

Bar Hoppin' With Hops

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

Bar 239:

Chicagos Restaurant & Bar

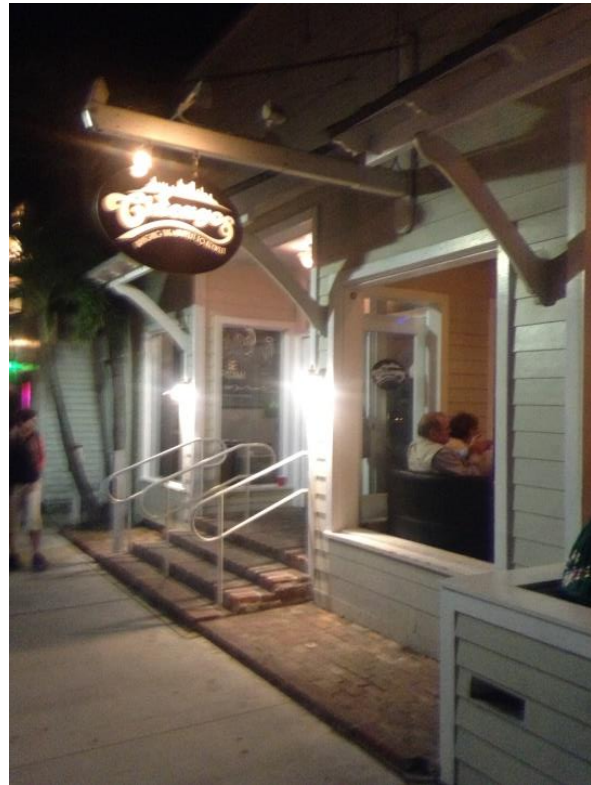
610 Greene Street

Thursday, February 12, 2015, 7:30 PM

Founders IPA (draft) \$4.50

We found another soft opening! Love these affairs!

It's a familiar address, having been Shameless Lounge (#220) and Solo American Bistro (#108), and The Sports Page before that, way back in pre-boondoggle times.



Chicagos brought back the dimmer lighting that Solo had used so well, but added quite a bit of good artwork to those big walls, replacing the garish collages that Shameless tried. The best of all is the large mural of the Chicago skyline, on the far right as you enter. The big black bar still rules the room -- as it **should**, damn it! -- with the tables along the walls, and a few movable ones near the front. There's a cool front porch to hang out on also, with big comfy couches.

B&J and I came together for this Hop. Back on Hop #107, at Greene Street Cigar Company (right next door), we all met Ben and Adrian, the very dapper brothers who are the locomotive driving this here train. Shameless



tanked out, and the opportunity was there, so they cut their ties with GSCC and went for it. By the time we arrived, the place was full and full of life. We saw some familiar faces among both patrons and staff, and settled in at three freshly-abandoned bar seats. B&J recognized

Fred behind the bar, who seemed to be the man with the biggest clue, doing his best to deal with co-workers with significantly smaller clues. Though several keeps circulated behind the bar during our stay, it always seemed that Fred was the only one on the ball enough to handle our re-orders.

I was in that situation a couple of lives ago when I got a barkeeping gig on the inaugural staff at Indigo Run Country Club on Hilton Head Island. My co-keepers were fun guys and they could mix wild concoctions with the best of 'em, but we had this whacko computer program that was basically an extension of the pro shop. It might have been great for Titleists, Nike



shoes, and Cabretta leather gloves, but, mannn, it took about five four-digit codes just to ring in a Bud draft. A lunch order for a foursome required about 200 key strokes -- and they had to be the *right* ones! It was awful.

I've always had a head for numbers, so I could lock in on it and keep the codes straight, but the

others had no chance. Our boss could only describe it as a "clusterfuck." It got so bad that my task at lunch became register-ringer. Everyone else did the bartending and serving, and I stayed at the register and punched keys for the whole shift. Boring and lame, but I did get free golf out of it (and they did get a better system pretty quickly).

So that kind of thing seemed to be Fred's Night at Chicagos. It's rare to find an opening without it. The only way to master the unfamiliar Point-o-Purchase thang is to do again and again. You can't just go running for Fred every time you forget a UPC.

Adrian was in his glory. Dressed to the nines, he was reveling in his role as the greeter, shmoozer, and general front-of-the-house Mr. Feel Good. Ben did his share of shmoozing too, but he also had to oversee all the staff ... and the foood.

Yeahhhh, there was a buffet. The wall to our left had been left open for

graffitti throughout the evening. Chicagos will be a purveyor of fine cigars, and a closed-room humidior will hide this wall in the near future, so they laid out some Sharpies and let us all sign some well-wishes all over the wall. Then Ben and his people trotted out the victuals. Good stuff too! People practically sprinted into line. We sat casually at the bar, enjoying our drinks. When the line was at maximum length, and the serving tray lids were removed, I smirked at Jan and said, "I'm about to piss off a lot of people."

Our hosts had set up a fine buffet, with plates and silverware and napkins laid out in perfect symmetry. The tables ran from a half-wall towards the front doors. The entire line was on the left side of the tables. There was no assigned server, so **nobody** was on the right side. I strolled around to that side, availed myself of plate, fork, napkin, and food without a second of wait time. One older gent started to voice protest, so I just held out my hands and gestured to all the items stacked neatly and ready on *my side of the table* and he shut up. Most people just rolled their eyes with a *why didn't I think of that?* look.

B&J got a good chuckle out of it, and once I was seated, Jan went up and did the same thing. Nobody gave *her* any shit though.

Chicagos is not about TV's, but it *is* about music. Ben is bigtime into live music, especially live *bluesy* music. He had been a behind-the-scenes



supporter of 90 Mile Lounge when it was in its heyday way back in 2013-14. Using his longtime Windy City connections, he had lured 87-year-old legendary blues guitarist George Freeman down here for the opening weekend. The man seemed to be reveling in his gig *and in the weather*. "It's four degrees back home! I'm in noooooo hurry."

The room configuration requires a slightly awkward placement of the stage. There is quite a bit of empty space behind the band, but if they go any further back, then everyone along the left wall loses sight of them. On crowded nights, you could conceivably see a party of six seated *behind* the band.

Live music is great, but between sets, the music fed over their sound system

sounds so goood. A band can overpower conversation sometimes, but fine tunage fed through an array of top notch speakers isa/ways excellent.

The place stayed full for a good long time. No one was in much of a hurry to leave. At one point, something in the crowd struck me: a function of new technology. In the dim candlelit ambience, a youngish blonde woman sat on the adjacent wing of the bar, texting or reading or whatever on her smartphone. The screen illuminated her face, and the look fascinated me. I still don't know why, maybe because she was beautiful anyway, and the glow made her seem as if she was lit by angels. Ha. Maybe.



BTW, the sign in front says "Chicagos", not "Chicago's", so that is not a typo, Harpo.

Ha.