

Editorial

Ilaria Iaquinta



Every move matters

In chess, each move responds to the one before, in a continuous flow where no piece moves in isolation. Every move is considered the best possible answer to what just happened—or at least, so we hope—yet it roots itself in moves already made. The same is true in the competitive legal world: each strategic choice shapes itself around market dynamics, balancing reaction with planning. Does a new client need arise? A fresh service proposal arrives. A team of lawyers moves firms? A parallel game begins to find someone to fill the gap left behind. It's a delicate balance, almost a synchronised dance, where each step adjusts to the last.

This is my take on a market in constant motion in 2024, as we bring you this issue of *Iberian Lawyer*.

It's been a year of great dynamism for law firms, immersed in the redefinition of their identity. Partner moves in Spain and Portugal, as you'll read about in the following pages, are the clearest proof: it's not just about changing names on office plaques, but a reflection of profound evolution in progress. The legal market is experiencing an accelerated transformation. Competition no longer stops at local borders; firms are looking to expand, diversify, and adapt to

an increasingly globalised and digitalised world. This dynamism is visible in recent appointments and departures of key professionals who bring fresh perspectives and skills to their teams. It's a time full of opportunities, though not without challenges, pushing us to rethink strategies and approaches.

On future strategies and visions, **Íñigo Erlaiz**, managing partner of GA_P, assesses the past year and outlines the direction the firm plans to take in coming years, with a focus on sustainability, international expansion, and the continuous challenge of attracting top talent. Similarly, the boutique firm Melo Alves is redesigning its identity: once a family-run firm, it is now opening itself to the Portuguese legal market, ready to compete with larger firms. Its boutique essence remains, yet it projects towards a new phase where tradition and ambition intersect.


These changes, however, must be viewed within the context of the broader challenges facing the legal community today. Technology, while providing us with powerful tools, also presents risks we cannot overlook. Cybersquatting, for instance, emerges as a silent yet tangible threat. This is not only a matter of digital ownership but a wake-up call about how technology can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it offers us efficiency and reach; on the other, it opens new doors to vulnerability. It's essential that we stay ahead in protecting rights in the digital realm, developing regulations and tools that safeguard both individuals and companies. In this context, deepfakes represent another battleground. The ability to manipulate images and sounds with unsettling precision threatens the integrity of information and public trust. We face new frontiers of digital identity, where virtual representations of people intertwine with intellectual property, posing unprecedented legal challenges. Pioneering agreements between technology companies and international celebrities to create hyper-realistic digital avatars illustrate how digital identity can evolve in a commercial and technological world. These avatars replicate not only physical appearance but also voice, behaviour, and gestures, thanks to advanced techniques like photogrammetry and artificial neural networks. However, this innovation raises ethical and legal issues about commercial exploitation and the protection of individual identity. It's crucial to strike a balance between technology and individual rights, ensuring that the legal framework protects people's integrity and reputation in an increasingly complex digital environment. As lawyers, we have a responsibility to help create regulations that govern these advances, ensuring that technological innovation goes hand in hand with the protection of fundamental rights.

Space exploration, once a distant dream, is now a concrete reality, and Spain is taking its first steps in this field. This is how space law emerges, an up-and-coming discipline that demands legal attention: it's not just about satellites and rockets, but also matters of sovereignty,

resource exploitation, and international liability. It's vital that the legal community is involved in building a robust regulatory framework to support these technological advancements.

While we look to the stars, however, we cannot ignore the issues emerging on our own ground. The problem of renting remains an open wound in Spain, worsened by the shortage of affordable housing. Internationally, the European Union has initiated legal action against Spain and Portugal for failing to implement the global minimum tax for multinationals. This conflict highlights the difficulties in harmonising tax policies in a globalised context, and beyond the economic implications, it reflects tensions between national sovereignty and community obligations.

