

MVP: Willkie's David Drewes

By Isaac Monterose

Law360 (December 10, 2025, 4:03 PM EST) -- David C. Drewes, co-chair of Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP's real estate department, has guided major transactions, such as Saks Global's \$2.7 billion Neiman Marcus Group acquisition and Henry Crown & Company's \$3.5 billion Rockefeller Center refinancing, earning him a spot as one of the 2025 Law360 Real Estate MVPs.

Why he's a real estate attorney:

Drewes told Law360 that he decided to become a transactional real estate attorney, in part, because the work involved "negotiating and collaborating," skills that are "consistent with my own personality, my own characteristics and my strengths."

"So I decided to pursue transactional work generally," he said. "Then, when I was a summer associate and leading up to the beginning of my career, I became very interested in real estate because I was interested in our built environment and how decisions get made that result in what gets built where."

Drewes also pointed to a college internship that taught him about the urban renewal process and about how stakeholders make decisions that impact communities. The internship was with the New York City Housing Preservation and Development Department, and it focused on urban renewal areas, Drewes said.

According to Drewes, this internship "opened my eyes to the realm of real estate transactional work."

What motivates him:

Drewes said he is motivated by opportunities to help his clients by providing them with legal guidance informed by experience.

"I feel very gratified when I'm in a position to use my judgment for the benefit of a client, to help them



solve a problem or get to a closing of a transaction that's important for them for one reason or another," he said.

Additionally, Drewes said he's motivated by mentoring and training new attorneys in the firm's real estate department.

"I really like working with more junior folks, helping them come to an understanding of what it is we do, helping them understand what might be motivating our clients, how that impacts how we perform our work and what we should be doing," he said.

His advice for junior attorneys:

Drewes told Law360 that junior attorneys should dedicate themselves to learning as much as they can about their work.

"Make yourself a sponge," he said. "Absorb as much information as you can and show up with a good attitude, ready to learn and ready to work."

Drewes also emphasized how important it is for junior attorneys to use their own critical thinking skills, especially given the growing prevalence of artificial intelligence. According to Drewes, a junior attorney should strive "to be an active thinker, to engage with material and not just blindly accept provisions that are in forms or things that may be presented to you."

His biggest accomplishment over the past year:

Drewes declined to name a specific transaction as his biggest accomplishment. Instead, he pointed to building up Willkie's real estate team.

"It's just a top-notch group of professionals with varied backgrounds with a very broad base of expertise who work very well together and who want to support each other," he said. "I view that as my biggest accomplishment: helping create and guide this team of people."

Drewes said he became the co-chair of the 45-attorney real estate department more than a decade ago. He said the department's growth over the past year has come mainly from adding six attorneys to its Dallas real estate team.

Asked what makes the real estate team so good, Drewes spoke about the importance of teamwork.

"I think what's critically important in this field is having people who have relationships where you want to work together and support each other in furtherance of clients' goals," he said. "We are stronger when we're drawing on each other's perspectives and judgment and sets of experience."

"On a day-to-day basis, I am emailing, talking to and consulting with my partners and other colleagues, both within our group and within our firm," he added.

His biggest challenge over the past year:

Drewes pointed to the Neiman Marcus deal, which he said "had a number of real estate components."

"There was just a lot of complexity involved there and a lot of work across department lines with our

corporate colleagues and capital markets colleagues and others," he said. "It had to get done in a very condensed time frame."

The deal, which was announced in July 2024, closed in December 2024.

As for The Rockefeller Center refinancing deal, Drewes told Law360 that the most noteworthy aspects of the deal were the size of the transaction and office assets being involved when those types of assets were "generally seen as challenged."

His proudest moment from the past year:

According to Drewes, his proudest moment in the past year was bringing in "a lateral team of colleagues located in Dallas."

"The team is headed by John Bain and Wesley Smith," he said, referring to two Willkie real estate partners.

"Having them agree to come over and buy into the vision that we have for our group and the sort of culture that we have in our group was particularly gratifying," he added.

--As told to Isaac Monterose. Editing by Amy French.

Law360's MVPs are attorneys who have distinguished themselves from their peers over the past year through high-stakes litigation, record-breaking deals and complex global matters. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2025 MVP winners after reviewing nearly 900 submissions.