

Bar Hoppin' With Hops

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

Bar #277:

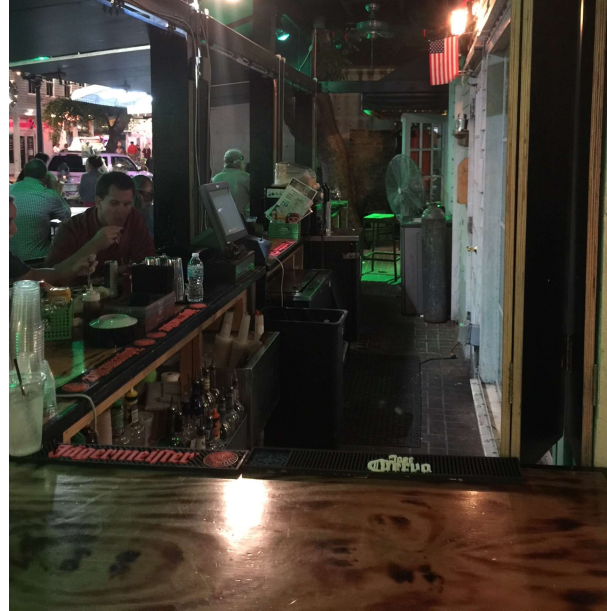
Gas Monkey Up Front

217 Duval Street

Saturday, 25 November 2017, 7 PM

Yuengling (can) \$5

Did I detect a querulous look from you about this one? Something about GM getting a second Hop, and only 14 Hops after the original? Hmm?



Well, I admit, this one took a little convincing. B&J and Double-A all seemed to vote for the inclusion of the front bar, but I wasn't sure. I had to convene the Committee.

NOT the *Committee!*

Yes, the Committee, dammit. Rules needed to be reviewed, precedents needed to be scrutinized, and, potentially, beers would need to be consumed. The latter was a given, of course, but the former two were not ... and least not yet.

Gas Monkey has multiple bars, as we know from Hop #263. On that Hop, I went deep, into the back-most area, beside the stage, only glancing at the inner and upper and frontal consumption zones.

Clearly, precedents have been made for multiple Hops on one property: some were on different floors, some were separate rooms, indoors vs. outdoors, various areas within/out hotels, and, of course, that mess that has been the Cowboy Bill's complex. The rationale for inclusion as a new Hop has always been that the bar had to be *different* enough that it feels like you're in a whole new bar. You can't just walk across the room and say you're at another bar. Lazy Gecko (#2) and Back Bay (#180) were a great example: different decors, different approach entertainment-wise; you chose your barroom based on what you were in the mood for.

So, that's what it came down to: would the Back Stage zone of Gas Monkey and the Up Front zone be different enough to be considered two bars?

Only one way to find out, yes? Let's try it out! Worst case scenario: we drink a beer at a bar. Just have tough it out.

So we settled onto four stools on the butt end of the Up Front bar. That's my name for it, by the way. Had to call it *something*, right? Gotta diff-er-en-she-ate.

I admit I liked the funky/junky make-up of this bar. It seemed really thrown together. A varnished sheet of plywood as the bartop, and ordinary strapping nailed to the edges, all built onto a simple frame of 2x4's. It's not gonna win any awards for style, but in the bars that I tend to frequent,



functional wins out over fancy almost every time. (Sometimes I do like to treat myself to a fancy-schmancy bar, like Berlin's (#184), or KWYC (#182), just to practice my country club walk and talk.)

Given the ordinariness of the bar itself, we stayed with pretty ordinary beers: can o' Yuengling (I), can o' Coors Light (B), can o' Bud Light (Double-A), and a cup o' water (J). Fifteen bucks was the total, so the water must have been more than we expected.

Our barkeep was a good egg. He was large. He told us about happy hour and locals stuff and all that. It's always good to get the lowdown on HH's around town, but some,

like this one, don't do me a lot of good. It's 3-6, which is generous, but since I don't get outa work till 5:30 ... well, you know.

The biggest difference between the GM Up Front Bar and the GM Back Stage Bar is what you can see. Back there, you have a bar and the band. Up here, you have the Duval Street goings-on – IF, that is, you're sitting on the butt end like we were. Facing forward, we looked straight down along the front façade of the building, towards Shorty's, so if we turned our heads slightly left (which we often do anyway), Duval comes into view. And it is a more compelling view than the back of the homemade bar, I'm tellin' ya.

But if you are sitting along the longer, more popular, front side of the GMUF bar, you don't see any of that because it is *behind you*. You are facing the building, my friend, and though the windows look nice, and you may even

see something interesting happening inside the GM Inner Sanctum Bar, you're not gonna see Duval. There are tables, though, between and bar and the railing, where the *real* people-watching takes place.

Another thing that is definitely different about GMUF vs. GMBS is the, um, "neighborhood ambiance."

Back there, you're in your own world, but up here, though you have Duval as entertainment, you also have to deal with Senor Frog's (#262), Duval's most obnoxious bar. That title used to belong to Coyote Ugly Saloon (#57), but since their departure, Froggo has eagerly seized the title. So, Up Front has to compete with their noise, which must make some people think twice about parking their behinds here. Many seem to opt for the aforementioned Inner Sanctum (again, my words), which is *kinnda* starting to sound like it might be a Hop all its own, too, duddinit?



We polished off our bevs, and began to effect our departure when this tall, low-30's dude, all full of mirth, came flowing out of the Inner Sanctum. For some reason, he singled me out for a random conversation. It was OK, though, he was nothing but Friendly. VERY friendly for sure, but nothing sinister behind it. He was just drunk and loving the world. He gushed about what a beautiful night it was and how great Key West was.

Turns out he was from Northern England, just a little southeast of Edinburgh, Scotland. Having driven through the cold, gloom and wet of that area in late June – I saw the sun for about 5 hours total in 10 days, the temp never got above 60° F, and it rained almost all day every day – I could understand why he would revel in our taken-for-granted climate. I told him in a good-natured way that the weather in his homeland sucks duck ass, and he laughed loudly and gave me a big hug.

His cohorts came out from the Sanctum about that time. The *he* of the couple was "just kinda funny lookin'" – like Carl Showalter (played by Steve Buscemi) in *Fargo* – and the *she* was dressed top-to-toes in War Eagle blue-and-orange, beaming proudly after Auburn's upset win over 'Bama on the

gridiron. Somehow, right away, I thought: "locals". Tourists just don't look like these two did. Tourists look like Drunk Brit Guy.

Anyway, they started an animated conversation about the game or some such crap, and I used that as my excuse to take a powder. I went to make that gotta-go-back-to-my-buds gesture only to look around and see that I was pointing to abandoned barstools. B&J and Double-A had skedaddled! I needed a Plan B pronto, so I twisted my gesture thataway and turned it into a gotta-hit-the-head indicator. They didn't notice anyway, so I just quietly wandered off.

I only found my co-hoppers by texting. They were standing by Tree Bar (#) watching the Drunk Brit Guy exchange from a safe distance.

So, I guess that constitutes a Hop, hm?

The other option, of course, would have been to do an addendum to the original Hop. You know, tag a few paragraphs onto the original Gas Monkey hopter as an update on the place, without creating a new number. That probably woulda been the best way to go.

But, since you're reading this under the heading of Hop #277, I guess you know what the Committee decreed.

Full disclosure: I think I'm mostly hesitant because of the deep dread over what it might lead to. Senor Frog's has opened up a sidewalkside bar as well, and Brian has already threatened to call Hop on it. It's not often that the thought of a Bar Hop makes me shudder.

Ha. =]

