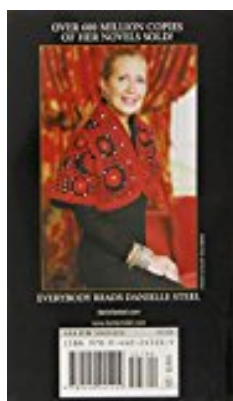


[PDF] Hotel Vendome: A Novel

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Description:

About the Author Danielle Steel has been hailed as one of the world's most popular authors, with over 590 million copies of her novels sold. Her many international bestsellers include *Happy Birthday*, *44 Charles Street*, *Legacy*, *Family Ties*, *Big Girl*, *Southern Lights*, and other highly acclaimed novels. She is also the author of *His Bright Light*, the story of her son Nick Traina's life and death.

From the Hardcover edition.

The scene in the lobby of the Hotel Vendôme on East 69th Street in New York was one of impeccable elegance and meticulous precision. The black-and-white-checked-marble floors were immaculate, red runners were rolled out the instant there was a drop of rain outside, the moldings on the walls were exquisite, and the enormous crystal chandelier that hung in the lobby was reminiscent of the finest palaces in Europe. The hotel was much smaller than the one that had inspired its decor, but for practiced travelers, it was remarkably similar to the Ritz in Paris, where the Hotel Vendôme's owner had worked as an assistant manager for two years, during his training in the finest hotels in Europe.

Hugues Martin was forty years old, a graduate of the illustrious and respected École Hôtelière de Lausanne in Switzerland, and the hotel on Manhattan's Upper East Side was his dream. He still couldn't believe how lucky he had been, how perfectly it had all come together five years before. His Swiss banker father and equally conservative mother had been devastated when he announced that he wanted to go to hotel school. He came from a family of bankers, and they thought that running a hotel, or working in one, had a seamy quality to it, of which they strongly disapproved. They had done everything they could to talk him out of it, to no avail. After four years at the school in Lausanne, he trained and eventually had respected positions at the Hotel du Cap in Cap d'Antibes, the Ritz in Paris, and Claridge's in London, and even did a brief stint at the famed Peninsula Hotel in Hong Kong. He figured out during that time that if he ever had his own hotel, he wanted it to be somewhere in the States.

Hugues worked at the Plaza in New York before it closed for extensive renovations, and he assumed that he was still light-years away from his dream. Then it happened. The Hotel Mulberry was put up for sale, a small tired hotel that had been run-down for years and had never been considered chic, despite its perfect location. When he heard about it, Hugues put together every penny of his savings, took out every loan he could get in both New York and Switzerland, and used all of the modest inheritance his parents had left him, which he had carefully put aside and invested. And the combination made the purchase of the hotel possible. He just managed to do it, with a mortgage on the building. And suddenly Hugues was able to buy the

Mulberry and do the necessary renovations, which took two years, and at the end of it the Hotel Vendôme was born, to the amazement of New Yorkers, most of whom said they had never even realized that there was a hotel in that location.

The building had been a small private hospital in the 1920s and was turned into a hotel in the 1940s, with abysmally bad decor. In contrast, in its transformed state, every inch of the Vendôme was magnificent, and the service was superb. Hugues had brought chefs from all over the world for their now extremely popular restaurant. His catering manager was one of the best in the business, and everyone agreed that even the food from room service was fantastic. In its first year it had become an overnight success and was booked months in advance now, with reservations made by visitors to the city from around the world. The presidential suite was one of the finest in the city. The Hotel Vendôme was an absolute gem, with beautifully decorated suites, and rooms with fireplaces, moldings, and high ceilings. The hotel faced south, so most of the rooms were sunny, and Hugues had chosen the finest china, crystal, and linens, and as many antiques as he could afford, like the chandelier in the lobby, which he had bought in Geneva at a Christie's auction. It had come out of a French château near Bordeaux and was in perfect condition.

Hugues ran his 120-room hotel with Swiss precision, a warm smile, and an iron hand. His employees were discreet and experienced, had a remarkable memory for every guest, and kept detailed files on

each important client's needs and requests while they were there. It had made the Vendôme the most popular small hotel in New York for the past three years. And the moment one entered the lobby, one knew it was a special place. A young bellboy stood at the revolving door, in a uniform inspired by those the chasseurs wore at the Ritz: navy pants, a short jacket, a small amount of gold braid on the collar, and a little round hat with a strap under the chin, tilted at an angle. To meet the clients' needs, there was a fleet of willing bellmen, a crew of brilliantly capable concierges. Everyone moved rapidly to serve the guests, and the entire staff was ready to service large requests and small ones. Hugues knew that impeccable service was

essential.

