

The Sisters Behind The Cochrane House Serve Hospitality

The Detroit inn offers great food and Detroit-centric interiors in a historic mansion

By **Rachael Thomas** and **Photographs by Hayden Stinebaugh** - July 19, 2022





The staircase on the first floor of The Cochrane House — which is not original to the home, as many guests believe — is a modern touch in the rooms at the bed-and-breakfast.

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hen I arrived at The Cochrane House Luxury Historic Inn in Detroit’s Brush Park neighborhood, I found a pleasant mini-staycation after only taking a few steps into the bed-and-breakfast.

Co-owners, innkeepers, and sisters Roderica “Rica” James and Francina “Cina” James transformed a Detroit home into a perfect getaway that is both airy and bright yet still cozy and intimate. Their goal was to create a space that is welcoming and uplifting, evident in elements of The Cochrane House like the artwork and decor featuring nods to the city, the homestyle breakfasts they serve their guests, and even the names of the rooms.

“When we invite people in, this is what we feel like we’re giving them: an authentic Detroit experience,”





Innkeepers, co-owners, and sisters Roderica (left) and Francina James.

Roderica and Francina opened The Cochrane House's doors in 2018, eight years after Roderica purchased several years of renovations. The mansion was built in 1870 and was occupied soon after by Lyman Cochrane, a superior court judge in Detroit and whom the home is named after.

Located on Winder Street just northwest of downtown, The Cochrane House is a short drive, or even walk, to many city attractions. From the window in my room, I could see Comerica Park and Ford Field, which are both less than a mile away. Head west down Winder, and you're on Woodward Avenue, right across the street from Little Caesars Arena.

"We came together and we did it," Roderica, 43, says of opening the bed-and-breakfast, adding that she and Francina started the business when the economy was still recovering from the Great Recession and Detroit wasn't as much of a tourist destination as it is now. The sisters have been close their entire lives, and the debut of their business, she says, was all in God's timing.

The duo had no previous experience in hospitality prior to opening The Cochrane House. Both sisters worked in real estate in company and owned real estate in Michigan and Georgia, where Roderica lived for about nine years. Roderica is a former student intervention specialist for Oak Park Schools and Francina is a licensed attorney.

"When we opened up, we were very intentional," Francina, 44, says. "We wanted to represent Detroit."



As guests make their way to the stairs, they're welcomed by this vibrant mural by local artist Desiree Kelly.

When the James sisters began renovations on the mansion — “The house was gutted,” Roderica recalls — down the walls of the first floor’s original five rooms to create one large, open-concept room.

Jazz, R&B, and soul music by artists like John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Eric Roberson, and Robert Glasper through speakers. A lounge area near the entrance features two sofas, two ottomans, and a wooden coffee table where guests can sit to chat, read, or play one of the provided board games. On a table by the large bay window (where guests in need of a refresher) can find a binder filled with pamphlets and flyers explaining different things about the neighborhood. In the gift shop at the check-in area, guests can browse the inn’s merchandise and items by local makers, such as a collage by artist Desiree Kelly and pillows and tea towels from textile printing house Scarlet Crane.

Toward the middle of the first floor is a long dining table followed by the kitchen located at the back of the house where the sisters whip up breakfast each morning. Guests order their breakfast on the inn’s website by scanning a QR code.

“We decided that we wanted to keep everything kind of homestyle,” Francina says. For my breakfast, I eat turkey bacon from Randy’s Sausage at Eastern Market, scrambled egg whites, pan-fried homestyle potatoes. “It was kind of like how our grandparents did [it]; they [would make us] a big breakfast,” she adds.

But it was the artwork and decor that I found myself gravitating toward. The sisters filled the first floor with their own furniture and other furnishings they had in their previous homes over the years as well as items that belonged to family members.

“We want ourselves to be represented; we want this place to represent what we saw as children,” Roderica says. “So, you see [an Annie Lee painting] on the kitchen wall because my mom had Annie Lee in the house.”

present through works that the sisters commissioned for The Cochrane House. A large, colorful mural de Reese and Stevie Wonder by Kelly greets you at the top of the staircase. And fedoras featuring hand-pair and the Tigers, by Florida-based artist Melissa Charyse of Mass Creatvty are displayed on the wall by the works by Black artists from around the country such as Kehinde Wiley, Fahamu Pecou, Tawny Chatman, i room.

The second floor houses the inn's lodging. The names of the rooms — The Melodic Room, The Jazz Fusion Lounge Suite — were inspired by Paradise Valley, a former entertainment and business district in the city businesses. The Melodic and Jazz Fusion rooms are each 250 square feet with a queen-size bed and a fre Jazz Fusion Room has a private balcony. The Rhythm Section Lounge Suite, where I stayed, is a 600-sq bed, a steam shower, and a separate living room with a sofa, TV, and plenty of natural light thanks to the

"I want them to feel comfort; I want them to feel at home," Francina says of her hopes for their guests. I anything, like an extra toothbrush and more towels or even essential oils for their steam shower, Roderic away, as they live on the third floor of The Cochrane House.

The Jazz Fusion Room features a queen-size bed and a private balcony.

Exposed brick, three-dimensional artwork iconography are just a few elements.

The Cochrane House is more than a traditional bed-and-breakfast; the James sisters go above and beyor an unforgettable one. They offer private-chef dining, photography services, and spa packages. The duo h anniversary, birthday, and engagement celebrations. The Cochrane House can be rented out for private e people. A winter wedding was held in 2019, and Roderica and Francina put it together entirely themselve a Christmas tree by the bay windows). You can even have your car washed and detailed during your stay business the sisters work with.

"One of our most popular packages is our romantic celebration package," Francina says. "We decorate th chocolate-covered strawberries, balloons. All guests have to do is just show up, bring their significant otl during our interview, Marvin Powell, who owns The Chocolate Experience and serves as The Cochrane Hc by to drop off some chocolate-covered strawberries.

And it's not uncommon for the bed-and-breakfast to host people from across the country — and even th

Francisco, Seattle, Alaska, Germany, Hong Kong, and other locales have lodged at the inn. During my stay, I was staying the night and catching a Tigers game (which unfortunately got rained out) before returning home on my trip in the U.S.

“It’s been amazing. I’m always surprised to see how many people we get,” says Francina, who credits much of their success. They must be doing something right — even celebrities and public figures like rapper and U.S. Sen. Cory Booker have stayed there. “We didn’t know it was *the* Cory Booker until his security showed up,” she says. “It was so funny.”

No matter who you are — a notable politician visiting the city, a local teacher in need of some much-desired romantic getaway, or a group hosting an event — we’re confident you’ll be taken care of at The Cochrane House.

Rates start at \$255. *The Cochrane House Luxury Historic Inn, 216 Winder St., Detroit; 313-230-0398; [the-cochrane-house.com](#)*

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