



# The Spirit of New Orleans

Step out beyond Bourbon Street and explore the host city of *VMSD's* 17th annual International Retail Design Conference.



*By Lauren Mang, Contributing Writer*

IT'S EASY TO IMMEDIATELY ASSOCIATE NEW ORLEANS WITH MARDI GRAS, Bourbon Street, scandalously obtained beads and those towering, brightly colored frozen adult beverages. But there's more to experience in this buzzy, European-inspired Louisiana city along the Mississippi River, including its distinct cuisine, live music (it's the birthplace of jazz) and grandiose architecture. This Sept. 5-8, *VMSD's* 17th annual International Retail Design Conference (IRDC) heads to NOLA for four days of compelling design talks, networking sessions, interactive workshops, self-guided city tours and most important – inspiration. It's an ideal time to get better acquainted with all New Orleans has to offer.



### BE AN EXPLORER

“It’s an intimate city, in that people say hello to one another, stop to chat, laugh and share a story or two,” says Tippy Tippens, founder and ceo at New Orleans-based, eco-friendly retailer Goods That Matter.

She recommends wandering the city beyond the French Quarter (home of IRDC’s 2017 headquarters, The Ritz-Carlton) into neighborhoods such as Mid-City, Bywater and the Lower Garden District, with its massive old oak trees, colorful shotgun-style homes and Greek Revival architecture. The six-mile-long Magazine Street, which begins downtown and winds through the Lower Garden District and the stately Garden District and ends near the 350-acre Audubon Park, is filled with art galleries, coffee shops, antiques stores and a mix of local offerings such as T-shirt shop Dirty Coast Press and national retailers like Warby Parker, West Elm and Design Within Reach.

