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Industry Watch

Sheppard Mullin Gains Two Veteran Entertainment Lawyers

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LOS ANGELES — In a boost to its growing entertainment and media practice, Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton has added two veteran entertainment lawyers to its Century City office: James E. Curry and Robb Klein.

Curry's move comes more than a decade after a bitter break from what is now Christensen, Glaser, Fink, Jacobs, Weil & Shapiro that led to the formation of White O'Connor Curry, of which Curry was a name partner. His former firm has since changed its name to White O'Connor Fink & Brenner.

Curry said he joined the partnership, after leaving the boutique firm, for what he saw as a flourishing entertainment practice at Sheppard Mullin.

"There are only a handful of firms that do a substantial amount of entertainment litigation," Curry said. "This one appears to be growing by leaps and bounds and has a strong transactional base in entertainment, as well. I don't know of another firm that is very strong in both as this one is."

Klein signed on as special counsel after leaving the London office of leading European law firm SJ Berwin, where he was a partner in its media and communications group.

He said one of the main reasons he joined Sheppard Mullin was because it was "time for a move," and, with two young children, it was "now or never."

"Instead of going to a firm down the street, I decided to do something more radical," he said.

Although the physical move may have been drastic, Klein said Sheppard Mullin isn't that different from his former firm.

"The size of the practice is the same as the one I came from, and the type of practice is very much along the lines of my kind of work," he added.

Sheppard Mullin's Century City office, which houses 36 attorneys, opened in 2004, in large part to support a newly founded entertainment and media practice led by partner Martin Katz.

"Sheppard has always been a great law firm,



ROBERT LEVINS/ Daily Journal

Entertainment lawyers Robb Klein, left, and James E. Curry are joining Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton's Century City office. Curry said the firm "appears to be growing by leaps and bounds and has a strong transactional base in entertainment, as well." Klein explained his move from England: "Instead of going to a firm down the street, I decided to do something more radical."

but in this area it's really become a presence in the last five or six years," Curry said.

Curry said the parting with White O'Connor was amicable.

Andrew White, of Curry's previous firm, said he and Curry had "differences of vision and direction," including those concerning the firm's growth and client mix.

White said he intends to continue to keep the firm small and focused on litigation. Much of the firm's work is in entertainment litigation for studios, networks and production companies.

Curry declined to name his clients, but he has represented a long list of entertainment giants, including CBS, Disney, Paramount Viacom, Universal Studios and Infinity Broadcasting. He has upcoming trials in the summer representing CBS and SK Entertainment Inc.

He brings his entire book of business, which is worth millions.

Legal recruiting firm Watanabe Nason Schwartz & Lippman brokered the deal.

Klein specializes in film and television financing, production and distribution, merchandising and the licensing of rights and

new media. He has worked on financing and production of numerous feature films, from small independent movies to studio blockbusters, including "PS I Love You," "Love in the Time of Cholera" and "Basic Instinct 2."

He said another reason he decided to head to the States was because of a downturn in movie production and financing work in the United Kingdom ever since the treasury decided to stop providing tax incentive for filmmakers.

"When those tax breaks stopped, the exchange rate made it completely prohibitive for the Americans to work in the UK, so they started filming back in the States," Klein said.

Robert A. Darwell, who heads Sheppard Mullin's entertainment and media practice group, said the firm has focused a lot on the international entertainment business recently, and he believes adding Klein to the team will strengthen that aspect of the firm's work.

"Having a British lawyer working on British films, he's used to puzzling together financing from multiple sources," Darwell explained. "That's increasingly becoming the case in the U.S., as well. There aren't many films with studios writing big checks."