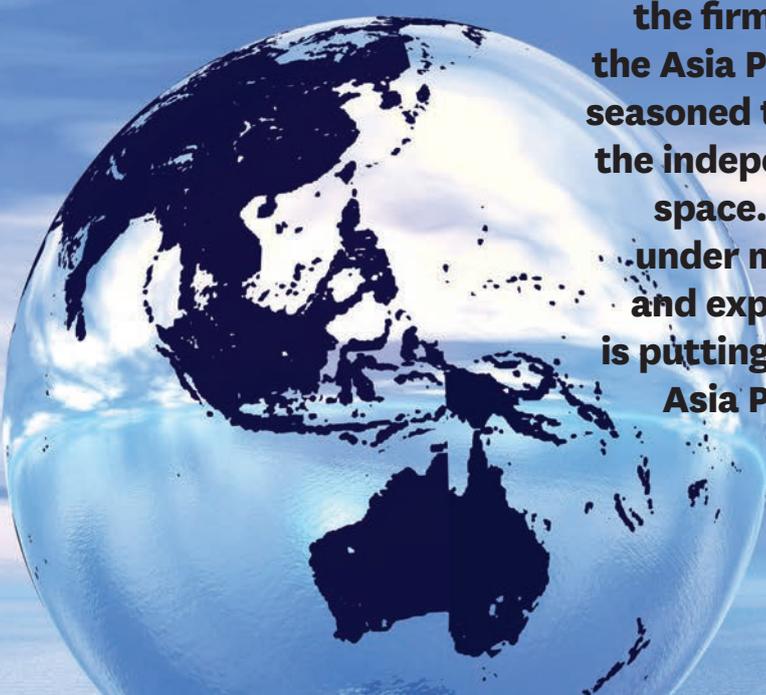


# EFG's Ongoing Quest for Entrepreneurial Talent amid Asia Pacific Expansion



**Oliver Balmelli, Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Head of Private Banking Singapore at EFG Bank, met with us recently to highlight the firm's ongoing commitment to the Asia Pacific region, the quest for seasoned talent and a deep dive into the independent asset management space. With CHF30 billion assets under management in Asia Pacific and expanding into Australia, EFG is putting the pieces in place to ride Asia Pacific's continuing wave of private wealth escalation.**

**S**WISS PRIVATE BANK EFG BEGAN LIFE IN 1995 in Zurich and 10 years later listed on the SIX Swiss Exchange. In 2016 the bank took another leap forward by combining forces with one of the oldest private banks in Switzerland, BSI, in a nearly 1 billion Swiss franc deal. Today, the combined entity has a growing global footprint with around 40 locations worldwide.

EFG is now one of the largest Swiss private banks with a fast-growing global presence. The combination of EFG and BSI has helped created a larger, more solid and more dynamic platform. The words of EFG's Chairman, John Williamson, when he met with Hubbis in late 2017 are certainly ringing true, as the firm has indeed been producing some high profile hires since mid-2018 and also expanding via acquisition, the latest being of an established wealth management business in Australia earlier this year.

### **Keeping up the momentum**

EFG in late June 2018 hired Richard Straus as the new head of its private bank in Hong Kong. Straus had moved from rival Julius Baer, where for the previous three years he was Group Head of their Greater China wealth management business. He joined Kees Stoute, EFG's Chief Executive Officer in Hong Kong and another veteran private banker with long experience in Asia, who had earlier re-joined EFG after a sabbatical.

And over in Singapore, Oliver Balmelli, already with EFG, became the deputy chief executive officer and head of private banking in Singapore. Balmelli brought with him two decades of experience in private banking, his long history of working in Asia, as well as his knowledge of EFG, when he

joined EFG Singapore in 2016. He reported to Eng Huat Kong, Chief Executive Officer, Singapore, who retired at the end of 2018. Kong had been the head of the Singapore operation for seven years and had overseen the EFG merger with BSI Singapore, which was announced in 2016 and completed in 2017. Kong was succeeded by Tho Gea Hong who became the Chief Executive Office for EFG Singapore in July 2018.

Other notable recent hires include Angela Bow from Julius Baer who is now Deputy Head of Asia Pacific region, Kimmis Pun, previously from VP Bank who is now the Head of Greater China, EFG Singapore and Jennie Han-anto, previously from Bank J Safra Sarasin who is now the Head of the South East Asia team.

### **Clear statements of intent**

EFG is thereby showing clear intent to keeping up its drive in the region and the firm's leaders in Asia have been energetically promoting EFG's enhanced financial, managerial and logistical strengths, which the firm believes are ideally suited to exploit the private banking and wealth management potential they see worldwide. The Asia region offers outstanding potential for the firm to further build on its already solid base in the region.

EFG's wealth management offering today encompasses investment solutions (discretionary mandates and advisory mandates), wealth solutions (from corporate finance or succession planning to retirement provision) and financing solutions (including a range of financing facilities to construct investment portfolios).

EFG's group-wide Investment Solutions platform leads all asset management activities and

### **Key Priorities**

Hiring new CROs is key to growth for the bank. "We want to attract high-quality bankers, to drive future growth." Balmelli reports.

Expanding further into target markets is another key mission. "We are looking into expanding our NRI and IAM businesses."

provides global guidance and coordination on advisory and product management, while a global diversified trading business serves sophisticated private and institutional clients and external asset managers.

A sound balance sheet and focus on risk management mean that EFG is one of the best-capitalised Swiss private banks and has a stated commitment to maintaining a low-risk profile and adopting a conservative approach.

