

## [He Dreamed Up Bosch and the Lincoln Lawyer. It All Started With L.A.](#)

*For almost four decades, Michael Connelly has set his characters loose in a city of big dreams and lucky breaks. Now they're facing an altered landscape. So is he.*

On Dec. 10, Michael Connelly stood on the patio behind his house in the Hollywood Hills and gazed down at a generous slice of the city he's been writing about for 38 years. There were the spires of Hogwarts at Universal Studios. There was the 101 freeway, flowing steadily in both directions. There was the Hollywood sign, presiding over a slope of trees and scrub.

Depending on the direction of the wind, Connelly said, you could smell smoke from a wildfire in Malibu. Then, with his Chihuahua mix, Pinto, in quick pursuit, he led the way through his kitchen and family room to the office where he starts writing at 5 or 6 every morning.

"The sun comes up over those mountains," Connelly said, pointing over a shelf of his own hardcovers to a window framing yet another coniferous view. "I just love that moment. It gives me the feeling that I'm the only one awake in the city."

Connelly, 68, has written 40 books, including a slew of No. 1 best sellers, and sold over 89 million copies worldwide. He's the executive producer of "[The Lincoln Lawyer](#)" on Netflix and "[Bosch](#)" and "[Bosch: Legacy](#)" on Amazon. ("Bosch: Legacy" begins its third and final season on March 27.) He's also a podcaster. Oh, and he has two novels planned for 2025 — "Nightshade," coming out on May 20, introduces a new detective — plus another Amazon show, "Ballard," launching this summer.

Most of Connelly's stories feature cops, lawyers and the seedy underworlds they infiltrate and expose. One might not imagine him as a guy who makes time for sunrises — or Chihuahuas, for that matter — but his work contains a certain tenderness, especially around Los Angeles. Connelly returns to the city again and again, in book after book, infusing dark, sometimes violent tales with ocean views, lanky palms and intimate chats at local watering holes.

"There's a tension here," Connelly said of Los Angeles. "It's a place everyone comes to, looking for a big break, but not everyone gets what they want. I'm one of the lucky ones."

Connelly's novels feature a rotating cast of regular characters, including Harry Bosch, Renée Ballard, Mickey Haller and Jack McEvoy, a crime reporter who first appeared in "The Poet" (1996). Detective Stilwell of Catalina Island will make his debut in "Nightshade" (2025).

Connelly got the lay of the land from detective novels by [Raymond Chandler](#), [Ross Macdonald](#) and [Joseph Wambaugh](#), knowing even as a teenager in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., that he wanted to follow in their footsteps. His father advised going into journalism instead. By his late 20s, Connelly had earned his chops as a crime reporter in South Florida. He'd also written two unpublished books.

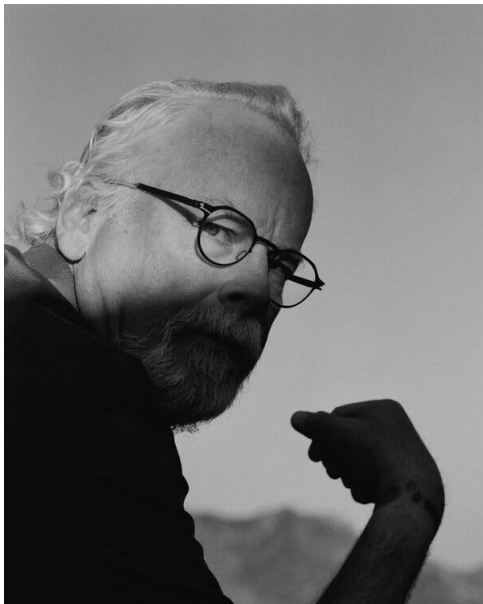
“We were putting off having a family, and the deal I’d made with Linda” — his wife of 40 years — “was that I would get four nights a week and one weekend day to work on novels,” Connelly said. “That went on for 10 years.”

