

## Bar Hoppin' With Hops

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

Bar #291:

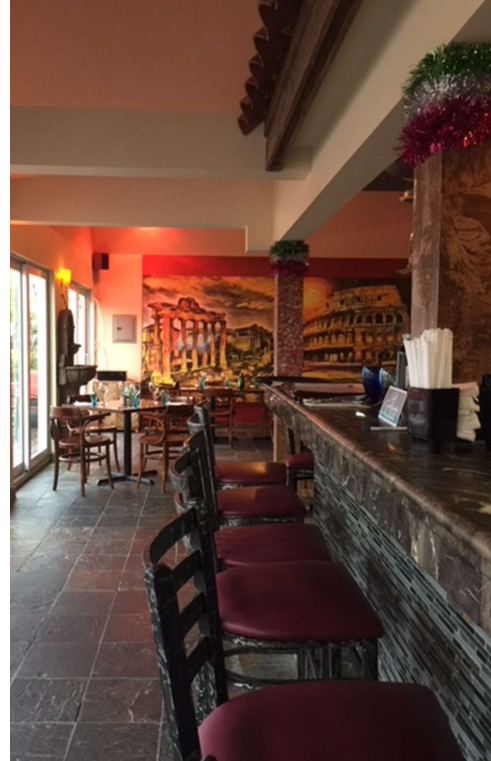
### Terrace Roma

300 Front Street

Saturday, 10 March 2018, 6:00 pm

*Captain-and-Coke (glass) \$10!!!*

It was a nostalgic, and somewhat melancholy, climb up the tall staircase to the second floor of 300 Front. I made this ascent many times when the upstairs space was occupied by 90 Mile Lounge (#104). It had stood vacant for a long time before Terrace Roma came along.



If I didn't know TR was here, I'm not sure I would've known it was here. There was no large sign to announce its presence. Or, at least, I didn't see one. Then again, I walked right under the big, colorful 90 Mile Lounge without noticing it – and that had a sweet pair of bare babe buns on it. So, maybe signs are overrated.

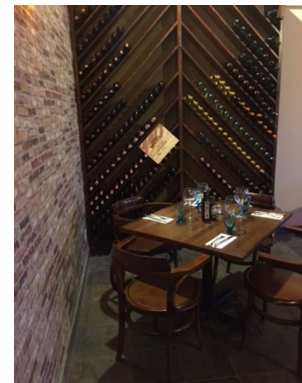


All they had was a menu posted in the sign box at the host stand next to the sidewalk. I noticed that as I was leaving. Ha.

I had no use for the menu anyway. I did not come here for food. Ugh. Food. Bah.

The redesign of that big room was done well. Lots of new artwork, and a handful of tables where those big comfy couches and stage used to be. It's a very nice atmosphere, even on this cloudy evening.

You still can't see the bar as you walk in, though, so you may experience a slight pang of panic. You have to be most of the way across the indoor dining area before you see it to your left. But then you see that long straight



counter top opposite the floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors and you reeeeelax.

Wait a sec. How can you even have a "handful of tables"? How small are those tables?? Certainly too small to eat on. Maybe dollhouse tables, huh? That would be about it.



Unless we're talking about periodic tables. Hell, I could hold a stack of more than 500 of those suckers in one hand, provided they were printed on normal letter-size paper. But the big charts like they have on the wall in chemistry class, well, maybe one would be the limit.

But I digress.

There were no customers in the dining room and only two groups of diners out on the porch. It was Saturday night, in season, but it was only 6:00, which is pretty early for the Key West dinner scene. Most folks are still out doing stuff while daylight prevails, and the dinner rush is always gonna be post-sunset.

That must be weird if you live really far north or south where your summer sunsets are closing in on midnight and your winter days stay dark around the clock. I was in Fairbanks, Alaska a couple of summers ago and walked out of a bar at 11:45 PM and had to shade my eyes from the sun. 12:30 AM sunset, and a 3:21 AM sunrise. Jayzuz. Sign me up for that coveted 3:30 AM tee time, please.

But here at Terrace Roma, where daylight only had an hour so left, I had my choice of seats at the bar, so I chose the choicest seat and waited for someone to notice me. It didn't take long. Within a minute, a young woman server strode purposefully past, giving me a nod and a friendly "hi." But she was waiting on the diners, so off she went.

I took a minute to survey the scene. The large mural on the far wall looked good with its Roman scenes and such. The outdoor dining area had a good look too. The dinner crowd out there was an older crowd. Granted, it was a small sample size, but I'm no spring chicken and even I viewed them as old.

After another couple of minutes, a different young woman walked by, giving me the same greeting. She disappeared into the kitchen. A moment later she came back out, giving me another smile and nod as she passed. But, to her credit, she stopped, looked back, and said, "You've been waited on, yes?"

