

ABSOLUTE **HOME**

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No. 32**

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# DELIVERING DIVERSE DESIGN

Brighton's Havana restaurant was recently transformed into the all-in-one **No.32** and Daniel White sat down with owner Ben Samandi to find out what to expect

*Photography by [www.7two9.com](http://www.7two9.com)*

**WHAT IS NO.32?** It's an all-encompassing restaurant, bar and late night venue in the heart of the city. With live music and DJs you can eat, drink and dance.

**WHAT STYLE IS THE INTERIOR DESIGN OF NO.32?** The interior is a modern interpretation of an American diner with European and British influences. The interior design also reflects the balance of our three elements by mixing old and modern; using the right texture and colours.

**WHAT MAKES NO.32 SPECIAL?** No.32 is an all-in-one venue in which you get sophistication but where you can also come in for a casual coffee. It has the right balance of ambiance for a restaurant, bar and club, which I don't think any other venue has in Brighton.

**WHY HAVE YOU MADE THE CHANGE FROM HAVANA TO NO.32?** I wanted to create something different and it was very difficult to use the Havana brand to create something more inclusive and diverse, which No.32 has. Havana had such a strong image of exclusiveness that I found it really hard to tamper with that image.

**HOW IMPORTANT WAS DESIGNING THE RIGHT INTERIOR?** It was incredibly important as, having created Havana with a classic beauty, I felt like I was in competition with myself not to create anything less. In a funny way, this is Havana part two. It was a struggle for months trying to come up with a plan when I don't know how to draw; having to do it all in my head. It resulted in a lot of sleepless nights but I think it has been well worth it, as we have created something very unique for Brighton and for our customers.

**WHAT CHALLENGES WERE INVOLVED WHEN TRANSFORMING NO.32?** There were financial challenges as well as emotional challenges. For example, having to get rid of the classical strong features of Havana, which has been there for 20 years, was tough especially considering





**RAW BEEF**  
honey, mustard,  
rye



**SNOWBALL**  
chocolate ice cream,  
coconut



**SCALLOPS**  
charred cabbage,  
smoked butter



**CHARRED  
MACKEREL**  
pine nuts, rye

*“The job was done over such a short time. In just under four weeks we completely transformed the building, which took a huge effort.”*

that many people loved its style. The job was done over such a short time. In just under four weeks we completely transformed the building, which took a huge effort.

**HOW WILL THE STYLE FIT IN WITH THE CULTURE OF BRIGHTON?** It is a diverse venue that should suit a wide range of clientele and hopefully it will become an institution which goes on for another 20 years, as Havana did.

**WHAT HAS BEEN THE MAJOR IMPACT FROM THE LAUNCH OF NO.32?** The love the people are giving it and the genuine happiness I see in both my staff and our customer’s faces. I feel I have done Havana justice.

**HOW DID YOU FIRST GET STARTED IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY?** I started a small take-away selling burgers at 24 years old; 25 years later we now have gourmet burgers on our menu. Between that time I ran a number of well known venues in Brighton and Hove.

**WHAT WOULD YOU SAY YOUR BEST BUSINESS MOVE HAS BEEN?** Founding Havana at the age of 28. I dreamt of creating the best restaurant in Brighton at the time and I believe I did so and I continue to follow that dream.

**DURING YOUR TIME WITHIN THE INDUSTRY, HOW DO YOU FEEL HOSPITALITY DESIGN HAS EVOLVED OVER THE YEARS?** It has changed from being very grand or tacky to diverse looks. Now it’s less grand and tacky all the way around and is shifting to the middle ground. Fine dining is now a small percentage of the market and the middle ground market and the café culture is a large portion of it.

**HOW HAVE YOUR TASTES AND INSPIRATIONS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?** My taste has become more refined and sophisticated but incredibly relaxed. I find inspiration in everything I see; movies, travels, pop culture and from just what I like.

**WHAT ARE THE CURRENT TRENDS IN RESTAURANT INTERIOR DESIGN?** From my personal view I think the industry look is big, less stuffy and more relaxed.

**HOW DO YOU TRY TO BREAK THE MOULD?** The best way I know is to stay true to what I believe and where I believe the market is but while keeping a sense of style.

**WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY TODAY?** Making money and keeping the cost down, while keeping the prices competitive.

**WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR NO.32 AND YOURSELF?** I would love to expand on No.32, maybe to 72 or 62 and maybe even to LA or New York. I feel positive about the future and there are many exciting possibilities.

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