

Hawksford's Alice Quek on the Unerring Dedication to Asia's Private Clients

Alice Quek is perfectly at home in her native Singapore, or in her favourite international travel destination of San Francisco. As the very recently arrived Director of Private Client Services at Hawksford, she evidently lives and breathes her role, at work and at leisure enjoying close relationships with clients and with her many friends working in the wealth and asset management industry. She met with Hubbis recently to explain why she joined the independent Hawksford, owned as it is 51% by management and 49% by private equity. And to recount why she believes Hawksford's multi-jurisdictional private client offering is well suited to Asia.

“**H**AWKSFORD’S 60-YEAR PRIVATE CLIENT HERITAGE makes

us one of the most trusted names in fiduciary services for individuals and families from all over the world,” Quek begins. “Generations of clients take confidence in our expert advice. Our clients include diverse and complex first, second or third generation HNW families.”

She reports that the Hawksford private client team has a wealth of technical expertise in creating trusts, companies, foundations and other complex structures. “I was attracted to join Hawksford partly because I saw the personal approach of the firm, which inspires confidence, as the clients trust us to protect and nurture their wealth.”

Understanding the motivations

As director of Private Client Services since June and with long expertise in private banking and in trustee services, Quek fully understands that the motivations for wealth structuring are driven by clients’ knowledge of the importance of having an effective succession plan in place, so as to ensure that they protect their assets and leave behind a legacy for their beneficiaries.

Addressing the key trends in wealth structuring and planning today, Quek sees increasing focus on multi-generational succession planning, asset protection and family governance, while noting that due to the implementation of regulations such as FATCA and CRS, there is a robust, unerring move towards greater transparency in wealth structures.

Keeping things transparent

“Wealth structures with fewer layers of holding companies, along with the use of more onshore juris-

dictions are preferred today,” she explains. “In Asia, it is becoming more challenging for banks to open accounts for offshore investment holding vehicles due to the need for transparency and greater compliance with the various jurisdictions’ KYC and AML regulations.”

Quek perceives a number of common concerns amongst Asia’s HNW and UHNW families. “With rising affluence in Asia and the increasing number of HNWI and families,” she says, “we have

seen both the emergence of new wealth created, as well as the old wealth being passed down and then managed by the second generation. Common concerns amongst these families in Asia will be to preserve the family harmony while continuing to grow their business and generate more wealth for their next generations.”

Avoiding the pitfalls

In recent years, she remarks that there have been reports of promi-

Getting Personal

Quek was born in Singapore, and later studies banking at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and then completed her Master’s in Applied Finance from the University of Melbourne in Australia.

Her early career was in banking at Citi, then Standard Chartered and ABN AMRO. In 2014, she moved in trust work with Amicorp in Singapore, before joining Hawksford in June this year.

Quek enjoys her life with friends and business relationships in Singapore and travels as much as possible for leisure. “Italy was a recent trip,” she recalls, “and utterly delightful, visiting the wonderful cities of Milan, Verona, Venice, Florence and then flying home from Rome.”

But San Francisco is her favourite destination. “for me, it is the most romantic city in the world,” she says, “with its inspiring vistas, its hills, the sea, the architecture, the lovely trams, it is so clean, there is wonderful diversity and friendliness from the people - Americans tend to be very forthcoming and welcoming - and of course the food is great!”

Spare time at home in Singapore is spent meandering the many malls and restaurants of Singapore. “My friends are old friends, business associates involved in wealth management and also clients,” she explains, “this is really a wonderful place to be involved in this business.”



ALICE QUEK
Hawksford

ment family businesses where family members have had disagreements over the distributions of assets after the passing of the founder/patriarch. “And unfortunately, we have also seen an increase in the number of wills being contested,” she adds. “Avoiding these types of situations is of paramount importance for our private clients.”

She adds that having a proper succession plan coupled with family governance should help ensure that the children, regardless of whether they are involved in the business, will consider they are fairly allocated from the estate.

