

CASE STUDY

Dalhousie University Hospitality Brand System

A comprehensive brand architecture for Canada's leading maritime university dining program

CLIENT

Dalhousie University / Compass Group Canada

PROJECT VALUE

\$180M RFP

ROLE

Lead Designer (Sole Creative)

TIMELINE

4 Weeks

OVERVIEW

The Challenge

Dalhousie University needed a unified hospitality brand system that could span multiple campuses, dining halls, and retail cafés — while respecting the institution's 200-year heritage and connecting with today's students.

THE PROBLEM

The existing dining program lacked cohesive visual identity. Each location operated with inconsistent branding, making wayfinding difficult and diluting the overall campus dining experience. The university needed a system that felt both prestigious and approachable.

THE SOLUTION

A three-tier brand architecture that unifies all dining touchpoints under a master brand, while giving each dining hall and café its own distinct personality. The system scales from environmental graphics to digital menus to social media.

5

DINING HALLS

8+

RETAIL CAFÉS

2

CAMPUS LOCATIONS

Deliverables

- ✓ Master brand identity
- ✓ Brand architecture system
- ✓ 5 dining hall sub-brands
- ✓ 8+ café brand identities
- ✓ Environmental design mockups
- ✓ Digital menu board templates
- ✓ Signage & wayfinding concepts
- ✓ Brand guidelines documentation

Brand Architecture

The system needed to balance university heritage with contemporary dining culture. I developed a hierarchical structure that connects every touchpoint back to Dalhousie's core identity while allowing each location to express its unique character.



Design Principles

Heritage meets Modern: The laurel wreath motif connects to academic tradition while the bold color palette and contemporary typography speak to today's students.

Positioning

Master Idea: Dining as a hub of belonging, wellness, and ambition.

Promise: Every meal embodies Dalhousie's values — infinite ambition, global impact — interpreted through food, community, and sustainability.

Tone of Voice

Confident, modern, inclusive, and human. Friendly but aspirational. The brand speaks to students as peers, not customers.

Form Language: Geometric, symmetrical, high-contrast, authoritative, and modernized heritage.

Exploration & Iteration

I explored multiple concept directions, each with a distinct visual approach. The goal was to find a system flexible enough to scale across all locations while maintaining recognizable family resemblance.

Concept Directions Explored

Circle Concept: Using circular forms as the unifying element — the laurel-framed circle anchors the master brand while each dining hall gets a unique circular icon reflecting its personality.

Shield Concept: Leveraging Dalhousie's existing shield motif, this direction connects every level of dining back to the university's main identity with custom shields for each hall.

Laurels Concept: The wreath — symbolizing achievement, harvest, and community — frames a central element that can read as table, plate, sun, or unity.

Woodblock Concept: A more graphic, stamp-like approach using bold shapes and feather-inspired forms derived from the Dalhousie eagle.

DALHOUSIE DINING

Ideation



Laurels are widely used in universities, representing achievement, knowledge, and honor (the phrase "laureate" comes from this).

A wreath made of leaves/grain ties naturally to harvest, abundance, and community.

The central circle is neutral, abstract, and flexible. It can symbolize the table, the plate, the sun, or even unity.

Early ideation exploring laurel, wheat, and wreath motifs

SOLUTION

Dining Hall Identity System

Each dining hall received a unique identity based on its history, location, and student community — while maintaining visual cohesion through consistent iconography, typography, and the shared shield form language.

DALHOUSIE DINING

Concepts



DALHOUSIE DINING



RISLEY HALL

Main campus. est. 2004, Risley is one of Dal's newer, modern residences with a big population of first-year students. Energetic, youthful, a social hub. Busy, buzzing, lots of conversation and student life. Coffee cup works well. Perhaps a chat bubble as second option.



HOWE HALL

One of Dalhousie's largest and oldest residences. est. 1950s. Houses hundreds of students, a very traditional and central dining facility. Stalwart, institutional, anchor of dining life. Big, steady, reliable meals for a lot of students. Flame or Torch signals tradition, abundance, the "heart of campus dining."



JENKINS HALL

WHEAT

Agricultural Campus. Central dining facility for the Agricultural Campus, with strong ties to local food, sustainability, and the natural sciences. Rooted in agriculture, sustainability, and community. Smaller community vibe than main campus. Leaf makes good sense.



