

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

Bar #132:

Coasters

218 Simonton Street

www.facebook.com/CoastersKeyWest

Friday, 28 June, 11:00 PM

Yeungling (bottle) \$5.00

B&J and I were here for their Grand Opening back in ... whenever it was. I forget. February?? Tony had urged us to come and check it out.

The concept seemed like an odd mix from the get-go, though: a roller coaster simulator, annnnnd ... a bar. And not just a bar, a Miami-style night club. What market are they going for? People who want to have a few drinks then throw up? From personal experience -- a long time ago, but still vivid -- I can tell you that it's not good mix. I'll spare you the details. Just trust me on that.

Location is an issue too. Whitehead Street gets good foot traffic in the daytime hours -- cruise shippers and fans of Mel Fisher and the Audubon House, that ilk. Maybe that's also the best chance to find kids in this part of town, and, it would seem, kids are probably the most likely to want to ride a roller coaster simulator. But, even if they can read the sign, all big and spread out across the large windows, the dance club music spilling out of the bar is going to make parents go, "uhhhh, dun tink so, let's move on."

When I worked at Key Lime Inn, I used to tell people on their first visit here that if you went down Simonton or Whitehead, you would think that Key West is the quietest, quaintest little town in America, while one block away, on Duval, all kinds of mayhem could be taking place.

That's the biggest issue for Coasters. At night, there is just no pedestrian flow. They're not going to get any *Hey, this place looks cool, let's check it out*. So, it has to be a destination, not a whim. That means, also, that locals have to know it, like it, and frequent it; outa-towners are not going to have a clue about it unless someone from here tells them.



So, anyway, we got there around 9:00 that opening night. The bar is up above street level, so you can't see in from the sidewalk. As we got closer, we had to snicker at what we saw: a few brass stanchions, red velvet theater rope strung from pole to pole, and a long red, carpeted mat on the sidewalk. Some dude in a vest informed us that the doors would not open until ten. Nobody else was in sight anywhere. We shrugged, okie-doked him, and went to do some other shit for a while.

When we returned, there was still nobody else in sight, and certainly nobody in line. Vesto let us in and clicked the rope back in place as we passed. That cracked me up. Like he had people there that he needed to exclude.

Club music pounded the large bar room. High ceilings, dark graphics on the walls -- made even darker by the grim lighting. There were about ten people in there. I was halfway across the floor when Steve came over from one of the tables. Big greeting, like he was happy as hell to see someone he knew come in. He was there with his daughter Dawn, who had just gotten back from a three-month USA road trip in an old school bus, with her bf, another couple, and two Great Danes. Ya, three months in a bus with two humongous dogs. So, I had to hear some of the stories. Plus, Steve had said, "Let me buy ya a beer." Is that one of the best sentences ever, or what?

I joined them at their tiny hightop table and, in so doing, inadvertently ditched B&J. Oops, sorry, *mi compadres*.

The wall opposite the bar is huge. I reckon the coaster is behind it. I never saw or heard it. Steve said they saw it, but I couldn't hear if they rode it or not. I hear it's ten bucks to get that thrill. *Ten bucks!* For that money, it better be one lonnnnng ride.

When Tony was trying to convince us (and himself) what a terrific concept this place was, he spoke of parents bringing the kids in, chilling out at the bar while the kids rode the coaster. They'd come out all jubilant, begging, "Can we ride it again? Can we, can we, puh-leeeeeze?" And the parents would laugh and say, "Sure!" and get back their drinks.

My bottle of Yeungling cost five bucks. It's a good bet that a cocktail is eight or more, and a Mojito is ten-plus. So, mom and dad have a couple of those, and the kids ride the ride twice. That's more than *sixty bucks* in less than twenty minutes. So, I'm seeing a flaw in Tony's plan.

B&J had enough after one beer and waved bye-bye. I would've been right with them, but I was digging Dawn's tales and photos, so I tolerated the throbbing tunes.

To each his own, to each his own, and to each his own. To those who think this bar is the greatest thing since the gumball machine, well, knock yourself out. Enjoy the ride, enjoy the vibe. But you certainly won't have to worry about me being in your way. You don't want me here anyway. It just ain't my style, and I just ain't its.

When I met up with B&J the next day, we all agreed that our first visit to Coasters would be our last.

So, here we were again!

