

# Getting Inked



COURTESY OF JOY RUMORE

By Elizabeth Anderson

## Cat lovers show their permanent affection for cats.

Serious cat lovers are constantly looking for new ways to display their affection. Photos, T-shirts and jewelry continue to be popular choices. But perhaps the ultimate homage is something more permanent — a cat tattoo.

With reality television shows like “Miami Ink” and “LA Ink” currently broadcasting into homes across the nation, tattoos are getting some new exposure. But tattoos — especially those of big cats — have been around for ages. “Black panthers have been a staple of traditional tattoo design since the early days of modern tattooing,” says Joy Rumore, who owns Twelve 28 Tattoo in Brooklyn, N.Y. “Many sailors adorned themselves with this kind of imagery, and many people today still come in to get panther tattoos.”

Michelle Myles, who co-owns Fun City Tattoos and Daredevil Tattoo, both in New York City, concurs. “In the tattoo world, big cat tattoos are timeless and have a very broad appeal, especially panthers and tigers.” She adds that lions often are requested as the Leo symbol.

Michael Rush of Fort Polk, La., with three tiger tattoos, can relate. “I have always felt a close relationship to cats,” Rush says. “They are both extremely beautiful and graceful, yet they can also be ferocious and dangerous.”

What makes someone get a tattoo in the first

place? According to Bob Baxter, editor of “Skin & Ink” magazine, the reasons vary. “Some people do it to be trendy and fashionable, others to declare their independent natures,” he says. “Some are tattooed as part of tribal traditions. Some do it to defy authority. The short answer (and the most poetic) is ‘To show on the outside what is in the inside.’”

