

## A Family Business

An Interview with Frank Monteleone, Co-Owner, Hotel Monteleone

**EDITORS' NOTE** Frank Monteleone is a dynamic actor, producer, and entrepreneur. Alongside his body of work in mainstream Hollywood, Monteleone is a distinguished producer of independent films through his production company, Full Armor Films, as well as a family member and partial co-owner of the legendary luxury Hotel Monteleone in the French Quarter of New Orleans.



Frank Monteleone

Monteleone's notable acting credits include the Warner Bros.

feature film *Focus*, where he shared the screen with Will Smith, the *Marvel* series *Cloak & Dagger*, and the compelling legal drama *Bull* on CBS. His versatility is evident in a spectrum of roles, from the brooding drama of *The Secrets We Keep* to the intense *Lonewolf: Manhunt* on CBS, as well as a recurring role on OWN's highly acclaimed *Queen Sugar*. In 2022, he also graced the screen alongside Terrence Howard and Malcolm McDowell in the period drama *The Walk*.

Beyond his acting talent, Monteleone boasts a remarkable 17-year journey as a creative producer. His production career took root in Off-Broadway theater, and in 2005, he founded Full Armor Films, a dynamic development and production company based in New Orleans. Full Armor Films has provided production services to esteemed clients like ESPN, Geffen Records, and L'Oréal, along with post-production services for industry giants like Warner Bros. and Relativity Media. Monteleone has elevated Full Armor Films into a burgeoning development hub dedicated to film and television. His co-creation and production of the series *AVENUES*, licensed by Lionsgate and currently available on Tubi, stands as a testament to his creative vision. Notable projects also include the award-winning documentary *Hotel AI*, which aired on PBS, and the recently released feature film *American Reject*, featuring talents such as Annaleigh Ashford, Billy Ray Cyrus, and his wife, Kathleen Elizabeth Monteleone. Presently, Monteleone is executive producing the films *Barron's Cove*, starring Brittany Snow and Garrett Hedlund; *Fog of War*, starring Mira Sorvino and John Cusack; and is in production for one of the only Louisiana-based independent films to obtain a SAG-AFTRA interim agreement during the strike titled, *Average Joe*.

Simultaneously, he is leading the charge in establishing a multifaceted studio and production facility in the heart of New Orleans, partnering with industry stalwarts Wolper Organization and Keller Williams. Monteleone hopes to continue to stimulate the New Orleans economy by keeping production in New Orleans, as well as attracting other independent filmmakers to the burgeoning local creative community by lowering the bar for entry, including campaigning for tax credits. He is at the helm

of working with the city to develop a property to include a school, training facility for film, operational studio, and sound stages run by students.

Monteleone is a member of the largest and last of the great family-owned hotels in America, the Hotel Monteleone, which has been featured in numerous films and TV shows and has set the scene for countless literary works from authors such as Ernest Hemingway, Tennessee Williams, and William Faulkner. Combining his love for

both hotel and filmmaking, Full Armor Films is currently in development for a project surrounding the hotel.

Balancing his creative endeavors, Monteleone divides his time between New York and New Orleans, where he resides with his wife, Kathleen, an actress and writer with whom he runs their production company, and four children.

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Known as the grand dame of Royal Street, Hotel Monteleone ([hotelmonteleone.com](http://hotelmonteleone.com)) is one of the last great family-owned and operated hotels in New Orleans. Since 1886, five generations of Monteleones have dedicated themselves to making their hotel what it was, and still is – a sparkling jewel in the heart of the French Quarter. With over a century of history, Hotel Monteleone has earned numerous awards and prestige through dedicated service and a commitment to comfort. This historic hotel is an official literary landmark designated by the Friends of the Library Association and is a member of the Historic Hotels of America, the Preferred Hotel Group, and Associated Luxury Hotels International.



