



THE WORLD'S BEST BLACK BOOK

A limited-edition Hermès crocodile Kelly Bag? A seat on the front row of your wife's favourite designer's haute couture show? A last-minute jet charter? No problem – as long as you are one of Concetto Marletta's favoured few. Allow **Roja Dove** to introduce you to the world of luxury's inside man; the man that those in the know want to know

This warm, elegant, discreet Sicilian studied interior design, to enable him to join his family's furniture company. Having been sent to England at the tender age of 14 to learn English, he fell in love with it, admiring the beautiful architecture and elegant interiors he saw all around him, as well as a life far removed from home. This was to be a seminal moment, for in 1991 he decided that London was where he had to be, and set off on a journey that would not just shape his own life but many of those with whom he was to become an intimate, including captains of industry, music, film, and members of some of the most illustrious royal families in the world.

Concetto Marletta's affable warmth meant he secured a job at Claridge's hotel in Mayfair, where he quickly gained a reputation for service. His clients appreciated his ability and discretion and called on his services so much that Claridge's created a role especially for him: their first 'Guest Relations Manager'. Not bad for a 26 year old. It was during this time that Marletta started to create one of the most envied 'black books' in the world, as he was accumulating unprecedented access to the most prestigious and important tables, theatres, opera houses, jet companies and designers in the world, as well as starting to develop deep professional relationships with a diverse cross-section of clients, many of whom have become so attached to Marletta they would not dream of travelling without consulting him for help.

In 1998, he moved to the newly opened Mandarin Oriental in Knightsbridge and was surprised and flattered that many of his clients decided to follow him there. Whereas Claridge's had been all about individuality, with its old-style business travellers, royalty, and established families, the Mandarin Oriental was all about chairmen and CEOs – everyone was a VIP, which meant learning a new form of communication. By now this most un-diva-like man was fêted by the world of opera, with Caballe, Gheorghiu, Pavarotti, and Domingo all asking for him – no-one else would do. He had to learn how to tell one of the most powerful pop stars in the world that the hotel did not want her to stay, when she launched a highly controversial photo-book to accompany her album launch – a task that required him to deploy every scrap of his innate diplomacy and charm.



Marletta decided to further his horizons and gain an international view of the hospitality world and went to work in Hong Kong, Bangkok, New York and Los Angeles before returning to his beloved England and a job at The Dorchester. Asked what were some of the strangest things that had happened to him in his working career, he tells the story of a phone call he received from a Queen's equerry who was panicking as the Queen had left something extremely precious in the refrigerator. Marletta went to the suites personally, so as not to raise alarm, found the precious goods and duly returned them. The precious goods being a plate of sandwiches with a filling of which her majesty was especially fond.

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Having worked at The Dorchester for seven years, Marletta felt he had the seven-year itch. He was head-hunted but felt there were no other hotels he wanted to work for. 'The Dorchester is a melting pot with a very interesting clientele,' he explains. 'Royalty, film producers, movie and music stars, old and new money – it is a proper grand hotel.' Many of his clients, including royal households, were now clients of the hotel having, as ever, followed the man those in the know want to know. He felt that he had in many ways reached his goal: 'I have gained their trust as they follow me around. It is no longer just about them, it's about their wives, their children, and their personal lives.'

'My clients were asking me for things outside of the hotel: villas, tailors, etc. I remember one day receiving a call on my private phone from a client asking if I could arrange an aircraft within two hours, as theirs was not working. I did, and my partner Andrew said to me: "You have become so much part of these people's lives, beyond your work within the hotel; why don't you start your own business?"' And that is exactly what he did.

Marletta mentioned it to two of his long-standing clients, who greeted the idea with such enthusiasm, saying he was totally indispensable. He decided to resign. But when he told the manager of the hotel, they too found him indispensable, and came back with an unusual offer – asking him to stay while he ran his new business, as they understood how the clients felt about him. So he has the best of both worlds, still working within The Dorchester looking after their most illustrious clients needs, and looking after his own clients', who in many ways are one and the same group of people. Marletta is aware that there are concierge companies already, but his clientele understand that he has a black book unlike any that those companies possess and a level of personal service that is incomparable. And what to call his company? 'Indispensable', of course.

The scope of Indispensable is already expanding. When we meet, Marletta is just finalising the details for a villa he has sourced for a client. But this is no holiday timeshare on the Costa del Sol, for with it he has arranged butlers, a chef and full kitchen staff, 24-hour security, a private jet, and all the other things his client needed – many of which had not, I have no doubt, even crossed his client's mind.

His philosophy is simple: he does not mind how demanding a client is – in fact the more demanding, the more he enjoys the challenge – but what he will not tolerate is rudeness. He thrives on the impossible, which is borne out by two stories: A man knew his wife wanted an Hermès Kelly bag in crocodile and had no idea how long it took to order – especially as his wife wanted it in a specific size and colour. Feeling disheartened, he confided in Marletta who, within two days, handed his client the beautifully wrapped bag which he had secured by simply making a single call. And maybe the most inspired of all was the client who wanted something really unusual to 'blow his wife away' for her birthday. She already had everything a woman could want. Marletta told him to leave the problem with him. Within a week he handed over two tickets for the front row of his wife's favourite designer's couture show; flights, hotel, dinner all arranged. The husband had to think of nothing. Which is why Concetto Marletta is Indispensable.