

MANHATTAN

1ST ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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+PLUS

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GRAFFITI'S GALLERY TAKEOVER
& HOT SUMMER PARTY WRAP-UP

DIANE KRUGER: FRAU POWER!



SEPT/OCT 2009 \$5.95

MANHATTAN 7 W. 51ST ST., 8TH FLOOR NEW YORK, NY

**DBGB**

RATING: ★★★

299 Bowery, 212.933.5300

Lunch daily 12–3PM

Dinner daily at 5:30PM;

Sun. until 12AM, Mon.–Thurs.

until 1AM, Fri.–Sat. until 2AM

What the stars mean:

★ = fair, some noteworthy qualities

★★ = good, above average

★★★ = very good, well above norm

★★★★ = excellent, among the area's best

★★★★★ = extraordinary in every detail

Reviews are based on multiple visits. Ratings reflect the reviewer's overall reaction to food, ambiance and service.

Welcome to the Neighborhood

Uptown restaurateur Daniel Boulud takes his show to the Bowery with DBGB

| By Adeena Sussman | Photography by Evan Sung |

Five years ago, when there were still more dives on the Bowery than you could smash a guitar at, communing with the spirit of Joey Ramone or Debbie Harry wouldn't have seemed out of the question. But as I make my way through the tall glass doors of DBGB and spot the girls in Juicy tube dresses spooning up ice cream sundaes from parfait *coupes* and nouveau punks with popped polo shirt collars tapping away at their iPhones, I feel a pang of sorrow for the die-hards of a lost New York who could have never been seduced by the charms of master chef Daniel Boulud's slick, buzzy restaurant in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood.

Any vestiges of CBGB, the neighborhood's legendary, now-defunct music venue whose name Boulud cheekily references, are gone. John Varvatos took over the space, helping to make the area safe for other out-of-towners with cash, and...for people with expense accounts, like me. The capacious barroom has mirrored walls embossed with delicate white script detailing the encyclopedic beer and wine menu and dozens of quotes about food attributed to everyone from Virginia Woolf to Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin.

By the time the host ushers us into the long,

chamberlike dining room, I feel I've fulfilled my quota of summer reading, but there is more: Dozens of heavy copper pots—donated by Boulud's chefferati friends from around the world and labeled with their names on quaint hangtags—sit on shelves above boxes of kosher salt, matzo meal and rice meant to evoke the dry-goods stores of the Lower East Side of yore. The room, ringed with banquettes tucked into the perimeter, is clearly going for a different aesthetic than Boulud's flagship uptown, which is a study in tasteful art and sleek elegance. Here, the desired effect seems to be sensory overload.

A well-curated selection of 22 French, Belgian and American brews (available by the glass or in sleek liter-sized containers) go well with the long list of “Links, Bangers, Saucisses and Wieners,” which take up a good part of the menu. Boulud envisioned DBGB as a sort of upscale beer and bratwurst house—the chef's love of Gray's Papaya is well-chronicled—and the DBGB dog is one of the best, imbued with some of Gray's signature snap. That juicy pop was missing in a flabby but well-spiced curl of merguez resting over a bed of flavorful spinach. A smoked pork and Vermont cheddar link topped with hash browns tastes like a perfect breakfast

WHO'S THERE Chefs galore,

Whole Foods shoppers, Upper East Side wannabes, moneyed locals.

THE SOUNDTRACK Alt-country (Lucinda

Williams, Ryan Adams), Bowie, Bill Withers, iPhone ringtones.

DRESS CODE Studied casual for 10021

refugees (does Escada make jeans?); docksiders, fedoras, skinnies and minis for neighborhood locals.

BEST DISHES The Piggy burger,

Chop Chop salad with lobster, boudin Basque, ice cream sundaes.

WHAT IT COSTS Appetizers \$7–\$90

(for the Royale seafood platter); entrées \$10–\$26; desserts \$3–\$18.

EAT YOUR WORDS

Top left: DBGB's interior, designed by Thomas Schlessler, features mirrors scrawled with food-related quotes.



Uptown comes downtown, but Daniel is still Daniel. *Far left:* DBGB's Chop Chop salad. *Above:* Gilles Verot's chilled pig's head terrine.

I love all the refined comfort food but also found myself drawn to the classics—charcuterie courtesy of Bar Boulud's Gilles Verot, salmon with cream sauce and tart sorrel—since a part of me just wants Daniel to be Daniel, hot dogs be damned!

on a bun, and if you're inclined to eat the least palatable parts of the pig, no one is turning out a better boudin Basque these days.

Other dishes seem designed to appeal more to the grandparents of DBGB's target audience, people who probably know more about the uptown de Menils than their wayward progeny. Tripe is served two ways: molded into deep-fried squares napped with grainy mustard sauce, and as a tomato-tripe salad with a more overt version of offal. An admittedly delicious tuna crudo (is anyone else tiring of the crudo trend?) gets a much-needed jolt of flavor from tiny cubes of compressed watermelon, an ingredient that also shines in a chopped salad of romaine lettuce, avocado and a zesty ginger-sesame dressing (perfectly cooked lobster optional).

While many of the main courses are Boulud-worthy, among them a glorious breast of duck with tart cherries, some are less successful. A Paleron Carbonnade features the trendy Flatiron steak—a recession cut which has become the darling in many top NYC kitchens—braised in a sweet beer that overpowers the root vegetables; the gingerbread croutons practically push the dish over into the dessert column.

These days, every restaurant—no matter what the price point—needs to have a pedigreed burger, and DBGB does not disappoint. The Piggy is a juicy beef specimen topped with pulled pork courtesy of Adam Perry Lang's Daisy May's BBQ. The jalapeño mayo, the soft Boston lettuce and the moistness of the meat all work beautifully, though this standout item contains an indispensable ingredient from another restaurant.

Then again, Boulud's got nothing to prove in the burger department. Back at the turn of the century, when Pat LaFrieda was just some guy grinding meat and the best party in town was at Corner Bistro, Boulud hauted it up at DB Bistro Moderne with his \$40 foie-and-short-rib-stuffed wonder, changing burgerdom forever.

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myself drawn to the classics—charcuterie courtesy of Bar Boulud's Gilles Verot, salmon with cream sauce and tart sorrel—since a part of me just wants Daniel to be Daniel, hot dogs be damned! The befuddling menu is a multipage megillah that attempts to fuse the many sides of Boulud's personality: the uptown eminence with the Michelin stars and the guy who wants a piece of the downtown action.

The place pulses with energy, and it's a chef-magnet. In two visits I spotted Wylie Dufresne (WD-50), Susur Lee (Shang), Joey Campanaro (The Little Owl), Jonathan Waxman (Barbuto) and Harold Dieterle (Perilla). But I only saw them as they walked by on their way out of the restaurant. The dining room's shape is terrible for people-watching; it's actually easier to view the chefs working away in the huge, exposed kitchen than to spy on other diners. For that, stick to the barroom out front.

That's also where you're likely to find Boulud: hanging out with his chef buddies and the scene groupies, hair perfectly styled, buttery black leather jacket glistening in the muted light. In his element, he does look a bit like a rock star. He's no Joey Ramone, of course, but he's definitely bringing down the house. **M**