But it's not all challenges and obstacles: the legal community also knows how to show its more humane and supportive side. Events like Rock 'n Law are examples of how it can unite for charitable causes, using its influence to make a positive impact on society. These initiatives remind us that the law is not just a profession, but also a vocation in service of others. In the business sector, we spoke with the general counsel of Cupra and the VW Group in Spain, who shared how the brand is integrating sustainability and innovation into its legal and corporate strategy. Likewise, Miguel Riaño of Carbonia Investment offers a perspective on trends in investments and their impact on the legal and financial sectors.

We must be proactive, anticipate changes, and, above all, act as agents of positive transformation. Legality and justice are fundamental pillars in any democratic society, and maintaining them in times of uncertainty depends on the ability to adapt and respond to new realities, without losing sight of essential values. 



TIAGO MELO ALVES

BRUNO MELO ALVES

Born in the courtroom, rising to the world

**From family firm to international legal boutique:
Tiago Melo Alves and Bruno Melo Alves talk about
the journey of Melo Alves' expansion**

by glória paiva

From a family business with a tradition in criminal litigation to a legal boutique with international expansion. The journey of Melo Alves, founded in 1995 as a family firm, took a significant turn in the past year, during which the firm saw its number of partners and associates double. At the same time, it launched two teams focused on international clients: the Asian desk, led by partner **Jorge Chang**, and the Angola desk, headed by partners **Rui Andrade** and **Bruno Melo Alves**. In a short time, the firm's business volume doubled, with international clients accounting for about 40% of Melo Alves' revenue in this first year. The firm relocated to larger offices and is now preparing to conquer new markets while staying true to its traditional roots.

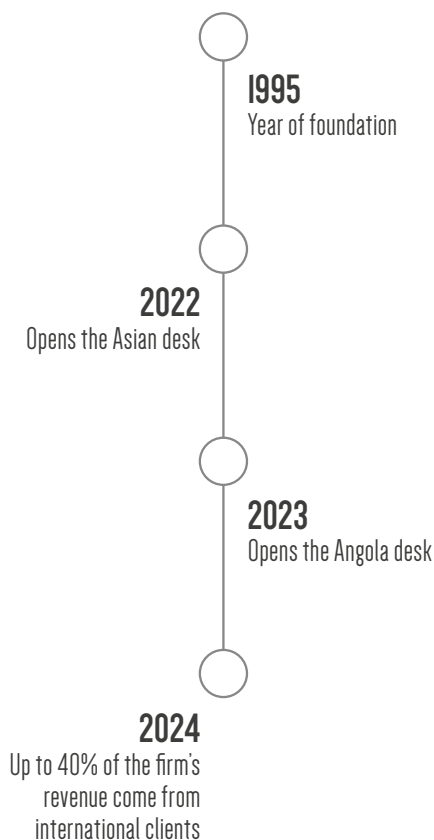
Thirty years ago, **Carlos Melo Alves**, founding partner specialized in criminal litigation, administrative offense law, and economic criminal law, established the firm that still bears his name. Since then, the firm has cemented its position as a specialized boutique, having participated in high-profile cases in Portugal, such as Operation "Fora de Jogo", which investigated corruption allegations in football, Operation "Marquês", involving former Prime Minister José Sócrates, and the case of the theft of military equipment in Tancos. However, an increasing demand from clients for support in non-criminal areas, along with the arrival of new talent in the past year, has expanded the scope of Melo Alves' operations.

"Criminal law is a very personalized field. Clients who already knew and trusted us started requesting support in other áreas", explains **Tiago Melo Alves**, managing partner since 2000. In 2022, the arrival of Chang, a Luso-Chinese associate at the time, opened up the Asian market. Shortly thereafter, two experienced lawyers with over 20 years of experience, from Vieira de Almeida (VdA), consolidated the firm's new international project in Angola, with partners Bruno Melo Alves and Rui Andrade, positioning the firm to assist multinational companies in the oil and gas, mining, banking, and other sectors. Angolan lawyer **Ana Major**,

«We were born in the courtroom. We don't cover all areas, but we dedicate to those where we excel»

Tiago Melo Alves

TIMELINE



former legal director of Chevron for Sub-Saharan Africa and former president of TAAG, completed the team as a senior international consultant.