A global world

Quek observes that more and of Asia’s HNWIs and UHNWIs have become what she terms ‘global citizens’, with most having received formal education in the West, and having absorbed diverse cultures, many even living full or part-time overseas, and certainly travelling extensively for business and leisure. “Accordingly,” she comments, “with such global ease of mobility, we are seeing more wealth structures where beneficiaries are tax domiciled in different jurisdictions.”

Quek cites the ancient maxim that life’s true certainties are taxes and mortality. “The key then,” she observes, “is to be really well-prepared, to ensure that wealth

that is generated through many years of labour does not disappear upon one’s death. To do so, it is important to think about how we want to pass our wealth to the next generation.”

Hawksford’s commitment

She believes Hawksford can play a vital role in educating clients on the importance of having a wealth transfer structure in place. “We engage in regular dialogues with clients and prospective clients to understand their concerns and together with their trusted advisors and family members,” she elucidates. “We develop a structure that ensures that the client’s needs are met, and the second generations continue to build on the wealth that has been passed to them and can subsequently then pass that wealth effectively to the third and subsequent generations.”

Hawksford is international private client, corporate and fund services group that has a



dynamic expansion path in Asia. Today, the firm has nearly 90 staff in its Singapore regional HQ, where it is one of the largest trust companies.

In total, the firm has around 200 staff members in its Asia-wide team with a strong platform in North Asia, where Quek reports the firm is increasingly successful in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

The firm has a core expertise in advisory, particularly family succession planning and trust work, providing advice on the sophisticated and holistic structuring around a family's needs, with family governance being a vital element of that dialogue. "Our first mission," Quek reports, "is always

to get to know the clients, to fully understand what they want to achieve and why."

Co Jersey from Rathbone Brothers Plc, a UK-listed wealth management and investment services firm, where it had been a successful business division for decades. UK private equity group Dunedin LLP was the buyer and remains the controlling shareholder to this day.

Building the team

Quek has joined Marcus Hinkley, head of Hawksford's private client services in Asia. After a 20-year career as a lawyer, Hinkley took up his current role in the second half of 2018 as a key part in Hawksford boosting its presence.

The firm is, she says, energised by the growing complexities facing the region's wealthy, which present

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Hawksford's heritage

From its Jersey headquarters, Hawksford has for many years been known as a quality provider of private client services, including bespoke family business and family office solutions, and the leaders of the firm in Asia are driven to ensure that the same quality of service is available to Asian clients out of its Singapore and Hong Kong offices.

Hawksford has a more than 60-year heritage in private client services, but in its current form it dates back to the 2008 management buyout of the trust and private client arm of Rathbone Trust

the firm with an outstanding opportunity to more comprehensively service the region's clients. Central to this is providing advice on more sophisticated and holistic structuring around a family's needs, with family governance being a vital element of that dialogue.

"I worked with another successful trust company here in Singapore for the past five years, but I come from the private banking sector, whereas Marcus Hinkley came from the legal sector," Quek reports, "so we are complementary in that regard. I believe Hawksford offers me the opportunity to rapidly grow the business, we see great opportunities ahead."

Quek was also attracted by the combination of the ownership of Hawksford in the hands of both

Key Priorities

"We are ambitiously and successfully engaging both internal and external stakeholders," Quek reports. "I have been at Hawksford for a month, but I feel like that I have been here for so long already, such is the dynamism. We get a lot of referrals from our internal colleagues in China and Singapore, but of course we are really focused also on the external relationships with bankers, family offices and other key friends and partners."

A second priority is to leverage the increased IPO activity amongst tech firms in Asia. "There is a huge opportunity for us in terms of building out the pre-IPO trusts. This has been an area where we have not really focused on for trusts, it has always been the family trust, so it is a great opportunity."

