

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

Bar 225:

**Viva Zapata (Viva Saloon)**

903 Duval Street

Friday, August 15, 2014, 7:00 PM

Yuengling (bottle) \$2.00

*Viva Zapata? Really?? Did I just see that???*

I wheeled Trekko The Wonder Bike around and, yep, sure enough, that building near the top of the hill that had been closed up tight for so long now had the boards down and fresh air was pouring through. A chalkboard propped out front proclaimed, "We're pouring beers and killing bugs!" Holy shit! This was *incredible* news!!



Many, many times in the last fourteen years, I have shaken my head in puzzlement over this aging building. Back in that van-gabonding winter of 1993-94, I was known to frequent VZ. It was a good take. A big old-style white bathtub was kept filled with ice and bottled beers, music was rockin' and it was always doing a brisk business. When I returned in 2001 to make the Conch Republic my home, I was disappointed to see the white building boarded up and looking decrepit.

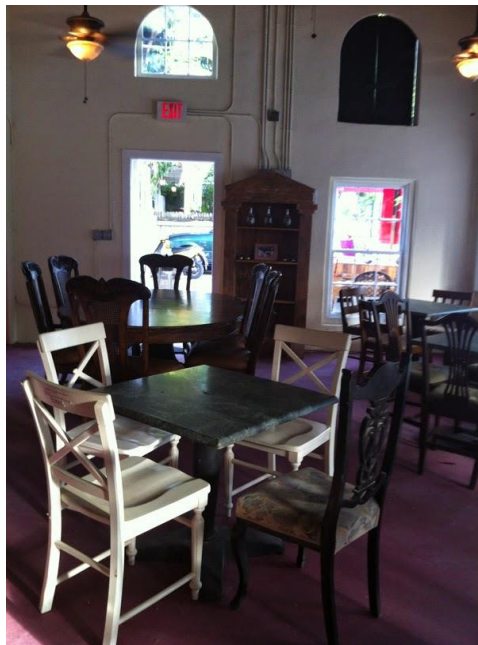
The decrepityness deepened as the years passed. All I could think of was, good God, how many freaking roaches, ants, rats and other sundry vermin are swarming inside?! Made my skin crawl.

And now it was open! And looking pretty decent!

I had a place I had to be, but I carved a mental note inside my head that **This Bar Must Be Hopped SOON**. Thus, I rallied my stalwart co-hoppers, B&J, and we made it a Friday focal point. We hopped Bliss first, as a warmup, but I was itching the whole time to get *here*.



The Zap was a lonnnng way from finished. They didn't even have a sign. You only knew it's Viva Zapata if you knew that it used to be Viva Zapata. The walls are pretty bare, though the large, painted Corona label still adorns the wall behind the zigzag-shaped bar. There's a lot of room behind that bar. The keeps gotta like that. Too often, you're slamming into each other and reaching around somebody's breasts to grab a lime, or groping between their legs for a bottle. Actually, that doesn't sound so bad, does it? Depends who you're working with, I reckon.



As luck would give it, Zap was still on Happy Hour -- Zappy Hour? -- when we got there. Two bucks for a Glingo!! DOS! Happy happy Hoppers today!

It had been 18 years since VZ had closed up. 18 freaking years. Not just ordinary years, mind you. These years freaked. Word is that renovations had been going on of late, but they must have been clandestine operations because the building always looked as dormant as ever.

The place has many rooms, and we did a little wandering to check them out. None of the rooms was anywhere close to ready for anything. The bar was by far the most complete. Rumor had it that they had to open and start puvaying their demon alcohol to us the public, or they would lose the liquor license. So,





they threw open the doors and windows and said *Fukkit, come on in and have a drink!* I don't know if that's true or not, but I like the sound of the tale, so I shall not pursue refutation.

We had just ordered up Round Two when we heard that some dude was about to give a couple of people a little show-around tour. We tagged along and got the lowdown. It's a pretty large place.

As usual, I took up the rear of our small group so I wouldn't block the view for anyone one else, and, as usual, as a result, I missed about half of what our guide said. But I caught enough to know that the kitchen stuff was back there; that this here was the main dining room; that there was a hidden, speakeasy-style room up at the top of the cool white-railed staircase; that a state-of-the-art sound system (see photo) was in the works; and that the ghost who occasionally shared the small upstairs apartment with our guide seemed to be tolerant of humans ("I respect him, he seems to respect me"). Hm.

There were big plans for the south side yard area too. It's a large lot, and it, too, needed a good bit of sprucing up. (Or mapling up. Or elming up. Or palming. Or pining. For the fjords.) Tables, chairs, maybe a food cart, and even a big video projection screen were all in their plans out there. Sounded mighty ambitious to me -- there wasn't even a TV inside yet -- but, hey, as long as the bar was open, all was well.

Business was good this evening. Can't keep a two-dollar beer a secret in this town. Donna was here with her husband, so we swapped a little road racing convo. I knew somebody I knew



would be here.

Then Andrea came in from the yard. Andrea, you skinny little freak!! Big, wraparound hug for ya. She is one kick in the head. For years, she was my liaison to the pizza/pasta carry-out world. A hard-working and smart-working young woman in a profession not overly noted for either, she made each pick-up a pleasure. Then she was there no more. Sigh. So, when I saw her here, it was hug-time big-time. Turns out she quit that world and would be tending bar here! Cool! As if two-dollar Glings wouldn't be enough to bring me back...

Addendum: May 2015

New ownership now; turns out that it's Donna and hub! So, it's just called "Viva Saloon" and maybe even just "Viva's". Still no signs. They canned Andrea, though, so I'm sad about that. She seemed to be doing one of those above-and-beyond jobs, just like she did when I first met her, but I guess she did not fit in with their plans. So it goes.