

Bar whiz bolts Bouley eatery

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Richard Johnson

With Paula Fraelich and Chris Wilson

THE heat is on at David Bouley's new TriBeCa restaurant, Bouley Bakery and Market, which is having a staff crisis the same week it's due to be reviewed by **Frank Bruni** at the New York Times and **Gael Greene** at New York Magazine.

Master mixologist **Stefan Trummer**, whose heavily publicized move to Bouley's new place follows a high-profile stint at Bar Masa at the Time Warner Center, is already on his way out the door. A number of other employees are said to be threatening to leave as well — unusual at the launch of a high-profile restaurant run by one of the city's most celebrated chefs.

"I know Stefan Trummer is leaving," confirms Bouley's rep, **Jennifer Baum**. But she said she was "not aware" of any other immi-

grant departures. Neither Bouley nor Trummer returned calls.

The brilliant, four-star chef's flagship restaurant, Bouley, enjoys the second-highest rating for food in the current Zagat Survey. But last summer, the Times chopped it down from four stars to three.

Bouley's career has been dogged by controversy.

After being lauded after 9/11 for turning his restaurant into a food outpost and tirelessly cooking for rescuers, Bouley's image was tarnished when it was learned that he was being paid by the Red Cross and using donated food and a volunteer staff.

He ended up in court with Tavern on the Green owner Warner LeRoy, with whom he had a partnership. He had a major falling-out with famed French pastry chef **Pierre**

Herme over a proposed joint venture.

One restaurant world insider who worked for Bouley for more than a year tells **PAGE SIX**: "He always obsessed about the food and his next project, but not the proper way to run a business."

"He didn't show up to his own book party. It was so embarrassing. Everyone was there, and we all had to make up a story about how he was in the kitchen cooking. He doesn't give a damn what anyone thinks of him."

Greene saw no signs of insurgency at the new place. She says, "I was shocked to see David Bouley, with gray hair and granny glasses behind the counter, actually cooking. The food was wonderful, and as I ate my sirloin burger, I thought, 'He's always been too fussy; isn't it amazing that David Bouley personally cooked this burger for me?'"

Blurry bongos

FOLKS are still talking about **Matthew McConaughey's** recent performance at a **John Mellencamp** show at the Hollywood Bowl. The Texan, who was famously arrested in 1999 for smoking weed and playing bongos in the buff, jumped onstage looking "completely out of it" and sat in on "Little Pink Houses." Our source reports: "He couldn't open his eyes, he didn't know any of the words ... He just kept hitting his bongos randomly and muttering ... When he finally left the stage, Mellencamp looked relieved and told the crowd, 'I'm glad he's a good actor at least.'" McConaughey's reps had no comment.

