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ASSIGNMENT OF COMMERCIAL LEASES—THE REASONABLENESS STANDARD AND WITHHOLDING CONSENT: KENDALL v. ERNEST PESTANA, INC.

I. INTRODUCTION

In *Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc.*, the California Supreme Court held that commercial lessors may not unreasonably withhold consent from a tenant’s assignment of the lease. While all jurisdictions require reasonableness when the lease prohibits unreasonable withholding of consent, jurisdictions are split over the imposition of reasonableness into an unqualified consent clause. When a lease contains an unqualified consent clause, the majority of jurisdictions allow a lessor to withhold consent for any reason, while the minority of jurisdictions require the lessor to show reasonableness. Prior to *Kendall*, California had not clearly adopted the majority or minority rule.

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2. See, e.g., Robinson v. Weitz, 171 Conn. 545, 370 A.2d 1066 (1976) (finding of reasonableness in consent denial when lessor’s accountants unable to verify proposed assignee’s financial statements); Roundup Tavern, Inc. v. Pardini, 68 Wash. 2d 513, 413 P.2d 820 (1966) (lessor’s objection to sublessee’s use of premises for tavern does not satisfy express reasonableness requirement). See R. Schoshinski, AMERICAN LAW OF LANDLORD AND TENANT (1980) [hereinafter Schoshinski]. Schoshinski explains that if a restrictive provision states that the lessee will not assign without the lessor’s consent, and further provides that such consent will not be unreasonably withheld, the lessor may not withhold consent without sufficient reason under the circumstances. Id. at 581. The standard of reasonableness is an objective one, and personal objectives of the lessor usually are not considered by the court. Id.
4. Cases adopting the minority view include: Homa-Goff Interiors, Inc. v. Cowden, 350 So. 2d 1035 (Ala. 1977) (setting forth moral need for the change); Hendrickson v. Fredricks, 620 P.2d 205 (Alaska 1980) (adopting minority view even though breach was found because assignment had been made without request for consent); Schweiso v. Williams, 150 Cal. App. 3d 883, 198 Cal. Rptr. 238 (1984) (relying in part on the scarcity of commercial space); Cohen
The Kendall court adopted the minority rule, but neglected to consider the impact of the decision. The court failed to state whether a lessor may reserve the right to unreasonably withhold consent. If parties are allowed to draft "unreasonable consent" provisions into their leases, the effect of the Kendall decision may be simply that California attorneys will routinely include these provisions in the parties' leases.

Kendall evidences the growing strength of the minority trend. This Note discusses the reasoning applied by both the minority and majority jurisdictions. The Note then proposes that the minority courts, in their efforts to support the rights of tenants, have been too quick to set aside fundamental principles of property and contract law. Furthermore, the minority jurisdictions have not defined the imposed reasonableness standard or distinguished the reasonableness standard from the duty of good faith.

II. BACKGROUND

While a lease may be characterized as a contract to create an estate, it is also a conveyance of land. Because the law favors the free alienation of property, the power of assignment is a legal right incident to a leasehold estate. Under common law, a tenant had the right to assign his leasehold

v. Ratinoff, 147 Cal. App. 3d 321, 195 Cal. Rptr. 84 (1983) (while holding that provision requiring the lessor's consent to an assignment is not inherently repugnant to the leasehold interest created, nevertheless finding an unreasonable restraint on alienation when the assignment provision is implemented in such a manner that its underlying purpose is perverted by the arbitrary withholding of consent); Fernandez v. Vasquez, 397 So. 2d 1171 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1981) (withholding of consent to assign lease, which fails the test for good faith and commercial reasonableness, constitutes breach of the lease agreement); Funk v. Funk, 102 Idaho 521, 633 P.2d 586 (1981) (explaining that no desirable public policy is served by upholding a lessor's arbitrary refusal of consent merely because of whim or caprice or for purely financial gain); Arrington v. Walter E. Heller Int'l Corp., 30 Ill. App. 3d 631, 333 N.E.2d 50 (1975) (despite lease provision requiring reasonableness, addressing the issue of an unqualified consent clause and holding refusal to consent to person acceptable by reasonable commercial standards is an unreasonable exercise and thus violative of the lease); Boss Barbara, Inc. v. Newbill, 97 N.M. 239, 638 P.2d 1084 (1982) (explaining that no logical reason exists for not requiring good faith in the rental of commercial premises).

The term "consent clause" shall refer to a clause in a lease requiring the landlord's consent before the tenant may assign or sublease. The term "qualified consent clause" shall refer to a consent clause which requires that the lessor adhere to a standard of reasonableness in his determination of consent.

5. SCHOSHINSKI, supra note 2, at 2; THOMPSON, supra note 3, § 1205. See also Kendall, 40 Cal. 3d at 498, 709 P.2d at 843, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 824 (referring to the dual nature of a lease as a conveyance of a leasehold interest and a contract); Green v. Superior Court, 10 Cal. 3d 616, 517 P.2d 1168, 111 Cal. Rptr. 705 (1974) (noting the contractual nature of a lease); Medico-Dental Bldg. Co. v. Horton & Converse, 21 Cal. 2d 411, 132 P.2d 457 (1942) (lease as contract and conveyance). See generally Stollery, The Lease as a Contract, 19 ALBERTA L. REV. 234 (1981) (examines the traditional view of a lease as a conveyance and the modern view of the lease as a contract, and reviews the nature of the landlord-tenant relationship).

interest without the consent of the lessor. This common law right, however, was and continues to be altered by contract. Many leases provide conditions under which the lessee may assign the lease. Because these provisions constitute restraints on alienation, courts strictly construe them.

When a commercial lease provides for assignment upon the lessor's consent, the courts disagree on whether the provision is subject to an implied rule of commercial reasonableness. The older, and still prevailing rule, is that the lessor may withhold consent for any reason. Courts refuse to imply reasonableness into a restrictive assignment clause, explaining that to do so would violate the integrity of the contract and ignore the express intention of the parties. Furthermore, the majority courts reason that to rewrite the provision to include reasonableness would encroach upon the lessor's right to maintain control over his property and modify the extent of the estate conveyed.

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7. Friedman, supra note 6, § 7.2.
8. Thompson, supra note 3, § 1205. See, e.g., Isbey v. Crews, 55 N.C. App. 47, 284 S.E.2d 534 (1981) (tenant for an estate for years may be absolutely barred from assignment by an express covenant).

Although the Kendall court and most courts interpreting consent clauses do not differentiate between an assignment and a sublease, the terms are not technically interchangeable. The basic distinction between an assignment and a sublease is that by an assignment, the lessee conveys his entire interest in the unexpired term, leaving himself no reversion. In a sublease, the lessee transfers only a part of the lease for a period less than the original term. See Thompson, supra note 3, § 1210. The courts have not found the distinction relevant in the application of reasonableness to consent clauses. See Kendall, 40 Cal. 3d at 492 n.2, 709 P.2d at 839 n.2, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 820 n.2.

9. Thompson, supra note 3, § 1211. See, e.g., Boss Barbara, Inc. v. Newbill, 97 N.M. 239, 638 P.2d 1084 (1982) (explaining that reasonable restraints upon the alienation of property must be strictly construed so as to operate within their exact limits). For example, because consent clauses are strictly construed by the courts, a provision against assignment without the lessor's consent does not prevent a subletting without his consent. Moynihan, supra note 6, at 75. See Stevinson v. Joy, 164 Cal. 279, 286, 128 P. 751, 754 (1912) (covenant against assignment did not affect lessee's right to sublease). See also Kendall, 40 Cal. 3d at 495, 709 P.2d at 840 n.7, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 821 n.7 (setting forth California examples of the narrow effect given to lease terms purporting to restrict assignment).

