



2000
DAVID BOULEY
CHAPTER *eleven*

AS THE ENFANT TERRIBLE OF THE 1970S AND 1980S CULINARY FRONT LINE, DAVID BOULEY TRAINED IN FRANCE. Like many others, he worked for nothing (or, almost nothing but food) and *staged* with nouvelle cuisine masters, had his butt kicked, became a target for flying utensils, and was yelled at in languages not his own.

Making a fair trade, he came home with the self-confidence, discipline, knowledge, and techniques to begin transforming modern American cuisine. Armed with energy and little patience, he now had the chops to break tradition and drive a stake through old-school perceptions of fine dining. Bouley was ready for the hard-scrabble climb to become what Charlie Trotter, the 1999 James Beard Foundation Outstanding Chef, called “the most influential chef in the United States.”

“A handsome young man came almost every day to my pastry shop in Santa Fe,” reminisces Michel Richard, now the renowned chef of Citronelle in Washington, D.C., and the 2007 James Beard Foundation Outstanding Chef. “His dream was to become a chef. When he wanted to go to France, I helped him find a job. Look at the results—he has become one of the top chefs of this country.” Richard is understandably proud, and Bouley is not the only chef he’s sponsored.

Bouley is embarrassed when reminded that he was named one of *People* magazine’s “50 Most Beautiful People” in 1994. But as attractive as he is, his culinary style and talent supersede all else.

Bouley was born and raised near Storrs, Connecticut. The second of nine children, he was influenced by farm life and his heritage as the grandson of French émigrés. “My roots are definitely French,” he says. “I’m a cook of ingredients. I was raised on a farm.”

Uncertain about a career as a chef, he began working in restaurants simply because he needed the job, and he spent time in restaurants in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Cape Cod, Massachusetts. After studying business at the Sorbonne, in Paris, though, he worked in restaurants in France and Switzerland.

In France, Bouley apprenticed, worked, and *staged* with some of Europe’s most acclaimed chefs, including Roger Vergé, Paul

Bocuse, Joël Robuchon, Gaston Lenôtre, and Frédy Girardet. Returning to the United States in 1980, he sharpened his skills in Manhattan’s leading restaurants of the time—Le Cirque, Le Périgord, and La Côte Basque—as well as working as sous-chef at Roger Vergé’s restaurant in San Francisco.

Teaming with Drew Nieporent, who he met in San Francisco, Bouley opened Montrachet in New York City in 1985. Bouley, seeking innovation, offered the first American *dégustation* menu—miniscule servings of a few exquisite bites designed, then refined, for flavor, texture, and anticipation. “We stimulate the palate, keeping the momentum moving all the way through the experience,” explains Bouley.

Two years later, he took another path, opening Bouley. He established his signature style there: superior quality and tiny courses, with several different offerings inspired by an individual guest, the season, the mood, or the moment.

His new restaurant was immediately a premiere dining experience, celebrity-studded, and sparkling with four-star reviews. Glitterati swooned. Accolades, rankings, and multiple awards quickly followed. From 1991 until it closed in 1996, Bouley was voted the most popular restaurant in New York by the Zagat Survey and received an unparalleled food rating of 29 out of 30 in the last three years. The *New York Times* restaurant critic, Bryan Miller, gave Bouley four stars, writing, “David Bouley’s rabid zeal for fresh regional ingredients, his cerebral approach to textures and flavors, and his obvious delight in wowing customers make this one of the most exciting restaurants in New York City.”

Always a pioneer, Bouley worked with universities and farmers to grow vegetables for and fostered the development of such artisanal produce as fingerling potatoes. His style of nutritious food balanced with beauty became paramount for him. “It’s a French approach to cooking that means a strong understanding of the history and the repertoire. It’s an interrelationship of products and a good understanding of technique, then employing all of them at the same time,” he explains.

He uses a minimum of cream and butter, relying instead on an almost worshipful approach to ingredients for depth and richness. He speaks with great feeling of food that goes straight “to your body and to your soul. Clean, pure food—as a chef, you can’t go beyond that. When you know that, and when you cook like that, is when you develop your own style. Nature can give you something so memorable.” Bouley’s extraordinary flavors are clear and exquisitely balanced. His seasoning is deft with complex creations in a classical simplicity.

Yet Bouley has always been provocative, following his own path, rather than one prescribed for a celebrity chef. What chef would successfully open for a time, then close dynamic restaurants once they were firmly established? One who is always impatient, exploring cuisines and ambiance, quite simply invigorated by challenges. One who proves his point, curiosity satisfied, or as the market changes, always moving ahead. Everything is built around his vision, powered by a restless intellect and persistence.

Bouley doesn’t see obstacles. Focused and controlled, he melds them into opportunities. He listens carefully, selectively, and becomes totally absorbed. Then, intrigued, emboldened by a concept, he breaks into action. “I need to have spontaneity and I work at the last minute,” Bouley confesses. “If I think too far ahead, I dilute myself.” He’s fast, and relatively fearless both in and out of the kitchen. He proved that racing motorcycles for Ducati in the 1960s, and later blasting around Manhattan on a Harley.

