

MAR 11 2011

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U.S. BKCY. APP. PANEL  
OF THE NINTH CIRCUIT

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY APPELLATE PANEL  
OF THE NINTH CIRCUIT

|                               |   |   |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| In re:                        | ) | BAP No. EC-10-1191-DHKi                 |
|                               | ) |   |
| BELLA VISTA BY PARAMONT, LLC, | ) | Bk. No. 07-90770-RHS                    |
|                               | ) |   |
| Debtor.                       | ) | Adv. Pro. No. 08-9107                   |
|                               | ) |   |
| WARDA & YONANO, LLP,          | ) |   |
|                               | ) |   |
| Appellant,                    | ) |   |
|                               | ) |   |
| v.                            | ) | <b>M E M O R A N D U M</b> <sup>1</sup> |
|                               | ) |   |
| GARY FARRAR,                  | ) |   |
| Chapter 7 Trustee,            | ) |   |
|                               | ) |   |
| Appellee.                     | ) |   |

Argued and Submitted on February 17, 2011  
at Sacramento, California

Filed - March 11, 2011

Appeal from the United States Bankruptcy Court  
for the Eastern District of California

Honorable Ronald H. Sargis, Bankruptcy Judge, Presiding

Appearances: Michael S. Warda, Esq. of Warda & Yonano, LLP for  
the Appellant.  
Clifford W. Stevens, Esq. of Neumiller & Beardslee  
for the Appellee.

Before: DUNN, HOLLOWELL and KIRSCHER, Bankruptcy Judges.

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<sup>1</sup> This disposition is not appropriate for publication.  
Although it may be cited for whatever persuasive value it may  
have (see Fed. R. App. P. 32.1), it has no precedential value.  
See 9th Cir. BAP Rule 8013-1.

1           Warda & Yonano ("W&Y") represented the debtor, Bella Vista  
2 by Paramount, LLC, in its chapter 7 bankruptcy case and certain  
3 state court litigation.<sup>2</sup> W&Y also represented JCW-Cypress Home  
4 Group ("JCW-Cypress") and JC Williams Co. (collectively,  
5 "Williams entities"), two entities affiliated with the debtor,  
6 and John Williams, president of JC Williams Co. Within one year  
7 before the debtor's bankruptcy filing, W&Y received payments for  
8 various legal services rendered to the debtor and the Williams  
9 entities. The payments to W&Y came out of funds from a \$100,000  
10 check made out to the debtor. The chapter 7 trustee, Gary  
11 Farrar, filed a complaint against W&Y, Williams and the Williams  
12 entities to avoid the payments as preferential and fraudulent  
13 transfers under §§ 547(b) and 548(a)(1)(B), respectively, and to  
14 recover them under § 550(a)(1). After a one-day trial, the  
15 bankruptcy court entered judgment against W&Y, but entered  
16 judgment in favor of Williams and the Williams entities.<sup>3</sup>

17           Only W&Y appeals the bankruptcy court's judgment, contending  
18 that the bankruptcy court erred in allowing the trustee to avoid  
19 the payments to W&Y as preferential transfers under § 547(b)  
20 because W&Y did not qualify as a non-statutory insider. It also  
21 argues that the bankruptcy court erred in allowing the trustee to  
22 avoid the payments to W&Y as fraudulent transfers under  
23 § 548(a)(1)(B) because the bankruptcy court could not determine  
24

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25           <sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all chapter, section and rule  
26 references are to the Bankruptcy Code, 11 U.S.C. §§ 101-1532, and  
to the Federal Rules of Bankruptcy Procedure, Rules 1001-9037.

27           <sup>3</sup> The bankruptcy court's judgment regarding Williams and the  
28 Williams entities was not appealed.

1 what portion of the funds were paid to W&Y for legal services  
2 rendered to the Williams entities. W&Y further contends that the  
3 bankruptcy court erred in allowing the trustee to recover the  
4 payments under § 550(a)(1) as W&Y was not an initial transferee.