10. In the absence of a contract provision restricting the lessor to an objective determination of consent, the lessor is entitled to a subjective determination. Thompson, supra note 3, § 1205. See, e.g., Richard v. Degen & Brody, Inc., 181 Cal. App. 2d 289, 5 Cal. Rptr. 263 (1960) (asserting the majority rule that lessor may withhold consent for any reason). See also supra note 3 (comparison of the majority and minority views).

11. See, e.g., Funk v. Funk, 102 Idaho 521, 525, 633 P.2d 586, 590 (1981) (Bakes, C.J., dissenting) (asserting that majority opinion had disregarded intent of the parties). See also Segre v. Ring, 103 N.H. 278, 170 A.2d 265 (1961) (suggesting that if the parties had intended otherwise, they could easily have qualified the approval clause in a number of ways); Herlou Card Shop, Inc. v. Prudential Ins. of Am., 73 A.D.2d 562, 422 N.Y.S.2d 708 (1979) (explaining that the landlord had merely exercised his contractual right).


13. Id. at 526-27, 633 P.2d at 591-92. Chief Justice Bakes asserted that because the
Despite the prevalence of the majority rule, a growing trend requires the landlord to act in a commercially reasonable manner when withholding consent.\textsuperscript{14} The majority rule, also called the “arbitrary and capricious” rule,\textsuperscript{15} is undergoing constant erosion. Courts adopting the minority view reason that unreasonable restraints on alienation are invalid, and thus reasonableness must be imposed.\textsuperscript{16} They assert that if the lessor can withhold consent unreasonably, the lessee’s freedom to alienate the property has been unreasonably restrained.\textsuperscript{17} The minority jurisdictions also reason that the implied duty of good faith mandates that the lessor act reasonably.\textsuperscript{18} Some courts stress basic principles of fairness, justice, and fair
Other courts rely on public policy and the modern necessity of permitting reasonable alienation of commercial space. Relying on these rationales, the American Law Institute adopted the minority view in the 1977 edition of the Restatement of Property.

A brief state survey evidences the split in the courts. One of the leading cases adopting the minority rule was Homa-Goff Interiors, Inc. v. Cowden. In that case, the Alaska Supreme Court followed the lead of the

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19. Boss Barbara, Inc. v. Newbill, 97 N.M. 239, 638 P.2d 1084 (1982). According to Boss Barbara, “New Mexico law has consistently required fairness, justice and right dealing in all commercial practices and transactions.” Id. at 241, 638 P.2d at 1086. Therefore, “[n]o logical reason exists for not requiring good faith in the rental of the commercial premises.” Id.

20. See Schweiso v. Williams, 150 Cal. App. 3d 883, 887, 198 Cal. Rptr. 238, 240 (1984). See also Comment, The Approval Clause, supra note 14, at 683 (explaining that a decrease in residential and commercial space has resulted from increased urbanization, and the problem has been increased by unreasonable restraints upon free alienation); Survey, 1984 California Courts of Appeal Survey - Landlord and Tenant Law, 7 WHITTIER L. REV. 211 (1985) (discussing necessity of permitting reasonable alienation of commercial space).

21. RESTATEMENT (SECOND) OF PROPERTY § 15.2(2) (1977): “A restraint on alienation without the consent of the landlord of the tenant’s interest in the leased property is valid, but the landlord’s consent to an alienation by the tenant cannot be withheld unreasonably, unless a freely negotiated provision in the lease gives the landlord an absolute right to withhold consent.”

Further support for the minority rule comes from legislative action. The legislatures in Alaska, Hawaii, and New York imposed a standard of reasonableness on consent clauses, but only with respect to residential leases.

ALASKA STAT. § 34.03.060 (1975) states:

(b) The tenant’s right to sublease the premises or assign the rental agreement to another shall be conditioned on obtaining the landlord’s consent, which may be withheld only upon the grounds specified in (d) . . . . Section (d) sets forth reasonable grounds for rejecting the prospective occupant, such as insufficient credit standing, number of persons in the household, or commercial activity.

HAW. REV. STAT. § 516-63 (Supp. 1975) states that:

“The lessor shall not require payment of any money for his consent except the service charge, nor withhold such consent unreasonably.”

N.Y. REAL PROP. LAW § 226-b (McKinney Supp. 1980) sets forth:

1. Unless a greater right to assign is conferred by the lease, a tenant renting a residence may not assign his lease without the written consent of the owner, which consent may be unconditionally withheld without cause provided that the owner shall release the tenant from the lease upon request of the tenant upon thirty days notice if the owner unreasonably withholds consent which release shall be the sole remedy of the tenant. If the owner reasonably withholds consent, there shall be no assignment and the tenant shall not be released from the lease.

The Kendall court expressly addressed commercial leases. The majority/minority dichotomy described throughout this Casenote, likewise, is limited to commercial leases. However, the statutes governing residential leases, as well as providing indirect support for the minority rule, serve as examples of prospective legislative change in the common law rules. See Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc., 40 Cal. 3d at 473, 709 P.2d at 852, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 833 (Lucas, J., dissenting) (proposing to overrule the common law by legislative action).

22. 350 So. 2d 1035 ( Ala. 1977). For further minority court decisions, see supra note 4.
Alabama Supreme Court in Hendrickson v. Fredricks.23 Similarly, the New Mexico Supreme Court adopted the minority position in Boss Barbara, Inc. v. Newbill.24 In contrast, other recent state decisions continue to adhere to the majority rule. Vermont declined to abandon the majority rule in B & R Oil Co. v. Ray's Mobile Homes, Inc.,25 and New Hampshire reaffirmed the majority position in Segre v. Ring.26

Prior to Kendall, the lower courts in California disagreed on the consent issue. In 1960 in Richard v. Degen & Brody, Inc.,27 a California appellate court followed the majority rule. The court held that the lessor could withhold his consent arbitrarily and without regard for the qualifications of the proposed assignee. Because the court held that the lessor could withhold consent for any reason, the court did not address the lessor's purported reason for withholding consent.28

In 1983, the California Second District in Cohen v. Ratinoff,29 abandoned the Richard rule, and held that the lessor must not withhold consent arbitrarily. The court set forth the rule that the lessor could not withhold consent absent a good faith reasonable objection, even in the absence of a provision prohibiting the unreasonable withholding of consent.30 The court found no good faith objection by the lessor in Cohen but rather, only an admission of arbitrariness.31 Therefore, the court concluded that the lessor had breached the lease.32

Following the lead of the Second District, the First District, in Schweiso v. Williams,33 adopted the minority rule. The court found that the conduct