EYES AND HANDS IN ANGOLA

For all of this to be possible, according to Bruno Melo Alves, it was necessary to establish a partnership with Angolan law firm Eckaley. “They are our exclusive partner in Angola, providing essential support to closely oversee our operations and offer local expertise”, explains the partner. The lawyers at Eckaley work as a single team with Lisbon, according to Bruno Melo Alves. “They are our hands, legs, and eyes there, along with Rui Andrade, who has an almost permanent presence in Angola”, he explains. In the African country, most of the firm’s clients are local companies and multinationals from the U.S., U.K., and France.

Meanwhile, in Macau, a partnership established this year with LS Advogados involves collaboration where both parties provide legal support services, exchange legal information and documents, and engage in commercial exchanges. According to Tiago Melo Alves,

FAMOUS CASES DEFENDED BY MELO ALVES

Operation Marquês (2014)

Focus: Suspicions of corruption, tax fraud, and money laundering, centered around former prime minister José Sócrates

Theft of military equipment in Tancos (2017)

Focus: Theft of weapons and ammunition from a Portuguese Army depot. Military personnel and civilians were accused of involvement in the crime

Operation Fora de Jogo (2020)

Focus: Suspicions of tax fraud and money laundering in professional football

Operation Malapata (2024)

Focus: Investigated football player transfers and bank accounts through which thousands of euros circulated

«The multinationals we assist operate across Portuguese-speaking Africa, offering us strong opportunities to form new partnerships»

Bruno Melo Alves

Chinese companies are one of the focuses of the Asian Desk. “We aim to leverage Jorge Chang’s know-how, particularly his language skills and experience in the region, and apply it to Angola, which today is a strong market for Chinese investment in sectors like construction and energy”, he notes.

SMALL STEPS, BIG PLANS

The internationalization project at Melo Alves has rapidly transformed its DNA: in a short time, international clients have come to represent 30% to 40% of the firm’s revenue. However, personalization and specialization, the firm’s hallmarks, remain at the core of its work style. “We were born in the courtroom, where we go daily to defend clients’ interests. We don’t cover all areas, but we dedicate ourselves to those where we excel”, explains Tiago Melo Alves.

Criminal law remains the firm’s core area, even outside Portugal, although its practice today also includes litigation, compliance, and internal investigations. “These sectors are increasingly in demand in the markets where we operate”, says Tiago. “When there’s internal fraud or potential corruption, companies ask for independent external firms.” Labor law is also an area where the firm is investing, particularly in Angola. “It’s a highly regulated area, especially in the oil and gas sector, requiring a high level of specialization,” states Bruno.

Mozambique, Timor-Leste, and Cape Verde are on the firm's radar as potential new markets. These jurisdictions, where the Angola Desk partners already have experience, could represent Melo Alves' new frontier in the medium term, according to Bruno. "The multinationals we assist operate not only in Angola, but across Portuguese-speaking Africa. That offers us strong opportunities to form new partnerships, if our clients' needs justify it", he ponders.

Innovation is also making its way into the firm's day-to-day operations, as it begins to introduce artificial intelligence into its routine. In partnership with a Portuguese startup, Melo Alves is testing a tool that assists in database research and provides answers to open questions about doctrine, case law, and specific case details.

"It's clear that litigation is unlikely to be replaced by AI, but we can count on help that frees up time for other matters. With this tool, it's as if a colleague can access information in seconds, which would often take us longer to find on our own," explains Tiago.

In a scenario of growing competition, with large local firms expanding and international offices gaining ground in Portugal, Melo Alves is betting on its history as the strategy to follow. "Litigation, which is our core, is an area that requires a high degree of specialization, a fact that is highly valued by the market. In litigation, we provide a distinctly differentiated service that adds value to our clients", believes Tiago. "Thirty years of doing this means a lot. Our brand is our name," he concludes. 

