

2020 MELNIK AWARD &
2009 FETNER AWARD WINNER

Aruni Weerasekera



What is the best part about being an IWIRC member?

I first joined IWIRC as co-chair to launch the Hong Kong network with a group of other women R&I professionals that were also friends, including my founding co-chair, who would go on to become one of my closest friends. This has become a consistent theme over the past two decades: IWIRC women that I met and worked with would go on to become friends. We would develop both a professional and personal relationship. I attribute this to both the consistent IWIRC culture around the world and its ability to attract and retain like-minded women as members. IWIRC is made up of exceptional female professionals who are all trailblazers in their own way but while also being exceptional mothers, wives, daughter, sisters etc. Combine this together with IWIRC's global reach and you have a sisterhood that is global and are always there for one another.

How has being the recipient of the Fetner Award impacted you and your career?

Winning the Fetner award in 2009 in conjunction with the founding co-chair of the Hong Kong network was a complete surprise for a number of reasons, including that, to date we do not know the identity of the person who submitted the nomination. Being the first network in Asia, we were not very familiar with the Founder's awards and their selection process. We were also still quite small in terms of membership numbers relative to other networks and therefore it had never even crossed our mind that we would be considered eligible for such an honour. The impact of this win was very significant for the Hong Kong network as it provided us with a calling card both internationally within IWIRC and within the Hong Kong R&I community as being part of a recognised international organisation. Personally, the greatest impact was that I was able to attend in-person the 2009 IWIRC Spring conference in Washington D.C., the first of many memorable international IWIRC conferences I have and continue to attend.

Winning the Melnik Award in 2022 was a momentous moment, an honour for me personally and an absolute highlight of my IWIRC journey. Firstly, because I had the privilege of knowing Selinda Melnik – we first met at the launch of the IWIRC Shanghai network on the eve of the INSOL 2008 conference, it was great to finally meet her and her enthusiasm and passion for IWIRC was almost overwhelming. The significance of the date, the eve of 15 September 2008, the day Lehman Brothers filed for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy, meant our paths would cross several times over the next few years.

Aruni Weerasekera (Continued)

Secondly, I know it sounds cliché but being considered eligible for this award was something that had never ever crossed my mind. Every time the annual announcements of the recipients of these awards were made, I remember being always pleasantly overwhelmed reading about how much these awardees had achieved within their own networks and being grateful for the huge contributions these women make to ensure IWIRC not only thrives but also continues from strength to strength. But almost all of their contributions had been within the US - Then, for me to be named the first winner of the 2022 Melnik award outside of the US was a testimony to the international expansion of IWIRC (and the credit for this goes to so many others in Asia too). As the saying goes "it's never our work alone". We were also still grappling with Covid-19 restrictions in Hong Kong which was an exceptionally challenging time for IWIRC Hong Kong that had otherwise thrived on hosting multiple in-person events through the year that were highly popular within the Hong Kong R&I community. This recognition validated the effort we had put on to keep the IWIRC flag flying in Hong Kong despite these challenging circumstances.

What is next/upcoming for you?

I have had the honour and privilege to serve IWIRC over the past 19+ years in many capabilities at many levels within the organisational structure. I have witnessed tremendous growth and geographic expansion. For example, since the establishment of the Hong Kong network in 2005 we have gone on to establish seven other networks around the region. The establishment of a thriving network in the United Kingdom, plus new networks in most continents including South Africa and South America. With growth has come the decision to undertake a strategic review of IWIRC. As my term on the IWIRC Advisory Board comes to an end this year it is my hope that I could be of value to the IWIRC executive boards of the next couple of years to lend my expertise in this sizable undertaking. I also hope to personally contribute to having a functional and active IWIRC Australia network in the not too distant future (of special interest as Australia is it is in fact home).

Any words of advice you would like to share with our members?

