



*I grew up hearing
the legends and ghost
stories of New Orleans.
This place is crazy
with ghosts. —Anne Rice*

in profile

Anne Rice

A True Daughter of New Orleans

Everything that I've written has come out of New Orleans," says author Anne Rice as she answers questions at her Garden District home. "It's saturated my work," says the 57-year-old.

Her long black hair, streaked with silver, frames an oval face lit with intelligent brown eyes.

Though battling a migraine, she nonetheless readily displays the quick wit and astuteness fans respect. "The characters seem to be completely interwoven in a tapestry of sensuality that reflects

New Orleans," she says as she sips a Tab. More of her favorite soft drink fills a nearby black-and-white cooler ("to match the limousines," an assistant says with a grin). "Our city's Gothic, but it's never gloomy. It's picturesque, but it's never grim."

Anne's First Street home reflects similar contradictions, with macabre artifacts blending seamlessly into the to-die-for antique decor. She lives there with her husband, Stan, a painter and poet, and, occasionally, their 21-year-old son, Chris, a novelist and screenplay writer. A skeleton made from balsa wood sports Mardi Gras beads and vies with a rubber mummy for attention. Dolls, including a rare 19th-century French Bru, gaze intensely at visitors, as does her collection of religious icons. The saints serenely mix with Stan's vibrant art, including a portrait of Anne.

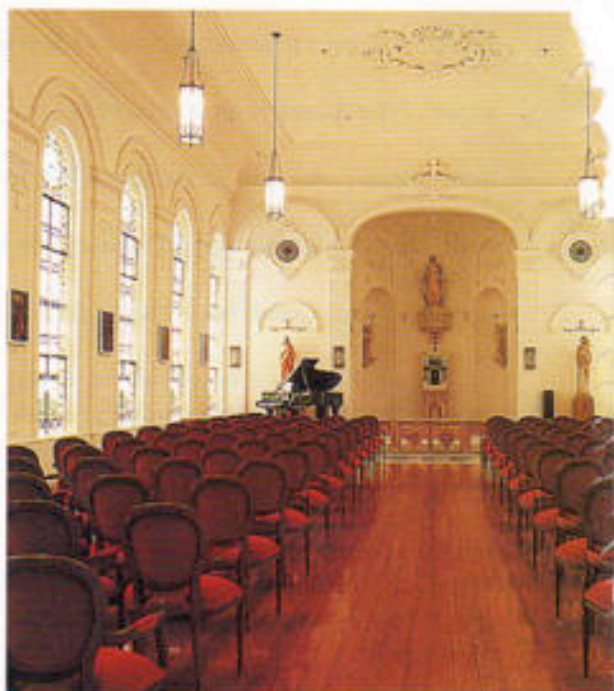
Earlier, Anne's assistant guides a visitor through the artfully overgrown greenery that envelopes the house. "This is where Lasher and Emaeth are buried," says Susan Quiroz, pointing to soil beneath a centuries-old oak. She refers to the mythical final resting place of fictional characters, but in the ripe, lush world of Anne Rice, reality and legend believably blur. Imaginary graves, vampiric encounters, bewitching powers, and ghostly hauntings seem as tangible as the nearby creaking gate.

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 21 novels and sold more than 100,000,000 copies. She is currently working on a book to come out sometime next year, following the spring 1999 release of *Vittorio the Vampire* (Knopf).

Time and again, her netherworld creatures battle their moral quandaries at one of the author's New Orleans properties: this Greek Revival home at 1239 First Street; the Creole cottage at 2524 St. Charles Avenue, where she spent her teen years; and St. Elizabeth's Orphanage at 1314 Napoleon Avenue, now a museum for her antique dolls and a gallery for Stan's paintings.

At the First Street home, the author conjures plot, setting, and character like Dr. Frankenstein piecing together a monstrous—and wondrous—creation from body parts. In

The author shares insights on her city, her writing, and how she combines the two in her imaginative world of the supernatural.