5 Based on our review of the entire record, we conclude that  
6 the facts do not support the bankruptcy court's findings for the  
7 purposes of avoiding the payments as preferential transfers under  
8 § 547(b) and as fraudulent transfers under § 548(a)(1)(B).  
9 Further, we determine that the bankruptcy court should not have  
10 allowed the trustee to recover the payments to W&Y under § 550.  
11 We REVERSE.

12  
13 **FACTS**

14 JCW-Cypress was the sole member of the debtor. JC Williams  
15 Co. was the general partner of JCW-Cypress. Williams acted as  
16 representative for the debtor and the Williams entities.<sup>4</sup>

17 Michael Warda of W&Y represented the debtor, Williams and  
18 the Williams entities in various matters before and during the  
19 debtor's bankruptcy case.

20 In 2003, the debtor, Williams and the Williams entities  
21 entered into a settlement agreement with Denny Brooks, Inc.  
22 ("DBI"), a former member of the debtor, and Denny Brooks, the  
23 shareholder of DBI. Under the settlement agreement, DBI and  
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25 <sup>4</sup> Neither the debtor nor W&Y included in the record a  
26 complete copy of the transcript of the April 26, 2010 trial. We  
27 obtained a copy of the transcript from the bankruptcy court's  
28 adversary proceeding docket. See Atwood v. Chase Manhattan  
Mortg. Co. (In re Atwood), 293 B.R. 227, 233 n.9 (9th Cir. BAP  
2003).

1 Brooks agreed to indemnify the debtor up to \$100,000 for any  
2 judgment entered against it in a state court action in which the  
3 debtor and JCW-Cypress were defendants.

4 Sometime in late 2006, DBI issued a check in the amount of  
5 \$100,000, payable to the debtor ("Bella Vista check"). The funds  
6 were deposited in W&Y's client trust account ("trust account  
7 funds") created for the debtor, Williams and the Williams  
8 entities.

9 The debtor owed W&Y a total of approximately \$23,000.  
10 Williams authorized W&Y to use the trust account funds to pay any  
11 outstanding bills owed by the debtor and the Williams entities.  
12 Over the course of three or four months, W&Y allocated the trust  
13 account funds among the various bills owed by the debtor and the  
14 Williams entities, paying itself accordingly. By March 21, 2007,  
15 the trust account funds were fully depleted.

16 On July 30, 2007, the debtor filed its chapter 7 petition,  
17 with Warda as its attorney. The debtor did not schedule W&Y as a  
18 general unsecured creditor; it scheduled only two general  
19 unsecured creditors, Ross Carroll, Inc. and JCW-Cypress, both  
20 with claims in unknown amounts.

21 The debtor did not list on its statement of financial  
22 affairs ("SOFA") any payments made to W&Y within one year before  
23 the bankruptcy filing. The debtor did not list on its SOFA other  
24 transfers made other than in the ordinary course of business in  
25 the two years before the bankruptcy filing. The debtor also did  
26 not list on its SOFA any payments made to W&Y for legal services

27 ///

28 ///

1 rendered in connection with its bankruptcy case.<sup>5</sup>

2 The trustee filed a complaint against W&Y, Williams and the  
3 Williams entities, seeking to avoid as preferential transfers  
4 under § 547(b) and as fraudulent transfers under § 548(a)(1)(B)  
5 the payments made to W&Y with the trust account funds.<sup>6</sup> The  
6 trustee further sought to recover the payments made to W&Y,  
7 Williams and the Williams entities under § 550.

8 The bankruptcy court held a trial on the trustee's complaint  
9 on April 26, 2010. At trial, Warda gave testimony concerning the  
10 nature of W&Y's relationship with the debtor. He testified that  
11 W&Y had never been in a relationship that would have qualified it  
12 as an insider of the debtor, Williams and the Williams entities.  
13 Warda stated that neither W&Y nor its partners were officers,  
14 directors or general partners of the debtor and/or either of the  
15 Williams entities. He further testified that neither W&Y nor its  
16 partners had financial or managerial control over the debtor and  
17 the Williams entities.

