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15 Years Later

MONTEFORTE LAW CELEBRATES A BIG MILESTONE

A few months ago, I was scrolling through Facebook when I noticed an attorney I'm friends with celebrating the 10th anniversary of his practice. That got me thinking, and after inquiring around the office, I realized that Monteforte Law P.C. is 15 years old this September.

I couldn't believe it — and if I had not been on Facebook, I may not have ever known!

In the beginning, I was a single-person operation, putting together furniture at night alone in an office space I shared with a friend. Today, I have a strong team behind me, another attorney who just joined our firm, and an outlook that is beyond anything I could have imagined as I prayed for the phone to ring 15 years ago.

I had only taken the leap into owning my own business because I had noticed an open office space near my house and what would become my kids' school. The kids were very young then — Mikey was 1 year old and Gabby was 2 years old — but I saw that vacant office as a sign. If I was ever going to hang up my own shingle, that would be the space to do it.

I convinced a friend of mine, Attorney Steven Grant, to split the rent with me in the office space (he had his own practice), and on Sept. 1, 2006, I opened my doors without a desk, chair, copier, or computer. It was just me and the handful of clients I was able to bring with me from my previous firm.

As I built the firm, I tried to stave off the fear of failure. I respected my old law firm, and they wished me the best (I'm still close with them today). But I couldn't bear the thought of admitting that I couldn't run my own practice and that I needed my job back.

Amazingly, Jill wasn't worried. She's believed in me from the very beginning, and without her acting as the voice of reason, I'm not sure if Monteforte Law P.C. would exist today! She always encourages me to keep going, even during those early months when I didn't make a dime doing the work I did.

Finally, the practice started to grow, and along with it, so did my need for help. My friend moved out of the office into another space, and I hired my first assistant. That was another terrifying moment. I knew I needed someone to help me, but I feared that I actually didn't have enough work to give her!

It all worked out, though, and I soon became too comfortable. Admittedly, there have been some years where the practice grew very little, and honestly, I know that's because I was too scared to do anything. I was so terrified that I was going to fail — and fail my clients, my employee, and my family — that I didn't do much to grow in those years.

That has all changed. As you may remember from last month's cover article, we have moved once again into a newer, bigger space, and I am really excited about the vision and direction my team has for this practice. The addition of another attorney, Amanda Wood, and my super talented managers, Ashley and Nicole, has catapulted this practice far beyond what I saw when I first noticed our original office space.

It's been an amazing journey these past 15 years, and I cannot wait to see how we continue to grow in the next 15 years. (We may even add Gabby to the practice — she's considering becoming a lawyer!) I'm grateful to every client who has trusted us with their legal needs, to the team who has helped me build this business, and to my family, who continues to be my motivation.

To the next 15 years,

—Mike Monteforte, Jr.



Remember the ‘McDonald’s Hot Coffee’ Lawsuit? It Was Justified All Along

Back in 1992, an elderly woman named Stella Liebeck sued McDonald’s in what became known as the infamous “hot coffee lawsuit.” The public relations team at McDonald’s has made sure the case is remembered as frivolous, but, like the third-degree burns Stella Liebeck suffered from a cup of McDonald’s coffee, her lawsuit was dead serious.

The facts were simple: Mrs. Liebeck used the drive-thru with her grandson, who was at the wheel. Once the car stopped moving, she placed the cup of coffee she’d just ordered between her legs and tried to add some creamer. The cup tipped over, dumping the contents into her lap, causing third-degree burns over 16% of her body.

She required hospitalization for eight days. Whirlpool debridement of the burns and skin grafts followed. She was at least partially disabled for more than two years, and that’s to say nothing of her pain and suffering.

For all of this damage, Mrs. Liebeck asked McDonald’s for \$20,000 — arguably not even enough to pay her hospital bills.

When McDonald’s refused to pay more than \$800, the case went to court, and it came out that they’d known for at least 10 years

about the dangers their hot coffee represented, with over 700 recorded burns and several lawsuits. But in 1992, their policy was to store coffee at 180–190 degrees F, which is almost the boiling point! Furthermore, McDonald’s higher-ups testified on the stand that no matter what happened, they had no intention of changing their behavior. Unsurprisingly, at the end of the trial, McDonald’s was hit with a \$2.9 million penalty.