Get involved!!! There is no perfect time in your career to do so. The sooner the better. There is simply no better global female-led organisation that supports the growth of women. IWIRC also offers anyone that joins a network board the opportunity to become a leader, negotiator, fundraiser, event planner, communications expert, toast master and so much more. At the time of launching IWIRC Hong Kong there was no IWIRC brand awareness and therefore no support and definitely no sponsorship dollars. We had to learn to do it all. I have been asked if I ever envisioned the exceptional growth of IWIRC Hong Kong and Asia as a region and my response is always that it blows me away how far we have come. Also, through IWIRC, I have had firsthand experience that the power of 'fear of failure' can be a very real force for good.



2021 FETNER AWARD WINNER

Aisling Dwyer

What is the best part about being an IWIRC member?

Knowing you have a community of wonderful supportive and capable women who you can reach out to locally and internationally, whether professionally or socially, and wherever you go you will receive the same welcome and feel the same connection amongst members.

How has being the recipient of the Fetner Award impacted you and your career?

Winning the Fetner Award in 2021 was a massive honour for me and gave me a real chance to reflect on the value of IWIRC, the opportunities it has offered me professionally and personally and my own IWIRC journey. It was really lovely to receive such special recognition for my contributions to the organisation and it inspired and invigorated me to support and champion other members in IWIRC and celebrate their role in, and impact on, the organisation. I have really enjoyed being part of the IWIRC Woman of the Year in Restructuring Award (Asia) sub-committee and looking to shine the light on the amazing contributions of so many women in the insolvency and restructuring industry in Asia and am so delighted to think we have completed our seventh year of the award.

What is next/upcoming for you?

After attending the wonderful Leadership Summit in Singapore over the summer, there are several upcoming events at the IWIRC Hong Kong level which I look forward to attending and IWIRC has some exciting collaborations with other industry organisations in Asia, in the coming months including INSOL and International Insolvency Institute, so watch this space!

Any words of advice you would like to share with our members?

I don't think our members need any advice as they already know the benefits of IWIRC and our commitment to the connection, promotion and success of women worldwide. However, it is definitely worth getting involved at your local board level or looking to progress to regional and international roles on IWIRC's board of directors. Through active participation locally and internationally, IWIRC can grow, develop and adapt to the changing profile of its members.

2017 FETNER AWARD WINNER

Karen Fellowes



What is the best part about being an IWIRC member?

The best part of being an IWIRC member is the empowerment and inspiration which comes from being part of a growing, successful international community. I really believe we are making a difference.

How has being the recipient of the Fetner Award impacted you and your career?

I remember I was notified that I had won the Fetner when I was on holidays and feeling a bit disconnected to my work and career. I didn't even know my network had nominated me! Receiving this award was a huge boost and helped re-energize my love for this work.

What is next/upcoming for you?

I am having the time of my life this year as IWIRC Chair – what an honour and opportunity to lead this organization through strategic planning and its first Leadership Summit in Asia.

Any words of advice you would like to share with our members?

My advice would be to nominate, nominate, nominate - for every award you can. That includes self-nomination. It costs nothing but shows kindness, respect and honour – which are priceless.

2019 FETNER AWARD WINNER

Eloise Matsui



What is the best part about being an IWIRC member?

The friendships I have made with fellow insolvency & restructuring practitioners in my home town of Hong Kong as well as across the globe.

How has being the recipient of the Fetner Award impacted you and your career?

Being recipient of the Fetner Award was a great opportunity for me share my achievements and contributions to the wider R&I community and also to my colleagues. It was recognition that all the time and effort I had contributed to IWIRC did not go unnoticed. Receiving the award was great for building my internal profile within the law firm I was working at (when I received the award) which was really important because at the time I was working towards partnership promotion.

What is next/upcoming for you?

I recently made a career shift from being in private practice as a lawyer to working as an investment manager in the litigation finance industry. I am looking forward to building my profile in the funding industry and developing my financial skill set. From an IWIRC perspective, I will be Vice Chair of IWIRC in 2025 and look forward to helping implement the strategic priorities identified in IWIRC's strategic plan in order to help improve our wonderful organisation.

Any words of advice you would like to share with our members?

Don't hesitate to volunteer and get involved with IWIRC. Whether that is joining your local network board or a committee or organising an event, joining an international committee or nominating for the international board. IWIRC is truly an organisation where you get more out of it the more you put in.