

Brand Photography

Let your photos do the talking – hospitality à la Hank and Margot.

Hank and Margot is a photography studio that has hospitality at its heart, not only in its subject matter, but also in its approach. We spoke to the people behind the studio in one of their favourite places to work and play; Couch - located in the independent hospitality hub of Stirchley, Birmingham, just down the road from NCASS HQ. So, who are behind Hank and Margot? Two creatives who have been in photography for over 24 years respectively, who have worked together and been married for 4 years; Lee Allen and Lisa Brown.





They work across music, film, media and weddings and their focus on hospitality started during covid. 'During lockdown we noticed that local businesses didn't have any professional photography shots' Lisa told us, 'people were mostly taking photos on their phones and the content they were pushing across socials was few and far between because they were just too busy. Things changed during covid and focus shifted to communication through social media, presenting a gap in the market.' Lisa and Lee filled that gap and began providing professional photography services to make sure hospitality businesses always had good images to share. In turn, this enabled the business owners to focus on their people, their customers and crucially, surviving through the pandemic.

Since then, Lee and Lisa have gone on to support many hospitality businesses in capturing their 'best side' and needless to say, it's raised the bar for their businesses and could inspire a change in the way you use photos to promote what you do. We asked Lee and Lisa about their approach to help you share your brand in the best light.

WHAT ROLE DOES PHOTOGRAPHY PLAY WHEN IT COMES TO HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES?

People use image more than anything else to make decisions about where to go out, where to eat and where to drink. Independents are often shared via word of mouth, but people often use socials as their first port of call. People talk about a great place they have been to but unless they see it, they don't know, so great images are more important than ever now.

Photography can reflect the atmosphere and energy of a place and with everything that has happened over the past few years we noticed that people wanted to support indies more than anyone else, the people behind them and what they do.

We have helped lots of business by building a bank of images that showcase them at their very best. Having those images for socials, website and decks is invaluable as well as being able to show current and potential customers what it feels like to spend an evening with them - whether this is in a fixed site, at street food pitches or events. Having great imagery means that more people will shout about you.

HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO HAVE STRONG BRAND IDENTITY BEFORE YOU BEGIN TO USE PHOTOS TO PROMOTE WHAT YOU DO?

If you have a strong brand identity (this includes logo, colour pallet and fonts) it makes a photographer's life much easier. If not there can be more back and forth to get the right look and feel – sometimes people have an idea in their head of what they want their food / drink to look like.

However, it's nice sometimes to work with independents who aren't sure where they are going as you can help them to find what they are looking for. Our experience and references help the process, and we always ask if there is anything that they like the



look of, or anything that has grabbed their attention and we look at how that could work for their brand. We create images with the businesses by our side as we can make tweaks while we do it – it's always a collaborative process.

WHAT'S YOUR APPROACH?

Rather than going into a business and taking photos of their food and their environment without having any idea of what their brand means, we go in and ask what they aspire to. As a rule, we ask clients to give us a mood board and brand guidelines for things like fonts, colour, style and pop culture references because what we want to do is reflect what they are as a business and the people behind it.

Some businesses have a good idea of what they want, and others don't. When you work with big brands, they have a pre prescribed idea about what they want and it's quite sterile and generic – the reason we like working with independents is because we want to champion what they do and get people excited about their offering.

It's interesting when we have a company who asks us to take photos and they don't have a set goal. Sometimes we take photos, and the business can see themselves as the customers do. We have worked with wedding couples for many years now and the photos are really personal - your business is as personal - so we take a similar approach.

Part of the reason we work with independents is because we want to help businesses in the community - for many they are just starting out, so we want to help them build a community. When a business is fairly well established, we want to build on their community and what they do. Sometimes they could be scared to change things so it's interesting to go in and do what they think they want but as the process progresses, we're able to experiment and show them something different that gets them excited about their business again – this is always really rewarding.

WHAT DO PEOPLE NEED TO HAVE IN PLACE BEFORE THEY START WORKING WITH A PHOTOGRAPHER?