"I've been waited on, no."

"No?"

"Nyet." (She looked Russian.)

"Oh, I get someone for you," and she nipped back into the kitchen.



When that kitchen door swung back open, it was not her, but a gray-haired, very Italian looking man. For some reason, he looked like a Vito. He was reasonably tall, looked reasonably fit, and had reasonably good posture. My immediate reasonable thought: owner. And I'm confident I was right.

Vito greeted me by pushing a menu my way, but I assured him that I was only here to drink, bullshitting that I might be back later in the evening with some friends.

Hey, *maybe*, you know? *Maybe*, I'd bump into some long lost cronies who had come to town specifically to dine at Terrace Roma and they'd invite me along for a meal on them. *Maybe*, right? Ya, maybe not, too. In fact, a whole LOT of maybe-nots, but a maybe is still a maybe. What would you



expect me to tell him: I'm only here to have a drink so I can cross you off the list and never come back? That would more honest, but not very nice.

But Vito took the dinner possibility and ran with it, boasting about the menu and tonight's specials. I have to admit that the Carib Lobster and the Filet Mignon in creamy (something) sauce did sound purdy dang appetizing.

I asked him where he was from, and he proudly answered "Roma!" in what was close to a bellow. It was like he was on stage making a proclamation. I nearly laughed. So, instead, I ordered up a Captain-and-Coke, mainly because I had been drinking those all afternoon. I had my 30-ounce stainless steel Polar Camel tumbler (yes, a YETI knock-off, whatever), and it was still half full of ice. He mixed me up a fairly strong C&C in a regular rocks glass and I promptly dumped it into my PC-30. He tried to sell me on some appetizers, but I politely declined, and he gave up and walked back into the kitchen.

One of the cooks must have been looking for something to do because he came out to cut some lemons for the bar. He picked up a bottle of Tito's vodka and chuckled "American water." I snickered in reply and asked where he was from. "Serbia-Montenegro," he said, expecting a where-the-fuck-is-that look from me. But I surprised him by knowing exactly where it was, and even gave him a jab about starting World War I.

"What do they drink there?" I asked.

"Grey Goose!" he proclaimed. Lots of proclaiming going on in here. I was feeling the need to proclaim something soon myself.

He went back in the kitchen and I went back to my reveries. The whole time I had been there (yeah, like all eight minutes), some good tunes had been playing over the sound system, most recently *Glory Days* by Bruce Springsteen. Great tune, to be sure, but not the kind of atmosphere music you'd expect in a pricey Italian restaurant.



And it was Pirate Radio! Ha. When the song stopped, a Pirate Radio promo came on. Nothing like making you feel like you're grabbing a snack in your car, huh?

Well, I was looking to proclaim my departure, but I had to pay up. I asked the aptly named Server Number One to get someone to take my money. The owner came out. I asked, "how much?"

He proclaimed, "Ten dollars." Ouch, Vito, kick me right where it hurts.

I pulled a sawbuck from my wallet and dropped it on the bar. He took it and vamoosed back into the kitchen. I'll bet anything that tenner went right in his pocket. Hey, if he's the owner, why not, I guess.

But now I had left myself in a quandary. All I had was twenties. Not even any coin. Dilemma. Do I skedaddle without tipping, thus becoming an official scoundrel? Or do I flag down someone to make change so I could leave a gratuity. Hmm. The drink was overpriced enough that I could have considered the gratuity included, but that assumption was a bit much. I've spent too many years on the work-side of the bar to ever leave without tipping – unless the keeper was a total asshole, as has happened at times. Vito was not a total asshole, just a proclaimer, which was kinda cool, in a messed up way.

I intercepted Server Number Two (the Russian one) and asked if I could get change for a twenty. She nodded, took it, and went off towards the front door, then out and down the stairs. WTF? Maybe she was punting on her lame tip night and absconding with my twenty. But she returned a few minutes later, looking flustered. She told me she could not find him, meaning Vito, I assumed.



"I don't need him. I just need change." And she went away again.

Another couple of clock ticks later, she was back, still clutching my double-sawbuck. She looked like she was about to utter more apologies.

"Look," I said, reassuringly, "I've already paid. I just need to change the twenty so I can leave a tip. I'm not about to tip \$20 for a \$10 drink."

Finally, we got it squared away, so I wandered away, taking note of the Roman babe painted on the wall near the door. How did I miss her on the way in? Too focused on the bar, no doubt.

I should have just left without tipping, right? It's not like I'll be back any time soon. But, maybe when I get to the Pearly Gates, and St. Peter reviews my stats, he'll purse his lips disapprovingly, start to shake his head, and then stop himself, saying "But, hey, you *did* leave a tip at Terrace Roma that night. Come on in. I think you'll like our IPA."

Maybe.