

## 100 Bars in 100 Days

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

### BAR 18:

Conch Town Liquor & Lounge

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Conch-Town-Liquor-Lounge/194642593891015>

3340 North Roosevelt Boulevard

Thursday 8/2, 9:15 pm

### Yeungling (draft)

This was not virgin ground. I've been to Conch Town several times. My first couples of visits were back when it was a freaking smoke house. Not ribs, mind you: cigarettes. The drink prices were good, and the people were too, but man, that place got so thick with cigarette smoke that I just couldn't stay for more than a couple of quick beers.



Is it my imagination, or does ciggy smoke stick to you more than it used to? You know, you leave a place and your clothes carry the smoke with you. I guess it always did, but now, as smoking is allowed in fewer and fewer places, it is more noticeable. Back when it happened all the time, you just never paid it much heed; it was just a part of everywhere life. But the rarer something becomes, the more it strikes you.

The worst place for that was Lewis' Bar & Grill, near Boston, one of my usual haunts when I lived up thataway. This place was like a freaking cave: long, narrow, dimly-lit, with no windows. It had an open-fire grill, fatty meat, inadequate exhaust ventilation, and friends in high enough places to get away with it. Great place, though! The Lewisburger is an all-time classic, the beer was cheap, and the crowd was always lively. But when you left there, you had a coating of smoke and grease about an inch thick. You couldn't even leave your clothes in the same room at night. If I left my coat in the van overnight, I was hit with a blast of smoke stench as soon as I opened the door the next day.

Years of bartending made me generally immune to it, but when I drifted out of that lifestyle, the tolerance fell off. Still, it's amazing to think back to my days as a kid, travelling in a closed-up car with five adults, all of whom were chain-smoking. And you could smoke on airplanes! Yeeesh, how much would *that* suck now?

Several months ago, though, our work group was going to convene for an after-work Happy Hour, and Conch Town was suggested. Someone else mentioned the smoke problem and Javier reassured us, *No, it's not like that anymore, check it out.* So

we did, and it's not like that anymore! I'm not sure what actually changed: rules, boundaries, ventilation, I didn't ask – it is just a LOT easier to settle in and hang out.

Drink prices were never an issue here. On this Thursday night, my Sierra Nevada cost a whopping \$2.00! Two bucks! And, actually, the \$2 didn't even whop. I thought I had seen the last of the two-dollar beer. It was a special, I'm told: every Thursday night from 9 to 12. Curious time for a special, but a bonanza for Hopsy!



I sat at the bar this time. The bartop itself here is cool. It's made of hundreds and hundreds of pennies, and dozens and dozens of gold Conch dollar coins, all, of course, under thick layers of varnish.

There were a couple of guys playing pool in the side room. There are always a couple of guys playing pool in the side room. I think the only time I've ever been here when that wasn't the case was the night of the benefit for the American Cancer Society. They were using the pool table for their wheel of fortune thingo and such.

For a place this small, Conch Town sure has a lot of rooms. The front room, by the big windows, is long and narrow, but a good little hangout space away from bar noise and pool racket. It's not closed off, so you still get some of all that, but you're also kind of in your own country where you can thumb your noses at the bar barons and the pool patrons.

I didn't stay long here tonight. The drop-in had been on a whim. I had just done a run out by the gold course, and was driving home down North Roosevelt, checking out the newly-begun lane re-routing. The big, bad NRB reconstruction project was now underway. The lane closures had not come this far up yet, but traffic was already different. With northbound traffic blocked as far as Kennedy, there were no cars at all coming from the south. It was spooky. Not a headlight in sight from the triangle to Conch Town, and as far as I could see beyond.

When the diggers do come up this far, Conch Town will get dusty, for sure. But the locals all know the back way in and out by the movie theater, and know how to use the back door. There's more parking out that way anyway...

