



IGNITE THE FUTURE

Scholarship: Bobby Culinary Arts Scholarship  
Grantor: New Jersey Restaurant Educational Foundation  
Award Amount \$1000.00  
Scholarship Application Deadline: All applications must be received by April 15, 2021

#### Background

Robert (Bobby) Alvirgi began his passion for the culinary arts as a youngster while watching "The French Chef" starring Julia Child. Bobby realized his dream when he graduated from The French Culinary Arts Institute in New York City in 1987. Bobby interned at Gourmonds in Palermo, Sicily. He worked as a chef in many restaurants before opening his first restaurant in 1999 known as Danielle's Bistro in Chatham NJ. In his honor and to keep his love of the Culinary craft, his family has established a scholarship fund for individuals with the same excitement & love for the culinary craft.

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MAY 21, 2000

THE SUNDAY STAR-LEDGER

### Dining

## Chatham bistro sets sights high and sometimes hits bulls-eye

**Danielle's**  
219 Main St., Chatham,  
Hours: 11:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Tuesday-  
Thursday, 11:30 a.m.-11 p.m. Friday-  
Saturday, 4-9 p.m. Sunday BYOW.  
Major credit cards. Casual dress. No  
smoking. Wheelchair accessible.  
Reservations for parties of five or  
more: (973) 701-7990.

★ ★ 1/2

By Cody Kendall  
for the STAR-LEDGER

Danielle's is just what you'd want from a storefront bistro in the middle of a suburban downtown. There's a menu that runs all the way from \$7.95 pizza to \$25.95 specials, the atmosphere is attractive but not pretentious, and it's family-friendly.

The kitchen seems to aspire higher, however, and sometimes it reaches its goals. At other moments, the food is just what one would expect from an ordinary neighborhood restaurant.

Chelouner Bob Alvirgi went to the French Culinary Institute and did an externship in Sicily before spending five years working in California. While he's cooking, his wife, Danielle Bergame-Alvirgi handles the front of the house, a big city room with light wood tables and attractive murals framing a bustling dining scene.

We found appetizers beautifully prepared, a showpiece for the chef's artistry. A Jewel was the Italian stuffed cabbage (\$8.95), seared with sausage as well as lots of garlic, tomato and cheese. Despite its description, it wasn't the least bit messy; to eat, the garlic and cheese melted over the slightly inhertent blandness of the searole.

No less interesting was the shrimp and bean salad (\$8.95). The shrimp, curled along the outside of the plate were a bonus. We didn't even need them because the mix of green beans, campanelli beans and nicely ripe diced fresh tomato in a spiced vinaigrette was so good. Equally well-balanced, the goat cheese rolled in thin slices of eggplant (\$6.95) played well with its accompanying peppers and sun-dried tomatoes. They added a little spark with one unpalating, the mellowness of the main ingredients.

We veiled in anticipation for how the main courses would top that. Most of them were able to, though not being perfectly acceptable. The star among the main courses was homemade spinach ravioli (\$12.95), with chopped spinach covered by tomato-cent paste, proudly floating in an old-fashioned rich cream sauce punctuated with pieces of fresh asparagus. One step down on the scale, the

risotto filled al mare (\$16.95) had the requisite consistency, not misty or undercooked. The scallops and mussels we found in it were perfectly done; the overdone calamari bordered on the rubbery.

The tuna in the mixed seafood grill (\$22.95) also stayed too long on the fire and lacked even a trace of plink inside. Tilapia and sea bass complemented this trio, but the fatless baked contrast. Grilled shrimp or salmon would have made this a livelier three.

The meat mixed grill (\$25.95), offered a kangaroo chop, lamb chop and venison chop. The shalot demi glace added a very light note of interest to the meat. The kangaroo, of course, was the key here for its rarity. It tasted slick like a rare piece of inexpensive steak. It didn't seem to have as much flavor as ostrich, if that's any help in providing a frame of reference. (While I was eating kangaroo the other night, we all enjoyed eating a ropt audience-of-out-next-cocktail party.)

Pappardelle with lamb and wild mushrooms (\$16.95) actually was far more exciting, with lots of meat in a lively angle of noodles, a perfect dish for colder weather. It contrasted with the dull veal Gribnitz (\$15.95), the only veal on the regular menu. Aside from the lovely chopped salad of artichoke, red onion and basil on top of it, the breaded veal outlet dish was dry and lacked character.

Desserts also were a mixed bag. Approaching ice cream fixation in espresso (\$4.50) sounds strange, but a perfect way for coffee lovers to end a meal. A peach bread pudding (\$5.95) had been painstakingly prepared in a caramel fruit gaze and was moist. If only I could have said the same about the Chiffreleil chocolate cake (\$4.95), a very plain slab that had nothing to recommend it.

Despite having to handle a crowd, the staff managed to take good care of our table. However, the otherwise lovely server kept calling us, "you guys." That's fine when talking to friends at the mall, but it just won't do while waiting on a table. Speaking properly to patrons should be as much a part of training as the way an order is taken or a bottle of wine is opened. She handled both of those tasks very well, my guess is that she could easily learn another way to address guests, if someone would suggest it.

The downside of welcoming children is the consequent noise level, so be warned. This obviously isn't meant to be a romantic spot, anyway. It's a place for a nice meal of a reasonable price. You won't leave Danielle's hungry or broke.

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