

## shop front



### INFINITY FOODS BRIGHTON



It's a Brighton institution. Infinity Foods founded in 1971, a workers' co-op since 1979, was a pioneer of organic, vegetarian wholefood and ethical business and is one of the longest established natural food stores in the UK.

By last year, the store in the town's bustling North Laine quarter, which was the height of contemporary hippy retail chic when it had a radical makeover in the 1980s, was looking decidedly dated. Thanks to a huge expansion in organic foods the interior had become too "cosy" for comfort. There just wasn't room to cram the stock in and cope efficiently with the high volume of customers Infinity attracts. At the busiest times, shoppers had to negotiate around the bunches of people queueing for the till.

All this changed in 2007 with a £200,000 investment to expand into the shop next door. Knocking through into the former bath store has taken Infinity's floor space from 1,800 sq ft to nearly 3,000ft and gives the shop a multi-frontage, along a good stretch of North Street and around the corner into Gardner Street, where the Infinity Café is located a few doors along.

Davies Shopfitters, with clients such as Dior and Louis Vuitton, were given a brief to make this smart new Infinity store clean and bright but not bland, contemporary but not edgily chilly. It was important to retain the store's warm, welcoming character.

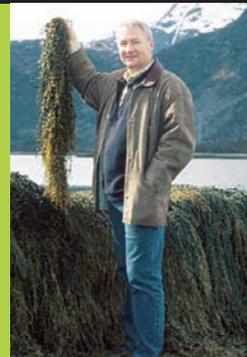
The store now has the space for a substantial body care section, as well as more household and health products. But Infinity is about food above all else. Today, sourcing local is de rigueur for natural food stores, but it has always been Infinity's natural way of doing business. Toos Jeuken is one of the longest standing suppliers, since 1979, of organic fruit and vegetables from her farm at Cuckfield. There is Montezuma's Chocolate made in Chichester, Sedlescombe wines from Battle and Full of Beans tofu made in Lewes. The store has its own artisanal bakery, producing daily bread and a range of specialities such as cheese & mustard croissants, rye, raisin and porter bread and fennel & raisin focaccia.

As a workers' co-operative Infinity is wholly owned and democratically controlled by its "worker-owners". Many of its customers feel a sense of ownership and huge loyalty, too. And they showed how they felt when their votes placed Infinity as the UK's best 'Best Local Retailer' in the 2007 *Observer* Ethical Awards.

## this working life

SIMON RANGER,  
MANAGING DIRECTOR, SEAGREENS

**MAKING THE MOVE:** Simon Ranger, a forty-something with a successful mainstream advertising agency, decided in the mid 90s to create his own brand. It had to meet three objectives: have integrity, the ability to be global and to do people good. A Swedish advertising client's acquisition of a family business harvesting wild arctic seaweeds in Norway caught his attention. "I thought, this is incredibly nutritional, why aren't we all eating it?"



**GRAM A DAY:** Ranger's research led him to conclude getting a gram a day into the daily diet of the general population would put back most if not all of the micronutrients missing from the modern diet – and not readily available in land foods: "With land vegetables we need to eat different varieties to get the nutrient spectrum and even then there are still a lot of gaps. In those gaps are the nutrients that enable us to metabolise the food we eat and do all sorts of other jobs to prevent disease."

**GOING IT ALONE:** Ranger set up Seagreens with the Swedish client, launching dried granules of organic seaweed in 1998. When the Swedish partner retired in 2000, Ranger went solo, religiously sticking to pure seaweeds, and becoming perhaps the only seaweed producer worldwide to be biodynamically and organically approved.

**STICKING IT OUT:** By 2004, Ranger's friends were saying 'you're crazy – have you made any money yet?' "Not until the seventh year did we make a profit – but I remember I got a letter from a customer saying she and her husband really valued the benefits they got from taking the seaweed, but most of all what they liked was its integrity."

**WORKING DAY:** "Like every small business, the mad man who starts it has to do everything." Ten years down the track Seagreens has five employees who operate as a team rather than a hierarchy. Based at his small biodynamic estate (in conversion) in Handcross, West Sussex, Ranger says: "Most of us do everything – like today I packaged up three orders and took them to the couriers. I want to balance what's good for people and the world with what's good for business, so it's sustainable."

**RESEARCHING THE BENEFITS:** Now Seagreens works with healthcare practitioners using seaweed for clients with issues such as autism, obesity and cancer, and a research project at Sheffield University on replacing junk food ingredients has chosen Seagreens as its salt alternative. "We also have our first product for domestic pets and horses, and are involved in trials in India with 150 family farms using seaweed to help restore the fertility of the land."

**FOUNDATION FOOD:** 2008 sees Seagreens celebrate ten years in business. Get-togethers with stakeholders are planned in London, Bristol and elsewhere, to meet retailers and other manufacturers such as Artisan Breads and Barts Spices, who use Seagreens as an ingredient. Keen to develop this area, Ranger has started a Seagreens certified ingredients division.

Demeter approval in the US has opened the way to dealing directly with retailers there, a strategy Ranger has adopted to establish the product's credentials. "We want to make sure it is sold with integrity in the US. It's not a glamorous superfood or a conventional supplement; it is a much-needed foundation of health."

Tracey McLoughlin