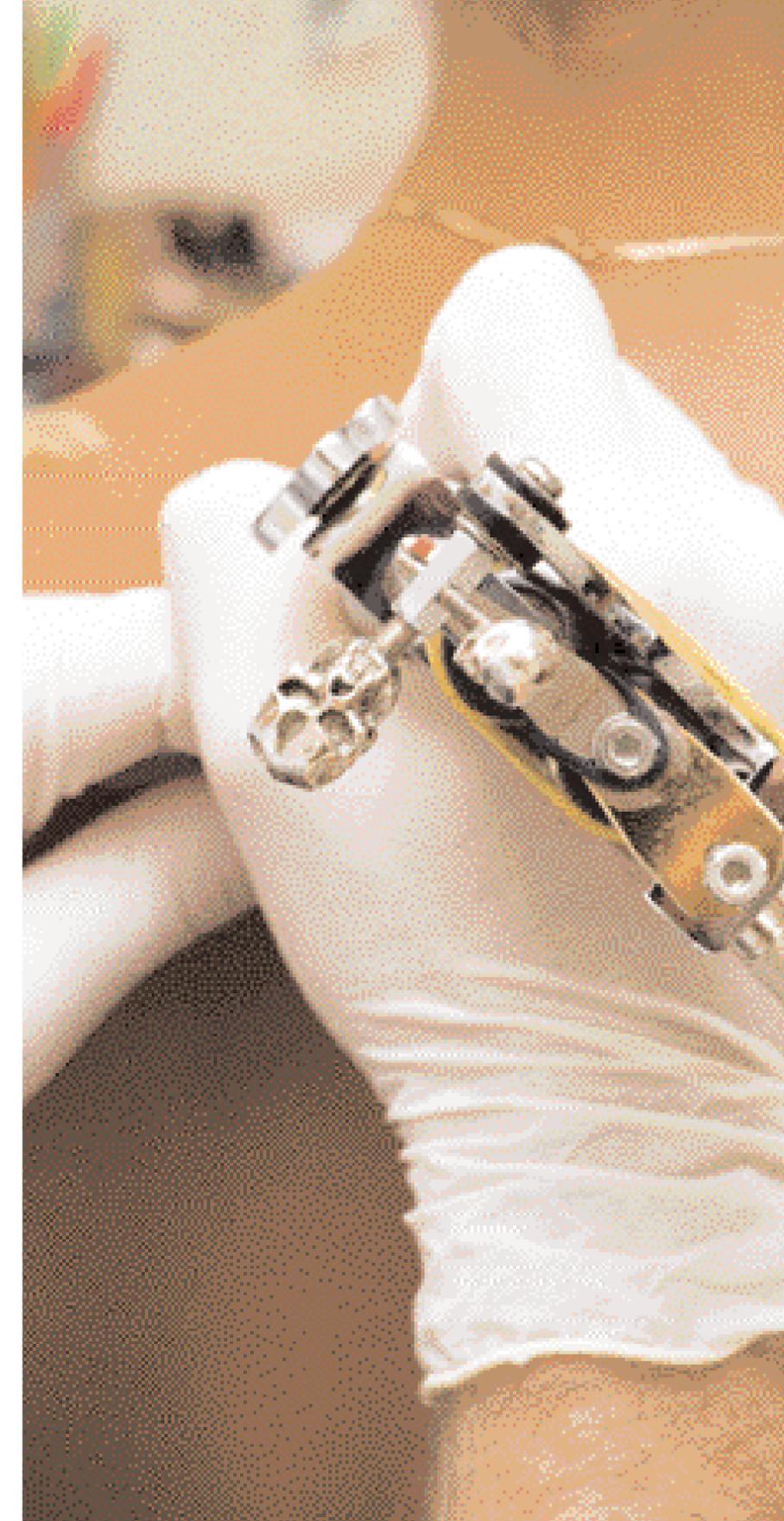
### PERMANENT PORTRAITS

Rumore has many clients who request highly personal cat tattoos. “Domestic cat portraits, for both living pets and those who’ve passed away are a good portion of my business,” she says. “I tattooed a friend’s dog on her leg a couple years ago and that sparked a multitude of customers asking for pet portraits. I’ve kind of become the pet portrait lady!”

Some people find tattoos are like that proverbial potato chip — they can’t stop with just one. Cat owner Vicki Gail from Agoura, Calif., has around 20 tattoos, five of which are cat related: two of actual cats and three of her cats’ names spelled in hieroglyphics on her back.

Along with both jungle and urban jungle cats, animated felines are common, too. The Cheshire Cat from Alice in Wonderland is a popular choice. Samantha Whitmer of Ventura, Calif., in fact, considered it just the tattoo to get her started. “I intend to get all of the Alice in Wonderland characters tattooed on me one day,”

Joy Rumore (top) tattooed a friend’s dog on her leg a couple years ago, which prompted so many clients that she’s “kind of become the pet portrait lady.”



### CatChannel Exclusive:

#### Considering a Cat Tattoo?

Whether your first tat is of a cat or something else, tattoo artist and parlor owner Joy Rumore offers helpful tips on [www.catchannel.com](http://www.catchannel.com).

Right: Michelle Myles has done many cat tattoos, including this one of a client and his cat that inspired the tat.

Below: Val Spaulding-Harvey and daughter Kc Randall have matching tattoos to signify their bond with each other and their love of cats. It's Kc's first tattoo and Val's 10th.

COURTESY OF MICHELLE MYLES



COURTESY OF VICKI GAIL



Counterclockwise from left: Vicki Gail has a version of the feline Baby Phat fashion company logo. Michelle Myles' cat tattoo portfolio includes a cat stretching ankle tattoo. Joy Rumore and one of her clients corresponded for about a year to create a large, full-body portrait of her kitty, Amber, who had passed away. The client flew to New York City from Chicago to get the piece done and now has her sweet calico with her always.

COURTESY OF MICHELLE MYLES



COURTESY OF JOY RUMORE



COURTESY OF VAL SPAULDING-HARVEY

Whitmer says. "The Cheshire Cat was just the first because he is my favorite character."

A less common idea is matching mother and daughter tats. Val Spaulding-Harvey and daughter Kc Randall have tattoos on opposite shoulder blades so that, when they're side by side, the cats are looking at each other. The cats might look a little familiar — Harvey describes them as custom-drawn Cheshire Cats with an evil twist.

