

Rising Star: Mayer Brown's Pablo Ferrante

By **Juan Carlos Rodriguez**

Law360, New York (March 20, 2012, 3:49 PM ET) -- Mayer Brown LLP partner Pablo Ferrante intended to return to his native Argentina after getting a few months of experience at a U.S. law firm, but eight years later, his hard work and bicultural fluency has helped his firm establish a strong foothold in the Latin American energy market, earning him a spot as one of five attorneys under 40 to be honored by Law360 as a rising legal star in the energy practice area.

Ferrante, 37, works in Mayer Brown's Houston office, where he represents oil and gas companies on domestic and cross-border mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, exploration, drilling and production contracts, development projects, and a variety of agreements.

One of his current endeavors is representing Colombia's national oil company Ecopetrol in connection with a \$3.3 billion modernization and expansion project for the Barrancabermeja Refinery, Colombia's largest oil refinery.

"That's a major project, very significant for the country," Ferrante said.

He said his role is helping the deal conform with international best practices with an eye toward encouraging more international contractors to participate in the deal.

"They recognize there is a lot of value we can bring to the table," Ferrante said of Latin American clients who want to raise their international profiles.

Ferrante also recently represented Bioenergy, a Colombian energy company, on the negotiation of its agreement with Isolux Corsan for the engineering, procurement and construction of Bioenergy's \$203 million ethanol plant in Puerto Lopez, Colombia. The plant will be the largest ethanol plant in the country, with the capacity to produce 480,000 liters of ethanol per day.

And he represented Ecopetrol in the \$510 million acquisition of a 9.2 percent interest in the K2 field — a deepwater producing field located in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico — from Union Oil Co. of California, a subsidiary of Chevron Corp.

He also regularly advises other major global oil corporations, such as Spain's Repsol, Mexico's Pemex, Korea National Oil Corp., Angola's Sonangol and South Korea's SK Innovation.

He said he developed an interest in international law early in his career.

“Working at a large law firm [in Argentina], I was very used to working with foreign investors, and I started developing an interest in having an international practice. So I became interested in coming to the U.S. and studying there as well,” Ferrante said.

After graduating from Northwestern University’s law school, Ferrante said he got a three-month internship at Thompson & Knight LLP in Houston. In 2010 he moved to Mayer Brown.

“I was at the right place at the right time,” Ferrante said. “I’ve been here in Houston during a time in which the energy industry was booming. And Houston was increasing its role as a gateway for business in Latin America.”

Ferrante said he’s seen a shift during his time in Houston in that firms with a presence in Houston are taking over some of the Latin American energy market previously dominated by New York-based firms.

He credits some of his success to his ability to do business easily in both the U.S. and Latin American cultures.

“That is, in a way, the base of my practice. I have been able to turn these different language skills into an asset for doing this type of work. Knowing the culture, having been trained in both legal systems, in common law and civil law, is what really allows us to do what we do effectively throughout the region,” he said.

Dallas Parker, a Mayer Brown partner who heads the firm’s global oil and gas practice, said he worked with Ferrante at Thompson & Knight and helped bring him to his current firm.

“I’ve been incredibly impressed with Pablo from the beginning. At every step of the way, he’s exceeded my expectations. I’ve had him involved in everything from Foreign Corrupt Practices Act investigations to planning programs for companies that are active internationally,” Parker said. “He’s always gone the extra mile to learn the law, the language, the client.”

Ferrante said it’s been a challenge to be on the younger side in his profession because sometimes there is a presumption that the “older guys” know more.

“You have to create your own path, but that’s always the case,” he said. “It’s been very important to have good mentors and team up with more experienced attorneys. So you get the guidance that you need and are able to learn from them, and at the same time can contribute with the enthusiasm and the energy and the willingness to work very hard.”

--Editing by Kat Laskowski.