

MONEY

Cafe Coco has a new owner — again — but the beloved Midtown spot isn't going anywhere

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Nathaniel Peete first stepped into Cafe Coco in the early 2000s as a Stratford High School graduate bound for Austin Peay State University. The Midtown Nashville dining and music destination was the perfect spot for a college-bound student trying to impress on a first date, he said — or for broke kids to get some grub after hours.

"We could only afford fries and water," Peete said. "We thought that we were just so cool to finally come and hang out."

Peete now owns Cafe Coco after purchasing the restaurant in October. Together with founder Chuck Cinelli, Peete said he and his team are doing everything possible to preserve the restaurant he stepped into 20 years ago.

"It's worked for 26 years, so why change anything?" Peete said. "I grew up here, so having something that feels like it's original to Nashville meant a whole lot to me."

Big changes nearly came to Coco's in 2020. Cinelli announced in May 2020 that the restaurant would close and become an Italian market similar to his other Nashville properties. New owners purchased the restaurant around August and announced they would bring back the original concept, but they were quickly forced to sell because of personal health reasons.

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Peete and his team bought the restaurant in October. They've made some changes, including a revamped performance space called Coco's Backstage and a tweaked menu. Peete is a co-

owner at Black Sheep's Society Entertainment, a Nashville talent agency, and Coco's will host performances from signed artists as well as local acts.

But Cinelli, still Peete's business partner at Coco's, said the longtime spot for study sessions, first dates, post-church conversations and live music is alive and well under new ownership.

"I never tell anyone I own the restaurant," Cinelli said. "Between the neighborhood and the building itself and the music and the staff, it wasn't me. I just felt like I was the maintenance guy."

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