

DAILY BUSINESS REVIEW

PROFILES IN LAW

Manella Runs Real Estate Practice With Bilingual Bonus

by CARLOS HARRISON

Ross Manella still has people ask him for the recipe for Ruby Foo’s garlic spareribs. But renowned attorney Louis Nizer’s writings about the legal profession exerted a stronger pull than his family’s restaurants did.

“I started reading Louis Nizer’s books, and I found him fascinating,” Manella said. “Just from a young age, that was the only thing I wanted to do.”

Born and raised in Montreal, the son of a Canadian father and an American mother, Manella



MELANIE BELL

Hinshaw & Culbertson’s Ross Manella learned English and French growing up in Montreal and uses both languages in his bilingual real estate practice.

ROSS MANELLA

Born: 1951, Montreal

Spouse: Susan

Children: David, Morgan

Education: McGill University, LL.B., 1976; B.C.L., 1975; B.A., 1972

Experience: Partner, Hinshaw & Culbertson, 2005-present; Partner, Ross H. Manella P.A., 1979-2005

learned the ins and outs of the family restaurants.

“One of them was Ruby Foo’s,” he said. “It’s not the Ruby Foo’s of New York. But it was probably the largest grossing restaurant in North America in its day,” known for its outstanding Chinese food, white-glove service and world-class entertainment.

“The Frank Sinatras of the world would come and sing there,”

he said. “Everybody in Montreal remembers Ruby Foo’s.”

The appeal of the restaurants was strong.

“I actually weighed going to Cornell and going to the hotel and restaurant administration school,” Manella said. “Frankly, to this day, one of my dreams is to own a hotel somewhere.”

Law, though, had a special appeal. Even though there were no

attorneys in his family, Manella dreamed of studying at Canada's premier law school, McGill University. As he calls it, "the Harvard of the North."

"As a youngster, I looked at kids who got into McGill University law school and I would say, 'Oh, my God, this is never going to happen. This is so long from now and how am I going to get in? It's such a phenomenal university I'll never get in,' " he said.

He was wrong. He did get in, for undergraduate and law school.

"I feel very blessed that I knew what I wanted to do at a young age and I pursued it. I had a passion for it," he said.

REAL ESTATE

Manella also found himself drawn to the area of practice he turned into a career.

"I always enjoyed the real estate aspect. I majored in economics at McGill, and I really enjoyed business and real estate. My family was involved in a lot of real estate matters, and I just found it a fascinating area of the law," he said.

A large part of the appeal is that "it's not adversarial. You're working together with opposing counsel, not for the purpose of hurting someone nor taking advantage. Obviously you want to negotiate the best contract possible for your client, but

you're working in a collaborative effort. And I enjoy that. ... I find it extremely, extremely rewarding."

He got both a civil law degree and bachelor of laws at McGill but decided that Florida offered more opportunities in the practice of real estate. When he got here, though, he discovered that his "foreign degrees" weren't recognized by the state.

He launched a two-pronged effort to be allowed to take the Florida Bar exam. He applied to an accelerated program at Nova Southeastern University and, with the help of an attorney, appealed to the state Supreme Court for a waiver. The waiver came through first.

"I actually got a 4-3 decision that allowed me to write the Florida Bar," he said. "I got that about three weeks before the bar exam. So I ran and took a review course and ended up taking the bar exam."

As soon as he passed the bar, he opened his own firm in 1979. He quickly found a niche where he had a competitive advantage.

BILINGUAL ADVANTAGE

Growing up in the French-speaking community of Montreal, Manella said he made it a point to become fluent in that language even though his parents spoke only English.

"Going through high school and university and law school I

made it my business to become bilingual. I think it's important," he said. "It's frankly a gift and I use it every day."

It also allowed him to become a member of the Quebec bar in addition to his admission in Florida.

Now, he said, "I have a large client base from Canada, from France, Switzerland and many of the French countries including Haiti."

In 2005, he said the international law firm Hinshaw & Culbertson "reached out to me. They wanted to start a real estate practice in Florida. They didn't have anyone doing real estate here. It was being at the right place at the right time. And here I am."

As a Fort Lauderdale partner, His experience and language skills have proven valuable. He has become involved with immigration matters and, working with other attorneys in the firm, helped French-speaking victims of fraud "recover substantial amounts of funds."

"Although I concentrate on real estate, I get involved in other areas, and that's why I find the law so fascinating," he said. "Frankly, I just don't say this for lip service, but when I wake up in the morning I'm excited because I never know what's going to be there for me and what interesting issues are going to pop up."