

Uno Reverse - Kirkland vs Paul Weiss

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After more than two decades with a London presence, in August 2023 the New York firm **Paul Weiss** relaunched its London office with an English law offering. Since then, and particularly in the 18 months following its fiery City re-birth, it has behaved less like a conventional lateral hirer and [more like an invasive species dropped into a previously stable ecosystem](#): a Wall Street raptor, backed by a nine-figure investment, ripping out established partners from rivals, repricing the very top of the market, and forcing knock-on restocking across the London Big Law biome.

During this rampage, no firm has suffered more conspicuously from these predations than **Kirkland & Ellis** — itself long the apex predator of the private capital food chain — which has lost no fewer than **16** laterals, at least half of them share partners, to the New Yorker's Air Street office.

“Having been steadily picked over since August 2023, the Chicago leviathan finally turns and bites back”

Still, for all Paul Weiss' apparent dominance over its Chicago rival, the traffic has not been entirely one-way. And behind the Wall Street firm's headline-grabbing noise, market watchers may remember that right at the start of this saga - in the immediate run-up to Paul Weiss' London reboot - Kirkland announced that it was [hiring a four-partner private-equity M&A team \(two laterals and two verticals\) from Paul Weiss' London office](#), led by then office head **Alvaro Membrillera** - a move in itself of no small significance.

Then last week we saw the most resonant twist yet in this long-running duel, and it was quite the Kirkland riposte. Having been steadily picked over since August 2023, the Chicago leviathan finally turned and bit back, snatching Paul Weiss' European head of M&A, **Will Aitken-Davies**.

In a market where symbolism matters, the significance is twofold: Aitken-Davies is not a "makeweight" hire - so, if anyone needed reminding, the move is proof that the Illinois powerhouse can give as good as it gets; more importantly, his departure marks Paul Weiss' first ever English-law lateral defection in London, puncturing the illusion of an unstoppable Big Law blitzkrieg.

C'est la guerre!

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