27. 181 Cal. App. 2d 289, 5 Cal. Rptr. 263 (1960). In Richard, the lessor brought an unlawful detainer action against the lessee. The commercial lease between the parties prohibited assignment or subletting by the lessee without the written consent of the lessor. Id. at 292, 5 Cal. Rptr. at 265. In violation of the contract, the lessee subletted a portion of the leased premises to a third party without the lessor's consent. Id. at 293, 5 Cal. Rptr. at 265.
28. Id. at 299, 5 Cal. Rptr. at 269. The only reason apparent from the decision is that the lessor "want[ed] the building for [him]self." Id. at 296, 5 Cal. Rptr. at 267.
29. 147 Cal. App. 3d 321, 195 Cal. Rptr. 84 (1983). In Cohen, plaintiff lessee and defendant lessor entered into a four year commercial lease, limiting the use of the premises to the sale of carpet, drapery, and furnishings. Id. at 324, 195 Cal. Rptr. at 85. As in Richard, the lease expressly prohibited assignment or subletting without the lessor's consent. Id. at 325, 195 Cal. Rptr. at 85. The lessee entered into a sales contract with a third party to purchase lessee's business, along with the lease. Id. at 325, 195 Cal. Rptr. at 86. The buyer, Floormart, was a carpet company and thus would be using the premises for the purposes described in the original lease. Id. When the lessee requested the lessor's consent, the lessor's attorney informed the lessee that "my client may be as arbitrary as he chooses." Id. Floormart then terminated the sales agreement with the lessee.
30. Id. at 330, 195 Cal. Rptr. at 89.
32. Id.
of the lessors in Schweiso was even more indicative of bad faith than the lessor’s conduct in Cohen.34 The court adopted a standard of reasonableness and then held that withholding consent in order to charge a higher rent failed the test of reasonableness.35

Subsequent to Schweiso and Cohen, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals followed Prestin v. Mobile Oil Corp.,36 and applied the minority rule. The Prestin court referred to Schweiso and Cohen and noted that the Richard view had little support in later cases.37

Recently, the California Appellate Court for the Fourth District in Hamilton v. Dixon,38 declined to follow the Cohen and Schweiso trend and adopted the majority rule. In Hamilton, the court found that the tenant had breached the lease by subleasing without the landlord’s required consent.39 The court refused to evaluate the reasonableness of the lessor’s refusal and concluded that even if the refusal was arbitrary, the landlord’s contractual right to refuse consent should be enforced.40 The court explained that the lessee had offered no authority which would justify the court’s ignoring the unambiguous language of the lease and rewriting the contract fifteen years later.41

Although the California legislature has not expressly addressed the issue of a lessor’s consent to assignment, one statute implicitly recognizes the existence of the majority rule. In Civil Code section 1951.4,42 which deals

34. Id. at 886, 198 Cal. Rptr. at 240. In Schweiso, the lessees entered into sales contracts with third parties to sell their businesses, including their leases. Id. at 885, 198 Cal. Rptr. at 239. The court held that the defendant lessor, for no valid commercial reason, had refused to consent to assignment unless the lessees paid a certain percentage of the purchase price. Id. The lessor told one lessee that the consent provision in the lease was the lessor’s “license to steal;” that the transfer fee was “blood money;” and that the lessor had a right to be unreasonable. Id. at 885, 198 Cal. Rptr. at 238.
35. Id. at 886, 198 Cal. Rptr. at 240.

Courts generally agree that the application of a reasonableness standard, whether by express provision or implication, precludes denial of consent for purely financial gain. See, e.g., Funk v. Funk, 102 Idaho 521, 633 P.2d 586 (1981) (withholding consent, because lessor wanted new lease agreement with increased financial benefits, unreasonable).

For a decision in which the court refused to impose a reasonableness standard, and upheld the lessor’s denial of consent based on financial motives, see Herlou Card Shop, Inc. v. Prudential Ins. of Am., 73 A.D.2d 562, 422 N.Y.S.2d 708 (1979). The court explained: “In the circumstances, the landlord was merely exercising its legal contractual rights in refusing to consent to an assignment of the lease unless the lease was modified to increase the rent.” Id. at 562, 422 N.Y.S.2d at 708-09.
36. 741 F.2d 268 (9th Cir. 1984).
37. Id. at 271.
39. Id. at 1004, 214 Cal. Rptr. at 639.
40. Id. at 1009, 214 Cal. Rptr. at 642.
42. CAL. CIV. CODE § 1951.4 (West 1985) provides:

... (b) Even though a lessee of real property has breached his lease and abandoned the property, the lease continues in effect for so long as the lessor does
with the mitigation of damages, the legislature provided for the existence of the majority rule in one of the provisions. Section 1951.4 allows a lessor to avoid the statutory duty to mitigate damages by shifting that duty to the lessee by contract. The statute provides that where consent to assignment is required by the lease, the lease must expressly state that the consent will not be unreasonably withheld. Without a consent clause, the majority rule allows a lessor to refuse consent for any reason. In sum, the legislature in section 1951.4 both recognized the right of the landlord to bargain for the ability to arbitrarily withhold consent, and provided an incentive for him not to do so.

While the legislature had addressed the issue of a lessor's consent to assignment only indirectly prior to Kendall, the lower California courts set the stage for a supreme court decision. The appellate courts, which had adopted the minority rule in Schweiso and Cohen, indicated a growing

not terminate the lessee's right to possession, and the lessor may enforce all his
rights and remedies under the lease, including the right to recover the rent as it
becomes due under the lease, if the lease permits the lessee to do any of the
following:

... (3) Sublet the property, assign his interest in the lease, or both, with the consent
of the lessor, and the lease provides that such consent shall not unreasonably be
withheld.

43. CAL. CIV. CODE § 1951.2 (West 1985). This section sets forth general mitigation rules
which apply except as otherwise provided in section 1951.4. If section 1951.4 is not invoked by
compliance with its requirements, section 1951.2 places the burden on the lessor of reletting
the property to mitigate the damages.

As section 1951.4 illustrates, California has chosen to resolve by statute the issue of whether a landlord has a duty to mitigate damages incurred when the lessee abandons during the lease term. The general rule among jurisdictions is that the lessor has no duty to mitigate. "If the tenant abandons possession and refuses to pay any further rent the landlord can, in most states, allow the premises to remain idle and sue the tenant for rent as it falls due."

MOYNIHAN, supra note 6, at 78-79. However, a growing trend places a duty on the landlord to mitigate. See, e.g., Note, Landlord-Tenant—Landlord's Duty to Rellet When a Tenant Abandons Leased Property, 43 Mo. L. REV. 359 (1978). The author favors adoption of a landlord's duty to mitigate because of changing social conditions, the tendency of courts to recognize the contractual nature of leases, and the public policy against waste. See also Comment, Landlord's Duty to Mitigate Damages—A New Obligation, 16 AM. BUS. L.J. 351 (1979) (noting the need to recognize the lease as being an agreement to which contract rights and duties apply). The rationales behind the imposition of a duty to mitigate often coincide with those behind the imposition of a standard of reasonableness. However, the issues involved are separate and should not be confused. See Levin, supra note 14, at 109.

For an extensive survey of the case and statutory law on the landlord's duty to mitigate, see Weissenberger, The Landlord's Duty to Mitigate Damages on the Tenant's Abandonment: A Survey of Old Law and New Trends, 53 TEMP. L.Q. 1 (1980). The primary purpose of the article is to facilitate reform through the identification of current trends relating to abandonment and mitigation. See also Bulkeley, Does a Landlord Have a Duty to Mitigate Damages When a Tenant Abandons During the Lease?, 68 ILL. B.J. 588 (1980) (surveying Illinois law and presenting advice to landlords as to how to avoid the duty to mitigate).

44. CAL. CIV. CODE § 1951.4 (3) (West 1985): "[A]nd the lease provides that such consent
shall not be unreasonably withheld."

disfavor with the majority rule. However, in *Hamilton*, a Fourth District Appellate Court had reaffirmed the majority rule. To resolve the conflict between the lower courts, the California Supreme Court, in *Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc.*, decided to adopt the minority rule for the state of California.