18 Warda also testified that neither he nor Nicholas Yonano,  
19 the other name partner of W&Y, was related to Williams or any  
20 person affiliated with the debtor or the Williams entities. He

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21  
22 <sup>5</sup> Specifically, in its SOFA, the debtor referred to the  
23 "attached schedule," which the bankruptcy court deduced to mean  
24 the disclosure of compensation of attorney for debtor ("attorney  
25 fee disclosure"). The attorney fee disclosure indicated that W&Y  
had received \$0 prior to the bankruptcy filing and that the  
balance due to W&Y was unknown. See main case docket no. 9.

26 <sup>6</sup> The trustee also sought to avoid the payments made to W&Y  
27 as fraudulent transfers under § 544(b). W&Y does not appear to  
28 challenge on appeal the bankruptcy court's determinations under  
§ 544(b), if any.

1 further stated that neither he nor Yonano was granted power of  
2 attorney to conduct the affairs of the debtor and the Williams  
3 entities.

4 He testified that neither he nor Yonano ever conducted  
5 business or dealt with the debtor and the Williams entities other  
6 than at arm's length. Warda asserted that W&Y and its partners  
7 only provided legal services.

8 Warda testified that the debtor filed for bankruptcy to stop  
9 Ross Carroll, Inc.'s attempts to recover from the debtor funds  
10 relating to a state court judgment and as "a good way to just  
11 dissolve the entity."<sup>7</sup> Warda testified that he did not review  
12 the debtor's bankruptcy schedules with Williams, though he  
13 provided them to Williams.

14 Warda explained that he worked with Williams's assistant,  
15 Melissa Jimenez, in preparing the debtor's bankruptcy schedules.  
16 Specifically, Warda confirmed with Jimenez that there were no  
17 unpaid creditors; she informed Warda that the debtor had not  
18 incurred any debt since 2003.

19 Jimenez did not provide any input, however, as to whether  
20 Warda should include Ross Carroll, Inc. and JCW-Cypress as  
21 general unsecured creditors in the debtor's bankruptcy schedules.  
22 She only indicated that JCW-Cypress may have a claim against the  
23 debtor for funds JCW-Cypress advanced to the debtor. Warda  
24

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25  
26 <sup>7</sup> Though Warda testified that he believed the bankruptcy  
27 filing was a "good way" to dissolve the debtor, he later  
28 testified that Ross Carroll, Inc.'s collection efforts were "the  
sole reason for the bankruptcy [filing]." Hr'g Tr. (April 26,  
2010), at 106:8-12.

1 explained that he decided to schedule JCW-Cypress as a general  
2 unsecured creditor based on his discussion with Jimenez. He  
3 decided to schedule Ross Carroll, Inc. as a general unsecured  
4 creditor because Ross Carroll, Inc. claimed that it had not been  
5 paid.

6 Warda testified that, after payment to W&Y for bills owed by  
7 the debtor, the remaining trust account funds were paid to W&Y  
8 for bills owed by the Williams entities. He stated that he could  
9 not distinguish the amounts owed by the debtor and the Williams  
10 entities for legal services rendered on their behalf by W&Y.

11 The bankruptcy court orally issued its ruling at the end of  
12 trial. It went through the elements of a preferential transfer  
13 under § 547(b). Among its findings, the bankruptcy court  
14 determined that W&Y "was imminently involved in the operations of  
15 [the debtor]," as evidenced in W&Y's preparation of the debtor's  
16 bankruptcy petition and schedules. Hr'g Tr. (April 26, 2010), at  
17 176:11-14. The bankruptcy court found that W&Y "knew all of the  
18 [debtor's] debts [and] the [state court] litigation [and]  
19 appeared to take part with respect to when the bankruptcy was  
20 going to be filed." Hr'g Tr. (April 26, 2010), at 176:14-16.  
21 The bankruptcy court thus concluded that W&Y was an insider for  
22 the purpose of applying the reachback period under § 547(b).

