

The Majesty of the French Quarter

Kerri McCaffety

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“When the town was fresh and young she was seductive, voluptuous and vulnerable in the composition of a great mistress,” writes Mikko Macchione in the foreword of this book. An appropriate motto for photographer and writer McCaffety’s selection of color photographs highlighting the architecture of New Orleans’ French Quarter. The book’s emphasis is on the culture created by those of French and Spanish decent born in the New World, also known as Creoles. Therefore the content of McCaffety’s work remains primarily European-influenced with occasional references to African, Caribbean or Native American contributions. The reader who is craving a more worldly examination of New Orleans’ essence will most likely feel unsatisfied with this selection.

A light text weaves throughout colorful photographs and includes historical anecdotes, author commentary and amusing quotes from literary writers, society members and prominent local figures. Most noteworthy of all are the images. McCaffety captures architectural structures with an unobtrusive and engaging eye, remaining acutely perceptive to light and its consequence of shadow. The reader bears witness to the elegantly chipped paint of walls, ancient wooden and winding stairwells and plushly decorated boudoirs upon parlors upon continual antique and mythical settings.

Truman Capote is quoted as claiming, “Of all secret cities, New Orleans, so it seems to me, is the most secretive, the most unlike, in reality, what an outsider is permitted to observe.” Readers are blessed with visions from both its exterior and interior. Many of these photographs represent the scenery visible on a casual walk through the quarter.

Also featured are the views from the inside looking out; the behind-the-scene facades that pedestrians could only fantasize about. Now the reader can linger in the hidden garden of a Royal Street house. From this view of the enclosed brick-lined oasis, the blossoms of hundreds of lush, beaded red flowers and the leafage of verdurous greens seem to tumble from every direction and spill onto the cobble-stoned patio with its white-rimmed table and chairs. Also impressionable are several fountains dating back to the late 1700s. In one instance the faded illusion of patinas delicately sprawl over the body of a cherub blowing his horn, while nestled in an intimate brick archway overcome with twisting greenery.

Unquestionably, every image in this collection opens the gateways for poetic possibility.

KYLE NORRIS (March / April 2000)

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