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## GINO'S VINO: A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY

I'm a sucker for a casual, hole-in-the-wall restaurant. My 30th birthday was coming up and nothing sounded worse than getting all dolled up and dropping hundreds a person on a "trendy" meal that left me hungry. So I hopped on Yelp and after a few *hidden gems of Austin*-like searches, I stumbled across [Gino's Vino](#).

Gino's Vino is an unassuming Italian restaurant in a strip center of north east Austin. Being right up my alley, I told all a few friends to meet me there to celebrate. We walked in and the hostess had the perfect table for six waiting for us. The interior of Gino's looked as I'd expected. About 30 tables, dim-ish lighting, white table cloths and mass-produced prints of Tuscany dotting the walls. But amongst the standard Italian restaurant décor was a one-person stage and within two minutes of us sitting down, up popped the "entertainment," a Marilyn Monroe impersonator all done up with the wig, pearls and beauty mark, who broke out in a rendition of "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" (aside – the birthday song was completely coincidental).

Just moments later, we were greeted at the table by Ping, Gino's wife, who when she learned it was my birthday, flagged down Gino to come say hello. He rushed over, gave me, the birthday girl, a huge hug and insisted that our appetizers were on the house. Naturally, the meal was amazing. All homemade pasta, fresh ingredients, tasty wine. And at the end of our meal when the crowd started to thin, Gino pulled up a chair with his Bud Light in hand and struck up a conversation. He told us the good, bad and ugly of opening four restaurants in his lifetime and how he landed on Gino's. He wanted a no-nonsense Italian restaurant where you are greeted like family, at a price point that's not astronomical, but pricey enough that you looked forward to going. To say the least, Gino has succeeded with flying colors.

Of course, the warm welcome, tableside Caesar and heavy-handed cocktails *made* my 30th birthday night. But the kicker was when I returned to Gino's Vino four months later. I walk in, am led to my table and from across the restaurant, I catch a glimpse of Gino. He was vigorously waving at me, with a huge smile saying, "Hey, birthday girl! Welcome back." He had remembered me.

Gino and his hole-in-the-wall made a lasting impression on me and all it took was him taking a little time out to make me feel special. Moral of the story is as marketers, we too, should strive for that reaction from our audiences. Sure, he comped \$8 worth of calamari (a birthday exception I'm sure), but other than that what set Gino apart didn't cost him a dime and yet I've sent over ten people to his restaurant. I'm sure you would agree, that's damn good ROI.

Until next time –

Ashley

