

## Connecticut BYOB Gourmet Dining Destinations



Prosciutto-wrapped monkfish from Basso Cafe in Norwalk.

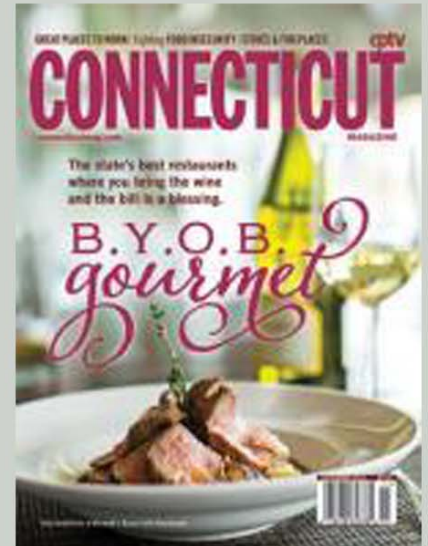
All images Julie Bidwell unless otherwise noted

Nothing takes the bite out of late fall better than sharing a good bottle of wine with someone special over a nice dinner in a warm, welcoming place—but romantic dinners can bite back with bills that climb into the hundreds faster than the first snowfall.

One reason is the wine. A bottle you buy for \$20 in a retail shop (which paid \$13 to \$14) will cost you about \$40 in most restaurants. Markups are even worse for those who order by the glass. In response, wine-savvy couples might stay home, light a fire, cook something easy and happily savor a 90-plus-point wine that cost just \$13.99, or even \$9.99.

Fortunately in Connecticut, there's an alternative that limits the cost of the wine (and thus the cost of the dinner) but doesn't keep you at home. Lots of delicious places embrace a BYOB philosophy, making for gourmet bargains. Here's the scoop on some of the best ones to help warm up the coming cold nights. Enjoy!

**The Place:** Basso Café Restaurant, Norwalk



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**The Vibe:** An intimate, bustling hidden gem of a bistro with soft lights, a convivial atmosphere and bold flavors.

**Dish Not to Miss:** Stuffed pork chop—pan-roasted fontina and spinach-stuffed pork chop with polenta squares and roasted grapes sauce.



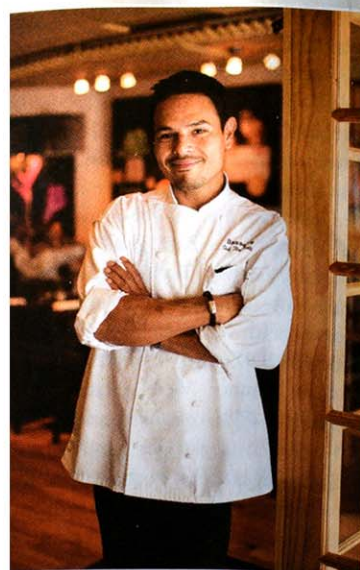
*Also popular at Basso: veal tenderloin.*

**Closest Wine Shop:** **Stew Leonard's Wines**, 55 Westport Ave., (203) 750-6162, [stewswines.com](http://stewswines.com). Offers an enormous selection of world-class wines at discount prices, further extending the savings to be had.

**The Details:** Corkage fee \$10 for each 750 ml and \$15 for 1.5 l. Dinner Tue. through Sat. 5:30-10 p.m., Sun. 5-10 p.m. (203) 354-6566, [bassobistrocafe.com](http://bassobistrocafe.com)

**Why We Love It:** The menu changes regularly, but always channels the fine dining sensibilities of chef/owner Renato Donzelli's Mediterranean and Latin American roots, explored in a wide range of flavors and dishes. Chef Donzelli (a fan of Verdejo) encourages patrons to bring their favorite vintages—Pinot noirs, cabernets, shirazes, merlots and cabernet blends as well as whites for any of the fish dishes, which change often. Every visit feels like a new adventure, but with a familiar guide who never disappoints.





Prosciutto-wrapped monkfish from Norwalk's Basso Café-Restaurant; (inset left) friends share great food and great wine; (inset right) Basso chef/owner Renato Donzelli.

Photos by Julie Bidwell

# BYOB gourmet

by Ray Bendici, Douglas P. Clement, Kate Hartman & Erik Ofgang

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