23 The bankruptcy court also made fraudulent transfer  
24 determinations under § 548(a)(1)(B), focusing on the first  
25 element: whether the debtor received less than a reasonably  
26 equivalent value in exchange for such transfers. The bankruptcy  
27 court ultimately determined that the debtor did not receive  
28 reasonably equivalent value in exchange for the payments made to

1 W&Y on bills owed to it by the Williams entities.

2 The bankruptcy court began by stating that if a creditor of  
3 the debtor receives payment, payment of the debt constitutes  
4 reasonably equivalent value. It went on to say that if a party  
5 was not a creditor of the debtor but nonetheless received payment  
6 from the debtor, such payment constituted a fraudulent transfer.

7 The bankruptcy court found that the debtor had an unpaid  
8 debt to JCW-Cypress, which appeared to be undisputed, though the  
9 debt was in an unknown amount. It then determined that the trust  
10 account funds belonged to the debtor because the check - the  
11 source of the trust account funds - had been made payable to the  
12 debtor. The bankruptcy court determined that, even though the  
13 trust account funds belonged to the debtor, some of the trust  
14 account funds had been used to pay bills owed by the Williams  
15 entities to W&Y. The bankruptcy court could not determine from  
16 the record before it, however, what portion of the trust account  
17 funds had been used to pay bills owed by the Williams entities to  
18 W&Y. The bankruptcy court concluded that, because some of the  
19 trust account funds had been used to pay W&Y for legal services  
20 rendered to the Williams entities, the payments to W&Y  
21 constituted fraudulent transfers under § 548(a)(1)(B).

22 The bankruptcy court further found that the trustee could  
23 recover from W&Y the entire amount of the trust account funds  
24 under § 550, as the payments to W&Y with the trust account funds  
25 constituted preferential and fraudulent transfers. The  
26 bankruptcy court stated that "[b]ecause it's the same \$100,000,  
27 it [was] not fatally defective to the trustee's claim that today  
28 [the bankruptcy court could] not identify the specific dollar



1 amount that represent[ed] the fraudulent conveyance part and the  
2 dollar amount that represent[ed] the preference." Hr'g Tr.  
3 (April 26, 2010), at 178:24-25, 179:1-3. The bankruptcy court  
4 thus concluded that "with respect to [W&Y], [under] Section 550,  
5 the trustee is entitled to judgment for the \$100,000 between it  
6 being a fraudulent conveyance and being a preference." Hr'g Tr.  
7 (April 26, 2010), at 178:20-23. Notably, the bankruptcy court  
8 did not make fraudulent transfer findings against the Williams  
9 entities because it could not determine from the evidence  
10 presented how much of the Williams entities' bills had been paid  
11 from the \$100,000 Bella Vista check.

12 The bankruptcy court entered judgment in favor of the  
13 trustee against W&Y on May 17, 2010. W&Y timely appealed the  
14 bankruptcy court's judgment.

#### 15 16 **JURISDICTION**

17 The bankruptcy court had jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C.  
18 §§ 1334 and 157(b)(2)(F). We have jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C.  
19 § 158.

#### 20 21 **ISSUES**

22 (1) Did the bankruptcy court err in determining that W&Y was  
23 an "insider" for the purpose of applying the one-year preference  
24 period under § 547(b)(4)(B)?

25 (2) Did the bankruptcy court err in determining that W&Y  
26 received a fraudulent transfer under § 548(a)(1)(B)?

27 (3) Did the bankruptcy court err in determining that W&Y was  
28 an "initial transferee" for the purpose of allowing the trustee

1 to recover the trust account funds under § 550(a)(1)?

