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In 1995, *The American Lawyer* identified the private bar's next generation of leaders. Now, we look back at them—and ahead to their successors.

The word “elite” comes from an Old French verb meaning “to choose.” In its modern connotation, the word has also come to stand for high achievement. Both meanings apply to the special report that follows—the culmination of an intensive effort by the staff of *The American Lawyer* to choose 45 of the highest-performing members of the private bar under the age of 45.

We had help. Many months ago, we contacted all the firms in *The Am Law 200* to seek their nominations. We also spun our own Rolodexes, scanned Web sites and news clippings, and reached out to luminaries within particular practice areas to solicit their thoughts.

As for criteria, there were a very few. We looked for prodigies who had already notched a major trial win or complex deal, for those who had established remarkable records of professional development, for those who could point to an independent book of business, for those who might have overcome adversity. We also looked far and wide. It would be possible to construct a list of 45 young bankruptcy specialists whose accomplishments were noteworthy (particularly in this market), but we wanted to draw from many walks of law.

The result, we think, will stand up over time. That was certainly true of the alumni from our last such effort; their impressive updates appear throughout the following pages. So, for all you elitists out there, happy talent scouting.

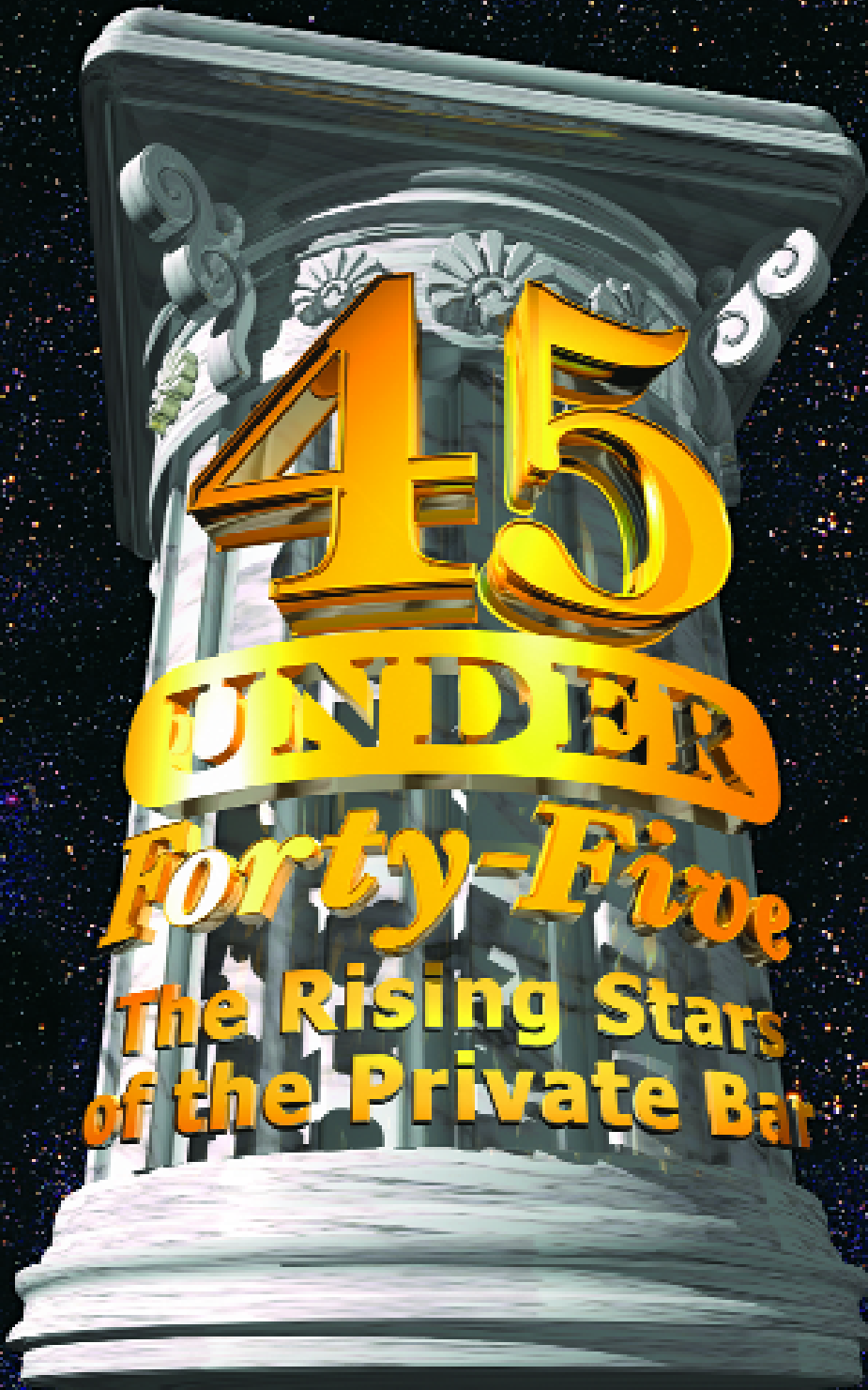


ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN DUGAN



JEFFREY HALL, 42

**Bartlit Beck Herman
Palenchar & Scott
Chicago**

WHEN CLIENTS AND COLLEAGUES TALK ABOUT Jeffrey Hall, they invariably emphasize his midwestern qualities: down-to-earth, straightforward, trustworthy. The Detroit native, who is a partner at Chicago's Bartlit Beck, put those traits to good use as lead defense lawyer in a two-and-a-half-month jury trial for E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company last fall.

The company had been sued in New Jersey state court by some 1,500 residents who claimed that emissions from a nearby DuPont plant had damaged their health and property values. Ten test plaintiffs went to trial. The judge threw out the punitive damages claims, and the jury returned a verdict of less than \$500,000 for just three individuals. (At press time the parties were awaiting the judge's posttrial rulings.) Although it was not a complete win, DuPont is pleased. "We consider it a victory," says corporate counsel Ross Schmucki. In March, Hall is scheduled to defend DuPont again in federal court against similar claims arising from the same plant. He is also lead counsel for plaintiff Apartment Investment and Management Company in a bad-faith insurance overcharge suit.

A 1988 graduate of University of Michigan Law School, where he was articles editor of the law review, Hall started his career at Chicago's Kirkland & Ellis, then followed Fred Bartlit when he set up his firm in 1993. Bartlit, who has tried a half-dozen cases with the younger lawyer, says Hall's breakthrough court performance came when he was assisting Bartlit in a trial over the billion-dollar Simmons family trusts in 1997.

"He has great personal credibility," says Bartlit. "If you met him, you'd believe everything he said."

Hall's partner Sidney "Skip" Herman says that Hall may not seem especially dynamic in ordinary settings, but "when he steps into a courtroom, he's transformed. His body expands, and his command changes." Partner Philip Beck recently tried a lender liability case with Hall for GMAC's Residential Funding Corporation, which had been sued for \$390 million plus punitive damages. Hall impressed Beck with his low-key but effective impeachment of an expert. "There's a temptation to go overboard and gloat a bit and be theatrical [in these situations]," says Beck. "He conducted the examination in a way that [seemed like he was] almost reluctantly revealing the untruth." The jury returned a defense verdict for Residential Funding and awarded \$96 million for a counterclaim.

"I try never to be nasty in court. I don't think it's a good thing," says Hall, who adds, "I find it can be disarming to the opponent if you actually admit where your case is weak and explain why."

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UNDER 45

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