Central casting could have sent him onto a movie set as an eccentric chef. Protégés adore him and appreciate his quirks. Cooks who are puzzled by it all don’t make the cut. Bouley conceptualizes, cooks with jubilant abandon, and at the same time is a masterful technician. To work with Bouley is to be flexible, and most of all, intuitive, and in tune with him. At various times during service, he’ll change a recipe, or even change the menu. His spontaneity keeps his cooks excited and vigilant. “If they get complacent and into a routine groove, the food tastes bland. If the cook is alert, on edge, it is reflected in the food.”

Bouley’s imagination is sparked in an extreme environment. If the pressure isn’t there, he cranks it up to another level. It stimulates the creativity he uses to refine everything when he relaxes enough to get into a mindset where most people stress or freeze. His technique is instinctive from decades of execution, and daring. “Why not?” he asks. “Why not now?” Never, “How?”

The 2009 James Beard Foundation Outstanding Chef Dan Barber described the inner workings of the Bouley kitchen as “controlled chaos.” The atmosphere was intense. It was also, as Barber remembers, confusing. “Around him, there is an orbit of madness.”

Certainly nothing about him is static. Since the original Bouley opened in 1987, the resilient chef has developed and tested several concepts: Danube, an Austrian restaurant; then Secession, his New York bistro in the old Danube space; and the newest experiment, Brushstroke, a Japanese notion on West Broadway. Since the destruction of September 11th in lower Manhattan in 2001, Bouley Bakery, part of the original restaurant group in TriBeCa, has moved to new quarters and been reimaged as a smaller, finer concept. His Upstairs restaurant has morphed into a more casual dining spot for baked goods and takeout. His aim is now more targeted, and objectives precise. Transformation is important to him.

Bouley restaurant is his flagship, though, and the keystone of his TriBeCa epicurean empire. The original closed in 1996; the current incarnation opened in 2008.

The dramatic vaulted arches in the newest Bouley are a stunning design built in tandem with his contractor brother, Martin. They discussed the possibilities, built it, ripped it out, and started over, doing it again and again until they were satisfied. That was the same aesthetic and willingness to revise that is echoed in his approach to his menus.

The front doors, made of walnut, were salvaged from a sixteenth-century abbey in Provence, France. A master craftsman restored the doors and six eighteenth-century wooden beams across the lounge area ceiling. Through another master artisan, Bouley secured twenty tons of stone for the fireplace, walls, and staircases

from a long-closed quarry in France used to build Versailles. Bouley's restaurant was the only project outside France to receive the stone. The meticulously cut stones were carefully arranged according to their color, shape, and texture to replicate intricate, historical patterns. The vestibule is lined with narrow shelves of fresh apples, producing an orchard of fragrance, a hint of surprises ahead.

Large Impressionist-style paintings, commissioned from artist Claude Chevally, grace the dining room. A massive limestone fireplace warms the interior, with tapered candles reflecting off vaulted gold-leafed ceilings and silvered walls. The room shimmers with lush fabrics, saturated colors, and lustrous glazed surfaces.

By contrast, his test kitchen research facility, with its state-of-the-art equipment, provides ongoing stimulation and education for Bouley and his staff. On occasion, food enthusiasts are invited to spend time learning the alchemy in his private sanctum. Bouley collects talent in many fields, bringing them together for collaboration. He invites other chefs, cheesemakers, vintners, and food experts from around the world for freewheeling brainstorming sessions of technique, new ingredients, and trends. A huge slate wall acts as a blackboard for doodling ideas. Oversized video screens project the work in progress, and an adjacent library contains fine culinary resources.

Bouley thrives on executing an idea. It could be a thoughtful process or a whimsical one. His immaculate kitchen is calibrated to his pace. Cooks work at a custom-made Molteni, the Ferrari of gas stoves. He communicates at times without words, directing the brigade with a searing glare, an arched eyebrow, or an impatient gesture.

One now-famous chef chuckles as he recalls his first day in the kitchen when Bouley instructed him to talk to a fish. It was the chef's metaphor to explain that every fish, like every person, is different. A cook must be sensitive to nuance and communication is essential, extending to all foods. He insists that cooks look at, and consider, each product. He tries to learn from every situation. Bouley says,

"IT'S ABOUT REACHING A POINT OF TAKING YOUR CLASSICAL CULINARY INFLUENCES AND DEVELOPING A VOICE OF YOUR OWN. IT IS ABOUT UNDERSTANDING HOW TO ENHANCE THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF A FRUIT OR A PIECE OF FISH, RATHER THAN OBSCURING IT WITH INAPPROPRIATE HERBS AND SPICES."

The kitchen has always dictated his personal life, so it's fitting that Bouley met his wife on the day that Danube closed. Nicole Bartelme, a Rhode Island School of Design graduate, runs the philanthropic organization TriBeCa Native, founded the TriBeCa Film Festival, and has a hand in Bouley's restaurant projects. "David and I have very similar tastes, so we work very well together," says the artist and photographer.

"Restaurants start when the guests sit down at the tables, and cooking can only be considered an art once the customer has finished the last bite," Bouley believes, already thinking ahead to his next creation.





