

New York
RESIDENT

Daniel's Skybox
A Unique View of A Unique Restaurant

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Glass is an integral part of New York City's skyline. From the mirrored spires of the Time Warner building on Columbus Circle to the transparent walls of Richard Meier's stark homes on Perry Street, the views streaming through have become as important to the living experience as the interior of the site. But for passionate epicureans, there is a secret glass shell with priceless views that can be yours for a few delicious hours.

Push the heavy doors at Daniel, the four-star restaurant within the old Mayfair Regent on East 65th Street, and you are in the comfortable foyer. Behind the desk, the maitre d' welcomes guests with a warm smile. Take a quick look on your right at the richly tented bar and lounge and step into the opulent dining room. There, all is smooth and orderly. But when you are led through the rear doors into the kitchen, another world opens up.

There are 40 cooks busy in the kitchen of Daniel, at all times under the watchful eye of executive chef Jean-Francois Bruel. Even though they are not all visible – many work in the production kitchen on the lower level – eyes under white toques follow your progress as you step into their territory. A metallic ladder leads to Maestro Daniel's den, next to which is the "sky box," a small cozy room painted in red and covered with photographs chronicling celebrity diners and other encounters. For those seeking anonymity, curtains can be drawn. For the hungry voyeur, two glass walls reveal the action in the kitchen below.

"The chef's office is not usually a priority when you are building a restaurant," said Daniel Boulud. "I didn't want my office in the basement, but also didn't want it to take up valuable space. The 18-foot ceiling in our kitchen provided a unique opportunity. There was room to build my office on top of the coffee pantry. The double-decker result is a space perched way up high overlooking the kitchen with a kind of eagle's nest feel to it. That's why we call it the 'sky box.' It's an

intimate glass box that overlooks the entire kitchen.”

On most nights, Chef Boulud, in his most elegant whites, is your charming host. Relax and let him and his maitre sommelier Philippe Marchal create an eight-course menu paired with hand-picked wines. The parade starts with not one, but four or five amuse-bouches, such as the most ethereal of parmesan crisps or an intense sardine emulsion. Simply baked turbot delights, as well as a collection of veal cooked four different ways. From his roots in the Lyon terroir and his grandmother’s beloved cuisine, Daniel brings earthiness and ancient dishes he updates and builds on. From his international life in New York, he designs creative touches for contemporary recipes such as a dazzling yuzu marinated Thai snapper. On the walls, the photographs of the old Café Boulud, owned by his grandparents in the 1900s, remind guests that this man’s genuine hospitality runs in the family.

The service in the sky box is superior even to that of the dining room, an almost impossible feat, as William Grimes noted in his 2001 New York Times review, “A model of professionalism.” In fact, the cooks regularly steal glances up into the sky box. They watch your reaction as you savor the first bite and know just when to send the next course. Don’t be surprised to hear the chef’s strong voice fill the room midway through the meal, asking if the evening is to your liking. He speaks on a direct line between kitchen and skybox. Your waiter, a consummate professional, must have climbed the ladder 50 times during the evening. By the time desserts are hoisted up, the pressure downstairs seems to ease. The last guests in the dining room linger on, reluctant to leave.

Daniel’s special table is available for groups of four from Monday through Wednesday only, for \$250 per person.