2  
3 **STANDARDS OF REVIEW**

4 "The determination of insider status is a question of fact."  
5 Friedman v. Sheila Plotsky Brokers, Inc. (In re Friedman),  
6 126 B.R. 63, 67 (9th Cir. BAP 1991). We review the bankruptcy  
7 court's factual findings for clear error. Id. Factual findings  
8 are clearly erroneous when, although there is evidence supporting  
9 them, upon review of the entire evidence, we have the definite  
10 and firm conviction that a mistake has been committed. Banks v.  
11 Gill Distrib. Ctrs., Inc. (In re Banks), 263 F.3d 862, 869 (9th  
12 Cir. 2001)(quotation omitted).

13 We review de novo mixed questions of law and fact. Murray  
14 v. Bammer (In re Bammer), 131 F.3d 788, 792 (9th Cir. 1997). A  
15 mixed question of law and fact arises "when the historical facts  
16 are established; the rule of law is undisputed . . . and the  
17 issue is whether the facts satisfy the legal rule." Id.

18 We also review de novo the bankruptcy court's conclusions of  
19 law and statutory interpretations. Abele v. Modern Fin. Plans  
20 Servs., Inc. (In re Cohen), 300 F.3d 1097, 1101 (9th Cir. 2002).

21  
22 **DISCUSSION<sup>8</sup>**

23  
24 

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<sup>8</sup> Among the nine issue statements made by W&Y in its opening  
25 brief, W&Y argues that the bankruptcy court should not have  
26 allowed the trustee to offer any exhibits into evidence at trial  
27 because he did not comply with LBR 9017-1 and the bankruptcy  
28 court's order rescheduling the trial (adv. proc. docket no. 23).  
W&Y does not brief this issue, however. We thus decline to  
address this issue here. See Meehan v. County of Los Angeles,

(continued...)

1           A.    Insider status under § 547(b)

2           Section 547(b) authorizes a trustee to avoid preferential  
3 transfers made by a debtor within certain periods of time before  
4 the bankruptcy filing.<sup>9</sup> Miller v. Schuman (In re Schuman),  
5 81 B.R. 583, 585 (9th Cir. BAP 1987). Where a creditor is an  
6 insider, the preference period is one year. Id. The trustee  
7 bears the burden of proof to establish each and every element

8  
9  
10           <sup>8</sup>(...continued)  
11 856 F.2d 102, 106 n.1 (9th Cir. 1988)(issue deemed abandoned  
12 because plaintiffs did not brief it); Phillips v. Calhoun,  
13 956 F.2d 949, 954 (10th Cir. 1992)("[E]ven issues designated for  
14 review are lost if they are not actually argued in the party's  
brief."); Adams v. Unione Mediterranea Di Scurta, 364 F.3d 646,  
653 (5th Cir. 2004)("Issues not raised or inadequately briefed on  
appeal are waived.").

15           <sup>9</sup> Section 547 in relevant part provides:

16           (b) Except as provided in subsection (c) and (i) of  
17 this section, the trustee may avoid any transfer of an  
18 interest of the debtor in property –

- 19           (1) to or for the benefit of a creditor;  
20           (2) for or on account of an antecedent debt owed  
21           by the debtor before such transfer was made;  
22           (3) made while the debtor was insolvent;  
23           (4) made –

24           . . . .  
25           (B) between ninety days and one year before  
26           the date of the filing of the petition, if  
27           such creditor at the time of such transfer  
28           was an insider; and

- 29           (5) that enables such creditor to receive more  
30           than such creditor would receive if –  
31           (A) the case were a case under chapter 7 of  
32           this title;  
33           (B) the transfer had not been made; and  
34           (C) such creditor received payment of such  
35           debt to the extent provided by the provisions  
36           of this title.

