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*Killias & Legler: a new boutique
law firm "independent by design"*

«A domestic approach no longer fits today's legal world»

Interview with Anne-Véronique Schläpfer, managing partner of White & Case Switzerland, on
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THOMAS LEGLER AND LAURENT KILLIAS

Independent by design

After decades at Pestalozzi, Laurent Killias and Thomas Legler launched their own arbitration boutique—lean, selective and tailored to the evolving demands of global clients. In this exclusive interview they explain *MAG* why “boutique is the new big”

by claudia la via

They left one of Switzerland's most prominent law firms to launch a boutique with just their names on the door. After decades at Pestalozzi, **Laurent Killias** and **Thomas Legler** have founded **Killias & Legler**, a lean and focused arbitration boutique with offices in Zurich and Geneva. The decision, they explain, stemmed from a shared desire to build something more personal, agile, and tailored—"something that reflects our vision of how legal services – particularly in arbitration and litigation – should be delivered: agile, highly specialized, and with direct partner involvement from start to finish". In this exclusive double interview with *MAG*, the two founders discuss their reasons for breaking away from big law, how they plan to differentiate themselves in a mature legal market, and why they believe their model is better aligned with the evolving demands of today's clients. During the interview, the two partners expressed complete alignment in their decision and their view of the legal market, often speaking with a single, unified voice.

What made you decide to leave a major law firm to start your own boutique? Was there a specific motivation or moment that pushed you to take the leap?

After years in a structured, institutional environment, we felt it was the right time to build something of our own—leaner, more focused, and fully aligned with how we believe legal services should be delivered. We wanted a practice where we could be personally and directly involved in each mandate, from start to finish. Being present in both Zurich and Geneva, we're well placed in two of the leading international arbitration hubs.

In your view, what defines a boutique law firm—and how do you intend to differentiate yourselves in a market like Switzerland?

A boutique firm is defined by its sharp focus and high partner-to-client engagement. We are not trying to cover every area of law—we are deliberately selective, focusing on dispute resolution and international arbitration. In Switzerland's mature legal market, our edge will come from a combination of subject-matter



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Laurent Killias

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expertise, experience, efficiency, and flexibility that larger structures often struggle to offer.

A word or phrase that describes your vision for the firm in one line?

We definitely agree on that: precision-driven, client-focused, and independent by design.

Do you see a broader shift toward boutique models among senior lawyers in Switzerland? Is this part of a larger evolution in the legal market?

Yes, we believe so. The legal profession is evolving, and with growing client demand for specialized, cost-effective services, the boutique model is becoming more attractive. It allows senior lawyers to retain independence while offering high-quality service that is tailored and streamlined.

What kind of working culture are you hoping to build within the firm, especially compared to a traditional big law setting?

We want to create a culture of trust, collaboration, and intellectual freedom. The aim is to foster a dynamic environment with professionals who value substance over status. Unlike traditional models, we want to keep bureaucracy to a minimum and focus on meaningful legal work.

From your perspective, how have client expectations changed over the past decade—and how does your new structure help meet those evolving demands?

Clients are looking for more than just legal expertise—they expect responsiveness, business acumen, experience, and cost transparency. Our structure enables us to be lean, fast, and directly involved. We can tailor our approach to each client without navigating layers of internal process.

Mr Killias, you've led major arbitration and litigation matters. What do you see as the most significant changes happening right now in dispute resolution, both in court and through alternative mechanisms?

Killias: One key trend is the increasing



«AI also raises ethical and professional questions we must address with care»

Thomas Legler

complexity and internationalization of disputes, particularly in areas like construction, energy, and finance. At the same time, clients are increasingly turning to arbitration and mediation to avoid the inefficiencies of court systems. Technology is also starting to reshape procedural aspects, such as digital hearings and document management.

Mr Legler, you've been a voice in digital law and tech transformation. How do you see developments like AI reshaping the legal profession—not just for clients, but for lawyers themselves?

AI is changing how we process legal information, draft documents, and—to some extent—even predict outcomes. For lawyers, this means a shift toward higher-value strategic work, and for clients, it brings faster, more efficient services. But it also raises ethical and professional questions we must address with care.

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What does leadership mean to you now that you're managing your own firm? How does that compare with leadership inside a large partnership?

Killias: Leadership now is about setting a clear vision and being accountable for it. In a boutique setting, leadership is more direct and hands-on.

Legler: Moreover, in larger partnerships, decisions are often made collectively, which can slow things down. Here, we have the agility to act quickly and stay true to our values.

Launching a new firm is always a challenge. What was the biggest risk or obstacle you faced in this process—and what has been the most rewarding part so far?

The biggest risk was stepping out of an established and comfortable setting. The most rewarding part has been the positive response from clients and peers—it confirms that there is a genuine appetite for a firm like ours.

What is your long-term vision for Killias & Legler? Do you see the firm growing, or staying intentionally focused and selective?

We plan to grow in a thoughtful way. Growth is not a goal in itself; we will remain focused and selective, adding people only when there is a need and they truly fit our culture and vision. Our ambition is to be recognized as a go-to firm in our niche—nothing more, but certainly nothing less.


What kind of legacy would you like the firm to establish—not only in terms of clients, but also in culture, mentorship, or innovation?

Killias: We are not setting out to build a large structure or to create a legacy in the traditional sense. Our ambition is more modest: to deliver work of consistently high quality, with integrity

and independence.

Legler: That said, we believe the next generation of lawyers should be encouraged to think critically, act ethically, and value substance over form—ideals we hope to quietly uphold in our practice.

At this point the last question comes naturally: your best advice to a young lawyer thinking about founding a firm one day?

Build your reputation patiently, surround yourself with people you trust, and when the time feels right—go for it. But only if you have a clear vision and the courage to follow it. 



THE KILLIAS & LEGLER OFFICES IN GENEVA