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Modular Pincer-type Pyridylidene Amide Ruthenium(II) Complexes for Efficient Transfer Hydrogenation Catalysis

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S Supporting Information



ABSTRACT: A set of bench-stable ruthenium complexes with new N,N,N-tridentate coordinating pincer-type pyridylbis(pyridylideneamide) ligands was synthesized in excellent yields, with the pyridylidene amide in meta or in para position (m-PYA and *p*-PYA, respectively). While complex $[Ru(p-PYA)(MeCN)_3]^{2+}$ is catalytically silent in transfer hydrogenation, its *meta* isomer $[Ru(m-PYA)(MeCN)_3]^{2+}$ shows considerable activity with turnover frequencies at 50% conversion $TOF_{50} = 100 \text{ h}^{-1}$. Spectroscopic, electrochemical, and crystallographic analyses suggest considerably stronger donor properties of the zwitterionic m-PYA ligand compared to the partially π -acidic p-PYA analogue, imparted by valence isomerization. Further catalyst optimization was achieved by exchanging the ancillary MeCN ligands with imines (4-picoline), amines (ethylenediamine), and phosphines (PPh₃, dppm, dppe). The most active catalyst was comprised of the *m*-PYA pincer ligand and PPh₃, complex $[Ru(m-PYA)(PPh_3)(MeCN)_2]^{2+}$, which reached a TOF₅₀ of 430 h⁻¹ under aerobic conditions and up to 4000 h⁻¹ in the absence of oxygen. The presence of oxygen reversibly deactivates the catalytically active species, which compromises activity, but not longevity of the catalyst. Ligand exchange kinetic studies by NMR spectroscopy indicate that the strong trans effect of the phosphine is critical for high catalyst activity. Diaryl, aryl-alkyl, and dialkyl ketones were hydrogenated with high conversion, and α_{β} -unsaturated ketones produced selectively the saturated ketone as the only product due to exclusive C=C bond hydrogenation, a distinctly different selectivity from most other transfer hydrogenation catalysts.

INTRODUCTION

The pincer ligand motif is typically comprised of a meridional tridentate donor system and has attracted considerable interest as a platform for organometallic and inorganic chemistry.^{1–10} Originally, the pincer platform has been confined to an ECE donor system with a central carbanion and flanking phosphines $(E = P)^{11}$ or amines (E = N).^{12,13} Complexes with this ECE pincer motif feature a remarkably robust C-M bond, which enables the stabilization of a variety of otherwise highly reactive transition states, e.g., for transmetalation, ^{14,15} oxidative addition,¹⁶ or C-C bond making and breaking reactions.¹⁷⁻²¹ The pincer platform has been continuously expanded to include a variety of donor combinations.² A particularly versatile and catalytically competent variation includes pincer ligands containing a central pyridyl unit such as PNP and PNN pincer ligands, often referred to as the Milstein system.²²⁻²⁵ In these ligands, the central aromatic ring features a lower resonance stabilization energy compared to the benzene ring in aryl-based ECE pincer ligands, which favors deprotonation of

the benzylic position and formation of an exocyclic double bond with concomitant pyridine dearomatization. Since this process is reversible, these pincer ligands provide a scaffold for reversible proton storage and release.^{24,26} These ligands are therefore noninnocent, and when coordinated to a suitable metal, the complexes offer bifunctionality for efficient catalysis,²⁷⁻³⁰ similar to Noyori's or Shvo's catalyst.^{31,32} This noninnocence of the pincer ligand has been explored by using variations on the theme, including aliphatic backbones³³ as well as different central heterocycles.³⁴

In all these pincer ligands, (de)protonation reversibly changes the ligand donor properties from a neutral imine to a formally anionic amide. We have been intrigued by the possibility to install similar donor flexibility by using resonance flexibility, which does not require the transfer of a proton. Pyridylidene amides (PYAs)³⁵⁻⁴³ offer excellent prospects for

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Scheme 1. Limiting Resonance Structures of para-PYA (top) and meta-PYA Ligands



such applications, as they exist in two limiting resonance forms: a zwitterionic form with an amide coordination site (**A**, Scheme 1) and a neutral imine form (**B**, Scheme 1). Accordingly, the donor properties of this ligand can be modulated by external factors such as the coordinated metal and its spectator ligands and by the polarity of the solvent.^{44–46} The flexibility imparts catalytic activity and is further modulated upon alteration of the pyridine substitution pattern from *para*-PYAs (**A**, **B**) to *meta*-PYA scaffolds (**C**, Scheme 1).⁴⁷ Of note, such *meta*-PYA ligands cannot be represented by a neutral resonance structure and feature only zwitterionic structures.⁴⁸ Provided resonance structures **D**–**F** are also relevant, and these ligands are mesoionic *N*-donor systems,⁴⁹ related to mesoionic *N*-heterocyclic carbenes.^{50–52}

The ligand flexibility imparted by these PYA systems offers intriguing opportunities for the stabilization of different metal electronic configurations without the need for chemical transformation of the ligand skeleton. Therefore, we were particularly intrigued by combining the very successful pincer motif and the PYA donor systems to develop catalysts for redox transformations. Here we now present a new member of the pincer family comprised of PYA donors. We demonstrate the electronic control that is exerted by the PYA donors on the coordinated ruthenium center, as well as catalytic application in transfer hydrogenation. The catalytic activity is optimized by the choice of PYA system as well as the spectator ligands, which allowed turnover numbers to be continuously raised from 100 to 4000 h⁻¹.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Synthesis of Generic bis-PYA Pincer Ruthenium Complexes. The two PYA pincer ligand precursors L1 and L2 (Scheme 2) were obtained from the corresponding iodide salts, which were prepared in two straightforward steps according to literature procedures.⁵³ Anion exchange was performed to avoid iodide ions in the metal complexes, as iodides tend to interfere with redox transformations, and was achieved by heating the iodide salts with an excess of $\rm NH_4PF_6$ in a H₂O/MeCN mixture (Figure S1).

The dicationic pincer ruthenium(II) complexes 1 and 2a with *para* and *meta*-PYA pincer arms, respectively, were synthesized in excellent yields (>90%) by an *in situ* deprotonation/metalation procedure using Na₂CO₃ and $[RuCl_2(cym)]_2$ (Scheme 1). This procedure avoids the formation of the neutral free ligand. Complexation was indicated macroscopically by a color change of the reaction mixture from orange to deep red. Complexes 1 and 2a are airand moisture-stable and have been purified by repetitive precipitation.

Evidence for the formation of the complexes was obtained by ¹H NMR spectroscopy, which showed the loss of the amide

Scheme 2. Synthesis of Ru(II) PYA Pincer Complexes 1 and $2a^a$



^{*a*}Reactions and conditions: (a) 0.5 equiv of $[RuCl_2(cym)]_2$; 3 equiv of Na_2CO_3 in MeCN, reflux, 16 h.

proton resonances at $\delta_{\rm H}$ = 11.95 and 11.67 from L1 and L2, respectively. Moreover, the pyridyl proton resonances of the PYA unit shifted markedly upfield upon ruthenation. For example, the two doublets appearing at $\delta_{\rm H}$ = 8.87 and 8.49 in L1 resonate at about 0.5 ppm higher field in the ruthenium complex 1 ($\delta_{\rm H}$ = 8.52 and 7.91). Similar shift differences were observed for complex 2a in comparison to the resonances of L2. The resonances of the coordinated MeCN ligands appear as two distinct singlets in a 2:1 integral ratio around $\delta_{\rm H}$ = 2.3 and 2.7 for the two axial and the in-plane ligands, respectively, suggesting no significant ligand exchange in DMSO-d₆. The resonances of the axial MeCN ligands are identical in both complexes, while the equatorial ligand is less shielded in 1 ($\delta_{
m H}$ = 2.76) than in 2a ($\delta_{\rm H}$ = 2.65), indicative of a stronger donation of the *m*-PYA ligand compared to the para isomer. High resolution MS of the complexes showed the characteristic isotopic signature of ruthenium together with the expected m/z signal at 676.0590 (676.0593 calculated for [1-MeCN- PF_6^{+} and m/z = 717.0859 (717.0862 calculated for [2- PF_6]⁺; Figures S2 and S3).

Crystal Structure Analysis. Single crystal X-ray diffraction analysis of complexes 1 and 2a confirmed the structural assignment (Figure 1). The molecular structures of complexes 1 and 2a both feature a ruthenium center in distorted octahedral geometry with a N,N,N-tridentate *mer*-chelating bis-PYA pincer ligand and three MeCN spectator ligands. The most severe distortion is entailed by the relatively small bite angle of the bis-PYA pincer ligand, which is identical within esds for complexes 1 and 2a (157.82(14)° and 157.55(8)°, respectively) and considerably smaller than the ideal 180°.

