



Astor Place Vintage

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A New York Novel taking place in two time periods. When a vintage clothing store owner in New York City discovers a journal from 1907, she finds her destiny at stake as the past and present collide.

The past has a seductive allure to Amanda Rosenbloom, especially when it comes to vintage clothing. She's devoted to running her shop, *Astor Place Vintage*, but with Manhattan's rising rents and a troubled economy, it's tough to keep the business alive. Meanwhile, she can't bring herself to end an affair with a man who really should be history. When Amanda finds a journal sewn into a fur muff she's recently acquired for the shop, she's happy to escape into the world of Olive Westcott, a young lady who lived in New York City one hundred years ago.

As Amanda becomes immersed in the journal, she learns the future appeals to Olive. Olive looks forward to a time when repressive Victorian ideas have been replaced by more modern ways of thinking. But the financial panic of 1907 thrusts her from a stable, comfortable life into an uncertain and insecure existence. She's resourceful and soon finds employment, but as she's drawn into the social circle of shopgirls living on the edge of poverty, Olive is tempted to take risks that could bring her to ruin. Reading Olive's woes, Amanda discovers a secret that could save her future and keep her from dwelling in the past.

It's Olive, however, who ends up helping Amanda, through revelations that come in the final entries of the journal. As the lives of these two women merge, Amanda is inspired to stop living in the past and take control of her future.

Astor Place Vintage Details

Date : Published June 11th 2013 by Gallery Books (first published June 1st 2013)

ISBN : 9781451682052

Author : Stephanie Lehmann

Format : Paperback 416 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit, New York

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From Reader Review Astor Place Vintage for online ebook

C. says

I enjoyed every page of this little gem. The reason I like this book so much is because the characters became like friends. There is a shifting narrative in APV both taking place in New York City. One character is present time, Amanda, who owns a vintage clothing store, and the other is Olive who lives in 1907 New York. With shifting narrative's I often like one over the other but not in this book. Both characters are equally absorbing and interesting and for me became like friends. While I wasn't reading the book, I actually worried about one character or the other from wherever I left off in the book. This is just a mesmerizing read that celebrates women, past and present with their failures, struggles and accomplishments.

The story goes like this: Amanda, picking up some vintage clothing, finds an old diary sewn inside a fur muff when she goes to a New York mansion to pick up some clothing from an old woman. The finding of the diary takes the reader on an adventure with Olive Westcott, a less than typical young woman who longs for more than marriage in a day when men ruled most everything. This adventure is intermingled with Amanda's life and her struggles with career and love and belonging.

I learned a lot about vintage clothing, New York architecture and the department store of the early 1900's as I enjoyed the trials and stories of Olive and Amanda. This is a book to savor this summer. It's a magical book that will transport you to the bustling city of New York today as well as New York 100 years ago. A most excellent read.

I almost forgot to add another thing I thought was cool about this book! There are vintage pictures of New York throughout. I have a vintage picture of the Flat Iron building that I adore hanging on my wall. I love the vintage pictures Stephanie Lehmann added to this book. Seeing the places while you are reading is just a great touch.

Angie Boyter says

Amanda Rosenbloom, proprietor of Astor Place Vintage, a vintage clothing store in Manhattan, is intrigued when she finds an old journal sewn into the lining of a fur muff she has bought from an elderly woman, Mrs. Kelly. As she reads the story of Olive Westcott, a young woman in the New York City of 1907, both she and the reader find that the two women have much in common despite the 100 years that separate them. Twenty-year-old Olive is the genteel daughter of the manager of Woolworth's flagship store in Manhattan. Groomed by the finest of finishing schools for a future as the wife of a wealthy man, Olive learns from her education that "I was far more likely to succeed in managing a business than a household." When tragedy forces a change in her circumstances, Olive is determined to find success and happiness on her own terms rather than to take the expected route for a young woman of her background and seek the protection of a husband. Her quest introduces her to people like lovely immigrant Angelina Spinelli and her handsome brother Joe and to young women who manage to live on the meager wages paid to women employees by having affluent male "friends" who help cover their living expenses. In the 21st century Amanda encounters an unexpected business reversal and the occasion of her birthday provokes a personal crisis involving her 7-year affair with a married man and the fear that, as she approaches her 40s, a chance for a family of her own may elude her. Their stories merge in a very clever surprise ending.

