

## Hitting the right notes: Wendy Stimpson



**Wendy Stimpson** (formerly, Mather) runs her own consultancy business, in which law, finance and music all play a part. She shares the highlights of her career from litigation lawyer to in-house general counsel and reveals how each of these phases have played a pivotal role in guiding the foundations for her business.

Risk – locating it, weighing it, managing it and advising on it. That has been central to everything Wendy Stimpson has done, from her time as a litigation lawyer at Herbert Smith (as was) through to working in-house for Merrill Lynch and then as the bank’s general counsel covering Australia and the Asia-Pacific region to running her own consultancy and search business and, most recently, as the proud co-owner with her husband of a vineyard in Western Australia. (What is it about HSF alumni and vineyards? Wendy is following the same path trodden by several HSF alumni, among them, Marianne Klausberger, Bill Moodie, Stephen Hancock and Sarah Driver, all of whom have gravitated towards having their own wine-making businesses!)

To that, you could also add Wendy’s love of music. She originally trained to be a musician (she plays the cello and the piano) obtaining diplomas from the Guildhall School of Music in London, before deciding that law offered better career prospects. Graduating in law from Durham University in 1993, Wendy trained at HS and

qualified into litigation. As she puts it, she “joined the top team in town” headed by Lawrence Collins and working on the most high-profile disputes.

She carried on happily as an associate through the 1990s and might have continued at the firm had she not met her future husband, Barry (as it happens, working on the other side in one of the firm’s cases) and moved with him to Hong Kong. Wendy joined Freshfields in Hong Kong but soon found herself on secondment with Morgan Stanley. With Herbert Smith, she had also been seconded to a bank (in that case, Rothschild) and found that she enjoyed the experience of working in-house in financial services.

“The attraction of being in-house for me was a combination of involvement on the business side, and the nature of the work specifically in a financial institution,” Wendy says. “You are closer to the business decision makers, and, with the variety of issues that come across your desk, you are called upon to give your judgment often. On the deal side (as the in-house lawyer), you are managing risk rather than managing transactions, which suited me more.”

Wendy was then approached to move to Merrill Lynch in a permanent position in 2000. That took her in various roles to all points of the Asia-Pacific region, as well as being based at different times in Hong Kong, Sydney and Singapore. It culminated in her being made general counsel and director of compliance with responsibility for businesses within the company in the Pacific Rim. Risk management writ large, you might say, especially as her time with the company was before, during and after the global financial crisis. However, she rose to the challenge and also enjoyed the scope of her brief (“all part of the adventure,” she reflects now).

Changes within Merrill Lynch, including the merger with Bank of America, led to Wendy leaving the company in late 2009. She took the opportunity of enforced gardening leave to return to her first love, music. Acquiring a new cello with the proceeds of her severance pay, Wendy taught at a couple of international schools in Singapore, as well as performing (including with Andrea Bocelli and Imogen Heap, just to give an idea of her range of musical styles). She also did some work as a trustee and general counsel for a local family office.

## **Expanding horizons**

Wendy also turned her thoughts to starting her own business. Recognising that she had built an excellent set of contacts both within the legal and the financial world, she sensed a business opportunity. Her business started life as Cerulean Business Partners and then transformed into its current incarnation, Astrum Partners.

The aim of the business was – and is – to provide strategic consultancy and risk management advice to help businesses expand in Asia-Pacific, as well as advising

on executive level recruitment. The clients are mostly international law firms and financial institutions (which is what you would expect). The key point, Wendy says, is that the consultancy allows her to fulfill the role she most enjoys – that of trusted advisor. Like any start-up, it is hard work (not that she minds that) but has the added bonus that she is more in control of her own hours. In a relatively short time, the business has established itself and her team has grown, and Wendy sees ample scope for more opportunities.

Now, well ensconced in Singapore, Wendy is a non-executive director of a charity called [Very Special Arts Singapore](#), which provides opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in and enjoy the arts.

She and Barry also own a vineyard in Margaret River in Western Australia. They originally bought the vineyard five years ago simply because they fell in love with the beauty of the property, and initially treated it as a hobby, selling the grapes to neighbouring vineyards. But, since then, they have upped their ambitions and started making their own wines under the [Passel Estate](#) label. And with some success: their cabernet sauvignon, shiraz and chardonnay wines have already notched up awards. Their Tasting Room opened for business on 1st December 2016, and the wines are now on sale in Australia and Singapore.

Through all the changes and moves, Wendy has stayed in touch with Herbert Smith Freehills and especially with her former colleagues. She also says she owes much to her time with the firm, in terms of the values that were drummed into her. “Herbert Smith set me up very well. Everything we were taught: attention to detail, strategic thinking, having the mindset to solve problems – all of these things, I have carried with me.”