The metrics around the ruthenium center are almost identical for both complexes. The bond distances between



Figure 1. ORTEP representations of the complex cations 1 (a) and **2a** (b); all ellipsoids at 50% probability level (hydrogen atoms, noncoordinating PF_6^- anions, cocrystallized solvent molecules, and conformational disorder of the methyl-pyridinium groups omitted for clarity).

ruthenium and the central pyridyl nitrogen of the PYA pincer ligand (Ru–N2 = 1.961(3) Å and 1.9589(19) Å in 1 and 2a, respectively) are substantially shorter compared to the Ru–N_{PYA} bonds (Ru–N1/3 in the 2.102–2.134 Å range) because of the compressed geometry of the pincer ligands due to the small bite angle (Table 1). In both complexes, the Ru–N4

Table 1. Selected Bond Lengths (Å) and Angles (deg) for Ligand L1 and Complexes 1 and 2a

	L1	1 ^{<i>a</i>}	$2a^{a}$
Ru1-N1		2.102(3)	2.1064(19)
Ru1-N2		1.961(3)	1.9589(19)
Ru1–N3		2.134(3)	2.1137(18)
Ru1-N4		2.034(4)	2.056(2)
Ru1–N5		2.008(4)	2.010(2)
Ru1–N6		2.016(4)	2.024(2)
$N-C_{A}^{b}$ (N7-C2, N7-C6)	1.341(4)	1.335(8)	1.345(3)
$C_{A} - C_{\beta}^{b}$ (C2-C3, C5-C6)	1.367(4)	1.351(7)	1.374(4)
$C_{\beta} - C_{\gamma}^{b}$ (C3-C4, C4-C5)	1.393(4)	1.400(7)	1.393(4)
N1-Ru1-N3		157.82(14)	157.55(8)
θ PYA-pyr ^c	0	39.3, 40.5	34.9, 41.8

^{*a*}For complexes 1 and 2a the disordered pyridylic ring was not taken into account. ^{*b*}Average of two bonds. ^{*c*}Dihedral angle θ between the PYA heterocycles and the N–C=O amide plane.

bond to the in-plane MeCN ligand is slightly longer (Ru–N4 = 2.034(3) Å and 2.056(2) Å in 1 and 2a, respectively) than the Ru–N_{MeCN} bond of the axially coordinated MeCN ligands (Ru–N5/6 between 2.008(3) and 2.024(2) Å). Whereas the *p*-PYA pincer ligand precursor L1 (Figure S1) reveals a completely planar geometry, similar to the previously reported structure of its iodide analogue, ⁵³ the PYA heterocycles in the ruthenium complexes are substantially twisted out of the plane of the central pyridine ring by 39.3° and 40.5° in complex 1 and by 41.8° and 34.9° in complex 2a. This large dihedral angle indicates a low π contribution to the N_{PYA}–C_{pyridyl} bond and hence little conjugation between the PYA heterocycle and the metal-bound nitrogen. Accordingly, the amide nitrogen is predominantly anionic and π -basic as depicted in the zwitterionic limiting resonance structure A (cf., Scheme 1).

A closer look at the bond length alterations within the PYA systems allows for comparison of the mesomeric flexibility of the PYA ligands (Table 1) which is particularly interesting for complex 1 since the *p*-PYA ligand features two strongly diverting limiting resonance structures (zwitterionic aromatic vs. neutral diene, cf. Scheme 1). Complex 1 shows distinctly shorter bond distances for $C_{\alpha}-C_{\beta}$ compared to $C_{\beta}-C_{\gamma}$

(1.351(7) Å vs. 1.400(7) Å), thus indicating a pronounced diene character (resonance form **A** in Scheme 1). In contrast, the ligand **L1** shows an aromatic structure with only 0.026 Å difference between $C_{\alpha}-C_{\beta}$ and $C_{\beta}-C_{\gamma}$. In the *m*-PYA pincer ligand of complex **2a**, the bond length alteration is even smaller (less than 0.02 Å), which is in good agreement with a predominantly zwitterionic resonance structure and an aromatic PYA heterocycle. This divergence demonstrates the adaptiveness of the *p*-PYA ligand and agrees with solution NMR data, supporting a formally anionic and stronger π -basic metal-bound nitrogen of the *m*-PYA unit.

Preliminary Catalytic Evaluation. Both complexes were tested as catalysts (1 mol %) in transfer hydrogenation of benzophenone under standard conditions,⁵⁴ i.e., using *i*PrOH as a hydrogen source under basic conditions (10 mol % KOH) at reflux temperature and under aerobic conditions. While the *p*-PYA complex 1 was essentially inactive and reached less than 5% conversion after 6 h, the *m*-PYA complex **2a** showed appreciable catalytic activity with 97% conversion after 2 h (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Time-conversion profiles for the transfer hydrogenation of benzophenone in iPrOH and KOH (10 mol %) with complex 1 (gray) and complex 2a (black; both at 1 mol %).

To better understand their radically different catalytic behavior, the two complexes were investigated electrochemically using cyclic voltammetry. Both complexes showed two reversible oxidation processes, which were assigned to a consecutive oxidation of the ruthenium center from +II to +III and then to +IV (Figure 3, Table 2). The *p*-PYA pincer ligand in complex 1 induces higher oxidation potentials ($E_{1/2} = +0.78$ V for Ru^{II/III} and +1.95 V for Ru^{III/IV,} all potentials vs. SSCE) than the *m*-PYA ligand in complex 2 ($E_{1/2} = +0.67$ V and +1.85



Figure 3. Cyclovoltammetry measurements of complexes 1 (gray) and 2a (black) in MeCN (potentials vs SSCE using. the Fc⁺/Fc couple as standard; $E_{1/2} = +0.43$ V; (nBu₄N)PF₆ as electrolyte, 100 mV s⁻¹ scan rate).

Table 2. Characteristic Electrochemical and Photochemical Values for Complexes 1 and 2a

	1	2a			
$E_{1/2}(\operatorname{Ru}^{II/III})[V]^a$	0.78 (77)	0.67 (75)			
$E_{1/2}(\operatorname{Ru}^{\operatorname{III/IV}})[V]^{b}$	1.95 (148)	1.85 (134)			
λ_{\max} (MLCT) [nm] ^b	412 (8100); 504 (4000)	402 (9100); 476 (2900)			
^{<i>a</i>} Potentials in MeCN vs. SSCE at 100 mV·s ⁻¹ scan rate using the Fc ⁺ / Fc couple as standard; $E_{1/2} = +0.43$ V and $(nBu_4N)PF_6$ as electrolyte; $\Delta E_p = E_{pc} - E_{pa} $ [mV] in parentheses. ^{<i>b</i>} Measured in MeCN; molar extinction coefficient ε [L·mol ⁻¹ ·cm ⁻¹] in parentheses.					

V). This 100 mV shift is in agreement with stronger electron donor properties of the *m*-PYA ligand, which can be rationalized by the more pronounced zwitterionic resonance structure contribution, and the low relevance of a π -acidic imine-type neutral donor site (cf. Scheme 1). In contrast, the valence isomerization of the *p*-PYA ligand to the imine resonance form in complex 1 reduces the donor properties, and hence this ligand stabilizes lower metal oxidation states, thus entailing higher oxidation potentials. These electrochemical analyses paired with the NMR and solid state studies underline the electronic tunability of bis-PYA pincer ligand without significantly altering the steric properties.

UV-vis absorption spectra show a similar distinction between the effects of the *m*- and *p*-PYA ligand. The MLCT bands in the visible region of the spectra deriving from metal to ligand $d-\pi^*$ transitions are useful indicators for the electronic impact of the two ligand types. These bands appear at $\lambda_{max} =$ 412 and 504 nm for complex 1 and are hypsochromically shifted to 402 and 476 nm for complex 2a (Figure S4). This shift of λ_{max} corroborates a more pronounced π -acidic diene type structure of the *p*-PYA ligand in complex 1, which imparts a higher degree of conjugation and electron delocalization and therefore a smaller energy difference between the HOMO dorbitals (metal-centered) and the ligand-centered unoccupied π^* MOs when compared with the electronic configuration in the zwitterionic *m*-PYA ligand.

All analytic data therefore indicate a significant dependence of the metal properties on the PYA substitution pattern and in particular on the position of the N–Me group. The *m*-PYA pincer ligand exerts stronger donor properties than the more diene-type *p*-PYA pincer ligand in complex 1, and complex 2a outperforms the *p*-PYA pincer complex 1 by far in transfer hydrogenation catalysis. Therefore, modification of the ancillary ligands in 2a has been envisaged as a methodology to improve catalytic activity and to develop second generation transfer hydrogenation catalysts.

Ancillary Ligand Modulation of Complex 2a. Substitution of the MeCN spectator ligands in 2a was accomplished upon refluxing an EtOH solution of complex 2a in the presence of extraneous ligands. On the basis of their distinct steric and electronic impact, a diverse set of ligands was selected, including mono- and bidentate phosphines (diphenylphosphinomethane, dppm; diphenylphosphinoethane dppe; PPh₃), amines (ethylenediamine, en), and imines (4-picoline) to yield complexes 2b–f, respectively (Scheme 3). While coordination of the bidentate ligands dppm, dppe, and en are unsurprising, it is worth noting that only one PPh₃ ligand binds to the Ru(m-PYA) unit in the axial position, even

Scheme 3. Synthesis of Second-Generation (m-PYA) Pincer Ru Complexes 2b-f





Figure 4. ORTEP representations of the complex cations of 2b (a), 2c (b), 2d (c), and 2f (d); all ellipsoids at 50% probability, H atoms, noncoordinating PF_6^- anions, cocrystallized solvent molecules, and conformational disorder of methyl-pyridinium rings omitted for clarity.

in the presence of a large excess of phosphine. Coordination of only one phosphine is presumably due to steric constraints imparted by the restricted orientation of the N–CH₃ group of the PYA units. In contrast, picoline coordination is sterically less demanding and substitution from 2a afforded exclusively complex 2f with two picoline ligands in mutual *trans* position.

