



Bar Boulud



navarin at Bar Boulud



chocolate éclairs at Bar Boulud

2008 DESTINATIONS

Superchefs Raise the Bar

by Jane Sigal

There is no chef at *Au Sauvignon*, Marie-Françoise Vergne's tiny wine bar in Paris's seventh *arrondissement*. There isn't even a kitchen. Vergne, whose father, Henri, bought the bar in the '50s, offers only cold plates: tartines of *rillettes* and *saucisson sec* on sour Poilâne bread as well as tangy crottin de Chavignol and raw-milk Camembert.

Yet *Au Sauvignon* was one of the inspirations for *Bar Boulud*, star chef Daniel Boulud's latest restaurant on New York City's Upper West Side. "It's Old France, and I just love that," says Daniel Johnnes, Bar Boulud's wine director. "The tartines are stacked up in the case by the bar. I discovered Domaine Mardon Quincy there 15 or 20 years ago, and now it's on the list at Bar Boulud."

Not long ago, top chefs were opening bistros, second restaurants where diners could

experience their cooking at lower prices and with less formality. Today, leading chefs are expanding their restaurant empires with wine bars. Beside Daniel Boulud, Gray Kunz, of *Café Gray*, the internationally star-studded Alain Ducasse and Australian celebrity chef Luke Mangan have all opened restaurants in the United States that lead with wine. Tony Mantuano, of *Spiaggia* in Chicago, and Michael Mina, with 11 restaurants across the country, also have wine bar projects in the works.

These new bars are based on places like *Au Sauvignon*, where simple food accompanies carefully chosen, small-production wines often from Beaujolais, Loire and Alsace. In fact, these American variations are closer to full-scale restaurants. Bar Boulud is casual compared to Boulud's luxe *Restaurant Daniel* and chic bistros *Café Boulud* and *DB Bistro Moderne*. And Bar Boulud's *pâté grand-mère* and *jambon de Paris* could easily take on *Au Sauvignon*'s charcuterie—Boulud hired



The wine bar at Alain Ducasse's Adour



Shrimp at South Food +Wine Bar



Luke Mangan from South Food +Wine Bar

Sylvain Gason, disciple of deli wizard Gilles Verot to make the sausages, terrines and *tourtes*. But executive chef Damian Sansonetti also turns out a roster of updated bistro classics like coq au vin and *navarin* (lamb stew) for the 100-seat space. And executive pastry chef Ghaya Oliveira offers pâtisserie favorites such as chocolate éclairs and pastry cream-filled *gâteau basque*.

These wine bars also pay as much attention to the décor as to what's on the wine list. While Au Sauvignon is essentially a corner café plastered with Beaujolais Nouveau posters and maps of the wine routes of France, Boulud's architect, Thomas Schlessler, was more ambitious. He rehabbed a cavernous space across from Lincoln Center to look like a long, vaulted wine cellar with gravel walls and photographs of wine stains by artist Vik Muniz.

For the wine directors at this new brand of American restaurant, "wine bar" has a slightly different meaning. "It's something focused

with an unusual and unexpected selection of wines," says Liz O'Connell, a co-owner with New Zealander Anna Weinberg and international restaurateur and TV chef Luke Mangan of the recently opened *South Food + Wine Bar* in San Francisco's South of Market district. There's an educational component too. "I was frustrated," she says. "I wanted to move beyond Australian and New Zealand wines as cheap and cheerful at seven dollars a bottle." O'Connell, whose family started Australia's boutique vineyard Mandalay Road, sells only regionally expressive wines from Australia and New Zealand, like the Maori-named Te Kairanga Pinot Noir from New Zealand's North Island. "It's Martinborough's take on pinot noir. It doesn't taste like Central Otago pinot. It has a deeper, more peppery, intense style."

O'Connell originally imagined opening a straight wine bar with nothing but cheese and cured meats. "I was wrong," she says.

"Food and the matching of wine in a food-and-wine town like San Francisco is so important." That's when she brought in Mangan and his Mod Oz, Asian-inflected cooking. Mangan's fish and chips with wasabi mayo, for instance, is a great pairing for the crisp New Zealand Yarrabank Sparkling Cuvee on the restaurant's wine list. His coconut broth with tempura New Zealand green lip mussels goes well with another of the wine bar's New Zealand offerings, the floral Bird Gewurztraminer from Marlborough.

O'Connell did, however, keep the convivial aspect of a traditional wine bar. In addition to reserved seating, a long communal table seats 20. "We want the wine to be serious but we want South to be a welcoming, friendly, warm place," she says. "We stuck photographs of our winemakers on the walls of the toilet because, at the end of the day, it's grape juice."