One of the catalysts of the *Second Century Tour* was the chance to hop a few places that had not yet arrived on the scene in time for inclusion in 2012's *Peace, Love & IPA Tour* -- primarily World of Beer. *SCT* was well and happily underway when Jan noted, "And you get to go to Coasters again." Groan. Ya, thanks for the reminder. And it wasn't "**we** get to go to Coasters again," it was "**you** get to go to Coasters again."

Thus, I was both surprised and impressed when they chose to accompany me on the official Coasters Hop. Truly noble. It's one thing when you don't know how the bar will be, but when you've been there already, and your experience was, um, *poor*, and you still take one for the team by going back for more, that is serious commitment to The Art Of The Hop.

We left 90 Mile Lounge when the band took their 10:30 break. We were sated with good music, and contented with our consumed beverages. I would not have blamed B&J at all if they begged out and said, "Meet you at WOB in twenty?"

No red carpet this time, and no vest, there was still theater rope. As we came up the sidewalk, there was kind of a shifty-looking middle-aged guy leaning on the railing of the upper walkway. As we turned and mounted the half-dozen or so steps, he hurried through the bar's entrance.

When we got to the door, we noticed a heavy, dark drapery hanging from the high ceiling to the floor, blocking any view of the room. To our left there was a small table and Mr. Shifty. We took one step in. "Four dollars," he said, shiftily.

"Huh?" I replied, second doubts exploding across my mind. Bad enough to deliberately walk into an overcharging bar with annoying music, but to have to pay for that experience? Didn't see it happening.

"Four dollars," he repeated.

I laughed out loud this time. Brian said levelly, "I don't think so. See ya later."

Before we could turn away, Shifty shifted gears, yanked the curtain back and said, "no, no, go on in!"

We all gave him the strange look that so richly deserved as we went past him and into the bar.

It was pretty empty. Our entrance might have made it a dozen. We took up position around the middle of the bar. The lighting was just a bit brighter than before. The wall art looked more recognizable -- rollercoaster-ish designs -- but they looked like graphics that were meant to be seen, colorfully, in full light, instead being cloaked by the dim night club reds and blues.

The DJ was up on his perch, throbbing it out. A few people sat at the bar, and two at a table. Yay. Fun times.

There had been speculation that the Gecko's big drop in late-night bizniz was due to that crowd switching over to here for their hip-hop and urban vibes. I was hoping for Coasters' sake that it was true. But on a Friday night, the Gecko always had the DJ's podium up and running at 10:00 and people streaming in. This was 11:00, and no streaming -- unless you count the three of us. But we were merely hoppers, not hip-hoppers. So, I don't know about that speculation.

The barkeep was a charming, young, slim woman with long blonde hair. Mannn, did she seem out of place. Not that charming blondes shouldn't be tending night club bars, but I picture her as a better fit in some high caliber club in Hilton Head Island. Surely, her income would be better.

Brian was a tad cranky. The trend of rising beer prices is rankling him, just as it is me. "Four dollars for a Coors Light and five dollars for a Yuengling," he said, shaking his head, "and we're not even on Duval Street." And to make it worse, Jan, in her designated walker role, asked for a water and she was told that she had to buy a bottle for four dollars. She scoffed and said,

"No, thank you." Jan is way too polite to use the words "fuck that shit!" but her tone of voice said it loud and clear.

I excused myself to go hit the head. What a trek that was! Down a long hallway with blank walls, to a door that seemed to be "guarded" by some tall suspicious dude. Or maybe he was just standing there because he's anti-social and came to this bar so he wouldn't be near anyone. Anyway, past him and through the door, then down another long white hallway. It was creepy back there.

And on the way back out, there was more than one door, they were all closed, and all unmarked. WTF is this shit?? I found the correct door on my second try, and returned to the bar.

Right about then, the DJ seemed to punt on his throbs for a while and play something a little mellower. He even lightened the lights some. You know what happened? People got up and danced! Just two at first, kinda slow dance, kinda bouncy dance. Then two more, then everybody ... except, of course, us. Five couples slow dancing at Coasters. There was actually a pretty good vibe in the room.

We decided to get out while the gettin' was good. Chalk up #132 and move on.

Addendum: August 16, 2013

Looks like summer hours have cut back. Facebook page says that they are now open till 10 PM, and the photos clearly emphasize the Coaster as the attraction rather than the bar.

Somebody posted a funny vid too.