

CTbites

Your guide to great food in Fairfield County

Basso Cafe: Venezuela & Italy meet in Norwalk



When you enter **Basso Café** you feel transported to a warmer climate with the vibrant colors and art of the Mediterranean. The green walls are adorned with large colorful paintings depicting various culinary delights and the dark wood tables are inviting and offer a calming respite from the hustle and bustle of the day. At the helm of the Basso Café is Owner / Chef Renato Donzelli, who is proud that his dream still thrives after opening at the worst possible time at the beginning of the financial crisis in September 2007. A loyal following and favorable word of mouth allowed him to weather the crisis, and his strong menu has given him continued success.

Born in Venezuela and raised in Naples, Italy, Chef Renato's cuisine focuses primarily on Mediterranean flavors with a Venezuelan influence. The appetizers at Basso Café include options from Arepas and Empanadas to Bruschetta di Parma on crostini to Fried Yuca, while entrée selections include several fish, meat and poultry selections, plus several pastas.



The highlight of the tapas / appetizers that we sampled was the sautéed spinach and chick peas with shaved garlic and olive oil. The spinach was flavorful and was complemented by the chick peas and Chef Renato elevated the brightness and flavors of the dish with a touch of lemon.



The Medjool dates stuffed with Formaggio Capra cheese and wrapped with smoked apple wood bacon were flavorful while the Mozzarella wrapped in applewood-smoked bacon and served with apricots and an apricot-caramel sauce offered various textures.



One of the current appetizer specials includes a slice of seared Foie Gras sitting atop a house-made duck and pork sausage and topped with a fig, white truffle oil and surrounded with droplets of chive oil. This savory dish delivers the full flavors of the various components but would benefit from a touch of sweetness to further enhance the richness of the Foie Gras.



We also enjoyed two entrées. The seared Halibut sat atop baby Italian eggplant filled with caponata and served with a Romanesco sauce and topped fried strands of leeks. The dish was delicious, the mild flavor of the halibut worked well with the eggplant and caponata and further enhanced by the boldness of the tomato and pepper sauce.



The “Lamb Two Ways” included three lamb ribs plus several slices of roasted leg of lamb served with Parmesan and green pea risotto plus several grilled asparagus. The lamb chops were perfectly cooked to maintain a pink interior while the sliced leg of lamb was served to medium doneness. We very much enjoyed its deep and rich flavor. Likewise the risotto was served to my preference of just short of al dente while the Parmesan cheese created a luscious and creamy finish.



Of the three desserts we sampled, we highly recommend the Tres Leches cake and the Tiramisu. The vanilla cake was soaked in three kinds of milk and subsequently drizzled with caramel. The cake was soft and flavorful and the three toppings added a sweet component to the dish. The Tiramisu was wonderful with Savoiardi biscuits that were softened by soaking in espresso, and then layered with whipped mascarpone and topped with bittersweet chocolate. This was a delightful version of the Italian classic dessert and was soft, flavorful and the addition of the Venezuelan cocoa atop the dish was delicious. These were two excellent choices to complete the meal.



A more mild dessert was the Berry Napoleon that included several types of berries within three layers of cookie plus lemon curd. The dessert was good, but we found the full flavors of the other desserts a better ending to the meal.

With numerous appetizers and tapas to choose from, share several with friends and family and then enjoy one of the entrees, but leave room for one of the sweet recommended desserts.