**III. *Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc.***

In *Kendall*, the lessee, Bixler, requested consent from the lessor's successor-in-interest, Pestana, to assign his lease to another commercial tenant, Kendall. The original lease provided that the lessor's consent was necessary before the lessee could assign. The lease did not, however, require that consent be withheld for commercially reasonable objections. Despite Kendall's credentials, lessor Pestana denied consent. Pestana conditioned consent on an increase in rent, and Kendall sued for an unlawful restraint on his freedom of alienation. The Superior Court, Santa Clara County, entered an order sustaining the lessor's demurrer, and the First District Appellate Court affirmed.

The supreme court reversed the lower court's holding and adopted the minority rule for California. The court relied on two rationales for the holding. First, the court reasoned that the lease, as a conveyance, invoked the policy against unreasonable restraints on alienation. The court cited the proposed assignees had a strong financial record, and they were willing to be bound by the terms of the lease.

The lessor maintained that he had an absolute right to arbitrarily refuse any request. The complaint recited that the lessor demanded "increased rent and other more onerous terms" as a condition of consenting. The court which held for the lessor in *Kendall* was the same court (the first district) which had previously adopted the minority rule in *Schweiso*. The appellate court in *Kendall* decided that "[b]oth Schweiso and Cohen were wrongly decided." *Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc.*, 163 Cal. App. 3d 11, 209 Cal. Rptr. 135, 136 (1984).

The court explained, "[T]he impetus for change in the majority rule has come from two directions, reflecting the dual nature of a lease as a conveyance of a leasehold interest and a contract." *Id.* at 497, 709 P.2d at 843, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 824. As the court explained, "Because the *Kendall* court was willing to view the lease as both a contract and a conveyance, the court was free to rely on selected principles of both contract and property law. The use of particular contract principles can be especially advantageous to the tenant. According to Professor Levin:

The application of contract law to lease interpretation necessitates that leases be construed like other contracts. This construction effectively promotes consumer protection because courts have broadened seller's responsibility for the quality of goods sold by implying warranties of merchantability and fitness. Similarly, in landlord-tenant relations, the law should protect tenant's reasonable expectations..."
Civil Code section 711 and noted the modern necessity of permitting reasonable alienation of commercial space. Section 711 provides that restraints on alienation are void when repugnant to the interest created. The court cited Cohen for the proposition that if an assignment provision is implemented so that its purpose is undermined by an unreasonable withholding of consent, an unreasonable restraint on alienation is established. In other words, the court questioned the continued validity of the traditional lease exception to the common law's hostility toward restraints on alienation. The court explained that the policy justifications supporting the common law exception, such as the lessor's right to personal selection, did not justify the lessor's arbitrary refusal to consent. The court noted the Restatement's position that the lessor's interests are sufficiently protected by the lessor's right to object on reasonable commercial grounds.

The court's second basis for adopting the minority rule was the contractual nature of a lease. The trend, according to the court, is to recognize a duty of good faith in every contract. Because of this implied duty, the court...
explained that the lessor’s discretionary power to consent should be exercised in accordance with commercially reasonable standards.\textsuperscript{60} The court did not differentiate between the standard of objective commercial reasonableness and the contractual duty of good faith.\textsuperscript{61} Instead, by imposing reasonableness, the court simply noted that reasonableness was a question of fact.\textsuperscript{62} The court referred to other court decisions which had established guidelines for reasonableness,\textsuperscript{63} and concluded that the lessor’s conduct in \textit{Kendall} had not been commercially reasonable. The court held that it was not reasonable for a lessor to withhold consent in order to charge a higher rent.\textsuperscript{64}

The \textit{Kendall} court next discussed five rationales for the majority rule and concluded that none of these were persuasive. The court first rejected the majority's assertion that since a lease is a conveyance, the lessor has no obligation to look to anyone else but the lessee for rent. The court rejected this argument because most courts require the lessor to mitigate damages, and therefore, the modern landlord-tenant relationship is not a pure conveyance.\textsuperscript{65} Second, the court set forth varying interpretations of the standard lease approval clause to negate the majority courts’ assertion that the clause is unambiguous.\textsuperscript{66} Third, the court dismissed the claim of stare decisis by stressing the need for change.\textsuperscript{67} Next, in response to the assertion that the lessor had the right to realization of any increased value, the court stated

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{60} Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc., 40 Cal. 3d at 500, 709 P.2d at 845, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 826.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} \textit{Id.} The court used the terms relatively interchangeably.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} \textit{Id.}
  \item \textsuperscript{63} See, e.g., Fernandez v. Vasquez, 397 So. 2d 1171, 1174 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1981) (setting forth the five general factors to consider in determining commercial reasonableness: (1) financial responsibility; (2) identity or business character; (3) need for alteration of the premises; (4) legality of the proposed use; (5) the nature of the occupancy). \textit{See also} American Book v. Yeshiva Univ. Dev. Found., Inc., 59 Misc. 2d 31, 297 N.Y.S.2d 156 (1969) (setting forth reasonableness criteria similar to Fernandez).
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc., 40 Cal. 3d at 501, 709 P.2d at 845, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 826. For precedent supporting the court’s determination of unreasonableness when the lessor simply wishes to charge a higher rent, see \textit{infra} note 117.
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc., 40 Cal. 3d at 502, 709 P.2d at 846, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 827. Modern mitigation laws de-emphasize the traditional conveyance nature of a lease, stressing the altered nature of the landlord and tenant relationship. The court noted the California statute which adopts the rule that lessors have a duty to mitigate damages, when the lessee abandons the property, by seeking a substitute lessee. \textit{See} Cal. Civ. Code \S\ 1951.2, \textit{supra} note 43. For a discussion of the judicial confusion between the issues of mitigation and consent, see Levin, \textit{supra} note 14, at 109. \textit{See also} \textit{infra} note 43.
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc., 40 Cal. 3d at 503, 709 P.2d at 846-47, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 827-28. The court noted judicial opinions which held reasonableness inherent in the general consent provision, even absent express wording. \textit{See}, e.g., Shaker Bldg. Co. v. Federal Lime & Stone Co., 28 Ohio Misc. 246, 252 N.E.2d 587 (1971) (inherent in the provision that consent will not be withheld under all circumstances).
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc., 40 Cal. 3d at 503-04, 709 P.2d at 847, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 828. “We would be remiss in our duty if we declined to question a view held by the majority of jurisdictions simply because it is held by a majority.” \textit{Id.}
\end{itemize}
that the lessor was not entitled to receive any more than for what he had bargained. The Kendall court also rejected the demand for legislative, rather than judicial, direction on the issue. The court explained that it was entitled to rule in the absence of legislative direction. The court disagreed with the appellate court's suggestion that the California Legislature had rejected adopting the minority rule in section 1951.4 of the Civil Code. The dissent argued that the court should not rewrite the contract since the language of the lease was unambiguous. Alternatively, the dissent argued that if the minority rule was adopted, the court should only apply the rule prospectively, since attorneys had relied on the existing law in drafting leases. Moreover, the dissent explained that the legislature was the more appropriate decision-maker on the issue. Justice Lucas suggested that the legislature's refusal to act in section 1951.4 implied legislative approval of the current law.

