

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

Bar #167:

Mojitos Cafe & Bar

902 Whitehead Street

<http://www.historickeywestinns.com/the-inns/lighthouse-court/lighthouse-court-cafe-bar/>

Saturday, 3 August, 4:00

Yuengling (bottle) \$4.50

I worked here for a while. Just a few days, actually, and not specifically *here*. Still, I was in here as an employee; that much is undeniable. So, if I'm asked, *Hops, good sir, were you ever in here as an employee?* I will not be able to deny it, even if I try.



It was a very different place then. That was in 2008-2009, when I was a Front Desk for Historic Key West Inns. That's what my name tag said I was: a Front Desk. It had my first name in large letters and underneath it, in smaller letters, it said "Front Desk". Not *Front Desk Attendant* or *Front Desk Agent*, or even *Front Desk Douchebag*.



I thought it was a little bit dumb to even have that on the tag. If I was seated there in my company shirt, it was pretty obvious where I was, without the tag's assistance. And if I was away from my desk, it just made it appear that I was derelict in my duties -- even if I was in a guest room plunging a clogged toilet (yes, of course it happened), and would have been much happier twiddling my fingers and toes at the Front Desk. At times like those, I wanted to point to my tag and say, "Sorry, sir or ma'am, I am a Front

Desk, as you can see by my tag, and cannot leave my post. No hotel, motel, or guest house can be without a Front Desk."

Ya, Marlon (my boss) would have really loved that one. At Key Lime Inn, where I did 99% of my shifts, his office was directly upstairs from the real front desk, and an old air vent in his floor allowed him to hear every word that was said down below. He would not hesitate to yell down any corrections or suggestions that came to mind. It was aggravating as all hell, partly because I'm sure I would have done the same thing myself.



So, when I got a chance to do a fill-in shift at one of the other properties -- Chelsea House, Albury Court, or here at Lighthouse Court -- I was all over it. Each one had its quirks. They were "historic", which, of course, is a euphemism for "old", so they have some creaks and groans in the wood and a few odd configurations in the floor plans. But LC was and is my favorite.

It sits directly across Whitehead Street from Ernest Hemingway's house, with its six-toed cats and never-ending flow of tourists. LC's mix of small cottages throughout the compound, and traditional rooms in the large central house accommodate somewhere between 60 and a million guests, I forget exactly.

The most noteworthy points of the property for me were, first, the swank Hemingway Suite on the top floor -- Marlon had introduced it to me proudly as "the nicest suite in a Key West", and I don't think it's an idle boast -- second, the shower in the guest room below that suite -- a large, cube-like chamber, with dark brown tiles on ceiling and floor and all four walls, cool recessed lighting, and water jets that shot from multiple ceiling spots and several in each wall, soooooo cool (but, no, never got to use it) -- and what is now Mojitos C&B but what was then more like a storage room that had a counter in it.

Part of the problem with that old arrangement was that the bar area had to share the space



with a lame, tiny "fitness center." That little gym was what was relevant to me -- I couldn't use the bar while I was working, now, could I? -- because I had free use of it as long as I worked for HKWI. It was good enough to get some basic, functional exercising done, which was, well, good enough. If you put two people in there at one time, however, it was overcrowded.

The bar, though, was just small and plain and dark enough to seem dingy, even if there was no dingy actually in there. The counter was like a big wooden box turned in its side. There were just three stools, and the selection -- just a few pre-made sandwiches -- was pretty thin. It was functional enough for the guests to step off the pool deck and grab a plastic vessel of liquid refreshment, but it was also the kind of place where you kept one eye open for bugs. Both gym and bar were only there so LC could advertise that they had one. I imagine many guests were, um, surprised.

So, that's what was in my head as I met up with B&J for some Saturday afternoon hoppin'. We actually met across the street under the misguided notion that the little cafe called The Six Toed Cat might have a bar. They do not, so we shrugged it off and came right on over here.

We walked through the elegant white gate and followed the path around to the right of the main building and back towards the cement pond. That all looked the same as it ever did. But when we reached the gate to the pool



deck, all I could say was, "Nice job, Marlon!"

That shadowy closet was now bright and clean and airy under a broad blue awning, just beckoning those pool deckers to come on in for a cocktail -- specifically, a Mojito, a favorite drink of old Ernie Hemingway. He brought fame to the bar called [La Bodeguita del Medio](#), which was his Havana hangout. He wrote on the wall of the bar room, *My mojito in La Bodeguita, My daiquiri in El Floridita*, where it can still be seen today (according to Wikipedia).

Doncha love Wikipedia? And the Internet in general? I mean, there is no excuse to *not know* things these days. You could even look up the air speed velocity of an unladen swallow (African) with just a few clicks. [FYI: it's 24 MPH, on average --> <http://askville.amazon.com/air-speed-velocity-African-Swallow/AnswerViewer.do?requestId=91761>]

Anywayyyy, Mojito Cafe & Bar was a very pleasant surprise. We went right in and took three seats at the unoccupied bar. An early twenties, kinda-big-but-not-huge Polish guy with his baseball cap on sideways waited on us. His name was Peter. Or at least he said it was. He was having a lazy afternoon. There were some people lying in the deck chairs by the pool, but none of them looked like they'd been doing much moving about. Some mellow music played and it wasn't loud at all. The mood was Deep Siesta.

Peter was cool, though, despite the stupidass hat look. He told us that we could use the pool, as long as we bought something at the bar. Ding ding, make a little note of that on a hot summer afternoon.

Man, this place was niice. B&J probably just thought it was nice; I knew it for what it once was, so, to me, it was niiiiice. Oops, I mean niice. (It wasn't that niiiiice.) The gym was gone (wise choice), and in its stead was a sitting space with a couple of padded wall-benches (is there a better name for those than "wall-benches"?) and small tables and chairs. Through the wide open doors and multiple window panes, you get a cool view of the pool and big shady trees beyond it.



Multi-colored chalk spelled out the array of drinks on the beverage menu board. "Pineapple UpDown Cake" looked like it might be worth a try someday.

Mojitos were *nahn dollah*. Traditionally, that Cuban cocktail is relatively low in alcohol (about 10%) when apportioned correctly, so \$9 would seem kinda high.



But (#1), it is a lot of extra work for the barkeep, so maybe the price includes labor. But (#2), I have seen exactly **no one** in Key West pour just one ounce of rum into a Mojito. Instead of tipping in one lonely o-z of booze and then

filling the glass with soda water, most KW keepers invert that rum bottle for an eight-count and then add a soda splash. Now, *that* would justify the *nahn dollah*.

There was a good variety of salads and light samiches in the food case, and a reasonably diverse selection of bottled brews.

We had some back-and-forth with Peter about Poland and his relocation here, and let an easy half-hour slide by. It crossed my kind to take a quick dip in the pool *just cuz I could*, but that just wasn't a compelling enough reason. I was freshly showered and very content with the A/C, so no need to rock that boat with wet shorts and stringy hair.

And we had mo' hoppin' to do, so we saddled (up) and skedaddled (out).