Olive and Amanda tell their stories in the first person in alternating chapters. This structure worked well, as

it highlighted the similarities in the challenges they faced, although I occasionally forgot which woman was speaking at a given time (my weakness, I suspect, not the author's)! It also showed their differences, e.g., Olive's virginity and total ignorance of the most basic information about sex versus Amanda's modern attitudes and experience. Olive and Amanda's comments about other people did a marvelous job of simultaneously revealing something about both the narrator and the person being commented on, such as when Amanda says about Mrs. Kelly, "Loose skin sagged under her cheekbones and jaw. Red-rimmed, glassy eyes sank deep in the sockets. What was it like to look at yourself in the mirror every day and see you'd turned into an old lady?" (Speaking from experience, Amanda, it ain't fun.)

Astor Place Vintage is a wonderful book to take on your summer vacation, but it is more than a "beach book". Certainly there is a well-told story---two stories actually---of women trying to find happiness and fulfillment under difficult circumstances. The writing is vivid and evocative of place and time. In addition, the book could almost serve as a travel guide to New York City buildings, as they were in 1907 and one hundred years later, showing how the city has changed and how it has stayed the same. There are even pictures of the turn-of-the-last-century buildings to enhance the travelogue. A real pleasure, well-done enough that you need not even feel guilty at your enjoyment!

Emily says

I bought an ARC of this book for 50 cents at the SFPL Big Book Fair two years ago, and it's been hanging out in my apartment ever since. It's one of those books that I kept stacking hopefully in my TBR pile (see: entries #4-50 on my to-read shelf) and I finally started skimming it yesterday to see if I should keep it. Answer: NO. The writing is awfully clunky - lots of exposition in the form of "conversation" - and the characters are wooden and unbelievable. 2007 protagonist Amanda would be the most irritating person on the face of this planet if she was actually alive, given that she's a single thirty-nine-year-old woman having an affair with a married man who thinks that having his baby might be a good idea for their relationship (which she texts him at one point using "u" instead of "you," natch). 1907 protagonist Olive is unable to function socially. Her conversations with potential suitors end with put-downs that are supposed to be witty but make her sound like her dialogue was written by a seventh-grader. They're both awful.

The aspects of this book that I enjoyed were the descriptions of New York in 1907. The author is extremely blatant about shoving her research into normal conversations ("Did you hear about that murder case?" "I wondered to myself just what contraception was available." "I love it when a man can undo each hook of my corset.") which makes this a bad novel but interesting to skim. Olive is impoverished about 60 pages in and has to become a Career Woman at a fancy downtown department store. It was fun to read the descriptions of the building and the salesgirls' routines. And it was fun to read about Amanda's store, Astor Place Vintage, specifically the styles from each decade that she buys and the modifications she makes - it made me want to take up sewing. Luckily, I was able to separate those parts from the fact that Amanda is literally the worst businesswoman ever and it's unbelievable that she's able to keep her store afloat even with money from her sleazy married boyfriend. I wouldn't believe Amanda if she tried to break up with me, either. Girl is crazy.

I just saw that Khaled Hosseini has a blurb on the front of the ARC copy that I have that says he found it insightful and charming. That means he either did not read it, or he read this description of Amanda having sex (both possibilities are equally delightful): "I felt like everything everywhere and didn't want it to end."

Lauren says

It's not bad. It's not great. It's just eh. And at 400 pages, I want more than eh.

Astor Place Vintage is the story of two women (Amanda in 2007, Olive in 1907) told in alternating chapters, although be warned there's no noticeable difference between their two voices. Olive sounds way too much like a modern woman, which is a major pet peeve of mine when reading historical fiction. I could see what Ms. Lehmann wanted to do with Olive, but the character's arc is fairly flat and predictable. It didn't go anywhere new or interesting, and the writing isn't strong enough to carry such a well-trod story.

As for Amanda, I don't know. I wanted to like her but she was so annoying. Again, I liked what Ms. Lehmann attempted to do with the character, but the execution didn't click.

