

Bar Hoppin' With Hops

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

Bar #299:

Clemente's Wood-Fired Pizzeria

516 Fleming Street
Saturday, 8/18/18, 10 PM

Narragansett Lager Beer (bottle), \$5

Yes, you read that right: Narra-freaking-gansett, baby. Ice cold in the brown bottle.

So, now that I've seized your attention, let's recap how it came to be.

B&J and I were doing the usual Saturday evening pilgrimage to Tuna (#33) and, as Carl and the band were heading towards their break, I planted the seed. While B was in the restroom, I asked J if she felt like walking up here to Clemente's to score the Hop. It had been on our short list for quite some time. She deferred, opting to consult the hubby. B came back and J headed headward. I asked B the same thing. He said he wanted to see what Jan wanted to do. When she came back, he asked her, she said, whatever you want. Sensing weakness in their resolve -- after all, they had been doing their own hopping for a few hours already, while I had



just begun my evening's revelry -- I said, "Well, I'm going to go and chalk up 299, so..."

I knew I had them. We had not been Hopping a real lot lately. There had been a flurry back in the early 290's in February and March, but then work hit the Hell Months and I didn't have the time to write those Hopters for several weeks. I didn't want to fall too far behind, so I called for a pause for the literary

cause -- you know, it's a LOT easier to go to a bar than it is to write about it -- and we kinda lost our momentum.

But with that tantalizing number 299 thrown out there, they could not resist. "We can even get some food to take home!" Brian decreed, and with that, we began the almost-three-block stroll up the hill. For me, it was the direction I would've been heading anyway, but I give B&J credit because this was quadrupling their walk home.

We had popped our heads in the door of Clemente's months ago while it was being put together. They were moving into a place that had been vacated by Sam's Treasure Chest, a store that had brandished the sign, "We buy JUNK and sell ANTIQUES." Jan called in and gave them a hearty, "Welcome to the neighborhood, we'll see you soon!" Well, between the usual Key West construction delays, and the pause-for-the-cause, this was not exactly "soon."

I was one of the many people who did not know the name of the green trolley-car pizza kitchen that used to sit at the corner of Duval and Angela, kinda tucked in behind DJ's Clam Shack. I had grabbed a late-night slab o' 'za there several times and was always happy that I did. Well, that trolley car was called Clemente's. Well, tickle my pickle, who knew?



Anyway, their new location is just 50 yards off the main drag and they have a bright red-and-green neon "Pizza By The Slice" sign that shines towards Duval's pedestrian flow. We didn't need that impulse beacon, though; we were on a mission.

The first thing we noticed as we walked in was the brightly-lit kitchen area in the back corner. It was open for all to see, with the gaping frog-like mouth of the wood-fire oven and the gleaming vent pipe leading up from it. Then I heard Brian say, "whoaaa, look at that," and turned to see the big green trolley ... rendered in paint, filling the wall, by Rick Worth. Nice touch!

The bar is not large here, just a half-dozen stools, but we only needed three. And, yeah, Clemente's is not primarily a bar, is it? There are four or five tables in the room -- maybe more or fewer depending on how you merge or split them -- and a few seats at the counter along the front window. Our friendly barkeep slid us menus as we settled in. My eyes wandered the shelves of the back bar, seeking a tidy display of beers from which to make my selection. I always prefer that to scouring the menu for printed names, don't you? I mean, the actual container has so much more appeal. I spied the row of bottles and scanned, like most western hemispherians would, from left to right. Peroni, ya, ok, pizza restaurant, makes sense; Stella, ya, maybe, I like a good Stell now and then; La Rubia, never heard of it, next; a couple of Funky Buddhas, eh, not a real fan of that brewery, what else you g---- holy shit, is that Gansett?!? And in a bottle, not that tall bland can. It sang out loud and clear.



"Hey, Brian, they got Narragansett!"

"Ha! No shit. I'll have one if you will!" I suspect he was joking, but I was already planning on throwing that same dare his way.

"Excellent! Crack two!"

This *oh-shit-what-have-I-done* look ran across his face, but it was quickly replaced by an *okay-why-the-hell-not?* shrug.

We did that kind of thing at World Of Beer (#101) a few years ago, but with Gansett cans. It didn't taste all that great, but for a couple of native New Englanders, it stirred a lot of memories about growing up listening to Red Sox games on Boston's AM station WHDH: Curt Gowdy on the mike, Dick Radatz on the mound, brought to you by Narragansett. Cue the jingle:

*Hi neighbor, have a 'Gansett
Give that lager beer a chance.
It has that straight-from-the-barrel taste
In bottle, can, on tap, it's great.
Yes, 'Gansett's got that flavor, Narragansett flavor
'Gansett's light, but not too light,
Straight from the barrel taste, that's right.
That's 'Gansett!*

When you hear that tune several hundred times every baseball season as a little kid, it burns itself into your brain. I can do Schaefer too, but we're not drinking that one here.

The 'Gansett was really cold, and I commented that I had no intention of letting it get not-cold. While icy Narragansett was proving to be very tolerable indeed, I was wary of the warmer variety.

So, with beer acquired and Hop 299 officially consummated, it was time for some wood-fired pizza. I was peckish, but not ravenous, so I opted for the single slice of Sicilian pan pizza. I asked for it to be topped with pineapple and chicken. B&J ordered similar slices to go. The guy beside me had a full thin-crust pizza that he was chowing down. It looked good, but way too much for my current appy-tite.

The woman who took my order came back a moment later to tell me that the kitchen was out of chicken. Without missing a beat, I responded, "Bacon will be just fiiiine." I almost chose bacon at first anyway, so this must have been destiny. I recognized the woman from my trolley stops; I was pretty sure she was part owner.

About the time our 'za arrived, a guy about our age came up and patted Brian's Red Sox cap affectionately. That launched a convo about the Sox, our New England roots, his own New England roots, and his affinity for Narragansett. "That's my beer!" he proclaimed with pride. Like it says on the top label of the bottle, "If you're not drinking Narragansett, you're not from New England." The man's name was Angelo and he was either owner or co-owner of Clemente's. I wondered what his last name was. Hey, if I owned a place, I'd have my favorite beers on the menu too.



Angelo had a seat and we chatted about the relocation process, about the Rick Worth paint job, about Google not letting him simply change the address on the listing he already had, and about how his kids know nothing but success for Boston sports teams while we all had suffered through decades of dismay. I romanced my slice -- which was sliced diagonally, actually, creating two slices -- as we talked. It was tasty stuff. In retrospect, I think I could've gone for the full pie. Trouble was, I was biking it tonight,

and getting pizza leftovers home intact would've been too much of a challenge. Next time.

B&J headed home -- later than they had been planning, but, oh well, ha -- and I lingered for a while, finishing my 'za. I noticed the colorful chalkboard between kitchen and dining area, displaying quite a variety of alternatives to



pizza: Lobster Cakes, Eggplant Stack, homemade meatballs (which made me wonder if they really did make them at home and then brought them in), gnocchi, cavatelli, pastas and sauces. Nice.

Angelo was called away to greet somebody, so I placed my empty 'Gansett bottle quietly on the bar, paid my tab, tipped well, bid them good night and good luck, and headed out to see who was playing at The Green Parrot (#4).

299 bars, y'all!