

DAUGHTER



Anne Rice shares insights on her city, her writing, and her inspiration.

This is where Lasher and Emaeth are buried," says Susan Quiroz, assistant to author Anne Rice. She points to soil beneath a centuries-old oak at the novelist's Garden District New Orleans home, referring to the mythical grave of fictional characters. Nonetheless, reality and legend believably blur in the ripe, lush world of Anne Rice.

For more than 20 years, the New Orleans native has created preternatural beings so vividly fleshed-and-blooded, they seem to stalk among us. Since the 1976 debut of *Interview With the Vampire*, the prolific writer has produced 19 novels and sold over 100 million copies. Her latest, *The Vampire Armand* (Knopf), comes out this fall.

Time and again, her netherworld creatures battle their moral quandaries at one of Anne's properties: the Greek-Revival Garden District home at 1239 First Street; the raised Creole cottage at 2524 St. Charles Avenue, where she spent teenage years; and St. Elizabeth's Orphanage at 1314 Napoleon Avenue, now a museum for her more than 800 antique dolls.

"Everything I've written has come out of New Orleans," says Anne as she sips a Tab. "It's saturated my work. The characters seem to be completely interwoven in a tapestry of sensuality that reflects

New Orleans. Our city is Gothic, but it's never gloomy. It's picturesque but never grim."

Somehow, macabre artifacts blend seamlessly in the antique decor of Anne's First Street home. She lives there with husband Stan, a painter and poet, and their 19-year-old son, Chris. A skeleton, made from balsa wood, sports Mardi Gras beads and vies for attention with a rubber mummy. Dolls, including a rare

19th-century French Bru, gaze intensely at visitors, as does her collection of religious icons. Stan's art graces nearly every room. Mountains of books spill onto tables and cram shelves climbing to the office's 14-foot ceiling. On the doorway, walls, and furniture, the author has scribbled late-night revelations with a Sharpie pen.

"When we were little children, we wrote on the walls a lot," says Anne,



OF DARKNESS

BY NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON / PHOTOGRAPHY ALLEN ROKACH

referring to her sisters, Alice O'Brien Borchardt (who has just published a werewolf tale, *The Silver Wolf*), Tamara, and Karen.

Wall scrawling exemplified the creative expression encouraged by Howard and Katherine O'Brien, Anne's parents, who christened her Howard Allen O'Brien. (She renamed herself Anne in first grade.) Her mother died of alcoholism at age 48 when Anne was 14. Her father, a

postal worker, moved the family to Texas and remarried. There Anne met and wed Stan. They moved to California, where Stan was a professor at San Francisco State, and had a daughter, Michelle, who died of leukemia at age 5.

During the dark days after Michelle's death, Anne penned *Interview* in a white-fury frenzy. Many scholars believe this vampiric passion play elevated the genre from schlock

Dracula stories to that of great literature. Although the loss of her daughter inspired the tale of immortal beings—there's even a blonde vampire child, Claudia—Anne says she didn't connect her personal loss with her professional triumph at the time.

"I don't think too much about why I'm writing," says the novelist. "I get the inspiration and I get obsessed with the idea. Writing is incredibly intense. It leaves me absolutely drained at the end."

The best-selling author enjoys a two-books-a-year contract with Knopf. "They didn't think two books would go over," says Anne, "[but] I just had too many stories to tell." Readers support the move. *Violin* (fall 1997) stayed on the best-seller list until the 1998 release of *Pandora*.

The author moved back to the Crescent City from California in 1988. "I think I'm a daughter of New Orleans—which is different from the South," she says. "I'm a daughter of Mardi Gras and St. Patrick's Day and New Orleans Catholic churches. I was brought up an old-fashioned Catholic," says the writer, who once thought she'd be a nun. "I was inundated with symbols and allegory. Also, I grew up hearing the leg-

ends and ghost stories of New Orleans. This place is crazy with ghosts."

Although she's never encountered a ghost, she believes in them. "When I see a ghost, my life will be changed," she says. What does this dark tale spinner fear? "Cockroaches!"

Her playful nature seems to belie the angst-ridden reputation of her tales. But true Rice aficionados know optimism and hope reside within her pages as vividly as mayhem and moroseness. It's as if she lets readers glimpse her very soul, both the suffering and the exaltation, each time she sits in front of a blank screen. Glorious storytelling results.

And as fans also keep discovering, this New Orleans daughter's tales of darkness journey resolutely toward the light. In fact, words she penned on her office door may say the most about Anne Rice's multilayered imagination:

"Ignore any loss of nerve—ignore any loss of self-confidence—ignore any doubt or confusion. Move on, believing in love, in peace and harmony, and in great accomplishment. Remember, joy isn't a stranger to you. You are winning and you are strong. Love. Love first, love always, love forever." ♦

"I write incessantly about religion, about good and evil," says author Anne Rice, shown here with dolls depicting her vampire characters Louis and Claudia.

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