



Bar Hoppin' With Hops

The Keep On Hoppin' Tour

Hops MacBarley's Ongoing

Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar 237:

Deuce's Off The Hook Grill

728 Simonton Street

www.offthehookkeywest.com

Saturday, December 20, 2014, 9:15 PM

Sandbar Sunday (draft) \$6.50

Deuce's is one of those word-of-mouth places. Oh, they advertise and all that, but I'm betting they get a lot of business

from people telling other people, *it's this cool little off-Duval restaurant with a great atmosphere and excellent food, and don't be surprised if there's a line.*

The corner of Simonton and Petronia is not part of the main arterial flow of K-Dub. It's not waaaay off the well-traveled path, like some of the island's other esoteric eateries (i.e., 7 Fish (#125) and Flaming Buoy Filet Co. (#164)), but it might be a bit of a search-out for map-challenged outa-towners.

Not for me, though. I think it's a very cool location, and the big shingled roof-front thing suits it well. However, Off The Hook *was* one of those places that I had to do a window look-through at some point to determine if they did, in fact, even have a bar.

Some restaurants don't, you know, as preposterous as that seems. Pisces is one. And Denny's. Amigos (the erstwhile Iguana Cafe) is another, and that irks me; that place has the vibe of a cool bar, but your drinks get brought to you by a server, which DQ's it from Tour consideration. You need to be able to approach the drink service zone -- you can either stand or sit once you get there -- and get your drink directly from the person who pours it (or pulls it



from the fridge). If your server has to cross some public floor to bring it to your table, you, my friend, are not "at a bar." [Hey, my Tour, my rules. Ha.]



Now, if the Gecko is packed, and Nicole (consummate professional, that she is) sees you through the crowd, adds your can of Sierra Nevada to her next delivery scoot, and hands it off to you in the middle of the room as she flies by, then, yeah, I'll give ya that. But if you're sitting at table, na-ah.

Anyway, Deuce's is a small space, and I thought it was possible that the designers may have opted for maximum tableage. But the Hook's bar turns out to be a dominant feature of the establishment. I'd even go so far as to say that, on appearance alone, this place *could* even pass as a Bar With Tables just easily as a Restaurant With A Bar. Their emphasis is very much on food, though, even if mine wasn't. It's small,

dark, and classy. A top-end menu in a corner shack. If I liked seafood, and HAD MONEY, I'd come here often.

I had tried to gain access here about 90 minutes earlier, but there was indeed a wait. The hostess, who stands at a podium *outside* the front door, told me there was no room within, and to give it another shot after 9:00. So, here I was, with a *Where's my damn seat, bitch?* look on my face. She smiled, and let and me in.



Plenty of people were still here, but a couple of bar seats were available. I took the one on the deepest end, guaranteeing that, at most, I could only be neighbored by one dumbass. Being flanked by douchebags, dumabsses, or idiots is NEVER a good thing. And, sure, I *could* end up with tremendous, fantastic, amazing people -- like any of you fine folks, for example -- but I'm an inherent pessimist. I expect the worst, so when it

happens, my mood doesn't darken too much, but if it *doesn't* happen, I'm

just frickin' delighted. If I'm ready for a dumbass, douchebag or idiot, and I get a cool neighbor instead, hey, *jackpot!*

Here, though, I had a wall on my right and an empty seat on my left. Poifect.

The slender young woman barkeep came over and offered me a menu. What the heck, I figured, it was gettin' late and I hadn't eaten yet, so maybe a snicky snack was in order. Sweet Potato Tater Tots caught my eye. It didn't seem to be named right, though; Potato and Tater are the same thing. It said the same thing twice *and* it was redundant. But Sweet Potato Tots seemed out of whack. Gotta say "tater" with tots"; it's like a rule or something. And Sweet Tater Tots felt like it was missing a beat or two. I'm sure the members of management argued long and hard, with passion and zeal and maybe even hissed insults and scowled threats, before they settled on this wording.

The Tots come with Maple Syrup. Interesting touch. All for just fo' bux. Fo' bux! *Gotta* go for that.

So, I ordered up a heapin' helpin' of those SPTT's. Cassie, my barkeep, flashed a strange smile and seemed like she wanted to say something, but was called away by another patron.

I sat for a spell, looked idly at the TV's above the back bar, and casually surveyed the dining crowd. Just about everyone seemed to be finished with their entree or working on dessert or coffee. It must have been chaotic back in that kitchen forty minutes ago.

For a good little while, I hung out there in high contentment, dipping my tots, sipping my Sunday, and plipping some new paragraphs into one of the early *Keep On Hoppin'*

Tour chapters. Soon, it occurred to me that almost everyone had up and left. They didn't do it a huff -- at least, I didn't *hear* any huff -- but dey wuz dun gone.

It gave me a brief flashback to a roadtrip about a decade ago when I reached a rest area in the Mojave Desert at about 2AM after a 700-mile day, and had to squeeze my van in among two-hundred-plus





eighteen-wheelers, all humming and grrrr-ing as they slept off their own days' travels. It was a **huge** lot, and it was jammed full. I only found a spot because I could barely fit under a tree branch and the bigger rigs could not. When I awoke to answer Nature's call five hours later, I was the only vehicle in the lot. WTF did I not hear a single rig fire up its motors, shifts its gears, and roar out right past me? And 200 of them! I still think

they were all sucked up into an alien craft and the tree saved me.

Yeah, OK, so with the hecticcy now gone from Deuce's, Cassie struck up a little conversation. She said he knew that she knew me from somewhere, but it wasn't until I ordered the tots that it clicked. She and I had shared an order of tater tots at Jack Flats (#48) one night! Best part was that they were her boyfriend's tots. He was too busy talking sports with some stranger to his left and basically had put Cassie on Ignore. She didn't think was particularly chivalrous of him, so she turned to the wicked cool dude sitting to her right -- yeah, me -- and struck up a convo of her own. We hit it off famously. She bought us both a shot of Fireball (on his tab) and reached over and took his dish of tots. We killed 'em off in short order. She bought me another beer (on him) and we had a good, long, fun talk: life stories in nutshell, and random adventures along the way. Good time.

And it was the tots that now reconnected us. Never underestimate the Power of Tots.



I wasn't the last customer to leave Deuce's, but it was close. No line outside as I was leaving.