And the third priority is of course to continue to grow the business through the future range of opportunities that present themselves. "We must continue to evolve with the market and to be at the leading edge of this industry," Quek concludes.

49% private equity and 51% management. "There are tremendous advantages to this combination in terms of attracting new blood

to the firm and new ideas,” she comments, “so we enjoy what I consider to be the best of both worlds.

Rapid expansion in Asia

Quek now operates out of the Hawksford Singapore HQ, which is an ideal strategic hub for the rapidly growing wealth management and corporate markets of the region. Singapore become Hawksford’s Asia hub when in 2014 the firm made its first significant acquisition, buying the Singapore-based corporate services business in Asia named Janus, which also served clients in Hong Kong. Then in 2016, Hawksford was granted its full trust licence by the Monetary Authority of Singapore.

The company made a further major leap forward in the region earlier in 2018 when it acquired People & Projects Ltd (P&P). This was part of the firm’s strategic expansion in Asia and brought into the group a dynamic, full-service

corporate services business with a strong track record of supporting international corporates.

The deal was considered transformation for Hawksford’s presence in the region, as P&P operated out of Singapore and Hong Kong, as well through several offices in mainland China. Its arrival also nearly doubled the global headcount, with fifty per cent of Hawksford’s manpower now based in Asia.

Delivering the message

Hawksford is now working energetically to expand its HNWI relationships through connections to lawyers, accountants, private bankers, IFAs, external asset managers, family offices and other non-competing advisers and intermediaries in the region.

Quek notes that given the Asian cultures and values, HNWI families do not like to share with outsiders what happens within the family. “In Europe, a lot of our referrals comes from tax advisers or lawyers, whereas in Asia the bulk of business

tends to come from family offices, trust advisers, and bankers,” she reports. “Asian families tend to have a preference to share their innermost secrets with trusted advisers, who then introduce their clients to us, due to our expertise and quality. We complement each other, we do not compete for business in any way with other specialists and advisers.”

Quek sees a trend of clients moving away from bank-controlled trusts. “Why?” she asks, rhetorically. “First of all, because bank trusts typically only hold bankable assets. Secondly, there is a growing trend towards independent asset managers and family offices, who prefer independent trustees for more flexibility, the ability to hold more asset types, and more importantly because we are not so institutionalised.”

Independence days

“As independent trustees,” Quek elucidates, “we play a vital independent and fiduciary role. In



doing this, we ensure that we act in the best interests of the beneficiaries. Having regular engagement with our clients enables us to understand how their circumstances and needs have changed, and to advise if any updates to their structure is necessary.”

Quek also explains how in her role at Hawksford, she must ensure that when a client approaches the firm to set up a family trust, it is vital for the trustee to understand far beyond the scope of work handled.

“The trustee can add value by having a joint meeting with the bankers, the insurance broker, the lawyer, tax advisor and the client to understand how the investments will be managed, and how

best to structure,” she comments. “One key aspect of developing a great structure is having all the relevant information, and such information is often best gathered from a joint meeting with all the relevant parties.”

It is also essential for Hawksford to operate out of international financial centres (IFCs) that represent quality and integrity and Quek believes the firm’s HQ in Jersey and Asian centres in Singapore and Hong Kong exemplify exactly those qualities.

“IFCs are these days driven to greater transparency and closer collaboration,” Quek comments. “IFCs are also recognising that clients look for a holistic approach in managing and passing on their

wealth. Professionals need to be aware of the whole process and the current challenges and opportunities. Substance is important today as governments over the world are vigilant in their hunt for the taxes due to their countries’ coffers.”

Quek adds that tax authorities are especially concerned with businesses which are tax-domiciled in a low or no-tax jurisdiction, yet management and control is held somewhere else. “The issue of base erosion profit shifting (BEPS) is predominant,” she reports, “and it is important for us to educate our clients on the essence of this, and to advise them to seek tax advice from an appropriate source to ensure that they comply with the regulations.” ■

