

Lawyers Sans

We've all wondered what it would be like to work in Gay Paris. YSG tracked down an English lawyer who has been there with Lovells for the last five years, and who shows no signs of getting homesick



David Taylor studied for a Masters degree in Engineering before moving to France to carry out research leading to a PhD in Physics. He retrained as a solicitor and spent two years in the Lovells London Office before moving to the intellectual property, technology and media practice in Paris in March 1997. David was

President of the European Young Bar Association (www.eyba.org) between 1998 and 2000.

How did you end up back in Paris?

On qualification in the UK, I was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. Milan Chromecek, an intellectual property partner from our Prague office was moving to Paris (an example of a truly international lawyer, qualified in Canada, Czech Republic and France) and wanted an English-trained junior to assist him setting up the IP practice.

Wouldn't it have been better to remain in the London office for a couple of years first?

Many people advised that. If you went to one of the foreign offices it was perceived that you might be 'forgotten', that you would not work for the London partners, thus not be noticed, and find your career path hampered.

So you decided to go anyway?

I thought the wine would definitely be better.

And how have things progressed working in Paris?

Well, I have been here nearly five years now and things have developed considerably. The Intellectual Property, Technology and Media Group now has 18 lawyers supported by a team of paralegals and secretaries. The Paris office itself has grown to over 100 lawyers and is now the second biggest Lovells office outside London. As such it has changed considerably, but the mixture of French and English makes the day to day challenges all the more interesting, and amusing. The international work seems more international when carried out abroad.

Do you feel cut off from London?

Not at all. In fact it was lucky that that thing called the Internet, which I was using back in 1990-1992, was embraced by commerce and lawyers. It makes contact with the other offices all the easier. Indeed the problem with email is that you end up emailing your neighbour in the office, rather than talking to him face to face. At least when you are emailing Hong Kong, or the London office, you are using email for the reason it was designed.

And how does the field of law you work in transpose to France?

Quite easily in fact. I am perhaps lucky in that Intellectual Property law was originally created by states to have effect only in their territories. However, in the 19th century, it became evident that the works of nationals were protected internationally. Hence international cooperation was required, and since the 1883 Paris Convention on intellectual property few areas of law have received so much international scrutiny and international legislation. The result is that there is a considerable degree of harmonisation across Europe. The paradox is the way in which the territorial nature of intellectual property laws have become so 'international'. The advent of the Internet means we are now dealing with the largest copying machine on earth, and the largest advertising medium in the world.

And what about the fact you originally qualified in England, is that a problem?

No. It can be an asset and a hindrance. It is always difficult to attempt to draft a contract in a language that is not your mother tongue. Also, I obviously do not have the same experience in French law as my French colleagues. However, coming from a common law system, with English as mother tongue, is a great asset when dealing with English and US clients. One is able to 'talk the same language': not only English, but by contrasting and comparing the issues encountered with ones more familiar to them.

What about the people in your immediate entourage - is everyone French?

The IP, IT and media lawyers in our Paris office are all French with the exception of myself and Milan Chromecek (the original international lawyer I men-

Frontières



tioned earlier). However in the area which I concentrate more on, namely IP rights on the Internet, e-commerce, domain name registration and protection, I am with two other French lawyers, one Australian paralegal, one New Zealand paralegal, one half Japanese paralegal, and my secretary is Austrian...

How does working on the continent differ from the UK?

Apart from the necessity of being able to converse and draft letters in French, in many ways it is similar to the UK. In essence, much of the work of an international law firm is by nature international and can be stressful, no matter where you do it.

Obviously the French are different to the English in many ways. The challenge is to blend in as much as possible, and yet to retain your individuality and that individuality should not be bigoted in any way. The opportunity to work in Paris, probably the most beautiful and romantic city in the world after Carlisle, is the best thing I could have done. Experiencing the cultural diversity and actually working within that diversity is hugely fulfilling. Dealing with the French administration is also a challenge, and one can be tempted to think that there is an inbuilt 'foreigner detector' designed to hinder you at every step. Sometimes you wonder if you need to provide a DNA sample to obtain a bus ticket. Only when you realise the French around you have the same problem can you carry on with a wry smile.

What does a typical day involve?

One of the best things about Paris is that you do not have to commute for hours each day. The city is much smaller than London, for example, so more like our provincial cities in feel. I actually walk 20 minutes to work, past the Eiffel tower, across the Seine... it's a nice walk! Generally I start at 9.15am, leaving around 8pm on a good day, 9pm on a less good day, and later when things are tough. The image of the long French lunch lin-

gering over onion soup and confit de canard, washed down with a bottle of St Julien 1983, does not happen, just like the image of seeing French men on bicycles dressed in berets and blue stripy shirts with onions around their necks!

Today, work itself involved domain name registration work in Croatia, Hungary, Cuba, South Africa and France; arranging for the transfer of a domain name which had been negotiated and purchased for £150,000; meeting with a client from Japan concerning his domain name and trade mark portfolios; filing a UDRP (online complaint) on behalf of a French client against a domain name 'cybersquatter' based in Russia; advising on a Czech website incorporating a well known client's trade mark in its domain name and meta tags and happily selling the same products online as our client. Of course these are ongoing and were not all finished by lunch time. The counterbalance was preparing two invoices and billing narratives, one in French, the other in English - oh, and writing these replies for this interview!

Do you consider yourself a Brit who's abroad, or a European who's at home? And what are your plans for the future?

I definitely consider myself a European, though being English one is always considered as slightly peculiar... I guess I'm European with a light British flavour.

As for the future, I certainly intend to stay working in France. My South African girlfriend is moving to Paris on Friday. There is a temptation to move south to below the olive tree line, but unfortunately we don't have an office in the south of France yet...

