

Bar Hoppin' With Hops
The Keep On Hoppin' Tour
Hops MacBarley's Ongoing
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar 211:
Wine-O
430 Duval Street
www.laconchakeywest.com/wine-o.aspx
Saturday, 6 March, 8:30 PM

Pinot Grigio (glass) \$8.00

First off, I gotta say that Wine-O is a beautiful place. It wows you. The layout, the bars, the lighting, the full-wall wine racks, the funky white bar stools, the dark wood furnishings and the wooden floor and ceiling -- all top notch stuff.

A Hop has occurred on this space before. Jack's Seafood Shack (#37) used to occupy this street-level segment of Crown Plaza La Concha Hotel. That place seemed to do OK, but they shut it down and did a total overhaul. It

amazed everyone when they took off the wrapper and unveiled Wine-O.

Wine-O sells wine. *Of course*, Wine-O sells wine. **But** no booze and no beer. Yeah, no beer. Sigh. Wine doesn't have any hops in it, so I had to summon my repressed inner soul-dweller, Stomps MacGrapes, and let him steer through this Hop. (We don't let Stomps out much. He's weird.)

We were fresh from our 915 Hop and Brian and Big Dog had had enough of any place even marginally nice. They shunned the whole wine experience and proceeded down to the Gecko (#2) for some not-so-nice, free lance boozing. Jan was all too happy to take on the role as my wingwoman, though, and she and I

took a couple of seats at the rounded bar on the right side of the room. She





promised to pick a wine that I could tolerate.

I have never acquired any kind of a taste for wine -- red, white, blush, sparkling, or whatever. I'll admit that I've never given it much of a try, though. There's nothing judgmental in that. I don't think that wine drinkers are deviant, evil, or mentally ill. Some are, for sure, but that's true of beer drinkers too. And non-drinkers. *Especially*

non-drinkers.

So, there is no moral principle involved. I'm not protesting the mistreatment of grapes or anything noble like that. I just don't like the taste. Simple. Every wine I've ever sampled -- going back to that first Catholic boy sip from the chalice at communion in third grade -- just tasted sour to me, and I don't dig sour.

Somehow, through determined practice, I *did* develop a taste for beer. I didn't like it initially, as a high school sophomore surreptitiously expanding my experiential horizons. Vodka was the elixir of choice in those rookie days, mixed with *anything* to mitigate the vile flavor -- OJ, CJ, Coke, even grape juice and root beer (not both at once, no). It still tasted awful, but at least we could pound down shots and get ourselves to Drunk Town with minimal time spent going *Yukkkkk, that's gross!*

By college time, I had gotten friendly with beer, and the friendship has just grown stronger with time. Beer understands me, and I understand it. More or less.

Not so with wine. Blame it on my progression of social circles. I've never hung out with people who preferred wine. Just never knew any.



But Jan *is* a wine drinker, and she knows enough about wine to be my guide through Wine-O. She doesn't drink very often or very much, but when she does, wine is her choice (or Bailey's). I've seen her drink red, white, and even chocolate wine -- which looked more like chocolate milk to me -- so I felt confident that she'd pick me a winner.



Our bartender was a young woman with bright red hair -- like Wendy-bright, but straight. Her name was Corinne. We were pretty honest about our intentions. I said right up front that I was not a wine fan and asked if, by some remote chance, she had *any* kind of beer stashed somewhere. He took at look at my ratty canvas shoulder bag plopped carelessly on her smooth

marble bar, shuddered inwardly, and turned her attention to Jan. She liked Jan a lot more. (Good judge of character, I agree.)

Corinne explained to Jan that Wine-O is a package store and not really a wine bar. You can sample things by the glass, but their goal is to sell you a bottle. Hopefully, you'll park your foursome in the comfy couches, kill off your bottle, and buy another one. (She didn't say that last part; I merely surmised it.)

They also sell chocolate. Lots of chocolate. Godiva chocolate. The whole western "wing" is dedicated to a full array of the tasty sweets. Jan likes wine, but *loves* chocolate. Chocolate is a lovable thing, *ca va?*

She ordered "a nice Pinot Grigio" and eagerly added a dish of Godiva Pearls. They looked like chocolate-covered peas to me. I kept referring to them as *pellets*. It wasn't intentional; for some reason the word *pearls* was just not sticking in my head. Pearls are white. Pellets are... well, not white.

Corinne brought Jan the glass of wine and the little dish of chocolate, ignoring the reprehensible reprobate seated next to her, made a few *if you need anything else* kind of comments, and went off to search for more wine-thusiastic patrons.

Normally, my co-hoppers and I will clink glasses to toast the Hop, but having only one glass made that difficult. So, I held the glass and Jan held the pellet dish and we did the best clink we could.

The Pinot Grigio was surprisingly light, which also means it was light on flavor, and, hence, light on *sour* flavor. So, it wasn't bad. It wasn't luring me away from beer as my *joie de boire*, but, still, well chosen, Jan!

Part of the lightness, though, was the glass itself. I've handled many a wine glass on my bartending days and nights but this one was amazing. It didn't look any different, but it felt almost weightless. You know how you automatically anticipate a certain feeling and when it turns out to be different it really strikes you. This was like that. As soon as I lifted the glass, I gave it a *WTF* look. When the wine was almost gone, I felt as if I had an empty hand and I was mime-drinking.

Weird stuff, that wine.

I drank most of the PG, with Jan sipping maybe a third of it. She ate most of the pellets. For the record, the wine was \$8, and the pellets were \$3.

Eight bucks for five ounces of wine *sounds* like a rip, considering that eight bucks for twelves ounces of beer or eight bucks for a one-ounce shot

would *definitely* be a rip. But, as any *good* barkeep can tell you, those are the standardized servings based on alcohol content. High ABV versions of those libations skew the balance, but that was how it was set up when God created glassware.



I polished off the last of the PG, and Jan ruefully gulped down the final GP (Godiva Pearl). Corinne was attending to some well-off-looking people at the other bar, so we dismounted our tall, funky bar seats and headed out onto Duval. For some reason, the street and sidewalk just seemed dirtier than they did before.

