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TOP WHITE COLLAR LAWYERS 2021



Marino and husband Richard D. Kaplan opened the doors to their white-collar criminal defense firm in 1997. They've since added three more lawyers, but vow to keep it small.

"We've got a really tight team right now and we work really, really well together," Marino said, adding that future plans include an expansion into civil rights and criminal forfeiture litigation.

In September, the boutique relocated to a renovated West Hollywood home. "Many of our clients are high-net-worth individuals that are likely to be recognized in a big public setting," like their former office building, she said. "Going into an office tower is the last thing they want to do when they're facing serious charges and trying to unwind a serious situation."

A side benefit: no elevator, so it's safer during the pandemic, Marino pointed out. "And it's five minutes from my house. This is the best quality of life move I've made in a long time."

On a Wednesday in November, Marino attended a conference with government officials over the status of her client, Jianjun Qiao, a former Chinese official extradited with his wife from Sweden to the U.S. on money laundering charges. *U.S. v. Qiao*, 14-cr-00384 (C.D. Cal., filed July 2, 2014).

"This is Chinese political persecution against a leader of an opposition party in China," Marino said. "It's a highly sensitive matter."

In March, when the FBI raided the private Beverly Hills safe deposit box facility U.S. Private Vaults and seized every box holder's property, Marino's phone lit up. Officials alleged the facility was a front for money laundering and drug trafficking, but Marino contends the claims are much too broad. "That week was like nothing else," she said. "I fielded at least 50 calls from very upset boxholders and I'm still getting calls."

Her firm accepted about a dozen clients, filed claims and successfully achieved the return of property for many. Marino said she still represents five clients and is negotiating on their behalf; in one case, she has filed suit over 120 gold coins worth several hundred thousand dollars that remain missing. *Mellein v. U.S.*, 21-cv-02803 (C.D. Cal., filed Aug. 13, 2021).

"Also, I'm working to change the dynamic of this case with the Department of Justice," she said. "I'm taking on the role of organizing the defense lawyers who represent all of the box holders to present a united front to the government and bring awareness of their inexcusable view of people's Fourth Amendment right to be free from unlawful search and seizure. If we get no satisfaction locally, we'll take this case to Main Justice in Washington, D.C."

Kaplan Marino's offices feature walls full of modern paintings and subdued colors. The gray tones "show



NINA MARINO
KAPLAN MARINO, PC

LOS ANGELES

WHITE-COLLAR CRIMINAL
DEFENSE

how nuanced details, such as shades of gray, can transform the black-and-white arguments relied upon by criminal prosecutors," Marino said.

— Don DeBenedictis