The formation of complexes 2b-f was confirmed by ¹H NMR, ¹³C{¹H} NMR, and ³¹P{¹H} NMR spectroscopy. The spectra of complexes 2b-d feature the expected new proton resonances in the aromatic region integrating to 20 and 15 H, respectively. In addition, the singlet due to the C2-bound hydrogen of the PYA ligand shifts diagnostically upfield upon phosphine coordination from $\delta_{\rm H}$ = 9.07 in 2a to $\delta_{\rm H} \approx$ 7.7 in 2b and 2c, and less upfield to $\delta_{\rm H} = 8.33$ in the monophosphine complex 2d. The limited steric flexibility of the dppm ligand induces a lower symmetry for complex 2c, as demonstrated by the appearance of two distinct singlets for the C2-H protons of each PYA unit in the ¹H NMR spectrum at $\delta_{\rm H}$ = 7.75 and 7.73. The cis-coordinating dppm ligand appears as AB doublets in the ³¹P{H} NMR spectrum at $\delta_P = 0.1$ and -3.2 (² $J_{PP} = 57.8$ Hz) for 2b, and as AX doublet at $\delta_{\rm p}$ = 66.2 and 54.3 (² $J_{\rm PP}$ = 13.8 Hz) for 2c. Coordination of only one PPh₃ in complex 2d was identified by a singlet at $\delta_{\rm P}$ = 51.6 and a 1:2 integral ratio with the highfield PF_6^- resonance at $\delta_P = -144.6$ (septett, ${}^1J_{PF}$ = 707 Hz).

Complexes 2e and 2f with nitrogen-containing ancillary ligands showed the signals expected due to the newly bound en and picoline ligands in the aliphatic and aromatic region, respectively. For example, the picoline resonances of complex 2f appear as two characteristic doublets ($\delta_{\rm H} = 7.69$ and 7.06, ${}^{3}J_{\rm HH} = 6.6$ Hz) and integrated for two symmetry-related and hence mutually *trans* coordinated ligands. Interestingly, the C2–H proton resonance is less shifted upon en coordination

 $(\delta_{\rm H} = 8.48)$ than in the phosphine complexes, and it is unchanged in the picoline complex 2f at ($\delta_{\rm H} = 9.08$, cf. 9.07 for 2a). The C2–H proton resonance of the *m*-PYA unit therefore is a sensitive probe for the stereoelectronic impact of the ancillary ligands.

Modification of the ancillary ligands also had a marked influence on the lability of the residual MeCN ligands. While NMR spectra in deuterated MeCN or DMSO did not indicate any substitution of this ligand in complexes with N-donor ligands (**2a**, **2e**, and **2f**), phosphine coordination in complexes **2b**-d induced rapid ligand exchange in both solvents, and no coordinated MeCN was observed in the ¹H NMR spectrum of the dppx complexes **2b** and **2c**. For complex **2d** only one resonance for coordinated MeCN was observed ($\delta_{\rm H} = 2.98$ in DMSO- d_6 and 2.67 in MeCN- d_3 , respectively), which decreased in a zero-order reaction and completely disappeared after 24 h (Figure S8, S9). In noncoordinating CD₂Cl₂, both coordinated MeCN ligands were observed and resonate at $\delta_{\rm H}$ = 2.26 and 2.54 (Figure S10).

1D NOESY measurements of **2d** in CD₂Cl₂ and MeCN- d_3 were carried out to unambiguously assign the position of the MeCN ligands and to investigate the rotation dynamics of the PYA units in solution (Figures S11–S15). Upon saturation of the MeCN proton resonance at $\delta_{\rm H} = 2.54$ in CD₂Cl₂ solution, spin–spin coupling to the N–CH₃ protons of the PYA unit ($\delta_{\rm H} = 4.31$) and to the PPh₃ protons ($\delta_{\rm H} = 6.8-6.9$ and 7.0–7.1) was observed, suggesting an equatorial position of this MeCN ligand and a *cis* relationship with PPh₃. In contrast, saturation of the MeCN resonance at $\delta_{\rm H} = 2.26$ did not show any interaction with the PPh₃ protons nor the N–CH₃ group, which is in agreement with an axial position with respect to the pincer ligand plane (*viz. trans* to PPh₃). In MeCN- d_3 , one MeCN ligand is rapidly exchanging, and only one NCCH₃

Table 5. Selected Dond Deligns (II) and Thigles (deg) for Complexes 2a d and 21

	2a ($L_{ax} = N5$)	2b ($L_{ax} = P1$)	$2c (L_{ax} = P1)$	$2d (L_{ax} = P1)$	$2f (L_{ax} = N5)$
Ru-N1	2.1064(19)	2.114(5)	2.161(3)	2.147(2)	2.1208(18)
Ru–N2	1.9589(19)	2.034(5)	2.047(3)	1.977(2)	1.953(2)
Ru–N3	2.1137(18)	2.134(4)	2.146(3)	2.136(2)	2.1208(18)
Ru-N4 or Ru-P2	2.056(2)	2.2951(15)	2.3209(10)	2.050(2)	2.055(3)
Ru-N5	2.010(2)	2.102(5)	2.118(3)	2.096(2)	2.0910(18)
Ru-L _{ax}	2.024(2)	2.2642(16)	2.2802(11)	2.3271(6)	2.0910(18)
N1-Ru-N3	157.55(8)	152.6(2)	152.85(12)	155.79(8)	157.06(10)
θ PYA-pyr ^a	34.9, 41.8	76.9, 79.3	61.7, 81.9	31.6, 40.2	41.3, 41.3
^a Dihedral angle θ between	the PYA heterocycles an	d the pyridylamide play	ne.		

resonance was observed (*vide supra*). Saturation of this resonance ($\delta_{\rm H} = 2.67$) revealed an NOE with the PPh₃ protons, indicating that the axial MeCN ligand is significantly more labile, in agreement with the higher *trans* effect of PPh₃ vs the pyridyl donor site⁵⁵ of the pincer ligand.

Irrespective of the solvent (CD₂Cl₂ or MeCN- d_3), NOEs were also observed between the equatorial MeCN proton resonances and three of the four protons of the pyridylidene heterocycle (H², H⁴, and H⁵). These interactions indicate substantial wagging of the PYA unit about the exocyclic C–N_{PYA} bond and suggest single bond character of this bond. Such a conclusion corroborates the preponderance of the zwitterionic PYA form (C in Scheme 1) and provides another indication for a formally anionic and π -basic PYA nitrogen donor site in complex 2a.

Interestingly, the different degrees of lability of the MeCN ligand are also reflected in the HR-MS data of complexes $2\mathbf{b}-\mathbf{f}$. The phosphine complexes $2\mathbf{b}-\mathbf{d}$ all show a M⁺ signal resulting from dissociation of a PF₆⁻ anion and all MeCN ligands (m/z = 978.1259 for $[2\mathbf{b}-\text{MeCN}-\text{PF}_6]^+$, 992.1430 for $[2\mathbf{c}-\text{MeCN}-\text{PF}_6]^+$, and 856.0985 for $[2\mathbf{d}-2\text{MeCN}-\text{PF}_6]^+$) in excellent agreement with the calculated values (978.1259, 992.1415, and 856.0973, respectively). In contrast, the N-donor complexes ionized only via loss of the PF₆⁻ anion, and the mother ion included the coordinated MeCN ligand (m/z = 695.1032 for $[2\mathbf{e}-\text{PF}_6]^+$ and 821.1528 for $[2\mathbf{f}-\text{PF}_6]^+$.

Crystallographic Analysis. The structures of complexes 2b-d and 2f were unequivocally confirmed by single crystal Xray diffraction analysis. All complexes show a distorted octahedral ruthenium center with the m-PYA pincer ligand in a meridional coordination mode (Figure 4). The bite angle of the pincer ligand N1-Ru-N3 decreases from 157.6° in the solvento complex 2a to 155.8° in 2d with one PPh₃ ligand and even further to 152.6° and 152.9° in the bidentate dppx complexes 2b and 2c (Table 2). The phenyl rings of the dppx ligands and the PYA heterocycle are oriented in a parallel manner, indicative of π -stacking interactions. These interactions lead to a large twist of the PYA heterocycle out of the pyridylamide plane with dihedral angles between 61 and 82° in complexes 2b and 2c compared to less than 42° in complexes 2a, 2d, and 2f. Another distinctive feature is the expected higher trans influence of the phosphine ligand compared to pyridine in these complexes as demonstrated by the lengthening of the Ru– N_{pyr} and Ru– N_{MeCN} bonds. This higher trans influence correlates here also with a higher trans effect, as noted for the fast substitution of the MeCN ligand trans to a phosphine in complexes 2b-d.

