

Bar Hoppin' With Hops

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

Bar 251:

VIP Balcony Bar (Irish Kevin's)

211 Duval Street

www.irishkevins.com

Friday, September 4, 2015, 8:30 PM

Monkey Fist (draft, in a glasstic) \$6

Well, we hit 250 and we bonked. True, there was virtually nothing available to hop; we had squeezed 250 bars out of this damn little island, so what could be left?? We took a two-month break and let some seeds take root and sprout bars. It doesn't feel much like *barhopping* when you do one a month.

So, anyway, B&J, Double A and I did the usual Friday night Happy Hour at Lazy Gecko (#2) till the half-price thing wore off, and then we girded up our



loins for the trek to IK. We couldn't find a cab, so we hoofed it from 203 Duval to 211 Duval. It wasn't so bad. We weren't even tired. Thirsty, yes, but not tired.

We had been here before, of course (#153 as I'm sure you remember). The bar was already in party-hearty mode, and the solo entertainer was doing his best to whip them into a frenzy. It was not as packed and raucous as our

previous visit, just it also was not as late. For 8:30 on a night in September, though, it was a pretty sturdy crowd.

The stairway to the balcony is way in the back, and the only way to get there is to barge right through the crowd. There is a bit of a walkspace right in front





of the stage, so we just had to hope that the entertainer would not find any of us interesting enough to yank us up on stage to chug a Guinness or two.

The best time to go is when he's in the middle of a song. He's probably not going to halt the rockin' vibe just to shit on somebody. Between songs, though, anyone is fair game. Just by walking into Irish Kevin's, you tacitly agree to subject yourself to whatever is done to you in the name of entertainment and fun.

But we made it through unmolested and found the stairs. This is one of the nicest stairways in all of Key West's bars. The wood was clean and new and virtually undecorated, and the steps themselves have cool little lights. To be fair, though, not many K-Dub bars even *have* stairways. People in this town generally think a flight of stairs is just too much damn work. But this flight up to the VIP Balcony Bar is certainly nicer than that treacherous slope from the Whistle down to the Bull, or the ordinary flights up to the Tower Bar (#117), Teasers (#69), 90 Mile Lounge (#104 (closed)) or Crow's Nest (#145), among others. With its double-turn-configuration, it reminded me of the stairs up to Point 5 (#72), but *this* set was as refined as *that* one is rickety.

There were only two other patrons in the Balcony Bar when we arrived. B&J knew the barkeep, Daria. (Of course.) That's a good thing, for sure; there's nothing wrong with being on the coattails of a cheery greeting. I can even pretend that part of her cute smile was meant for me.

Jan was quick to point out the ceiling, a shiny silver metallic relief pattern. [I don't know how to describe it; just look



at the foto.] The next thing we noticed was the chandelier. It actually hangs over the downstairs bar, but it's not as noticeable from there. From up here, it dominates the view: an inverted, round pyramid of green booze bottles. Nice. Kudos to the designer.

The balcony separates you from the crowd, but not from the party. The entertainer is still loud and clear up here, and, so you won't miss anything, he is also displayed on the 70" TV screen on the side wall.

We got our drinks, toasted our return to Hopping, and chilled out for a few. The drinks were served in plastic. Not the translucent, crumply, cheapass to-go cups that you see everywhere, though. These with plasticware wine glasses and beer tumblers -- as I call it, "glasstic." They look good, and my beer felt extra light when I lifted it up to take a drink. That gives a classier feel to The Balcony, and it must help with breakage ... off people's heads when the glasstics get dropped (or tossed) to the bar crowd below.



There is a sign posted, though, warning that if you toss, you will get tossed.

Word must have gotten out that the Hoppers were back at it, because within five minutes, the Balcony was full. And every one who came up here was pretty lit already. We decided we'd one-and-done it and give them all a bit more room for their imminent frenzy.

Irish Kevin's and our foursome are not exactly on the same wavelength -- no surprise, right? Nothing judgmental about it, just the way it is. Fresh outta college, maybe -- depends on if I was stoned mellow or rowdy drunk -- but not so much nowadays.

Ha. Nowadays. Stupid word. Only old people say that. Shit, I musta been old for a second there.