

BRYAN BATT'S GUIDE TO NEW ORLEANS

You may have spotted Bryan Batt in the “Tales of the City” reboot – or riding the New Orleans float in NYC’s World Pride Parade. But the Crescent City native, a fixture on stage, screen and TV, may be best known for his role as Sal Romano, the closeted Sterling Cooper art director on AMC’s “Mad Men.” Now he’s at work as writer/performer of the autobiographical “Dear Mr. Williams,” which poignantly (and hilariously) weaves his growing up with the New Orleans life, real and imagined, of Tennessee Williams. For the Big Easy convention of NLGJA: The Association of LGBTQ Journalists, he shares his hometown’s guide.

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A great way to start the day -- and one of the many walking tours of the **French Quarter** -- is with scrumptious powdered sugar-covered beignets and Café Au Lait at **Café Du Monde** (800 Decatur St.), with a perfect view of picturesque Jackson Square and the iconic St. Louis Cathedral, Cabildo and The Presbytère.

If you must see **Bourbon Street** and have a “Hurricane,” make it fast on your way to **Preservation Hall** (726 St. Peters St.) for classic NOLA jazz (it’s a short, but perfect real jazz set), then beeline to **Frenchmen Street**, where the locals go to celebrate the music scene. On any given night at D.B.A. (618 Frenchmen St.), you may have the pleasure of hearing one of the many New Orleans legends like Trombone Shorty, just like on the TV series “Treme.” **Snug Harbor** (626 Frenchmen St.) and **Mimi’s In the Marigny** 2601 Royal St.) are red hot!

The free-of-charge **Besthoff Sculpture Garden**, next to the **New Orleans Museum of Art** (noma.org), sits amongst a majestic collection of Spanish moss-laden live oaks in City Park. Newly expanded to 11 acres, it boasts a vast collection of outdoor works, both classic and contemporary, from Rodin to Botero, all in a beautifully manicured botanical setting. Another great green space is **Audubon Park** (audubonnatureinstitute.org) with a jogging/biking track, golf course, and world-class zoo! It’s just a St. Charles Ave. streetcar ride away.

Napoleon House (500 Chartres St.) is a wonderfully historic bar and light eatery that looks ready to crumble before your very eyes. Originally built to house Napoleon in exile, it is one of the best places to drink a Pimm’s cup, down gumbo and jambalaya, and hear non-stop opera! For the perfect Muffelata sandwich, visit nearby **Central Grocery** (923 Decatur St.)

Going antiquing? The Big Easy is an antique freak’s Mecca! There is a plethora of fantastic shops that I must list in the French Quarter alone: **The French Antique Shop** (225 Royal St.), **Royal Antiques** (309 Royal St.), **Moss Antiques** (411 Royal St.), **M.S. Rau Antiques** (630 Royal St.) and **Lucullus** (610 Chartres St.) all rule. Uptown **Karla Katz Antiques** (4017 Magazine St.), **Wirthmore Antiques** (3727 Magazine St.), **Balzac Antiques** (3506 Magazine St.), **Mac Maison** (3963 Magazine St.) and **Uptowner Antiques** (3828 Magazine St.) are a must!

One has to work very hard not to have a great meal in New Orleans. Some people eat to live, but here we live to eat. The high-end **Restaurant August** (301 Tchoupitoulas St.) and **Bayona** (430 Dauphine St.) are loved just as much as my favorite Po-Boy spot, **Parkway Bakery & Tavern** (538 Hagan Ave.) ... simply the best! Order the "Surf and Turf," roast beef with fried shrimp, and the fries with debris gravy and cheddar cheese -- nothing short of divine. Other favorites: **Paladar 511** (511 Marigny St.), great farm-totable; **Li'l Dizzy's Café** (1500 Esplanade Ave.), no-frills soul and Creole for lunch; and **Hotel Peter & Paul** (2317 Burgundy St.), a remade church, rectory and convent with restaurant and bar that serves up elegant high-end chic.