A strong idea about who they are - this often becomes a conversation, and this becomes a reference point for mood boards so we can figure out the look we want to go for. Sometimes you walk into somewhere and you know exactly what the aesthetic of the photography would be – images can express energy and atmosphere, product and personality.

WHAT HAPPENS ON A SHOOT?

We may go and visit to understand what the vibe is and then go in and hang out and shoot from there especially if it's a bar / restaurant. We'll hang out sit, watch, and document what's happening, it's an organic process that is also orchestrated. We have a conversation with the business about their needs and shoot both portrait and landscape to cater for grid posts and stories. In many cases we will shoot things specifically for Instagram stories so there will be enough negative space for them to

use it multiple times and they can place text on the image to promote what they are doing at the time.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD UPDATED PHOTOS BE TAKEN?

This depends on the business, some don't need to do this very often unless they have a change of personnel, Street Food businesses might have a monthly shoot, it's very dependent on how often their offering changes. If you want to keep things consistent, they potentially may need a couple of hours each month but they will always have a bank of images to work with. Event photography has longevity behind it as that is about the atmosphere and the experience people are having so images of events could be used multiple times as they show what it would be like to experience an event at a particular place.

TELL ME ABOUT SOME OF YOUR FAVOURITE SHOOTS

We end up in weird places sometimes; Michelin star kitchens with chefs making you try food or bars where they are saying try this, you really become involved in what they are doing. It's nice to be around people who are excited about what they do and it's that excitement that pushes everyone to another level. The experience you have when you go to a high-end restaurant is everything from where the cutlery has come from, who made the plates, to the server looking after you. If you go to Luca in London, you have 4 waiters serving you all the time, whereas if you go to Carters it's much more laid back – they are similar experiences but a completely different experience at the same time and photographs capture that uniqueness.

WHAT SHOULD BUSINESSES CONSIDER WHEN THEY ARE TAKING PHOTOS OF THEIR FOOD THEMSELVES?

- Light, light, light - lots of natural light – windows are your friend
- Keep it simple
- The little details are key – clean cutlery, clean glasses, linen etc
- Remember where it is going – do you need negative space for text for example?

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

Film, TV, music, and light. It's one of those things, when you get really blue skies and harsh sunlight when you're walking around in built up areas, you get lovely shafts of light with slashes of colour and it is those things that inspire you to create certain images as well as certain colour pallets - these can play a really important part in photography.

WHERE ARE YOUR FAVOURITE PLACE TO EAT / DRINK?

To Drink: Couch, Passing Fancies and Deadbeat (Birmingham).

To Eat: Eat Vietnam (Birmingham) Yard Sale Pizza (London) All Press Coffee (London), OPM (Birmingham) Black Lock (London), Flat Iron (London), Smokestack (London).

BEST FOOD EXPERIENCE YOU'VE HAD?

In Brooklyn, pizza by the slice – dirty and quick and incredible.

Carters was exceptional – the level of service and attention to detail on each dish was insane and the food was incredible, every staff member who came and told you about each dish was really excited about the menu too.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT WORKING WITH INDEPENDENT HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES?

They are passionate about what they do, they are always striving to be better, they are genuine, and inspiring. When people win awards, we've both cried happy tears because we're so excited for them - we genuinely love them and are part of their family.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO SOMEONE WHO IS CONSIDERING WORKING WITH A PHOTOGRAPHER

- Be very open about your budget
- Have examples of photos you like
- Photographers often have different rates - have an open mind about what someone can do for you
- Ask to see a portfolio

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT WHAT YOU DO?

Lee – I get to work with my best friend.

Lisa - It doesn't feel like work, we hang out with some of our favourite people at amazing places and events.

