

100 Bars in 100 Days

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

BAR 66:

Vinos on Duval

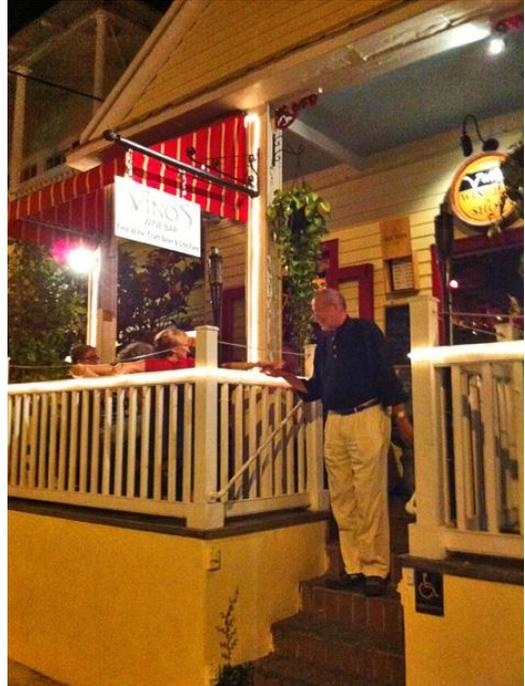
www.vinosonduval.com

810 Duval Street

Saturday 9/22, 10:30 pm

Monty Python's Holy Gr-ale (bottle) \$6.00

Vinos – not Vino's, thank ya – rode the crest of the wave of small, upper-scale drinkeries in town. Clayton, the owner, had made a career out of designing bars but had moved to Key West with thoughts of doing other things. When the niche opened up, and he had the chance to design *his own* bar, Vinos came to be. Now, he has also opened a mainland branch in Miami.



And it surprises a lot of people how mellow this location is. Every time you tell someone, "it's on the 800 block," you can see visions of gay mania flash before them. 801 Bourbon, on the corner, is the only gay bar on the 800 block. It's the 700 block that is more active, especially since much of the "pink triangle" crowd zooms right from 801 to Bourbon Street Pub or to Aqua in a beeline. The queens on the corner are friendly and funny as hell – they are professional entertainers, after all – but once you walk beyond that little cluster, there is a nary a rainbow in sight.

Vinos became a northern extension of the more classy Upper Duval scene. Duvalling from the high number blocks of the south is so different than



Duvalling from the low. There are no Sloppy Joe's, Rick's, Irish Kevin's, or Willy T's types up here; there are several places for a sip or a sud, but they are mucchhhhhh more reeeelaxed. Grand Vin, Cork & Stogie, Speakeasy, Point 5, Orchid Bar – all cool and quiet places to hang and chill without the boom and bellow of the sunset side of the hill. Vinos extended that vibe up another block, and fit in just great.

As the name implies, it's more about wine than beer – it says "Wine Bar and Shop" right on the barrelhead sign over the door. The Porch and Krawl Off Duval could give that impression when you first walk in; all those room temperature bottles of red wine nuzzled in their diamond-shaped cubbies take up a lot more space, and are a lot more visible, than craft beer bottles and pony kegs stashed in the under-counter coolers.

Those places show the wine but feature the craft beers. At Vinos, though, wine is the thing, with some esoteric beers available for the not-so-fine-on-wine folks (like me) who get dragged along by the fervid fans of the fermented grape.



And you don't get much more esoteric than Monty Python's Holy Gr-ale. The bottle actually says "Grail" but in typical Python fashion, the "Gr" was X'ed out in black crayon.

It's worth a gotta-say-I-had-one, but not much more. It's actually a terrible tasting beer. Really low class flavor. Tastes like rabbit piss (no, I'm just conjecturing). I'm sure nobody at MP thought that their beer would become anyone's favorite -- an empty bottle on the shelf, trophy-style, (like mine is) would be about the best legacy they could expect -- so they filled 'em up with whizzo and said, "Piss on you, ya bastids."

Vinos' atmosphere is predictably more mellow than a beer-oriented place. I'm sure there are some occasional loud laughs and raucous conversations after a few quick glasses of a sturdy Merlot, but not like you'd get from the Budweiser gang. Not many fights either. The walls -- what is not covered by wine bottles -- are a dark burgundy hue (fittingly enough), giving a deep and easy darkness to the room. The lights over the bar double as wine glass racks.

And, like many KW establishments do these days, Vinos has, by design, priced out the low-budget common man. When I started the *PLIPAT*, I figured on five bucks, plus a buck tip, at each place. That seemed like a safe, high-side estimate. It's been disappointing that that number has been so often spot-on, and even too low. Granted, MP Holy Ail is a novelty item,

so you would expect a high price tag, but there are no three dollar brews in their sole stand-up, glass-door refrigerator.

If I'm ponying up six bucks for a high-ABV Dogfish Head or a Sierra Nevada Torpedo, and getting the extra flood of flavor and punch of potency, then I'm OK with that deal. But for a beer with three-dollar flavor (like MPHA), that's just a rip, even if it is "tempered over burning witches," which I suspect is not true.



This particular night, the crowd was very much the well-dressed, post-theater type. Soft background music, almost-hushed talk, and some light clinkings of glass were about all I could hear as I walked in.

When Vinos dims the room lights, as they did tonight, this place gets a real speakeasy feel to it.

Indirect lighting glows dimly on the rock walls, and the people become discreetly shadowy around the small, glimmering, table candles. Almost every seat was taken at the bar, at the tables, and on the front porch, and everyone seemed to be of the same ilk.

I, on the other hand, in my black-and-green tropical shirt and nineteen-year-old black cowboy hat, did not really blennnd in. What's worse is that everyone seemed to feel that way. They weren't quite a Bushwood crowd, but they were closer to it than I was. And I wasn't exactly Al Czervik, but I was closer than they were. The barkeep seemed to like me, but warily, like any minute I might start belting out *Sit On My Face And Tell Me That You Love Me* or some other Python Classic.

The growing vibe in the room wasn't nasty or anything like that. It was more like, *Man, are you in the wrong place. Green Parrot is four blocks thataway.*

And I had to agree. When I came in for Hop #66, I had a feeling this could go either way. The mood does shift with the clientele, maybe more than most places I've seen. Many times, the place sets the mood and you either

roll with it or not. Vinos, being small and intimate, seems like it wraps around the vibe of its patrons.

Maybe that's a crock, though. I took my Ail, gave a grinning bye-bye nod to the anyone who happened to look my way, and headed for the Parrot.