

# Dream team

## Chile

### Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos & Cía Ltda

**With an unrivalled pedigree that charts the history of the Chilean legal system, Santiago-based Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos & Cía has traced a fascinating evolution from its 19th century beginnings into a trailblazer on the global legal and commercial stage**

There are top law firms. And then there are those top law firms with distinguished and romantic pasts which stretch far back into history, reminding us just how far the profession has come. Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos & Cía is one such firm, with a lineage dating all the way back to 1889. Throughout the 20th century the firm established a solid presence on the Chilean legal market, advising the manufacturing, banking and mining sectors which were the engines of the national economy. On the way to achieving its current status as one of Chile's most important and respected practices, its partners have helped to edit the Chilean Constitution in 1980, been engaged to advise public institutions such as the Central Bank of Chile and contributed members to the national Senate.

Today, nine years after a groundbreaking merger uniting Cariola and Díez & Pérez-Cotapos Ltda heralded a quantum leap for the practice, these historic credentials take their place alongside the modern and extensive range of services on offer at the firm. Still a leading player in industry and infrastructure – while firm HQ is located in the capital, Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos also has an office in Antofagasta in the north of the country so as best to serve the mining interests which still form a crucial part of the business – other more recent areas of expertise added to the firm roster include competition, energy and utilities

and intellectual property, through sister firm Sargent & Krahn. Unilever, Shell, IBM, Coca-Cola, Chevron, Endesa, Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton are among the most visible of its clients.

Nor, bar warm Latin courtesy, is there anything remotely old-fashioned about the client care which in recent years has enhanced the firm's reputation still further. And in a market where marketing is still a slightly suspect proposition, reputation – still sustained by good old-fashioned word of mouth – is all, both at home, across Latin America and among law's global elite. In these days of personalization, diversification, information democratization and flexible, cross-cultural business solutions, one truth on which the worldwide legal community agrees is that there is no one single formula for cutting-edge client service. Which is just as well at Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos, because if its partners were trying to make a trade secret of what they readily credit as the cornerstone of their successful service, they wouldn't quite manage to keep it under wraps. In conversation with four of the firm's partners about the working methods which distinguish its client service, one word crops up again and again: "teamwork".

#### A one-word mantra

"Although it's fundamental to client care to formulate a working relationship specific to the client's individual needs," says partner Francisco Illanes, head of the firm's banking and finance divisions, "which means devoting the necessary time to knowing the client's business and circumstances, teamwork is key to our distinctive delivery of our expertise and our attentive, responsive service. For all the technology-assisted prompt response rates, closer client relationships and progressive commercial attitudes which have become essential to working at the top level in a globalized work environment, the unique style of attention we provide rests on the structure and dynamics of our project teams, and on our care in relating this to the client's interests in whatever way is most appropriate to each individual case. A partner, as well as many associates and others, is involved in each team, so every client has access

# The roles of lawyers and legal teams are evolving here, as they have in the rest of the world

to that level of authority and to that partner's network of contacts and knowledge."

"On another level," adds Sebastián Obach, the firm's senior partner, whose practice areas include commercial, tax and M&A, "this teamwork manifests itself as the sharing of insights and specialist expertise across the firm, where we take care to cultivate a free, fluid exchange of opinions and ideas both within and across teams and, more broadly, with our consultants we deal with around the country and in markets around the world. And the ways in which we can combine and tailor these inputs are close to limitless and constantly evolving, which chimes with the growing range of ways people are doing business as the corporate and commercial world opens up. This versatility will no doubt become more and more important as increasingly specialized and creative routes are added to the commercial canon."

Teamwork, as practised in Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos's offices, begins with a clear outline group structure. Every project team is led by one or two of the firm's 15 partners, supported by associates and with the input of consultants as appropriate. From a practical, client-facing point of view, this ensures that several professionals are in a position to assist the client at any point, as well as encouraging close discussion that engages different viewpoints and experiences within teams. Another layer of consultation takes place between project teams and specialized lawyers in-house, distilling truly 360-degree solutions from an efficient and economical use of the broad range of resources the firm can put at its clients' fingertips.

## Aligning benefits, delivering goals

"This aligns many important client benefits with the achievement of our paramount goal," says managing partner Jose Luis Letelier, who specializes in corporate and M&A law. "That is to say: furnishing the highest possible quality of legal advice in the most timely way, and delivering it in the form of efficient, precise solutions tailored to the client."

Continuous analysis of this breadth of expertise and influence, and a constant, free-flowing dialogue with clients, also foster a deep understanding of clients' specific interests and ambitions, personalizing the team's work to the client's desires in a way that ultimately becomes intuitive. "Close knowledge of our clients allows us to think for them to some extent; to anticipate their responses to the newest developments in law and business and government; to be on the lookout for their interests constantly," says partner Sergio Díez, whose practice areas include corporate and M&A law. "This is why to get to know clients well, to invest the time and energy to inspire trust, is crucial." Carefully nurtured, these bonds of confidence can accelerate the process, forging more direct paths to the client's goals. Thus, in the short term, efficiencies are achieved and capabilities are freed up with the potential ultimately to translate into business successes worth millions.

