

Mar. 11, 2024

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Mar. 11, 2024

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## Partition Pros

**Underwood Law Firm helps clients move past the difficulties of co-owned property.**



*Christine Luu and Elijah Underwood.  
Photo: Justin L. Stewart / Special to  
the Daily Journal*

By the late spring of 2021, Elijah M. Underwood had decided he was ready to launch his own firm and was determined to focus on just one area of practice: partition law.

"We've really planted our flag in this field," Underwood said. "If you check out our website, it says 'partition lawyers.' It doesn't say 'real estate lawyers' or 'civil litigation lawyers.' ... We've planted our flag: - "Here's who we are; here's what we do' - and we haven't really hedged in that respect."

Underwood said the practice is an area of law that even other attorneys often don't know much about.

## Partition Pros

By Shane Nelson | Mar. 11, 2024

"It's basically just when a few people own real estate, and they don't get along, and one person wants to sell, but the other one doesn't," he explained, noting that his partition law cases often feature siblings who've inherited a parent's home or unmarried couples who buy a house together and then break up.

Underwood Law Firm PC first opened in June 2021 in Sacramento, but the five-attorney boutique now features offices in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Newport Beach and San Diego.

"We definitely have a statewide practice, which is really cool," said Underwood, who graduated from UC Hastings College of Law and passed the bar in 2009.

"I just had this novel idea, 'What if I had a firm that only did partition law, and I spent every day just doing something I liked?'" Underwood said. "And that was just such a happy thought to me I decided to pursue it."

Underwood began his career focusing largely on real estate and water law but eventually found that he enjoyed what he described as the more tangible and concrete nature of partition cases.

"For me, a lot of litigation just felt like it went around in circles," he explained. "Whereas with partition, people come in with a problem, and they leave the firm with a result. They leave with money in their pocket to go and do whatever they want with the rest of their lives. To me, the problem-solving aspect of it is incredibly gratifying."

Underwood noted that most of the firm's partition matters end up resolving through relatively simple motion practice but on rare occasions some of the cases do end up at trial, an arena he also enjoys.

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"It's a chance to do what I'll call real lawyering," Underwood said. "Lawyers spend a lot of time in discovery practice - just sitting at a desk, going through documents. So having the opportunity to get into court and interact with the judge is always exciting for me."

Associate Christine Luu joined the boutique's Sacramento office shortly after graduating from McGeorge School of Law in 2022, and she described Underwood as a great mentor.

"I've learned so much from Eli," Luu said, noting that Underwood provides her with a great deal of independence on cases. "As a young attorney, there's still some hesitation on making arguments because you're not exactly sure what's going to be correct. But he gives us the right tools and the resources, and he provides us with great advice. ... He's always there if we need him."

In addition to partition cases featuring family members or unmarried couples, Underwood said his firm routinely works as well on matters involving people who've purchased real estate together for business purposes but later choose to unwind those partnerships. And while the firm's cases - especially those featuring siblings or former romantic partners - can include a fair amount of emotion, Underwood noted they're not typically quite as charged as a family law matter, which might, for example, involve child custody issues.

Even so, Underwood said complex interpersonal relationship challenges do pop up regularly in the practice area.