Electrochemical and UV–vis Spectroscopic Analysis. Electrochemical measurements and spectroscopic data suggest a strong influence of the different spectator ligands on the electronic properties of the Ru(II) metal center. Cyclic voltammetry in MeCN shows for all complexes a reversible oxidation in the +0.2 to +1.0 V range, which was attributed to a metal-centered $Ru^{II/III}$ redox process.⁵⁶

When comparing the half-wave potentials (Figure 5, Table S1), a trend emerges that correlates with the donor properties



Figure 5. Cyclovoltammetry measurements of the *m*-PYA Ru(II) complex variations **2a** (black, L = MeCN), **2b** (purple, L = dppm), **2c** (blue, L = dppe), **2d** (green, L = PPh₃), **2e** (red, L = en), and **2f** (orange, L = 4-picoline) in MeCN showing the reversible redox processes for the Ru^{II/III} transition (potentials vs SSCE using the Fc⁺/ Fc couple as standard; $E_{1/2} = +0.43$ V; nBu₄NPF₆ as supporting electrolyte, 100 mV s⁻¹ scan rate).

of the ancillary ligand. The oxidation potentials increase in the sequence $2e (0.26 \text{ V}) < 2f (0.46 \text{ V}) < 2a (0.67 \text{ V}) < 2d (0.79 \text{ V}) < 2c (0.86 \text{ V}) \approx 2b (0.88 \text{ V}; all potentials vs SSCE), in agreement with the hardness of the ligand setting, which decreases in the order of en (2e) > pyr (2f) > RCN (2a) > PR₃ (2d). Exchange of another MeCN ligand by a second phosphine (2b, 2c) further reduces the electron density at the metal center and hence increases the potential needed to reach the oxidized Ru^{III} state. Hence, the ancillary ligands allow the electronic properties of the ruthenium center to be tailored over a substantial potential range.$

Photospectroscopic measurements of the complexes show an absorption in the 350–450 nm range that was assigned to a $d-\pi^*$ MLCT band (Figure S5). The absorption maximum λ_{max} of this band is strongly dependent on the ancillary ligand and shifts to higher energy as the ligand hardness is reduced following the sequence 2e (456 nm) > 2f (437 nm) > 2a (402 nm) > 2d (390 nm) > 2b (367 nm) \approx 2c (360 nm). This sequence is identical to the order of redox potentials established by electrochemical measurements and hence supports the notion that the electronic properties of these *m*- PYA pincer ruthenium complexes can be tailored over a broad range. Interestingly, a plot of the absorption maxima (λ_{max}) vs the redox potentials ($E_{1/2}$) is linear (Figure 6), indicative of a



Figure 6. Linear correlation of the Ru^{II/III} redox potentials $E_{1/2}$ with the maximum absorption λ_{max} of the MLCT process for the *m*-PYA pincer ruthenium complexes **2a**-**f** ($R^2 = 0.95$).

direct correlation. Since the Ru^{II/III} redox potentials are predominantly affected by the metal 4d orbital energy of the HOMO, the linear correlation with λ_{max} implies that the energy of the LUMO remains constant. It therefore follows that for all investigated complexes **2a**-**f**, the LUMO is centered on the *m*-PYA pincer ligand. Considering the π -basic nature of the amide donor sites of the PYA pincer ligand, these data suggest the LUMO to be largely localized on the central pyridyl ring. Hence this pincer ligand is behaving as a π acid, qualitatively similar to terpyridine.

Catalytic Transfer Hydrogenation Activity of Complexes 2a–f. The second generation *m*-PYA pincer ruthenium(II) complexes **2b–f** were tested as catalyst precursors for the transfer hydrogenation of benzophenone in *i*PrOH under basic conditions and compared to **2a**. At 1 mol % ruthenium loading, the complexes with ancillary phosphine ligands **2b–d** displayed the best performance of the series and reached turnover frequencies at 50% conversion (TOF₅₀) up to 430 h⁻¹ (Figure 7, Table 4, entries 2–4), which is a 4-fold increase compared to complex **2a** with MeCN ancillary ligands (TOF₅₀ = 100 h⁻¹; entry 1). Complexes **2e** and **2f** with en and



Figure 7. Time-conversion profile for *m*-PYA ruthenium complexes with variable ancillary ligands in the transfer hydrogenation of benzophenone: 2a (black), 2b (purple), 2c (blue), 2d (green), 2e (red), and 2f (orange).

Table 4. Catalytic Activity of Complexes 1 and 2a-f in Transfer Hydrogenation of Benzophenone^{*a*}

	O Ph	Ph KOH, <i>i-</i>	cat. ►PrOH, reflux	OH Ph [∕] F	Ph
			yield (%) ^b		
entry	cat.	0.25 h	0.5 h	2 h	$TOF_{50} (h^{-1})$
2	2a	24	51	97	100
3	2b	60	81	99	300
4	2c	58	78	98	300
5	2d	78	95	98	430
6 ^c	2d	18	26	44	150
7^d	2d	<2	<2	<2	
8	2e	3	5	20	
9	2f	12	26	69	40

^{*a*}General reaction conditions: benzophenone (1 mmol), KOH (0.1 mmol, 10 mol %), [Ru] (0.01 mmol, 1 mol %), *i*PrOH (5 mL), reflux temperature. ^{*b*}Determined by GC using hexadecane as internal standard and averaged over at least two runs, conversions correspond with yields. ^{*c*}[Ru] (0.001 mmol, 0.1 mol %). ^{*d*}Without base.

pyridine ancillary ligands, respectively, were considerably less active (entries 8, 9). While complex **2f** reached almost 70% conversion after 2 h (TOF₅₀ = 40 h⁻¹), the en-containing complex **2e** was essentially inactive and reached a modest 20% conversion after 2 h. This substantial variation of catalytic activity in complexes **2a**–**f** demonstrates the tunability of the *m*-PYA pincer ruthenium unit.

When the most active catalyst 2d was evaluated at lower catalyst loadings of 0.1 mol %, catalytic activity was preserved with a $\text{TOF}_{50\%}$ of 150 h⁻¹ (entry 6), though considerably longer reaction times were required to reach high conversion (87% after 24 h, corresponding to 870 turnovers). The presence of a base is essential, as under base-free conditions no substrate was converted (entry 7).

While the enhanced catalytic activity of the *m*-PYA pincer complex in comparison to the *p*-PYA analogue was attributed to the stronger donor properties of the mesoionic PYA ligand sites in complex 2, such arguments based on electron donor ability fall short to rationalize the observed catalytic activity trend for 2a-f. The complexes with the highest redox potential, i.e., the phosphine complexes with the least electron-donating ligand set, show the highest catalytic activity. In fact, the ligand donor properties correlate inversely with the catalytic activity. A more plausible rationale for the high catalytic activity of complexes 2b-d therefore invokes the high trans effect of the phosphine ligand, which labilizes in particular the MeCN ligand trans to the phosphine (cf. NMR studies above). According to such a model, substrate coordination and presumably also product release are facilitated in these complexes. Steric congestion imparted by the equatorial phosphine in the diphosphine complexes 2b and 2c may account for the slightly lower activity of these complexes when compared to the monophosphine complex 2d.

Catalytic Transfer Hydrogenation Studies with 2d as the Most Active Complex. On the basis of its high activity, complex **2d** was used to investigate catalyst longevity and a brief substrate scope. The robustness of the catalytically active species was probed by increasing the substrate/catalyst (S/C) ratio. At a 1000:1 S/C ratio, the reaction is considerably slower and 24 h rather than 30 min are required to reach synthetically useful conversions. Lowering the catalyst concentration from 1

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mM to 0.1 mM (cf. entry 6 in Table 3) had the same effect as increasing the substrate concentration from 0.1 to 1 M, suggesting that the intrinsic stability of the catalytic species is limiting the longevity and not potential impurities of the solvent or aerobic oxidative catalyst degradation. In an attempt to preserve the high turnover frequency observed when applying a 100:1 S/C ratio, a further experiment was carried out in which 100 equiv of benzophenone was added consecutively each 20 min. After 10 additions, the same 1000:1 S/C ratio was reached. A 20 min interval was selected because after this time the 100:1 S/C run shows high but not full conversion (cf. entry 5, Table 3). This situation ensures that the catalyst is still active.

The conversion profile of this run with stepwise addition of substrate reveals a gradual decrease of catalytic activity as shown by the reduction of turnover numbers (TONs) within each 20 min segment, from 78 in the first segment to a modest 10 in the last segment (Figure 8). Interestingly, however, after



Figure 8. Conversion and TON profiles for the transfer hydrogenation of benzophenone with complex 2d in iPrOH under different conditions: ■ stepwise addition of 10× 100 equiv. substrate every 20 min (sampling every 20 min); pillars show the TON for each of those 10 cycles; ● stepwise addition of 100 equiv of substrate every 20 min (with no sampling before 210 min); ○ S/C 1000:1 from onset under aerobic conditions; ▲ S/C 1000:1 from onset under N₂ atmosphere; conversions are plotted based on the final 1000:1 S/C ratio.

