MVP: Kasowitz's Jennifer S. Recine

By **Isaac Monterose**

Law360 (September 28, 2021, 2:44 PM EDT) -- Jennifer S. Recine of Kasowitz Benson Torres LLP was part of a legal team that successfully defended New York's Chelsea Hotel from tenant harassment allegations brought by the city during an agency trial and subsequently took the city to court with a more than $100 million suit, landing her a spot among Law360's 2021 Real Estate MVPs.

HER BIGGEST ACCOMPLISHMENT THIS PAST YEAR:

For nine months, real estate co-chair Recine and her team successfully defended the Chelsea Hotel during an agency trial that started in 2018 over tenant harassment allegations. The trial followed a stop-work order that paused the hotel's redevelopment because the City of New York wanted the hotel to reclassify itself as a single room occupancy multiple dwelling and file a certificate of no harassment to continue its redevelopment.
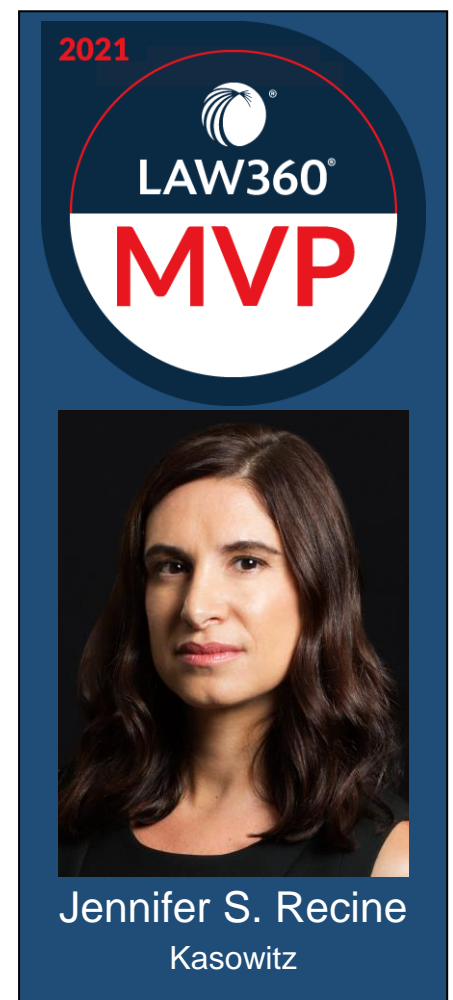
But in late 2020, "linchpin" evidence in favor of the hotel showed that the building was approved by the city for a luxury exemption in 1997. According to a suit filed in May on behalf of the hotel by Recine and her Kasowitz team, the city withdrew its allegations against the hotel's landlords after the evidence was found and the hotel was allowed to continue its redevelopment.

Jennifer S. Recine
Kasowitz

"It's extremely gratifying to be able to get a client what they need without needing to go to a verdict," Recine told Law360, adding that while "it's lovely to go to a verdict and get a decision from the court," it's better for clients to get the decision they want without needing a verdict.

The suit seeks more than $100 million in damages and accuses the city of wrongfully issuing the 2018 stop-work order against the hotel, which halted the hotel's redevelopment for over two years. Recine said the city appeared to have an agenda against the hotel, declined multiple settlement offers during the trial and seemed determined to make the developers of the building "a trophy on their wall."

HER BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS PAST YEAR:

Recine's biggest challenge this past year was dealing with the transition from in-person court

appearances to Zoom court meetings due to the coronavirus pandemic. Recine told Law360 that the Zoom format lacks decorum due to judges struggling to "maintain control of the courtroom."

"I represented a Franklin Avenue development [in Brooklyn] in its effort to get its rezoning in land use, which was held up by pro se petitioners," she said. "It was exceedingly difficult for that judge to maintain normal courtroom procedures."

According to Recine, the pro se petitioners were "sophisticated" but "not bound" by the rules the way lawyers are. "The litigants would do things like turn off the video, testify in Zoom in masks," she said, adding that these actions made it difficult to assess their credibility.

Why she's a real estate litigator:
Recine told Law360 that one of the reasons she enjoys real estate litigation is because of how "very tangible" it is, since you can "see and walk around the [subjects] you're litigating."

She also enjoys the problem-solving aspect of her job, saying that being able to "turn a problem around three-dimensionally and find different entryways or seams" is an important part of the role.

Her advice for young attorneys:
"I'm a huge proponent of getting as close to [the] facts of any case you touch as you can," Recine said. "The more you know about every facet of a case you're working on, the more you absorb early in your career, the faster your trajectory will be."

She described litigation as an "apprenticeship," saying experience is what matters. Deep research of cases "accelerates that apprenticeship," and that doing research aids clients in the courtroom, she added. Extensive research, she said, will make you the "go-to" person.

— *As told to Issac Monterose*

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