



BREWING UP BUSINESS

At The Nook Café, Students Will Have a Place
to Study and Sip Cougar Blend

By Wendell Brock



When Derek Shaw (BBA '03, MBA '11) lived on campus as a Bauer College undergrad and Residential Assistant, he felt there was no place on campus to take a date and make a good impression.

A few years later, when he returned to the college for his MBA, he needed caffeine to stay awake for his evening classes. Apparently, so did a lot of other people.

Shaw frequently found himself standing in line at Starbucks, along with dozens of bleary-eyed members of the University of Houston community. "I was like, 'There's got to be a better way,'" he remembers.

Now, thanks to Shaw, UH students jonesing for a cup o' joe — or a place to have a quiet conversation with a friend — will have another option. The Nook Café, opening this fall on Calhoun Road, is Shaw's vision of a campus coffeehouse and wine bar.

Shaw has called on UH alumni to roast the beans and design the space. He is hiring UH students to serve as baristas — and giving student artists a place to perform and show their work. The house roast, created by UH alumnus and Katz Coffee owner Avi Katz, will be known as Cougar Blend.

"We are really trying to put Houston on the map when it comes to coffee," says Shaw, a full-time executive and first-time entrepreneur. As the curator of The Nook's menu, he has enlisted 13 Celsius' Ian Rosenberg (a UH alumnus) and Mike Sammons to assist with wine and beer selection. He will source pastries and cakes from French Riviera Bakery & Café and Take the Cake. (Rosenberg, who trained as an architect at UH, also designed the café.)

Shaw, who likes his coffee with cream and sugar, is fairly new to the game. (By day, he is chief operations officer at ParrishShaw, a Houston company founded 20 years ago by his mother to recover delinquent insurance payments for healthcare providers.) "I was

never a coffee geek until this idea came along," he says, "and I started realizing just how little I knew about coffee."

Right now Shaw sounds pretty pumped about what will surely be the centerpiece of The Nook. It's the Alpha Dominche Steampunk coffee-brewing system, a gorgeous stainless-steel machine with four glass crucibles for making coffee. The Steampunk, Shaw says, combines elements of the French press coffee plunger and trendy siphon coffee pots that actually date from 1830s Berlin.

"It uses steam to agitate the coffee grounds and then pressurizes these glass tubes so that it presses water through the coffee grounds and gets a maximum extraction," Shaw says. "So it's really the best of both worlds, siphon and French press."

Shaw, a Rhode Island native who grew up in Houston, studied marketing and finance as a Bauer undergrad and later returned for his MBA.

He says his Bauer experience has served him well at ParrishShaw, and no doubt it gave him the entrepreneurial zest to supply a solution for something he felt was missing at UH.

His partner on his new venture is Sam Wijnberg, a friend since childhood. Wijnberg has played a pivotal role in the design and feel of The Nook. With both parents being University of Houston alumni, Wijnberg, though never a student of UH, is proud to play a role in improving the quality of life for students on campus.

Directly across the street from Calhoun Lofts, The Nook will be open until midnight every night except Saturday, when it will serve until 1 a.m. As Shaw sees it, it will be a place for early birds and night owls to study quietly and sip strong java, or to bring a date for coffee and cake.

"Ultimately," he says, "we really wanted to build this place for the students."



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