8 h, the conversion is essentially identical to runs which started directly at a 1000:1 S/C ratio (TONs of 750 \pm 50). This result

implies that catalytic activity resumes after the additions are complete (i.e., after 200 min) and that the repeated sampling and substrate addition is inhibiting catalytic turnover. Inhibition has been attributed to a reversible deactivation of the catalytically active species by oxygen. Such deactivation is promoted by the repetitive opening of the reaction vessel for sampling and is reversed by solution degassing through reflux. Support for such a conclusion was obtained from a run in which only substrate was added, but no samples were taken to determine conversion. After 210 min, this run reached much higher conversion than when sampling after each substrate addition (520 vs 420 TON, compare to 710 TON of a sample starting at a 1000:1 ratio without any sampling or substrate addition). However, final conversions are identical with previous runs, which is in agreement with a reversible deactivation of the catalytic species. Moreover, a catalytic run at a 1000:1 ratio under strict exclusion of air featured the highest catalytic activity, reaching a TOF_{50} of 4000 h⁻¹ (7.5 min for 50% conversion), almost full conversion after 30 min, and a final TON of 990. These experiments provide strong support for reversible catalyst inhibition by oxygen, in agreement with the formation of a sensitive hydride species with a sufficiently long lifetime.⁵⁷ Moreover, the regeneration of the active species under reflux conditions indicates a catalytic species that is molecularly well-defined and homogeneously operating.

A preliminary evaluation of the substrate scope of complex 2d involved diaryl, aryl-alkyl, and dialkyl ketones, which were hydrogenated with high conversion, including open chain and cyclic aliphatic ketones (see Figures S16 and S17 for timeconversion profiles). Transfer hydrogenation of (substituted) acetophenones under aerobic conditions proceeded at rates that are comparable to those observed for the reduction of benzophenone (entries 1-8). No direct electronic effect was observed and electron withdrawing (e.g., $-CF_3$, entry 6) as well as electron-donating groups (-OMe, entry 4) were converted at similar rates, though slightly slower in comparison to unsubstituted acetophenone (entry 2). Nitrogen-containing substituents were incompatible with the catalyst and both nitro as well as amine groups inhibited transfer hydrogenation significantly, presumably due to amine coordination to the active site. Remarkably, sterically shielded 2-methylacetophenone was hydrogenated faster than the unshielded parent



Figure 9. Time-conversion profiles for the transfer hydrogenation of pyridyl-substituted ketones with monophosphine complex 2d (left, solid lines) and diphosphine complex 2c (right, dashed lines). Reaction conditions as indicated in Table 5.

substrate, and >90% conversion was achieved already after 15 min (entry 8). Steric shielding of the alkyl side of acetophenone led to decreased catalytic rates, and isobutyr-ophenone was hydrogenated only to 46% within the same reaction period (entry 9). Cyclohexanone as a representative cyclic aliphatic ketone was converted very rapidly, and essentially complete conversion was noted after 15 min (entry 10). In contrast, open chain aliphatic ketones such as 2-octanone and 4-phenyl-2-butanone react slightly slower than acetophenone, and up to 2 h are required to reach maximum conversion (entries 11 and 12).

Pyridyl-containing ketones are generally challenging substrates for transfer hydrogenation because the pyridyl group favorably competes with the carbonyl group for coordination to late transition metals and often inhibits substrate conversion (cf. also entries 3,7). Indeed, conversion of di(2-pyridyl)ketone and the different acetylpyridines with complex 2d was only moderate to low (entries 13-16). Inspection of the timeconversion profiles reveals some interesting insights (Figure 9). The initial conversion rates are substrate-dependent and therefore point to substrate inhibition of the catalytic species. By far the lowest activity was noted for 2-acetylpyridine (<2 TON after 15 min, entry 14), which is attributed to a higher stability of N-coordination of the substrate supported by NObidentate chelation. Similar chelation is sterically disfavored in 3- and 4-acetylpyridine, and hence, these substrates are converted faster (entries 15 and 16). While dipyridylketone may chelate in a similar way as 2-acetylpyridine, N,O-bidentate bonding is surmised to be weakened due to the low electron density of the carbonyl group because of the two pyridyl substituents, and turnover frequencies are considerably higher (40 TON after 15 min, entry 13). In agreement with such a model, conversion of this substrate drops markedly after about 40% conversion, which is attributed to product inhibition, as the hydrogenated product is a stronger chelate than the substrate (more basic pyridyl unit and alkoxide as stronger donor than ketone).

On the basis of these considerations, we used complex 2c which has only one substitution-labile site for substrate coordination due to the bidentate dppe ligand (entries 17-20). This complex configuration prevents chelation of the substrate or product. Indeed, conversion of 2-acetylpyridine is substantially enhanced, reaching essentially full conversion already after 30 min (entry 18). Similarly, inhibition with 2pyridylketone or its product dipyridylmethanol is suppressed, and transfer hydrogenation is complete within 15 min (entry 17). The effect of the dppe ancillary ligand is less pronounced for 3- and 4-acetylpyridine (entries 19 and 20, essentially complete conversion after 4 and 24 h, respectively), presumably because the pyridine coordination site is sterically less protected as the acetyl group is in a more remote position. Hence, engineering of the ancillary ligand allows tailoring of the pincer PYA ruthenium complexes for the transformation of challenging substrates.

The activity of complex 2d toward α,β -unsaturated ketones was evaluated using methyl cinnamylketone 3 as substrate. Transfer hydrogenation produced selectively the saturated ketone 4-phenyl-2-butanone 4 as the only product within 30 min, and the reaction composition did not alter upon extending the reaction time to several hours (Scheme 4). This outcome is distinct from most other transfer hydrogenation catalysts which either produce mixtures of products from hydrogenation of the C=C bond, the ketone, or both, Scheme 4. Selective Olefin Transfer Hydrogenation of Methyl Cinnamylketone 3 with Complex 2d Producing the Saturated Ketone 4 as the Exclusive Product



typically yielding the fully saturated product.^{58–60} For example, Noyori-type catalysts are known for their carbonyl-selective hydrogenation of α , β -unsaturated ketones.⁶¹ Only very few catalytic systems are known that selectively reduce only the C=C bond in such Michael systems, requiring either precious metals,⁶² or peculiar reaction conditions such as ionic liquids.⁶³

The NMR spectra of samples taken at different time intervals only reveal the characteristic resonances of the product and the starting material, but no trace of an allyl alcohol product that would result from ketone reduction (Figure S18). These observations suggest that either double bond isomerization is very fast, or that the catalyst is selectively reducing the conjugated C=C bond of the substrate. The selectivity of this reduction is remarkable when considering that the product ketone is per se a suitable substrate that is converted to completion in a separate catalytic run within 1 h (Table 5, entry 12; Figure S19). The selective olefin hydrogenation of 3 therefore implies that olefin reduction of methyl cinnamylketone deactivates the catalytically active species. This hypothesis was verified by running a catalytic experiment using initially methyl cinnamylketone as a substrate followed by addition of acetophenone (1 mol equiv) after 30 min. Conversion of acetophenone was negligible, reaching just 5% after 6 h (Figure S20; cf. full conversion after 0.5 h in a separate run, Table 5 entry 2). Several attempts to characterize the deactivated species have been unsuccessful so far, which prevents the postulation of a plausible rationale for this exquisite selectivity in the reduction of this unsaturated ketone. Similar reactivity patterns were observed with related α_{β} unsaturated ketones such as trans-chalcone, while 1-phenyl-2buten-3-one was fully reduced to the saturated alcohol. However, with both substrates, considerable amounts of side products were formed due to oxidative C=C bond cleavage (see Supporting Information for details).

CONCLUSIONS

Here we have designed and exploited the properties of a new N,N,N-tridentate pincer ligand containing zwitterionic *m*-PYA chelating groups. The distinct structural and electronic properties of these chelating groups compared to *p*-PYA systems with more pronounced valence isomerism induce significant catalytic activity of the ruthenium complexes in transfer hydrogenation, in contrast to the *p*-PYA analogue which was catalytically silent. Substitution of the ancillary ligands of the [Ru(N^N^N)L₃] complex provides a method to rationally tailor the electron density at the ruthenium(II) center and its catalytic activity. Phosphine ligands increase the catalytic activity substantially, and mechanistic investigations indicate that this enhancement is conveyed by the strong *trans* effect of phosphines and the ensuing lability of the MeCN ligand for facile substrate coordination and product release.

Moreover, the PYA pincer platform imparts stability and provides access to a molecular catalyst with appreciable turnover numbers, and unusual selectivity patterns, as

Table 5. Substrate Scope of Complex 2d in Catalytic Transfer Hydrogenation^a

	O L	cat 2d	→ J		
	R ^{< `} R'	KOH, <i>i</i> -PrOH, ı	reflux R´`R		
entry	substrate		yield (%) ^b		$TOF_{50}(h^{-1})$
	0	0.25 h	0.5 h	2 h	
1		78	95	98	430
2		82	98	>99	350
3	H ₂ N	26	36	49	20
4		73	85	90	450
5	ci	71	95	>99	290
6	F ₃ C	65	88	>99	300
7	O ₂ N	<2	<2	<2	-
8		91	99	>99	550
9		46	57	87	150
10	\bigcirc°	99	>99	>99	490
11		62	80	96	310
12		71	92	>99	360
13	N N N	40	46	58	60
14	N N	<2	3	5	-
15	N	15	18	28	-
16	N N	11	14	21	-
17 <i>°</i>	N N N	82	>99	>99	320
18 <i>°</i>	N	44	87	>99	180
19 <i>°</i>	N	11	21	68	40
20 °	N N N	9	14	38	20

"General reaction conditions: substrate (1 mmol), KOH (0.1 mmol, 10 mol %), 2d (0.01 mmol, 1 mol %), iPrOH (5 mL), reflux temperature, aerobic conditions. ^bDetermined by ¹H NMR spectroscopy using anisole or hexamethylbenzene as internal standard, conversions correspond to yields, calculated as an average of at least two runs. ^cComplex 2c (0.01 mmol, 1 mol %) as catalyst.

demonstrated with the selective C=C bond hydrogenation in α , β -unsaturated ketones and the efficient transfer hydrogenation of 2-acetylpyridine. Due to the facile synthetic assembly and their unique properties, such PYA pincer systems provide an attractive scaffold for other metals and catalytic processes.

EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

General. All reagents were commercially available and used as received. Unless specified otherwise, NMR spectra were recorded at 25 $^{\circ}$ C on Bruker spectrometers operating at 300 or 400 MHz (¹H

NMR), and 100 MHz (¹³C NMR), respectively. Chemical shifts (δ in ppm, coupling constants *J* in Hz) were referenced to residual solvent signals (¹H, ¹³C). Assignments are based on homo- and heteronuclear shift correlation spectroscopy. Purity of bulk samples of the complexes has been established by NMR spectroscopy, and when possible by elemental analysis. Elemental analyses were performed at DCB Microanalytic Laboratory using a Thermo Scientific Flash 2000 CHNS-O elemental analyzer. High-resolution mass spectrometry was carried out with a Thermo Scientific LTQ Orbitrap XL (ESI-TOF) by the mass spectroscopy group of the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, University of Bern, PD Dr. S. Schürch. Gas chromatography measurements were performed on the 7697A

Headspace Sampler and 7820A GC System by Agilent Technologies. The UV-1800 from Shimadzu with 1 cm quartz cuvettes was used for the UV/vis measurements. Cyclic voltammograms were recorded using an Autolab PGSTAT101 from Metrohm in MeCN solutions: 10 mL solvent, 1 mM sample, and 100 mM tetrabutylammonium hexfluorophosphate (nBu_4N)PF₆ as supporting electrolyte). Solutions were deaerated with argon gas for 10 min prior to each run. The scan rate was 100 mV/s. Redox potentials were measured using a Pt-button working electrode, an Ag/AgCl reference electrode (SSCE) and a Pt-wire auxiliary electrode and are tabulated versus a ferrocene internal standard. The Fc⁺/Fc couple is 0.43 V vs SSCE in 0.1 M (nBu_4N)PF₆ MeCN solutions.⁶⁴

Synthetic Procedures. Compound L1. To a suspension of the iodide salt (1.560 g, 2.6 mmol) in MeCN (30 mL) a solution of NH_4PF_6 (2.119 g, 13.0 mmol) in H_2O (60 mL) was added under vigorous stirring. The white suspension was heated to reflux for 5 min, which gave a clear solution. Upon slow cooling to room temperature colorless crystals formed. They were collected by filtration and washed with water and Et₂O and dried under reduced pressure to give L1 as colorless needle-like crystals (1.564 g, 96%). ¹H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO- d_6) δ 11.95 (s, 2H, NH_{amide}), 8.87 (d, ${}^3J_{\rm HH}$ = 7.4 Hz, 4H, H_{PYA}), 8.56–8.58 (m, 2H, H_{pyr}), 8.49 (d, ${}^{3}J_{HH} = 7.4$ Hz, 4H, H_{PYA}), 8.44–8.50 (m, 1H, H_{pyr}), 4.26 (s, 6H, N–CH₃). ¹³C NMR (101 MHz, DMSO–d₆) δ 163.3 (CO), 150.8 (C_{pyr}), 147.2 (C_{pyr}), 146.2 (CH_{pyr}), 141.0 (CH_{pyr}), 127.3 (CH_{pyr}), 116.0 (CH_{pyr}), 46.7 $(N-CH_3)$. ESI MS $(CH_3CN) m/z$: 494.12 $[M-PF_6]^+$, 348.15 [M- $2PF_6 - H$]⁺. HR-MS: m/z calculated for $C_{19}H_{19}O_2N_5F_6P [M-PF_6]^+$ = 494.1151; found: 494.1175. Elemental Analysis: Anal. Calculated for C₁₉H₁₉F₁₂N₅O₂P₂: C: 35.70; H: 3.00; N: 10.95. Found: C: 35.63; H: 3.85; N: 10.69.

Compound L2. This product was prepared according to the same procedure as described for L1 from the iodide salt X2 (1.808 g, 3.0 mmol) in MeCN (50 mL) and NH₄PF₆ (2.458 g, 15.0 mmol) in H₂O (100 mL), which afforded L2 as colorless crystals (1.863 g, 97%). ¹H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO-*d*₆) δ 11.67 (*s*, 2H, NH_{amide}), 9.72 (*s*, 2H, H_{PYA}), 8.85 (d, ³J_{HH} = 8.6, 2H, H_{PYA}), 8.82 (d, ³J_{HH} = 6.0, 2H, H_{PYA}), 8.53–8.55 (m, 2H, H_{pyr}), 8.43–8.47 (m, 1H, H_{pyr}), 8.23 (dd, ³J_{HH} = 8.6, 6.0 Hz, 2H, H_{PYA}), 4.47 (*s*, 6H, N–CH₃). ¹³C NMR (101 MHz, DMSO-*d*₆) δ 162.4 (CO), 147.3 (C_{pyr}), 141.1 (CH_{pyr}), 141.0 (CH_{pyr}), 137.9 (C_{pyr}), 136.4 (CH_{pyr}), 135.1 (CH_{pyr}), 127.9 (CH_{pyr}), 126.6 (CH_{pyr}), 48.7 (N–CH₃). ESI MS (CH₃CN) *m*/*z*: 494.12 [M – PF₆]₊, 174.58 [M–2 PF₆]²⁺. Elemental Analysis: Anal. Calculated for C₁₉H₁₉F₁₂N₅O₂P₂: C: 35.70; H: 3.00; N: 10.95. Found: C: 35.66; H: 3.00; N: 10.89.

Complex 1. A solution of L1 (130 mg, 0.20 mmol), $[RuCl_2(cym)]_2$ (60 mg, 0.10 mmol), and Na₂CO₃ (65 mg, 0.60 mmol) in MeCN (50 mL) was stirred at reflux for 16 h. The reaction mixture changed color from orange to deep red. After cooling to rt, the reaction mixture was filtered over Celite, and the red solution was concentrated under reduced pressure to 5 mL. Addition of Et₂O (100 mL) gave a dark red precipitate which was collected by filtration and redissolved in MeCN (10 mL), filtered over Celite, and precipitated again by addition of Et₂O (100 mL). The product was collected by filtration and drying of the residue under reduced pressure yielded the complex as a redbrown powder 1 (157 mg, 91%). ¹H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO- d_6) δ 8.52 (d, ${}^{3}J_{HH} = 7.3$ Hz, 4H, H_{PYA}), 8.19–8.21 (m, 3H, H_{pyr}), 7.91 (d, ${}^{3}J_{\text{HH}}$ = 7.3 Hz, 4H, H_{PYA}), 4.13 (s, 6H, N-CH₃), 2.76 (s, 3H, NCCH₃), 2.34 (s, 6H, NCCH₃). ¹³C NMR (101 MHz, DMSO- d_6) δ 170.9 (CO), 164.3 (C_{pyr}), 153.9 (C_{pyr}), 144.1 (CH_{pyr}), 139.1 (CH_{pyr}), 130.8 (NCMe), 128.1 (CH_{pyr}), 122.7 (CH_{pyr}), 118.1 (NCMe), 45.9 $(N-CH_3)$, 4.7 $(NCCH_3)$, 1.1 $(NCCH_3)$. HR-MS: m/z calculated for $C_{23}H_{23}O_2N_7F_6PRu [M - PF_6 - MeCN]^+ = 676.0590;$ found: 676.0593. Elemental Analysis: anal. calculated for C25H26F12N8O2P2Ru: C: 34.85; H: 3.04; N: 13.01. Found: C: 34.86; H: 3.02; N: 12.71.

