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TOP BOUTIQUES IN CALIFORNIA 2021



**OPPENHEIMER
INVESTIGATIONS
GROUP**

BERKELEY

EMPLOYMENT LAW

Left to Right: Vida L. Thomas, Zaneta Seidel, Amy J. Oppenheimer, Alezah Carlota Trigueros, Christina Ro-Connolly

GARY WAGNER/ DAILY JOURNAL

Oppenheimer Investigations Group largely focuses on conducting impartial investigations into allegations of discrimination, harassment, retaliation, workplace bullying and other misconduct. The firm's work is confidential, but it has been hired by public and private entities, cities, counties, nonprofits and schools. It also provides executive coaching and training, climate assessments, expert testimony and mediation services.

Amy J. Oppenheimer founded a solo practice in the 1980s and slowly expanded her law firm as the need for investigations increased. After a surge in caseload in 2020, she relaunched the firm in 2021 as Oppenheimer Investigations Group LLP with a new partnership structure that includes Christina Ro-Connolly, Vida L. Thomas, Zaneta Siedel and Alezah Carlota Trigueros.

"This whole area of law just took off," Oppenheimer said. "It became a

whole niche within employment law. As I expanded and began working with very talented women who became my partners, it was an opportunity to do more than just one person or a small group could do. It has become an entire business focused on helping employers do the right thing by employees, doing fair and truly impartial investigations, adding different perspectives that our diversity brings, and helping enforce civil rights."

Recent movements such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter helped bring misconduct issues to the forefront. Public perceptions of such misconduct in the workplace – and expectations about employer response – have also evolved, raising the stakes for the investigative process, Oppenheimer said.

"There's a greater awareness and understanding, not just on the part of the investigator, but on the part of the employer to be trauma informed – to be sensitive toward the circum-

stances of what might be happening, the power dynamics, the fear of retaliation," Ro-Connolly added. "People were less sensitive to all those components in the past, but the #MeToo Movement has really highlighted and brought to life what victims have had to endure, and brought a new level of nuance to our analysis."

The firm now includes a team of 15 multilingual attorneys and a host of supporting professionals, including writers, mediators and administrators. Oppenheimer Investigations Group is the largest law firm in the Bay Area devoted exclusively to this practice.

What really sets the firm apart, said partners Ro-Connolly and Thomas, is the diversity of its team. Organizations recognize the need to have an investigative team that reflects its community of employees, citizens or students, Oppenheimer said.

For example, the firm now sees a lot of cases involving micro-aggres-

sions. The term refers to the everyday slights and indignities that marginalized people experience in their daily interactions. Oppenheimer and Thomas agreed that the team members' diversity across gender, race, age, religion and sexual orientation helps them better understand the complaint being filed and the perspectives of those involved in it.

Team members also boast a diversity of backgrounds, including the plaintiff's bar, defense bar, public and private law.

"Some employers see diversity as a bottom-line issue, or do it because they feel pressure from their clientele or the public," Thomas said. "Amy supported diversity long before those pressures came about, because she honestly believed that when you work with people from a diverse background, the work you do is more enriching and the quality is better."

— Jennifer Chung Klam