Although the penalty was later reduced, McDonald’s still dragged Mrs. Liebeck’s name through the mud in the press, with their version of the story being the one that stuck in the public consciousness. But it wouldn’t change the fact that they had to pay her around \$700,000 at the end of the day — or that their coffee is now being served at a reasonable temperature.

Here Comes the Sun! The Pros and Cons of Home Solar Panels

Solar power has been all over the news, and odds are good that at least one door-to-door salesperson came knocking this summer to sing their praises. Celebrities like Tom Hanks, Brad Pitt, and Pierce Brosnan have invested in solar or installed it on their homes to convert to green energy — but is following in their famous footsteps the right move for your family?

The Pros of Powering Up

The biggest selling point for solar panels is that they’re a quick, easy source of green energy. They can reduce or replace fossil fuels in your home, decrease your family’s carbon footprint, and help fight climate change. They’re also a proven technology dating back to 1954, and individual panels can last 25–30 years before they need



replacing. Switching to solar also increases the independence of the whole U.S. electricity grid, and covering your roof with panels can boost the value of your home by as much as \$15,000.

The Cons No One Talks About

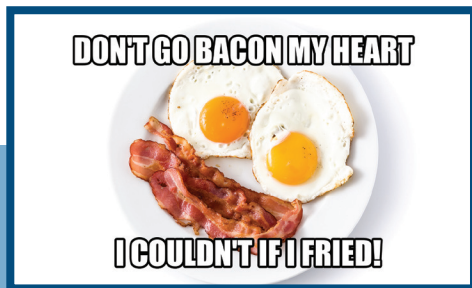
The biggest downside of solar is that it simply doesn’t work for every home. If your roof is consistently shaded by trees or poorly oriented for panels, or you live in a rainy climate, your panels might only generate 10%–25% of their energy potential. If you have the space, ground-installed solar panels may work to avoid some of these issues, but they won’t solve weather problems.

Solar can also be expensive. Installing it will cost you \$15,000–\$20,000 on average. For some homeowners, this investment is offset by lower long-term electricity costs, but it might not be affordable for you or make sense if your electricity bill is already low.

CO2-Saving Alternatives

If you want to dip your toes into the world of solar but can’t afford to power your whole home, you can start small with solar lights for your yard, a solar oven, or a solar-powered water heater. You can even explore wind power! Small wind energy systems cost under \$500 on Amazon.com or at Home Depot and can lower your electricity bill by 50%–90%.

TAKE A *BREAK*



ONE-PAN APPLE CIDER CHICKEN

Inspired by WellPlated.com

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 lbs boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 1 tsp salt, divided
- 1/2 tsp black pepper, divided
- 1/2 cup apple cider
- 2 tsp Dijon mustard
- 4 tsp olive oil, divided
- 3 sweet apples, cut into 1/2-inch slices
- 2 tsp fresh rosemary, chopped, plus more for garnish

Directions

1. Sprinkle chicken with 1/2 tsp salt and 1/4 tsp pepper. Set aside.
2. In a small bowl, combine apple cider and mustard. Set aside.
3. In a large skillet over medium heat, warm 2 tsp olive oil. When shimmering, add chicken thighs top-side down. Cook for 4 minutes, then flip and cook for 4 more minutes. Transfer to a plate and cover with foil. Wipe the skillet clean.
4. Heat the remaining oil in the skillet, then add sliced apples, remaining salt and pepper, and rosemary. Cook for 5 minutes.
5. Return the chicken to the skillet and add apple cider-mustard mixture. Cook for 5 minutes, then serve sprinkled with rosemary!

WANT TO TRY MINIMALISM?

7 RESOURCES TO HELP YOU GET STARTED

Before they separated, Kim Kardashian and Kanye West owned one of the most extreme minimalist homes in Hollywood. One bright white room held nothing but a massive plush “sculpture” by Isabel Rower. In Architectural Digest’s photos, it looks like a giant octopus made out of pillows, and the six Kardashian-West’s climbing around on it appear straight out of a sci-fi novel.

The Kardashian-West’s extreme minimalism is a symptom of a larger aesthetic trend that caught fire during the pandemic when people stuck in their homes realized they’d prefer to spend time in calm, clutter-free spaces with neutral colors and clean lines. If minimalism has intrigued you and you want to learn more about the decor trend and lifestyle, here are a few places to get started.