IV. ANALYSIS OF KENDALL V. ERNEST PESTANA, INC.

The majority rule, abandoned by the California Supreme Court, rests on fundamental principles of property and contract law. The majority courts stress the importance of upholding contracts which were voluntarily entered into by the parties. The traditional rule respects the integrity of the contract

68. Id. at 504, 709 P.2d at 847-48, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 829.
69. Id. at 506, 709 P.2d at 849, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 830. The court denied the existence of judicial direction in Civil Code § 1951.4, supra note 42. The court held that section 1951.4, which only implicitly recognized the majority rule, did not prevent the court from examining the rule.
71. Id. at 511, 709 P.2d at 850, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 833 (Lucas, J., dissenting).
72. Id.
73. Id. at 508, 709 P.2d at 851, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 832. According to the dissent, overruling the common law by legislative action would be the wisest procedure, "if only to effect the repeal prospectively and thereby give force to those contracts entered into when the common law prevailed." Id.
74. Id. For the text of the statute and a discussion, see supra note 42 and accompanying text.
76. To uphold freely negotiated provisions is perhaps the most frequently cited reason given for the majority rule. See, e.g., Hamilton v. Dixon, 168 Cal. App. 3d 1004, 1009, 214 Cal. Rptr. 639, 642 (1985) (freedom to negotiate terms of the lease); Gruman v. Investors Diversified Serv., 244 Minn. 502, 509-10, 78 N.W.2d 377, 382 (1956) (court finding itself compelled to give the lease terms their full force and effect); Isbey v. Crews, 55 N.C. App. 47, 49-50, 284 S.E.2d 534, 537 (1981) (court refused to insert terms into a contract when the parties elected to omit such terms); Segre v. Ring, 103 N.H. 278, 280, 170 A.2d 265, 266 (1961) (court declines to rewrite agreement for the parties); Herlou Card Shop, Inc. v. Prudential Ins. of Am., 73 A.D. 2d 562, 422 N.Y.S.2d 708, 708-09 (1979) (landlord merely exercising his legal contractual right).
and preserves the parties' intentions. 77 According to one dissenter in a minority jurisdiction, "For the members of this court to inject a new requirement . . . is in effect to say that this court may at any time disregard the intentions of the parties as expressed in their unambiguous agreement and rewrite the contract because a majority of this court is of the opinion that it should be altered." 78

In addition to principles of contract law, the majority courts emphasize the property law's concern for the preservation of freedom of ownership and control over one's property. 79 A fundamental principle of property law is that an owner of property may transfer as much or as little control over his property as he pleases. 80 Equally fundamental to property law is the hostility with which courts view restraints on alienation. 81 At common law, lease restrictions were an exception to the general rule against restraints on alienation, because the law chose to protect the interests of the lessor who retains a reversionary interest in the property. 82

Abandoning the fundamental concepts protected by the majority rule, the Kendall court adopted the reasoning of the minority courts. The minority rule rests on the concept that a lease is a contract, and therefore, should be limited by the contract principle of implied good faith. 83 Modern courts

77. See supra note 76. See also Funk v. Funk, 102 Idaho 521, 525, 633 P.2d 586, 590 (1981) (Bakes, C.J., dissenting) (arguing that to abandon the majority rule is in effect to disregard the intentions of the parties as expressed in an unambiguous contract).


79. Id. at 526, 633 P.2d at 591.

80. Id. Of course, the lessee also holds an interest in the property—a leasehold, which entitles him to the exclusive possession of the property for the term of the lease. See Schoshinski, supra note 2, at 10.

81. See Chapman v. Great W. Gypsum Co., 216 Cal. 420, 14 P.2d 758 (1932). "It hardly needs citation of authority to the principle that covenants limiting the free alienation of property such as covenants against assignment are barely tolerated and must be strictly construed." Id. at 426, 14 P.2d at 760.

82. Id. "It was believed that the objectives served by allowing such restraints outweighed the social evils implicit in the restraints, in that they gave to the lessor a needed control over the person entrusted with the lessor's property and to whom he must look for the performance of the covenants contained in the lease." Note that Powell questions the full, continued validity of this reasoning, due to, for one, the increasingly impersonal relationship between the lessor and lessee.

83. Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc., 40 Cal. 3d at 500, 709 P.2d at 844, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 825. See also Schweiso v. Williams, 150 Cal. App. 3d 883, 198 Cal. Rptr. 238 (1984) (holding that because a lease contained an implicit covenant of good faith, refusal to consent must not be arbitrary); Fernandez v. Vasquez, 397 So. 2d 1171, 1173-74 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1981) (explaining that underlying the cases abolishing the arbitrary and capricious rule is the concept that a lease is a contract, and as such, should be governed by the general contract principles of good faith).
increasingly recognize the duty of good faith and fair dealing inherent in every contract. The lessor, therefore, having discretionary power by the contract, is obligated to exercise the power in good faith. The minority courts, however, have imposed more than a duty of good faith; they have imposed an objective standard of commercial reasonableness.

While at least one court has used the terms good faith and commercial reasonableness interchangeably, others recognize a fine distinction between the terms. The minority courts equate a general duty of good faith with a covenant not to unreasonably withhold consent. These courts fail to recognize that the covenant not to unreasonably withhold consent may change the fundamental character of the bargain. Unlike the good faith requirement, the reasonableness standard does not take into account genuine concerns peculiar to the particular lessor. The lessor must accept an assignee if it is commercially reasonable to do so. Reasonableness suggests objective

84. See supra note 18.
86. See generally Levin, supra note 14, at 140. Levin asserts that the minority view "erroneously equates implied good faith with an express covenant of reasonableness, failing to appreciate that an approval clause that has been qualified by an express covenant of reasonableness differs from an unqualified approval clause." Id. at 140. For a comment suggesting that reasonableness is a more rigorous and advantageous standard to apply than good faith, see Comment, The Approval Clause, supra note 14, at 694: "Under the objective standard of reasonableness, the whims of the lessor are rendered irrelevant."
87. See, e.g., Fernandez v. Vasquez, 397 So. 2d 1171 (Fla. Dist. Ct. App. 1981) (holding that withholding of consent to assign lease, which fails tests of good faith and commercial reasonableness, constitutes breach of lease agreement).
88. See Comment, The Approval Clause, supra note 14, at 694-95. For an explanation of the distinction, see Levin, supra note 14, at 139. Levin stresses that the objective reasonableness standard imposes a substantially greater burden on landlords than what would be required of mere good faith since it does not permit contemplation of the specific concerns of a particular landlord. Id.
89. See Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc., 40 Cal. 3d at 499, 709 P.2d at 844, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 825.
90. See Levin, supra note 14, at 140. Levin explains that the difference between an express covenant of reasonableness and the judicial implication of reasonableness into an unqualified approval clause "is that parties to a qualified approval clause intended what the clause states—that consent shall not be withheld unreasonably—and the term the parties used has an established meaning and concomitant objective test . . . ." Id. In contrast, parties to an unqualified approval clause had no such intent. Id.
91. See American Book Co. v. Yeshiva Univ. Dev. Found., Inc., 59 Misc. 2d 31, 35, 297 N.Y.S.2d 156, 158 (1969) (interpreting lease clause expressly requiring reasonableness and holding that reasonableness involves objective criteria which do not vary with the identity of the lessor). See also Levin, supra note 14, at 139.
92. See Funk v. Funk, 102 Idaho 521, 524-25, 633 P.2d 586, 589-90 (1981) (setting forth that the proper standard by which to review the lessor's refusal to consent, is one of a reasonable person in the position of the landlord). See also Kehr, Lease Assignments: The Landlord's Consent, 55 CAL. ST. B.J. 108, 114 (1980) (stating that it is hard to defend "a landlord's rejection of a proposed commercial assignee for any reasons other than objective commercial
considerations, which do not vary with the identity of the lessor.\(^9\) In contrast, a requirement of subjective good faith allows for genuine concerns of a particular lessor.\(^4\) The imposition of a requirement of good faith may satisfy many of the policy concerns of the minority courts, without significantly altering the agreement of the parties. For example, a lessor in good faith may not be able to withhold consent in order to charge more rent.\(^9\) However, a subjective standard of good faith would probably still allow the lessor to act arbitrarily, according to commercial standards.\(^6\)

The minority standard does not provide sufficient protection of the lessor's interests. The lessor alone is aware of his own particular needs regarding his property.\(^7\) Even a "reasonable lessor" in the same situation may not share the same concerns.\(^8\) The lessor's main reasons for the inclusion of a consent
clause are to protect his investment, and to see that his tenants meet his particular standards and not necessarily the standards of the "reasonable lessor." In the absence of a covenant requiring commercial reasonableness, the lessor is held to a good faith, subjective determination of consent.