As for the intertwining story: it kind of worked. I'm more and more jaded to the "two women separated across time but united for some reason that may or may not be clear at the start of the book" genre. *Astor Place Vintage* didn't help that fatigue, especially because the connecting threads were shallow and convenient, despite the potential for a deeper, thematic connection between the two women lurking within the pages.

Finally, a warning: I found the feminist angle teeth-grindingly obnoxious. And I say this as someone who proudly identifies as a feminist. All the rah-rah women's lib was written as hit-readers-over-the-head pronouncements with no finesse or building realizations. If I want the twee sayings and clunky rallying cries about girl power, I'll check out Twitter. Not recommended.

Jennifer says

Why Should You Read This Book?

The characters are the most realistic I've read in a long while. Seriously. They make decisions that you don't often see in books. They are real women with realistic dilemmas.

Do you want to be grateful to be a modern woman? Imagine using sanitary napkins connected to belts. Good gravy, no. How about not understanding what the "sex act" actually is with no way to find out? Would you like to rent an apartment or a hotel room? You'd best be accompanied by a man or it's no dice. We've come a long way baby and this novel will remind you of that.

The historical tidbits in this book are spot-on. Ms. Lehmann did her research and she did it well. I was checking Wikipedia like a mad woman to learn even more about the events that were mentioned. I've read many books that swing back and forth from the present to a time in history. I've never read one that did it this successfully. I'm almost always in a hurry to get back to the past. Not this time. I consider that a small literary miracle.

Astor Place Vintage is an absolute delight. I think you'd agree.

Morgan says

I had the distinct pleasure of reading this book as a pre-read for MainStreet BookEnds in preparation for a visit from the author. First of all Stephanie Lehmann is a really fun person who has obviously researched her work quite intensely and is very passionate about the changing roles of women at the turn of the century. The book itself is an engaging portrait of New York in two times, 1907 and 2007.

The plot switches between both time as two women's lives mirror each other in fun and engaging ways. Olive is a feisty and heroic protagonist in 1907 who must find her own way in the world while facing down the challenges she meets in a patriarchal turn of the century New York. I loved the story of Olive and the old city as well as the window both provide into another time and place for women and their roles in society.

Present day we meet Amanda who is a struggling business owner and NYC resident. A romantic at heart Amanda discovers the story of Olive in a box of old clothes we wants to buy for her vintage shop and is transported and transformed by her journey in another woman's shoes. Amanda is a flawed character but she is utterly relatable and very interesting to get to know. Definitely a great summer read that will have you thinking from the start!

Lynn Spencer says

Ugh. I picked this book up thinking that the story sounded intriguing and had so much potential. The historical plot was pretty interesting in places, though the clunky writing made it somewhat of an average read. Seeing Olive discover herself and try to follow her calling in life in early 20th century New York made me appreciate all over again just how different life was only 100 years ago.

But then there was the modern-day plot. Not only do readers have to contend with the same clunkiness in the writing, but the modern heroine, Amanda, is one of the most frustrating twits I've come across in literature. As a 39-year-old business owner who has lived independently for quite some time, one might expect her to have some maturity. And that would be your first mistake.

As it turns out, Amanda does have a passion for vintage clothing, but from what I saw in the book, she's disorganized and somewhat lackadaisical in how she runs her business. I also lost respect for her when I found out about her personal life. Amanda has spent the past six years having an affair with a married man. On top of that, pretty much the only reason Amanda's business didn't go under is because said married man pays her an allowance. So yes, Amanda is pretty much a kept woman. Oh, and her segue into the historical story comes when she gets her hands on Olive's diary - which she basically stole from a client.

Amanda drove me up a wall almost from the beginning and normally I would have tossed this book pretty quickly. However, the details of early 20th century New York intrigued me and I kept reading against my better judgment. Hence the second star.

Lil (Heidi) says

This was a really enjoyable read. First off, this is my neck of the woods and I knew the streets she mentioned, and could easily picture in my head Mad Sq Park, the buildings on the lower east, the basements

with the cyclone fenced quadrants for storage, and I had to laugh when she visited the old Siegel-Cooper department store only to find that it's now a TJ Maxx/Bed Bath & Beyond/Marshalls. I've shopped there countless times and wondered about the building! So it was a lovely yarn, knitting together a struggling woman around my age, with the story of a woman struggling against the societal norms and conditions of 1907 New York.

