

OPEN TO CHANGE

An expert on complex real estate transactions, Phillip G. Nichols shares his drafting and negotiating skills with students

By Christina Schweighofer

When USC Gould Lecturer in Law Phillip G. Nichols looks down from his office in Century City, he sees to his left an empty lot. Eventually, a high-rise will go up on that site, blocking his view of the triangular Century Plaza Towers and Downtown Los Angeles in

mentored the first-year associate, sending drafts back to him black with comments. “Leo was fabulous at teaching me about complex issues as we went along,” Nichols says.

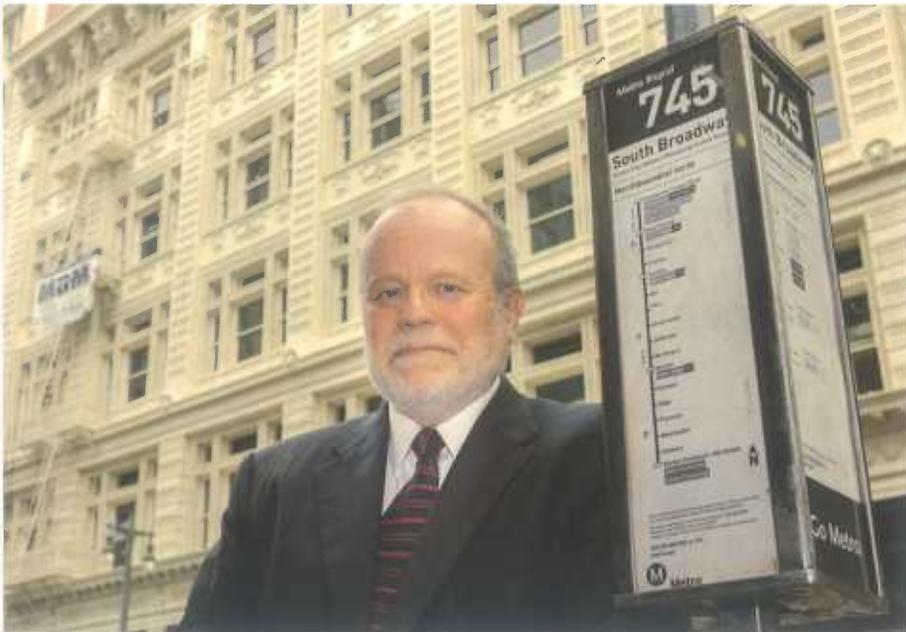
Doing deals around the country almost from the beginning, Nichols always thrived on the intellectual challenges, the fast pace and the collaborative side of his work. “Every deal is like a pop-up community you’re building around a transaction,” he says. “You need to get people to trust you, and at the same time you need to aggressively represent your client.”

In 1983, he, Pircher and 15 other attorneys left Lawler to start a boutique real estate law firm, Pircher, Nichols & Meeks. A senior counsel at the firm, which employs 60 transactional lawyers, Nichols’ work was recognized by his peers, who named him Best Lawyers’ Lawyer of the Year for Real Estate Law in Los Angeles. He was also recently recognized by the Los Angeles County Bar Association (LACBA) as “Outstanding Real Estate Attorney.”

Nichols is eager to pass on his expertise to young associates and to students at USC Gould. “My objective is to help them become better lawyers than they otherwise might have been,” he says. His class this fall, “Drafting and Negotiating Purchase Agreements for Commercial Real Property,” will include mock negotiations and weekly drafting assignments that he will return black with comments.

In his private life, Nichols takes time each week to hang out with his four grandchildren and to volunteer at a church in Beverly Hills that serves lunch and music to people who are homeless or otherwise in need. Nichols plays the keyboard. “When the people start dancing,” he says, “you know you’re succeeding. It’s a nice connecting moment.”

Nichols is optimistic about Los Angeles. “Over the past 50 years, Los Angeles has had a surprising emergence,” he says. “This city is fascinating for its failures and successes — its continuous evolution is so interesting.”



Phil Nichols, who teaches “Drafting and Negotiating Purchase Agreements for Commercial Real Property,” feels optimistic about Los Angeles.

the distance. Nichols doesn’t resent the change ahead. What he wonders is: How will the architects fill the void? And how will people experience the new space?

Being open to change, to exploring new concepts and ideas, comes naturally to Nichols. A once beads-wearing philosophy major, a former United Farm Workers full-time volunteer and an ex-Marine (via the draft), he found a way to get “paid to think,” as he says, when he graduated from UCLA’s law school as one of the top three students in his class.

Nichols started his career at Lawler, Felix & Hall where one of the partners, Leo Pircher, soon needed a hand with his burgeoning real estate practice. Pircher