

The attorney of the year 2012

Pierre Véron, the free spirit of patent litigation

Pierre Véron, founding partner of the law firm Véron & Associés, has been voted intellectual property attorney of the year by attorneys-at-law and in-house legal counsels according to a survey by the magazine. Recounting the brilliant career of a patent litigation attorney

Born in the Roanne area, Pierre Véron in no way resembles the stereotype of Paris attorneys-at-law. Residing with his wife in Lyon, capital of Gaul, since the beginning of his career, he divides his time between the Paris and Lyon offices of his law firm, Véron & Associés. An entity which he transformed, in little more than a decade, into *the* French reference law firm in patent litigation. *"I have noted, among other attorneys-at-law, some of the skills I encountered in Pierre Véron's team, but nowhere else have I found them all together"*, affirms one of his clients, Vice-President of a French group listed on the CAC 40 Index.

Yet, as a child, Pierre Véron never imagined wearing a lawyer's robe. He wanted to be veterinary surgeon. After graduating from high school in 1965 with a degree in experimental science, he enrolled in a preparatory course in Nancy to prepare the entrance examination to the Veterinary School of Lyon. The experience lasted only a few weeks, and he did not feel suited to the learning methods specific to a preparatory class. His mother, a Professor of Classics, advised him to undertake literary studies. His father, an "Avoué" attorney-at-law, suggested he study law. He agreed with his father's opinion, convinced that law would better suit his rigorous and methodical nature. *"I am very well-organised"*, he says, before bursting out laughing and admitting: *"It is almost pathological"*. A character trait that undoubtedly explains his taste for patent litigation, a subject which is, as a rule, well-defined, rigorous and leaves no room for rough estimates. He even requires that his pleadings follow a precise organisation. *"My mother taught me to respect the accuracy of language and to strive for conciseness of expression. Thanks to her, I organise my pleadings today according to two levels of reading: the judge should first find an overview of the file, then, at the right time, the detailed technical information he needs to render his judgment"*, he explains. He acknowledges having dedicated time to training his attorneys-at-law

in writing pleadings. His law firm is undoubtedly the only one in France to employ a proofreader, a former employee of a publishing house, who revises all texts and indicates linguistic inconsistencies and inaccuracies.

An independent nature

Pierre Véron's experience studying law was positive, culminating in a successful graduation. In 1962, at the age of only 22, he was admitted to the Lyon Bar and immediately sought work. *"A friend of my father's put me in contact with three young attorneys-at-law who had just founded their own law firm: Alain Dodet, Dominique Saint-Pierre and Bruno Lamy"*, he recalls. Together with those who would soon become good friends, he embarked on adventure. Three years later, at a time when the profession of first-instance *Avoué* ceased to exist, they founded Lyon's first professional civil company, and the young attorney became a partner. Case upon case followed, for several years. *"I was not yet specialised in a specific field.*

His first intellectual property file dates back to 1973.

I dealt with all possible judicial matters: from criminal law (including cases before the cour d'assises, the French criminal trial court) to commercial law including administrative law and even military law." He even remembers one particular incident in the years after 1968 when he was appointed by the court to defend a young anarchist who, refusing to do his military service, had tried to swallow a fork and was being sued for self-inflicted injury. His first intellectual property file dates back to 1973. He defended a figurative mark for the Carrefour group. His first patent case related to car floor repairs for the 2CV Citroën. *"I counselled an industrialist from Haute-Savoie whose patent had been held invalid. It was my first failure in the matter. But I was not discouraged, I was immediately all the more interested in that field of law"*, he recalls. He undertook training at the Centre Paul Roubier, in Lyon. Always very sociable, he made many professional contacts, including Michel Laurent, a patent attorney, with whom he



established an immediate rapport. *“Michel Laurent entrusted me with several litigation cases. But I very quickly sought to develop my own clientele, which at the time, was relatively original”*, he acknowledges. Lawyers specializing in patent litigation were mainly sustained by business sent over by patent attorneys. Certain traditional law firms continue to respect this custom nowadays. But Pierre Véron quickly chose to assert his independence and develop his own client base made up of industrial entities. His law firm flourished and grew, and saw certain changes. In 1973, Alain Dodet became a bailiff. Dominique Saint-Pierre turned to politics. He would later become a Member of the European Parliament. Joining the team as a new partner came Alain Ribeyre, reputed for his activity in collective insolvency law. The firm changed its name to Lamy Véron Ribeyre. But at the eve of the new millennium, Pierre Véron decided to separate from his partners to found a boutique law firm dedicated to patent litigation. He explains, *“I deemed that the subject required a professional structure and different means than a general law firm. Together with three colleagues, we therefore founded Véron & Associés”*.

A reassuring authority

Pierre Véron, Isabelle Romet, Thomas Bouvet and Sabine Agé consider that patent litigation, a subject matter that encompasses legal, technical, economic and often multinational dimensions, calls for the cooperation of several competences. The four partners decide to build a team composed of attorneys and technical experts. Their firm thus presents the distinction of having two scientific consultants – a professor of physics and chemistry and a pharmacist – an economic litigation consultant, for the calculation of damages, several translators and a graphic designer. *“In the field of patent litigation, one of the essential goals of the attorney is to provide the court with the elements that will allow it to tackle issues surrounding the patented technique as quickly as possible. We take particular care in the conception and creation of supporting material, in the form of illustrations, models, films, 2D and 3D video animations”*, explains Pierre Véron. In the Parisian office’s boardroom, several



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models are on display: a molecule of the breast cancer medication Taxol, the skin, a molecule of the AIDS virus. *“This one was presented during a very technical hearing that I will remember for a long time”*, he starts, indicating the AIDS virus molecule. *“The case involved a*

patent belonging to the Institut Pasteur on AIDS diagnosis through blood tests. It was the first case concerning molecular biology patent infringement to be heard by a French court. The inventor, a Nobel Prize winner, was in attendance, on our adversary’s side. It was a sensitive thing to do – having to explain, in his presence, that the scope of his patent should be limited. Nonetheless, that’s what was decided”. The technical nature of the cases he takes on does not intimidate him. *“One of the reasons why I’m so passionate about my work is that I learn something every day”*, he says

contentedly. *“Pierre Véron has become, over the years, a reassuring authority. He has an in-depth knowledge of the law, but he is also one of the very few attorneys in France who can challenge his clients’ technical reasoning”*, according to the Head of Intellectual Property of a major French group. These days, Pierre Véron provides counsel for an elite clientele: Novartis, Sanofi Aventis, Rhodia, Air Liquide, Nokia, Eurocopter and L’Oréal. His reputation for excellence has granted him the honour of presiding over the AAPI (Association of Industrial Property Lawyers) for several years. He also founded EPLAW (European Patent Lawyers Association) in 2001, bringing together the best patent litigation specialists in Europe. He currently serves as an expert with the European Commission on projects involving the Unified European Patent Court.

The future is assured

Now at age 65, Pierre Véron continues to work on his cases and develop his firm with ever the vigour and independence that so define him. *“We have been approached on numerous occasions by international law firms that have proposed to buy the firm. We have always refused, and have instead favoured the construction of a solid international network of partner firms”*, he maintains. Comprising two offices, one in Lyon, the other in Paris, Véron & Associés now employs more than 30 people, including 13 attorneys. According to one client, *“The team is as qualified as it is united. The future is assured. That’s rare, in France”*.

Ondine Delaunay