The second rationale of the minority position is that restraints on alienation should be unenforceable. Relying on this principle, one minority court reasoned that because restraints are to be strictly construed so as to operate within their exact limits, the court should require the lessor to act reasonably. Alternatively, it can be argued that a court should not be allowed to add terms to a contract.

Furthermore, the common law has long provided that leases are an exception to the general rule against restraints on alienation. Lease restraints were an exception because they gave the lessor control over the person entrusted with his property. Consequently, the common law enforced covenants requiring the lessor's consent to assignment. The minority courts and over the past 50 years, his business instincts have never proved wrong. When the lessor examined the proposed assignee's credentials, although the business appeared sound on paper, the lessor's good faith gut instinct warned him that this business would only be trouble. Having contracted for an absolute right to withhold consent, the lessor will be sorely surprised when a minority court imposes a standard of reasonableness into the lease. By operation of the standard of the "reasonable lessor," this particular lessor's refusal to consent will be deemed arbitrary, and he will be held to have breached the lease. See Cohen v. Ratinoff, 147 Cal. App. 3d 321, 330, 195 Cal. Rptr. 84, 89 (a breach by the lessor of his duty of reasonableness constitutes a breach of the lease agreement). For a discussion of the possibility that the minority courts may further disallow this particular lessor from expressly providing in the lease an absolute right to consent, see infra note 128 and accompanying text.

99. For a discussion of the concerns of the lessor, see Note, Landlord-Tenant, supra note 14, at 309 (endorsing the minority view).

100. If the lessor and lessee had intended that the lessor's consent was to be subject to a reasonableness standard, they could have included such a provision. An express provision requiring reasonableness, in contrast to the judicially implied requirement, will be bargained for by the parties. The lessor is thus not compelled to give up his absolute right to withhold consent without some corresponding concession on the part of the lessee. See Levin, supra note 14, at 140 (parties to an unqualified approval clause had no intent to impose reasonableness). See also Shaker Bldg. Co. v. Federal Lime & Stone Co., 28 Ohio Misc. 246, 251, 277 N.E.2d 584, 587, 57 Ohio Op. 486, 489 (1971) (explaining that parties did contemplate that consent to assign would be given under certain circumstances although these circumstances were not specifically described in the general consent clause).

101. Chapman v. Great W. Gypsum Co., 216 Cal. 420, 426, 14 P.2d 758, 760 (1932). See also Chanslor-Western Oil & Dev. Co. v. Metropolitan Sanitary Dist., 131 Ill. App. 2d 527, 266 N.E.2d 405 (1970) (explaining that since the covenant restricted the lessee's freedom to sublet, the provision was to be construed most strongly against the lessor).

102. Boss Barbara, 97 N.M. 239 at 241, 638 P.2d 1084 at 1086.

103. See, e.g., Herlou Card Shop, Inc. v. Prudential Ins. of Am., 73 A.D.2d 708, 422 N.Y.S.2d 708 (1979) (holding that since there was no express limitation in the lease that consent should not be unreasonably withheld, the court would not add terms).


105. Id.

106. Thompson, supra note 3, § 1205.
further the alienability of property by imposing reasonableness into an unqualified consent clause. According to one scholar, such a strict adherence to the common law is paradoxical in the face of the modern trend of viewing a lease as predominantly contractual.

The Kendall court failed to reconcile the restraint on alienation rule with the fundamental principle of control over property. A lessor retains a significant reversionary interest in the property he leases. The court in Kendall modified the extent of the leasehold estate conveyed by the lessor, by imposing a standard of reasonableness to the consent clause. The lessor is required to convey a larger estate than he intended. While he intended to convey a leasehold estate which could not be assigned unless he approved, he is forced, by judicial construction, to convey a leasehold estate which may be freely assigned unless he can demonstrate a commercially reasonable objection.

Along with the asserted legal rationales, strong public policy considerations lie beneath the court's decision in Kendall. California courts have formulated a "pro-tenant" philosophy even with regard to commercial tenants. While

107. There does not seem to be any reason why such a rationale would not apply also to express provisions allowing for unreasonableness. See infra note 128 and accompanying text.
108. Levin, supra note 14, at 133. See also supra note 65 (discussion of modern mitigation rules).
109. Of course, the lessee as well as the lessor, holds an interest in the property. The lessee's interest—the leasehold estate—however, is a nonfreehold estate. See MOYNIHAN, supra note 6, at 63.
110. POWELL, supra note 97, § 246(1).
112. The minority courts hence disregard the intent expressed in the lease. See supra note 11.
113. See, e.g., Green v. Superior Court, 10 Cal. 3d 616, 517 P.2d 1168, 111 Cal. Rptr. 704 (1974). In Green, the California Supreme Court held that the breach of an implied warranty of habitability in residential leases in California may be raised as a defense in an unlawful detainer action. Green, 10 Cal. 3d at 619, 517 P.2d at 1169-70, 111 Cal. Rptr. at 705. While the Green holding applies to residential leases only, the decision is nevertheless relevant to the Kendall analysis, because it evidences the pro-tenant philosophy of the California courts. The Green court held that the common law doctrine of caveat emptor must be set aside, because "[c]ontinued adherence to the time worn doctrine conflicts with the expectations and demands of contemporary landlord-tenant relationships . . . ." Green, 10 Cal. 3d at 620, 517 P.2d at 1170, 111 Cal. Rptr. at 706. The court chose to protect the tenant by implying a warranty of habitability, because of such policy considerations as the scarcity of adequate housing. Id. at 625, 517 P.2d at 1173-74, 111 Cal. Rptr. at 709-10. Note that the Kendall court's concern for the lack of available commercial space parallels the Green court's concern for the shortage of adequate residential space.

For an economic analysis of the recent changes in the landlord-tenant relationships, see Hirsch & Hirsch, The Changing Landlord-Tenant Relationship in California: An Economic Analysis of the Swinging Pendulum, 14 Sw. U.L. Rev. 1 (1983). The article discusses repair and deduct remedies, the implied warranty of habitability, and rent control, and concludes that "however well meaning the recent modifications in landlord-tenant relations may have been,
a commercial tenant may not be as disadvantaged by unequal bargaining power as a residential tenant, a commercial tenant is adversely affected by an unreasonable refusal to consent, when commercial space is selling at a premium.

