

# 'Indispensable' personified

Concetto Marletta's 'little black book' ensures his clients have their every need catered to



Concetto Marletta's journey into the world of überluxury changed his life and brought him in contact with many high-profile personalities, including multinational CEOs, stars of film and opera, and the most prestigious royal and aristocratic families

By SCOTT ADAMS  
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**W**hen it comes to getting exactly what you want without having to lift a finger, except to move it a few times over your BlackBerry keys, Indispensable is the worldwide answer, and the man behind providing the global magic is the savvy Sicilian Concetto Marletta.

Although based in London, Marletta never goes anywhere without his "little black book", which is the backbone of his luxury concierge company Indispensable. The service can be put into action anywhere and Marletta can look after the needs of his clients, from whatever part of the world they, or he, may be in. "Today's technology allows me to carry all I need for work with me in my pocket," he explains. "The basis of my service comes from my long-established contacts who can open doors to provide people with exactly what they want."

To access Marletta's talent and know-how, it is essential to pay a yearly membership fee. His services are then charged for by the hour. "I want to keep everything very honest and totally transparent," Marletta says. "I meet prospective clients first to make sure that, before they join Indispensable, I can provide what they want and that we are right for each other."

He has discovered that people's needs vary incredibly and sometimes his clients are not sure exactly what they want. Marletta can solve the finer points of requests, including elements that perhaps the client hadn't even thought of themselves. Last year, before the World Cup in South Africa, he received a call from a gentleman who was desperate to get tickets to some of the key football matches which had been sold out months before. When Marletta got back to the footy aficionado a few days later, the client was delighted to discover that everything had been taken care of, from the private jet, to the luxury villa, complete with butler, chef, 24-hour security and, of course, the coveted tickets to the big games. Marletta had thought of everything and the trip was an enormous success.

What has become the backbone of Indispensable began about 20 years ago when the debonair Italian was a young man working in the five-star hotel Claridges in Mayfair, London. His journey into the world of überluxury changed his life and brought him in contact with many high-profile personalities, including multinational CEOs, stars of film, music, opera and theatre, and members of some of the world's most prestigious royal and aristocratic families.



Concetto Marletta has even arranged for Academy Awards invitations to be sent to a wealthy businessman who wanted to attend the event with his wife

In an amusing anecdote, he tells us about the time at Claridges when one of Europe's queens was staying at the hotel. After her departure for the airport, her esquire called up Marletta. The man was frantic, explaining that the queen had left behind something extremely important in the suite she had been occupying. Not wanting to raise the alarm, Marletta went personally to the suite to investigate, thinking that perhaps jewels had been left behind in the safe. The precious item turned out to be a plate of sandwiches with the queen's favourite filling which she hoped to enjoy during her flight home. Marletta arranged for the sandwiches to be rushed to the airport and be on-board when the flight departed.

The high-profile guests also discovered very early on that Marletta's personal qualities of warmth, discretion and professionalism were what made their time in the hotel so hassle-free. He became indispensable to them. The management at Claridges realised the extraordinary talent that the Italian, then 26 years old, had and subsequently created a special role for him — the guest relations manager.

It was through his work looking after the requirements of guests that Marletta began to compile the information which would go on to become one of the most envied "black books" in the world. It originally contained the contacts to get the best tables at exclusive restaurants, hard-to-get opera tickets, access to private jets and most importantly the trust of the people who could really make doors open.

"During that time," he recalls, "I met a wide cross-section of people. I was always eager to help in whatever way I could." His affable nature meant that he was just as happy giving a shopping tip to a young couple as he was organising a prestigious private dinner for ten served with the host's favourite wines, in one of the hotel's glorious suites.

Marletta tells the anecdote of one high-profile client and his fiancée. Desperate to find the perfect pre-nuptial gift for his beloved, he conferred with Marletta. The client had already lavished his wife-to-be with a sports car, diamonds, designer dresses and much more, and couldn't imagine what he could give her next. Marletta's ingenious mind went to work and he came up with the perfect solution. Knowing that the young lady adored Versace's haute couture, he made a phone call and subsequently presented his client with two front-row "money can't buy" tickets to the designer's catwalk show in Milan.

