



Alain Decombe: an entrepreneurial attorney

Listening to and supporting his partners is how Alain Decombe spontaneously describes his day-to-day activities as managing partner of Dechert's Paris office. His duties are however far from being limited to human relations management. Driven by a concern for detail, this manager, who continues to be very active on client matters and business development, attaches as much importance to the flower arrangements as to the billing turnover rates and rate of collection of the firms bills or to career development of associates and administrative staff "I don't consider myself as a law intellectual and I'm not afraid of tackling practical problems. Partners, associates, administrative staff, clients, finance... the management of a law firm involves all these aspects. And above all a lot of work not related to client files," explains Alain Decombe who relies on his Office Manager, Aurélie Roger, to run the structure on an everyday basis. With a mother from Martinique and a father from the Jura who spent most of his working life abroad — he was born in Nigeria - Alain Decombe has had an international focus right from the start. It is moreover no accident that he was the first French student to follow an LL.M on the UCLA campus in Los Angeles in 1985. His brother has been installed in Silicon Valley for 20 years. The real family heritage however does not stop at crossing borders and includes a dimension that is quite rare in France: a taste for entrepreneurship. "My father is an entrepreneur in spirit who passed on to me the desire to build and taught me not to be afraid", explains the man who runs the equivalent of an SME which now has a staff of a hundred or so in Paris. "What interests me above all is to build up from scratch. That's why I have great admiration for our clients from whom I think we as business lawyers have a lot to learn," explains Alain Decombe, who says he works for pleasure and that he owes a lot to those accompanying him in this entrepreneurial approach. "I have a natural tendency to trust people and don't want to get unnecessarily involved in all the small details of a file. This is furthermore essential in order to grow. One of the first management lessons learnt at Andersen is to know how to give responsibilities to talented young people very quickly — the diametrical opposite of the culture of an attorney, who is very individualistic and naturally loath to delegate."

Portrait

What they say about him

Hervé Descazeaux
A partner at Cathay Capital

Dynamism and determination: Alain is interested in building a long-term client relationship. Doing a service and helping to put people in contact: he's a professional who knows how to network and likes networking. Loyalty and selflessness; listens to his clients. He's a good guy, with genuine human values, he likes to help people. He's humble, mindful of his value, but humble, and generous with those around him

**Patrick Maurel, co-President of
the Executive Board of
Leonardo&Co**

Alain has a lot of energy ... and what's more positive energy! He constantly forges ahead, always looking for solutions, which he usually finds in fact! He's also someone flamboyant who knows how to continue to serve his clients. Finally, he's loyal – to his principles and in friendship.

Denis Musson,
Group General Counsel &
Company Secretary of Imerys

Alain is not only an excellent lawyer and negotiator, but also a manager keen to use law as a strategic tool for his clients, attentive and concerned about "value for money" of the services rendered by him and his firm and also convinced that the practice of law is an economic sector which needs to be defended and developed. At 50 years of age, he seems to have reaped the full benefits of his past legal and entrepreneurial experience to offer a bright future for Dechert's activities in France!

Andersen. This name is quick to come up in the conversation when talking about Alain Decombe's career.

looking to strengthen in France. He saw it had development potential with strong synergies in healthcare.

He spent the first part of his professional career there, joining the firm through Archibald before leaving in 2003, when it was taken over by Ernst & Young in the wake of the Enron affair. All his partners at that time are now scattered over the Paris legal market. "It was an emblematic firm that should never have disappeared and that's why it lives on today", says Alain Decombe, referring in this manner to the great solidarity which still exists between the former members of the Andersen organization.

Several round trips to Philadelphia later Dechert's Chairman was convinced.

This was when Alain Decombe agreed to take over the Paris office of Coudert Brothers; the clients followed and he successfully relaunched the M&A practice.

A good choice. 7 years on, the US firm's French office has revenue of \$35 million. "The arbitration team, which generated modest revenue when it arrived at Dechert, has become one of the market leaders in less than 10 years with revenue that has been multiplied by 40!" But Alain Decombe is also proud of having successfully integrated IP, tax and labor law teams over the last two years. The partners of these practices, Marianne Schaffner, Bruno Leroy and Philippe Thomas, share the firm's entrepreneurial spirit.

However, the law firm encountered significant financial difficulties at global level and after three years, Alain Decombe had to deal with the liquidation of the Paris office with his partner Xavier Nyssen. Giving priority in an emergency situation to an ambitious solution covering all the Paris office's teams instead of just concentrating on the M&A practice, he gained hands-on experience of crisis management. But once again, Alain Decombe showed the ability to bounce back. Anticipating what was likely to happen, he had already pinpointed Dechert, a US law firm which then only had around ten people in Paris and was

Always on the leading edge in M&A transactions at the head of a team of 7 partners and 20 associates, he doesn't intend to stop there: "We need to make progress in M&A and add an antitrust law practice. But building takes time as I've learnt over the years," concedes this highly impatient person. Among the successes that have been built over time it is important to add healthcare, a sector in which the team has been a leader for many years with French and foreign clients, both industrial companies and funds, involved in all the different fields (pharma, biotech, medtech, services, healthcare institutions...).

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His career

1988

Linklaters & Paines

1990

S.G. Archibald which
later became Archibald
Andersen

2003

Coudert

2006

Dechert

**“Andersen is an emblematic firm
which should never have
disappeared and that’s why it lives
on today”**

Alain Decombe

“I have always appreciated industrialists who are a client population who generally have good human values and show respect for their counsel. This is especially true in healthcare, where the importance of the regulatory aspects showcases the value of the legal function both internally and externally. We carry out a lot of mid-cap growth transactions for them and I am very proud of this fact. We are increasingly contacted by investment funds - Private Equity is an important practice at Dechert, which is among the top 10 firms in this sector in the United States – interested in this key industry; we are delighted to work alongside them and to share with them more than 20 years’ experience we have gained in this area.”

Dynamic, cultivating a culture of results and more at home at business lunches than at social get-togethers, Alain Decombe admits to a few difficulties in cutting off from his profession. But he can be recognized as having a rare quality in his

professional circle: decision-making capabilities. He was quickly identified by the Firm’s leadership for this trait and elected as a member of the Policy Committee of Dechert LLP, which is one of the most dynamic and profitable US firms. Within this framework, the leadership team in the US regularly asks him to conduct assignments to develop offices outside the United States. Once again an international focus.

Having lost nothing of his appetite for development at over 50 years of age, Alain Decombe is one of those rare attorneys who is a managing partner by vocation. The French marketplace needs people like him.■