

Dalhousie University Hospitality Brand System

A comprehensive brand architecture unifying 13+ dining locations across Canada's leading maritime university

CLIENT

Dalhousie University

PROJECT VALUE

\$180M RFP

ROLE

Lead Designer (Sole Creative)

TIMELINE

4 Weeks

OVERVIEW

The Challenge

Dalhousie University needed a unified hospitality brand system spanning 5 dining halls and 8+ retail cafés across multiple campuses — while honoring 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 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 that scales from signage to digital menus.

5

DINING HALLS

8+

RETAIL CAFÉS

2

CAMPUSES

4

WEEKS

Deliverables

- ✓ Complete brand architecture strategy
- ✓ Master brand identity system
- ✓ 5 dining hall sub-brand identities
- ✓ 8+ café/retail brand identities
- ✓ Environmental design mockups
- ✓ Digital menu board templates
- ✓ Multiple concept directions
- ✓ Client presentation deck

Master Brand Dalhousie Hospitality — anchors the entire system

Dining Halls Risley, Howe, Shireff, O'Brien, Jenkins — each with unique identity

Retail Cafés Ground Zero, Green Cafe, Topio's, Cox, Brief Break, Frederic's, and more

Deconstructing the Brand DNA

Before designing a single logo, I conducted deep research into Dalhousie's existing brand system. The goal: create a hospitality identity that feels like a natural extension of the university, not an external addition.

DALHOUSIE U - Overarching Brand

This concept brings together heritage and modernity in a single, unified mark that anchors the entire dining brand system.



Great care was taken to break down and understand the "design language" used in the main Dal U branding



KEY DISCOVERY: THE "DALCON"

I identified a distinctive design element in Dalhousie's eagle crest — an abstracted beak/wing form I termed the "Dalcon." This shape became a unifying motif throughout my brand system, creating subtle visual connections back to the university's heritage.

Brand 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.

Design Principles

Tone: Confident, modern, inclusive, human. Friendly but aspirational.

Form Language: Geometric, symmetrical, high-contrast, authoritative — modernized heritage that speaks to students while respecting tradition.

Exploration & Ideation

I explored multiple concept territories — from laurel wreaths to shield systems to typographic solutions — testing which visual language could best scale across the entire hospitality ecosystem.

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.

Why Laurels? Laurels are deeply embedded in academic tradition — the word "laureate" comes from this symbolism. A wreath made of leaves/grain also ties naturally to harvest, abundance, and community. The central circle is flexible: it can symbolize the table, the plate, the sun, or unity.

Testing Visual Systems

Beyond the master brand, I explored how iconography, color systems, and naming conventions could work together to differentiate locations while maintaining family resemblance.

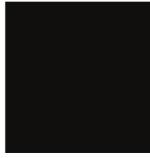
DALHOUSIE DINING

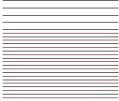
Further Explorations




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**DALHOUSIE
DINING**





**DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY**















THE COMMONS
MAIN CAMPUS

THE COMMONS
HEARTHSTONE

THE GROVE
AGRICULTURAL CAMPUS

FIELDSTONE


EXCHANGEWAY






HARVESTWAY






COMMONS
CAMPUS


GROVE
CAMPUS

Icon Explorations

Coffee cups, wheat stalks, leaves, and geometric forms were tested as potential icon systems. The line-based illustrations drew from Dalhousie's existing design language.

Naming Concepts

Alternative naming systems like "The Commons," "Hearthstone," and "Exchangeway" were explored before deciding to retain existing hall names for student familiarity.

FINAL DIRECTION

Concept 01: Circle System

The recommended direction uses the circle as the unifying design element — a laurel-framed "D" anchors the master brand while each dining hall receives a unique circular icon reflecting its personality.



Using a circle as the unifying design element this concept creates a system that ties every level of Dalhousie Dining together. The master brand is anchored by the laurel-framed circle, while each dining hall is represented with its own unique circular icon that reflects its personality and student community. The cafés extend the system through bold divided circles, differentiated by colour from Dal's palette. Together, the circle concept creates a cohesive, flexible, and instantly recognizable visual language, ensuring every location feels like part of one family.



