

WRITE STUFF Author Alyson Noël at home



Home Grown

Orange County serves as the setting for bestselling author Alyson Noël and her popular works of fiction. | By Aisha Gomez | Photography by Duncan Struett |

Chances are, we're going to start hearing a lot more about Alyson Noël. The Laguna Niguel resident is not only a successful author (she has several *New York Times* bestsellers), but she's also a bit of a Hollywood darling, penning deals for her young adult novels—the *Immortals* and *Riley Bloom* series—with Summit Entertainment (you know, the company behind the blockbuster *Twilight* films). Her chick-lit novel, *Fly Me to the Moon*, was optioned by Ridley Scott's production company and now has famed director Sharon Maguire (*Bridget Jones's Diary*) attached to the project. And that's not to mention her latest publishing deal: a multimillion-dollar contract for a new book series, *Soul Seekers*, debuting in 2012.

Although she spends a fair amount of time with her head in the clouds (dreaming up her next hit, no doubt), Noël and her stories remain firmly rooted in Orange County. Here the admitted vampire-phile shares her favorite area haunts.

You write a lot about teens and young adults. How are you still a kid at heart? Despite the number of birthdays piling up behind me, I never really feel like an adult. I always feel more like a kid who somehow ended up with a husband, a mortgage and credit cards.

You grew up in Yorba Linda. What's your favorite childhood memory? Riding horses with my friends after school was the best. We would race home, dump our books, hop on our horses and meet in the lakebed where we'd have great adventures until the sun went down and it was time to head home. Those were truly good times!

Several of your books take place in Orange County. Why is it such a great backdrop for your novels? Aside from being a great place to live, I love the dichotomy of coastal Orange County. I love how, on the surface, it appears to be this perfect, pristine place of stunning beaches and upscale shopping—but inside all of those beautiful homes are real people, living real lives, facing real struggles. Those struggles are what interest me. That's where the story lives.

Who would you love to see play your lead character, Hailey Lane, in the movie version of *Fly Me to the Moon*? I hate to admit it, but I'm really bad at this game. I see the characters so clearly in my head while I'm writing that it makes it impossible for me to replace them with real people. But, with Sharon Maguire directing, I've no doubt she'll surprise me in a good way—I loved what she did with *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Favorite O.C. restaurants? Vine in San Clemente; Stone Hill Tavern at The St. Regis Monarch Beach; Studio at the Montage Laguna Beach resort; Izakaya Wasa Sushi at the Irvine Spectrum; The Original Pancake House in Yorba Linda; and Marché Moderne, AnQi and Charlie Palmer, which are all at South Coast Plaza.

Coffee, tea or cocktails—and where do you like to get it? A glass of Champagne at the Montage resort lobby bar at sunset is a favorite way to celebrate.

Favorite place to shop in Orange County? South Coast Plaza—it has everything!

Guilty pleasure? Watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reruns while eating Golden Spoon frozen yogurt.

Cooler thing that ever happened to you as a writer? Meeting Judy Blume in person and getting to tell her that her books inspired me to be a writer. She's been an idol of mine since I was a kid, and she was just as kind, gracious and warm as I hoped she would be. ■