1 under § 547(b) in order to avoid a transfer as a preference.  
2 Batlan v. TransAmerica Commercial Fin. Corp. (In re Smith's Home  
3 Furnishings, Inc.), 265 F.3d 959, 963 (9th Cir. 2001). As we  
4 mentioned above, however, W&Y only challenges the bankruptcy  
5 court's determination of its insider status under § 547(b).

6 Section 101(31) lists various entities that qualify as  
7 insiders (i.e., "per se insiders") when the debtor is a  
8 corporation. Friedman, 126 B.R. at 69. The list is not  
9 exhaustive, however; the classification of insiders is not  
10 limited to the statutory listing. See Schuman, 81 B.R. at 586.  
11 Insiders that do not fall within this classification are known as  
12 "non-statutory insiders."

13 "[Non-statutory] insider status may be based on a  
14 professional or business relationship with the debtor, in  
15 addition to the Code's per se classifications, where such  
16 relationship compels the conclusion that the individual or entity  
17 has a relationship with the debtor, close enough to gain an  
18 advantage attributable simply to affinity rather than to the  
19 course of business dealings between the parties." Friedman,  
20 126 B.R. at 70. A non-statutory insider is one "who has a  
21 sufficiently close relationship with the debtor that his conduct  
22 is made subject to closer scrutiny than those dealing at arms  
23 [sic] length with the debtor." Id. (quotation and citation  
24 omitted).

25 In determining whether a creditor qualifies as a non-  
26 statutory insider, courts look at "the closeness of the parties  
27 and the degree to which the transferee is able to exert control  
28 or influence over the debtor." Schuman, 81 B.R. at 586. A

1 transferee is a non-statutory insider if he or she "exercises  
2 such control or influence over the debtor as to render their  
3 transaction not arms-length [sic]." <sup>10</sup> Id. (quotation and  
4 citation omitted). Courts have assessed the creditor's presence  
5 or absence of control over the debtor and the creditor's access  
6 to inside information in making their determinations of non-  
7 statutory insider status. Anstine, 531 F.3d at 1277. The  
8 inquiry thus boils down to whether there is a close relationship  
9 between the debtor and the creditor and whether there is anything  
10 other than closeness to suggest that any transactions were not  
11 conducted at arm's length. Id. Non-statutory insiders "are to  
12 be found by courts 'in particular cases, based on the specific  
13 facts.'" Id. (quoting Rupp v. United Security Bank (In re Kunz),  
14 489 F.3d 1072, 1079 (10th Cir. 2007)).

15 Here, the bankruptcy court found that W&Y qualified as an  
16 insider because it was "imminently involved in the operations of  
17 the debtor."<sup>11</sup> The bankruptcy court deduced this from W&Y's  
18 knowledge of the debtor's debts and state court litigation and  
19 W&Y's timing of the debtor's bankruptcy filing.

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20  
21 <sup>10</sup> "An arm's-length transaction is a transaction in good  
22 faith in the ordinary course of business by parties with  
23 independent interests . . . . The standard under which unrelated  
24 parties, each acting in his or her own best interest, would carry  
25 out a particular transaction." Anstine v. Carl Zeiss Meditec AG  
(In re U.S. Medical, Inc.), 531 F.3d 1272, 1277 n.4 (10th Cir.  
2008)(quoting Black's Law Dictionary 109 (6th ed. 1990))  
(quotation marks omitted).

26 <sup>11</sup> Warda testified that W&Y did not fall within any of the  
27 classifications under § 101(31). We thus conclude that the  
28 bankruptcy court focused its inquiry on whether W&Y qualified as  
a non-statutory insider, even though the bankruptcy court did not  
expressly state this.

