

Two Stars of Palm Beach

The young gun and the old hand



PHOTOS BY STUDIO PALM BEACH

Daniel Boulud (center), famous for his much-heralded restaurants in New York City, has taken his talents and his chefs (Chef de Cuisine Zach Bell, left, and Executive Pastry Chef Rémy Fünfrock, right) south to Palm Beach.

This is a tale of two restaurants not so far away. On the state's other coast, in a little place called Palm Beach. Two hours away, in the posh and tony town where the jet meets the set and wealth drips from the palms, two great restaurants beckon.

Actually, to call them great would be to diminish their greatness. They are profound, inspiring, marvelous, grand. And, did I mention, just a couple of hours away.

Café Boulud and Café L'Europe are different in their eminence. One is a shooting star, the other a grand cornerstone.

Daniel Boulud may very well be the most celebrated chef in America at this time. His eponymous restaurant in New York, Daniel, is considered by many the finest restaurant in the country. He has

been named Chef of the Year by almost every food organization and magazine that matter and he's a frequent guest of the *Today Show*, *Regis*, and *Letterman*. Author of four heralded books, lecturer the world over, he also has his own cookware line.

That he would take his restaurant to Palm Beach was natural. The gilded and glamorous that frequent Café Boulud are the same who fill his three New York rooms. With his former sous-chef, Zachariah Bell, now at the helm, the Café was destined to be a hit.

Norbert Goldner was there with Café L'Europe when Boulud arrived. In fact, he has been there for quite some time—about twenty-three years. Better than two decades dedicated to building and running a restaurant that has garnered its fair

share of attention. Granted, there was no bluster of television appearances or book-signings for Goldner, but the esteemed DiRona Restaurant awards that cover the entryway are worth the attention. So, too, the countless other awards and four-star reviews that shout the greatness of the venerable place from the walls.

Café L'Europe welcomed Bell and Café Boulud. Goldner, you see, looks beyond the competition and recognizes what Boulud brings—more quality to an already distinguished town. And Goldner is the cornerstone, a model of consistent excellence since 1980.

They are but two of many wonderful restaurants in Palm Beach, but they are my favorite two.

Café Boulud is a warm, inviting room full of contemporary colors and fabrics

and design lines that lend it a casual elegance and comforting tone. The dining room is both vibrant and subdued, teeming and intimate, relaxed and refined.

The menu itself is a joy. Based on the chef's four muses, the menu is separated into four distinct styles that may be ordered as one or mixed-and-matched. La Tradition is grounded in classic French dishes that Boulud grew up with, given new twists with his use of American ingredients.

The changing menu often features standards such as Salade Lyonnaise, a warm salad of chicken livers, duck confit, and lardon with poached egg and frisée, and Poulet aux Champignons, braised and roasted chicken, hen-of-the-woods mushrooms, and baby spinach.

La Saison is a section dedicated to the delicacies and harvest of each season. A Peekytoe Crab salad may be paired with pickled gold pineapple and served with watercress and a coriander vinaigrette. Or perhaps a Golden Tilefish, pulled from the ocean just hours ago and presented with summer squash and an apple-and-mussel cocotte.

Le Potager celebrates the wonders of the vegetable garden. Asian Pear and Beet Salad joined by warm goat cheese and a walnut vinaigrette, or Grilled Sea Bass with a bouquet of winter vegetables and a truffle broth.

And finally, Boulud presents Le Voyage, a journey of exploration through the exotic flavors of the world presented in his unique style, from Thai Grilled Shrimp with green papaya salad and spicy peanut sauce, to Colorado Lamb Loin paired with marinated eggplant, wilted romaine, Greek yogurt, and cumin and coriander. This portion of the menu is most certainly diverse and bold.

Amazingly—or perhaps not, considering his stature—such a broad display becomes a sweet and timeless harmony. On our most recent visit, the selections ranged from Pâté de Campagne Provençale to Atlantic Salmon set on a bed of warm Lentil Salad and Caramelized Fennel to a duo of gazpachos representing the Old and New World styles.

And as the courses flowed and the items were shared, the diversity of the dishes began to blend and complement and enrich one another to a level that makes you realize you have moved

WHERE TO STAY

You've decided to make the trip to Palm Beach, so you might as well stay the night; no sense driving back on a full stomach. You could stay at one of the old standbys such as The Ritz-Carlton or The Breakers, but I'd recommend one of three that are just around the corner and well worth it:

The Brazilian Court, 301 Australian Ave., 561/655-7740, www.braziliancourt.com. A famous Palm Beach landmark and mainstay on the way to conversion into condo/hotel, which means major upgrades on an already impressive property. A walk through the courtyards with their romantic chairs and lush tropical gardens is the perfect mood-setter. And with the Café Boulud serving breakfast as well, it's almost too much to hope for.

Plaza Inn, 215 Brazilian Ave., 800/233-2632, www.plazainnpalmbeach.com. Its billing as a small European boutique hotel doesn't say quite enough. Its style is defined by the fact that no two rooms are alike, and each one has a character that is equal parts kitschy, classic, and, above all, unique. A real treat, considering today's corporate sameness.

Palm Beach Historic Inn, 365 South County Road, 561/832-4009, www.palmbeachhistoriccinn.com. Bed-and-breakfasts aren't allowed in Palm Beach, according to the owner, but this inn bears the most striking resemblance to a B&B that I've ever seen. Thirteen rooms in the heart of Palm Beach, a short walk from Worth Avenue, and a dynamite breakfast each morning. Hmmm.



Chef Jens Dahlmann's compositions at Café L'Europe stay within the realm of the familiar but stretch the boundaries.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CAFÉ L'EUROPE

beyond dinner and into a true dining experience.

But, as it is often said, greatness comes in many forms. And another such form is most certainly Goldner's Café L'Europe.

While not nearly as contemporary as Café Boulud, the atmosphere of Café L'Europe is no less impressive. The front room is fully windowed and mirrored, lending an open airiness that gives a relaxed feel to a sophisticated setting. The interior dining room is full of seasonal treatments and stylish nuances that give the room a rich and grand feel. Gorgeous wine cellars play a prominent role in the restaurants, as they should, considering the impressive and prodigious wine list that is one of L'Europe's focal points. More than 1,600 labels and an inventory of more than half a million dollars containing some of the most highly cherished and tightly allocated bottles available make this a haven for wine lovers.

Equally impressive is the menu, executed by executive chef Jens Dahlmann and delivered by a polished staff. From the light and bright Timbale of Palm Hearts, Oven Dried Tomato, and Avocado to the rich Foie Gras paired with Mission Figs, Sweetbreads, and Morels,

the bill of fare traverses the landscape of the palate.

Dahlmann's compositions are stimulating, staying within the realm of the familiar but stretching those boundaries in order to keep things interesting. From an Alaskan Halibut wrapped in Serrano Ham to a Black Olive Crusted Lamb Loin accompanied by a Potato-Goat Cheese Flan, the presentations are powerful, robust, and fulfilling.

Pastry chef Stephanie Steiga deserves special attention. Her presentations were simply the finest compilation of desserts I have tasted in some time. Beautiful to view, even better to taste, and well worth a visit on their own merits. Add to this an inspiring jazz quartet and it is easy to understand Café L'Europe's longevity.

Two wonderful restaurants. Two different styles. Two hours away. How could you not? 🍷

David Grant is food editor of Times of the Islands.

Café L'Europe, 331 South County Road at Brazilian Avenue, Palm Beach; 561/655-4020, www.cafeleurope.com

Café Boulud, The Brazilian Court hotel, 301 Australian Avenue, Palm Beach; 561/655-6060, www.danielnyc.com