



# From the Heart

## Yvonne Ho uses skills gained from both lawyering and playing concert piano to serve her community and support fledgling attorneys

BY CAROL TICE

For Yvonne Ho, collecting coats for the homeless and mentoring young lawyers are welcome changes from her usual intense appellate court prep—which often finds her holed up in her office, analyzing briefs and court decisions.

“We’re the monks of the law, appellate lawyers,” says Ho, a partner at Bracewell LLP. “You already have a bucket of facts, and the job is to piece all that together in a concise package to convince the appeals court your client is in the right, and the district court got it right or wrong.”

The intensity suits her just fine. “I read cases for fun, when I’m having my coffee,” she says with a laugh. That extra research has paid off during her 14-year career. Her wins include a legally complex victory in 2012 in *Pasadena Refining System, Inc. v. McCraven*, in which the appeals court upheld a \$5 million verdict for an injured worker. It was only the second case of its type—involving a suit against a property owner by the employee of a contractor—to be affirmed on appeal. Meaning it met Texas’ stringent requirement for the worker to prove the property owner controlled the manner in which a contractor’s work was performed, and failed to provide a warning about a known dangerous condition.

Ho’s knack for being persuasive in court is also useful for persuading companies to participate in civic projects. “It’s really enjoyable, using natural skills you’ve built as a lawyer—and you feel like you’re making an immediate impact,” says Ho, who has served in leadership roles on at least a half-dozen Houston Bar committees. “I didn’t want to stick with one committee too long; I wanted to get a chance to do everything.”

One of her first projects was participating in a hugely successful book drive. Along with other lawyers on the Houston Bar Association’s literacy committee, she solicited donations, sorted and delivered a vast quantity of free books—wrangling nearly 25,000 volumes in a cramped storage room—to schools, prisons, hospitals and other organizations in Houston.

Ho’s communication skills preceded her legal career; she started teaching piano in college, and has also performed as a concert pianist in small groups with symphony orchestras, mainly in Houston and California. “I learned to adapt

my message so that it reached every one of my students,” she says. “Volunteering, I may read to grade-school children, mentor young lawyers, or ask law firms and businesses to fund or support causes. Each calls for a different way of communicating.”

The art of performance is also a transferable skill. “Nothing I’ve done in the field of law has ever been more anxiety-inducing than stepping onto a stage, alone under the lights, and holding an audience’s attention while performing a 90-minute recital program, all from memory,” Ho notes. “Through that process, I learned how to harness the adrenaline to sharpen and heighten my performance. I use that skill every time I ‘perform’ in court.”

Her volunteer performances are equally impressive.

“When she co-chaired the Minority Opportunities committee [in 2013-2014], she created a handbook for all the future committee members to use,” says Tara Shockley, associate executive director of the Houston Bar Association. “She doesn’t just do something and move on; she cares about the bigger picture.”

Helping female and minority law students find paths to success is one of Ho’s passions. While she was co-leading Minority Opportunities, the committee placed a record 70 students in internships. As more awareness is built in the legal community about unconscious bias against those who look different from ourselves, Ho says, the internship program is finding a more receptive audience for minority law students. Such awareness is encouraged through educational programs, including seminars put on by the Diversity & Inclusion committee at Ho’s own firm, which she chairs.

“The University of Houston Law Center has me on speed dial if someone says, ‘I’m thinking about applying for a clerkship,’” she says. “We all have to share our knowledge with others so they can find their way.” **SL**



**Yvonne Y. Ho**  
BRACEWELL LLP  
APPELLATE  
HOUSTON



## Leading the Way

A few of Yvonne Ho’s favorite Houston Bar Association committees:

- **Minority Opportunities in the Legal Profession—Co-chair 2013-14**
- **Campaign for the Homeless—Co-chair 2015-16**
- **Literacy—Co-chair 2012-13**
- **Professionalism—Co-chair 2014-15 and 2018-19**
- **Judicial-Ratings Polls—Co-chair 2016-17**