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They've Got Next: **The 40 Under 40**

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Business & Practice

Anna Martini Pereira of Willkie Farr & Gallagher

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Anna Martini Pereira

Age: 38

Law Firm: Willkie Farr & Gallagher

Practice Area: Mergers & Acquisitions

Title: Partner

Location: New York

Law School: Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro

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Please describe two of your most substantial, recent wins in practice.

In July 2023, I led Ferrara Candy Company—the largest US sugar confections company, controlled by CTH Invest (parent of the Ferrero Group)—in its first Latin American acquisition: the purchase of Dori Alimentos, a leading Brazilian candy and snacks manufacturer. This deal marked Ferrara's entry into Brazil and an important step in its global expansion. The transaction presented distinct challenges. Dori was family-owned and private equity-backed, originally pursuing an IPO before pivoting to a cross-border private sale—bringing together multiple stakeholders with varying interests. We navigated Brazil's regulatory requirements, sensitive negotiations, and coordination across three continents. This transaction was personally meaningful, combining my Brazilian background with my cross-border M&A experience. The client relied on me to bridge gaps across Europe, the US, and Brazil—not just on legal matters but also on cultural and commercial considerations. Ferrara is now well-positioned for growth in Latin America, and I'm grateful to have helped get them there.

Another standout is my ongoing relationship with Bending Spoons, a Milan-based, now publicly traded technology company I've represented since 2022. Beginning with its acquisition of Evernote, one of its first US deals, I've led multiple acquisitions and corporate reorganizations, including the high-profile acquisition of AOL from Yahoo. These deals involve navigating complex deal structures and various commercial and regulatory frameworks across multiple jurisdictions. What makes this relationship especially meaningful is its continuity—Bending Spoons has entrusted me with some of its most significant growth initiatives. I remain committed to supporting them as they continue to scale.

What was your favorite law school class? Did it shape your practice interests?

My favorite law school class was Negotiation. I always encourage law students to take a negotiation course—ideally outside the law school. I took mine at Stanford Law, but friends who enrolled at the business or design schools had an even more distinctive experience. The class was valuable because it challenged my critical thinking and problem-solving skills while also developing new ones. It reframed negotiation as a collaborative discipline and showed how difficult it can be to advocate for a position you are not passionate about—or with which you may even disagree. One memorable exercise required us to pair up, select a topic we felt strongly about, and argue the opposite side while our partner defended our view. The class also reinforced a critical lesson: Preparation matters. Never approach a negotiation or difficult conversation unprepared.

What is the most important lesson you learned as a first-year attorney and how does it inform your practice today?

The most important lesson I learned as a first-year attorney was deceptively simple: Treat every task with the same level of effort, poise, and commitment—regardless of what it is or who assigned it.

Early in my career, I realized that the lawyers I admired most approached a language translation with the same discipline as a diligence report or complex transaction document. They treated an assignment from a junior associate with the same seriousness as a request from a senior partner. There was no hierarchy of effort—only a consistent standard of excellence applied to everything. I adopted that mindset immediately, and it has shaped my practice ever since.

The other lessons I learned—and ones I wish more young lawyers heard—are to embrace repetition and to always ask questions and ask for help. You don't become great at negotiating acquisition agreements by doing it once. You get better by doing it again and again, each time with curiosity and engagement. And you get better faster when you aren't afraid to say, "I don't know" and seek guidance from others. The lawyers who resist repetition or pretend to have all the answers plateau; the ones who lean in and stay curious evolve. I credit these principles for much of my growth—and the first things I teach every junior lawyer who joins my team.

How do you define success in your practice?

