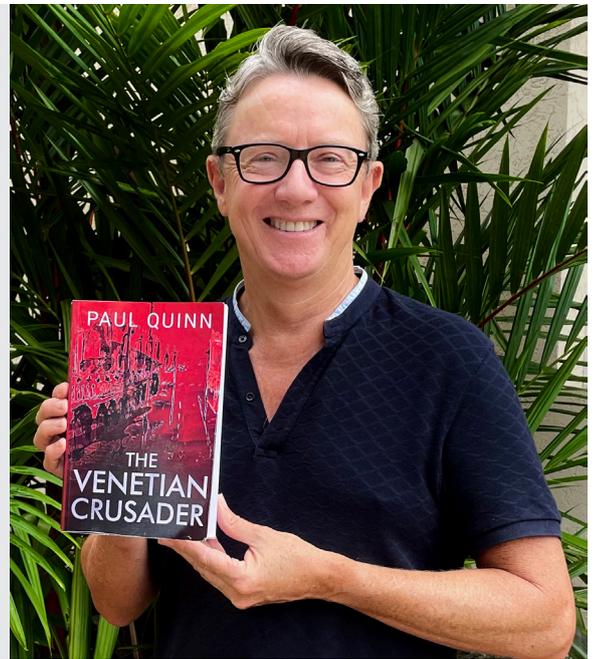


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WRITING A NEW CHAPTER

A TRIP TO VENICE INSPIRED LAWYER PAUL QUINN TO PURSUE HIS INTEREST IN HISTORY AND CRAFT A CAREER CHANGE.
BY KARIN DERKLEY



Corporate lawyer Paul Quinn and his artist wife were in Venice in 2015 for the Biennale when he came across the germ of the story that would become his first novel *The Venetian Crusader*.

As part of the exhibition they had visited the Arsenale, once a major ship-building centre in Venice that is normally off limits to tourists. There, Mr Quinn learned about the extraordinary story of the Fourth Crusade and the political scheming and machinations by the aged doge of Venice to take advantage of it to enrich himself and the city he ruled.

"The more I got into the story, the more I was drawn in," he says. "It just had everything – amazing characters, charismatic leaders who changed the course of history, and the story of how Venice got its wealth and power.

"There was so much scheming and manipulation going on, and you can still see the results of this today," he says. What had for more than a thousand years been the Byzantine Empire was divided between the Latin Empire that replaced it and the French Crusaders. "But Venice got the best bits. The four horses at St Mark's Basilica were taken from the Hippodrome in Constantinople as part of the spoils, and in the vault area a lot of the icons and religious relics were part of the booty."

On his return, Mr Quinn, then still working full time as practice director at Allens, started researching and writing the first few chapters of a book based on that story. The process of research was "just lots of fun", he says. "I've always loved travel, and I've always loved history. Working on this novel brought together all my interests, including doing research of places I love, like Venice and Istanbul."

Before COVID-19 slammed the world shut, he was able to visit Venice again, as well as Istanbul. "You can do a lot of research online, but I wanted to see the museums and the original documents. The physical side of it is so important."

After retiring from full-time work in 2017, Mr Quinn devoted more time to this new interest, alongside other new pursuits including

board memberships and a coaching business for professionals planning a career transition.

"I'd written those first few chapters without thinking too much about it, but then I thought I'd better get some skills. I'd never had any formal writing education, other than the communication skills you get by being a lawyer. But that's quite a different skill set. As a lawyer you have certain barriers about creativity. You're not expected to be creative, you're there to get it right."

He attended writing conferences and sought the input of an editor, learning techniques of character development and writing models, such as having a hook at the end of each chapter.

"The books I really loved when I was younger were by authors like James Clavell, where you have a great story, but you also learnt a lot from the book. What I wanted was to make the book accessible for people who might not be inclined to read about history, but like a good story – and if there's a bit of history to it that's a bonus. I spent a lot of time getting the facts right, but my aim was for it to be a page-turner."

Once he'd finished a draft of the novel, he managed to secure a contract with UK publisher Vanguard Press and spent the COVID-19 2020 lockdown redrafting the manuscript. "I ended up going with the UK publisher because it was a European story and it's just a bigger market."

That was a whole new learning experience. "Once you get with the publisher, you have to wait your turn and go through the editing process. So you're then beholden to their timetable rather than your own."

The book was published in July and already Mr Quinn is on to his next novel. "I don't want to give too much away but this one will be set in the future, even though it will be dealing with similar themes of trade and power, but also artificial intelligence." ■