

# Houston real estate attorney among youngest to earn board certification



By Brian Cox

Responsiveness and dependability are two qualities that Texas attorney Michael Cohodes prides himself on.

"I'll work as hard as humanly possible to not let down my clients," says Cohodes, a partner at the Houston law firm Stephenson Fournier where he heads up the firm's real estate department alongside fellow partner Christopher Hanno.

Both Cohodes and Hanno hold the distinction of being board certified in commercial real estate law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization, a qualification earned by fewer than 400 lawyers in the state. Cohodes, who passed the difficult certification test at the start of the year, is one of the younger lawyers to have achieved the certification, which requires a minimum of five years

as a member of the Texas state bar and three years practicing real estate law, among other requirements.

A native Texan, Cohodes' early life revolved around the Jewish community in Houston, where he was born and raised. Michael was active in his Jewish youth group and synagogue, which is the biggest conservative synagogue in the United States. His mother, Carla, was a home health nurse and his father, Joel, was a salesman for Aviva Metals. Cohodes spent his childhood attending sports camps, playing baseball, competing in youth bowling leagues, and becoming a lifelong fan of the Astros, Texans, and Rockets.

But when it comes to college football, Cohodes is an outlier in the Lone Star State. His father – who grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan – encouraged him to root for the University of Michigan Wolverines.



Attorney Michael Cohodes celebrates a coveted achievement in golf, earning a hole-in-one at Cypresswood Cypress Course, hole 7. With him are friends (l-r) Andrew Stoler, Jeffrey Davidoff, and Hunter Comiskey.



Michael and Lauren have two 100-pound labradoodles – Bear and Sabra – that take up much of their time and energy.



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**An avid traveler, Michael enjoyed experiencing Thailand and hopes to see more of Asia on future travels.**

“I was brainwashed as a child,” jokes Cohodes. “I’m a die-hard Michigan fan, even though I went to University of Texas.”

One of Cohodes’ most cherished experiences was taking his father to NRG Stadium in Houston earlier this year to see the Wolverines trounce the Washington Huskies 34-13 for the National Championship title.

Cohodes’ love of sports led him to pursue a degree in sports management from the University of Texas. It wasn’t long, however, before it was made clear to him that a career in sports management was a very difficult path and that success in the industry depended on tremendous luck as much as hard work.

As a senior, he was elected president of his fraternity, Sigma Alpha Mu, and was tasked, among other things, with sorting out some legal issues that he inherited in his role. Michael worked with the university to reach a resolution in what was his first real introduction to the legal world. Shortly thereafter, Cohodes learned that his best friend was taking the LSAT, and Cohodes decided to follow suit and take the LSAT as well.

During law school, Cohodes received invaluable advice from an older cousin, Naomi Berman, who went to law school in her mid-50s and graduated only three or four years earlier. “She drilled into my head that I needed to focus on memorizing the rules of law and preparing for the tests,” says Cohodes. “I attribute a huge part of my work ethic in law school to her. What she taught me laid a

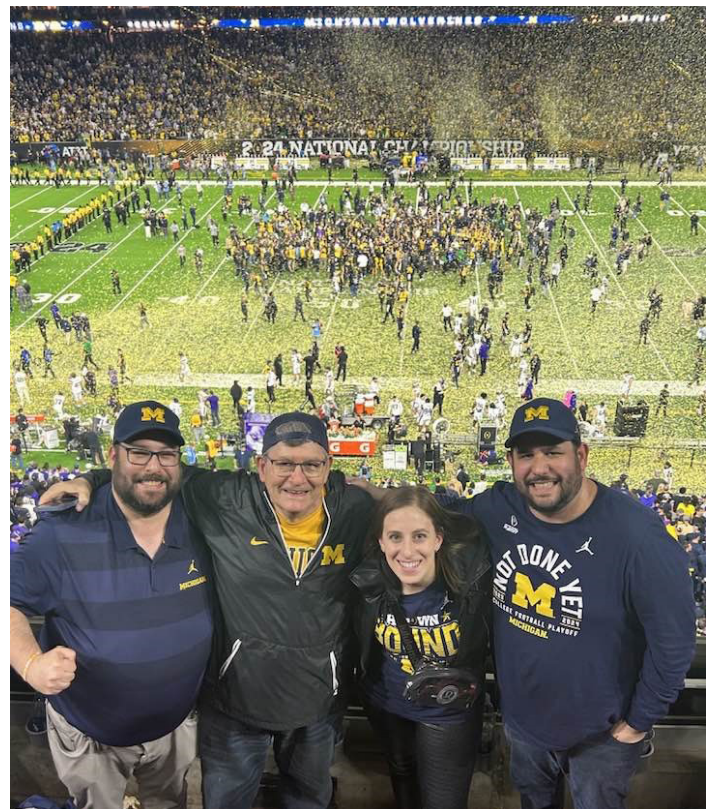
foundation for how to be a good lawyer.” It required a shift in his mindset, he says.

