

CHELSEA ARTS & LIFESTYLES

Book heralds end of an era at the Hotel Chelsea

BY MELISSA KORN

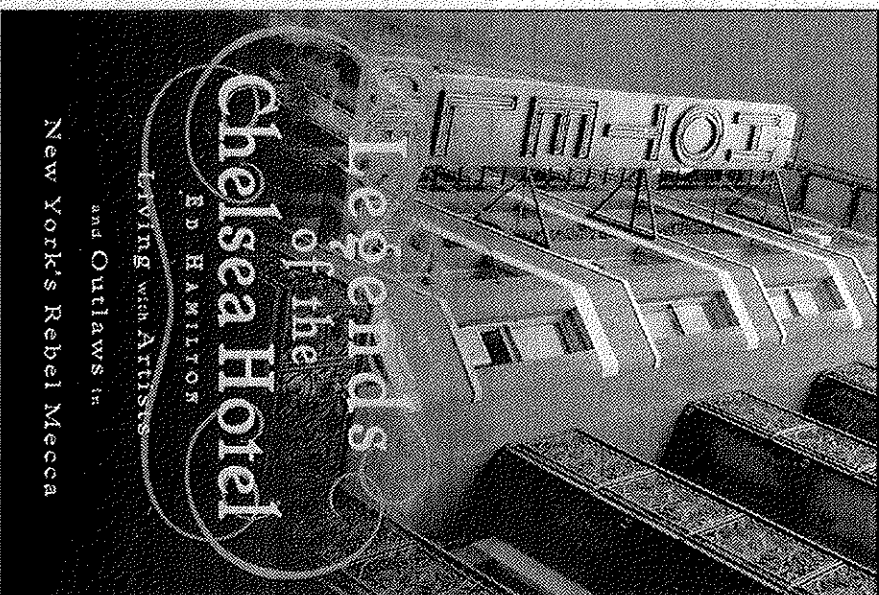
"We live side by side with the giants of the past, and it's the influence of these legends that we all have to live up to in our everyday lives," Ed Hamilton writes toward the beginning of *Legends of the Chelsea Hotel: Living with Artists and Outlaws in New York's Rebel Mecca*.

He claims he didn't set out to rehash the stories of the Chelsea Hotel's famous old residents, but their ghosts couldn't be ignored. In an entertaining collection of blog posts from the past two and a half years, Hamilton, the editor of hotelchelseablog.com and a contributor to Chelsea Now, combines the tales of some of those giants — Thomas Wolfe, Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen, Dee Dee Ramone, and a few dozen more — with stories of his own encounters with junkies, has-beens and wannabes.

The Hotel, which will celebrate its 125th anniversary next year, has been undergoing radical changes since longtime manager Stanley Bard was ousted in June. Hamilton, a 12-year veteran of the residential hotel, adds a new urgency to the residents' plight by bringing them to life. Or, in the case of poor Nancy, death.

If you're interested enough in pop culture to be reading this book, some of the stories Hamilton relates will be old news. He rehashes the messy run of the Sex Pistols in his section on Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen, and is similarly thorough when discussing Edie Sedgwick and Rene Ricard, reminding readers at length that Edie latched on first to Andy Warhol, then to Bob Dylan, before dying of a drug overdose. Hamilton sometimes falters with these anecdotes by dint of his formulaic structure. He begins with a scene in the present relating to the legend, jumps to a biography of the character, then returns to the scene. These flashbacks would be more successful if they were better integrated into the stories. Instead, there is a definitive break in the text for each, all beginning with the near-uniform sentence, "[famous person] was born in [blank town] in [blank year]."

Hamilton's strongest section is the one from 1997, *Bathroom Bumps*, about the joys of living with com-



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munal toilets. It's funny without being forced, as he recalls receiving a bleach-stained espresso maker pot — sans machine — as a thank-you for returning a found purse and becoming obsessive in his turf war with the junkies. The short anecdotes about his elevator encounters are similarly amusing.

While there's a great deal of humor in his observations, Hamilton also carries a strain of the tragic

BOOK REVIEW

LEGENDS OF THE CHELSEA HOTEL

By Ed Hamilton

Da Capo Press

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Upcoming reading:

Oct. 23 at 7 p.m.

Barnes & Noble

675 6th Ave. at W. 21st St.

throughout the book. We meet Hiroya, a Japanese painter who hawks his wares all over the neighborhood, is befriended and abandoned by Dee Dee Ramone and ultimately forced out of the hotel, left alone at the — gasp! — Gershwin. While Hamilton makes it clear that you, too, would be annoyed by the artist, he also makes you want to buy his paintings, clean him up, and carry on his legacy. (He died of a drug overdose.)

Of course, the saddest part of all is that time doesn't stop for these artists and misfits, many of whom lived out their final days in the Hotel in varying degrees of drunken or drug-induced stupors.

The next chapter of the Chelsea Hotel is still playing itself out, with BD Hotels now in charge. The "inmates" are revolting as best they can, but it may be too late. "Legends of the Chelsea Hotel" helps keep the building's true character — "grandly trashy" as it may be — alive a little longer.

Ed Hamilton will also read from "Legends" at 7 p.m., Nov. 8, at 192 Books, 192 Tenth Ave. at W. 21st St., and 7 p.m., Nov. 12, at The Half King, 505 W. 23rd St. at Tenth Ave.