

**Bar Hoppin' With Hops**  
The Second Century Tour  
Hops MacBarley's 2013  
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar 116:

**Alonzo's Oyster Bar**

700 Front Street #101

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

Friday, 14 June 2013, 7:30 PM

*Key West Sunset Ale (draft) \$5.00*

There was an SSDC (Sunset Social Drinkers Club) gathering this night, starting at 8:00 at the Galleon's Sunset Tiki Bar (#54) and following that with some sloshing -- decked out with glow sticks and glow paint -- at various Front and Greene Street bars.



But I had time for one more Hop before mixing it up with that ilk, and Alonzo's was only a little bit out of the way. Besides, it was a beautiful evening for a stroll along the boardwalk. Boats, wood, water, sky, adjective, adjective. Yahhh.



Alonzo's has an elite location, for sure. Everybody who walks by it walks by it -- *everybody*. And most of them probably see it. They have three sides on the boardwalk and sit right under one of KW's most famous places: A&B Lobster House.

I entered via the side door and strode right to a random seat on the nearest flank of the bar. Plenty of people were sitting at dinner tables, but I was the sole patron on

my side of the bar. The row of tall, slat-backed seats seemed so orderly, until I callously disrupted their neat pattern. But seats love your ass, literally. The empty seats pouted silently while my seat got to caress my buns. It was smug about the honor too, I could tell.

The taps were in plain view and my selection was an easy one. When my young woman barkeep, whom I randomly nicknamed Kate, asked me what I would like, I replied that the Key West Sunset Ale was "just what I needed." It looked so good just a-sittin' there, all chill and gold and bubbly, that I had to paint its portrait (digitally speaking). Then I had to drink it.

As I was doing so, my mind wandered around the establishment. The furniture was nicely worn wood. It wasn't polished to a fine shine, nor was it bare planks, but it had the worn spots from years and years of business. It was like inside-a-ship wood. It looked just fine and functional. Sometimes it's good to know that thousands of customers have sat here before you (seats loving it); it means that it must be a good restaurant. In this town, you don't last long if you suck.

My barkeep came over as I was finished one of my early swigs and asked if everything was OK. "Just what I needed," I replied with a grin.

I was sitting right near the kitchen door, so I got to hear the familiar clinks, clanks and clamors of the back of the house. I pictured fiery stoves, blackened pans, a steaming stainless steel dishwasher, plastic racks filled with dripping water glasses, thick black rubber honeycomb mats on the clay-red square-tiled floor. No urgency to any voices; the staff had this crowd covered with ease. Not exactly peak season. An easy-breezy night all around, at least, so far.

One of the absurd inequities of the F&B world is that the kitchen krewe always makes the same money. They certainly can have a baaaad night, but it's never a bad-money night. The servers and barkeeps rise and fall with the head count and



the check ching. If bizniz is slow, so is the heart rate, but so too is the flow to the tip jar. The cooks just cruise. If the restaurant is slammed, the servers bust their buns but (hopefully) rake in some cool cash for their soul-scraping efforts. The kitchen is kicking and rocking and losing their freaking minds, but they get paid the same as if nobody had even ordered a bologna sandwich all night. They don't even get tipped out.

In my barkeeping days, I never forgot my cooks. In the middle of a slamming evening, I'd squeeze out a minute to bring the chefs a trayful of refreshments: tall, iced, plastic soda glasses, filled with dark brown, bubbly



Coca-Colas. No discerning eye would question it. But I knew that Willy liked Jim Beam, Chad dug the Captain, and Sam (like myself) was partial to Myers's dark Jamaican rum, mon.

None of those spirits diluted the color of a Coke enough to arouse suspicion. Like my manager at the Westin in Hilton Head once told me, "I'm not watching the guests; I'm watching the staff, you better be

watching the staff, and I'm watching *you*. If *I* can't tell, then the guests can't tell. Have fun tonight." I'd let the staff have a few, I'd have a few, and we'd all be in a good mood.

And I'd always bring the overheated cooks an end-of-the-night round. It was definitely against company policy, but what's right is right. I never seemed have to wait for my food orders.

My reveries were derailed by an Alonzo's server coming quickly up to the end of the bar to my left. He wasn't totally stressed, but he needed something pronto. "Kate, cork me!"

I half expected her to retort, "Go cork yourself," or "Cork this," but she calmly took the bottle of Chardonnay that he was holding, carried to a levered device on the wall, did a few twists and such and *zim-bang-boo* the bottle was open. Server Dude must have broken the cork while he was trying to open the bottle at the table. If you're new to the task, that can happen.

But does it happen so often that they have installed a broken cork remover device on the wall? How commonplace is it that a server can just say "cork me" and everyone knows what to do?

Anyway, Kate handed the bottle back to Corky, who skedaddled back to his probably-bemused customers.

My ale was gone at this point and I laid exact cash plus tip on the bar. Kate asked me if I enjoyed my beer. I smirked and said, "Just what I needed."

My mind searched for some clever way to work "you can cork me anytime" or some such stupid blather into the parting exchange, but, thankfully, none presented itself.