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A toast to Café Boulud's 20th anniversary at the Brazilian Court in Palm Beach.

BY RAY ROGERS



Café Boulud honors two decades in Palm Beach with food and wine celebrations.

Hailing from Lyon, France, Daniel Boulud arrived in New York City in 1982, and has since built a culinary empire that stretches throughout the States and extends to locations around the world including Montreal, Singapore, the Bahamas and Dubai.

RAY ROGERS: Café Boulud celebrates its 20th anniversary at the Brazilian Court Hotel in Palm Beach this season. Congratulations, that's quite a milestone. Can you take us back to opening night—what do you recall about that evening, and what went into preparing for the launch?

DANIEL BOULUD: Opening night in Palm Beach was much anticipated, as the entire time we were under construction, we were talking to our guests in New York City about what was happening there. At that time, I already had a big following in New York; guests coming in from around

the world were very excited. The local clientele, the local chefs, Palm Beach clients who were through different connections, media, industry, customers, socialites—they all embraced us right away. There have been many restaurant openings in Palm Beach over the years, but many didn't last and we have stood the test of time.

RR: When did you feel like you got into a groove here?

DB: Pretty quickly we got into a groove because we could offer everything for our guests in the same location—from a bar and lounge to an amazing outdoor space, to a wonderful dining room, a covered terrace and private dining rooms. In cuisine, the Café Boulud concept was red-hot in New York—only 5 years old at the time. There was already a base of customers in NYC who traveled down to Palm Beach and spread the word about us.

RR: I imagine you've seen quite a change over the past 20

Courtesy of Café Boulud

years in Palm Beach. Can you tell us about your experiences there over the course of that time?

DB: We could tell 20 years ago that Palm Beach was in an evolution. There were trendy restaurants—some short and some long-lived, but Palm Beach has always been classic, and Café Boulud is part of the classic mode 20 years later.

People need classics, just as they need newcomers, and Palm Beach has grown exponentially. We have made it a priority to really ingrain ourselves in this community. I have done a lot of private parties here. We work very hard to find good local suppliers and support them well.

RR: People's understanding of food and choices in how they eat have also dramatically changed. Of course, your menus have always prioritized seasonal produce. In what ways have you been able to stay true to your vision as a chef, while also evolving with the times?

DB: I don't know if people have changed, or if trends come and go. For me, I still see we make an amazing Cobb, and that's still popular. Ingredients are the key to consistency and quality. We develop new menu items based on other locations in the Daniel Boulud family and feed each other ideas. Café Boulud was always about French cuisine, but also with a focus on seasonal cuisine. For example, fresh vegetables for the Le Potager part of our menu. And on the Le Voyage part of the menu, while we are not a Thai or a Japanese restaurant, we play with flavors and dishes that pay homage to those cuisines. Palm Beachers always enjoy quality and consistency—you can tell if a dish has been made by a chef or a short-line cook. Chef-driven restaurants have always existed in Palm Beach, and I associate myself with chef-driven concepts more than anything else.

RR: For instance, is there a dish you now serve that would have been unthinkable when you started—or ingredients that are now more commonly in use?

DB: We always do an amazing chilled soup. You want things that are light and refreshing in Palm Beach. The first thing I do when I come to town is have our Cobb salad. We celebrate ingredients, so when it's truffle season, that's the focus. When it's stone crab season, you will see this on our menu. We do a lot of wine dinners—we have a wonderful wine cellar. The fish at Café Boulud is always seasonal. We always try to celebrate what's coming from our local fish suppliers, surprising our guests with dishes that are not always conventional in a restaurant.

RR: Do you have a current favorite item on the menu?

DB: The Bass en Paupiette—this recipe is 35 years old. I



created it as a young chef, and it has never gone out of style.

RR: Craft cocktail culture has also blossomed over those years, and I know the bar area expanded when you renovated some years back. What inspires you about the craft cocktail movement?

DB: I've been following this for a long time in New York and it's

nothing new in Europe. Le Cirque had a cocktail culture without calling it that. Now it's like cooking—bartenders are utilizing flavors like vegetables and maturation and infusion to create a liquor of their own. A great cocktail you sip with leisure. In Palm Beach, people have plenty of leisure time.

RR: How will you celebrate the 20th anniversary at the Brazilian Court?

DB: I'm coming down to Palm Beach and we plan to do a fantastic event. What I love about Palm Beach is I know the clientele, the grandparents, parents, children. Throughout the year, we will create celebrations about wine and food to honor this special moment in our history.

RR: How do you help people entertain in Palm Beach—and how does that differ from other locales?

DB: We have two courtyards at the Brazilian Court, and often there are events that start in the North Courtyard and move to the South Courtyard, or to our private dining room. It's a perfect combination for us.

RR: What does wellness mean to you?

DB: Palm Beach puts you in the mood for wellness because it's perfect weather. You feel energized.

RR: What is the perfect Palm Beach day, from morning to night, for you?

DB: I have young children, and my wife spent quite some time living in Palm Beach. To be able to catch sunrise on the beach—it's the coolest moment of the day with the kids. We love spending time on the beach. We also love to visit The Breakers, one of the finest hotels in America. Of course, lunch at Café Boulud. Then, play tennis or have a boat ride. I like the galleries on Worth Avenue. I also enjoy old West Palm Beach and make sure to stop and see my friend Marcello at La Sirena.

RR: Tell us about your work with Citymeals on Wheels. Why did this organization's mission call to you?

DB: This has always been an important cause for me, and I have worked with Citymeals for many years. It's an essential fabric of New York, ensuring that the homebound elderly get the nutritious meals they need. Chefs have always been asked to support food charities, whether local or international. Food is life.

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