

play SWEET DREAMS

The exterior of the Lee House B&B exudes 19th century charm (right). However, the interior is stylish, modern, and contemporary like the open kitchen with a cappuccino machine and an honor bar (below).



Urban Renewal

Like the mythical Phoenix, the Lee House Bed & Breakfast Inn has literally risen from the ashes to become a fashionable retreat in downtown Pensacola.

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In the heart of Pensacola's historic district, the Lee House Bed and Breakfast Inn adds modern sophistication to its storied neighborhood. The original Lee House, built in the 1860s, was home to William F. Lee, a Civil War veteran and jack of all trades who had his elegant home built on Gregory Street. In the 1960s the historic mansion was moved to a spacious corner lot at 400 Bayfront Parkway. The mansion's fate was sealed, however, by the one-two punch of a devastating fire in 2001, followed by a direct hit from Hurricane Ivan. A total loss, the Lee House was demolished.

Though the house was gone, its location was still a prime one, and in 2007, Norma Fleming Murray and her husband, Dr. Patrick Murray, bought the property, demolished another structure in the back of the lot, and began planning the reincarnation of Lee House.

A long-time Pensacola restaurateur, Norma always dreamed of owning her own bed and breakfast. With input from her daughters—who voted in

favor of large bathrooms and against ruffles—she began working with architect Scott Holland and designer Quinn Stinson to create a building that would appear historic on the outside, but decidedly modern and urban within.

The exterior of Lee House—which opened at the beginning of 2009—features wraparound porches on each of its two stories and looks like an elegant 19th-century mansion. Inside, visitors find a spacious gathering room which resembles the lobby of a boutique hotel, with comfortable seating groups, a modern fireplace, and large photo murals depicting old Pensacola. Shelves hold bottles, jugs, and pots uncovered in an archeological dig at the site.

The only other antique in the room is an 1868 Steinway baby grand piano whose ivories musically inclined guests enjoy tickling. The adjoining dining room hosts breakfast for guests as well as lunch conferences for local businesses. The walls feature stunning black and white photos by Norma's son-in-law, Tim Hubbard.



The wraparound porches are the perfect spot to begin or end a day in Pensacola's downtown (above). The sitting room on the first level (right) is more akin to a boutique hotel with the sleek furnishings and recessed lighting. The bathrooms (top, right) and suites (bottom, right) bring a new level of luxury to Northwest Florida.

The dramatic open kitchen is loaded with custom touches including a cappuccino machine, a guest refrigerator, and an honor bar. Planters overflowing with herbs—which Norma uses in sumptuous breakfasts—line the windows which overlook the inn's 1,600-square-foot courtyard.

The eight guest suites were decorated by local designers as part of the Wayne Dalton Symphony and Guild Showhouse fundraiser in December 2008. Nearly 1,000 visitors toured the inn and Norma says word of mouth apparently percolated as far away as New England judging by some of the Inn's far-flung reservations.

The guest suites—including a handicapped-accessible suite on the first floor—are eclectically decorated. The designers, given free rein, created stunning, sleek rooms which incorporate comfortable touches including spa robes, large bathrooms, and luxurious bedding. The flooring in the hall incorporates oak planks from a building on the original property. The second floor porches provide a spectacular view over Pensacola Bay on one side and a shady park on the other.

Guests enjoy a breakfast which may include some of Norma's signature dishes such as poppy seed bread and egg and ham strata, as well as grits, orange French toast, and fresh fruit. On the weekends, breakfast is served buffet style.

Within walking distance of most of Pensacola's historic downtown sites, a boat landing is located right across the street as some guests have begun arriving by water. To further enjoy tooling about town, a tandem bicycle is also available for guests who want a little one-on-one time away from their plush digs.

With its dramatic resurrection, the Lee House is poised to launch a new era in hospitality for Pensacola's historic waterfront, combining 21st century style and traditional warmth to create one unforgettable stay. ●



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