

# Mintz Toronto is in for the long haul as it nears two years proving naysayers wrong

[ROBYN DOOLITTLE](#)

Corporate Law Reporter

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From left to right: Geoffrey Cher, Emily Fan and Adam Banack at Mintz law firm's Bay Street office in Toronto on Jan. 7. SAMMY KOGAN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

It'll be dead in three years.

American firms have tried this before.

They won't be able to attract talent.

Mitch Frazer heard it all in the days after he walked out of Torys LLP to co-found the first Canadian office of U.S. law firm Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo PC.

The naysayers never spoke to him directly, Mr. Frazer said. Instead, the chatter would filter through intermediaries – or a snarky forwarded e-mail.

“People would give timelines. ‘This won’t last more than a year.’ ‘This won’t last more than three years,’” Mr. Frazer said. “When you do something like this, you don’t think about it not lasting. We wanted to build something. It gave us something to prove.”

This April marks two years since the [launch](#) of Mintz Toronto. So far, the firm’s managing partner, Bob Bodian, says the Toronto office is hitting expectations “across the board.”

From a straight profit and loss calculation, the office is not yet standing on its own two feet. But Mr. Bodian says this equation doesn’t take into account the vast amount of work that’s been coming to the American side through the Canadian office – including a large litigation file – or the benefit that clients get from having seamless access to counsel in both countries.

Mr. Frazer, who is Mintz’s managing partner in Toronto, said the office makes more money every month and is holding its own within the wider firm, both because of the referrals as well as the work Mintz is able to attract because the firm is north-south.

“We did a \$4-billion [deal](#) last year with Future Electronics, which is headquartered in Montreal. Mintz wouldn’t have been able to do this without having our office, because they wouldn’t have had the cross-border capabilities,” Mr. Frazer said.

That deal was one of the largest in terms of monetary value in Mintz’s history.

“More and more major Canadian corporations have investments in the U.S. Many of these companies have to use two different firms. We are the one firm that can do Tier 1 work on both sides of the border.”

And as for fears that top talent would be afraid to come on board, Mintz Toronto has lured three more senior lawyers away from competitors.

Litigator Emily Fan, previously of Lerner LLP, energy and infrastructure lawyer Adam Banack, who had been with Torys, and corporate and securities lawyer Geoffrey Cher, who was with Wildeboer Dellelce LLP, all start at Mintz Toronto this month.

Mr. Cher, whose practice focuses on alternative assets, said the move to Mintz made sense because of his clients’ needs.

“I do a lot of work with technology-enabled companies, which are seeking capital, seeking acquisition targets and seeking growth opportunities – and those are all in the U.S.,” he said. “A lot of what I do, what we do collectively, requires a north-south axis for legal support, much more than east-west access in Canada.”

With the new hires, the office’s total head count is now 35 lawyers – with a couple more on the way, Mr. Frazer said.

The latest hires mark a seven-fold increase since April, 2023, when Mintz Toronto launched with five founding partners: private equity and fund formation lawyer Michael Akkawi, Cheryl Reicin, who specializes in life sciences, and Mr. Frazer, one of Canada’s premier pension lawyers, who were all from Torys, as well as capital markets and mergers and acquisitions lawyer Eric Foster, of Dentons, and intellectual property lawyer Lee Johnson, who came from Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati in the United States.

When it opened, Mintz Toronto had no office and got by renting space from Regus (which is like WeWork for corporate clients). Meanwhile, Mr. Frazer spent his days scouring the financial district for a proper office. Mintz lucked out by finding prime space at a great rate in the Royal Bank Plaza South Tower, which a mining company no longer needed. He also worked through mundane tasks such as setting up internet, buying office furniture and leasing a photocopier.

“The day the logo was installed by the elevator was a big day,” Mr. Frazer said chuckling. “It felt like: Okay, this is real.”

In the midst of balancing all the startup logistics, there was legal work to do. That, at least, provided some normalcy, Mr. Frazer said.

Each of the founding five partners brought along big books of business, which is why Mintz’s Toronto expansion has worked.

Ms. Reicin had been the practice leader of the life sciences group at Torys. When she jumped, 84 clients followed, she said. Today, Mintz Toronto has 256 life sciences clients, which include medical device businesses, biotechnology and health technology companies, investors and academic medical institutions.

One reason Ms. Reicin was attracted to Mintz was the firm’s life sciences practice, which is one of the firm’s pillars. Across Mintz’s offices – Boston, New York, Los Angeles, Miami, San Diego, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and now Toronto – about 250 lawyers work in life sciences. (Firm-wide, Mintz has 612 lawyers.) Ms. Reicin now co-chairs the firm’s life sciences practice across all eight offices.

Of note, all Mintz partners share in one profit pool. By contrast, international firms such as Dentons and Norton Rose Fulbright that have set up shop in Canada use a Swiss *verein* model, with separate profit pools for Canadian partners. Mintz, which was founded in 1933, is among the top 100 U.S. law firms in terms of gross revenue.

For firm chair Mr. Bodian, Mintz Toronto has been a huge success.

“Toronto just fits perfectly,” he said. “Even culturally, the way we look at our offices, it’s one big firm.”

Mr. Bodian actually spent most of November working out of the Toronto office. And this May, the firm will host its annual partner retreat in Toronto.

“We’re in this for the long haul,” he said.

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