

## EXTRA

## COVER STORY

FORCE  
MAJEURE

Call them competitors, trailblazers, maybe even bitches if you're hung up on an image of women that's all sugar and spice. Whatever label you affix to the Top 50 Women Litigators in California, we're sure you'll agree that their commitment to excellence has earned them a place among the profession's elite, not to mention countless victories in the courtroom.

My brief tenure as a practicing lawyer produced very few sterling memories. But one has stayed with me for 15 years. ■ The spring of 1988 was all about savings and loan litigation in the private firms. And mostly, it was about white men in fancy dark suits getting together around large conference tables to determine the amounts to be paid by other white men in fancy dark suits who had the misfortune, or lack of foresight, of serving on the boards of savings and loans. ■ I was sent downtown to attend a meeting of the lawyers defending the directors of one of those institutions and sheepishly found my way into a conference room. Long, gleaming table. Good art. Many dark suits talking among themselves. ■ And then she walked in. Va-va-voom. ■ Not va-va-voom like, "Hey, baby." Va-va-voom like, "Wow, I've never seen a woman lawyer come in and clean the clocks of a bunch of guys like that before." ■ She wasn't the only woman cutting a niche for herself in the men's world of trial work, but she was the one whom fate put in my path. Not coincidentally, she had her own female role model, Mariana Pfaelzer, who mentored several of the women featured on the following pages. Predictably, she was sometimes called a bitch because that's the label that tended to be applied to women who liked to compete and win and didn't mince words about it. ■ We had lunch recently and I fought the urge to share this memory. Besides, we were too busy talking about court funding, football, winning and international travel during wartime. ■ But I kept thinking about that lunch as Daily Journal EXTRA put together the following list of the 50 top women litigators in California, taking nominations, calling our best sources, vetting their records. We knew that women had become a force in our courtrooms, but still we were amazed at the depth of talent that's out there across every practice area and style. ■ The 50 women featured here span three distinct generations. ■ A few of the trailblazers — the women who were offered jobs getting someone's coffee with their law degree — are represented, although many of them have gone onto the bench or are less active in the courtrooms now. ■ And then there are today's stars, including my friend from lunch. They have redefined the stage on which women perform and utterly changed the heights to which they can climb. ■ Finally, there are the 40-somethings, those new powerhouses who face their own uphill battles but start from a more equal playing field. ■ They have all earned a large measure of our profession's respect. They also are all owed a debt of gratitude from men and women alike for their insistence on excellence, their demand that they be judged on the merits, for defying expectations and for further opening the door for the next generation. ■ Besides, fancy dark suits on a never-ending stream of white men were sooo boring.

By Katrina Dewey

## Susan Harriman

A mark of a good lawyer is never giving up on a case.

Susan Harriman, who handles general business litigation as a partner at San Francisco's Keker & Van Nest, is confident about her client Genentech's chances on appeal after a \$500 million loss in a breach of contract trial against City of Hope. Oral arguments on the appellate briefs could come by the end of this year.



Maintaining optimism — and working hard for a better tomorrow — is a theme that runs through the 49-year-old's life.

Before attending Hastings College of the Law, Harriman spent two years as a Peace Corps. volunteer in Zaire, where she taught high school English.

Harriman is on the board of directors of the nonprofit Institute for the Study and Development of Legal Systems, under whose auspices she traveled to Bolivia, Jordan and the West Bank.

Success for Harriman isn't only measured by complete victories, such as defense verdicts. She represented a now-dissolved biotech startup, Jenner Biotherapies, and a major investor against the company founder, who demanded more than \$1 million and punitive damages in connection with a stock transaction.

The case ended with a \$350,000 jury verdict in February for breach of fiduciary duty, although Harriman prevailed on the breach-of-contract and fraud claims.

— Eron Ben-Yehuda