Complex **2a**. This complex was synthesized according to the same procedure as described for complex **1** starting from L2 (419 mg, 0.645 mmol), $[RuCl_2(cym)]_2$ (201 mg, 0.335 mmol), and $Na_2CO_3(218 mg, 2.0 mmol)$ in MeCN (150 mL) and was obtained as a red crystalline powder (505 mg, 96%). ¹H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO- d_6) δ 9.07 (s,

2H, H_{PYA}), 8.55 (d, ${}^{3}J_{HH}$ = 5.9 Hz, 2H, H_{PYA}), 8.32 (d, ${}^{3}J_{HH}$ = 9.0 Hz, 2H, H_{PYA}), 8.10–8.20 (m, 3H, H_{pyr}), 8.01 (dd, ${}^{3}J_{HH}$ = 9.0, 5.9 Hz, 2H, H_{PYA}), 4.37 (s, 6H, N–CH₃), 2.65 (s, 3H, NCCH₃), 2.34 (s, 6H, NCCH₃). 13 C NMR (101 MHz, DMSO- d_{6}) δ 169.4 (CO), 153.6 (C_{pyr}), 151.8 (C_{pyr}), 144.0 (CH_{pyr}), 143.0 (CH_{pyr}), 139.9 (CH_{pyr}), 139.5 (CH_{pyr}), 127.2 (CH_{pyr}), 125.3 (CH_{pyr}), 125.1 (NCMe), 118.1 (NCMe), 47.7 (N–CH₃), 3.8 (NCCH₃), 1.1 (NCCH₃). HR-MS: m/zcalculated for C₂₅H₂₆F₆N₈O₂PRu [M – PF₆]⁺ = 717.0862; found: 717.0859. Elemental Analysis: anal. calculated for C₂₅H₂₆F₁₂N₈O₂P₂Ru: C: 34.85, H: 3.04, N: 13.01. Found: C: 35.50, H: 3.63, N: 12.50.

General Procedure for the Synthesis of Complexes 2b–f. Compound 2a (1.0 equiv) and the indicated ligand were dissolved in EtOH (50 mL) and heated to reflux at 90 °C for 16 h. The mixture was cooled to rt and evaporated to dryness. The residue was dissolved in a minimum amount of MeCN and precipitated by addition of Et₂O. The precipitate was filtered, and washed with Et₂O, and dried in vacuo to yield the title complex as a crystalline powder.

Complex 2b. This complex was synthesized according to the general procedure from 2a (97 mg, 0.113 mmol, 1.0 equiv) and 1,1bis(diphenylphosphino)methane (92 mg, 0.120 mmol). Compound 2b was obtained as orange crystalline powder (106 mg, 79%). ¹H NMR (400 MHz, MeCN- d_3) δ 8.35–8.39 (m, 1H, H_{pyr}), 8.27–8.29 (m, 2H, H_{pyr}), 7.75 (s, 1H, H_{PYA}), 7.73 (s, 1H, H_{PYA}) 7.44–7.46 (m, $2H, H_{PYA}$, 7.43–7.37 (m, 4H, H_{Ph}), 7.30–7.34 (m, 2H, H_{PYA}), 7.27– 7.18 (m, 8H, H_{Ph}), 7.16-7.05 (m, 8H, H_{Ph}), 6.94-6.98 (m, 2H, H_{PYA}), 4.72 (d, ${}^{2}J_{HH}$ = 10.1 Hz, 1H, CH₂), 4.69 (d, ${}^{2}J_{HH}$ = 10.1 Hz, ¹¹PYA), 4:72 (d, $J_{HH} = 10.1 \text{ Hz}$, III, CH₂), 4:39 (d, $J_{HH} = 10.1 \text{ Hz}$, 1H, CH₂), 3:85 (s, 6H, N–CH₃). ¹³C NMR (101 MHz, MeCN-d₃) δ 170.3 (CO), 154.6 (C_{pyr}), 152.5 (C_{pyr}), 143.8 (CH_{pyr}), 143.2 (CH_{pyr}), 139.7 (CH_{pyr}), 139.2 (CH_{pyr}), 134.7 (¹ $J_{CP} = 37 \text{ Hz}, {}^{3}J_{CP} = 4.2 \text{ Hz},$ C_{Ph}), 134.3 (¹ $J_{CP} = 33 \text{ Hz}, {}^{3}J_{CP} = 3.6 \text{ Hz}, \text{C_{Ph}}), 132.1 (<math>J_{CP} = 11.2 \text{ Hz},$ CH_{Ph}), 131.8 (J_{CP} = 2.6 Hz, CH_{Ph}), 131.4 (J_{CP} = 10.3 Hz, CH_{Ph}), 131.2 (J_{CP} = 2.4 Hz, CH_{Ph}), 130.4 (J_{CP} = 10.0 Hz, CH_{Ph}), 129.9 (J_{CP} = 9.7 Hz, CH_{ph}), 128.0 (CH_{pyr}), 127.1 (CH_{pyr}), 48.9 (N–CH₃), 43.0 (t, ${}^{1}_{JCP}$ = 26 Hz, CH₂). ${}^{31}P{}^{1}H{}$ NMR (162 MHz, MeCN– d_{3}) δ 0.14 (d, ${}^{2}J_{PP}$ = 57.8 Hz, 1P, dppm), - 3.24 (d, ${}^{2}J_{PP}$ = 57.8 Hz, 1P, dppm), - 144.59 (hept, ${}^{1}J_{PF}$ = 708 Hz, 2P, PF₆). HR-MS: *m/z* calculated for $C_{44}H_{39}O_2N_5F_6P_3Ru [M - PF_6 - MeCN]^+ = 978.1259;$ found 978.1259. Elemental Analysis: anal. calculated for $C_{46}H_{42}F_{12}N_6O_2P_4Ru \times H_2O: C: 46.75, H: 3.75, N: 7.11.$ Found: C: 46.70, H: 4.13, N: 6.90.

Complex 2c. This complex was synthesized according to general procedures with compound 2a (117 mg, 0.136 mmol, 1.0 equiv) and 1,2-bis(diphenylphosphino)ethane (56 mg, 0.141 mmol, 1.0 equiv). Compound 2c was obtained as orange crystalline powder (137 mg, 0.116 mmol, 99% yield). ¹H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO-d₆) δ 8.50 (t, ${}^{3}J_{\rm HH} = 7.8$ Hz, 1H, H_{pyr}), 8.26 (d, ${}^{3}J_{\rm HH} = 7.8$ Hz, 2H, H_{pyr}), 8.06 (d, ${}^{3}J_{\rm HH} = 6.9$ Hz, 2H, H_{PYA}), 7.66 (s, 2H, H_{PYA}), 7.31 (dd, ${}^{3}J_{\rm HH} = 6.9, 8.4$ Hz, 2H, H_{PYA}), 7.28–7.16 (m, 14H, H_{Ph}), 7.06–7.02 (m, 6H, H_{Ph}), 6.81 (d, ${}^{3}J_{HH} = 8.4$ Hz, 2H, H_{PYA}), 3.98 (s, 6H, N–CH₃), 3.06 (br m, 2H, P–CH₂), 2.81 (br m, 2H, P–CH₂). ${}^{13}C$ NMR (101 MHz, DMSO– d_{6}) δ 170.5 (CO), 154.1 (C_{pyr}), 150.8 (C_{pyr}), 142.9 (CH_{pyr}), 140.5 (CH_{pyr}), 139.5 (CH_{pyr}), 138.2 (CH_{pyr}), 134.9 (${}^{1}J_{CP} = 36$ Hz, C_{Ph}), 130.8 (CH_{pyr}), 130.2 (J_{CP} = 8.1 Hz, CH_{Ph}), 128.9 (J_{CP} = 9.5 Hz, CH_{Ph}), 128.2 (J_{CP} = 8.9 Hz, CH_{Ph}), 126.7 (CH_{pyr}), 114.5 (NCMe), 47.4 (N-CH₃), 24.0 (P-CH₂), 22.0 (P-CH₂), 1.1 (NCCH₃). ³¹P NMR (162 MHz, DMSO- d_6) δ 66.23 (d, ${}^{3}J_{\rm PP}$ = 13.8 Hz, 1P,dppe), 54.25 (d, ${}^{3}J_{\rm PP}$ = 13.8 Hz, 1P, dppe), - 144.17 (hept, ${}^{1}J_{\rm PF}$ = 711 Hz, 2P, PF₆). HR-MS: m/z calculated for C₄₅H₄₁O₂N₅F₆P₃Ru [M - PF₆ - MeCN]⁺ = 992.1415; found: 992.1430. Elemental Analysis: anal. calculated for $C_{47}H_{44}F_{12}N_6O_2P_4Ru \times H_2O$: C: 47.21, H: 3.88, N: 7.03. Found: C: 47.19, H: 4.29, N: 6.79.

Complex 2*d*. This complex was synthesized according to general procedures with compound 2a (96 mg, 0.111 mmol, 1.0 equiv) and triphenylphosphine (31 mg, 0.118 mmol, 1.0 equiv). Compound 2d was obtained as red crystalline powder (100 mg, 0.077 mmol, 66% yield). ¹H NMR (400 MHz, MeCN– d_3) δ 8.33 (s, 2H, H_{PYA}), 8.24 (d, ³*J*_{HH} = 8.5, 2H, H_{PYA}), 8.18 (d, ³*J*_{HH} = 6.0, 2H, H_{PYA}), 7.88 (dd, ³*J*_{HH} = 8.5, 6.0 Hz, 2H, H_{PYA}), 7.76 (t, ³*J*_{HH} = 7.7 Hz, 1H, H_{Pyr}), 7.60 (d, ³*J*_{HH} = 7.7 Hz, 2H, H_{Pyr}), 7.24–7.28 (m, 3H, H_{Ph}), 6.99–7.04 (m,

6H, H_{Ph}), 6.89–6.94(m, 6H, H_{Ph}), 4.13 (s, 6H, N–CH₃), 2.67 (s, 3H, NCCH3).¹³C NMR (101 MHz, MeCN– d_3) δ 170.3 (CO), 156.1 (C_{pyr}), 152.6 (C_{pyr}), 143.8(CH_{pyr}), 142.2 (CH_{pyr}), 138.1 (CH_{pyr}), 136.9 (CH_{pyr}), 133.5 (J_{CP} = 10.6 Hz, CH_{Ph}), 132.5($^{1}J_{CP}$ = 45 Hz, C_{Ph}), 130.7 (J_{CP} = 2.3 Hz, CH_{Ph}), 129.0 (J_{CP} = 9.3 Hz, CH_{Ph}), 128.1 (CH_{pyr}), 126.9 (CH_{pyr}), 49.0(N–CH₃), 5.4 (NCCH₃).³¹P NMR (162 MHz, MeCN- d_3) δ 51.6 (s, 1P, PPh₃), – 144.62 (hept, $^{1}J_{PF}$ = 707 Hz, 2P, PF₆). HR-MS: *m*/*z* calculated for C₃₇H₃₂O₂N₅F₆P₂Ru [M – PF₆ – 2MeCN]⁺ = 856.0973; found 856.0985. Elemental analysis: anal. calculated for C₄₁H₃₈F₁₂N₇O₂P₃Ru: C: 45.48, H: 3.54, N: 9.06. Found:C: 44.67, H: 4.81, N: 9.01.

