

A Culinary Empire

An Interview with Daniel Boulud, Chef and Owner, The Dinex Group



Daniel Boulud at the entrance to DANIEL Restaurant on 65th Street in New York City (above); Grilled lobster from La Tête d'Or by Daniel (below)

Boulud, Boulud Sud, Maison Boulud, Jōji, Epicerie Boulud and La Tête d'Or. Boulud has won countless awards for his achievements, including James Beard Foundation awards for Outstanding Restaurant; Outstanding Restaurateur; Best Chef, New York City; and Outstanding Chef of the Year. He has been named Chef of the Year by the Culinary Institute of America, Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur and Officier de l'Ordre du Mérite Agricole et Chevalier du Mérite National by the French government. In 2015, the World's 50 Best Restaurants awarded Boulud the Diners Club® Lifetime Achievement Award for his success as a restaurateur, businessman, and chef who is revered as one of the world's finest. In 2021, Les Grandes Tables du Monde named him Best Restaurateur in the World. He also earned the 2023 Innovation Award from La Liste. His Michelin-starred restaurants include DANIEL, Le Pavillon, Jōji and Café Boulud New York. Boulud's culinary style is reflected in nine cookbooks, including the definitive DANIEL: My French Cuisine and My Best: Daniel Boulud. Additionally, Boulud is chair of Citymeals on Wheels, an organization dedicated to serving meals to New Yorkers in need; is Co-Founder of Food1st, in partnership with SL Green Realty Corp.; and is Chairman of Ment'Or BKB Foundation, providing grants to young chefs to advance their culinary education.

EDITORS' NOTE Chef Daniel Boulud is widely celebrated as one of America's leading culinary authorities and restaurateurs. Inspired driven by fine ingredients, Boulud (danielboulud.com) has become renowned for the contemporary appeal he adds to soulful cooking rooted in French tradition. Since arriving in the U.S. in 1982, he has continually evolved his cuisine and expanded his reach from one location (DANIEL in 1993) to multiple properties in New York City and across the U.S., as well as Toronto, Montreal, Singapore, Dubai, The Bahamas, and Riyadh. Boulud was raised on his family's farm in the village of Saint-Pierre-de-Chandieu, outside of Lyon. In 1993, he opened the much-celebrated DANIEL on Manhattan's Upper East Side. His restaurant group has grown significantly over the past 30 years, and today encompasses notable brands including: DANIEL, Café Boulud, Le Pavillon, Centurion NY, Blue Box Café by Daniel Boulud, Le Gratin, Bar





The Chef's Salon at La Tête d'Or steakhouse at One Madison in New York City

Did you know at an early age that your passion was to be a chef?

It was quite early that I knew this is what I wanted to do, and at a young age I was working in restaurants with high standards and expectations. I was able to work with some of the best chefs in the world which was so valuable at the beginning of my career. I worked hard and did well so these chefs would recommend me to other leading chefs which provided me opportunities to grow in my career. I was also passionate about learning what made each restaurant special in addition to the food, so I watched and studied the design, the art, and the flowers. I also paid close attention to the service. I knew that one day I wanted to have my own place, and I was always curious about all the other pieces that were essential in addition to being a great chef in order to build a great restaurant.

With all of the growth that you have experienced, how are you able to still be so present in the restaurants?

The first DANIEL restaurant was within a short radius of my home. I have been living in the same zip code on the Upper East Side for 40 years, and when you operate within your village, it gives you a proximity to get to places. I would go between

DANIEL and Café Boulud all the time, walking up Madison Avenue in my chef's clothes. For the past 28 years, I have been living above DANIEL – my bedroom and my children's bedrooms are right above the kitchen. This makes it easy to spend quality time with my family and still have the time to be at the restaurants. It is incredibly important for me to be present at my restaurants because this is a people business, and it is all about building relationships with my guests. It is obviously more difficult when I am traveling, but my team represents me so well and they have built their own relationships with our guests, so it is a team effort.

Will you discuss your projects at One Vanderbilt and One Madison, and what excited you about these opportunities?

My business is about opportunity, about risk, about partnership, and about people you trust and who trust you. When I created DANIEL, I had an opportunity to create a small restaurant that was independent, and it was fantastic. Five years later, we moved DANIEL to its current location when the Mayfair Hotel became a condominium, and my partner convinced me that we should acquire the space. The reality is that 20 years ago, the risk to buy the real estate and to transform the space into

a restaurant was very high, but I trusted everyone around me and we made it happen. We were able to do this because an opportunity presented itself, and there was such deep trust between me and my partners.

When I was approached by Marc Holliday (Chairman and CEO of SL Green) when they were developing One Vanderbilt, Marc wanted to create a restaurant that was built to last, but also something that was personal to me, personal to One Vanderbilt, and personal to New York. Marc and SL Green were our partners, and I really trust them. It was very important to me that Marc and the team at SL Green trusted me and believed in our team. Following the creation of Le Pavillon at One Vanderbilt, we created Jōji, an amazing Omakase experience with Chef-partners George Ruan and Wayne Cheng, as well as Épicerie Boulud, an eat-in/take-out market. We have also created food offerings to be delivered to the tenants of the building. We are currently working on a unique private dining experience that will be located on the 72nd floor of the building.

One Madison is a project that is very dear to Marc and close to his heart. It is a stunning development and at One Madison we have Le Jardin sur Madison, which is a one-of-a-kind event space and rooftop garden that is an amenity for the tenants as well as a private event space with a huge terrace. Then there is La Tête d'Or which is my first-ever steakhouse restaurant featuring a 120-person dining area, a stylish cocktail bar, private dining room, and an exclusive omakase steak and seafood table for a truly unique experience. I am very proud of what we have been able to achieve with La Tête d'Or.

You commit your time and energy to many charitable causes. What has made philanthropic work so important to you?

Our clients are incredibly supportive of us and our community. I've witnessed the commitment to philanthropy among business leaders in New York and the amazing support they offer to the community. As a chef, we are asked to contribute to many charities, and we do whatever we can to be of help. I have been involved for three decades with Citymeals on Wheels where I serve as board chair. Every March, I open our flagship restaurant, DANIEL, and host an elegant dinner gala for Citymeals supporters along with a rotating group of fabulous guest chefs. It is an intimate and unforgettable night of fine dining, cocktails, and a silent auction.

With all that you have accomplished, are you able to take moments to celebrate the wins or are you always thinking about what is next?

I am very proud of what we have achieved at Dinex. As I have become more mature in the business, I am trying to take moments to enjoy the wins, but this is about the team since we win together. There is nothing that makes me prouder than to see one of the chefs that started with me and did an amazing job grow in their career. I get so much fulfillment from mentoring and inspiring the next generation of leaders in the industry. Having said that, it is not all about business. It is about personal life and family as well, and I want to continue to find more time to be with my family and to celebrate life with them. ●