



BRUSH PARK

# The Detroit sisters behind the historic Cochrane Inn

*Roderica and Francina James pounced on a real estate opportunity—and made a successful bed and breakfast*

By **Cynthia Lee** | Jul 10, 2019, 3:39pm EDT

Roderica and Francina James

| Photos by **Curbed** | Entering the [Cochrane House Luxury Historic Inn](#), you can't help but feel a sense of calm.

Scents of brown sugar, jasmine, and coconut emanate from soy candles. The neutral colors, elegant art pieces, and lavish furniture make you feel as if you walked straight into a luxury home magazine. There are wine and cheese hours, bath products, and, of course, breakfast served every morning.

This luxury bed and breakfast experience takes place in a historic Brush Park home, bought by two lifelong Detroiters at a time when few people were investing in Detroit real estate. Owners and sisters Roderica and Francina James purchased the seven-bedroom home nearly ten years ago, just before the downtown development boom, for \$85,000.

The Cochrane Historic Inn on Winder Street was built in the Italianate style, which emphasizes symmetry and prominent bracketed windows. There are only a handful of examples of the style in the city. It was erected in 1870 for Dr. John Terry, a Detroit eye doctor who lived in the mansion only for one year before Lyman Cochrane purchased it in 1871.

In the beginning, the sisters thought about creating a children's center in the home. But given the location and zoning regulations, they ultimately decided to do a bed and breakfast. Roderica thought it was a great way to combine their passions. "We like hospitality, we like design, we like homes, so it was one of the ways we could really bridge that gap," she says.

Roderica James did the interior design herself. There's a consistent, neutral color scheme

that accentuates the wood and exposed brick, as well as a number of modern flourishes. “Older houses are usually very compartmentalized,” Roderica James says. “For this space, we wanted to open it up to create a family feel when people come in.”



The Lyman Cochrane House | Wikimedia Commons



They made it imperative to add personal touches to their home design as well. “I wanted to include African art to bring our culture in the space.”

There are three rooms available to guests—two smaller ones and a suite with a downtown view—with prices starting at \$255 per night. And it’s evidently worth the price: The Cochrane Inn has an average rating of five stars on Google with only one four star review.

Real estate is nothing new to the sisters—perhaps that’s why their timing was so good. Their grandfather was always fixing up the family home and stressing the importance of owning property.

For the sisters, being a family is an asset; their strong relationship makes it work. “My sister and I, we work well together because we know each other and it’s easier for us to make up if



we have opinions about something or disagreements,” Francina James says.

A lot has changed since the Jameses bought the Cochrane House; it’s now much harder to get into real estate in Detroit. For example, another Brush Park bed and breakfast listed in May this year for \$4 million.



And it’s especially hard for Detroit residents, many of whom don’t have the resources to take advantage of the rising property values. “Once everything starts gentrifying, it makes it harder for people of color to get in,” says Roderica James, who adds that they were fortunate to get in early.

But it’s still possible to find affordable property in many parts of the city. And Detroiters are poised to recognize an opportunity before outside investors do. “We know our neighborhoods the best. You have to know where to look at before they get in those neighborhoods.”

Francina recommends staying ready. “Save your money, so when the opportunity comes, you are able to get it.”

Ultimately, being from Detroit is a huge advantage, especially when running a bed and breakfast. “We know Detroit,” Roderica James says. “That was one of the key elements we wanted to bring to guests. To give them a tour from someone from the city, and as Detroiters, we wanted to represent our city.”



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