Complex 2e. This complex was synthesized according to general procedures with compound 2a (105 mg, 0.122 mmol, 1.0 equiv) and ethylenediamine (10 μ L, 0.150 mmol, 1.3 equiv). Compound 2e was obtained as a brown crystalline powder (90 mg, 0.107 mmol, 93% yield). ¹H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO-d₆) δ 8.55 (d, ³J_{HH} = 6.0 Hz, 2H, H_{PYA}), 8.48 (s, 2H, H_{PYA}), 8.27 (d, ³J_{HH} = 8.4 Hz, 2H, H_{PYA}), 7.91 (dd, ³J_{HH} = 8.4, 6.0 Hz, 2H, H_{PYA}), 7.87–7.90 (m, 2H, H_{pyr}), 7.79–7.84 (m, 1H, H_{pyr}), 4.50 (br s, 2H, NH₂), 4.32 (s, 6H, N–CH₃), 2.47 (s, 3H, NCCH₃), 2.06 (br m, 2H, CH₂), 1.89 (br m, 2H, CH₂). ¹³C NMR (101 MHz, DMSO-d₆) δ 171.3 (CO), 156.2 (C_{pyr}), 151.3 (C_{pyr}), 142.4 (CH_{pyr}), 141.5 (CH_{pyr}), 138.3 (CH_{pyr}), 135.8 (CH_{pyr}), 127.8 (CH_{pyr}), 126.6 (CH_{pyr}), 48.6 (N–CH₃), 45.7 (CH₂), 44.0 (CH₂), 1.6 (NCCH₃). HR-MS: *m*/*z* calculated for C₂₃H₂₈O₂N₈F₆PRu [M – PF₆]⁺ = 695.1015; found: 695.1032. Elemental Analysis: anal. calculated for C₂₃H₂₆F₁₂N₈O₂P₂Ru: C: 32.98, H: 3.13, N: 13.38. Found: C: 33.48, H: 4.62, N: 13.23.

Complex **2f**. This complex was synthesized according to general procedures with compound **2a** (100 mg, 0.116 mmol, 1.0 equiv) and 4-picoline (20 μ L, 0.232 mmol, 2.0 equiv). Compound **2f** was obtained as a black powder (95 mg, 0.098 mmol, 85% yield). ¹H NMR (300 MHz, DMSO-*d*₆) δ 9.08 (s, 2H, H_{PYA}), 8.56 (d, ³J_{HH} = 5.7 Hz, 2H, H_{PYA}), 8.02–8.08 (m, 3H, H_{pyt}), 7.91 (dd, ³J_{HH} = 8.6, 5.7 Hz, 2H, H_{PYA}), 7.78 (d, ³J_{HH} = 6.6 Hz, 4H, H _{4-pic}), 4.33 (s, 6H, N–CH₃), 2.67 (s, 3H, NCCH₃), 2.26 (s, 6H, CH₃ +_{pic}). ¹³C NMR (101 MHz, DMSO-*d*₆) δ 169.8 (CO), 156.6 (C_{pyr}), 152.4 (CH _{4-Pic}), 149.4 (C_{pyr}), 148.0 (C_{4-pic}), 141.6 (CH_{pyr}), 139.5 (CH_{pyr}), 137.7 (CH_{pyr}), 134.8 (CH_{pyr}), 129.9 (NCMe), 127.1 (CH_{pyr}), 126.5 (CH_{pyr}), 125.9 (CH _{4-pic}), 47.9 (N–CH₃), 20.2 (CH ₃ +_{Pic}), 4.2 (NCCH₃). HR-MS: *m/z* calculated for C₃₃H₃₄G₂N₈F₆PRu [M – PF₆]⁺ = 821.1485; found: 821.1528. Elemental Analysis: anal. calculated for C₃₃H₃₄F₁₂N₈O₂P₂Ru: C: 41.04, H: 3.55, N: 11.60. Found: C: 40.68, H: 4.52, N: 11.27.

General Procedure for Catalytic Transfer Hydrogenation. In a 10 mL one-neck round-bottom flask, a mixture of the complex (0.01 mmol), either anisole (54 mg, 0.5 mmol) or hexamethylbenzene (40 mg, 0.25 mmol) or hexadecane (226 mg, 1.0 mmol) as internal standard, and KOH (2 M solution in H₂O, 50 μ L, 0.1 mmol) in *i*PrOH (5 mL) was mixed. Then, substrate (1.0 mmol) was added, and the reaction mixture was heated to reflux in an oil bath (110 °C). Time zero was set when the mixture reached reflux conditions (ca. 30 s). Aliquots (ca. 0.1 mL) were taken at set times and dissolved in CDCl₃ (for NMR analysis) or diluted in *i*PrOH (for GC analysis). Conversions and yields were determined relative to anisole, hexamethylbenzene, or hexadecane as internal standards.

Crystal Structure Determinations. Suitable single crystals of L1, 1, 2a–d, and 2f were mounted in air at ambient conditions and measured on an *Oxford Diffraction SuperNova* area-detector diffractometer⁶⁵ using mirror optics monochromated Mo K α radiation ($\lambda = 0.71073$ Å) and Al filtered.⁶⁶ Data reduction was performed using the *CrysAlisPro*⁶⁵ program. The intensities were corrected for Lorentz and polarization effects, and an absorption correction based on the multiscan method using SCALE3 ABSPACK in *CrysAlisPro*⁶⁵ was applied. The structure was solved by direct methods using *SHELXT*,⁶⁷ which revealed the positions of all not disordered non-hydrogen atoms. The non-hydrogen atoms were refined anisotropically. All H-atoms were placed in geometrically calculated positions and refined using a riding model where each Hatom was assigned a fixed isotropic displacement parameter with a value equal to $1.2U_{eq}$ of its parent atom $(1.5U_{eq}$ for the methyl groups). Refinement of the structure was carried out on F^2 using fullmatrix least-squares procedures, which minimized the function $\Sigma w (F_0^2 - F_c^2)^2$. The weighting scheme was based on counting statistics and included a factor to downweight the intense reflections. All calculations were performed using the SHELXL-2014/76 program. Co-crystallized acetonitrile molecules in the asymmetric unit were found in the crystals of compound 1 (two), complex 2c (three), and complex 2f (one). The crystal of complex 2d contained one cocrystallized diethyl ether molecule in the asymmetric unit. In compounds 1 and 2a-c one methylpyridinium group is conformationally disordered about two orientations. The geometries of the two moieties of disordered methylpyridinium group were constrained to be similar in 2a. Remaining electron density in solvent accessible voids originating from heavily disordered cocrystallized acetonitrile was accounted for with the SQUEEZE function of PLATON⁶⁹ in compounds 1 and 2b. If present, disordered acetonitrile molecules, methylpyridinium groups, and PF₆ anions were restrained to standard values. Their ADPs were restrained by the SHELXL SIMU and DELU instructions. The ADPs of the second PF₆ anion were restrained by the SHELXL RIGU instruction. Further crystallographic details are compiled in Tables S3-S9. Crystallographic data for all structures have been deposited with the Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre (CCDC) as supplementary publication numbers 1851796 (L1), 1851797 (1), 1851801 (2a), 1851800 (2b), 1851802 (2c), 1851798 (2d), and 1851799 (2f).

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website at DOI: 10.1021/acs.inorg-chem.8b01895.

Listings of synthetic details, analytical data of the ligands and complexes, NMR data of ligand exchange reactions, time—conversion profiles for transfer hydrogenation and discussion on the reduction of α , β -unsaturated ketones, NMR spectra of all compounds, and crystallographic details (PDF)

Accession Codes

CCDC 1851796 and 1851802 contain the supplementary crystallographic data for this paper. These data can be obtained free of charge via www.ccdc.cam.ac.uk/data_request/cif, or by emailing data_request@ccdc.cam.ac.uk, or by contacting The Cambridge Crystallographic Data Centre, 12 Union Road, Cambridge CB2 1EZ, UK; fax: +44 1223 336033.

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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