At South Texas College of Law, one of the preeminent litigation schools in the country, Cohodes quickly learned that he didn’t want to practice litigation. His preference for considering and condensing his thoughts and then communicating them in writing steered him toward transactional work. “Texas real estate has always been a great market to be in,” he says. “There will always be ups and downs, but at the end of the day real estate transactions will always be happening.”

During his first summer in law school, Cohodes worked as a law clerk at the Houston-based Ignite Restaurant Group, which at the time owned and operated restaurant brands like Joe’s Crab Shack, Romano’s Macaroni Grill and Brick House Tavern + Tap. The job gave Cohodes a first-hand look into how “big corporations operate from a legal perspective.”

In the spring of his second year of law school, Stephenson Fournier offered Cohodes a law clerk position. “And here we are,” Cohodes sums up his law career journey. “I never left.”

He appreciated the firm’s small size, which ranges from five to seven attorneys, and its more casual interrelationships among colleagues. He also loved that he was “thrown into the fire” very early on.



**Though a native Houstonian, Michael Cohodes was raised to be a die-hard Michigan Wolverines fan. He and his father attended the College Football National Championship at NRG Stadium in Houston earlier this year to see the Wolverines trounce the Washington Huskies, 34-13.**



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“I was able to get hands-on experience on a ton of different transactions from an early age in my law career, including real estate, corporate, and oil and gas transactions.”

Cohodes now has extensive experience handling all aspects of commercial real estate transactions and represents developers, investors, lenders, borrowers, landlords, tenants, franchisees, and entrepreneurs in all sectors of the real estate industry, including retail, multifamily, office, industrial, and raw land transactions.

After 10 years with the firm and now as a partner, Cohodes has taken on the role of teacher for some of the associates. “I’ve learned that it’s really hard to teach,” he says. “The two most important things I’ve learned are to be thoughtful and patient with younger associates. You have to be proactive about explaining things to them, or else it will be hard for them to ever figure out how to properly practice law. It’s not easy, but it is rewarding.”

Michael and his wife, Lauren, married in 2022 after a friend introduced them, noting that they both worked in real estate and each had 100-pound labradoodles. “After many years of swiping on the dating apps, I guess you can say it worked out the ‘old-fashioned’ way,” says Cohodes with a laugh.

The pair enjoys traveling and have traveled extensively throughout Italy, Mexico, and the United States. Most of their trips revolve around new foods and restaurants, which has always been a passion of his. Cohodes, who grew up on the Food Network and “Diners, Drive-ins and Dives,” is an avid cook, with a partiality for Asian and Italian food.

Regardless of where he may travel, Cohodes always puts his clients’ needs first, and takes pride in providing timely and efficient legal solutions. “I tend to think the legal profession is much more than just giving legal advice – it’s a customer service business,” he says. “So much of this business is about being quick with assignments and meeting expectations, and that is always at the forefront of my mind.”



**Attorney Michael Cohodes and his wife Lauren enjoy traveling and have traveled extensively across the U.S.**