

# Shared Commitment

An Interview with Neil L. Rock and Agnesine (Nesa) Amamoo, Partners – Real Estate, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP

**EDITORS' NOTE** Neil Rock is the head of Skadden's Real Estate Group. He is experienced in acquisitions, developments, financings, restructurings, sale/leasebacks, leasing, partnerships and joint ventures, fund formations, and infrastructure transactions. Rock repeatedly has been selected for inclusion in Chambers Global: The World's Leading Lawyers for Business and Chambers USA: America's Leading Lawyers for Business. He was named as a 2020 Real Estate MVP by Law360 and also has been selected for inclusion in Best Lawyers in America. Rock earned a BA degree from Brandeis University and a JD cum laude from Fordham University School of Law where he was a member of the Fordham Law Review.

Nesa Amamoo's practice focuses on a range of matters related to real estate, real estate finance and private equity, including U.S. and offshore private placements, public and private REITs, joint ventures, opportunity zone funds, acquisitions and sales, construction and development projects, leasing and real estate-related capital markets and syndicated loan transactions and other credit facilities. Amamoo is active in pro bono work representing, among others, nonprofit organization The Eye-Care Foundation. She was named as one of Crain's New York Business' 2020 Rising Stars in Real Estate and Real Estate Forum's 2018 50 Under 40 in recognition of her transactional work and pro bono contributions. She also has been named as an Empire State Counsel Honoree by the New York State Bar Association. Amamoo earned a BA from Brown University and a JD from Harvard Law School.



Neil L. Rock



Agnesine Amamoo

**FIRM BRIEF** Founded in 1948, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP and affiliates (skadden.com) is one of the world's most highly respected law firms. Skadden has 22 offices, approximately 1,700 attorneys and more than 50 distinct areas of practice. The firm's clients include approximately 50 percent of Fortune 250 industrial and service corporations, as well as financial and governmental entities, startup companies and nonprofits.

**What have been the keys to Skadden's Real Estate Group's strength and leadership in the industry?**

Rock: What distinguishes our real estate practice is the strength of our firm globally. Our real estate team's focus goes beyond what most people think of when you mention real estate – we work with attorneys from Skadden's 50-plus practices to advise clients on any type of matter that involves real estate in any way. As an example, for one client that primarily operates real estate

in the healthcare space, attorneys across many of our practices have helped represent this client, including with respect to the acquisition of public companies, secured and unsecured financing transactions, equity issuances, recapitalization and restructuring transactions, and executive compensation and employment issues, to name a few.

Amamoo: As one of our clients recently put it, we're a "one-stop shop" – the real estate team gets to know our clients' businesses and helps them address essentially any legal need that arises.

**Will you provide an overview of your roles and key areas of focus?**

Amamoo: Key areas of my practice include private equity and real estate finance. I advise sponsors and investors on the formation, operation and capitalization of a wide range of funds, as well as on financings, acquisitions and dispositions. I also represent real estate companies, financial institutions and borrowers in the origination and sale of a variety of debt instruments. This past year, I helped close several opportunity zone fund deals, which I consider particularly rewarding because they provide tax incentives for investing in low-income communities. We completed deals for large projects in Queens and the Bronx.

I started at Skadden as a summer associate. One of the qualities that attracted me to the firm and that has kept me here throughout my career is that, although I'm a "real estate" attorney, I'm a general practitioner. The broad scope of our practice affords me the opportunity to advise clients on an array of real estate, corporate and other commercial matters. Members of our group are not siloed into specific areas of practice. We

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strongly encourage the growth, development and evolution of our attorneys. In my new role as a partner, I’m involved in mentoring younger attorneys and expanding our capabilities.

*Rock:* The focus of my practice seems to change about every three to five years. Right now, I spend a significant portion of my time on infrastructure transactions – we advised the Metropolitan Transit Authority on the renovation of Penn Station, and Nesa and I are currently representing the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey in the redevelopment of JFK International Airport. I also advise public and private companies with respect to their real estate portfolios in numerous sectors including healthcare, office, residential and student housing. As the head of our real estate practice, I also help cultivate client relationships and assist colleagues in developing their practices.

**How critical is it for Skadden to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?**

*Rock:* Making progress on diversity, equity and inclusion is essential for the success of the firm. Whether you are negotiating a deal or appearing before a judge, it is extremely important to call on the experience and insights of people with a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives to understand the different concerns or the different interpretations of provisions in a document that people may have. I was taught at a very early stage of my career that everyone who attends a meeting should plan to participate – we all have something to add.

*Amamoo:* I completely agree. As leaders, we have to encourage all of our colleagues to

speak up and voice their opinions. The very definition of “inclusion” is valuing everyone’s ideas in order to come up with the most creative solutions. The Real Estate Group’s commitment to diversity comes from the top down – with Neil as my sponsor, we participated in the firm’s Career Sponsorship Program. Our group also actively participates in the Skadden 1L Scholars Program which provides diverse 1L summer associates with law firm, in-house and public interest experience. I frequently work with our DEI team, including most recently by judging an innovation competition for high school students as part of the firm’s involvement in helping to increase diversity in the pipeline into the legal profession. Our group has hosted several discussions about inclusion, and throughout the pandemic we held voluntary small group discussions on race and mental health. I could go on and on.

**What sets Skadden apart in the industry?**

*Amamoo:* Most law firms would say they focus on attention to clients – after all, this is a service business, and that’s necessary. But what sets Skadden apart is our shared commitment to that mission: We promote teamwork and we value and rely on each other’s knowledge. If I’m working on a deal and I hit an issue I’m unfamiliar with, I can call a colleague and get immediate support from one of the brightest, most knowledgeable attorneys in the profession. When you extend that teamwork across our entire firm, it’s an unbelievably powerful tool and our clients know they can rely on it.

**What advice do you offer young people interested in a career in law?**

*Amamoo:* Pursue your dream and don’t give up. A career in law can be very rewarding. On great days, you’ll be closing deals that appear on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* and thinking, “I made it!” But the profession can also be demanding and you really need to stick to it. The best advice I’ve received is to stay centered and focused on your goals because the biggest rewards usually require overcoming challenges.

*Rock:* Agreed. I also think it’s important to look to the future and figure out what you aspire to do as a lawyer. Do you want to argue in front of the Supreme Court? Negotiate hostile takeovers? Work on transactions that will change the landscape of a city or the nation? Find an experienced attorney or two who excel at what you’re interested in, don’t be shy about asking for their advice, and then focus on achieving your objective, knowing that you don’t get to start where you want to end. You have to work your way toward it.

Also, try to maintain an open mind, because objectives can change. Neither Nesa nor I originally wanted to be a lawyer. Nesa planned to go into private equity. I wanted to be a sports agent. But I am about to celebrate my 33rd anniversary with Skadden. What changed? I was given tremendous respect and responsibility from day one and when I was a fourth-year associate, I was the lead negotiator on a large transaction for the first time and realized, “This is what I want to do – I want to negotiate transactions. I want to provide strategic advice.” So give yourself time to figure out where you want to be, and then go for it. ●

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