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NEWS FOR NEAPOLITANS

WORKING WITH MOM

Bleu Provence's Cariot on two decades of working with his mother



Clément Cariot talks about what it's like working with his mother, Lysielle, of Bleu Provence restaurant in Old Naples.

Since its inception in 1999, Bleu Provence has been a family business. When Jacques and Lysielle Cariot opened their French restaurant near the Naples Bay on Eighth Street South, Clément Cariot was only 19. At the time, Clément was focused on his studies outside Naples, but upon his return to Southwest Florida to complete his degree, he was tasked with working part-time in all capacities: hosting, bussing, food-running, bartending, serving, even dishwashing. “They loved calling me in on Saturday nights,” Clément joked. He didn’t mind, though; he’d get to spend all the money he’d make on his extended summer vacations in France.

After 25 years, in honor of Mother’s Day, Clément shared stories of what it was like being by his mother’s side as the family restaurant blossomed into an essential lifeline of the growing Naples dining scene for both seekers of French cuisine and dedicated oenophiles.

When Bleu Provence opened its doors, the family had only moved to Naples two years prior. Lysielle Cariot began with overseeing the front of the house alongside her husband, Jacques. “I definitely saw her as the boss anytime I stepped on any property they were running,” Clément said. In 2005, Lysielle took over the head chef responsibilities. “She still is the head chef today, overseeing the ordering and the plates, updating the menu, expediting or even filling in for anybody,” Clément said, citing his mother’s 12-hour workdays. A few years later, Clément would get called up for his first full-time gig at Bleu Provence as the front of house manager.

“She learned a lot from her mother, who went to school to become a housewife. Growing up in France, we were always hosting my father’s family and she would cook for 20 people something like once a month at least, always cooking us dinner.” Clément was always fond of his mother’s

cooking, even if after she began to helm the restaurant's kitchen it happened less often. "Even if she's not cooking for me, I get to see her every day."

But her touch on Bleu Provence didn't start (or end) there. In fact, Lysielle is responsible for the restaurant's trademark washed-blue-colored interior and the patterns you're surrounded with in the dining room.

A few minutes later, Clément added an interjection to our conversation to note that he changed his mind: "I totally lied, I definitely saw her as my mom, and she had to listen to my complaints. As much as she wanted to deal with me as an employee, she had to deal with me as her son."

In the summer of 2023, Bleu Provence made headlines with the news that it was being acquired by the Hoffmann Family of Companies. "After the last hurricane, my mother felt like she didn't have the energy to rebuild," Clément said. When Hurricane Ian caused the waters from Naples Bay to surge, it resulted in 6 feet of water inside the dining room of Bleu Provence. Everything would have to be replaced.

But a few months later, the deal was off the table and the Cariots would continue captaining the restaurant. "I was relieved the restaurant had a chance to stay in the family, but I knew we definitely had to find someone to replace her," Clément said. Today, brothers Clément and Kevin are the ones seen walking through the dining room during dinner service.



"The best thing about working with her was being able to see my mom every day and have that person there for me. That helped me feel confident in what I was doing. And not having that is going to be the biggest hole to fill. I'm not looking forward to it."

Lysielle has delegated some of her duties and cut her time investment down to eight hours a day from 12, and from six days a week to five. "That's the retirement plan, only working 40 hours a week."

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Reference: <https://www.naplespress.com/2024/05/10/working-with-mom/>