SHIREFF HALL

Main campus. One of Dal's historic residence/dining halls (built 1923). Feels older, more intimate than Risley or Howe. Cozy, traditional, a bit more home-like than the bigger, newer residences. Comfort food, everyday meals, home-style atmosphere. Bowl is perfect nourishment, comfort, home cooking.



O'BRIEN HALL

Main campus. Smaller residence/dining facility, tied closely to Sexton's engineering/technical programs. Practical, modern, innovative — focused on engineers and applied sciences. Smaller. Concentric Circles or Gear innovation, precision, tech-driven energy.

Each hall's icon reflects its unique character: Risley (coffee/social), Howe (flame/tradition), Jenkins (wheat/agricultural), Shireff (bowl/comfort), O'Brien (gear/innovation)

SOLUTION

Complete Brand System

The final system delivers a cohesive visual language that scales from master brand to individual café, with color-coded differentiation for easy wayfinding.

DALHOUSIE HOSPITALITY BRAND Simplified Shield



This system refines Dal U Eats into a shield-based architecture that connects every level of dining back to Dalhousie's main identity. Each dining hall then gets its own custom shield, where simple food and flame symbols are fused with feather-like forms inspired by the eagle, giving every hall a unique personality while keeping a consistent visual rhythm.

 Risley HALL	 Cox Café
 Howe HALL	 Topio's
 Shireff HALL	 Ground Zero
 O'brien HALL	 Green Cafe
 Jenkins HALL	 Fillings Bistro
 Barley Cafe	

Simplified Shield concept: Master brand with apple icon, dining halls with custom shield icons, cafés with color-coded identifiers

Justin Francisco | Noform Design Lab

Dalhousie University Hospitality Brand

SOLUTION

Alternative Direction: Woodblock

The Woodblock concept offers a bolder, more graphic approach — using stamp-like forms and eagle-feather inspired details. This direction provides stronger visual presence in environmental applications.

DALHOUSIE HOSPITALITY BRAND "Woodblock"



DALHOUSIE HOSPITALITY

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DALHOUSIE HOSPITALITY

FREDERIC'S





RISLEY HALL



HOWE HALL



SHIREFF HALL



O'BRIEN HALL



JENKINS HALL

Colour Options
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BRIEF BREAK
CAFÉ
Your Case for Great Coffee



FREDERIC'S
COFFEE & MORE



COX CAFÉ
Agricultural campus



TOPIO'S
pizza + gelato



GROUND ZERO
the coffee spot



GREEN CAFÉ
health-forward sustainability focus



FILLINGS BISTRO
sandwich focus



BARLEY CAFÉ
barley icon to match name



BRIEF BREAK CAFÉ



FREDERIC'S CAFÉ

Complete Woodblock system showing master brand variations, dining halls, cafés, and standalone brands
(Brief Break Café, Frederic's)

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Dalhousie University Hospitality Brand

Environmental Design

The brand system extends to physical environments — from signage and wayfinding to digital menu boards and retail kiosk design. Each touchpoint reinforces the cohesive identity.



Brief Break Café — Starbucks partnership



Cyber Café — Tech-forward coffee concept



Frederic's Café — Warm, artisanal feel



Green Café — Sustainability focus

Retail Concept: Boba Tea House

Beyond the core dining program, I developed additional retail concepts including this playful bubble tea brand featuring custom character illustrations and a vibrant color palette.



Boba Tea House — Full environmental mockup showing brand identity, menu boards, signage, and promotional materials

The Details: Custom mascot character, illustrated menu items, branded roll-up banner, digital menu boards, and cohesive environmental graphics that transform a standard food court kiosk into a destination.

Impact & Outcome

This comprehensive brand system was developed as part of Compass Group Canada's \$180M RFP response to Dalhousie University. The proposal demonstrates how a unified hospitality identity can transform the campus dining experience.

Status: RFP submitted. Results pending. The work represents a complete, implementation-ready brand system that can be rolled out across all Dalhousie dining locations.

What I Delivered

- ✓ Complete brand architecture strategy
- ✓ Master brand with multiple lock-ups
- ✓ 5 dining hall sub-brand identities
- ✓ 8+ café/retail brand identities
- ✓ Environmental design mockups
- ✓ Digital menu board templates
- ✓ Multiple concept directions
- ✓ Presentation deck (24 pages)

Timeline

Completed in **4 weeks** as sole designer, from initial strategy through final deliverables.

Justin Francisco

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