

100 Bars in 100 Days

Hops MacBarley's 2012 Key West Bar Boondoggle
"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

BAR 31:

White Tarpon Bar

www.whitetarpon.com

700 Front Street

Saturday 8/17, 9:00 pm

Dogfish Head 60-Minute IPA (draft)

I'm pretty sure this is the only deli / wine store / bar I've been to. It's a little hard to find, tucked in the recess between Commodore and A&B. You walk under the overhang and you see the deli first, then the bar door, back even further around the corner.



It was virgin turf. I never even knew it existed until Jacko briefly worked in the deli part.

I liked it right way, though, even before I got into the bar itself. The alcove that you walk into from the wooden harborwalk is done up all in red brick, with columns, and lit up with colored lights – mostly blue.



There are several tables, an outer bar, and a blue-lit tub filled with icy beer bottles.

I could have taken a seat here and had it count, but I saw the door for White Tarpon Bar, so I reckoned that I had to pass through that portal to make it official.

It was much brighter inside, and had a Much Nicer vibe. Part of me felt like retreating into the blue, but I decided to bluff my way through.

It's the wine angle that gives these places the air of respectability. When you inject enough fine wine drinkers into a crowd, you soften the edge. Those big fat glasses make you behave in a more mellow and refined manner. It's true. Take the thick beer glasses out of the Parrot and replace them with big bulbous wine glasses, and you'll see extended pinkies and violin music there every night. You watch.

Krawl and Porch both feature wine, but Krawl's beer gets a higher percentage of the attention; hence, the crowd is crunchier.

Right away, White Tarpon seemed to say, *Keep it on the chill side, chief. Voice down, and no sudden moves. Rowdies not welcome.* I could roll with that for a beer. Maybe



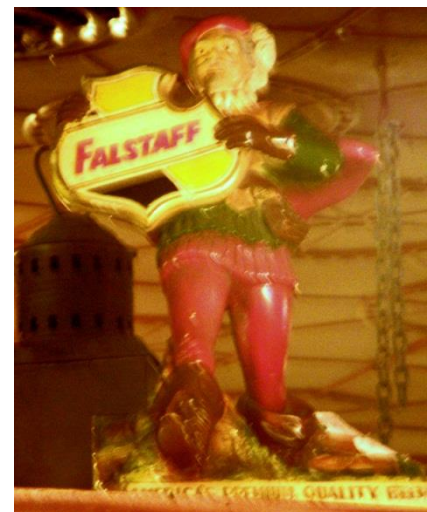
not so much for a whole evening, but for a beer, sure. I took the bar seat closest to the door – and taps – and looked over the selection.

The barkeep was a good-looking woman, maybe about 30, with straight dark blondish hair. She seemed friendly, but reserved. I knew the approach well. You don't know this dude, and you don't want to seem foolishly friendly in case he turns out to be a garrulous douche. I politely ordered my Dog-60, and

expressed my approval for the tall pilsner glass that it was served in. I commented that it was my first time in here, and that I liked it already. She seemed satisfied that I was not going to be any trouble, and went off to schmooze with the ten or so established customers seated around the far end of the U-shaped bar.

I snapped a few discreet photos, but there was one thing that I just had to take out the big camera for. On the shelf suspended above the bar, where the wine glasses hung by their feet, there was a small statue of Sir John Falstaff, holding a shield that bore the logo of that oh-so-special beer. Given that Falstaff had recently been brought up at Shanna Key (Bar 27 – it should be in your notes), I had to have the photo. The light up there was lame, but I zoomed in from my seat and did the best I could. One of the bar patrons made a approving comment about the statue and my photographing it, so I felt a tad less isolated.

Just when I thought I might have established myself as Acceptable, despite my tank-top attire, another patron wobbled through that portal. Outwardly, there were no immediate red flags about this dude. He was tall and fairly young, clean-shaven, wearing decent clothes. His unsteadiness may well have been an honest mis-step. He stood behind a stool two to my left and composed himself. Kinda. An askance glance told me, *This dude is fucking trashed*, and I could tell that Ms. Barkeep had picked up on same.



She adopted Strategy 1: Pretend I never saw him and maybe he will go away. It's a good strategy, but you need a certain degree of busi-ness to sell it, and WTB was just not busy enough. She eventually had to address him.

Unfortunately for me, though, he had leaned my way and started a randomly-aimed conversation. It wasn't rude or raunchy, but it wasn't welcome either. Still, I was informed that he worked on some boat that was docked outside, he needed smokes, and he desperately needed a piss. I acknowledged all with the practiced, *yahh, gotcha*.

But, to my dismay, the connection had been assumed. He came in shortly after me, he started a convo with me, ergo he and I were together. Ugh. Almost two minutes worth of character establishment down the drain. Among total strangers, no less.

So he gave her his tale of woe, in the same slurry tone that he had practiced on me. She efficiently gave him directions to the unisex restroom, fetched his butts, collected \$7 for the pack, and walked briskly away.

He stood there, slightly swaying, trying to open the pack. He should've taken care of Nature's urge. But he was drunnnnk, and kinda forgot, I guess. Some other task brought the barkeep back our way, and he started his spiel again, *I worked on yada-yada-boat-boat, and I really need to take...*

She cut him off coldly, *You told me. I don't care who you work for. And I told you where the bathroom is. Right over there.* And walked crisply away. Boom, bang. Shut the fuck up, drunk boy.

Ohhh kayy, so, of course, he had to share some of his drunken mish-mash-mush with me for a half-minute or so, before finally steering off to the restroom. What happened next could not have been scripted better. He was six feet from the door, reaching for the door handle, when, out of absolute *nowhere*, this slinky blonde woman appeared, never gave him the slightest glance, and slipped between him and relief. She vanished behind the shut door and he stood there stunned, and wobbly.

You or I might have just stood there and waited, but he had to dumbass his way back across the room to open up his cigarette pack. That in itself was a task. He finally got it open and pulled one out. He was muttering on about how he worked on a boat and he really really really needed the restroom. I pointed out that it was now vacant. He didn't hear me. The barkeep came over and somewhat sternly told him the same thing. He suddenly remembered his inner need and went directly there, carrying a cigarette.

Of course, he came out smoking the damn thing. Madame Barkeep pounced right on that. *There's no smoking in here, sir*, she said levelly, but clearly relishing the valid reason for booting his ass, *you'll have to take it outside*. She never even gave him the option of putting it out and staying. Obediently, wordlessly, and blankly, he followed her

directive and was gone. What the hell, he had his full pack and his empty bladder, so no reason to stay.

I thanked her, but she gave me a look like, *Well, aren't you going with him?* I was about to protest that I didn't even know the moron, but I just let it drop. If I had been on her side of the bar, I would have made the same assumptions. I'd have been protecting the level of atmosphere that my other customers relished, and deemed it my duty to weed out the riff-raff. She did a fine job with Drunk Sailor Dude; the guilt-by-association was an unfortunate accident. I waited a few minutes, though, to reinforce the separation, then calmly drained my glass.

I got up to leave, gave a polite *Thank you* in her direction and got no immediate reply. I slung my bag over my shoulder, and exited stage right. She must have had some pang of something, though, because, as the door was swinging shut behind me, I did hear an almost-apologetic sounding, *Have a good night, sir. Come again.*

Maybe. The bar was fine, it was the sole shithead that sullied the situation. Next time, though, I might just hang out in the Blue Light Zone. That looked pretty cool.

