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AMERICAN LAWYERShook, Seeking 'Critical Mass' in LA, Adds  
Trial Lawyers from K&L Gates

By Andrew Maloney

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## What You Need to Know

- Shook has added Christopher Kondon and Saman Rejali, employment litigation partners from K&L Gates, in LA.
- The duo said they were looking for a more focused litigation and trial experience.
- Shook's LA office leader said he's looking for additional IP and regulatory expertise and wants to reach 'critical mass.'

After growing from five to 27 lawyers over the last five years in Los Angeles, litigation-focused Shook, Hardy & Bacon is trying to reach "critical mass" in the city by adding roughly 20 more lawyers there over the next five years.

"To have critical mass, to really have a presence in the Los Angeles market and be a litigation powerhouse, I think you need about 45 to 50 lawyers," said Shook's LA office managing partner, Michael Mallow, adding he'd like to have that number in the next five years.

The firm's latest additions in Southern California also check another box Mallow pointed to as a preference: they have "deep connections" to Shook already. The firm this week announced that Christopher Kondon and Saman Rejali,



Courtesy photos

**L-R: Michael Mallow, Saman Rejali, and Christopher Kondon of Shook, Hardy & Bacon.**

employment litigation partners from K&L Gates, have joined the firm's business litigation practice.

The two are trial lawyers who specialize in California employment law and policy and have counseled clients across numerous industries, including manufacturing, technology, shipping and healthcare, to name a few. Kondon, in particular, worked with Mallow early in their careers at K&L and also worked with Shook practitioners Colm Moran and Robert Feyder.

Mallow also pointed to the team dynamic between Kondon and Rejali as a draw.

“They’re certainly the cliché of ‘1 + 1 = 3,’” Mallow added. “Everybody’s got positives, everybody’s got negatives, but when you can find a partner that just covers whatever your deficiencies may be, and you can cover theirs, and the things you do well are even better — that’s kind of the way those two interact.”

Looking forward, Mallow said his goal for growth in the office over the next half-decade isn’t a “huge expansion,” but that the firm is still looking for some specific kinds of talent.

“I’d love to see some boots-on-the-ground capability in IP. The firm has an amazing IP practice, but in LA, we don’t have those resources to assist the firm’s existing IP practice,” he said, adding the firm is also trying to expand its “regulatory capabilities, both in consumer and automotive.”

### **Rate Flexibility**

In interviews Tuesday, Kondon and Rejali said they were looking for a more litigation-focused firm, with an emphasis on taking cases to trial. They also said the move conceivably gives them more rate flexibility, given Shook is smaller and only has a domestic footprint.

“In some ways, I was looking for the career I had in the early 2000s, when K&L was a little bit smaller and more nimble,” Kondon said.

He said he wasn’t trying to be critical of his and Rejali’s former firm, but that there are both benefits and challenges of the kind of scale K&L has achieved.

“It’s difficult to calibrate your law firm to a point where you can have a policy lawyer in South America and legislative counselor available in Holland, and what it means is the practice has to be less-focused. Shook is focused on doing litigation work in the U.S., whereas K&L Gates has

spread itself to many, many different areas, and that has its own value,” he said.

“But my individual practice and my goals, the things I’m spending every day with my shoulder against the wheel trying to accomplish, align with Shook, and most of what the other people at Shook are doing, so it was more of a focus thing for me than anything else,” Kondon added.

Rejali said rates weren’t really an obstacle at K&L, but that there would conceivably be some more flexibility at Shook. Both laterals also said the focus on taking cases to trial was something they were particularly interested in.

“No firm is drowning in trial work, but that’s really what it came down to for us,” she said, adding: “I think the idea of going somewhere a little bit smaller, but still big enough to have the resources and the platform you would need for the kind of practice we would have, was appealing to us both.”

Both laterals said they mostly expect their clients to follow them to Shook. Rejali in a firm statement also pointed to the Shook’s stewardship of women leaders as a benefit. “You don’t see women as chairs of major law firms too often, and I’m looking forward to Madeleine McDonough’s leadership,” she said in the release.

And she said although she and Kondon focus on and are licensed in California, they might begin to do more work outside of California.

Kondon added that they should remain busy as lawmakers in California are generally loosening employers’ control over workers.

“They’re very interested in protecting an individual’s right to move between employers without obligations to old employers, so a tightening on the use of noncompete clauses. And even simple things like increases in the minimum wage law, or other things making it more difficult or perilous for employers,” he said.