

## Setting the Standard



Daniel Boulud



Lili Lynton



Épicerie Boulud

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

**EDITORS' NOTE** Chef-turned-restaurateur Daniel Boulud is considered one of America's leading culinary authorities. He is best known as chef-owner of his signature restaurant DANIEL on Manhattan's Upper East Side. He has been named "Best Chef New York City", "Chef of the Year for the United States", and "Outstanding Restaurateur of the Year" by the James Beard Foundation for his refined yet soulful cooking and generous approach to hospitality.

Lili Lynton has been Daniel Boulud's business partner since 1993 when, along with Joel Smilow, they opened the first Restaurant Daniel. Prior to 1993, Lynton worked on Wall Street as a financial analyst with Sanford C. Bernstein and Lehman Brothers. She was part of the management team that purchased and operated TeleBank, which was sold to E\*TRADE in 1999. She has worked with the New York City Investment Fund as a senior manager from 2001 to the present. Lynton is a graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Business School.

**COMPANY BRIEF** The Dinex Group ([www.danielnyc.com](http://www.danielnyc.com)) operates 12 restaurants: seven in New York – Daniel, a Relais & Châteaux member; Bar Boulud; db Bistro Moderne; Café Boulud; DBGB Kitchen and Bar and, most recently, Boulud Sud and Épicerie Boulud – with a second Café Boulud in Palm Beach, Florida; Maison Boulud in Beijing. His first restaurant in the U.K., Bar Boulud, opened in London's Mandarin Oriental in May 2010. Two new outposts recently opened include db Bistro Moderne in both Miami and Singapore.

**How much of an impact did the global economic crisis have on your business and how is Dinex Group positioned for growth?**

*Lynton:* During 2009, our sales declined about 3 percent for existing restaurants. We felt the drop primarily at our midtown restaurant, db Bistro Moderne. While it has a local clientele for business lunches, at dinner it caters to out-of-town guests and theatergoers, segments that suffered at the time. The situation was similar at our Lincoln Center location, Bar Boulud, which is also partly tourist dependent.

During 2010, we saw significant sales growth as tourists returned to New York City. Our other locations, including our flagship, Restaurant Daniel, and Cafe Boulud, both benefitted from recent expansions and

renovations. This demonstrated to our loyal patrons that we are committed to maintaining and even elevating our standards in a challenging business climate.

At the same time, we have continued to invest in opening new restaurants in New York City – DBGB Kitchen and Bar in 2009, and more recently, Boulud Sud and Épicerie Boulud in 2011. We've also expanded with locations in other cities including London, Miami, and Singapore. Our plans for the immediate future are to open restaurants at the Four Seasons in Toronto and the Ritz-Carlton in Montreal, both in 2012.

**Would you provide an overview of your two new establishments in New York, Épicerie Boulud and Boulud Sud, and how they will complement your other venues in the market?**

*Boulud:* Opened this past May, Boulud Sud, along with Épicerie Boulud and Bar Boulud, complete our Lincoln Center trio. We had plans to expand when we first opened on the West Side three years ago. While we had hoped to get started sooner, waiting for the adjacent spaces to become available had the advantage of giving us time to get to know the neighborhood.

Boulud Sud is a Mediterranean journey with a menu that travels the entire region from France's Côte d'Azur to North Africa and beyond. There's an emphasis on grilled fish and lamb and an abundance of fresh vegetables. The restaurant is open and airy. The yellow and slate grey mid-century modern interiors include a spacious bar and lounge in a light filled space framed by floor-to-ceiling windows and vaulted ceilings. The West 64th Street entrance is just steps from Lincoln Center. I see it as being both an attraction for neighborhood regulars and a destination for theatergoers.

Épicerie Boulud is an entirely new adventure and the first time I've created a place that departs from the classic sit-down restaurant model. It's an eat-in and take-out market. We finally have the perfect place to sell our signature charcuterie to-go. There's a wonderful cheese counter with artisanal French and American selections courtesy of Saxelby Cheesemongers. Our house-made offerings include soups, salads, gourmet sandwiches, and more. The Épicerie serves breakfast and lunch, gelati, and pastry and coffee in the afternoon, and evolves into an oyster bar with wines by the glass in the evening. We stand apart for making just about everything we sell in-house; all but the cheeses

and a few specialty items and condiments my chefs and I have found in our travels.

**You also recently reopened a new db Bistro Moderne in Miami. What are your expectations for the venue and do you have plans to expand the db Bistro Moderne brand into other markets?**

*Lynton:* We had experience in South Florida with our Café Boulud Palm Beach location and felt that a downtown Miami location would be equally successful, with perhaps fewer seasonal spikes in our business. We are just coming upon the one-year anniversary of Miami's db Bistro Moderne and are pleased to find that downtown offers a year-round market. The db Bistro brand is well suited to a central combined business/residential location as it caters well to business customers, locals, and tourists. As we find suitable downtown locations, we will consider opening more db Bistro Moderne restaurants in other cities. As with all our operations, we look to create a restaurant that is best suited to the specific location and clientele.

**You are a major employer in New York City with a staff of close to 700 in the market. How strong is the talent pool in New York City and what are the key characteristics that you look for in hiring talent?**

*Boulud:* New York is the strongest market we serve as far as talent pool, but recruiting still requires substantial work. Despite the economy, well-trained people are in demand. So we emphasize nurturing talent with our own ongoing in-house training in areas as diverse as wine knowledge, language skills, and dining room service. We often hire entry-level people without extensive experience but who show dedication and discipline. In potential hires, we look for the energy and professionalism of a leader, the ability to motivate and train a team, and most importantly, a great knack for taking care of people.

**Where do you see opportunities for additional expansion?**

*Lynton:* Within New York City, we would like to expand our Épicerie Boulud operations and are looking for additional locations for this concept. Outside the city, we would like to add venues in areas where we have had significant success, including locations in Asia. We are also looking to add a second location in Beijing where our brand has been especially well received. ●