

# French Quarter

By JACKSON SELLERS

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YOSHI and I had not visited New Orleans in 13 years. As we did in 1997, we stayed in the French Quarter, but this time at the Royal Orleans, a pricier hotel just a block from Bourbon Street and two blocks from Jackson Square. The Omni chain has stuck its prefix onto this hotel, but I refuse to use it. I did the same when I wrote about Boston's "Omni" Parker House. I'm consistently stubborn. We had Royal Orleans reservations five years ago, on our way to Boston, but the destructive Katrina hurricane wiped out that trip – an agate footnote to the suffering of New Orleans. This year's Gulf oil spill was worrisome. Coastal oyster beds were damaged to a degree. Puny bivalves were being harvested in deeper waters farther out. On the first morning, while I ate Eggs Benedict in the hotel's dining room overlooking Royal Street, I read *The Times-Picayune's* Page One "After the Spill" feature. The headline was "Oyster Company Still on Ice." P&J Oyster Co., the major supplier of quality oysters at major New Orleans restaurants, was damned near out of business. In desperation, P&J was arranging to import oysters from Texas, a few weeks away. We ate the tiny oysters available but quickly gave them up. We were accustomed to Japan's fat, succulent oysters, and lesser ones in New Orleans would not do. Instead, we ate New England lobsters at Dickie Brennan's Steakhouse on Iberville Street, fried



stuff at Deanie's Seafood just up the street, and Creole cuisine at The Court of Two Sisters on Royal. As usual, Yoshi was mistaken for Yoko Ono, John Lennon's widow. We were approached a couple of times and heard comments as we strolled crowded Bourbon Street. California-like smoking bans were enforced now, with one nice exception. Bars serving no food could place ashtrays at every stool and table seat. But the Touché bar, tucked into the Royal Street side of our hotel, took the exception a step further. There, one could drink, smoke *and* eat from the

Royal Orleans kitchen. I don't know how they got away with it. Above, Yoshi and I pose at the Touché bar. Below, Major General Andrew Jackson's equestrian statue still dominates Jackson Square in front of St Louis Cathedral. Near the end of the three-year War of 1812, Jackson's 5,000 American troops decisively defeated an invading British force of 7,500 in the Battle of New Orleans. "Old Hickory" – tough as the wood of a hickory tree, it was said – was now a national hero. He rode the victory into two terms as the 7th President of the United States.