The entrance of Hotel Monteleone in New Orleans





Acqua Bella Pool Bar

**Will you discuss the history and heritage of Hotel Monteleone?**

Hotel Monteleone is one of the last great family-owned and operated hotels in America today. It's a historic and iconic luxury hotel located in the heart of the French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana, and its history dates back to 1886 when my great-great-grandfather, Antonio Monteleone, an Italian immigrant, purchased the Commercial Hotel on Royal Street. He was a well-known shoe cobbler in that era and he took a risk in buying a new business in a different field. Over the years, the hotel underwent several expansions and renovations, transforming it into the elegant establishment it is today. Through it all – five generations, in fact – the hotel has been looked after by my family.

One of the most notable features of Hotel Monteleone is our Carousel Bar, which was installed in 1949 by my great-grandfather, Frank Monteleone, and which *Vogue* once named one of “the world’s most iconic bars.” The Carousel Bar is a rotating bar off the hotel’s lobby that slowly revolves, offering a unique and memorable drinking experience. Over the years, it has become a very popular attraction.

One of my favorite aspects is the hotel’s rich literary history, having hosted numerous famous writers and literary figures over the years. The hotel is even mentioned in several literary works, further solidifying its place in the cultural history of our city. The Carousel Bar, in particular, was a favorite haunt of authors such as Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner, and Truman Capote, with Tennessee Williams known to remark that the French Quarter begins in the lobby of Hotel Monteleone. In 2011, Hotel Monteleone was designated a literary landmark by the Friends of the Library Association,

recognizing its significant contribution to the literary culture of New Orleans.

As a family, we are proud that Hotel Monteleone continues to be a beloved landmark for guests and locals alike.

**How do you balance keeping some of the history and traditions of the hotel with the need to offer a modern and current feel?**

One of the biggest things I admire about my family and its history with Hotel Monteleone is that each generation has poured attention into and invested in the family business, as well as the surrounding French

Quarter. Every generation has witnessed the ebb and flow of history, including WWI and WWII, the Great Depression, and, of course, the recent pandemic, which closed our doors for the first time in history. Despite the various struggles and social and cultural changes, the hotel has persevered and maintained its reputation for luxury and hospitality, and that really comes down to my family’s commitment and care. To that end, we just completed a full renovation to our Iberville Tower as well as the Iberville Ballroom, bringing the most up-to-date luxury finishes and amenities to our rooms and facilities. These upgrades will enhance our guests’ experiences for years to come.

**Will you provide an overview of the suite product at Hotel Monteleone, and do you see the suite offering as a differentiator for the hotel?**

The suites at Hotel Monteleone typically feature spacious and well-appointed accommodations with upscale furnishings and amenities. Guests staying in suites often enjoy additional perks such as separate living areas, upgraded toiletries, and personalized services. The hotel takes pride in providing a high level of comfort and luxury to enhance the overall guest experience.

The suite offering at Hotel Monteleone is definitely a differentiator for the hotel. In a city known for its rich history and vibrant culture, having well-designed and comfortable suites adds an extra layer of allure. Our suites cater to discerning travelers who seek a more exclusive and indulgent stay.

To expand on the Iberville Tower renovations I mentioned, these new rooms offer a new generation of luxury for our guests, featuring technology such as electric mirrors and smart lighting plus detailed millwork, calming artwork,



Hotel Monteleone’s renowned Carousel Bar





*Living room of the William Faulkner Suite*

and spacious marble bathrooms with Rain Head shower heads. The experience is elevated by grand vanities and parlors, with twice daily housekeeping and a New Orleans-themed welcome amenity.

On top of it all, the hotel has become a place for memorable occasions. I can't tell you how often someone says they had parents, friends, or relatives who were married or hosted events or had romantic getaways at Hotel Monteleone. Its historic charm, central location, and upscale accommodations position the hotel as a standout choice for those looking for a unique and memorable stay in New Orleans.

