

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

Bar #181:

Havana Cafe

703.5 Duval Street

www.havana-keywest.net

Sunday, 18 August, 2:50 PM

Key West Sunset Ale (bottle) \$4.00

There were two urgencies afoot as I prepped this Hop. First, HC is a breakfast and lunch establishment and they close at 3:00. My noon-sleep (after a typical Saturday night revel -- yes, things picked up after the yawners of Hops #179 and #180) and a few thisses and a couple of thats had zapped away more time than planned (ha, like always), so what shoulda been a leisurely approach became a rush. Probably coulda skipped the thats, but, hey, sometimes ya just gotta have your thats.

The second urgency was the big yellow-and-red blob moving rapidly across the sky. OK, it wasn't really in the sky -- though how freaky would that be? -- it was on radar. A dark and rowdy storm was bearing down on Cayo Hueso, and I had to bike it to Duval before that beast unleashed. It was gonna be close.

The tall bank of clouds was looming over the south side of K-dub's most famous street as I locked Trekkie to the rack.

This city has good bike racks, for the most part. (Yeah, I know, I said I hate that expression. I hate toilets too, but I still use them.) The bad racks are the one with the straight, low, diagonal rails. Just where are you supposed to chain up on those? Your front wheel won't fit under the center pipe, and the slanted pieces are too damn low to do any good. No matter whether you front-in or back-in, your bike is all tipped and twisted with the others when you get back.



And in that tangle of spokes and gears and frames, you just might end up in that most dreaded scenario: locked to someone else's bike. Ugh. This happened to Jacko at one such rack on Southard Street. He was *pissed*. Can't blame him. Late night, just wanna get yer ass home, and some dooooooshbag has wrapped his chain around your frame. Ya. Not much you can do but wail at the heavens. I don't know if he did that. I do know that I would have.

When I asked him, "What did you do?" expecting an answer like, "Wail at the heavens and go have another beer," he replied, with total conviction that it was the sole and proper response, "I locked my bike to his!"

Yup. Not sure what that was supposed to accomplish. There are times in life that you do unto others what they did unto you, just to show them how fripping stoooooid they were to do it in the first place, but I'm thinking that this was *notttt* the best time for that approach. To me, it was apparent that Jacko created a stalemate: first to unlock and leave loses. Me, I take my unlucky beating, stroll the mile-plus home, get a good night's sleep, go back the next day and retrieve my liberated bike. As it turned out, Jacko never did ride that bike again. After several days, KWPD cut them both loose and cleared the rack.

So, anyway, the **good** racks are the three-foot-tall inverted U's. These were invented by a bike rider. The others were invented by some putz who had enough backing to market them to a panel of other putzes. With the inverted U, locking up takes six seconds, and unlocking takes less.

I dismount Trekkie before she even stops, cozy the worthy steed up against a vacant pipe, release the lock on the cable that is coiled around my seat pipe, slip the two ends under my center bar and around the waiting pipe, and I am done. No uncoiling, removing, or awkward repositioning; this is just plain zippy, Skippy. The unlocking is even crisper, as the coils seem to retract eagerly to their post for immediate departure. I LOVE those U racks!



Umm, ya.

Havana Cafe. Yes. You were saying? :)

There is partnership here with the place next door, KWest Liquors (Hop #141). Havana provides the kitchen for that yum fried chicken and KWest provides the liquor license for that yummmm booze. Seems like a good balance.

Quite the nice little place, actually. One nice thing about these Tours of mine is that they afford me the opportunity to visit places I probably would never go otherwise. I mean, c'mon, a breakfast and lunch restaurant? I don't even buy breakfast at IHOP, fer Crissake.

I hear you asking, *But, Hops, you exquisite lush, is this a bar??* Yes it is. Just look at the pictures, haggis face. I sat on a tall stool at a tall bar and got me a cold beer from a woman assigned to do exactly that.