### **Asia Pacific a priority region**

With the dramatic economic growth in Asia and the rapid expansion of the numbers of HNW individuals and their investible assets, Asia is naturally a key target region for rapid expansion.

The bank's leaders believe EFG now has the scale, the reinforced position, enlarged market coverage and improved platform to further sustain its growth in Asia, offering an entrepreneurial and highly professional culture designed to encourage talented individuals to innovate and to build their book of business, leveraging regional and global expertise and



OLIVER BALMELLI  
EFG Bank

what its leaders see as a dynamic, team-oriented and highly client-centric business culture.

A key priority for the region's heads has also been to build the EFG name and brand recognition.

### **Selective, strategic expansion**

"According to our strategic plan, hiring of experienced CROs is key to developing our business" Balmelli reports. "And we are also expanding into selected countries and/or markets like Indonesia, Thailand, and segments of the NRI business, as well as the Independent Asset Managers or External Asset Management market."

The bank now has 246 CROs in Asia Pacific and an Asia Pacific AUM figure of around CHF30 billion, as of 1H19, following the 51% acquisition of the Australian financial service provider Shaw and Partners, which was announced in March subject at the time to regulatory approvals.

### **Seasoned bankers to drive growth**

In the quest for new talent to further drive the business, Balmelli explains that EFG seeks seasoned

### **Getting Personal**

Balmelli was born in Germany to a father from Switzerland and a German mother but soon moved to Switzerland and spent his formative years there. He grew up mostly in delightful Lugano, in the Ticino region, and then moved to Lausanne in the French-speaking region of Switzerland.

He holds a degree in Political Science from the University of Lausanne Switzerland, an MBA from Cass Business School London and a specialisation in Investment Management from the London Business School and attended the Senior Executive Program from Columbia Business School New York. He is also a member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

Balmelli has more than 20 years of experience as a senior banker and leader of high performing private banking teams. "I believe in taking a very client-centric approach and with sensitivity to the local and regional cultures" he reports. "I have spent most of my career in Asia and my banking experiences in both Switzerland and London give depth to the way I do business."

Married with two children aged 10 and 6, Balmelli's hands are full with family commitments in his leisure time. Winter holidays are spent skiing in the Swiss mountains, often in their favourite Sedrun, a small village in the east of Switzerland. Balmelli is a big fan of local food with a weakness for chicken rice and curry.

He retains a warm affection for London, where he spent seven years and where he has family living today. He and his own small family visited there earlier this summer. "It was great to catch up with friends, the weather was wonderful, and with the weak pound it was, surprisingly, cheaper than many other places," he comments.

professionals with at least 10 years of experience and with their own portfolios, preferably of at least USD250 million each.

A key appeal of EFG is the bank's entrepreneurial model. "We offer a very attractive platform which is open and best in class, with easy access to management, providing

the ability to react quickly to client demands and market sentiments," Balmelli explains.

### **CROs seeking flexibility**

Balmelli believes these attributes offer strong draws for new CROs, or Client Relationship Officers, EFG's name for relationship

managers. In its promotional literature, EFG indeed stresses that CROs view themselves as entrepreneurs who are at the firm to serve clients, who are passionate about cultivating long-term relationships that are founded on trust and one which offer hands-on solutions.

“This approach is one of the hallmarks of EFG and it shows our deep understanding of private banking. At EFG, we are committed to building strong relationships that are founded on trust and mutual understanding.” says Balmelli. Moreover, CROs tend to stay with EFG for a long time by industry standards.

And Balmelli highlighted EFG’s very strict risk and compliance framework, which complements the bank’s open architecture and zero product push. “We do not use standardised products or set sales targets for our own products,” he reports.

### **Pieces on the board**

EFG is putting other pieces of the global and Asia Pacific jigsaw in place. In another important development in June this year, EFG announced plans to enhance its offering for Independent Asset Managers (IAMs) by expanding its services to include a comprehensive multi-custody platform. The new platform, due to launch on September 1, is being developed

in partnership with AM-One AG, a subsidiary of Swiss fintech Experisoft Systems AG, which is one of the leading providers of innovative software solutions for asset and wealth managers.

According to the bank, the comprehensive multi-custody platform will include functionalities ranging from client relationship management to portfolio management and reporting, as well as compliance and risk management.

### **IAM-centricity**

“As part of this new offering, IAMs will benefit from an automated custodian data feed from all EFG booking centres as well as access

by our CEO Giorgio Pradelli earlier this year.”

EFG’s offering for IAMs encompasses a dedicated team of advisors in major financial centres (Switzerland, Luxembourg, Monaco, Miami, Singapore and Hong Kong), providing services for the overall management of IAM’s accounts. They are supported by investment, credit, financial planning and corporate finance specialists.

“We are dedicated to the IAM space.” Balmelli comments. “I am the Head of the IAM business for the region, and we have a strong team in Singapore headed by Gino Ragazzini and Kelvin Tan in Hong Kong”.

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to the bank’s extensive investment solutions service and product offering,” Balmelli explains. “The partnership is expected to create significant value for EFG’s IAM clients by offering them the advantages of an integrated services platform. IAMs is one of the key priorities for the bank, as set out

### **Trusting the model**

Away from investments, Balmelli notes EFG’s trust company, offering scope for advisory and implementation services in the field of wealth structures and estate planning.

Balmelli is both sanguine and realistic. “Challenges are what make life interesting, isn’t it?” ■