Before he took “one last swing” at novel-writing, Connelly decided to shake things up at his day job. He applied to newspapers in Chicago, Denver, Orange County and Los Angeles. “I was going to go with the first one that hired me, and luckily it was The L.A. Times,” Connelly said.

In 1987, the weekend before he started his new gig, [burglars robbed \\$91,000 from a local Bank of America branch](#) by tunneling into a vault from a storm drain on La Cienega Boulevard.

After a briefing about the crime, Connelly started to envision “[The Black Echo](#)” (1992), his first published book, in which a similar heist is investigated by a maverick L.A.P.D. homicide detective named Harry Bosch. A critic for The New York Times described the book as “part police procedural, part Big Boys’ Adventure Book,” a tale “you read with your knuckles — just hanging on until it’s over.”

It landed Connelly an Edgar Award, but he wasn’t ready to give up reporting.



Credit...Ryan Pfluger for The New York Times

When the time comes, Connelly plans to write his final novel about Harry Bosch. “I don’t know how it ends, whether he goes off fishing or dies,” he said. “But I’m going to

end it in a way that hopefully is fulfilling to readers and to me.” “I stayed at The L.A. Times longer than I needed to because I thought my press pass got me what I needed,” he said, referring to police sources and an inside line on developing stories. In time, Connelly discovered that his informants were more forthcoming when they no longer had to worry about what he’d write for the paper.

His press pass still hangs above his desk — a reminder of the shoe leather behind a tale well told. Several of Connelly’s articles appear in “[Crime Beat](#)” (2006), his lone work of nonfiction, which begins with a quote from “[The Poet](#)” (1996): “Death is my beat. I make my living from it.”

Like Bosch, who ages over the course of his series, Connelly’s other major characters grew out of encounters with people he crossed paths with in real life. Mickey Haller, the Lincoln lawyer, materialized after a Dodgers game, where Connelly struck up a conversation with a defense attorney who worked out of his car.

“He said, ‘It’s not because I’m a bad lawyer,’” Connelly recalled. “‘L.A. County, 400 miles of freeways, 40 courthouses, I cover the waterfront.’ A lightbulb went off.”

Several years later, Connelly met Mitzi Roberts, the inspiration for Renée Ballard, over breakfast at a restaurant across the street from the L.A.P.D.’s Rampart Station. Roberts, then a detective in the cold case unit, joined her partner, who was one of Connelly’s go-to sources. Connelly asked her about the challenges of being a woman in law enforcement.

“The only profession that I saw that was worse as far as sexism is Hollywood,” Roberts said. “It’s still a struggle for women to succeed.”

Connelly’s first Ballard book, “[The Late Show](#),” about an unsinkable detective working the graveyard shift, came out in 2017. He still shares early pages of each installment with Roberts to make sure he’s using current police jargon and accurately representing a woman’s perspective.

Image



Credit...Greg Gayne/Amazon

Titus Welliver plays Harry Bosch in both Connelly-inspired series on Amazon. “I was writing Bosch for 20 years before the show so in my head I have the guy I created,” Connelly said. “But I hear Titus’s voice.”

If you didn’t know Connelly was a best-selling writer, you might mistake him for a high school teacher who moonlights as a baseball coach, the kind who doesn’t need to raise his voice to be heard. Plaid, polar fleece and half-zip sweatshirts figure prominently in his wardrobe. He’s shy and slightly gruff, communicating in a clipped staccato you’d expect to hear in a Bogart movie between men in porkpie hats.

For example: “My books start with someone telling me a story. Defense lawyer. Detective. Sometimes they’re tied into bigger cases. I try to disguise those as much as I can.”

Several of Connelly’s books include nonfiction events — “The Waiting” (2024) tackles the notorious Black Dahlia case, for instance, and “The Dark Hours” (2021) covers the aftermath of Black Lives Matter protests. Some mysteries are solved, some are not and others flow into future books. The only constants are crime, punishment and the city itself.