System Logic: The master brand uses a laurel-framed circle with the "D" monogram. Dining halls each get a distinctive circular icon within a yellow ring. Cafés extend the system through color-coded divided circles for easy wayfinding.

Dining Hall Identities

Each dining hall received a unique identity based on its history, student community, and campus location — while maintaining visual cohesion through the shared circular icon system.

DALHOUSIE U - Dining Halls

The Modern Socializer



Risley is energetic, youthful, a social hub. Busy, buzzing, lots of conversation and student life.

The Hub



Howe is the largest residence. It serves as a central dining location. The flame calls forth a deeply rooted sense of gathering and meal time.

The Heritage



Shireff is cozy, traditional, a bit more home-like than the bigger, newer residences. Comfort food, everyday meals, home-style atmosphere.

Balanced Builder



O'Brien is tied closely to Sexton's engineering/technical programs. Practical, modern, innovative. Concentric Circles signal innovation, precision, tech-driven energy.

The Agricultural



Jenkins is the central dining facility for the Agricultural Campus, with strong ties to local food, sustainability, and the natural sciences. The seed sprouting icon is rooted in agriculture, sustainability, and community.

STRATEGIC ICON SELECTION

Each icon was chosen to reflect the hall's unique character: Risley's coffee cup signals social energy. Howe's flame represents tradition and gathering. Jenkins' seed sprout connects to the Agricultural Campus. Shireff's bowl evokes comfort and home cooking. O'Brien's concentric circles speak to engineering precision.

ALTERNATE DIRECTION

Concept 02: Woodblock System

The second direction takes a bolder, more graphic approach — using the "DalU Eats" naming with shield-based architecture that connects every level of dining directly back to Dalhousie's main identity.

DALHOUSIE U HOSPITALITY BRAND Woodblock



Master Brand

The "DalU Eats" mark combines an abstracted eagle head (derived from the Dalcon) with a shield frame, directly tying food to Dalhousie's crest identity.

Sub-brands

Dining halls receive squared icons with feather-like details. Cafés use rounded icons in brand colors. The system offers stronger environmental presence.

APPLICATION

Environmental Design

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

DALHOUSIE U - Dining Halls



RISLEY
HALL



O'BRIEN
HALL



HOWE
HALL



JENKINS
HALL



SHIREFF
HALL



Howe Hall dining signage mockup showing brand application in real environment

Retail Café Concepts

Beyond the core dining program, I developed complete environmental identities for retail café locations — each with distinct personality while remaining part of the Dalhousie family.



Brief Break Café — Starbucks partnership concept



Frederic's Coffee & More — Artisanal café



Green Café — Health-forward, sustainability focus



Cyber Café — Tech-forward coffee concept

Justin Francisco / Compass Group Canada

Dalhousie University Hospitality Brand System

Retail Concept: Boba Tea House

A complete retail concept featuring custom character illustration, branded menu systems, signage, and promotional materials — transforming a food court kiosk into a destination.



THE DETAILS

Custom mascot character, illustrated menu items, branded roll-up banner, digital menu boards, and cohesive environmental graphics. The playful aesthetic differentiates this concept while the form language keeps it connected to the broader system.

RESULTS

Impact & Outcome

This comprehensive brand system was developed as part of Compass Group Canada's \$180M RFP response to Dalhousie University. The work represents a complete, implementation-ready identity system.

Status: RFP submitted. Results pending. The proposal demonstrates how a unified hospitality identity can transform campus dining — from wayfinding to student engagement to brand perception.

What I Delivered

- ✓ Complete brand architecture strategy
- ✓ 2 fully-developed concept directions
- ✓ Master brand with multiple lock-ups
- ✓ 5 dining hall sub-brand identities
- ✓ 8+ café/retail brand identities
- ✓ Full environmental design mockups
- ✓ Digital menu board templates
- ✓ 24-page client presentation

Timeline

Completed in **4 weeks** as sole designer — from initial research and strategy through final deliverables and presentation.

Scope

Enterprise-scale brand system spanning **13+ locations** across 2 campuses, serving thousands of students daily.

Justin Francisco

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