

Frank Relle Photography

Key innovation: photographs of pre- and post-Katrina New Orleans
Biggest clients: Cristiano Raffignone, owner of Cristiano's Ristorante in Houma and Martinique Bistro in New Orleans
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Frank Relle, owner
Year introduced: series began in 2004
2006 sales: would not disclose

For an artist, capturing the essence of New Orleans is no easy matter.

Yet for photographer Frank Relle of Frank Relle Photography, the challenge inspires him to continually snap the "mood and mystery" of the city.

"My goal is to encourage viewers to see the familiar in a new way," Relle said. "You see houses every day but you don't really pay attention. Architecture is a reflection of the people and underlying story of New Orleans."

Relle began his series of New Orleans photographs in 2004, focusing on buildings to tell the story of locals.

"I want to personify all different levels of expression the city has," he said.

Relle's series of New Orleans photographs continued through Hurricane Katrina and the city's recovery. Regardless of the differences between pre- and post-Katrina New Orleans, Relle stressed he always shows up at the photo scene without any preconception.

"It's the same approach, just a different story," he said.

Shortly after the hurricane, Relle focused on capturing the feelings of New Orleanians during what he called their "quiet moments." He also wanted to tell the story of the people through the buildings they had inhabited.

Relle's pictures gained the attention of David Johnson, director of communications for the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. Johnson published some of Relle's images in the Louisiana Cultural Vistas summer 2006 issue.

"(Frank) has truly documented a time and place in a format that anyone would be drawn to," Johnson said.

Johnson said there has been some debate about Relle's post-Katrina photographs, with some viewers stating Relle took them to document history and others claiming he took them for artistic advancement.

However, Johnson said the photos are a combination of the two.

"He is presenting horrific scenes, but in a very compelling way."

Relle's photographs also captured the attention of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, where they have been included in the permanent collection.

A native New Orleanian, Relle graduated from Tulane University before apprenticing with various photographers. But New Orleans has been his greatest teacher.

"Everything I know, I understand through the metaphor of understanding New Orleans," he said. •

— Amy M. Ferrara

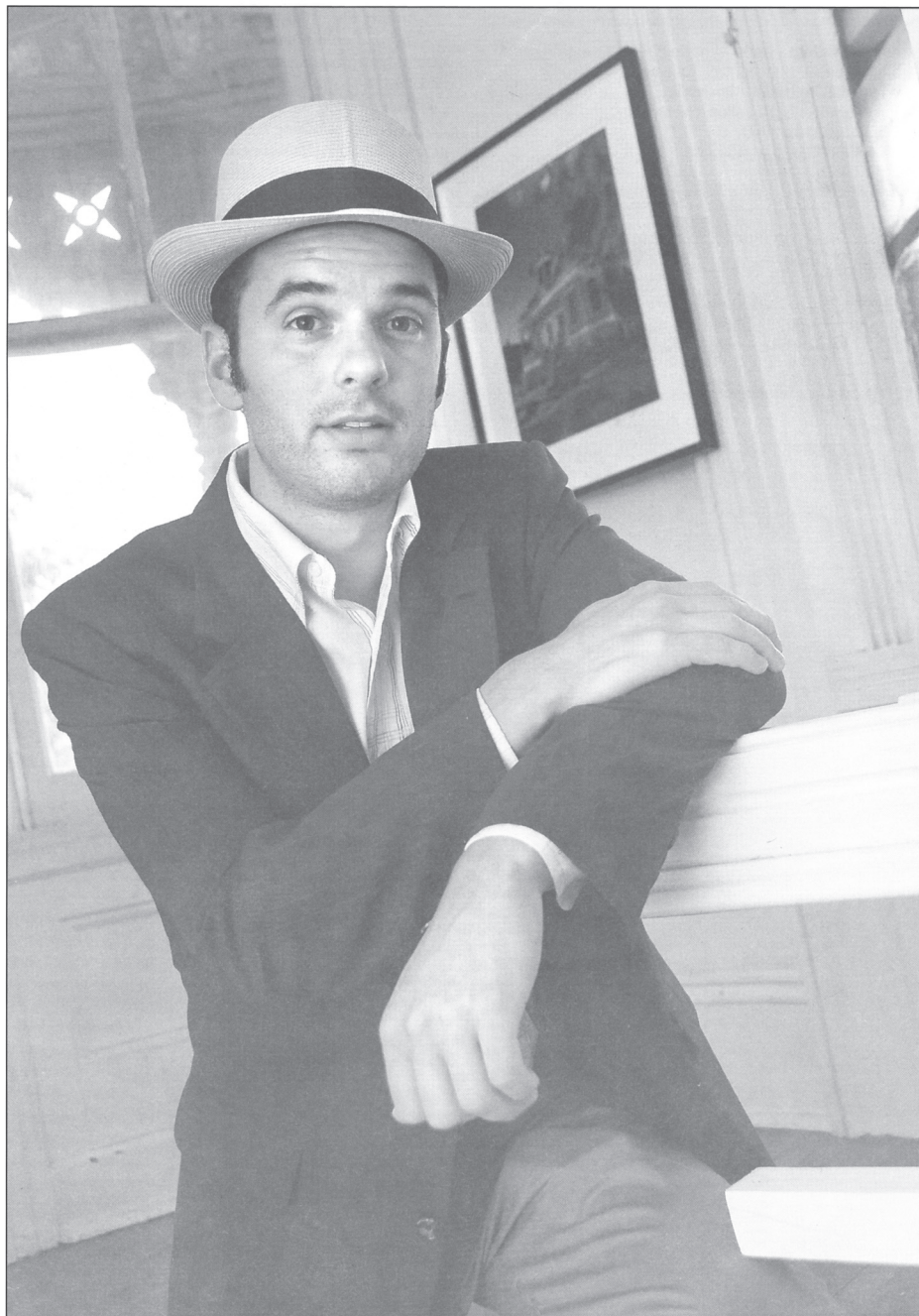


PHOTO BY FRANK RELLE

Photographer Frank Relle's pictures of pre- and post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans have been added to permanent additions at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.