The day before our meeting, Connelly was being interviewed for the PBS show “Lost L.A.” at Angels Flight, a historical downtown funicular that features in his [sixth Bosch book](#), when a passerby yelled, “I love your work!” It turned out, she was referring to Nathan Masters, the host of the program, not Connelly, who appeared slightly ill at ease in front of the cameras.

“I live a completely anonymous life,” Connelly said later. He likes it that way.

Asya Muchnick, Connelly’s editor of 20 years, said: “It’s hard to explain how singular he is. He doesn’t use ghost writers. He doesn’t use co-authors. He writes and researches all his own books and has them vetted by experts in the field.”

Those experts include two lawyers, a retired judge and several people who work in law enforcement, including Roberts — now a consultant on Amazon’s Ballard adaptation, which will star Maggie Q. Despite his prodigious output, Connelly maintains a small team, including his literary manager of 15 years and his sister, who handles his website and social media. His wife, Linda, is an early reader. They met in journalism school and have one daughter, to whom “Nightshade” is dedicated.

“I never have a word or page count,” Connelly said. “What I like to do is move the story a step a day. It could be a chapter. It could be a good interchange of dialogue. It’s very amorphous. I just know if I write every morning I’ll have a book a year.”

Michael Koryta, a fellow best-selling crime writer, was 21 years old when he met Connelly at a convention. “Mike is always working,” Koryta said. “I’ve traveled with him. You board the plane and lean back to watch a movie or take a nap and you look over and there’s Mike on his laptop.”

Koryta went on: “He’s the gold standard, as a writer and as a person. Each one of his books is a clinic in the macro and micro of storytelling, especially the way he holds the mirror up to Los Angeles.”

Image



Credit...Netflix

In the Netflix show, Mickey Haller drives a 1963 Lincoln Continental convertible with a vanity plate that reads “NTGUILTY.” Here, he’s played by Manuel Garcia-Rulfo; in the movie, he was played by Matthew McConaughey.

In December, Connelly started a new Lincoln Lawyer book. He shared the basics of the plot — a timely one — then said, “I’m actually worried real events are going to pass me by.”

They did, but not for the reasons Connelly was expecting.

On Jan. 8, Connelly was in Palm Springs for a book event when wildfires descended on large swaths of Los Angeles. His neighborhood was evacuated. His beach house in Malibu burned down.

“To the right, we saw the smoke from the Eaton Fire,” Connelly said in a follow-up interview. “To the left, we saw the glow of the Palisades Fire.”

Nevertheless, he added, “We got lucky.” The pain in his voice called to mind Bosch’s motto, “Everybody counts or nobody counts.”

On Jan. 13, Connelly reflected on the city’s losses in the newsletter he emails to more than 100,000 subscribers. “Is this the new new?” he wrote. “Will we need to face the possibility of nature turning against us again and again in these extreme ways? Are we now to pay the price for building a city in a desert so long ago?”

The missive ended: “I still love L.A. We always bounce back.”

Of course, there was the matter of Connelly’s novel in progress, which happens to take place during the week the fires started.

“How can I have a book set in 2025 in Los Angeles without mentioning the fires?” Connelly said. He wanted to incorporate the destruction in a way that was meaningful but not exploitative. The prospect was daunting, he said: “I just froze.”

He took a week off — an eternity, it seemed, enough to make him wonder whether he was suffering from writer’s block for the first time. He spent time with his family, walked Pinto, watched the helicopters and smelled the smoke. He mourned for Los Angeles.

“I don’t know anyone who hasn’t been affected,” Connelly said. “Twenty-two people on my TV show have lost their homes.”

He found a way to rework his novel by layering a new story atop the one he’d started: “It remains to be seen whether I did the right thing or not.”

The book is called “The Proving Ground.” It comes out in October.

In the meantime, Connelly is back to watching sunrises. He texted a picture of one, Technicolor and smoke heavy, taken on Jan. 10.

He wrote, “This was from my office window.”