

## 100 Bars in 100 Days

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

BAR 79:

Hard Rock Cafe

[www.hardrock.com](http://www.hardrock.com)

313 Duval Street

Thursday 10/4, 8:15 pm

Samuel Adams (draft) \$5.25

The second icon of the night! This one, though, thrives around the world, not merely on Duval Street. Hard Rock is one of the few chains that has made it on the island. Even Chili's and KFC bagged it. TGI Friday did well with all their US-1 traffic, but they shut down the minute the Big Dig launched ("for renovations" – "Good, they need a LOT," said a former TGIF barkeep that I know).



But The Rock rocks on. Absolutely prime location, jussst outside the raucous 200 block, and in a big, old, historic (and some would tell you haunted) mansion.

Like several of the earlier PLIPAT stops -- Virgilio's, Duffy's, Flying Monkeys, et cetera -- HRC is a place I used to frequent frequently. Once a week, I'd saddle up at the bar and get me a Grilled Chicken Salad with extra bacon bits and 1000 Island dressing annnnnd a tall cold Sammy Adams to enhance my dining experience. Often, Nicki was my barkeep, and like all good barkeeps, she got to know my Usual pretty quickly.



What was hilarious, though, was how often the Grilled Chicken Salad would arrive without the Grilled Chicken. Did they really think I

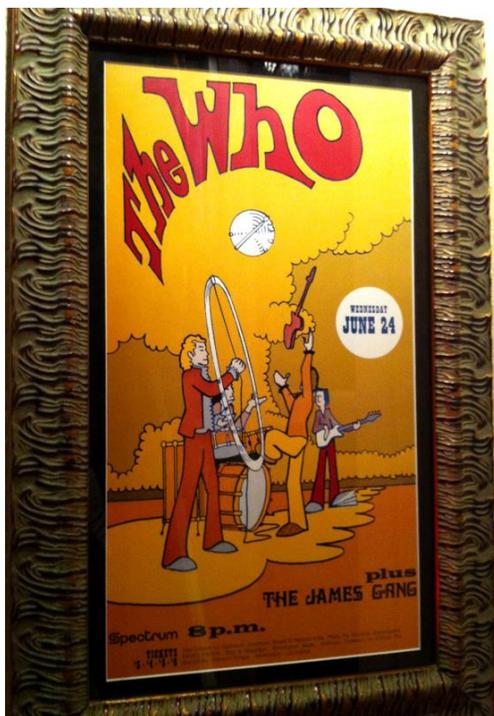
wouldn't notice?? The salads back then were huge, but not so huge that I wouldn't miss the keyest ingredient of them all. It didn't happen every time, but maybe one in five. That's pretty often.

What was really really hilarious (if you can handle more hilarity), was that it even happened at the HRC on the Riverwalk in San Antonio on one of my road trips. The barkeeps there couldn't understand why I



found it so funny. And, like all good tenders, they blamed it on the kitchen. Good chance that they were the ones who forgot or missed the keystroke or screentap for "With Grilled Chicken", but they didn't hesitate at all about

throwing the cooks right under the bus. WTF, I always did that too. Why not? Poor bastards aren't there to stand up for themselves, customers are never going to see them face-to-face, so blame all the dysfunctions of the known world and Canada on those freaks.



But then the price of iceberg lettuce skyrocketed. First, the portions shrunk but not the price. I was OK with that; I could almost never eat the whole thing anyway. But then, the recipe changed, dumping iceberg and replacing it with some weird purple shit, complete with the stems. WTF? And the price went **up!** I tried it once, nearly gagged, and scratched the Rock from my routine.

It had been quite a while since those salad days so I shouldn't have been surprised, but my tall Sammy was a bit more expensive. It certainly could have been worse, but \$5.25 (locals price, I believe) for a Boston Lager in a chilled 23-ounce glass sure beat the hell out of SJ's Ying for the same sum, Sam. However, the last one I had had there was on a gift certificate spree, so it seemed almost free. But, still, on that \$25 GC, my cheeseburger and one tall beer came to \$21, without tax or tip!

Are you shitting me?!? WT-effing-F?! That's almost thirty bucks after Uncle Sam and the barkeep get their share. For one (mediocre) burger and one draft beer! Jayzuz. No wonder I never go there anymore (nor does anyone else I know).