The stories of Olive and Amanda had some moments where there were parallels (the debate of motherhood, money issues, men, etc.) but the story tied together loosely enough that it wasn't overbearing.

I particularly liked the ending and won't spoil it other than to say that it was left open in many ways. I like that sort of ending, because it's more realistic. Life isn't neatly tied up. There are always unanswered questions and it let me imagine Olive walking away from me as she went about her work in the store, and imagine that Amanda will continue her life in a good way too. Good read, indeed.

Cynthia Haggard says

I was given a paperback copy of ASTOR PLACE VINTAGE by the author, Stephanie Lehmann, in exchange for an honest opinion.

I have to admit that when I finally began to read it, I had low expectations, mainly because of the cover. But I'll get to that in a moment.

This is a well-written engaging novel that is hard to put down. ASTOR PLACE VINTAGE is a braided story of two women, Amanda living in NYC in 2007, and Olive, living in New York City in 1907. Unlike some books, in which the modern part is less interesting than the historical part, Ms. Lehmann has made both parts equally strong. Both Olive and Amanda are compelling characters, partly because they have flaws, they make mistakes, and they both have to struggle to earn a living as single women.

It is obvious that Ms. Lehmann is a gifted researcher. The 1907 part of the novel was replete with fascinating facts about how hard it was to survive at that time as a single woman. But, unlike some authors, Ms. Lehmann has used that information to pull you into that world.

This novel is a treat to read. Ms. Lehmann is a combination of a gifted storyteller and a gifted researcher, two sets of skills that are very different, and more commonly than not, do not go together in the same person. I am sure that she is going to have a very successful career as an historical novelist.

Now to that cover. I don't think Touchstone/Simon & Schuster is doing Ms. Lehmann any favors. It simply

doesn't convey the message of the story at all. Instead of marketing this book as a serious look at women's issues, it gives the impression that this is yet another fluffy chick-lit yarn.

My recommendation would be to keep the gorgeous black and white photo in the background, but remove the foreground figure and all the pink, and instead replace it with two faces looking at each other, modern Amanda and 1907 Olive. You CANNOT tell this book by its cover! Five stars.

Betsy says

This was enthralling. I inhaled it over two days this weekend. I love the way the story moves back and forth between the present and the past.

I couldn't help but wonder if she's not a Maud Hart Lovelace fan. Among the characters in her book were people named Betsy, Joe and Bettina, and one family with the last name of Kelly.

The Lit Bitch says

3.5 stars!

I really enjoyed reading both POVs and thought it worked very very very well in this novel.

As for the characters, for me, Olive was the true heroine of the book. I completely fell in love with her. She had the perfect mixture of innocence and pluck. Her character and story drew me in almost immediately. Sometimes she made decisions that I thought went against what I thought her character should be, but at the same time I found that compelling and exciting!

Olive was kind of stuck in what I like to call 'history's limbo'. She wasn't a repressed woman of the Victorian era but she wasn't quite the 'Modern woman' of the 1920's. She was stuck in a very important transition period for women and I thought the author captured that dilemma spectacularly.

I didn't really care for Amanda. I personally felt like she was way too insecure and almost too pathetic for me to like. She grew on me a more toward the end of the novel but ultimately, for me, it was a little too late. I just couldn't say that I loved her.

Even though I can't say that I loved Amanda, I thought she was the most real character in the novel. Olive was perfect as the ideal heroine but Amanda was real. She was in a real dilemma and had to make some real tough choices, I thought that came across well in her character. I think a lot of women can relate to her in some way or another.

One thing that I particularly loved in this novel was how the author incorporated old pictures of New York into the novel. It was fun to see how Manhattan has changed by yet how the past remains immortalized in the future in the form of buildings. I will admit, I love New York City and its rich history and I thought the author captured that same nostalgia and history that Manhattan is so famous for.

To borrow a phrase from Olive....I would have to say this novel is lovely! It was charming and entertaining at the same time. It held my interest and I really enjoyed reading it from beginning to end. No low sports in this novel, it moved along nicely. With likeable characters and an interesting story line, this novel will be sure to entertain readers and fans of historic fiction and chick lit alike!