Small wonder, then, that the partners at Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos have such a clear-eyed commitment to the



cultivation of client care, both now and in the future, evolving to reflect the dramatic developments in the legal industry over the last two decades. And as the walls of that ivory tower which was the rarefied, old-world legal community continue to melt away, revealing the many parallels between legal practice and other models of contemporary business, the firm is mindful of the lessons to be learned from other corporate cultures. Already shaping the law's newly synergistic approach to providing the best possible service, as defined by the client's needs and tastes, the business world also affords useful models, and a confident grasp of commercial functions is now something the firm's recruiters seek in all budding applicants, alongside technical brilliance. Law no longer exists in a bubble, and what might once have seemed conflicting interests – or at least disciplines expressed in different languages – are now free to proceed hand in hand as co-enablers of business and progress

#### Refocusing classic resources

But this is not to say that the traditional ways of rounding out the firm's expertise have lost their power. One of the greatest lessons from the developments of the last 20 years is the value of engaging with minds and viewpoints at every level, and the classic channels of connectivity – legal commentaries and textbooks, lectures and seminars, and pro bono work – have taken on a new significance as they

feed into the organic pool of partners' and associates' experience. For Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos, links with the country's most prestigious law schools and universities are cherished: most of its senior associates and partners lecture as professors at Universidad Católica, Universidad de Chile and Universidad Adolfo Ibañez, among others. Pro bono activity is undertaken with great energy and enthusiasm, and initiatives which the firm currently supports – ranging from medical non-profit organizations to progressive social projects to an employment generation scheme – have their own useful knowledge and experience to tap into.

It is the firm's client care and progressive working dynamics, as much as the pace-setting, headline-grabbing merger of 1999, which have positioned Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos as an unmistakably future-facing organization. "Together we have long experience in advising prominent international companies in the acquisition of large listed corporations in Chile," says Obach, referring to projects which have included public biddings and tender offers in Chile and the United States. In the past, foreign clients have found it useful to be advised of local customs and conventions, such as the often glacial pace of court actions, and of those aspects of modern international law which still grate somewhat on businesspeople here. But the balance is shifting noticeably, and excitingly, as Chile fixes its gaze on new horizons.

# Close knowledge of our clients allows us to think for them; to anticipate their responses to the newest developments in law and business and government; to be on the lookout for their interests constantly

While Brazil's burgeoning economy was the first to hit the limelight for Latin America, Chile too is establishing itself as a fledgling global player, flexing new muscles in the worldwide marketplace. This can only be a good thing for highly equipped providers of the most sophisticated business services. "There are simply many, many more businesses and executives now who can benefit from top-class advice, both from here and with Chile as one base of operations," says Illanes. "The roles of lawyers and legal teams are evolving here, as they have in the rest of the world." And while international law firms have yet to set up shop in Chile, the pace of competition is unmistakably quickening.

## Reaching out to a global community

In a professional climate where all companies are now potentially global, an international focus is a cornerstone of Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos' capability. And this is not restricted to the distribution of consultants ready to partner on projects and specialisms. In a country whose legal profession encourages its young lawyers to travel in order to gain international experience and perspective, usually in the United States or United Kingdom, Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos has a reputation for promoting this practice with particular zeal; the chance to perfect legal English in a country short of bilingual colleges is another clear incentive. The firm counts Harvard, NYU, Michigan University, the London School of Economics, Stanford University, Oxford University and the University of California at Berkeley among the high-flying institutions which have hosted its lawyers on postgraduate legal courses. And in its turn, the firm also brings the world to

Chile: practitioners from South Africa, the United States, Germany, Poland and Spain have been invited to join the Santiago offices on work secondments and make their own inimitable contributions to the team. Nor do the firm's global leanings stop here: all partners and associates at Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos have at least one fluent language besides Spanish.

If the 1999 merger was not quite a call to action for Chile's legal and business communities, it was certainly a bold announcement of a dramatic new chapter for Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos. The intervening years have seen the firm's constructive, creative cooperation step up to the next level, and the evolution of a panoramic, global vision, founded on the bedrock of teamwork, where physical, geographical and cultural limitations have become no boundaries at all.

## **Cariola Díez Pérez-Cotapos & Cía Ltda**

Av Andrés Bello 2711 piso 19,  
Santiago,  
Chile

Tel: +56 2 360 4000

Fax: 56 2 360 4030

[www.cariola.cl](http://www.cariola.cl)

## **Contact:**

Sebastián Obach

Partner

[sobach@cariola.cl](mailto:sobach@cariola.cl)