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Top 20 Under 40

Sorting... Navigating... Leading...

- Sorting out a pharmaceutical company's duty to monitor off-label use of its drugs
- Putting together contracts for the largest construction project in the nation in five years
- Working to overturn California's gay marriage ban
- Leading the equity practice of one of the world's largest law firms

• Navigating the legal rights of cancer patients
These are a few of the issues being tackled by those on our 2010 list of top California lawyers under age 40.

Finding standouts among a group of exceptional people is never easy. We reviewed 150 eligible nominations this year.

There were many impressive candidates; these 20 were a cut above. They found a way

to make an impact on the world outside their sphere. One didn't just defend a lawsuit for a client but works to change the law so that other companies wouldn't face a similar suit. Another takes time from his practice putting together marquee transactions for corporate clients to help a non-profit start a grocery store in an underserved area of Oakland. This is exceptionalism at its best. We urge you to read on and get to know these people.

— The Editors



Christopher D. Dusseault, 40

GIBSON, DUNN & CRUTCHER
LOS ANGELES

LITIGATION

Antitrust and complex commercial litigation

At some point, wading through equal protection legal theory on behalf of same-sex couples fighting for the right to marry, Dusseault had a moment of clarity.

He thought, "We're just right here. This is just right."

'We're arguing that established rules intended to protect minority groups be applied, and that's all we're asking.'

Ultimately, a judge will decide who's right in the case, in which Dusseault represents two gay couples challenging Proposition 8, California's constitutional amendment defining marriage as between a man and a woman.

"It doesn't get much bigger, interesting and exciting than this," says Dusseault, who is co-partner in charge of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher's Los Angeles offices and heads the firm's summer associate program.

The Boston native, a graduate of Duke University School of Law, normally handles antitrust and complex commercial litigation. Just last week, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed a summary judgment ruling he won for Tyco Healthcare Group in an antitrust suit.

Gibson Dunn Los Angeles partner Theodore J. Boutrous Jr., also an attorney for the Proposition 8 plaintiffs, says Dusseault has been serving as the "field marshal" for the team.

"He's very cool and calm under intense pressure," Boutrous says. "He is able to deal with whatever issue is at hand but also to take the longer-term strategic view and make those decisions in that context in a way that really adds value to a trial team and a case."

Dusseault says trial is "the essence" of his job. And, despite all the hype about the novelty of the Proposition 8 case, he insists it's not that novel at all.

"We're arguing that established rules intended to protect minority groups be applied, and that's all we're asking," he says. "I think when they're applied, there's only one outcome you can come to."

— Rebecca Beyer