‘Taste addiction’ was the guiding motto of brothers and QUT graduates Sean and Colby Carthew when opening the first Burger Urge six years ago.

OVER a miniature wire basket of superbly crisp, herb-seasoned sweet potato chips with wasabi dressing, it’s clear the Carthew brothers achieved their goal: planning my next meal here begins after just a few mouthfuls. It’s impossible for a cheese lover to ignore a menu board featuring a burger with blue vein and tomato chutney.

Sean has a Bachelor of Property Economics and Colby a Bachelor of Business Management – opening a burger bar in a crowded market was hardly an obvious choice for a first business venture. Nevertheless they parlayed Colby’s long experience with food in various hospitality student jobs and their QUT-acquired knowledge into a thriving gourmet burger business.

“We started with the concept of ‘taste addiction’ and built our brand around that tagline. We wanted it to have an urban feel,” says Sean, seated in their fifth and latest New York-inspired, industrial-look outlet (complete with graffiti by local street artists), in the new Science and Engineering Centre.

“Half of our business is property – understanding leases and retail spaces – finding the right location is half the battle for a successful product. It’s very difficult to succeed in retail if the store location isn’t right – even if the product is great, so we spend a lot of time on this part of the business.”

Colby took on the job of working with local chefs for six months to develop the menu from locally grown produce for their first New Farm venture.

“I love the food side of the business but I’ve probably used the accounting component of my degree the most for analysing costs and price structures,” he says.

The brothers acquired some effective HR skills from their studies too. Many of the senior management team have been with the company more than three years, and their operations manager joined more than five years ago.

“We have a good culture, we encourage individuality. We want people to be themselves and we want our staff to have fun in their work environment,” they say.

And though some of the unusual burgers, such as the blue cheese, can be “polarising”, the new offerings coming on line – homemade gelati and boutique beers – should bring everyone back together again.

— Niki Widdowson

The Burger Brothers