Galatoires (209 Bourbon St.), the century-old classic Creole bistro-style restaurant at the start of Bourbon Street, is a vivacious New Orleans tradition. Locals never use menus, and always trust the recommendations of their familial server. You can never go wrong with soft shell crab, shrimp remoulade, or oysters en brochette! The Uptown equivalent is **Clancy's** (6100 Annunciation St.); the oysters-with-brie is to die for!

Jacques-Imo's (8324 Oak St.) and **Maple Leaf Bar** (8316 Oak St.) pair a renowned, funky, delicious restaurant and a great Uptown jazz club that should never be separated. Jack makes the best fried chicken ever along with incredible Southern Creole creations that have everyone lined up outside; listening to the sounds next door makes for a great sultry night!

Bourbon House (144 Bourbon St.): I love oysters, and there are great places all over town -- **Pascal's Manale** (1838 Napoleon Ave.), **Casamento's** (4330 Magazine St.), and **Acme Oyster House** (724 Iberville St.) among them -- but I prefer a variety of great Louisiana seafood and love a great plateau Fruit de Mer, and Bourbon House restaurateur Dickie Brennan offers of a fantastic multi-tiered presentation. There are great oysters at the bar, and don't dare leave without trying a Bourbon milk punch shake for dessert!

Commander's Palace (1403 Washington Ave.) is the Grand Dame of New Orleans' fine dining. Nestled in the heart of the Garden District amongst gorgeous historic mansions, this multi James Beard award-winning restaurant never misses. Whether it's dinner at 8 or Sunday Jazz brunch, an elegantly divine culinary experience awaits.

Hazelnut (5525 Magazine St.) is my husband Tom Cianfichi's and my home furnishings and fine gift shop. Since we opened our doors in 2003, Hazelnut has become a destination boutique for locals and visitors alike. A big hit is the exclusive New Orleans Toile fabric we designed. There is a fantastic variety of other specialty shops on world-famous Magazine Street: For the best dressed **Mimi** (5500 Magazine St.) offers a perfectly edited wardrobe for the elegant fashion plate, while **Scriptura** (5423 Magazine St.) is the place for all things paper and stationery. **Perch** (2844 Magazine St.) cannot be beat for great contemporary and vintage designs and furniture. The **Cole Pratt Gallery** (3800 Magazine St.) represents some of the best and most talented Southern artists. Note: On the first Saturday of the month, art galleries all over town extend their hours to unveil new exhibits with adult beverages!

Julia Street and the **Warehouse District** are home to some of the best art galleries and museums in the Big Easy. **Arthur Roger Gallery** (432 Julia St.) and **Jonathan Ferrara Gallery** (400 Julia St.), as well as the **Contemporary Arts Center** (900 Camp St.), **The National WWII Museum** (945 Magazine St.) and **Ogden Museum of Southern Art** (925 Camp St.) are among my favorites.

W.I.N.O. -- The Wine Institute of New Orleans (610 Tchoupitoulas St.) is a fantastic and welcoming wine bar where guests can taste over 100 varietals of wines from all over the world, by using a W.I.N.O. debit card to taste 1-, 2- or 4-ounce tastings, and proprietor and wine expert Bryan Burkey offers the best classes on Vino in the South. Nearby are the delectable restaurants **Emeril's** (800 Tchoupitoulas St.), **Cochon** and **Cochon Butcher** (930 Tchoupitoulas St.)

New Orleans is famous for her cemeteries, or as Anne Rice called them, "cities of the dead." Although many flock to **St. Louis Cemetery** (there are three: the oldest is St. Louis Cemetery No. 1 at 425 Basin St.), the most exquisite and unique examples of Victorian and Edwardian monuments and sculpture is found in **Metairie Cemetery/Lake Lawn Cemetery** (5100 Ponchartrain Blvd.), with some tombs dating back prior to the Civil War ... my ancestors rest there, and that's where I'll be one day. But don't wait till then to stop by!