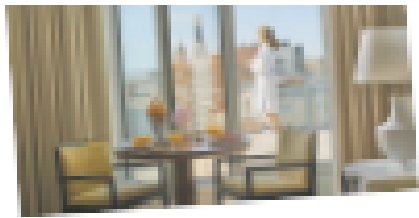


# NEW YORK POST



## Travel

THE BEST ESCAPES & ADVENTURES

# COLD COMFORT

Connecticut emerges from COVID as a foodie paradise



From Old Saybrook (above) to Mystic, restaurants like the Shipwright's Daughter and the Essex (left), chefs are serving up dishes that rival NYC's best hotels.



By CHRISTOPHER CAMERON

**T**O snarf the world's finest noosh, most Connecticut Yankees travel to Manhattan. But here's a case for the reverse commute.

In recent years, for factors variety, many tri-state locals who cut their teeth in New York City hospitality have moved back home and reinvested in local towns. Others, who many have been drawn to the city in years past, opted to stay put. The result is world-class dining in small Connecticut towns.

Take Mystic. Once a summer vacation village renowned for pizza (thank you Julia Roberts), Mystic has grown into a destination with year-round crowds boasting boom there, done that palates. They expect a

degree of seaside sophistication and that's what they are getting.

They flock to the **Whalers Inn** ([WhalersInnMystic.com](http://WhalersInnMystic.com)), a historic 1930-built hotel with 45 rooms and suites. Inside, blue and white interiors with modern nautical décor make it loud and clear that this isn't some ye olde sea shack.

This is a luxury affair (with reasonable winter room rates starting at just \$149) and the dining is no different.

In summer of 2020, in the doldrums of the pandemic, chef David Standridge opened the Shipwright's Daughter at the base of the hotel after 13 years and two Michelin Stars with culinary icon Joel

Robuchon in NYC and a tour of duty at the Maidstone Hotel in East Hampton.

The 68-seat, nautically inspired dining room is drawing foodies in with rotating, locally sourced menus reflecting classic shoreside staples — but jazzed up with the flavors of Oaxaca, Mexico, the Deep South and southern Italy. His wife, Kathleen Standridge, brings the booze, running the restaurant's



The Whaler's Inn

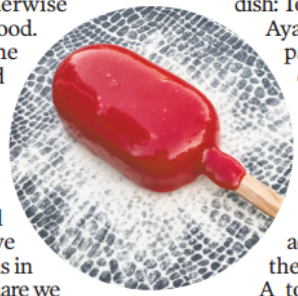
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## Eat stay love

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eclectic wine program and pairing out special wine-driven dinners — those in the know request her unique Hungarian Egri Bikavér, a invigorating red otherwise known as Bull's Blood.

Just down the road, decade-old Mystic institution **Oyster Club** (*Oyster-ClubCt.com*) is serving some of the freshest and most innovative plates and cocktails in Connecticut (and dare we say anywhere?). Last year, chef Renee Touponce took the restaurant's reins and things started happening. Monkfish got the pastrami treatment. Mushrooms became carpaccio. Empanadas



Courtesy of Old Saybrook Pointe

started outselling oysters. All the while beverage director Jada Ayala is letting seasoned elbow-benders know that she means business with cocktail ingredients like coconut washed cognac, parsnip milk and toasted nori. Here's more dish: Touponce and Ayala are expanding next door with a rum-focused "dive" bar — in the literal sense with actual diving-themed décor.

A town or two over in Old Saybrook (the original home of Yale, they're eager to tell you), another Michelin restaurant veteran is living his chef-y dreams at the **Essex**



Chef David Standridge helms the Shipwright's Daughter at the Whaler's Inn in Mystic.

(*TheEssex.com*). Last year, Le Bernardin alum Colt Taylor moved the tasting menu-focused eatery to the heart of Old Saybrook's main street, where he's using his wealth of travel experience to rotate internationally inspired menus at lightning speed.

It doesn't bare mentioning what to order because by the time you get there it'll be something newly dreamt up. But here's an idea: octopus a la plancha in a Korean barbecue sauce; a foie gras Popsicle with strawberry and milk bread (inset); and mushroom alfredo

tagliatelle. Some chefs lean on old favorites. Not Taylor. He's cooking what excites him right now (try his Japanese-inspired take on clam chowder — that one is likely to stick around). Old Saybrook is also home one of the area's best hotels,

the **Old Saybrook Point Resort & Marina** (*Saybrook.com*). Spread along the mouth of the Connecticut River, the hotel is composed of a hodgepodge of charming antique-filled rooms, beautiful period-style houses that can be booked out for large groups and event spaces for your waterfront wedding. In all there are 94 rooms starting at \$264 in March.

This marina hot spot, which draws yachters in the summer months, is nothing new. It started life as a motel beloved by the Rat Pack (Ol' Blue Eyes was a regular).

But today, after a full rebuild in the late 1970s, there's new fun afoot. The Choo Choo Lounge, a fresh lobby bar, pays homage to the area's history as steam train terminus.

A wine room tempts lovely lushes with a good time. Meanwhile, brunch buffets are an extravagant affair for the hale and hearty.

After a weekend in Connecticut's dining belt, you'll shun your suppers back in the Big Apple.

Lisa Nichols/Hearst CT Media; Courtesy of Essex (inset)