

'Come as You Are': Orrick Attracts 3 Women Partners to Counsel Tech Clients

By **Jessie Yount**

April 10, 2023

What You Need to Know

- Orrick hired three female partners for its growing global tech companies practice.
- The trio includes Laura Lariu, the GC of Relativity Space, Nikita Shah, the former associate GC at MasterClass, and Fenwick & West corporate lawyer Alexandra Wood.
- About 67% of the firm's lateral hires in 2023 and 45% of its hires since the start of 2022 are women.

Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe, continuing to build its roster of next-generation leaders, has hired three women partners with deep roots in the tech sector.

Laura Lariu, the general counsel at Relativity Space, joined the firm as a partner in New York on Monday. She arrives on the heels of Nikita Shah, the former associate general counsel at MasterClass, and Fenwick & West senior associate Alexandra Wood, both of whom joined the firm as partners in San Francisco in February.

The trio “collectively brings everything we strive to deliver for our clients—legal excellence, operational insight, a strong network, diverse perspectives, and a record of innovation and leadership,” Josh Pollick, the co-leader of Orrick's global tech companies group, said in a statement.



(L-R) Laura Lariu, Nikita Shah and Alexandra Wood of Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe.

More than 30 partners have joined Orrick's tech companies group since the start of 2022, including Fenwick & West capital markets practice co-leader Jamie Evans. The practice grew even last year, with the addition of 700 tech companies.

“Orrick is a standout firm, growing at a challenging time,” Shah said, noting that she was drawn to its sector focus, forward-looking strategy and culture that actively values and uplifts diverse perspectives. Shah is one of many female lawyers flocking to Orrick; 67% of the firm's lateral hires in 2023 and 45% of its hires since the start of 2022 are women (excluding those that arrived from Buckley).

The feeling was mutual for Lariu, who spent more than four years at Relativity Space, the company that last month launched the first 3D printed rocket into space, and three years as general counsel at Virgin Hyperloop. During her in-house stretch, she was counseled by Orrick's Lynne Hermle and her team.

"I was looking for a unicorn, and it turns out that unicorn had been under my nose the whole time," Lariu said of Orrick. "By unicorn, I mean that a lot of big firms talk about culture but few act on it in the way Orrick does. I've experienced that first-hand as a client. I've felt the gender balance working with the team. It's not just committed, it's demonstrated concrete action."

Lariu, who began her career at Gunderson Dettmer Stough Villeneuve Franklin & Hachigian, said her in-house experience changed her professionally and as a tech adviser to pioneering companies.

"I have a much better sense of what business leaders need," she said. "I hope to combine my deep transactional experience with an understanding of the pressure a founding team is under, in a way that provides thoughtful, consistent, and strategic advice. Founders need this at a moment in time where innovation is happening at lightning speed, budgets are constrained, and there is regulatory uncertainty."

Likewise, Shah said her nearly three-year run at MasterClass at a time of explosive growth helped her gain an intimate understanding of the legal challenges and business implications that founders and investors must navigate. Shah, a former associate at Cooley for about five years, said Orrick puts her in a position to be the first call clients make, whether it be for transactional guidance or other legal needs.

Her path to Orrick wasn't completely linear; Shah left MasterClass in 2021 and took about

a two-year career break to start a family. She said her time away was longer than expected because of the pandemic and the challenges of raising young children without a typical village of (in-person) support.

"Orrick said, without hesitation, come as you are," Shah said. "Most women I have met in senior roles at Orrick are moms or have young ones. It was so refreshing to have a team wrap their arms around me and say we will support you. They have continued to support me, and they approach everything they do with a rich diversity of experiences."

Wood, previously a senior associate on the partner track at Fenwick, was also inspired by Orrick's history of putting young partners and lawyers in leadership positions—many of them female. "In the earliest conversations with the firm, I was impressed by the entrepreneurial vision and strategy and the commitment to diversity," she said. "I immediately saw women in leadership positions. I felt at home."

"It was clear to me that mentorship is valued strongly at Orrick, and that is important to me as a mentor to juniors, but also to know that mentorship is there for you throughout your career," Wood added.

Another draw was Orrick's broad platform that spans tech, energy and finance, Wood said. "I see that as a strength," she said. "Orrick has leading attorneys in tech, but it also has all the specialists that can support tech and life sciences clients' needs."

Wood said that expertise was critical in the firm's response to Silicon Valley Bank's collapse, and will continue to help the firm as it counsels tech clients on funding, banking, employment and other legal challenges in the U.S. and around the world.