



may inspiration... new orleans, la

Given my love of architecture and historical preservation, it is hard to believe that my first trip to New Orleans came only four short years ago. It came about in a way that had nothing whatsoever to do with either architecture or with historic preservation. It came about because of the college search.

Our oldest son had just completed his freshman year at a university in the Northeast. He had a change of heart and decided that he wanted to transfer to another school and spend his remaining college years in an unfamiliar, hopefully urban location that would present him with different life experiences. Simply, in his own words, he wanted to embark on "an adventure".

In the spirit of his search for adventure, I took a wild leap of faith and let him plan our trip together to visit Tulane University. We stayed at a "Top Secret" hotel - which means booking with an online travel service not knowing which hotel you have booked until you hit the "send" button on your computer. To most adults I guess that seems a bit madcap! It certainly did for me. However, the force was with us. We booked a lovely, historic hotel in the French Quarter, and spent the next three days visiting the school and taking in the wonderfully authentic ambiance that you find in New Orleans.

I expected to love the city - the food, the music, the architecture - but what I didn't expect, was to feel as if I was *home*. Home - as in an old, comfortable pair of shoes, or that sigh of relief you feel when you open your front door after a long summer vacation. From the very first moment I stepped off the plane, I felt connected in an indescribable way. It was as if I was able to channel the city's "Southern Charm".



Each subsequent visit has been filled with meaningful encounters, connections with strangers and a feeling that I was able to communicate in a direct and easy way. Of the numerous times I have visited, I have had *moments* with locals, tourists, and even a cashier at the local CVS. One evening we were dining at a restaurant in the French Quarter. Our waiter overheard we were from New York City. When he discovered that I was an Interior Designer, he asked if I perhaps knew his wife, a New Orleans based antiques dealer with a small presence in NYC. I hadn't met her, but I was familiar with her shop in the design center. The next morning I received an email from his wife introducing herself and saying, "Please give our contact information to your son as we live close to his school. Tell him to contact us for anything at all...large or small...because in New Orleans, we take care of our own."

I have found that people in this city do take care of their own, but they will also reach out and welcome you with open arms. If you trust enough to return their gentle and most sincere hospitality, you will discover secrets, make connections, and even though you may never be a *true* local, the city will become a part of you, and you will become a part of it. In all the places that I have called my home, and those that I have not, I have never experienced anything quite as welcoming and accepting as the people of New Orleans. They have taught me to be curious, to investigate, to engage and to care about others in a very profound way.



Our oldest son, J.R. did decide to transfer to Tulane. Not only did he enroll, but a year later, our younger son did as well. For son #2...after one visit to campus, he made his decision to apply the following year. Maybe it was seeing how happy his older brother was, or maybe it was that streetcar ride from the Uptown campus to the French Quarter. I'll probably never know, but my guess is it had a lot to do with the fact that at 4:00 in the afternoon, there he sat with in a jazz club, his parents drinking Hurricanes and listening to a musician on the sax playing John Coltrane's *Blue Train*. For an 18 year old, it just doesn't get much better than that.

In closing, I would like to congratulate our son, J.R. deBart III, on his graduation from Tulane University, this May 17th (December graduate Class of 2013). J.R., may you take all you have learned in the three short years you have called NOLA your home. I am confident that you will continue your life's journey with an open heart, a personal passion, and that you will leave the world a better place by taking care of not just your own, but by giving back and making a difference in the world we live.

Godspeed to all!



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Architectural drawings from
New Orleans Observed,

*Drawings and Observations of
America's Most Foreign City*
by Errol Barron