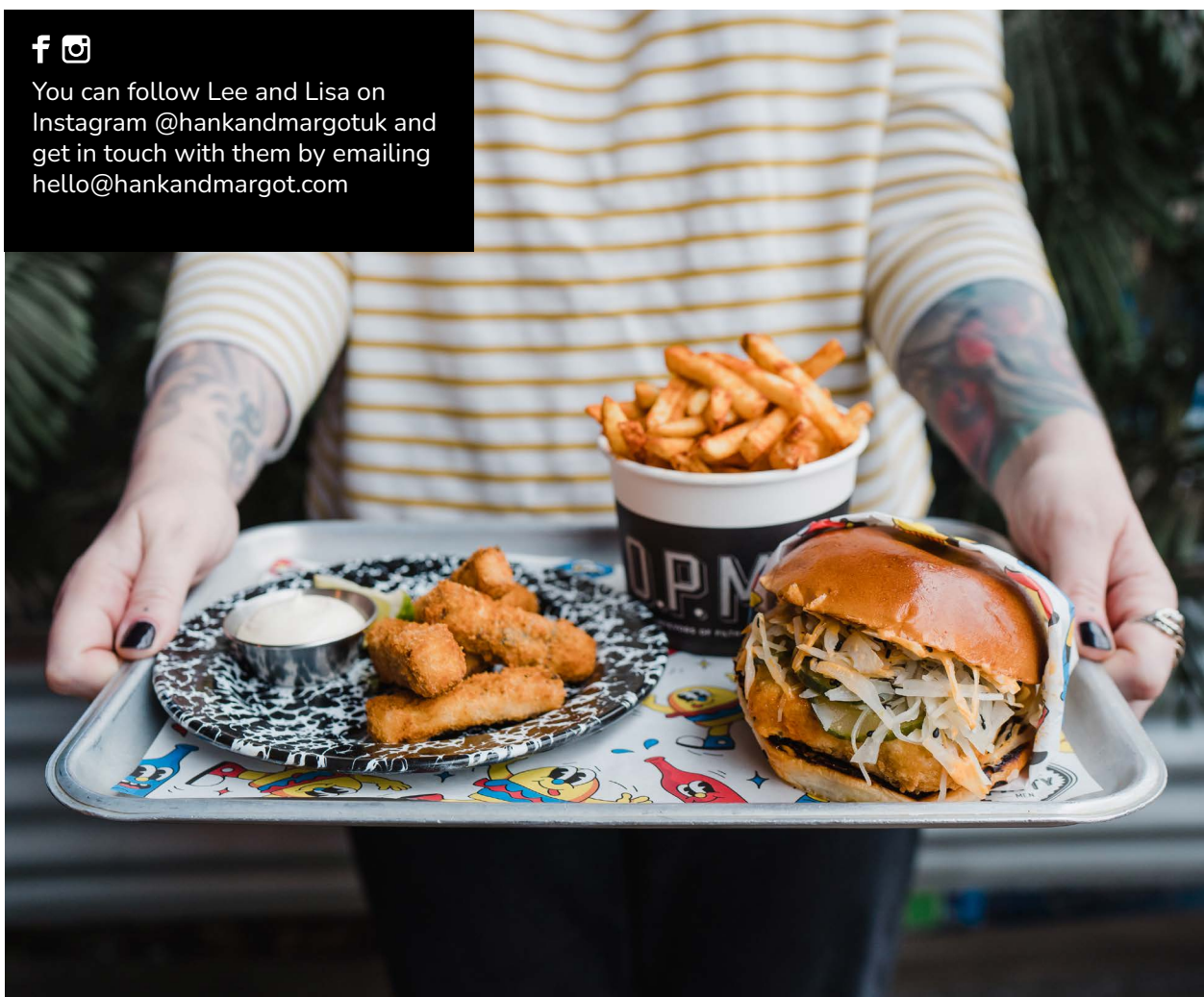
THE BIGGEST PIECES OF ADVICE YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN AND WOULD GIVE OTHERS?

Outsource what you cannot do to people who can.





You can follow Lee and Lisa on Instagram @hankandmargotuk and get in touch with them by emailing hello@hankandmargot.com



NCASS,
180 Lifford Lane,
Kings Norton,
Birmingham,
B30 3NU
t. 0300 124 6866
e. info@ncass.org.uk

   
www.ncass.org.uk