Above: Her office features a collage of favorite mementos. Photos in the left corner are of her husband, Stan, and their daughter, Michelle, who died at age 5. **Right:** When Anne purchased the deteriorating St. Elizabeth's Orphanage in 1993, the chapel ceiling literally rested on the pews. An estimated \$8 million later, the 47,000-square-foot building is now the site for galas, a doll museum, and plush guestrooms.

Only a faint
line exists
between the
supernatural
and reality in
Anne Rice's
world.

Anne's office, mountains of books spill onto tables and cram shelves. On the doorway, walls, and furniture, the uninhibited author has scribbled late-night revelations with a pen.

"When we were little children, we wrote on the walls a lot," says Anne, referring to her sisters Tamara, Karen, and Alice O'Brien Borchart, an author who recently published a werewolf tale, *The Silver Wolf* (Ballantine). "Writing on the wall is the ultimate."

Wall scrawling exemplified the creative expression encouraged by Howard and Katherine O'Brien, Anne's parents, who chris-

tened her Howard Allen O'Brien. (She adopted the nickname Anne in the first grade.) Her mother succumbed to alcoholism at age 48 when Anne was just 14. Her father remarried and moved the family to Texas. There, Anne met and married Stan. They moved to California, where Stan taught at San Francisco State; they had a daughter, Michelle, who died of leukemia at age 5.

During the dark days after her daughter's death, the novelist penned *Interview* in a white-fury frenzy. "I wanted it to be great literature," she says. "I was quite stunned when



Left: "Writing is a very mysterious process," says novelist Anne Rice in her office. "No one has an explanation of how stories wind out of you."

Below left: Anne rode—enclosed with a handheld fan—in this custom-made coffin for a *Memnoch the Devil* book signing. The Olympia Brass Band led the mule-drawn antique hearse. "Personally, I have only contempt for conformity, a horror of doing the familiar," the author says. The display is at St. Elizabeth's Orphanage, where fans can see her 800-plus doll collection.

writing," she says. "I get the inspiration and I get obsessed with the idea. Writing is incredibly intense."

During a book's creation, her blood-and-sweat sessions stretch for 12 hours, followed by 12 hours of sleep. Sandwiches serve as meals during the four to six writing weeks so she can pore over research material while she refuels. So extensive is her library, her staff has begun a Dewey Decimal cataloging system.

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 a very old-fashioned Catholic," says the writer, who once thought she'd be a nun.

Her playful nature seems to belie the angst-ridden reputation of her tales. But true Rice aficionados discover that optimism and hope reside within her pages as vividly as mayhem and moroseness. It's as if she lets her fans glimpse her

soul—both the suffering and the exaltation—each time she sits in front of a blank screen.

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 doubts or confusions. Move on, believing in love, in peace and harmony, and in great accomplishment. Remember, joy is no stranger to you. You are winning and you are strong! Love. Love first, love always, love forever."

—Nancy Dorman-Hickson

Accessing Anne Rice

"[Readers] are the people that count," says Anne Rice. "It's terribly important not to forget that."

Her Web site is www.annerice.com. The Anne Rice phone line includes a frequently updated taped message from the author. Call (504) 522-8634.

St. Elizabeth's Orphanage, located at 1314 Napoleon Avenue, houses her doll museum and is open for tours at 11 a.m. and 1 and 3 p.m. daily. Admission is \$7 adults, \$5 ages 12 and under. Call (504) 899-6450.

The Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club sponsors a party every Halloween in New Orleans. The Web site is www.arvlfc.org. Or write ARVLFC, P.O. Box 58277, New Orleans, LA 70158-8277.



[Writing] leaves me absolutely drained at the end.

—Anne Rice

it was condemned [by some critics] as popular fiction. Now, I'm quite delighted to be called a popular author because I realize that people from all walks of life are valuing it." Today many scholars believe the vampiric passion play she produced elevated the genre from schlock Dracula stories to that of important literature.

Although the loss of Michelle inspired the tale of immortal beings—there's even a blonde vampire child—Anne didn't connect her personal loss with her professional triumph at the time. "I don't think too much about why I'm