She was tall and blonde and really quite beautiful. Was she as beautiful and as lovely and as everythingly as Jola the Lithuanian lovely from Abbondanza? Hmmm, it was close, but you just can't put objective values on such things. Both were far more wonderful than the damn *pillow* that I go to sleep with every night, so, ha, yeah. Ha.

No offense, pillow.

So, yes, Havana Cafe.

This is a pretty nice little place. (Did I say that already? Scroll up and check, will ya? Thanks.) I've admired their windows for years, even when they were whatever that were before what they are now. Their front facade is made up of 24 square panes of glass, about 16-inch squares, set in tidy white framework: a classic small town look that would be an equally good fit in Paris (France) and Paris (Maine).

Inside, the bar is the first thing that seized my eye. Duh, right? It's a pretty dominating feature, though, taking up the whole right side of the room in dark cherry wood that matches the ceiling-high shelves behind it. They keep the bar mostly clear of the usual condiments and straw holders and crap like that, so it looks really smooth and classy. Then again, maybe it was so clear because they were just about to close and they had put everything away already. I'm sure there was a bit of a cringe when I walked in. People normally cringe about that, regardless of the hour, so it's a good bet.

I walked to the bar seat that was farthest back so I could better survey the whole place as I swilled. The stools were plain wood, to match the bar, and had a curved back. I like those; I have a curved back too. If you only like backless bar stools, this place is not for thee.

There are about eight stools and six or eight tables. Not seven. Six or eight. A party of four guys sat at a table by the wall. There didn't *seem* to be anything sinister about them. But people who are truly sinister will mask it with a facade of innocence. Hmm.

The tall blonde woman came over and waited on me. (Did I mention her already?) I was not expecting a tall blonde woman in this small, family-owned, Cuban-themed kinda place. A dark-haired Latin woman would have fit the scene better, but WTF, it's not a freaking movie (or any other kind of movie).



I assured her that I knew they were in shut-down mode and that I was only here for a beer. Apparently finding it *really* odd that anyone would come into this place, alone, ten minutes before closing and want *only* a beer, she began insisting that I could still order food: *It's OK, the cooks won't mind, we serve food right up to the time we close the doors, really, it's fine, you can order anything you want.*

I pondered the appropriateness of telling her that I just don't care for Cuban food, maybe even wording it something like, *Nah, that food blows*, but the Propriety Committee in my head rejected that approach. I smirked and assured her, again, that was, in fact, only here for a beer. She gave me a wry look and went off to get one for me.

When she returned, I explained my quest. I'm pretty sure that she thought I was making the whole thing up. She listened politely, and made a couple of generic "oh, cool" comments. When I was done, she asked, "Are you sure you don't want any food?"

"Just here for a beer."

I took my time with my KWSA. It was enough of a rush to get here, so it was a good deceleration mechanism to make slow and meaningful love to my brew. Then I'd be in the right mindset for a Sunday afternoon stroll around Duval.

The thunderstorm never did hit. I kept watching through the window to see the deluge, but it never even lost sunniness. As happens once in a great while, a totally inevitable downpour just -- whoooooosh -- dried up as it reached Key West. Maybe all the alcohol in the air has something to do with it. Or methane. It also happened at Hop #11, 2-Cent Pub, early in the *Peace, Love and IPA Tour* of 2012. You remembered that, yes? Keen memory, there, Claire.

It was about 3:05 when I drained the last drops of Sunset Ale. (Ha, spellcheck just tried to put *Subset*. What is that, Geometry beer?). The non-sinister party was still there, jauntily kibitzing over something. No idea what; they were speaking Spanish. (Not that I would have understood French, except for some numbers.). Can you *kibitz* in Spanish? Does that violate some international law of linguistics? Phukkitt.

I gathered by meager belongings and made ready to depart. Tall Blonde came over to take my bottle and crumpled napkin. "All set?"

"Is it too late to get food?" Ha, smile, exit stage right