

100 Bars in 100 Days

Hops MacBarley's 2012 Key West Bar
Boondoggle

"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

BAR 41:

Shimp Daddy's Sports Pub

www.shimp-daddys.com

908B Kennedy Drive

Thursday 8/30, 6:00 pm



Red Stripe (bottle) \$3.75

You may not have heard of Shimp Daddy's yet. Several long-time locals that I mentioned it to hadn't. When I said, *It used to be Charley's Place*, though, they knew where I meant, but were surprised that I went there.

Sometimes, you hear about a place as a *Best Kept Secret*. Shimp's might be *Best Kept A Secret*. Ha ha, that's a joke, Jake. I'm not going to rip the place. It *is* underbelly, but that's not an insult, just a category. I've spent many, many nights in underbelly bars, and that is often the style I seek out on my roadtrips; they are less pretentious, and the beer usually costs less.

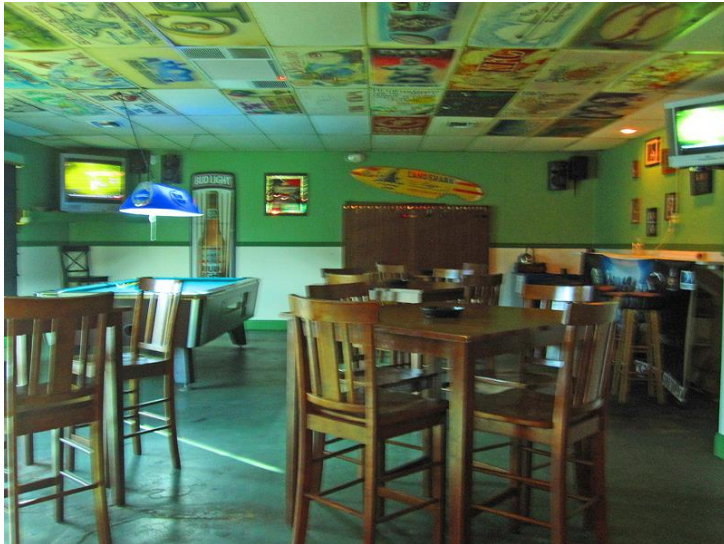
There are varying degrees of Underbelly. Upper Underbelly is OK. There's nothing fancy – people, food, TVs, furnishings, even beer – but there's usually nothing dangerous either. People are talking loudly, laughing heartily, cussing at one another, and drinking with zeal. Tank tops and dirty sport shorts are welcome; no one is there to impress. There's graffiti on the bathroom walls. You can belch with abandon; nobody will be offended. I can hang here, for sure.

Lower Underbelly, though, has too much black clothing, more demonic tattoos, too many scowls, dried blood on the bathroom walls, dried puke on top of the urinal, a fight could break out any minute, and anyone who is not a regular might be the target of it. Not my cup o' tea, thanks.

What has become much more of a decisive factor over the last decade though, is -- anyone, anyone? – yes, **smoke!** Now that smoking has been regulated out of bars that serve enough food, we've all gotten accustomed to the clearer air. So, when we do walk into a place that allows -- even encourages -- smoking, the air hits us like a blast of car exhaust. I'm sure there a lot of people who just turn right around and depart as soon as they get a lungful.

Well, speaking of which, that was my first interior impression of Ship Daddy's: the stale smell of cigarettes. There were only three people in the bar, but the stench was potent. I had to think, *Dammmn, what is this place like with 40 people in it?*

The outdoor impression came first, though. The white box of a building, the back-alley side of a strip mall, the unadorned large black windows that you can't see through – it all looked like a front for some speakeasy or gambling house.



The black windows serve a purpose, though. That side of the building gets the full brunt of the afternoon sun, and ordinary windows might just melt.

So, yeah, the initial blast of ciggy smoke does set a certain tone, and that's unfortunate for us no-smokies. There is no

luxury inside, aside from good AC, which, let's face it, is key. Tall, square, plain wood tables stood in the middle of the open space. A pool table was in the corner. Straight ahead was a big, out-of-date TV. You know, one those first-generation rear-projection things in the huge box, that no matter what angle you look at it from, you never feel like you're getting the full picture? One of those.

The bar seems like the feature. It's a half-rectangle here in the main room, but then it stretches back a lonnnng way to the other doors. There are about 30 or so stools, unpadded, but with backs. The backs may count as luxury on some lists. Me, I like 'em with backs.

The barkeep was about low-mid-40's, had very little hair, and wore a black t-shirt with some liquor emblem on the left chest. Couldn't make it out and didn't want to stare at his chest, so I guess I'll never know. It looked like the word BLACK was printed under the emblem, so I'm going to assume that the man's name was Black.

Black broke off his conversation with the only other customer at his bar to wait on me. He was friendly, and rightfully unstressed. I had a hankering for a Rolling Rock and told him so.

Black pursed his lips in that *I'm not sure that's a good idea* way. *I can get you one if that's what you want, but it's not gonna be real cold.* Good to hear that he was looking out for my interests. *The Rocks are in this cooler right here and that's at 41 degrees, so chilled, but not Real Cold.* Now, *those back there* – he pointed to the glass-doored refrigerators way in the far end of the bar, gesturing as if they were in Cuba – *are all kept at 22 degrees, so they are Real Cold.* I liked the way he said *Real Cold* as if it were an official title, or some rank to be achieved.

I strained my eyes back to Cuba to see what they had. I didn't have a prayer of reading labels from this distance (60-70 feet or so?), but I did recognize the squat shape of the Red Stripe bottle. Hooray, Beer!



Black took the long walk back to retrieve one. That must really suck on a busy night. All your Buds and Millers and other shitty mainstream beers are all 20 yards away – and that's just one way. 40 yards round trip. In eleven orders, you'll walk a quarter-mile.

He started me a tab, though I knew this would definitely be a one-n-done, and went back to his previous conversation. That gave me time to survey the room.

If you check your notes, you'll realize that I am a fan of ceilings. Tattoos & Scars might be leading the Best Ceiling competition at this point, with Island Dogs a strong contender as well.

Shimp Daddy's does not have the *best* ceiling, but it's certainly the most unique of the first 41. It has air-brushed-art ceiling panels. Yeah, they have that drop-ceiling that you picture is most office buildings and bingo halls, with those 5-foot-by-2-foot removable rectangles. Well, probably about half of these panels have been painted with team logos, odd cartoons, large names, NASCAR numbers, and God knows what else. Each one is pretty cool – especially the New England Patriots panel. There's not a real lot worth looking at on the walls and floor, so it was kinda interesting to be looking at the ceiling instead.



I did my best to blend in, but I don't think I was selling it. Tough to blend in with the crowd when there ain't no crowd. But the guy that Black was talking with looked a bit incongruous too. For one thing, he was drinking a glass of red wine. For some reason, that really struck me. This is a smoky beer bar. You don't picture wine drinkers in such a venue; they belong in restaurants, or The Café, or the Porch, or some other place with some shred of class.

The other weird thing about this guy was that he was wearing one of those stupid Bluetooth earpieces. Come on, mannnn, you need hands-free phone service so you can drink your wine? WTF? Those things look so dumb. It's like the wearer is role-playing Uhura from *Star Trek* or something.

I was brought back from my musings when Black began getting all loud and enthusiastic. He was raving on to Uhura-man that the best-tasting beer he ever had was a *non-alcoholic* beer called Clausthaler. He gushed about it! Finally, Uhura-man held his hands out and said, *Why would I want to drink*

that?? Yeah, just stick with your red wine and listen for Klingon transmissions.

In retrospect, maybe I should have asked to see the Wine List. I'll ask next time.