See my full review [here](#)

Kayse says

Ugh. Where to begin with this one? I was actually really looking forward to reading *Astor Place Vintage*. I thought the idea of a woman being connected to history through the merchandise in her vintage clothing store seemed pretty cool and unique. This was one I just *couldn't wait* till Christmas to ask for, so I bit the bullet and ordered it in August. All the banners and ads for it on Goodreads probably added to my sense of excitement and urgency.

The problem is, this book was, despite all my enthusiasm, hard to dredge through. It was seriously painful at times. Here's my list of Pros and Cons for this book:

Pros:

- 1.) I finished it. More than I can say for *the Last Summer*, by Judith Kinghorn
- 2.) Some of the historical details were interesting. Stephanie Lehmann obviously did extensive research.
- 3.) The ending came together neatly and tied up loose ends with both storylines.

Cons:

- 1.) I didn't like any of the characters. Seriously. I had no pity for stupid Amanda, who was bitching and moaning about how she has "wasted her thirties" on a married man. He is MARRIED. You are the OTHER WOMAN. He will NEVER LEAVE HIS WIFE FOR YOU. And the fact that she allowed for him to pay for her expenses and jewelry and such came across as very "kept woman" and hookerish. And Olive I had trouble connecting with as well. She was the now-stereotypical historical book character who is only interested in a Career, Not Marriage. She was very awkward with her beliefs. The worst part is, even none of the secondary characters did anything for me.
- 2.) Insert Wacky Best Friend Who Is Into Unconventional Sciences/Spirituality Here. So sick of that cliché, too.
- 3.) I HATE pseudo-fantasy elements in works of otherwise realistic fiction! When Amanda first finds the journal, she starts seeing flashes of colors behind her and feels another presence. I assume the author wanted us to think it was Olive's ghost? And then the author went over the top and had Amanda suffer from over-the-top, fantastical dreams that were "so real," which predictably all included Olive. Yawn. (And why was Amanda naked in all of them? That was weird.)
- 4.) There was information overload in the first half of the book. Above, I did praise the author for doing her research, but I feel like she included TOO MANY DETAILS for the 1906/1907 bits. There was too much frivolous minutiae about the early twentieth century that I felt was inserted by Lehmann saying, "HEY GUYS! GUYS! I DON'T KNOW IF YOU KNOW THIS, BUT THIS PART OF THE STORY TAKES PLACE IN THE PAST! LOOK AT ALL THIS RESEARCH I DID! I FOUND FACTS, GUYS!" And I love historical fiction, but even I felt overwhelmed by all the details. Lehmann really needed to do some serious detail-pruning for Olive's side of the story.
- 5.) There was too much about sex. Not even sexy-sex, which might have been fine. There was just way too

much about Olive naively wondering about sex, menstruation, conception, "rubber bags," childbirth, whatever, that it got to be repetitive and boring. I guess the point was to illustrate the how Victorian morals inhibited turn-of-the-century girls like Olive to learn/feel comfortable about their sexuality, but still, this was way too much. It stopped being interesting way early on in the story, but kept getting dragged out throughout the whole thing.

6.) I hate how the author used bipolar disorder as just a catchall "crazy" state of mind that somehow excused Jeff from having an affair, and explained away his wife's irrational behavior without really delving into it properly. It just seemed as if the author tacked on this particular disorder because it's taboo "bad enough" that it totally made everything okay without much explanation. And I found that incredibly tacky.

7.) Meh. I don't even feel like thinking about this book anymore. I felt a great sense of relief when I finished it, which just isn't the right emotion. This short list will have to do.

Becky Stone says

Astor Place Vintage tells the stories of Amanda, a vintage clothing store owner who has discovered a diary in an antique fur muff, and Olive, the long-ago girl who once hid her diary in the lining of her muff for safekeeping. Amanda happens upon (and steals) Olive's diary while on a clothing-buying outing for her store and begins to read it.

Amanda is a contemporary New Yorker who owns her own businesses, is afraid she's too old to have children, and evaluates every man she meets for marriageability potential. Olive, her counterpart, is woman from a well-to-do family who finds herself penniless and alone in early 1900's New York City after a family tragedy. Olive soldiers on through sexism, squalor, and seduction in pursuit of her dream: to support herself without depending on a man.

