

100 Bars in 100 Days

Hops MacBarley's 2012 Key West Bar Boondoggle
"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

BAR 1:

The Porch

www.theporchkw.com

Caroline & Duval

Friday 7/20, 6:30 pm

Dogfish Head 90-Minute IPA (draft)

Fresh and still moist from an ocean swim at Fort Zack, I strolled up the half-dozen steps and into the old Victorian mansion that houses The Porch. Just shy of two years old, The Porch was the first prominent Key West establishment to scream CRAFT BEER HERE!

I credit Crazy Jack at Ilona's, an little-known Hungarian restaurant that hid deep down in the puddly shadows of Appelrouth – even beyond Leathermasters -- with opening the Craft Beer gate in KW. His tiny 6-seat bar in the front corner of that esoteric eatery boasted 63 beers, about 60 of which, I'll bet, had never been seen in KW before. But Ilona's quirky off-the-beaten-path location proved to be its undoing, and it, like so many off-Duval efforts, went under. Glug glug.



When The Porch debuted, some cynics that I overheard dismissed it as a nichey spot, where beer snobs and wine snooties would mingle and moo. But my very first visit dashed any such apprehensions that might have been lurking. One look at the taps, and at the colorful chalk board with its drool-inducing list of dozens of delectable malt bevs in all manner of flavors and ABVs let me know that this place had The Lure.

ABV (alcohol by volume) is large here. The standard 5% is snickerable. 7's are commonplace, and 9's, 10's and even higher can always be found from the tap or in the bottle. And thanks to Dale's and a few others, you can even Get It In The Can.

It is a Behave Yo-Self kinda place, though (i.e., no Budweiser or Jagermeister). If you're lowdy (loud and rowdy), you're gonna stand out more than you wanna. A hearty laugh-out-loud and enthusiastic revelry are just ducky, but screaming out "☞◆♣& ☒□◆, ☒□◆ ♣◆■◆!" would be over the top. Irish Kevin's eet ees nott.

Plus, the location and interior design are just so dang classy cool. In most of my life's circumstances, entering a building like this would mean ... well, I don't know what it would mean because it doesn't happen. I think it would mean that I read the address and directions wrong.

The hallway gives you pause, at first, since there is no obvious sign of a bar. But it's easy enough to find. The bar room is small – some might say *cozy* or *intimate*, but screw that, it's small. There are about ten stools-with-backs at the highly polished J-shaped bar, and couple of small-n-tall tables in the wine rack room. The table in the corner is most coveted because of its very funky high-backed, lushly padded, overly ornate right angle seat.

There is just one TV, and you can't even see it from the bar. I've never seen anybody pay much attention to it. The tunes – often the barkeep's favorite head-bobbing Pandora station – are loud enough to enjoy but soft enough to talk around.

They do have one video game machine – Galaga -- which ownership is quite enthusiastic about. They even have an annual tournament wherein great demands are put on both gaming skills and quaffing skills. Lowdy is allowed during tourney time, apparently.



The Porch also takes great pride in their bocce team. The squad doesn't quite match the elite teams of the Southernmost Bocce League – the largest bocce league in the world, I'm told – but as the top team of the "second tier", the Porchers represent KW in a biannual match vs. the champions of the Big Pine Bocce League. They created a special trophy for the match and, in the true spirit of gaudy bravado, they have made it taller, crazier, and more admittedly obnoxious with each win. The brass plates that adorn the base have expressed that zany zeal as well; the third one read "The Freakin' Porch, Baby." The word in the street, though, is that the Big Piners won it away from them this year.

On this late afternoon on the start of the Great Tour, a

shortish woman with a cutely roundish face and a braided and looped brown pony tail was on bar duty. Her day was nearly done, but I had one last curveball to toss at her.

I run a shop (Local Awards & Engraving – you should check it out!) that does engraving, among *many* other things (like that brazen trophy, for example), and Keith, one of the Porch owners, had come in to order some brass tags to use on his wine shelves. Knowing that people from Old Town consider the three-mile trek out to New Town to be an exhausting journey, I bartered with him, offering him a downtown delivery in exchange for a Dogfish Head 90-Minute IPA draught on arrival. He heartily agreed.

Of course, that part never made it onto the invoice – not sure how Quickbooks would handle it -- so as I handed over the tag bag, I had to convince Ms. Barkeep that I wasn't just scamming her about the bevviwev. She had her suspicions – as a good barkeep should – but eventually figured, *yeahhhh, that sounds like something Keith would do*, and poured me my Dogfish Head 90-Minute IPA (10% ABV).

I had jussst missed Happy Hour (HH). That didn't matter much with a freebie in hand, but I think the crowd was thinner for it. Behind me, a couple of tiny yappy fluffy dogs got a tad feisty when an equally tiny scuffy mutt came along. The usual sizing-up went on for a bit, but Scruffo must have crossed some line of diminutive canine propriety because both Yappo and Fluffo got waaaaay too vocal. Nice thing about little dogs, though, is that the owner can retrieve them with a swoop of the hand. Scruffo

was up by scruff-daddy's shoulder in no time and Yappo and Fluffo went back to their snooties.



I polished off my own Dog, and moved on. The one-and-done is not common for me in a place like this – I tend to be tap-tourer -- but a not-yet-expired HH awaited a block away. I'm sure I'll be back here several times before The 100 is done. I'm definitely not letting this Tour gig keep me from my favorite bars.