The assistant managers wore black tailcoats and striped trousers, once again inspired by the Ritz. And Hugues himself was on hand night and day, in a dark blue suit, always with a white shirt and dark Hermès tie, and he had an extraordinary memory for everyone who had stayed with them and, whenever possible, greeted important guests himself. He was the consummate hotel owner, and no detail missed his practiced eye. And he expected his department heads to meet the standards that he set. Guests of the hotel came as much for the service as the luxurious decor.

As an added touch, the hotel was always filled with spectacular flowers, and its spa was one of the best. There was almost no service the staff wouldn't provide, as long as it was legal and in relatively good taste. And despite the objections Hugues knew his parents had had, he couldn't help feeling that they would have been proud of him now. He had used their money well, and the hotel had been such a success in its first three years that he was almost out of debt. It wasn't surprising, since Hugues worked day and night himself to make it what it was. And personally, his victory had come at a high price. Owning the hotel had cost him his wife. It had been the subject of considerable gossip among staff and guests.

Nine years before, when Hugues had been working at Claridge's in London, he had met Miriam Vale, the internationally famous and spectacularly beautiful supermodel. And like everyone else who laid eyes on her, he had been dazzled by her the moment they met. He had been infinitely proper and professional, as he had always been with guests of the hotels he worked in, but she was a twenty-three-year-old girl, and she had made it clear that she wanted him, and he fell head over heels in love with her overnight. She was American, and eventually he had followed her back to New York. It had been an exciting time for him, and he took a lesser position at the Plaza to be in the same city with her and continue their romance. And much to his own amazement, she was just as much in love with him, and they were married within six months. He had never been happier in his life than in their early years together.

Eighteen months later their daughter Heloise was born, and Hugues was madly in love with his wife and child. He trembled when he said it, for fear of angering the gods, but he always said then that he had the perfect life. And he was a dedicated man. Despite whatever temptations came his way in the hotel business, he was totally in love with and faithful to his wife. She continued her modeling career after Heloise was born, and everyone at the Plaza had fawned over his little girl and indulged her, and teased them about her name. Hugues assured them honestly that she had been named after his great-grandmother and he didn't expect to stay at the Plaza forever, so there was no reason not to use the name. Heloise was two years old when he bought the Mulberry and turned it into the Vendôme. He had everything he wanted then, a wife and child he loved, and his own hotel. Miriam had been far less enthused about the project and had complained bitterly that it would take too much of his time, but owning his own hotel, and one of the sort he was creating, had always been his dream.

His parents had been even less pleased about Miriam than they had been about his working in the hotel business. They had serious doubts that a spoiled, twenty-three-year-old, spectacularly beautiful, internationally known supermodel would make him a good wife. But Hugues loved her profoundly and had no doubts.

As Hugues had expected, it took two years to renovate the hotel. It came in only slightly over budget, and the end result was everything he had hoped.

He and Miriam had been married for six years, and Heloise was four, when the Hotel Vendôme opened, and Miriam had obligingly posed for some of their ads. It added a distinctive cachet that the owner was married to Miriam Vale, and male guests in particular always hoped they'd catch a glimpse of her in the lobby or at the bar. What they saw far more frequently than her mother was four-year-old Heloise following after her father, with one of the maids holding her hand, and she enchanted everyone she met. She had gone from being Heloise at the Plaza to being Heloise at the Vendôme, and became something of a mascot for the hotel, and was clearly the pride and joy of her father's life.

Greg Bones, the famous and notoriously badly behaved rock star, was one of the first guests in one of the penthouse suites, and fell in love with the hotel. Hugues was uneasy about it, because Bones was well known for trashing hotel rooms and causing chaos wherever he stayed, but he behaved surprisingly well at the Vendôme, much to Hugues's relief. And they were fully prepared to meet celebrity needs and requests.

On Greg's second day there, he met Miriam Vale Martin at the bar, surrounded by assistants, magazine editors, stylists, and a famous photographer after a shoot. They had just finished a twelve-page spread for Vogue that afternoon, and as soon as they recognized Greg Bones, they invited him to join them. And what happened afterward hadn't taken long. Miriam spent most of the following night in Greg's s...

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