



## Meet Melissa Lau: rediscovering a passion for insolvency & forensics

*Whether it's dealing with fraudsters and money launderers, or undertaking careful forensic investigations, Jirsch Sutherland Partner Melissa Lau's calm manner and nerves of steel have helped in many an 'interesting' situation. But it's her well-founded skills in investigation and her desire to help people that make her a sterling insolvency specialist. Here Melissa reveals how she rediscovered her passion for the sector.*



Melissa Lau, Jirsch Sutherland Partner, Head of the Asia Desk

When asked what she enjoys the most about insolvency, Brisbane-based Partner [Melissa Lau](#) doesn't hesitate: "I enjoy helping people realise they have options other than going into liquidation or becoming bankrupt. The Australian insolvency regime offers other solutions for anyone in financial trouble."

This desire to help business owners and directors was the reason Melissa returned to insolvency after a five-year 'break' in corporate banking in Hong Kong. "I realised I still had a passion for insolvency – and I wanted to practice again as a Registered Liquidator," says Melissa.

Melissa commenced her insolvency career in 2003 and has held senior roles at leading firms in Sydney, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. And while her time in corporate banking removed her from insolvency cases, she worked closely with other insolvency practitioners and performed pre-restructuring role within the bank. Her experience in special assets management and as Head of Risk and Compliance in financial institutions also gave her valuable insights into the banking system and sharpened her due diligence and fraud investigation skills.

In early 2020, when Melissa was exploring ways to return to insolvency – and to Australia – Jirsch Sutherland's Managing Partner [Bradd Morelli](#) mentioned the opportunity to set up and run the firm's [Asia Desk](#). Morelli and fellow Partner [Jimmy Trpcevski](#) had previously worked with Melissa and knew she had the perfect experience and expertise to head up the new division to assist Asian-Australian business owners and directors, and to investigate cases of fraud and

other white-collar crimes for the firm's SME clients throughout Australia and globally.

"I had wanted to bring Melissa on the team for years. Her knowledge of Asia and her vast experience in forensic accounting and fraud investigation, including asset tracing and recovery, makes her exceptional. There aren't many insolvency specialists in Australia who have her high-level expertise," says Morelli.

And so the Asia Desk was born. In her role as the division's Head, Melissa's focus is to reach out to and assist the Asian-Australian business community in Australia.

Melissa has also created a small but talented team who, like her, are fluent in various Asian languages and familiar with Asian business practices and etiquettes, cultures and laws.

## **The path to insolvency**



Melissa's nerves of steel and calm voice have proved invaluable during her career

After completing high school in Malaysia, Melissa initially wanted to become a doctor. "With the high cost for pursuing a medicine degree abroad, I did a Bachelor of Business at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) instead," she says, adding she doesn't regret going into insolvency. "My analytical skills, logical thinking and detail orientated approach have helped me solve cases and achieve good results for businesses."

In addition to her varied skills and expertise, Melissa is discrete, and her calm voice and nerves of steel have proved invaluable during her career, including while investigating fraudsters and money launderers, and taking possession of businesses.

## **The importance of forensics**

Melissa has a well-honed passion for forensic and fraud investigation and admits she enjoys wearing a hat as a "financial detective", investigating fraud and misappropriation of funds by "following the money".

“Forensic accounting requires a combination of accounting, auditing and investigative skills, which I’m fortunate to possess. I am detail oriented, particularly with due diligence. I’m able to pick up subtle hints and find suspicious clues.”

And with cybercrime on the rise, Melissa’s expertise in identifying the early tell-tale signs of fraud and other white-collar crimes and conducting investigations is proving invaluable. “In 2020-21, Australian businesses and individuals lost more than \$33 billion to cybercrime,” says Melissa, who has noticed an increase in the number and speed of fraud cases occurring.

## Double anniversary



Next month, the Asia Desk celebrates its second anniversary – and Melissa her second year back in insolvency. Since stepping into the role, she has found that a big part involves helping Asian-Australian business owners and directors adjust to operating in Australia and educating them on Australia’s insolvency regimes.

“Many are unfamiliar with Voluntary Administration and the legal requirements around winding up a business in Australia, and how the Australian Corporations Act works,” Melissa says. “If they can’t pay their debts, most business operators think the only options available is to put the company into liquidation.”

With recovery now a focus for many businesses, Melissa is expecting a busy time ahead. And she’s ready with her team and the support of the firm’s Partners. Plus, she now feels settled in Brisbane, where her husband’s family also live. “My children and I miss the food in Hong Kong, but we’ve found the food in Brisbane to be fantastic and are really enjoying exploring the city and getting involved in the community.”