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Opinion

Big-time luxury with small-town charm

Everett & Jane Royal excel in old-fashioned southern hospitality

By **ROBERT M. WILLIAMS, JR.**

Looking for a great getaway weekend? Want good food, no traffic? Throw in golf or boating, or maybe fishing for the guys? How about spa treatment for the ladies or top-rate shopping or antique-browsing?



What if we said you could combine all of this with what could easily be the grandest hotel stay you've ever experienced? Got you curious? Where is this place?

The Cloister? Luxurious, certainly, and service unparalleled. Dining on the American plan and "dressing" for dinner isn't my preference, though. How about the Ritz-Carlton? White-glove treatment will have their trademark "My pleasure" playing over and over in your mind. But ... too stuffy.

Enough of the tease. You'll never guess where we found five-star accommodations and what may be the finest hotel stay we've ever enjoyed:

Madison, Georgia.

Two days with Georgia editors from around the state took us recently to the place various magazines have proclaimed "America's Number One Small Town" — and that all happened before the James Madison Inn opened its doors just three years ago.

Madison's fame stems largely from an abundance of antebellum homes gracing the narrow streets. That's thanks to the fact the town's mayor was an old acquaintance of General Sherman, who agreed, during that long unpleasantness back in the 1860's, to spare the town from torching on his march to the sea. A first look at the James Madison Inn may lead you to believe the building's origins date back decades but it rose recently from the dusty

span of a littered vacant lot in a not-so-attractive part of town. Thanks to an abundance of "fairy dust" sprinkled liberally around the area (I'll explain later), the Inn now looks out on a gracious public park and beyond to a city block of equally aged-looking, but brand new, retail shops.

Innkeepers Everett and Jane Royal stay on top of their investment — literally — in a magnificent 5,000+ square foot third floor penthouse that will rival anything, anywhere in tasteful decor. Their investment in Madison has drawn attention, and

the land hosts The James Madison Inn & Conference Center, which Everett operates and the Madison Markets, a shopping district located in a renovated group of turn-of-the-century cotton warehouses that Jane operates. Madison Markets has more than 20,000 square feet of shopping space and a collection of 75 antique dealers."

(Told you there had been a lot of "fairy dust.")

Being guests in the Royals' home was a treat but only icing after the pleasure of bedding down in one of their

feature "the cuddler" model wrapped in 600-count Egyptian sheets. And cuddle you, they do. It's an indescribable experience, like floating on a cloud: soft, soundless and sumptuous.

The room includes breakfast and you don't want to miss it: Home-made breakfast casserole accompanied by bacon or sausage, your choice of juices, pastries, fruit, yogurt and more round out an early-morning offering that can stave off any need for lunch. Convenient trays make it easy for a humble husband to treat his queen to breakfast in bed, if you're

like me and always needing extra brownie points.

Sharing the parking lot is Town 220, a top-quality restaurant and — hold your wallet — the Madison Markets antique mall. You may need to drop bread crumbs to find your way back from among dozens of antique-filled cubicles. Plan for time, it's no quick browse.

You'll be cheating yourself, though, if you spend all your time shopping. Madison's old homes, the cultural center and other attractions offer a full range of activities designed to suit most every taste. And, remember, the dawgs are playing only 30 minutes away.

Tell the Royals we sent you.

• Want to go? Visit www.jamesmadisoninn.com for more information or call Mary DiLetto, General Manager, at 706-342-7040.

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The James Madison Inn in Downtown Madison, Georgia manages to combine the warmth and hospitality of a bed-and-breakfast with the service and amenities you'd normally find in a grand resort hotel. Throw in the slow pace and friendliness of the community and it makes for a great place to visit.

awards. The Georgia Cities Foundation presented the couple their Renaissance award this summer. Here's why, according to the Foundation's website:

"In 2007, the Royals invest more than \$11 million to redevelop a large parcel in downtown Madison that included a historic gin, warehouse and vacant land. Today,

hotel's 19 large, comfy guest rooms. The rooms feature a comfortable sitting area, wide-screen tv, a mini-refrigerator for icy drinks or a gas-log fireplace for a cool autumn weekend.

What a bed! There's something about living 60 years that teaches appreciation for fine bedding. The inn's beds, all locally made right there at Madison's Georgia Sleep Shop,