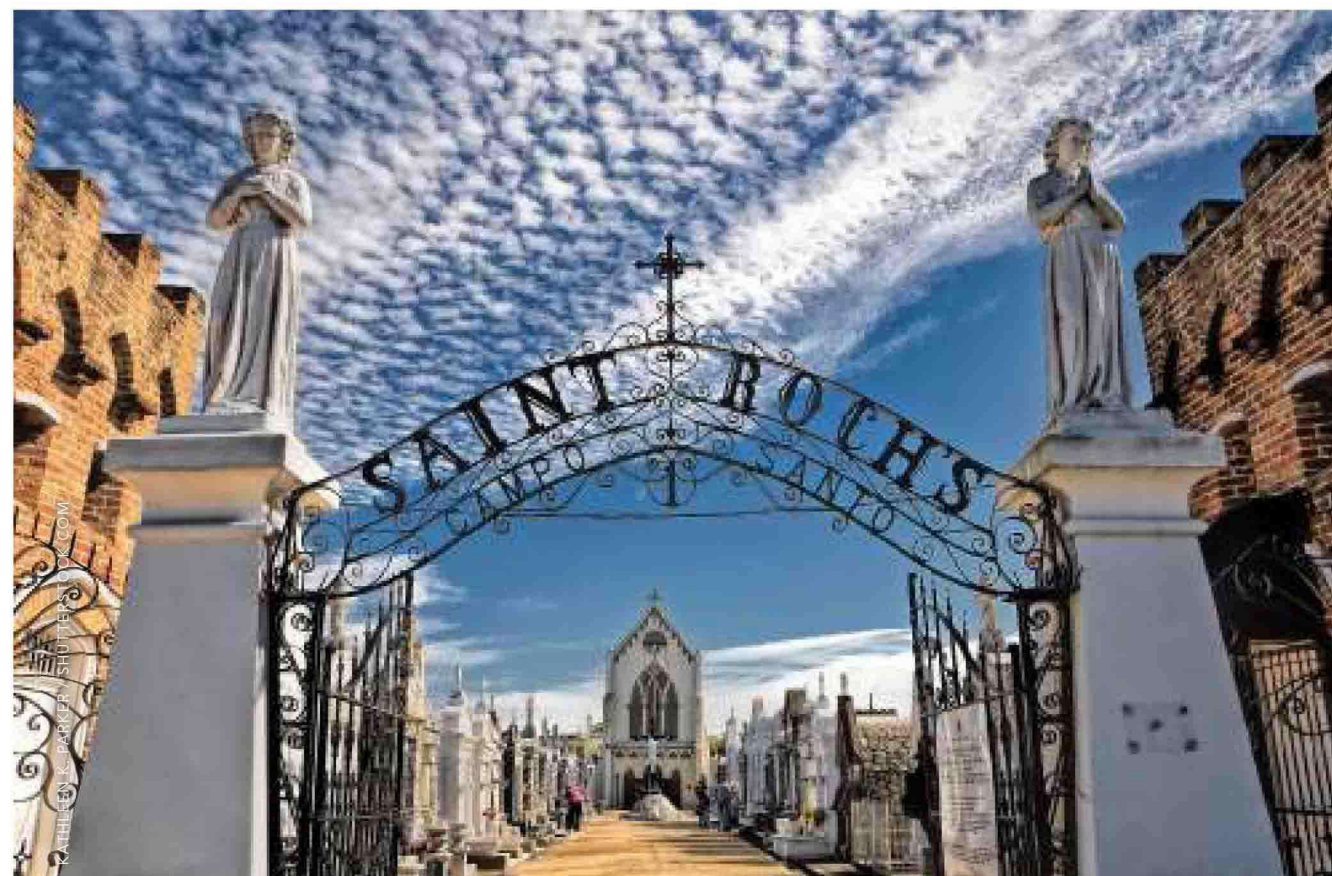


**TOP** The Garden District is home to tree-lined streets and historic Southern mansions.

**ABOVE** An impromptu “second line” brass band parade entertains in the French Quarter.

**RIGHT** The Ritz-Carlton New Orleans, once a department store itself, is headquarters for IRDC 2017.





**LEFT** *The Saint Roch neighborhood, part of New Orleans' Bywater District, is named for the shrine and cemetery of Saint Roch.*

**BELOW** *Visit the French Quarter by day to visit a surprising number of antique and curio shops.*

"I always recommend people skip Bourbon Street," says Margaret Sche, co-owner at NOLA-based retailer Saint Claude Social Club. "If you have to see it, take a stroll during the day and then be done with it." Instead, opt for Frenchmen Street in the Faubourg Marigny neighborhood, where spots such as live music club d.b.a. and the jazzy Spotted Cat Music Club offer nightly tunes in eclectic atmospheres. "You can't go wrong, anywhere you walk into will have authentic New Orleans music," Sche says.

Since moving to NOLA seven years ago, Tippens notes that there has been an uptick in the "maker" and local retail worlds, particularly when it comes to pop-ups and food markets (e.g. Saint Roch Art Market, Little Flea and pop-up kitchen Ramen Y'all). For eats worth writing home about, she suggests stopping by the small-plates bistro Bacchanal Wine in Bywater, Caribbean eatery Cane & Table in the French Quarter or Mid-City's Parkway Bakery for a po'boy. "I try to go there every Sunday. The people are sweet, the po'boys never disappoint, and it's an old-school fave."

#### **GOOD NATURED**

Along with the serene Audubon Park, there are ample opportunities to explore the city's natural surrounds, including a ferry ride (the Canal Street ferry has been





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**TOP** The Audubon Aquarium of the Americas houses more than 10,000 sea creatures and is part of a 16-acre park along the Mississippi Riverfront.

**ABOVE** Four streetcar lines offer a distinct view of the city for just \$1.25 (exact change, please).

in operation since 1827) across the river to the historic Algiers Point, where the biking and running Mississippi River Trail winds along the levee. While there, stroll the Robert E. Nims Jazz Walk of Fame, or check out one of the Algiers Historical Society's free walking tours of the area. And don't forget about the bayou. "We are surrounded by water, [so] it's awesome to get out of the city and into the swamp. It's a big part of New Orleans' culture," Tippens says. Consider taking it all in via a kayak tour on Bayou St. John or Bayou Bienvenue.

### MAKING STRIDES

It's been 12 years since Hurricane Katrina devastated the city, but in areas such as the historic Lower Ninth Ward, recovery has been slow. According to National Public Radio (NPR), as a whole, the number of households in the city has returned to roughly 90 percent of "pre-Katrina levels," yet the Lower Ninth Ward has experienced a mere 37 percent return of households.

Despite the challenges the city has faced, it continues to persevere, so much so that in 2015 it launched a comprehensive plan to build city resilience, guided by the organization 100 Resilient Cities, which helps metropolitan areas become better able to withstand future physical, social and economic challenges.

"[New Orleans] is a very special city, and I continue to learn from being here," says Susannah Lipsey, owner of lifestyle boutique Freda, inside the Warehouse District's Ace Hotel. "What makes it so great are the people, the food, the music, the history, the freedom of expression and the *joie de vivre*." ▀