

Bar Hoppin' With Hops

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

Bar #281:

Ocean Grill

1 Duval Square

Saturday, 16 December 2017, 5:30 PM

Hop Gun IPA (bottle) \$2.50 HH

After a couple years of almost no Hops, there was bound to be some turnover. I had not heard about this one. Big thumbs-up to Jan for sniffin' it out. It used to be Square One (#130) and is still primarily a restaurant, and a nice one at that.



The bar was on the left as we walked in, as it was 151 Hops ago. The three seats on the short end were available, so we settled in and relished the long view down the bar. Bars are not really meant for this view. Backbar



designs are intended to be most pleasing when seen head-on. From the end, you often see much that is hidden from the masses: lug tubs piled with dishes might be tucked under the ice bins; big jugs of industrial strength cleaners sit in the shadows, between drains and pipes and empty liquor bottles; discreetly placed wastebaskets are more in view; power-strips flicker amid a Gordian's Knot of electrical cords; and you see a whole lot more of those black, honeycombed rubber mats. It can be an ugly little world under there. And it's usually wet.

Our view tonight was not unpleasant, though, which was extra good because we had a fairly long time to look at it. Our barkeep had greeted us right away, but with a be-right-with-you gesture. There were only a few other bar patrons, and the dining area was just about empty, so the gesture seemed legit. But, sometimes, people just screw things up for ya.

The foursome down the other end took forever to decide what they wanted, asked Ron (I dubbed him Ron for plipping purposes, just because it's less work than typing "our bartender" over and over; I'd be amazed if he really was a Ron) a hundred questions about this drink and that menu item and where in town they could watch cockfights (OK, I made that up too).

All the while, the two table of diners had placed their orders and the drinks had rung up on the bar printer. Ron had to tear himself away from the Inquisitive Party Of Four to pour those dinner drinks, which, of course, were Mojitos and Manhattans. And, of course, he had to dash out back to fetch more mint leaves.



So, *finally*, it would be our turn, BUT, the Far-End Douches intercepted our intrepid barkeep with, "oh, one more quick question." Liars. Neither "quick" nor "just one." Come on, people, he's *our* barkeep too! I was ready to punt on Ocean Grill and move on. I'm amazed Brian didn't do exactly that. Thing was, we had walked a long way for this SoDu Hop and really wanted it to Hoppen.



Finally, Ron made his way back to us. You'd think we'd have our order ready by now, right? No. From our end-on view, we could not see the glass-front coolers, nor could we see any line of beer bottles that might have been on display on one of the shelves. So, Brian asked for the Coors Light, as always, and I simply asked for some kind of IPA. Jan ordered her usual glass of Chardonnay. Our bottles met expectations, bar Jan's wine was above and beyond. It was impressive (see phot, page one).

Standard servings, of course, as they teach you in bartender class, are 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, and one ounce of hard liquor. All have the same alcohol content. Bottles of beer are almost always 12, and when you get a draught, you usually get a 14-ounce glass that allows enough head to

give you a dozen ounces of drink. The one-ounce shot is always viewed as kind of a rip-off. The 4-count will usually get you a raised-eyebrow look from a seasoned saucer. A regular customer can reasonably expect a 6-



count, and, if you're getting a Mojito, faggedaboutit, that bottle inverts and just keeps gurgling. I've seen an 11-count in one of those drinks, with about a 1-count splash of soda. Yikes.

Wine is funny, though. It has to breeeeathe. Please cut the shit. Red wine and white wine have different shaped glasses, as if your precious grape juice would taste like toilet water if it was poured into the wrong shape. It seems, though, that it *is* true if that shape is can-shape. [See Hop #276]

What's extra weird, though, is that almost all wine glasses are way too big for the stated serving. Ask for a class of Cabernet at the KW Yacht Club (#182) and see what you get. Your glass will be enormous -- like half-the-bottle enormous -- but there will be a little laser-etched burgee way down near the bottom. That, my yachting friend, is the "pour line." It's so far down, it looks like you've almost finished your drink. If someone ever served me a beer that only filled that little of the glass, I'd shove it back in his face.

That was not an issue with Jan's wine here. Ron avoided any such confrontation when he poured Jan's chard. The glass was not as big as the KWYC cab cups, but it was a pretty big one, and it was easily three-quarters full. And that's different than the half-full-half-empty argument. There are some things that you don't want to be full – your trash can, your hard drive, your laundry hamper, your kid's diaper – but usually, three-quarters full is o-tay. Gas tank, cool. Beer cooler, great. Glass o' wine, frickin' awesome, baby!

Since there was gonna be some casual drinkin' time to enjoy, I passed a little of it by satisfying a random curiosity. The walls. Yeah,



the dining room walls. They looked so much like real brick that it was hard to believe they were really just wallpaper. I had to wander over and check 'em out. Know what? They were real brick! I shoulda slapped myself for being such a cynic. I reckon I've just become so accustomed to inexpensive replications that I don't expect the genuine article anymore. 'Twas good to see!

Brian and I fulfilled our 2-for-1 obligation at a more pedestrian pace than usual, and *still* Jan's glass was fuller than normal. We had a quandary: get another two each here, at that fine HH price, or take advantage of that wonderful Key West drink-to-go policy and mosey onward.

We did have another Hop to do, so we opted for mosey. Still, at those prices, and with that kind of a pouring touch, it may have been folly...

