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## The 10 Best Restaurants in New York 2012

BY ALAN RICHMAN |

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9. Bouley  
163 Duane St.  
Manhattan

The apples are back. Rows of them, perfuming the foyer of the new Bouley (circa 2008) with *eau de apple*, just as they did at the beloved and still-mourned old Bouley (circa 1987). To me the apples are a sign that David Bouley, one of the most talented, elusive, and puzzling chefs in New York history, is back, too.

Fascinating fellow, Bouley. Studied at the Sorbonne. Became a legend at the restaurant Montrachet while exasperating his then-boss, Drew Nieporent. Opened Bouley, which was *the* restaurant in those days. (How many chefs can boast that they once ran the most essential restaurant in New York?) After that, it's hard to know what he was doing or where he was doing it, although it was always somewhere in Tribeca. He was sometimes ahead of his time. He always seemed to lose track of time. One thing has never changed: Get this man in front of a stove and he cooks brilliantly.

The restaurant Bouley today idealizes what almost all other restaurants ignore: Romance, lavishness, dreams, warmth. It's a Provençal fantasy of palatial proportions, with vaulted ceilings, wooden bookcases, baronial landscape paintings, floor lamps, candlelit sconces, stone floors, and Oriental carpets. So comfortable. So comforting. The food is lavish, coherent, luxurious. My amuse-bouche, a velouté of pumpkin and butternut squash, was somewhat sweet, impossibly light. I can't think of a dish more perfect than a scrambled egg with Comté cheese and black truffles, or more intriguing than breast of chicken cooked *en cocotte* and presented over a compote of wheat berries, caramelized shallots, chestnuts, and Brussels sprouts. There's not a hint of heaviness in Bouley's fantasized French food. Desserts are lush, delicate, even feminine, especially a rose-petal *macaron* with whipped cream and lychee sorbet. Bouley is open for lunch on Saturday, and the meal bears no resemblance to Manhattan's routinely dull brunch experience. Why would you consider spending Saturday afternoon eating anywhere else?