Books

- “The Minimalist Home: A Room-by-Room Guide to a Decluttered, Refocused Life” by Joshua Becker — This book will take you through the process of simplifying and decluttering your home (and life!) room by room.
- “Minimalism for Families: Practical Minimalist Living Strategies to Simplify Your Home and Life” by Zoë Kim — This light read teaches the benefits of minimalism and explains how to get the whole family on board.

Documentaries

- “Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things” and “The Minimalists: Less Is Now” on Netflix — “Minimalism” and its follow-up explore the minimalist journeys of two people who discovered minimalism as adults and now share its lessons with others.
- “Thrive With Less” on Vimeo — This one-hour documentary follows six students who undertake the challenges of minimalism to find satisfaction in their lives. (Vimeo.com/ThriveWithLess)

YouTube Channels

- CKSPACE — If you want to learn more about celebrity minimalism, digital minimalism, or decluttering, this channel has you covered with its beautifully filmed videos.
- A Small Wardrobe — This channel, run by a former Australian art teacher, is geared toward women and offers minimalist home, wardrobe, and lifestyle advice.
- Matt D’Avella — Matt D’Avella’s famous video “A Day in the Life of a Minimalist” has more than 17 million views on YouTube. On his “Minimalism” playlist, you’ll find minimalist home and habit videos, along with mindset and productivity tips.



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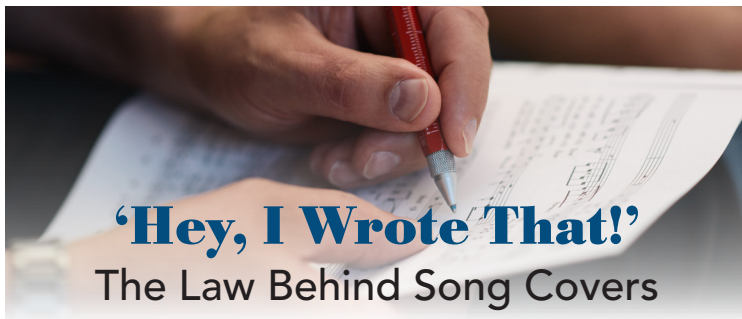
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You might think there's no way to get rich off a cover song — or if you do, it's because you're a famous musician with good attorneys. But neither is the case, and you'd be surprised to hear that patent law approaches cover songs pretty much like it approaches any song — with a flat fee for the songwriter, which in this case is about 10 cents for every copy you sell.

The same is not true for live music, however — in that case, you've got to deal with the tangled world of licensing and other concerns. In fact, a live venue may ask that you not play any covers at all. In the words of Marvin Gaye, "What's going on?"

Here's what's going on: That venue hasn't paid the right fees for the right licensing, and that means they can be fined for basically trying to cheat an artist or songwriter out of their cut.

The good news, though, is that there's no fee to play cover songs when the venue has the right licensing — and no way to play them if it doesn't!

These licensing arrangements are similar to recorded music in that each artist gets the same fee-per-song payouts no matter who they are — but that fee could be higher or lower depending on the agency in question.

Some artists have made lucrative careers from their work as songwriters. You might be thinking of someone like Bob Dylan, who is covered a lot by a lot of different people. But the artist who really maximized his songwriting is Ike Turner — bluesman and R&B legend who also appended his name to so many songs over the years that some question his role in their creation. His wife (and then ex-wife), Tina Turner, performed his songs most famously, but a variety of artists have covered Ike Turner's songs. As late as the mid-'90s, Ike earned hundreds of thousands of dollars from cover credits and samples of his music.

Before the age of digital distribution, the system outlined above kept the business of covering songs — and collecting royalties from the songs performed by others — relatively simple. Now, with the proliferation of new musicians and ways to distribute their music online, that's not the case. It's not hard to see the challenge here, but a solution remains a bit vaguer, at least one that doesn't infringe on people's First and Fourth Amendment rights.

Still, artists can take steps like setting up "trending search" alerts and relax knowing that if someone makes enough money off their songwriting to be worth the trouble, they'll likely hear about it. And a cover song always drives interest in the original, too — never a bad thing for anyone!