The facts in Kendall also presented the court with good reason to sympathize with the tenant, who was harmed by a lessor’s unreasonable withholding of consent. The lessor demanded a rent increase as a condition to consent to assignment. Such a demand is certainly one of the least palatable reasons a lessor can give for withholding consent, and the court was rightly concerned that the lessor should not be allowed to receive more rent than the amount bargained for with the original tenant. Nevertheless, the court

they at best helped tenants very little and at worst were counter-productive.”

California courts have extended the pro-tenant rationale to the commercial context where policy concerns are arguably less compelling. Because the commercial lessor and lessee usually have relatively equal bargaining power, as contrasted with residential tenants and commercial lessors, there is less need for judicial protection in the commercial arena. For an explanation of how the pro-tenant rationale affects the law of California, in both the commercial and residential contexts, see Survey, 1984 California Courts of Appeal Survey—Landlord and Tenant Law, 7 WHITTIER L. REV. 211 (1985). The article overviews the appellate court decisions and concludes that California courts have continued to emphasize and protect tenants’ interests.

Because of the increased concern for the unequal bargaining power of residential tenants, legislatures in Alaska, Hawaii, and New York have imposed a reasonableness standard into consent clauses. See supra note 21. Compare England’s Landlord and Tenant Act, 1927, 17 & 18 Geo. 5, Ch. 36, § 19: A covenant against assignment without landlord’s consent is deemed to provide that landlord’s consent is not unreasonably withheld.

See, e.g., Schweiso v. Williams, 150 Cal. App. 3d 883, 887, 198 Cal. Rptr. 238, 240 (1984) (“In recent times the necessity of permitting reasonable alienation of commercial space has become paramount in our increasingly urban society.”).

Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc., 40 Cal. 3d at 501, 709 P.2d at 826.

Bedford Inv. Co. v. Folb, 79 Cal. App. 2d 363, 180 P.2d 361 (1947) (finding, in the presence of clause requiring reasonableness, that it was not reasonable to deny consent in order to charge more rent). But see Herlou Card Shop, Inc. v. Prudential Ins. of Am., 73 A.D.2d 708, 422 N.Y.S.2d 708 (1979) (adhering to the majority rule and explaining that landlord was merely exercising his legal contractual rights in refusing to consent to assignment of lease unless lease was modified to increase rent).

The landlord agreed to dispose of possession for the limited term and he
failed to recognize that the lessor was not demanding that the tenant pay increased rent. The lessor had bargained for control over assignment, and he was simply exercising that control.119

If the traditional consent rule needs re-evaluation, the legislature is the more appropriate body to act.120 The legislature, by applying an enactment prospectively, can avoid any undue harshness to lessors relying on previously drafted contracts.121 While the California courts disagreed on the significance of the California legislature's implicit recognition of the majority rule in an unrelated statute,122 none of the courts asserted that the legislature had directly addressed the issue. Perhaps Kendall will spark a legislative decision.

V. IMPACT

The essential question unresolved by the Kendall court is whether contract provisions which allow the lessor to withhold consent for any reason are still enforceable.123 The court declined to decide this issue, but noted that the Restatement would allow such a provision if the provision was freely negotiated.124 If the court allows commercial lessors to easily circumvent the

could not reasonably anticipate any more than what was given to him by the terms of the lease. His reversionary estate will benefit from the increased value from the inflation in any event, at least upon the expiration of the lease.” Id. at 321.

119. Thus the reason for his choice to exercise control is not relevant. See Herlou Card Shop, Inc. v. Prudential Ins. of Am., 73 A.D.2d 708, 422 N.Y.S.2d 708 (1979) (lessor exercising contractual right by refusing consent).

120. The decision to adopt the minority rule and abandon the majority rule calls for policy determinations more appropriate to a legislative body. It is not the role of the courts to balance pro-tenant policy factors against the legal rights of the lessors. See Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc., 40 Cal. 3d at 510, 709 P.2d at 852, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 833 (Lucas, J., dissenting) (suggesting deference to the legislative branch); Funk v. Funk, 102 Idaho 521, 526, 633 P.2d 586, 591 (1981) (Bakes, C.J., dissenting) (asserting that the proper forum for such changes is the legislature).

121. See Funk v. Funk, 102 Idaho 521, 526, 633 P.2d 586, 591 (1981) (Bakes, C.J., dissenting) (expressing concern with leases already prepared in reliance upon the majority viewpoint); Gruman v. Investors Diversified Serv., 247 Minn. 502, 78 N.W.2d 377 (1956) (adhering to the majority rule). The Gruman court explained that “[m]any leases now in effect covering a substantial amount of real property and creating valuable property rights were carefully prepared by competent counsel in reliance upon the majority viewpoint.” Id. at 509, 78 N.W.2d at 381.

122. See supra note 69 and accompanying text.

123. Kendall v. Ernest Pestana Inc., 40 Cal. 3d. at 500 n.14, 709 P.2d at 844 n.14, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 825 n.14. This case does not present the question of the validity of a clause absolutely prohibiting assignment, or granting absolute discretion over assignment to the lessor. Id.

124. See Restatement (Second) of Property § 15.2(2) (1977): “A restraint on alienation without the consent of the landlord of a tenant’s interest in leased property is valid, but the landlord’s consent to an alienation by the tenant cannot be withheld unreasonably, unless a freely negotiated provision in the lease gives the landlord an absolute right to withhold consent.” Compare section 15.2 to the tentative draft of the Restatement, section 14.2, which did not permit the lessor to act arbitrarily under any circumstances.
reasonable standard imposed by the Kendall holding, the impact of Kendall may be narrow. Drafters will simply revise their leases to include such express provisions, subject only to the Restatement’s requirement that the provision be freely negotiated.125

Despite the possibility of a narrow reading of Kendall, such an interpretation would be difficult to reconcile with the court’s reasoning for requiring the new standard.126 After all, the tenant who agrees to an express provision allowing for unreasonableness is not really any different than the tenant who agrees to a general consent provision, considering that the majority of courts interpret such a provision to include unreasonableness.127 The reasons behind the Kendall court’s holding are equally as applicable to explicit contract provisions allowing for unreasonableness as they are to general provisions for consent.128 For example, the concern for reasonable alienation of leases, because of the shortage of commercial space,129 is germane to both an explicit and an implicit allowance for an unreasonable refusal to consent. In either situation, the lessors’ unreasonable actions add to the shortage of commercial space. Second, since the court asserted that it was following the trend of requiring good faith in contracts,130 the court could have held that similar to the Uniform Commercial Code,131 parties may not eliminate the require-

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125. Under the Restatement, if the lease provisions were not fairly bargained for, the lessor cannot unreasonably withhold consent, even if the lease provided for the absolute right to withhold consent. See Comment, The Right to Sublease, 53 Tul. L. Rev. 556 (1979). “Thus, where the lease is an adhesion contract, a lessor may not unreasonably refuse a sublease even if the lease explicitly so provides. Without this rule, form leases would be amended to give the lessor the explicit right to refuse a sublease unreasonably.” Id. at 561.

The Comment further suggests that section 15.2 of the Restatement requires even an absolute prohibition of subleases to be freely negotiated in order to be valid.

“If the Restatement was interpreted not to govern such restrictions, lessors could achieve precisely the power that its provisions attempted to regulate. A lessor, wishing to reserve the right to unreasonably refuse a sublease without having to negotiate such a provision freely, could absolutely forbid subletting . . . [and] then waive the provision for any reason he chose. Id. at 561.