**How has Hotel Monteleone approached its restaurant/food and beverage offerings?**

Aside from the Carousel Bar, we also feature Criollo Restaurant, which showcases the diverse flavors and traditions of New Orleans cuisine. Key aspects include culinary tradition with a modern twist, locally sourced ingredients, creative menu selection, crafted beverage selection and an elevated dining experience. Exclusively at Criollo Restaurant, we also offer Le Petit Chef, an immersive dining experience for the whole family. Along with a seasonal five-course meal, diners can enjoy the cinematic 3D storytelling of TableMation™ Studios, which guides guests through every delicious course in unison with Criollo's staff.

**Will you discuss Hotel Monteleone's focus on offering personalized service and a customized guest experience?**

A special and unique attribute of Hotel Monteleone is the family we have created with our staff. It is not uncommon to meet staff that have worked at the hotel for 30 years or more; in fact, my production company produced

*Hotel Al*, a short documentary about Al Barras, a doorman at the hotel for over 55 years and a true New Orleans character if there ever was one.

As a family-owned business, it's our firm belief that when you're with us you are part of the family. With the hotel's historic charm and elegance, it is renowned for offering guests a personalized and intimate experience. The staff often goes the extra mile to make guests feel welcome and attended to, and the concierge offers attentive services to assist guests with various aspects of their stay, including recommendations for local attractions, dining, and entertainment. We aim to provide a range of accommodations to suit different guests' preferences, and for guests celebrating special occasions such as anniversaries or weddings, the hotel offers amenities and packages to make these moments memorable. Returning guests who have come to know and love the Hotel Monteleone find that the staff recognizes and remembers them, and that we place a high degree of importance on their preferences, personalized amenities, and making them feel welcome.

**You founded a production company, Full Armor Films. What was your vision for founding the company and how do you define its mission?**

Full Armor Films was founded out of necessity – I needed a job after graduating college and I had an overwhelming love for movies. I was willing to do anything to see that dream become a reality, so I took out a business loan to secure the equipment I needed and became a one-man production company and crew. That was the beginning of it all.

Eventually I met the owner of a PR agency, which led to commercial work. My first pitch to commercial clients was, "Begin with creativity, end with originality." After moving from commercial work to post-production, we had scaled up to 40 employees and I made the move to development. That is where the real vision for Full Armor Films crystallized: to celebrate unique voices and create projects with the potential to unlock the human heart. We shifted our focus to partnering with artists we knew we could trust and finding collaborations we could build on.

Over time, we set our sights on New Orleans, my family home, as our main production hub after working mainly in New York and Los Angeles. I guess you could say that we wanted to create a "bayou-coastal" company, and we aim to do that by disrupting the entertainment map and re-centering it at the mouth of the Mississippi River.

**Will you highlight some of the work of Full Armor Films?**

Since shifting our focus primarily to development and relocating to New Orleans, we released our first original feature film with 1091 Pictures, *American Reject*, which can be found on Apple, Amazon, and all major digital platforms. Written by and starring my wife, Kathleen Elizabeth Monteleone, and co-starring Billy Ray Cyrus, Annaleigh Ashford and Keala Settle, the film is a big-hearted music comedy inspired by Kathleen's true story as a singing reality show hopeful.

We also worked with Lionsgate Television on a series, *AVENUES*, and the pilot can be found on Tubi. Currently, we're working on a new series set in New Orleans; we have assembled a fantastic team and we're eager to announce more details about that soon. Finally, we're in active development on two more feature films.

**What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?**

I like to give two pieces of advice. The first is: Put yourself to work. Even when you're working on something else or for someone else, work on yourself as much as you can. Read, study, and improve your skills related to the areas of focus you want to master. Be a career student and know that you can always get better.

I also like to tell people that relationships will become your most important asset. In many ways, achieving your goals is less about how you did it than who you did it with. If you're in a class, look to your left and right because chances are these will be the people you will be working with and encountering in years to come. It's important to value and improve yourself, but in the end, it will be about the people around you whom you serve and help because those relationships will ultimately determine how far you go. I have been fortunate to learn from some of the most successful people I've encountered that folks at the top are typically generous people who never stop valuing the relationships that got them there. ●