

Dining out with Sheldon Landwehr

Rated ★★★



Chef Daniel Boulud Goes South Prized New York Cafe Opens in Palm Beach

Photography by Michael Anthony, Inc.

Celebrated chef Daniel Boulud has headed South to Palm Beach, Florida, for the offshoot opening of his highly prized New York based Cafe Boulud. It's a warm, welcoming, French-American, provincial-style restaurant with a relaxed, casual yet elegant atmosphere. The informality is part of the charm, and an agreeable relief from the uptight, self-conscious dining found elsewhere.

The restaurant itself is conveniently positioned in the well-established Palm Beach hotel Brazilian Court, now developing exclusive condo residences featuring all its chic built-in amenities.

Cafe Boulud's understated tailored interior offers a down-to-earth noisy, animated milieu with tasteful colors running from pale gold to beige to burgundy. Walls are dominated by large paintings, mirrors and shaded-lighted sconces, and there is plenty room between handsomely upholstered banquettes and chairs flanking crisp white cloth covered, candle-flickering tables. A romantic, moonlit outdoor terrace offers al fresco dining to a privileged fifty.

The kitchen is in the articulate, capable hands of young but seasoned Chef de Cuisine Zach Bell, previously Sous Chef at New York's Cafe Boulud. The menu emphasizes hearty French country fare and a heavy emphasis on Zach's four muses. La Tradition highlighting classic French dishes, La Saison featuring seasonal courses, Le Potager offering a bounty of fresh vegetables, and Le Voyage, Daniel Boulud's interpretation of the worlds cuisine. The food is rich and the portions plentiful so come prepared to be filled to capacity.

Many French and American classic appetizers are tended each evening. Examples include excellent potato-leek soup imaginatively proffered with grated Gruyere cheese and large country style croissants on the side; tangy Thai grilled shrimp served room temperature, comes with green papaya salad and savory spicy peanut sauce; shredded Pecky Toe crab salad is pristinely clean, free of sharp shell fragments and flavor enhanced by pairing with pickled pineapple, watercress and coriander vinaigrette. A leafy salad blend containing toasted pumpkin seeds, crisp shallots, cranberries and a heavy-handed sweet garlic vinaigrette, also involves a fleshy hit of gorgonzola cheese (not cited on the menu descriptions) which disagreeably overpowered what could have been a virtuous dish. Opt instead for fresh heirloom tomato salad prepared to perfection. Probably the best of the appetizers is the generously lavish chilled lobster salad smoothly interrelated with celery root remoulade, fennel pomelo, silky avocado, basil, and delectable citrus vinaigrette.

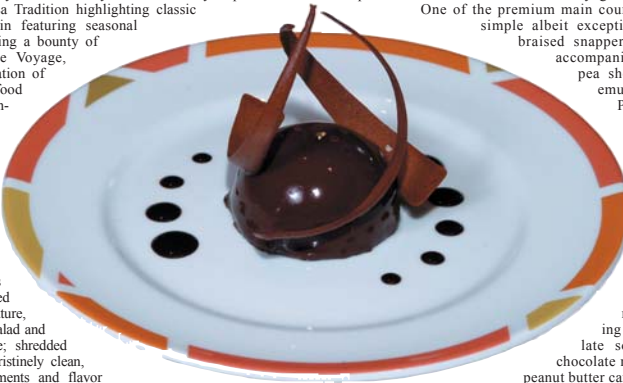
One of the most popular entrees is the local Mahi Mahi served plump and fresh with cauliflower, apple and mussel cocotte free of grit, but somewhat



Pastry Chef Remy Funrock demonstrates chocolate techniques to his pastry cook.



Chilled Lobster Salad with baby lettuces, fennel, pomelo, avocado, basil and citrus vinaigrette.



Chocolate Mousse Bombe with peanut butter caramel filling and chocolate honey tuile.

flawed by overly exotic West Indian Colombo spices. Wild mushroom risotto while enticing is imperfect from oversalt- ing. But do seek out the divinely imaginative artichoke ravioli, graciously garnished with black truffles, a truly memorable triumph.

Rioja beef duo is very rich and very substantial, perfect for hearty appetites. A melange of fork-tender, zesty braised short ribs and regrettably tough hanger steak, the overall dish is well received and mated with sweetly-tart cranberry bean stew and stuffed marrow bones. Full-bodied grilled lamb loin is a super choice, tender and succulent, its fully developed flavor created from clever seasonings. It's brought to table with excellent marinated egg-plant and wilted romaine with Greek yogurt.

One of the premium main courses at Cafe Boulud is the simple albeit exceptional, full-flavored truffle braised snapper served moist and juicy, accompanied by Vichy carrots and pea shoots magnified by truffle emulsion. Medallions of veal Provencale are discriminat- ingly sauced. The large portion of veal nuggets appears to be dry, but inside the meat is moist and delicious, and comes with grilled zucchini, fennel panisse, and herbs.

Among pastry chef Remy Funrock's desserts, all are deemed rich and raveworthy includ- ing warm upside down choco- late soufflé, creamy textured chocolate mousse bombe infused with peanut butter caramel, and sweet apple tarte tatin in a crisp puff pastry.

The fairly extensive range of wines is in the qualified hands of sommelier Kurt Taylor. He will match your meal to just the right vintage. On balance, Palm Beach's Cafe Boulud is a fine place for a relaxed lunch or dinner of good filling French-American fare, wrapped up with a complementary basket of warm lemon scented tea cakes (Madeleines) and mini-chocolates.

*** Cafe Boulud, The Brazilian Court, 301 Australian Avenue, Palm Beach, Florida. (561-655-6060. Serves breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. Dinner entrees average \$32 to \$38. Accepts reservations and major credit cards. BT



Medallions of Veal "Provencale" with grilled zucchini, fennel panisse, and herbes de Provence.



Peekytoe Crab Salad pickled gold pineapple, watercress and coriander vinaigrette.



Local Mahi-Mahi with cauliflower, apple and mussel cocotte and West Indian Colombo spices.



General Manager Philippe Langlois chats with restaurant guest Constance Pikulas.