I define success by the impact of my work—on clients, on colleagues, and on the profession. For clients, success means being the first call when the next deal comes—because they know I treat their problems as my own and prioritize bringing solutions to the table, not just raising concerns. When my client Bending Spoons returned for its seventh consecutive acquisition and Visma asked me to lead one of the most high-profile Latin American tech deals of 2025, those were clear measures of success to me that no ranking can replicate. For colleagues, success starts with building teams without ego—seeking out people whose skills complement your own and who make the whole team stronger. It means leading by attitude and example so everyone can show up as the best version of themselves. The ultimate measure is when those grow into established attorneys you respect, step into leadership roles of their own, and train the next generation. That cycle—investment, retention, growth, continuity—creates meaningful impact. For the profession, success means leaving it better than I found it—by raising the bar through excellent work, investing in the next generation, and contributing meaningfully to the legal community. And for women in the profession specifically, success means demonstrating that it is possible to reach the top ranks without sacrificing everything else along the way.

How would more junior lawyers on your team describe your leadership style?

I lead by example. I think of every deal as a group project: I'm in the trenches alongside the associates, I build teams without ego, and I seek out people whose strengths complement my own. I expect everyone—myself included—to show up as the best version of themselves, and I create space for that to happen. One principle I instill early: Give every task the same effort and commitment, no matter what it is or who assigned it. I also teach junior lawyers to embrace repetition and never fear saying, "I don't know"—ideally followed by "yet." Excellence in M&A comes from doing the work again and again with curiosity—picking up the phone, sketching out the issues, staying engaged. Despite the well-known phrase "fake it until you make it," I see real merit in leaning in, staying curious, and committing to continued growth.

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Who is your greatest mentor in the law and what have they taught you?

It would be unfair to name just one. At age 13, I decided I wanted to be a lawyer, and my father became my first and most enduring mentor. He also recognized the importance of diverse role models and introduced me to a female attorney who remains a source of guidance to this day. That experience taught me something I carry still: You don't need one mentor—you need your own personal board of directors. My father continues to be a trusted voice in my professional life, but over the years I have branched out and cultivated a diverse, growing board. At Mattos Filho, the Brazilian firm where I began my career, I found mentors who shaped my foundations as a transactional lawyer and who remain trusted advisers today. At Willkie, partners have mentored me, sponsored me, led by example, and consistently encouraged me to take the next step. Each relationship brings a distinct perspective—whether on navigating complex deals, building a practice, or balancing ambition with fulfillment. I pass the same advice to my mentees: Resist the pressure to find one perfect mentor and instead assemble your own board, one relationship at a time. After a period of time, your network of mentors, a backbone of your professional development, will have grown even further and will help you fuel what comes next.

What are you most proud of as a lawyer?

I'm most proud of the career path I have established. I began as a corporate lawyer in Brazil, earned my LLM at Stanford, and joined Willkie for what was initially a one-year international associate position. When I decided to stay permanently, a senior attorney I deeply respect in Brazil told me I'd never make partner here. That stung. Then I thought: Watch me. Everything I achieved since—making partner, being appointed chair of our Latin America Practice— came from relentless work, perseverance, and daily commitment to getting better. But none of it would be possible alone. I'm grateful to mentors who guided me, peers who challenged and supported me (including proofing emails at midnight), and dedicated junior lawyers who bring everything together and hold down the fort when I head home to read bedtime stories to my daughters. What makes me proudest is not any title or deal—it is the moments around the work: the associate who tells me a conversation helped her believe Big Law is compatible with her personal life; the Stanford student who says our Brazil trip opened her eyes to international practice; the client who calls to talk through a business decision, not a legal matter. I have built something meaningful—a practice, a team, a network—while staying true to who I am. And I'm just getting started.

Tell us your two favorite songs on your summer music playlist.

It depends on how broadly you define "summer music playlist." While "So Long, Farewell" from "The Sound of Music" isn't actually on my playlist, it's on heavy rotation in our house all year long—my 3.5-year-old is obsessed with the movie and insisted I upload the song to her Tonie box (for those not fluent in toddler lingo or tech, it's a kid-friendly audio player disguised as a toy). As for my actual Spotify, it's an indecipherable, patternless mix—but "Kids" by MGMT is always a good one.