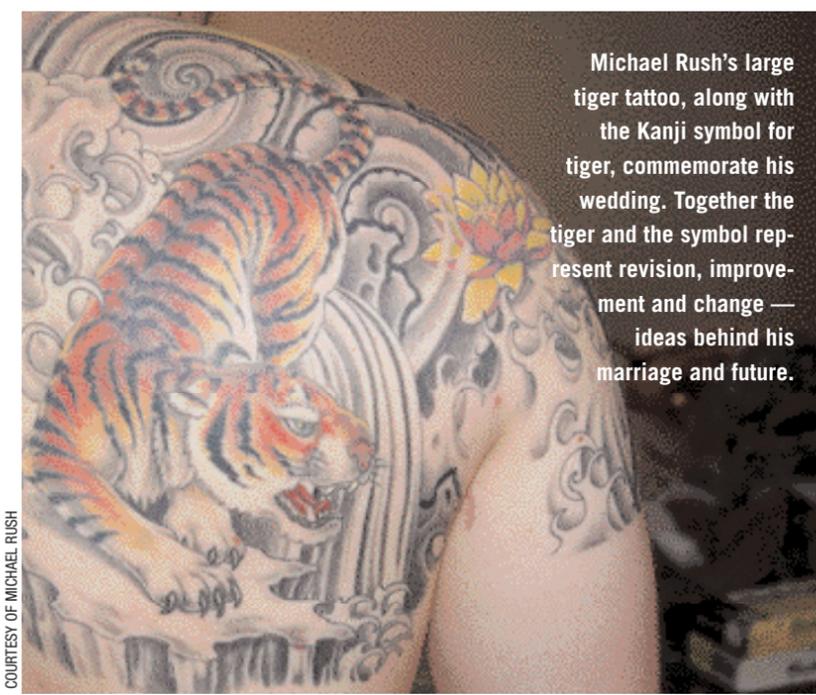
The reason behind getting them, however, was hardly evil. "It was something to bond us and make us closer," Glendale, Ariz., resident Harvey says. "Both my daughter and I love our three cats, and we wanted to get a tattoo together of something that meant something special to us — kitties."

**IN MEMORY OF ...**

Getting a tattoo in memoriam is common, and those tattoo images vary quite a bit. In fact, Randy Mastronicola's cat tattoo on his forearm isn't a picture of his cat, but instead his cat's name in Chinese letters. "I lost my beloved Murray after 16 years. We had a deep relationship, and I miss him every day," the Norco, Calif., resident says. "I wanted to honor his memory and have a special reminder."

Rush got his first cat tattoo when he was 19. "I was moving away to college, and my grandmother had died a short while earlier," he says. "I wanted something that would signify both events. Then I found a watercolor picture that my grandmother had painted. It was a strong portrait of a white tiger. I felt that it was perfect."

COURTESY OF MICHAEL RUSH



Michael Rush's large tiger tattoo, along with the Kanji symbol for tiger, commemorate his wedding. Together the tiger and the symbol represent revision, improvement and change — ideas behind his marriage and future.

Austin resident and cat owner Jennifer Chickowski, too, got her first cat tattoo to commemorate a life milestone. "I decided I wanted to do something special for my 18th birthday," Chickowski says. "I knew I wanted a cat tattoo. I have always loved cats, grew up with cats and had cats of my own."

**SHIFT IN ATTITUDE**

Cynthia Wright, a tattoo artist of eight years with CM Hurt Studios in Garden Grove, Calif., says the tattoo-shop reality shows haven't done much to change her clientele, which always ran the gamut. "Stereotypes no longer apply," she says. "One day, I am inking a 60-year-old grandmother getting her first, and the next it is an 18-year-old getting the first one."

Rumore has seen more of a difference in her clients' attitudes. "I think the stigma has been lifted enough that there are more of these conservative people being open about getting tattooed," Rumore says. "Instead of people coming in and getting a tattoo of their beloved pet in a place where it would not be seen in daily life, they have been more proud and willing to share

their artwork and stories about their pets with the public."

Rumore also has experienced some stigma changes first-hand. "Before the intense mainstreaming and publicizing of tattooing began, I had many more negative responses to my appearance and profession," she says, especially when clients learned she not only finished high school but also has a bachelor's degree in anthropology. "Now, people tend to be inquisitive rather than disapproving."

For people who aren't sure what tattoo they want or don't have a custom design in mind, they can look at flash — artwork the artist has done to get ideas.

"Now that I have opened my own shop, I run it completely custom," Rumore says. "I draw each tattoo for the customers to their specifications. I take a deposit for the custom piece, do a rough sketch, and go back and forth with the clients until it is exactly what they are looking for."

Whether someone comes in knowing exactly what type of cat tattoo they want or not, it seems the world of cat tattoos is as limitless as the world of felines that inspire them. ○

*Elizabeth Anderson is based in Orange County, Calif., and frequently writes about pet-related topics. She currently is pondering getting her first tattoo.*