1           However, upon reviewing the record, we do not consider W&Y's  
2 actions as rising to such a degree of control or influence as to  
3 render them not conducted at arm's length. Knowledge of the  
4 debtor's debts and involvement in the state court litigation is  
5 in the ordinary course of business for a debtor's attorney - it  
6 is part and parcel of his or her job to understand the debtor's  
7 financial condition in order to represent the debtor in  
8 bankruptcy. Timing the debtor's bankruptcy filing also is not  
9 necessarily indicative of control or influence over the debtor;  
10 oftentimes, an attorney files bankruptcy on behalf of a debtor  
11 based on circumstances (e.g., halting a foreclosure sale).

12           Warda's testimony demonstrates that W&Y neither had such a  
13 close relationship with the debtor nor exerted such control or  
14 influence over it as to render their transactions less than at  
15 arm's length. Warda testified that he scheduled JCW-Cypress as a  
16 general unsecured creditor based on his discussion with Jimenez.  
17 The fact that he had to consult Jimenez in order to prepare the  
18 schedules shows that he was not so close to the debtor as to be  
19 privy to all of the debtor's financial affairs. As for including  
20 Ross Carroll, Inc. in the debtor's schedules, Warda knew of its  
21 claims because he had been involved in much of the state court  
22 litigation between the debtor and Ross Carroll, Inc.

23           Moreover, W&Y cannot be an insider if it acted solely  
24 pursuant to instructions given by its client, Williams, who  
25 represented both the debtor and the Williams entities. Williams  
26 specifically authorized W&Y to use the trust account funds to pay  
27 bills owed by the debtor and the Williams entities.

28           Based on our review of the record, we have a definite and

1 firm impression that the facts do not support the bankruptcy  
2 court's determination that W&Y qualified as an insider for the  
3 purpose of applying the one-year preference period under  
4 § 547(b). The bankruptcy court clearly erred in that  
5 determination.

6  
7 B. Fraudulent transfers under § 548(a)(1)(B)<sup>12</sup>

8 As we mentioned above, the bankruptcy court found that the  
9 debtor did not receive reasonably equivalent value in exchange  
10 for the payments made to W&Y on bills owed to it by the Williams  
11 entities. W&Y does not appear to challenge the bankruptcy  
12 court's determination on this point. W&Y argues, however, that  
13 the bankruptcy court erred in entering a fraudulent transfer  
14 judgment against W&Y when it could not determine what portion of  
15 the trust account funds were paid to W&Y for legal services  
16 rendered to the Williams entities. The bankruptcy court believed  
17 it did not need to make such a determination because, whether the  
18 transfers were preferential or fraudulent, it was "the same  
19 \$100,000" (i.e., trust account funds).

20  
21 \_\_\_\_\_  
22 <sup>12</sup> Section 548 in relevant part provides:

23 (a)(1) The trustee may avoid any transfer (including  
24 any transfer to or for the benefit of an insider under  
25 an employment contract) of an interest of the debtor in  
26 property, or any obligation incurred by the debtor,  
27 that was made or incurred on or within 2 years before  
28 the date of the filing of the petition, if the debtor  
voluntarily or involuntarily -

(B)(i) received less than a reasonably equivalent  
value in exchange for such transfer or obligation

. . . .

1            "[T]he primary focus of Section 548 is on the net effect of  
2 the transaction on the debtor's estate and the funds available to  
3 the unsecured creditors." Frontier Bank v. Brown (In re N.  
4 Merch., Inc.), 371 F.3d 1056, 1059 (9th Cir. 2004). A party  
5 "receives reasonably equivalent value if it gets roughly the  
6 value it gave." Jordan v. Kroneberger (In re Jordan), 392 B.R.  
7 428, 441-42 (Bankr. D. Idaho 2008).

8            Because W&Y does not raise it as an issue on appeal, we do  
9 not question the bankruptcy court's determination as to  
10 "reasonably equivalent value." We do conclude, however, that the  
11 bankruptcy court erred in its fraudulent transfer determination  
12 against W&Y when it could not determine from the evidence  
13 presented the amount of the trust account funds paid to W&Y on  
14 bills owed by the Williams entities. Our conclusion in that  
15 regard is bolstered as we analyze the bankruptcy court's decision  
16 to allow the trustee to recover the payments to W&Y under § 550,  
17 as we discuss below.

