



Astor Place Vintage: A Novel

By Stephanie Lehmann

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Amanda Rosenbloom, proprietor of Astor Place Vintage, thinks she's on just another call to appraise and possibly purchase clothing from a wealthy, elderly woman. But after discovering a journal sewn into a fur muff, Amanda gets much more than she anticipated. The pages of the journal reveal the life of Olive Westcott, a young woman who had moved to Manhattan in 1907. Olive was set on pursuing a career as a department store buyer in an era when Victorian ideas, limiting a woman's sphere to marriage and motherhood, were only beginning to give way to modern ways of thinking. As Amanda reads the journal, her life begins to unravel until she can no longer ignore this voice from the past. Despite being separated by one hundred years, Amanda finds she's connected to Olive in ways neither could ever have imagined.

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Astor Place Vintage: A Novel By Stephanie Lehmann Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Author One-on-One: Stephanie Lehman and Lauren Willig



A native New Yorker, Lauren Willig thoroughly enjoyed getting to travel back in time to a different point in the city's history with Stephanie Lehman's *Astor Place Vintage* (although she will confess to owning no vintage clothing of her own, unless one counts the relics from college at the back of her closet). Lauren Willig is the author of eleven novels, all of which go back and forth between past and present: the bestselling *Pink Carnation* series, set between the Napoleonic Wars in the early nineteenth century and London in 2004, and her new stand-alone novel, the *New York Times* bestseller *The Ashford Affair*, which zig-zags back and forth between Edwardian England, World War I London, 1920s Kenya, and 1999 New York.

Q. What inspired you to write *Astor Place Vintage*?

A. My biggest inspiration for *Astor Place Vintage* is the metropolis of Manhattan. Ever since moving here from San Francisco, I've been fascinated, especially through the architecture, by how much the past still asserts itself into the city's present. It's so easy to imagine people from a hundred years ago walking down the same streets and living in the same buildings. This sense of shared space between two time periods really captured my imagination.

The first decade of the 20th century particularly attracted me because it was an amazing time of transition. Horses clipped-clopped on the streets while subways ran underground. Vaudeville theaters showed moving pictures. Lots of Victorian attitudes were still enforced, like restaurants that seated unescorted women in separate dining rooms and hotels that refused to rent them rooms. Meanwhile, women were increasingly working outside the home and experiencing unprecedented independence in a booming urban environment that encouraged everyone, male or female, to become avid consumers -- especially in those big new department stores.

Q. I loved how you brought us into the life of Olive in early 20th century New York City. How did you

discover so many details about department stores at the time?

A. I spent a lot of time at the New York Public Library's Science, Industry and Business branch on 34th Street. Ironically, this is located in what used to be the B. Altman Department Store. They have a huge collection of trade magazines from the era like Dry Goods Economist and Corset and Underwear Review, so I was going straight to the sources. I even found some Siegel-Cooper employee newsletters from that period on microfilm. I also read every novel to be found that had the setting of a department store.

Q. Amanda's Astor Place Vintage felt like a real vintage store to me! Do you visit vintage clothing stores often? Do you have a favorite?

A. I've been attracted to vintage for years, and it has not been good for my closet situation. When you're constantly fighting the urge to buy one of those portable clothing racks that people use for big parties, you know you're in trouble. Amanda's store is modeled on some shops I like in the East Village. But I enjoy digging for buried treasure, so I buy most of my vintage clothing at thrift stores and flea markets.

Q. Amanda works so diligently to restore some of the old garments she acquires. Do you sew also?

A. Though I'm not nearly as proficient as Amanda, I do love to sew, and this is actually a recent development that occurred in the process of writing the novel. You could say I aspired to be more like the character I was creating. I discovered that the break from words, sentences, and computer screens is like a mental vacation. Plus, as a novelist, it can take years to complete your project, but you can sew a dress in a few days, wear it, and have that gratification.

Q. What's your favorite item of vintage clothing in your wardrobe?

A. I see you've saved the hardest question for last. After much deliberation, I'm going to say that it's a Marimekko/Design Research sixties shift dress that I wheedled from my mother. I even have a home movie of her wearing it when I was little. Too bad it won't fit until I lose those five pounds I've been trying to get rid of for the past ten years.

Review

"A thoroughly engaging story about fate, struggle, and will, as told through the intertwined lives of two women in New York living a century apart. Past and present blur in unexpected ways in this insightful, charming, and wholly entertaining novel." (Khaled Hosseini, author of *The Kite Runner*)

"Lehmann's blend of past and present perfectly woven together create an addictively readable novel. New York City will never look the same to me after reading *Astor Place Vintage*." (Kathleen Grissom, author of *The Kitchen House*)

"This soul-searching journey of two women magically connected though time is spellbinding. I was transported by every moment." (Marjorie Hart, author of *Summer at Tiffany*)

"Stephanie Lehman's *Astor Place Vintage* is a fascinating tour of turn of the century New York. Guaranteed to appeal to anyone who likes to search for the bones of the past beneath the bustle of the present." (Lauren Willig, author of *The Secret History of the Pink Carnation*)

"A novel bound to be next summer's guilty pleasure! I love Amanda and Olive and how we come to understand what links them despite the passage of time. I love what Lehmann has done with the 1907 city--how real it is." (Beverly Swerling, author of *City of Promise*)

“This utterly engrossing novel gives us a portrait of one of the most fascinating cities in the world where long after the book has ended you will walk the streets in your mind.” (Stephanie Cowell, author of *Claude and Camille* and American Book Award recipient)

"A splendid banquet of fashion, style, and both old and contemporary New York City, couched in a riveting story. A feast not to be missed!" (Lynn Cullen, author of *The Creation of Eve*)

"Anyone who loves vintage clothing, feels the pull of nostalgia, and has a taste for retro will be utterly transported by this wise and wonderful novel. A mesmerizing story about two women separated by a century but united by a quest for independence, a talent for business, and the challenges of being a woman that arise in every era." (Pamela Redmond, author of *The Possibility of You*)

“The past meets the present in Lehmann's work of feminist literary fiction. . . . The author combines an impressive knowledge of history, sociology and psychology to create an intellectually and emotionally rewarding story.” (*Kirkus*)

"Lehmann does a seamless job of moving between the past and present and gives a definite sense of place to the story's two periods, with rich descriptions of city life and architecture. First-class storytelling with an enticing dose of New York City history." (*Publishers Weekly, starred review*)

About the Author

Stephanie Lehmann received her BA at UC Berkeley and a MA in English from New York University. She has taught novel writing at Mediabistro and online at Salon.com, where her essays have been published. She currently lives in New York City. Visit her online at StephanieLehmann.com and AstorPlaceVintage.com.

Users Review

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