

Haute AMBASSADOR

BY DANIEL BOULUD



A little to the west is the business capital of Toronto, which is sophisticated, cosmopolitan and more globally inspired in its cuisine, with many chefs exploring styles and ingredients from all over the world. There's a real synergy between what's happening in the kitchens of New York and Toronto, and a lot of chefs train in New York and then return home to put their own spin on what they've learned.

One of those chefs is Patrick Kriss of Aloette, who opened an impressive contemporary French restaurant and cocktail bar. A former chef of mine at Restaurant DANIEL, Patrick really shines at Aloette and perfectly displays his focus, talent, creativity and ambition in everything he does.

Ontario is similarly rich with local wineries, farms and cheese producers, many of which we use at our restaurants. There's a real locavore aspect to Toronto that plays an important influence on the vibrant restaurant scene. A few of my favorites when I'm in town are The Black Hoof, Bar Raval or Constantine by chef Craig Harding.

While judging on Top Chef Canada, I got to sample a lot of what so many young, talented chefs were making. Some of the contestants went on to open their own restaurants, such as recent finalist Chef Dustin Gallagher and his Peoples Eatery in Chinatown.

Canada remains interesting to me because of the constant exploration of chefs, local traditions and the true combination of climate and culture that really vary by region. From the rustic roots and traditional French influence on the East Coast to Nordic influences on the West Coast, there is so much to see and always a reason to visit.

Award-winning chef Daniel Boulud operates 16 restaurants globally, including Boulud Sud in Downtown Miami, Maison Boulud in Montreal and Café Boulud in Toronto.

GET LOST IN CANADA

About 10 years ago, I got lost in the forest somewhere between Montreal and Mont-Tremblant, and it turned out to be one of the many memorable culinary adventures I've experienced since I first started visiting Canada. At the time, I was lucky enough to be piloting a brand-new, fire-engine-red 599 12-cylinder Ferrari on an excursion to the Circuit Mont-Tremblant, where I was part of a caravan line of 20 vintage cars from the 1950s driving to celebrate the 50th anniversary of this exquisite car. Somewhere during the trip, I got separated from the police escorts and ended up on a long, deserted dirt road in the middle of nowhere that made me wonder if I was heading to Mont-Tremblant or the North Pole. After finally coming upon a gas station for directions, I eventually made it out of there and stopped at one of the best places for lunch—Bistro à Champlain.

This memory, like so many others, sticks out in my mind as I think about the culinary connection between the triangle that is New York City, Montreal and Toronto, which are three cities that any foodie should have on their list. Our neighbor to the

north is producing some incredibly talented chefs that are creating inventive cuisine and drawing upon their own local regions for inspiration.

I've been visiting Canada for about 20 years, and well before I had a restaurant there I was always going to Montreal to party, celebrate and have fun. Mont-Tremblant is a beautiful place year-round—it's a well-known ski destination in the winter, and in the summer it's fantastic to swim in the lakes. You can enjoy Husky-driven sleigh rides in the snow and a great local wine by a cozy fire at night. Montreal is one of those cities where you really feel the French influence—it's soulful, approachable, unpretentious and socially open. Similar to my upbringing on a farm in Lyon, France, Montreal has some of the best farmers and small producers of pork, venison and duck in the country.

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MAISON BOULUD

Located in Montreal, the hot spot serves the chef's famed cuisine with a Canadian twist incorporating local ingredients (photo above). Main photo: Chef Sylvain Assie and Daniel Boulud at Café Boulud in Toronto.