

100 Bars in 100 Days

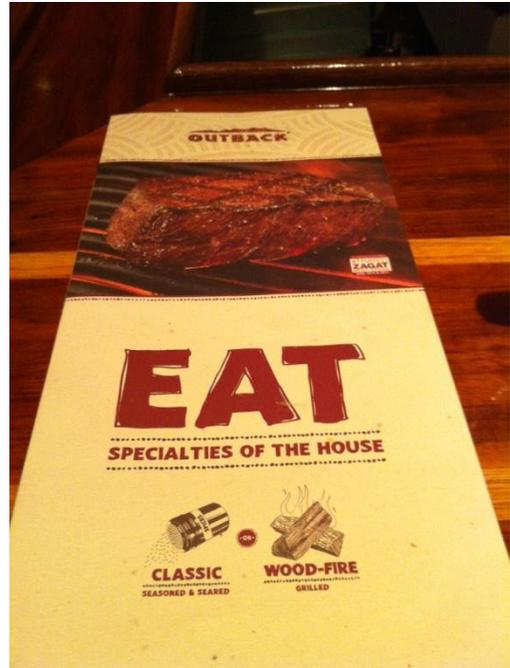
Hops MacBarley's 2012
Key West Bar Boondoggle
"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

BAR 46:

Outback Steakhouse
www.outback.com
3230 North Roosevelt Boulevard
Monday 9/3, 9:45 pm

Sam Adams Summer Ale (draft, 22-oz.)
\$6.00

What can you say about Outback?
Everyone's been to one, yes? They're all
essentially the same, yes? OK. Next bar.



Wait. I have to mention their logo. OK, it's the hilly terrain from the Australian outback. Got it. But what a vague shape! How many meetings were held, in how many offices, to decide where the highest hills would be? Who decided that it should be low over the U and high over the A? And why?



It's one of those images that you see but don't see. Until I deliberately looked at it, I guess I just assumed that it was Uluru, that famous monolith in the center of the continent. But it's not; it appears to be just a bunch of hills. For all I know, it could a profile look at a heap of dog crap, or lumps of vomit. Though I can't

see why the corporate bigwigs would go that route, it would make for a damn funny inside joke in the board room.

This stop was late on Monday night of a three-day weekend, so there was next to nothing going on in here. I should give Blair, my friendly barkeep, a few good words, though. She asked my name and gave me hers. She started to give me the name of the other barkeep, but caught herself and just smiled instead. I found out why a minute later. With most of the clean-up yet to be done, Blair's colleague was buggin' out. She gathered her stuff,

and as she walked around and headed for the door, Blair said, *I hope you feel better.*

Ahhh, the *I do not feel very well, do you, mind if I leave early?* ploy. It made me want to follow her out the door and look for the boyfriend's car, or seize her phone and scroll through the texts for the *What time can you sneak out?* message. Maybe I'm just a suspicious, pessimistic misanthrope, but I couldn't help thinking that Blair was getting the shaft.

I ordered the 22-ounce Sam Summer. Blair had given me the choice, *Would you like 16-ounce or 22-ounce?* No brainer. Right up my alley. And she asked it in a nice non-judgmental way. When I did the barkeeping at Uno's up north, we had 12-ounce mugs and 23-ounce curved glasses. If a customer ordered a draft, I'd hold up the two glasses and say, *Adult size or kid's size?* I sold a lot of tall beers.

I chose Sam Summer Ale in honor of Labor Day weekend – the symbolic end of summer up north. In KW, the heat just keeps coming. To me, September is the hottest month of the year. Maybe it's partly psychological, or maybe a few years of trying to crank it up in cross country mode, with 4:00 PM practices on steaming hot concrete sidewalks and asphalt roads, just made it seem even hotter than it was.



But in New England, the climate does begin to change, and the heat of summer is noticeably slipping away. It also always meant going back to school after a long, fun summer. I never worked in my summers off. I took roadtrips, played golf, went to Cape Cod, and reeeeelaxed. Those were the days.

Anyway...

Corporate chain restaurants like Outback are rare in Key West. There's TGIFriday, but not much else. Hooters and Planet Hollywood made a go of it but closed. Chili's didn't make it. Outback seems to have a good location

for their business. Plenty of parking, and you don't have to get downtown; that's good for locals and for all the visitors staying at the east-end hotels.

Blair gave me a menu, even though I declined it. She laid it down and said nicely, *Well, in case you want to look it over.* Clever girl. The menu has a blunt message on the front: **EAT.** The word just pulsed at me, unavoidable, even in my peripheral vision. I should have just turned the menu over, but the world held me.

I ordered wings. Wuss. Folded up like a house of cards. One thing I was *not* going to get was a Bloomin' Onion. I can do onion rings, but only a few, and a BO would be like 10 orders of rings. That's a lot of freakin' onion.

I was in Tombstone, Arizona, on a roadtrip once, having a 10 AM beer at Big Nose Kate's Saloon, and Dave the barkeep (photo, right) told me I had just missed the Tombstone Onion Festival. Wagons piled high with onions had filled the streets, and folks had schemed up just about every onion menu you could imagine. Naturally, there were (probably literally) tons of onions left over. Dave was, in fact, boxing up a few bloomin' onions as we were talking. He offered me one for free. I declined. He shook his head sadly, *I'm gonna be awfully sick of onions...*



A day before, I had driven through west Texas, and had caught a faint radio station advertising the Night In West Pecos Cantaloupe Festival. A few days later, someplace in New Mexico was having a Watermelon Festival. Mannn, people in the southwest sure do like to celebrate produce!

I was the last customer remaining when my wings arrived. I told Blair that I wouldn't take long eating them. She assured me that she had plenty of work to do, so there was no hurry. I almost commented on her, ahem, sick colleague, but I started eating instead.

There was no sign of Chaz, by the way – the

barkeep from Antonia's. I know you were wondering.

Wings were good. Bleu cheese. Mmmmm. Not blue cheese, that would be gross.

So ring up Bar #46, and close out the holiday weekend. And, like most nights, I had no idea what the next bar would be. My buddy Whim takes care of the itinerary.

