



LAURA SWIHART
Partner
Dechert

Laura Swihart, co-chair of Dechert's global finance and real estate practice groups, focuses on commercial real estate finance and securitization matters. Ms. Swihart regularly represents issuers, underwriters, mortgage loan sellers and subordinate bond buyers in connection with commercial mortgage-backed securitization transactions. She has represented joint ventures and entities in connection with the creation of commercial mortgage loan origination platforms, including the negotiation of organizational documents, the creation of internal underwriting and closing processes and the creation of form closing documents.

In addition, Ms. Swihart has represented financial institutions and funds as both seller's and purchaser's counsel in connection with the sale and purchase of whole mortgage loans and mezzanine loans and the creation, sale and purchase of pari passu, junior and senior interests in mortgage loans and mezzanine loans. She represents both borrowers and lenders in connection with commercial mortgage loan warehouse facilities and repurchase facilities. Ms. Swihart has also represented numerous borrowers, lenders, issuers and underwriters in connection with the negotiation of repurchase facilities and securitizations secured by non-performing commercial mortgage loans and REO properties.

In 2021, Ms. Swihart was named one of the Financial Times' top ten Innovative Lawyers in North America for guiding clients through multiple first-of-their-kind commercial mortgage-backed securities transactions and for championing women's advancement at Dechert and in the wider industry. Since 2015, Ms. Swihart has been consistently recognized for real estate finance and structured finance by The Legal 500 US, and is also ranked as a highly regarded structured finance and securitization lawyer by IFLR1000. Previously, she was named a "2016 Client Service All-Star" by BTI Consulting Group and among the Women Worth Watching by Profiles in Diversity Journal in 2017.

Ms. Swihart is the current CRE Finance Council Women's Network Chair. Ms. Swihart also serves as co-chair of the Structured Finance Association's CMBS Committee.

How are you personally supporting Gender Equality Today for Sustainable Tomorrow?

I believe I have consistently promoted and fostered the careers of women in my industry throughout the years. I am active in the Global Women's Initiative at my law firm, have been a mentor in numerous female mentoring programs, and am the current Chair of the CREFC Women's Network. But honestly, I think that one of the best things I have done for gender equality is to push for men at my law firm to have and take advantage of full paternity leave. I believe that assuming anything about one sex, male or female, is wrong. Having both be empowered to stay with their children or not and make that OK leaves it open for everyone to do their thing and equalizes. And my male associates have decided to take the leave and be with their children. This allows their wives to have a true partner who gets it and can help so they can both work on their careers and understand both sides of the equation. It also makes the work world realize that anyone having a child, man or woman, will and should take time off to do so and so women are not ostracized for maternity leave. There has been insane issues for women who want to do traditionally "male" things, but visa versa too. Men have had issues doing traditionally "female" things. To equalize we need to support and help both women and men to do what works for them.



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What inspired you to get into the finance industry?

I just loved the people and the work was interesting. I started out thinking I wanted to be a litigator, but when I summered at a law firm, I figured out that I was better at finance and transactional work because making a deal and everyone happy was more my nature. You need to go with your nature, even if it isn't what you originally had in your mind. I am good at finance, surprisingly.

How can companies invest in their women employees to prepare them for leadership roles?

In the same way they invest in men. Give them the opportunities. Let them try their own brand/style and it will work.

What advice do you have for other women in securitization?

I've said this before and will just say it again. Just keep showing up and doing your best. Don't have a chip on your shoulder. Show up and listen and learn. Many people have been accredited with it but someone said "99% of success is showing up." I truly believe that. Show up and don't be worried if what you say is perfect. Nothing is.

What is your favorite book?

The Elegance of the Hedgehog