

# The Worley Gig



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## Ivy Bar and Grill Elevates Neighborhood Bar Fare to Gourmet Eats



All Photos By Gail and Anne Raso

A comfy and welcoming bar and grill can easily become a favorite neighborhood hang out based on atmosphere, drink specials, favorite beers on tap and its number of wide screen TVs; with the quality of the food served being mostly inconsequential. And while the menu offered at **Ivy Bar and Grill**, open since February on **Eighth Avenue and 56th Street**, would indicate that they are not aiming to become an upscale dining establishment, the quality and taste of the new **American comfort food** they serve up says otherwise. I enjoy a good watering hole as much as the next New Yorker, but I am also a huge foodie, and Ivy is the first bar I've found that could seriously become a destination based on its cuisine. My dining companion and I discovered a few new favorites on our first visit this past week.

What will attract a varied clientele right away is **Ivy's** décor; sleek and modern with an understated essence that gives the restaurant an adaptable vibe for many occasions. A modern bar with lots of seating runs perhaps two thirds of the length of the space. Exposed brick walls are highlighted with attractive touches such as custom lighting fixtures and accent mirrors, and the bar is flanked on the opposite wall by plenty of high table seating, so everyone can make themselves comfortable while grabbing a beer and a bite before watching the game. Happy Hour specials run daily from 4:00 PM until 7:00 PM offers a specialty cocktail menu as well as a stand out selection of artisanal craft beers.



The rear of the restaurant is beautifully fitted out with a modern-textile upholstered high banquette encircling an intimate cluster of tables. In this way, **Ivy** feels contemporary and trendy, but also relaxed and without any pretense. Clearly, everyone is welcome.

We started our dinner with one of **Ivy's** unique cocktails, a fruity and refreshing **Kiss and Tell (\$10)** featuring **Stoli Razz** vodka, champagne and fresh raspberry purée, garnished with a skewer of fresh raspberries. This is a tasty drink with an appropriate kick. Any size appetite will be satiated by **Ivy's** impressively mouth-watering menu, which offers dozens of outrageous **Appetizers**, several **Salads**, a rather wide selection of **Sandwiches and Burgers**, and just enough **Entrees** to please basic tastes without overdoing it. We were tempted to dine solely from the many intriguing selections on the appetizer menu, and chose a few to start out.



We absolutely could not say no to the **Fried Brussel Sprouts with Bacon (\$11)**, a piled-high plate loaded crispy **applewood smoked bacon pieces**, sautéed sweet onions and topped generously with melted **aged white cheddar cheese**. The Brussels sprouts are cooked to perfection and have a pleasing mixed texture of being crispy fried (but not battered) on the outside and tender to the bite. There is no shortage of bacon chunks and we could easily have enjoyed this dish as a side to an entrée, or as an entrée itself with another appetizer. It's that good!

Being fans of polenta, we also tried the **Polenta Fries (\$10)**. This fun take on traditional French fries features Italian polenta cooked with herbs, cut into sticks and lightly fried, sprinkled with Parmesan cheese shavings and served with a creamy, mild Romano cheese sauce for dipping. Delicious, different and also appropriate as a side dish to accompany a sandwich or entree.



If you read **The Gig's** food coverage regularly you know we love a good steak, so the **Steakhouse Springrolls (\$13)** seemed like a natural choice. These crispy rolls take a generous portion of sliced steak and surround it with traditional steak house sides of **mashed potatoes** and **creamed spinach**. This little steak house meal you can eat with your fingers is served by a trio of homemade steak sauce, black peppercorn reduction and A-1 sauce for dipping. Yet another unique offering that goes far beyond the usual nachos and potato skins you find on most bar menus.

#### **Ivy Grilled Cheese Sandwich, with Chicken Roulade Entree in the Background**

On the Sandwich menu, the **Ivy Grilled Cheese (\$11)** caught our attention with its surprise main ingredient of **soft ripened Brie cheese**. This gourmet quality sandwich is stuffed with **avocado** and **homemade mango chutney** (made with fresh, diced ripe mangoes, not the sweet mango preserves you might be used to getting in Indian restaurants) and served on griddled sourdough bread, accompanied by a mound of crispy fries. We were fans from the first bite!

From the half dozen well-varied entrees we chose to split the **Chicken Roulade (\$20)**, a pounded thin and oven roasted breast of chicken rolled and stuffed with prosciutto, spinach and sundried tomatoes, served in natural pan jus. Sides included with this tasty dish are a sizeable scoop of luscious **truffle mashed potatoes** and perfectly tender fresh **grilled asparagus**. Considering that it's not unusual to pay \$20 for a burger at most sit-down establishments, **Ivy's Chicken Roulade** is very reasonable priced for an entrée of this size and quality.

**Hell's Kitchen** isn't that close to our 'hood, but we'll be going back to **Ivy Bar and Grill** to revisit some of the delicious creations featured in this review, as well as to try a few we are craving just from reading about them!

**Ivy Bar and Grill** is Located at 944 8th Ave. (between 56th St & 55th St.) New York, NY. Phone (212) 459-9444 or visit their website, [IvyBarNYC.com](http://IvyBarNYC.com) for full menus and more information.