According to the book summary, reading Olive's diary is supposed to teach Amanda valuable lessons about her own life. Olive's life and Amanda's life might have occasionally intersected in subject matter, but Amanda didn't really seem to learn anything beyond some useful history. She does have a major turning point that coincides with when she reads about a major turning point in Olive's life, but Amanda's revelation is the direct result of something she learns from the present, not the past.

I grew to like Olive by the middle of the novel - when she became interestingly self-sufficient and stopped being such a cliché. Amanda was a constant disappointment. She suffers from a woe-is-me, I-wasted-my-youth-on-a-man-who-never-married-me attitude that is infinitely irritating. It's boring, overplayed, and off-putting. Hasn't fiction had enough 30-something women who want to wallow in their failure to be married? Her inability to escape a long affair with her married lover and attendant despair could have been interesting and humanizing, but it's just not.

The one plot point that really was Olive's quest for accurate information about contraception in the early 1900's; I found the variation of misinformation she encountered and the depth of the taboos she challenged fascinating. As a girl who grew up without a mother, Olive had never had anyone explain the facts of life to her. When she's abruptly thrust into the lower echelons of New York society by her father's death, these missing facts suddenly become vital rather than just interesting. Sadly, this plot line wasn't a major focus.

This book is tied together by a number of unsurprising coincidences that shock the characters and bore the reader. Overall, this feels like two books that were chopped up and unsuccessfully mashed together. Astor

Place Vintage is a fun concept that failed to put its money where its mouth is.

Suzanne says

Astor Place Vintage was a terrific read! It is interesting that I chose to read it immediately after reading "The Girl You Left Behind," by JoJo Moyes. Both books span nearly 100 years in history, traveling back in time to connect the present day with the past. I loved the references in this book to fashion, New York landmarks, and its depiction of life in New York during the early 1900s, before WWI when women were just starting to become empowered. The women who came before us sacrificed so much, and it makes me take time to remember how far we have come in the last 100 years! Lehmann's writing is wonderful, and I enjoyed all of the photos of New York landmarks, it help me to better visualize the story. Her writing reminded me a little bit of Adriana Trigiani, perhaps it is her depiction of Angelina and her Italian immigrant family, that made me think back to "The Shoemaker's Wife," which I read earlier this year. I highly recommend this book for anyone that is interested in history, fashion and the women's movement!

Viviane Crystal says

Imagine living your life as a working young woman in 1907 or in 2007. What would be the same and what would be different? Believe it or not, not much, although as this novel depicts two women from each period run into society's strictures and mistakes of their own. This is the story of Olive Westcott, a young woman living in the earlier part of the 20th Century. She wants to be a retail seller of clothing in the worst possible way, but her father and business owners will not allow social pressures to make her dream possible. A woman could never go anywhere alone, let alone work without a male reference or supporter. She is up to the fight however, when her father no longer has that ever-present influence in her life. She proves that times are slowly changing by starting at the bottom as a salesgirl at a department store.

How do we know all this? Amanda Rosenbloom, who owns a clothing shop named per this novel's title, finds Olive's journal. Amanda is in a bit of a quandary herself. She's an insomniac dating a married man. She knows her future with him is going nowhere fast but lacks the strength to end it, at least initially. As it turns out, the economy in New York City is changing as well, and Amanda finds herself being evicted so the owner can charge a more exorbitant rent to the next person. After all, New York, both in Amanda and Olive's time, is prime territory for real estate and business. Amanda will prove to be creative and resourceful in her attempt to save her business, find a better place to live, and seek a satisfying romance.

Tall order for Olive and Amanda, yes; but Stephanie Lehmann offers the reader two females with all their strengths and weaknesses who are all the more likeable because they are so real! Lehmann also offers us through quaint, exciting and painstaking detail a thorough panorama of the architecture, interior designs, fashions in clothing, food, music, and art prominent in both time periods. This is an elegant picture of New York as it evolved over 100 years and a delight to relish equally with the story!

Astor Place Vintage is very finely written and a hugely entertaining read!