On another occasion he remembers being called at 5am on a Saturday by a flustered businessman. The client was stranded in Miami with six of his biggest business associates and desperately needed to get to Mexico. "He asked me if I he could find a private jet within two hours, as his was out of action." Confident, Marletta told him to make his way to the airport as it would all be looked after. The businessman was sitting in the luxurious private jet and taxiing along the runway right on schedule.

His high level of creativity and world knowledge has proved an essential tool over the years. He explains that the concept of luxury for many people is changing. "Whereas once I would get many requests for very showy experiences, today I find more and more people looking for a place where they can relax away from the crowds and perhaps get spiritual," he explains. "I've sent clients to Bhutan, Kerala and secret islands, where they can unwind or do personalised yoga or meditation courses," he adds.

Little by little the guests at Claridges came to treat Marletta as their personal concierge and would never do anything without requesting his help or advice. Such is their dedication to this remarkable man

that, when he transferred in 1998 to the Mandarin Oriental Hotel on Hyde Park in London, many of his clients moved with him so as not to lose his services. The very same happened when he finally took up his present position at The Dorchester in Mayfair.

"Some guests have been following me happily from hotel to hotel for some 20 years," he says.

He stayed at the Mandarin Oriental for a number of years but, with his curious mind and a hunger to experience other places, Marletta decided to head overseas. He worked for a time in Hong Kong and Bangkok. The Asian luxury hotel scene, with the importance it places on personal

attention, was a sharp learning curve for him. "I am continually amazed at how the staff in the hotels in Asia strive to improve customer service, how they remember all their guests' names and go the extra mile to make sure everything is perfect," he says.

In 2010, after seven years as head of client relations at The Dorchester, the sophisticated Sicilian was beginning to wonder what other opportunities and challenges were out there. His work with the hotel's guests had long expanded past in-house requirements. "My work was not just about my clients and The Dorchester any more," he says, "it was also about their families, friends and colleagues."

Marletta realised that he had become an important part of these people's lives and decided to start his own concierge company. But when he told the manager of The Dorchester that he planned to leave, his employer too found him indispensable and came back with an unusual offer. Marletta now divides his time between being head of client relations at The Dorchester and running his own business, Indispensable. The guests at the hotel and his clients are quite often one and the same.

Marletta's business philosophy is simple. He does not mind a demanding client and thrives on accomplishing tasks others would categorise as impossible. Earlier this year one of Europe's wealthiest men was keen to attend the Academy Awards ceremony in Los Angeles with his wife. For this prestigious event there are no ticket sales and the only way to get past the red-carpet doorman is with an official invitation. Getting the invitations and finding a suite in Los Angeles when there were no rooms available required Marletta to work almost 24/7. "The studios book out all the best hotels 12 months in advance," he explains. But he was eventually able to find accommodation and two invitations were sent to his clients so that they would be able to live this magical moment.

His latest project is massive and will keep him busy for most of this year. In late 2010 one of the Middle East's ruling families asked him to organise their daughter's marriage. "This is of course a massive job but I love a challenge," he says. This multifaceted task will include arrangements for the three-day-long engagement party and the clothes the bride-to-be and her fiancé will wear. "I'm looking at using about ten haute-couture designers from around the world for the various dresses and ensembles," he confides. "The young lady has requested that all her outfits be original pieces, that have never been seen before anywhere, not even on a catwalk."

The wedding, which is scheduled for later in the year, will also need Marletta to arrange for clothes for the bridal party, a spectacular wedding dress and a multitude of arrangements for the ceremony and post-nuptial celebrations, a cruise and the honeymoon. Will Marletta be able to deliver? Of course! To date he has never disappointed a client.

Scott Adams is a writer based in Madrid.