18  
19            C. Initial transferee under § 550

20            When a trustee successfully avoids a transfer of property,  
21 he or she may recover the property transferred from the initial  
22 transferee. See § 550(a)(1).<sup>13</sup> Although the Bankruptcy Code

23  
24            <sup>13</sup> Section 550 provides:

25            (a) Except as otherwise provided in this section, to  
26 the extent that a transfer is avoided under section  
27 544, 545, 547, 548 . . . of this title, the trustee may  
28 recover, for the benefit of the estate, the property  
transferred, or if, the court so orders, the value of

(continued...)



1 does not define "initial transferee," generally, "a transferee is  
2 one who, at a minimum, has dominion over the money or other  
3 asset, the right to put the money to one's own purpose." Abele  
4 v. Modern Fin. Plans Servs., Inc. (In re Cohen), 300 F.3d 1097,  
5 1102 (9th Cir. 2002). Within the Ninth Circuit, courts apply the  
6 "dominion test," which focuses on "whether an entity had legal  
7 authority over the money and the right to use the money however  
8 it wished." Universal Serv. Admin. Co. v. Post-Confirmation  
9 Comm. of Unsecured Creditors of Incomnet Commc'n Corp.  
10 (In re Incoment, Inc.), 463 F.3d 1064, 1070 (9th Cir. 2006).

11 The trustee did not demonstrate that W&Y qualified as an  
12 initial transferee under § 550. The bankruptcy court moreover  
13 provided no analysis under § 550. It did not make any specific  
14 findings as to whether W&Y was an initial transferee under § 550.  
15 The bankruptcy court simply concluded that the trustee could  
16 recover the payments to W&Y because they constituted preferential  
17 and fraudulent transfers. It granted the trustee judgment in the  
18 entire amount of the trust account funds (i.e., \$100,000) without  
19 distinguishing what portion of the trust account funds paid to  
20 W&Y for the Williams entities' bills constituted a fraudulent  
21 transfer under § 548(a)(1)(B). The bankruptcy court's  
22 determination of the fraudulent transfer claim under  
23 § 548(a)(1)(B) against W&Y is fundamentally inconsistent with its  
24 determination that it could not find in favor of the trustee on

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25  
26 <sup>13</sup>(...continued)

such property, from -

(1) the initial transferee of such transfer or the  
entity for whose benefit such transfer was made .

. . .

1 his fraudulent transfer claims against the Williams entities  
2 because the trustee did not meet his burden of proof to establish  
3 the amount of the fraudulent transfer(s). We therefore conclude  
4 that the bankruptcy court erred in entering judgment in favor of  
5 the trustee against W&Y on his fraudulent transfer claim.

6  
7 **CONCLUSION**

8 Reviewing the entire evidentiary record, we have the  
9 definite and firm conviction that the facts do not support the  
10 bankruptcy court's finding that W&Y qualified as an insider for  
11 the purpose of applying § 547(b). We also determine that the  
12 facts do not support the bankruptcy court's finding that W&Y is  
13 liable for all of the trust account funds paid to it for the  
14 debtor's and the William entities' bills under § 548(a)(1)(B).  
15 Because the bankruptcy court clearly erred in allowing the  
16 trustee to avoid the payments to W&Y as preferential under  
17 § 547(b), it should not have allowed the trustee to recover the  
18 payments under § 550(a)(1). The bankruptcy court also clearly  
19 erred in allowing the trustee to avoid all the payments made to  
20 W&Y under § 548(a)(1)(B) as fraudulent transfers without first  
21 determining what portion of the payments to W&Y out of the trust  
22 account funds constituted fraudulent transfers. We accordingly  
23 REVERSE the bankruptcy court's judgment in favor of the trustee.