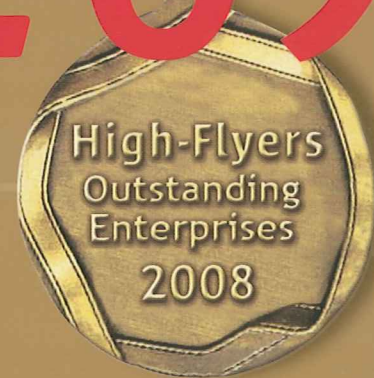


HONG KONG  
**BUSINESS**

# ANNUAL '09



# High-Flyers

HONG KONG'S  
OUTSTANDING ENTERPRISES

**HONG KONG ECONOMY** RIDING OUT THE STORM  
**POLITICS** FEW SURPRISES IN AN ELECTION YEAR  
**CHINA** RAPID RESPONSE TO GLOBAL DOWNTURN  
**NEWSMAKERS** HIGH-PROFILE PERSONALITIES  
**INDUSTRIES** MIXED FORTUNES AND FORECASTS

HK\$48





**PHILOSOPHY**

The firm's philosophy goes beyond just giving legal advice, not to mention a wealth of experience in dealing with China. "We've been able to do what we've done because we have a multicultural background and have been able to provide more than legal advice. If we're into negotiations, we know what to say. Many people know about law, but we know about the people and its environment. This is our added value"

## HOME-GROWN FRENCH FIRM WITH A MULTINATIONAL OUTLOOK

Thomas, Mayer provides key advice to SMEs doing cross-border business with mainland China and now seeking to expand across the region

**W**hen it comes to seeking a law firm that speaks your own language, just knowing the language is not enough. The law firm of Thomas, Mayer & Associés (TMA), conceived 15 years ago by Eric-Jean Thomas and Eric Mayer, sets the standards of service that go beyond the duties of a law firm.

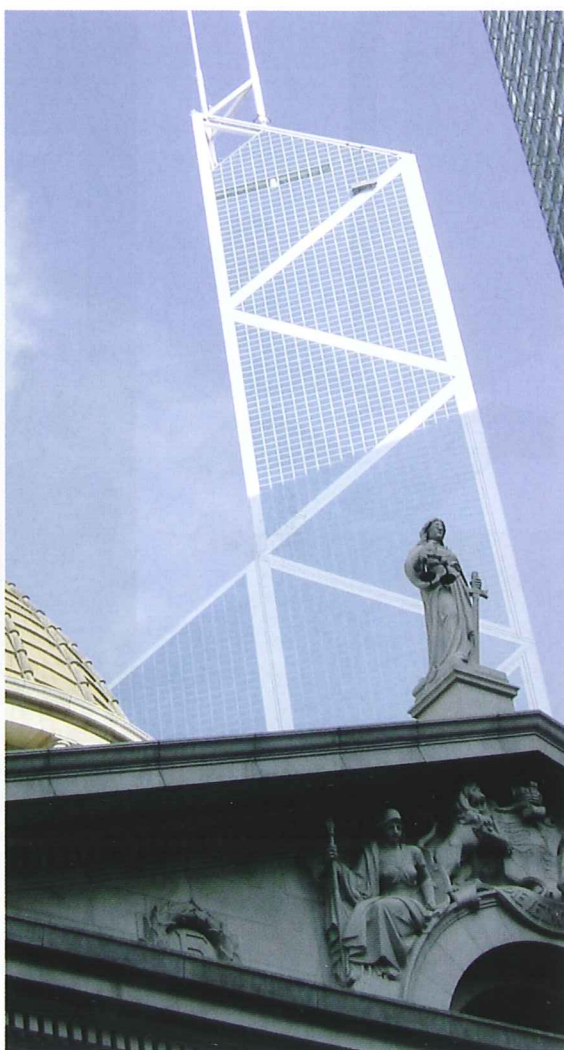
The firm's expertise lies in the perfect balance struck between Thomas and Mayer. Thomas' experience in China European work prompted him to establish an office in Hong Kong with Mayer, who worked with him in France. Mayer grew up in Hong Kong, learnt French here and studied law in France. "We wanted to do something fun and exciting," added Thomas. Originally the firm was a subsidiary of the office in Paris, which then branched out to become an independent firm in March 2001.

Helping clients grow is how the firm grows its business. Besides Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), listed companies come to the firm to get help springboarding into China, which, according to Thomas is often not by choice, as they are forced to in order to remain competitive. "So what we do is helping

clients, mostly companies, reach out from Hong Kong to China, Hong Kong to Vietnam and Thailand, having a base here for logistic, tax and financial business. Hong Kong is a hub to develop activities in various countries," remarked Mayer.

Two heads are better than one rings true for the firm that attributes its success to teamwork. "It's about the team. The key is team development," according to Thomas. Together with this unified approach the firm has built up a good image over the years, gaining the confidence and trust of clients who keep coming back to engage the firm's services.

This is a crucial element according to both Thomas and Mayer. "When you come to a new market as a lawyer, doctor or engineer, what you have to obtain is confidence and trust not only for yourself but from other people around, so you can build up an image." In addition, being able to come up with efficient solutions is important in the firm's success in dealing with client matters, especially those involving cross border work with ever-changing laws in countries like China. Thomas emphasised that it's "not enough to know the rules, as you have to find innovative and creative



TMA's French-speaking team assists small and medium enterprises and listed companies in doing cross-border deals with China and countries like Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand

*Opposite page, from left to right:* Eric-Jean Thomas and Eric Mayer, partners at Thomas, Mayer & Associés

#### FAST FACTS

- Established in 1995
- 9 full time lawyers
- More than half a dozen working languages
- A portfolio of more than 250 clients
- Clients from France, Belgium, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Spain and Hong Kong
- A cutting-edge law firm in structuring foreign Investments in China and the Asia-Pacific region

solutions for clients". However, Thomas and Mayer from experience mean balancing innovation with risk is vital for SMEs. "They have more at stake, they need innovative but secure solutions," said Mayer.

Thomas believes that the firm's competitive edge lies in its client solutions: "We structure our clients' investments on a Hong Kong based platform; we have the most appropriate experience in terms of structuring investments from Europe to China and optimisations and we're probably showing what Hong Kong is best at."

Experience working with French-speaking clients from a wide variety of industries and together with their cross border know-how gives TMA a strong advantage over their competitors. "We're good at explaining China-related issues to French clients. We've been here for 15 years so we know what we're talking about. We're the appointed legal advisers to the French General Consulate in Hong Kong. We are often the non-official legal interface with the Hong Kong French community," says Thomas.

The firm is a leader in serving the French-speaking investors here and in the region, and has noticed that

clients are channeling investments into other parts of Southeast Asia besides China. "We now serve more and more companies not only in the direction of China, but also countries like Vietnam, Indonesia and Thailand, for two reasons. China is not the only country people want to be in and people do not want to put all eggs in one basket. Being well-versed in both French law and China law allows the firm to deal with client investments in places like Vietnam with ease," emphasises Mayer.

Both Mayer and Thomas believe it has been a good year for the firm, and to predict what the coming year will be like is difficult given the current state of the global economy. "We have also seen an explosion of projects in Hong Kong. What's going to happen in 2009 is a big question mark. I think that even though there is a decline we won't see that affecting our firm till the beginning of next year. I would not be surprised if people are postponing the prospect of working on a project," replied Thomas. For the time being, the firm aims to maintain growth and to remain a law firm that the market can trust. ■

- Anna Tong