SEA URCHIN TERRINE *with* **CRÈME FRAÎCHE,**
OESTRA CAVIAR, *and* **FRESH KINOME**

3 sheets gelatin	1 teaspoon diced shallots
3 cups Dashi (page 127)	1 teaspoon fresh lime juice
2½ tablespoons soy sauce	1 bunch chives
1 tablespoon mirin	Salt
1 tablespoon sake	Freshly ground black pepper
6 ounces fresh shelled sea urchin	
	4 fresh <i>kinome</i> (prickly ash leaves)
1 cup crème fraîche	2 ounces osetra caviar
1 teaspoon yuzu juice	

1. Soften the gelatin sheets in cold water to cover, about 15 minutes.
2. To a medium saucepan over low heat, add the dashi, soy sauce, mirin, and sake.
3. Remove the gelatin and squeeze out excess water. Add it to the dashi mixture and stir until the gelatin has melted. Pour the mixture into 9-by-5-inch terrine mold. Let it stand at room temperature until almost set.
4. Arrange the sea urchin on the surface of the gelatin in the terrine. Refrigerate until firm.
5. In a bowl, whisk together the crème fraîche, yuzu, shallots, and lime juice. Season with salt and pepper.
6. Put the chives in a blender or food processor and purée. With the motor running, add the oil to the blender in a stream. Continue to purée until smooth. Season with salt and pepper.

To assemble

1. Spoon the yuzu crème fraîche onto each serving plate. Unmold and cut the terrine into 1-inch-thick slices and place 1 slice on each plate. Garnish with chive oil, *kinome*, and caviar and serve.

NOTE: Chive oil is another wonderful—and colorful—garnish for this dish. To make chive oil, purée 1 cup of coarsely chopped fresh chives in a blender or food processor. With the machine running, stream in ¾ cup soybean or grapeseed oil and process until the mixture is smooth. Season the oil with salt and pepper to taste. Drizzle the oil over the plated terrine slices.

SERVES 6

PORCINI FLAN *with* DUNGENESS CRAB *and* BLACK TRUFFLE DASHI

DASHI SAUCE

- 2 tablespoons kudzu powder
- 1 cup Dashi (page 127)
- 1 teaspoon mirin
- 1 tablespoon fresh ginger juice (squeezed from grated fresh ginger)
- 2 tablespoons light soy sauce
- 2 to 4 ounces jumbo lump crabmeat, plus extra for garnish
- 4 to 6 ounces black truffle pâté

MUSHROOM PURÉE

- 1½ to 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 pound porcini or royal trumpet mushrooms, thinly sliced
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

FLAN

- 3 small brown eggs
- 1 cup Dashi (page 127)
- 6 fresh *kinome* (prickly ash leaves)

To make the dashi sauce

1. In a small bowl, stir the kudzu into 1 ounce of cold water until smooth. In a small sauce-pan, heat the dashi until warm and add the mirin. Add the kudzu mixture and stir until the mixture thickens. Add the ginger juice and soy sauce.
2. Add the crabmeat to a bowl and add dashi mixture to cover. In a second bowl, combine the remaining dashi mixture with the pâté. Cover and keep warm.

To make the mushroom purée

1. In a large sauté pan, warm the olive oil and cook the mushrooms until tender. Purée the mushrooms in a food processor and season with salt and pepper.

To make the flan

1. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Whisk the eggs, then pour in the dashi and blend. Pass the mixture through a strainer, then divide it among six 4-ounce ramekins. Set the ramekins in a roasting pan or large baking dish and add hot water to the pan to come about halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Cover the pan and bake until the tip of a knife inserted into the center of the flans comes out clean, 8 to 10 minutes.

To serve

1. Spread 2 tablespoons of the mushroom purée on each cooked flan. Add a 1-inch-thick layer of the dashi-crabmeat mixture on top of each flan and finish with a ¼-inch-thick layer of the dashi-pâté mixture. Garnish with additional crabmeat and the *kinome*. Serve warm.
- NOTE:** If you do not eat crab, the recipe works very well with asparagus or corn instead.

SERVES 6

DASHI

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| 1 quart cold water, plus extra as needed (use Volvic bottled water for best results) | 1 ounce giant kelp (<i>kombu</i>) |
| | 1 ounce dried bonito flakes (<i>hana-katsuo</i>) |

1. Fill a medium pot with the water and put in the kelp. Bring to just below a boil, about 10 minutes. Remove the *kombu* before the water boils to avoid a strong odor. Test by inserting your thumbnail into the fleshiest part. If the flesh is tough, return the *kombu* to the pot for 1 or 2 minutes. If necessary to prevent boiling, add ¼ cup cold water. When the flesh is soft, remove the *kombu* and discard.
2. Bring the liquid to a boil. Add ¼ cup cold water to bring the temperature down quickly and immediately add the bonito flakes. Bring to a boil again and immediately remove from the heat to avoid bitterness. Allow the flakes to settle, about 30 to 60 seconds. Skim foam. Filter the stock through a cheesecloth-lined sieve, reserving the bonito and kelp to make a secondary dashi, if desired.

MAKES 1 QUART