Obviously, they are trying to keep out the riff raff, and, in my case, it's been working. Too bad, too, because it's pretty easy to dig the atmosphere in there. It gets a tad awkward when you're leaning over someone's table to look closely at a Jefferson Airplane LP cover while they're having dinner, but what the hey, they'd probably do it to me if they had the chance (another good reason to sit at the bar).

On this night, the downstairs area was pretty crowded, so it wasn't looking good for memorabilia grazing. No worries; I had come on more serious business. I had Tour Duty to fulfill.

The bartender was a young and very pretty – no, make that *beautiful* -- woman named Ashley. She just looked like an Ashley, too, especially when you looked at her name tag.

The customer that I seated myself next to had already engaged her in conversation (no, he didn't propose). A well-off-looking white-haired guy in an expensive and fancy boat shirt, he was weather-worn but in good shape. He was going on – apparently for a while -- about how he lived in the best place in the world (somewhere upstate) because of all the fishing.

Ashley didn't give a hamster's hang about fishing, you could tell, and she finally cut him off with a smile, "Yeah, I thought I lived in the best town ever, too, but now that I'm here, I am *totally* in love with Key West." That got her gushing on about how much she loved living here. She had been here just a few months and was loving life like never before.

It was good to hear that upbeat and flat-out grateful enthusiasm. Naive, yeah, to someone who has been here a while and has been taking it for granted for several years. But it did remind me of my own arrival here from gray and cold Rochester NY a decade-plus ago, when suddenly every freaking day was sunny and green and lush and warm and just plain ducky. Eventually, real life creeps in though, and you get jaded. You forget to smell the flowers. You neglect to gaze out over the ocean as you drive down South Roosevelt. Roosters suck more every day. Post Office lines are a pain. Gas costs too much. The AC is two degrees too warm. There's too much seaweed at the beach ... in January. Wah wah waah-hah.

Thanks, kiddo, for kicking my needle back into the groove.



When Ashley went off to make a server's drinks, Fisher dude turned his attention me. It was as if he had not heard a word she said, because he picked up right where he had left off about the fishing where he lived. After a couple of sentences, I had to reel him in. "I don't fish," I said with a polite chuckle, "So, I really have no interest in it at all in that. Sorry."



He looked a bit disappointed for a second, but he quickly recovered. "I also restore old cars." You could tell he just wanted to talk, ostensibly about his hobbies, but, indirectly, about himself. I made the mistake of saying, "My brother has dabbled in that too..."

But before I could finish with "... but it's not something I'm into," he was off and running. Years, makes, models, and modifications, blah, blah, blah.

Bar conversations get like this too often. I don't care about this blowhard's hobbies, passions, or life. I'll never see him again (I hope). What makes a person like this think that their bar neighbor wants to listen to such blather? Or listen to anything at all? If I was

going to talk with anyone, I would have FAR preferred Ashley. I'd listen to her stories about the big ones that she caught and released anytime.

But I had to lose Fisher dude. So, with beer done, I paid up and made the moving-on motions. Fisher dude asked me my name? Why does this happen so often, too? I guess we don't offer names up front all the time because we're still wary of being "a friend." It changes the tenor of the "random chat with a stranger." But what good does it do find out my name as I'm walking away from you forever? Are you gonna put it in your book or something? Just make one up, Fisher dude.

Duty done, I headed for the head. Now, I know I'm not the only one to have gone in the wrong rest room at HRC. I only did it once, and it was empty at the time, fortunately. There was that moment of odd befuddlement and revelation: *Where the hell are the ur- ohhhhhh*. But the rooms there are in the wrong order, aren't they? The ladies' room is always the first one you pass, iddinit? So out of habit... ugh, never mind.

And I *have* seen a guy walk out of that ladies' room. The odd part was that he did *not* then enter the men's room. Did he not even notice? Or just not care? Hmm. Not me. I got the fuck out, pronto, and went where I was supposed to went.



The walk back from either restroom is slower because you stop and look at all the cool shit on the walls. With the downstairs too full to do any memorabilia grazing, I skedaddled upstairs to see what I else could see. Not a soul was up there, so I took my time and saw a lot of classic stuff. Beatles, Stones, Dylan, Doors, Santana, Who, a few of which are posted here 4 all 2 c.

It was cool being solo up there. I took my time and read some of the letters from record companies and such, or from band members to friends or other musicians. If people had been around, I doubt I would have read so much; I suppose I would have just glanced and moved on. But, once sated, it was time to rock on outa here.