

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

Bar #147:

Blackfin Bistro

918 Duval Street

www.blackfinbistro.com

Sunday, 14 July, 6:30 PM

Dogfish 60-Minute IPA (bottle) \$7.00

Our foursome -- B&J, Big Dog, and the ubiquitous Hops MacB -- arrived after a casual two-block walk from Pincher's. We had to crest the hill on the way, so we were a little winded from the thin air. That hilltop is right about at Little Room Jazz Club (Hop #76). We coasted the downhill from there. Gravity can be a right cool thing sometimes.



Blackfin has an inviting look about it: clever graphic on a wooden sign, nice door, with a couple of plants and lamps flanking it. Inside is nice too: simple chairs at simple tables along the walls, black floor, white ceiling, small lights hanging down over the simple tables. It seemed pretty roomy, too, mainly because there were *no people* here. Too early for the dinner hour, I reckon. And no Sunday Happy Hour going on.



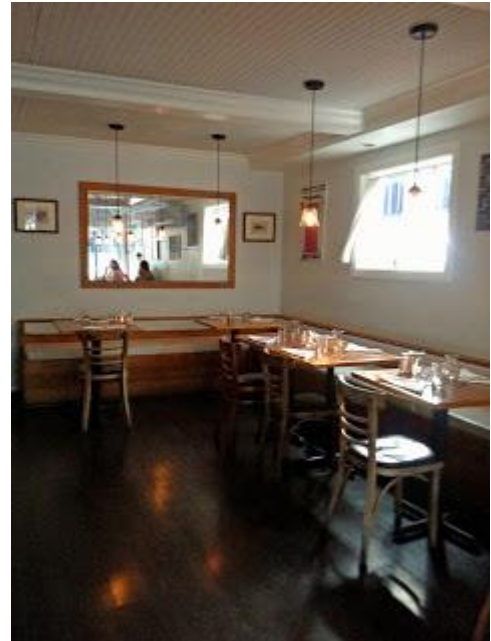
Two young blonde women and a skinny dark-haired guy comprised the front of the house staff. We didn't see much of the guy; he skedaddled into the back shortly after we arrived. I guess he was the host, and since we blew right past the podium and grabbed seats at the bar, he might have felt rejected.

I'm pretty sure neither of the women -- who looked very much alike, to me -- was assigned as bartender or server, not that it mattered right now. Both were behind the bar to handle The Rush (i.e., us). I'm guessing that when a dinner guest orders a drink, the server just

goes back there and makes it. Maybe the host even plays barkeep. Hard to tell at this point.

Jan got a glass of water, Brian got his Coors Light, and Big Dog and I treated ourselves right with a Dogfish. Seven dollars per Dog. Kee-rist.

B&J knew (kinda) one of the blondes from some other bar or restaurant. Of course they did; they know somebody everywhere we go. And it's very common to bump into a barkeep behind a different bar. Making a living by tending bar in this town often involves juggling shifts at multiple jobs, and jumping from business to business when a chance to make more money arises. I think I bought a beer from Grubby at three different places one day: late night at the Green Parrot, Happy Hour at The Porch, and I forget where at lunch time.



I've seen people find a bartending job shortly after arriving in town, boast about being all set, then suffer through a month or two of almost empty tip jars -- but still go out after work and spend it -- and then crawl out of town after their landlord boots their delinquent asses out.

However, if you land a good gig, and you are a good bartender, you can do very well. Doug and Matt at Jack Flats are among the best I've seen, but there are many others who have held high-paying jobs at good bars for years because they know how to do the job right. It's not easy facing the public every day -- especially the drunk public. It really can sap your energy.

My own bartending stints have tended to last no more than three years before I'd need a break, or at least a change. I'd just run out of friendliness. Someone would come through the door a half-hour before closing and, instead of thinking "hey, someone else to chat with," or "here comes a little more cash for the jar," I'd have gotten to the point where my mind would go "*arrrrgh, go awayyyyyyyy!!*" And that's not a good frame of mind in the service industry.

But that didn't seem to be the issue with these young ladies. They were carefree and amiable. If we had not come in, they would have been lonely and sad. Depression and low self-esteem could have followed, with eventual



thoughts of suicide. So, it would not be a stretch to say that we saved their lives by coming in to drink.

Blackfin has a back patio area too, with a square wooden hut for a bar and an eclectic array of outdoor-style tables and chairs. That was closed today. Or, at least, not active. It was open enough to walk out there, but it might've be days before I'd get served.

And have I mentioned the bar itself? I have not. An egregious oversight because it was very cool: glossy varnish over a type of overlapping gold leaf. A couple of lantern-ish glass candles were the only adornments on it. A large gridded rack of wine bottles dominates the wall behind it.

We bottomed-up our brews and prepped for the trek to the next Hop. As I passed the podium on the way out, I looked at the reservations list. It was empty. Then I looked at the heading. The day and date had been written in, and beside it, in a row titled Weather, the word "Rainy" had been circled.

I looked at the blonde -- no, the other one -- and said, "It isn't raining." She hadn't been watching me but she knew right away what I meant.

"Oh," she giggled, "we put that sometimes on slow nights so it looks like we have a reason." She punctuated it with a shrug and another giggle. It was cute.

I smiled, and headed out into the rain.

