

100 Bars in 100 Days

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

BAR 55:

The Grand Cafe
www.grandcafekeywest.com
314 Duval Street
Wednesday 9/12, 9:30 pm

Bass Ale (bottle) \$4.50

The Grand was one of those places that I was unsure about. Did they have a bar or not? Under Tour rules, I couldn't just go sit in a restaurant and get served at a table. It's a Bar Tour. It would not be cheating, though, to procure a beer at the bar and then retire to a table – but only if there were no bar seats available.



From the sidewalk, there is no hint of a bar. The patio teems with tables under fine white cloths and wide green umbrellas. It's one o' them fancy eatin' places. Not my typical style. I adopted a casually jaunty yes-I-do-fucking-belong-here-thank-you attitude, and strolled up the walkway and across the porch. Jan had assured me that a bar did indeed exist in the back half of that tall white house.

I had never been in the Grand. I'm not sure I'd ever been inside the front gate at all. Virgin turf, baby.

You have to walk through a couple of rooms to get to the bar here. It may be a restaurant, but the layout is still house. There are a few tables in each room, so even if the restaurant is full, you'll always have that small-room feel.



The brightly lit living room has a classic old fireplace and loopy, lacy drapes.

By contrast, the artwork that hangs on the walls is much more modern and even abstract. So, just as I thought I was in a stuffy old folks home, I can dig the groovy paintings and feel hip to the scene.

Then, at last at last, is the bar. Ahhhh, made it. It, too, is a good contrast to the stuffy Victorian décor. First of all, it is darrrrrk. I mean like cannot-read-your-watch dark. If the dining areas are daytime, the bar is deep night.

There is no direct light in the room; everything is directed off the walls, giving a backlit effect to the room, and keeping faces hard to see. The brightest light in the whole room, strangely enough, illuminates the laps of the bar-sitters. The tall seats slide under the extended bar top, and the light is on the underside of the bar top.

The bar itself is backed by large mirrored panes, separated by simulated palm trunks.

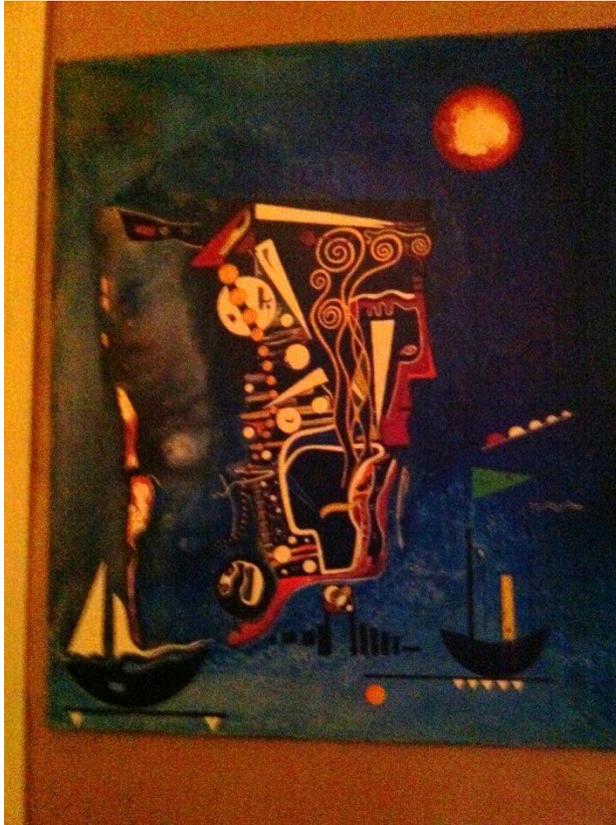
The coolest thing about the nighttime atmosphere is the starry sky. The ceiling is painted black, and there are dot lights scattered randomly across it in all directions. Very neat look indeed.

Golden candles about the size of coffee cans glow on each of the small four-top tables, almost like campfires under the celestial canopy.

Almost. Maybe not quite that poetic. Kinda makes you think I was stoned when I came here, duddinit. Ha. How preposterous.



OK, so all that is pretty neat and cool, but my favorite things about this bar are the seats. They are the tall variety, so you don't sit down, as such. For me, they're not much below buttock height anyway, so it's more like a sit-over than a sit-down. Shorter people might even have to climb up onto



them. They are curved for a good body fit, as you can see in the bar photo, so that helps the comfort level. And they are stylish, with gleaming chrome bases and stands.

What you cannot see in that photo, though, and what you have no hint of until you lower your carcass onto the seat, is the shock absorber. Yes, the seats are supported by springs – or some spring-like mechanism (I didn't crawl under to examine the workings) – and it recoils under your weight as you sit. VERY cool feeling when you first discover it.

You kind of forget about it after a bit, but whenever you shift your weight, it bounces you just a little, and you get to enjoy the surprise all over again. I even got a little carried

away and started enjoying the ride a tad too much. I caught myself before anyone saw me, I think, but joke 'em anyway, you know? Ha.

One of KW's City Council members was at the bar with his wife. They had finished their eats and were leaning back enjoying a few sips when I walked in. At the time, no seats were empty, so I had to stand behind them and order over their shoulders once I got the barkeep's attention.

Bass Ale, please, I said in my low and classy voice. The councilor raised his own Bass bottle in approval and said, *An excellent choice!* So I felt reassured that I had voted for the right guy.

I took my ale to the table in the corner where I enjoyed my ride and dug the campfires and astral display.

A few people came over to the councilor and I overheard them talking city stuff. They weren't raving citizens; they seemed like they also worked in

city business somewhere. But I actually felt sorry for him. Just having a little food and a refreshing adult beverage, and they won't leave you be. I guess bending an ear to the public's opinions is all part of being a true public servant.

The Bass was delicious, as always, and \$4.50 for such a quality beverage was most reasonable. KW beer prices are so erratic. You pay through the teeth at some places that you'd expect to be lower, and get surprised with relative bargains at some classy places like this.

Fifty-five down, forty-five to go. Hops barhops on!