

DANIEL JOLY

The Making of an International Chef

YOU MIGHT SAY THAT a hurricane brought chef Daniel Joly to Beaver Creek, where he has built a reputation for serving the freshest and highest quality cuisine in a warm and friendly European atmosphere at Mirabelle Restaurant.

The son of an architect, Joly was born and raised in Overysel, Belgium. His father hoped Joly would follow in his footsteps, but by age 14, Joly knew he didn't want to go through extensive schooling, or into the construction business. Instead, cooking piqued his interest, particularly as he watched his good friend work in a family restaurant.

"My dad was not too happy because (restaurants) are lots of work," Joly says. "Now, I have two sons, and both don't want anything to do with restaurants. One (28) is in the medical industry, and the other (23) is a mechanical engineer for Colorado School of Mines. I think that's what life is: You have to follow what your inspiration is."



Chef-Owner Daniel Joly and his team at Mirabelle Restaurant

THE MAKING OF A GREAT CHEF

Joly graduated from the Culinary Institute of Brussels in 1986, then trained at the Michelin, a 3-star restaurant in Brussels. While working there, he entered a nationwide cooking competition, where his assignment included preparing a pheasant — a bird that's quite tricky to cook. As fortune (and experience) would have it, he often prepared the dish at the Michelin, so he felt very comfortable

at the Best Young Chef of the Country Competition, which he ultimately won.

"I got a big, fancy diploma, and it was my first time on TV," Joly says.

It was also a huge turning point.

In 1989, he and his Belgian wife, Nathalie — his "sweetheart," who he met when he was 17 — were vacationing at her parent's second home in Florida when he met restaurateurs from South Carolina, who invited Joly to be their sous chef. So, that year, at age 23,

Joly and Nathalie moved to South Carolina on a visa.

"The competition helped with my immigration papers, because it showed I had talent," Joly says. "Immigration is difficult, so it helped me find a root in this country."

FROM SOUTH TO WEST

Joly worked at Million, a Relais & Chateaux restaurant, in Charleston, S.C. until Hurricane Hugo hit in 1991. The storm closed the restaurant for more than six months, and though the owners paid Joly, he couldn't

stand the thought of so much time off, so he decided to accept a friend's invitation to spend the winter as a sous chef at Cordillera, a "new hot spot in Edwards with fancy food," he says. Meanwhile, he continued to pay his mortgage in South Carolina.

But then he fell in love with the lifestyle, and the people, in the Vail Valley.

By 1992, he was committed to living in Beaver Creek and working as the chef and manager of Mirabelle Restaurant. Meanwhile, Nathalie, who studied to be a

Chef Daniel works with both sweet and savory ingredients. From decadent foie gras to fresh berries, he likes to elevate his products with classic techniques.



dental technician but couldn't find a job in the field, realized "she wouldn't see me if she didn't work in restaurants." In 1999, the couple purchased Mirabelle Restaurant.

"The Vail Valley is wonderful for kids and restaurant (life) because the off-season gives you time to regroup and reconnect," Joly says. "In big cities, you work 365 days a year and burn out. Here, there is a little more balance. ... The big challenge in the Vail Valley for any young chef is the cost of doing business, but the quality of life is unbelievable. It's just about persevering and going at it."

AMERICAN LIFESTYLE, EUROPEAN CHARM

Joly readily adopted the American way of life; he believes middle class Americans enjoy a better quality of life than Europeans. He acknowledges the more easy-going lifestyle, but

CHEF ACCOLADES

Joly has earned international acclaim from numerous publications and institutions, including four-star ratings from Mobil Travel Guide and AAA and an Award of Excellence from "Wine Spectator" for each of the 20-plus years he has owned Mirabelle Restaurant.

He is the only U.S.-based chef to earn a place on the Mastercook Wall of Fame; has been featured in the Naples, Florida "Food and Wine" and Aspen "Food and Wine" magazines; and was featured at Epcot Taste of the Nations in 2018.

also appreciates the fact that Americans tend to respect others who work hard, whereas "in Europe, they may think it's luck, or you have a rich daddy that helped you," he says. "Here, wealthy (people) are inspiring for young people," and certainly have been for him.

However, he deeply respects the more than 2,000-year European tradition of what has become known in the U.S. as "farm to table" — something he trained in and has adhered to his entire life as a chef.

"If you get good produce, you don't have to do much to make it good," he says. "Some people get so obsessed with the spicy food they forget the quality of ingredients. I look for the best quality, because I'm not a magician — I'm only a cook — there's only so much I can do with a can of beans versus a ripe tomato."

In addition to the finest ingredients, Joly's philosophy involves caring for his employees — many have been with him for 20 to 30 years — and treating guests with



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respect and open arms.

“I focus on the experience,” he says. “I’d rather do 20 people less and make sure everybody is happy. I’m not trying to make a quick buck.”

And, he especially doesn’t want guests to feel intimidated.

“I want to make people feel like they’re at home,” as opposed to stereotypically intimidating French restaurants where waiters overdress and six glasses sit at each place setting awaiting a complex hierarchy of wines. “I just want them to have a good time. The magic of Mirabelle is that I understand the community.”

The actual building that Mirabelle sits in — the original ranch house in Beaver Creek dating back to the early 1900s — also lends a rustic and homey charm.

EVOLUTION OF A CHEF

Joly travels the world as a judge at about 30 prestigious culinary events annually and serves as a brand ambassador for Belgium beer company in the U.S.

In 2009, he kept his employees working during the economic downturn by asking them to test recipes for his cookbook, “Not Just Another Cookbook.” The publication is aptly named, as it not only features Mirabelle’s classic dishes, but also tells Joly’s unique story of immigrating to the

United States and becoming the owner of one of the valley’s finest restaurants.

He’s also featured in the new “Vail Mountain Cookbook,” a publication released in fall 2019 that showcases recipes from the most elite chefs in the valley.

These days, he keeps busy with his professional duties, but he also donates his talent as a chef to charities, the most recent being a rural cancer clinic outside of Denver.

“Just helping people is a good feeling,” he says. “We are all about helping our community and supporting other local businesses.”

During his downtime, he hangs out with his family and dog at a small ranch he owns in McCoy. He particularly loves hiking and fishing — either on a river or in the deep sea.

“Outdoor living is very peaceful,” he says, adding that he enjoys watching the wildlife near his ranch but doesn’t like hunting. “I guess it’s because I’m a chef, I don’t enjoy cleaning meat on days off. Instead, we goof around outside.”

He says people sometimes view him as a “complicated person ... they think I’m fancy because I have an accent, but really, I’m a very simple person. ...I keep the accent, but I really take the attributes of American living. Home is here.” — BY KIMBERLY NICOLETTI

Bison carpaccio, top, and seared halibut with summer vegetables.