126. See supra notes 52-74 and accompanying text (rationale of the Kendall holding).

127. Based on the lease provisions, both tenants knew, or at least constructively knew, of the lessor’s right to withhold consent. Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc., 40 Cal. 3d at 493-94, ’09 P.2d at 840, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 821.

128. See Kehr, Lease Assignments: The Landlord’s Consent, 55 Cal. St. B.J. 108 (1980) (asserting that the policy rationale behind the minority rule should be extended to express provisions allowing for unreasonableness). See also Funk v. Funk, 102 Idaho 521, 526, 633 P.2d 586, 591 (1981) (Bakes, C.J., dissenting). Chief Justice Bakes asserted that while it is not clear whether lessors will have the right to contract for an absolute right to withhold consent, the broad language of the majority opinion suggests that even that provision would violate its “public policy.” Id.

129. See supra note 115 and accompanying text.


131. See section 1-102 of the Uniform Commercial Code (the obligation of good faith prescribed by the Act may not be disclaimed by agreement). Section 1-203 of the UCC imposes an obligation of good faith in the performance of every contract. Note, of course, that the UCC deals only with the sale of goods, and does not bear directly on the lease issue.
ment of good faith. The court adopted the minority position because of the conviction that a standard of commercial reasonableness was necessary. Furthermore, an express contractual allowance for unreasonable withholding of consent is just as much an unreasonable restraint on alienation as a general provision, permitting the lessor's refusal to consent for any reason. In both contexts, the lessee is denied freedom to assign based on the lessor's commercially unreasonable objections.

The Kendall court's rationales cannot be reconciled with the allowance of contract provisions providing for the absolute right to deny consent. Consequently, the future impact of the decision may be extensive. A lessor may never be able to withhold consent, except for a commercially reasonable objection, regardless of the parties' intent. Of course, such a result may not be disadvantageous to commercial lessees. However, the same result could be achieved without violating contract principles, by an express provision in the contract prescribing reasonableness. Consequently, the lessor and lessee would have to negotiate the provision, and the agreed-upon provision would then indicate the express intent of the parties. By requiring reasonableness even without an express provision, the court subjects all lessor consent refusals to a judicial review of reasonableness.

The phrase "unreasonable withholding of consent," whether imposed by contract or judicial interpretation, is neither well established nor generally known. The term, as it has been used in express contract provisions denying an unreasonable refusal to consent, has been the subject of much litigation. Many courts have not attempted to define the phrase, and many of those which have attempted to define the phrase, have used vague generalities. Because the standard has not been delineated extensively in case law, a lessor may not know whether his reason for withholding consent is commercially reasonable until the lessee takes him to court. Furthermore, the concept of reasonableness, as with all reasonableness standards in the law, is subject to change over time and change in circumstances.

The courts have not explicitly defined the term because the application of the standard makes generalization difficult. The outcome of each case is dependent on the facts involved, and as one scholar explained, "The situation is further complicated by viewing each piece of real property as unique." The courts have established a list of objective factors to consider when

132. See, e.g., Segre v. Ring, 103 N.H. 278, 280, 170 A.2d 265, 266 (1961) (asserting that the parties could have qualified the consent clause in any number of ways).
133. See supra note 76.
134. For a discussion of the evasive standard, see Todres & Lerner, supra note 93.
137. FREIDMAN, supra note 6, § 7.304c.
138. Todres & Lerner, supra note 93 at 199.
determining commercial reasonableness. Such factors include: (1) the financial responsibility and business character of the proposed assignee; (2) the legality of the proposed use; (3) the need for alteration of the premises; and (4) the general nature of the occupancy.139 Examining the Kendall facts, it is reasonably clear that a landlord cannot make his consent conditional on increased payment.140 Future facts, however, may not lend themselves so readily to judicial determination.

The impact of the Kendall decision on commercial lessors in California may be unduly severe, since the court applied the adopted rule retroactively.141 Parties may have drafted a lease in reliance on the majority rule which allows a lessor to withhold consent for any reason with an unqualified consent clause. The lessor's right to withhold consent for any reason may have been an important element in the commercial bargain.142 By applying the rule retroactively, the Kendall decision changed the nature of the contract to the detriment of the lessor.143

By adopting the minority view, the California Supreme Court evidenced the growing dissatisfaction with the traditional consent rule. The supreme courts in New Mexico,144 Idaho,145 and Alaska146 have also expressed dissatisfaction with the majority rule. Appellate courts in Illinois,147 Florida,148 and Alabama,149 along with lower courts in Massachusetts150 and Ohio,151 have applied the minority rule. However, some of the authorities have


140. FREDMAN, supra note 137, at 196. See also Bedford Inv. Co. v. Folb, 79 Cal. App. 2d 363, 180 P.2d 361 (1947) (not reasonable to deny consent in order to charge more rent).

141. The retroactive effect of the minority rule has been severely criticized. See, e.g., Justice Bloodworth's dissent in Homa-Goff Interiors, Inc. v. Cowden, 350 So. 2d 1035, 1039 (Ala. 1977) (Bloodworth, J., dissenting) ("To overturn a century and a quarter of existing real estate law without giving contracting parties fair notice' is my principal complaint . . . .")


144. See Boss Barbara, Inc. v. Newbill, 97 N.M. 239, 638 P.2d 1084 (1982).


combined the consent issue with the mitigation issue in their determinations,\textsuperscript{152} or have permitted subjective factors to be considered in the reasonableness standard.\textsuperscript{153} Nevertheless, a growing trend exists in support of the minority rule.\textsuperscript{154} Because the minority rule is usually applied retroactively,\textsuperscript{155} leases currently drafted in reliance on the majority rule may someday be interpreted by a newly-proclaimed minority court.

VI. CONCLUSION

The \textit{Kendall} court held that a commercial lessor may not withhold consent to an assignment absent a commercially reasonable objection.\textsuperscript{156} The court relied on the dual rationale of the contractual duty of good faith and the rule against unreasonable restraints on alienation. The court neglected, however, the fundamental principles of freedom to contract, as well as freedom to control one's property. Historically, courts have exempted leases from the strict rules against restraints on alienation.\textsuperscript{157} Furthermore, the \textit{Kendall} court did not distinguish an implied reasonableness standard from a duty of good faith. The most important question left open by \textit{Kendall} is whether an unreasonable consent allowance can be drafted into commercial leases. The rationale of the \textit{Kendall} decision suggests that this would not be allowed, in which case the impact of the decision may be extensive.

In the absence of legislative direction, the most appropriate course for the courts to follow is to reaffirm the majority rule. While the policy considerations underlying the minority rule are persuasive, the majority rule rests on established contract and property principles. If the minority rule is to be adopted, the state legislature is the appropriate body to act. Most importantly, the rule, if adopted by the courts, should be applied prospectively.

\textit{Lynn Hayner}

\textsuperscript{152} See, e.g., Shaker Bldg. Co. v. Federal Lime & Stone Co, 28 Ohio Misc. 246, 277 N.E.2d 584 (1971) (mixing the discussion of assignability and mitigation). See also Levin, \textit{supra} note 65 (noting judicial confusion where courts have failed to distinguish between the issues of mitigation and consent).


\textsuperscript{154} See \textit{supra} note 4.

\textsuperscript{155} See \textit{supra} note 121 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{156} Kendall v. Ernest Pestana, Inc., 40 Cal. 3d at 506, 709 P.2d at 849, 220 Cal. Rptr. at 830.

\textsuperscript{157} See \textit{supra} note 82 and accompanying text.