

100 Bars in 100 Days

Hops MacBarley's 2012

Key West Bar Boondoggle

"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

BAR 87:

Half Shell Raw Bar

231 Margaret Street

www.halfshellrawbar.com

Thursday 10/18, 6:00 pm

Stone IPA (draft) \$2.50

This was a freaking gorgeous mid-October day. I actually took a lunch hour today just so I could be outside. As good as it is to be in an air-conditioned building, sometimes you just have to get out into the fresh air, feel the sunshine on your skin and go *ahhhh*.

But how better to top it off than a Happy Hour at the hahbah. Yep, it was time to go see Edith Raw at the Half Shell.

The bar was full, except for the last two stools, when I walked in. The dining room had a lot of empty tables. More of a drinking hour than an eating hour, for sure.

I happily took my last-seat-at-the-end-of-the-bar. I like that spot. Maybe it's the inherent Cancer shyness that astrology-minded people keep telling me about (and how people mistake it for arrogance. Gah. Hope not. Sorry to y'all who might've thought that), or maybe it's just the comfort of knowing that dickheads can only be on one side of me now, they can't hem me in. Ha. Harrumph. (Nothing arrogant about a statement like that, hm?)

Or maybe it's just that I can take a pic of the whole bar from there, where a mid-bar seat requires two pics, or a panorama-stitching photo app like



Photosynth (great app, get it). Maybe.

Anyway, my companion Thirst was riding a zealous horse right now, so when the barkeep came over, I greeted him well, and ordered up a Stone IPA. I couldn't recall if Stone had been swilled on the PLIPAT or not. Do you know?



Check your notes. Five bonus points for the first person to corroborate something. Anything.

Joe was the barkeep. I liked him immediately. He was close to my age, pretty big, and was ruling his full bar with easy good humor. When I asked what the HH deal was, he clearly stated it and punctuated it with a smiling, "so...?"

I found myself returning his smile and ordering the half-priced Stone and a basket of half-priced wings. I should have been more specific, because he could have brought me a bushel basket of a 1000 wings, and smugly charged me for \$500.

After a solid swig to wet my whistle, I left the bag as a seat-saver and walked around snapping a few photos. Half Shell has maintained their rustic, seaside look. It still feels a little rough around edges; basic functional comfort over refined design. The decorations are cool, too, from the big model shop to all the license tags from far and wide. Varnished picnic-style tables with flat plank benches make up the dining room furniture, with your standard plastic yard chairs on the outdoor patio. The big windows look out on the dock and on the boats beyond. There are roll-down wood-slat blinds for times (like now) when the low sun just starts getting too blinding and too damn hot.

The back bar has one of those tabletop shuffleboard games that I love to play. I totally suck at the game, but I still love sliding those metal pucks down the smooth powdered wood and making them do that cool clacking



sound as they collide. Sometimes I try to recruit someone to play a few games, but they always eye me warily like I'm some kind of hustler, and decline. I try to convince them that I am terrible at it, and that they will almost surely beat my sorry ass, but that just deepens their resolve. Too bad. Fun game.

Edith is a kick too. The painted symbol of the HSRB, Edith Raw beckons in her leopard skin bikini, her high heels, and her huge gold earrings, luring you in with her big green-blue eyes and her tray of fresh oysters.

Pics done, I returned to my beer and seat. I had texted Jacko to call out the typical last-minute Whim & Wingit plan, so I was keeping a casual eye open for him. Jacko and I were high school track teammates in Massachusetts, then didn't see each other for three decades, and ended up as neighbors in KW, a classic WTF.

I kinda got lost in shucking for a few minutes. My end seat was right next to the bin where all the ice and oysters were. Two 19-year-olds were doing some shucking. They wore chain mail, like medieval knights might have, except it was a lot smaller and only on one hand. That kind of chain mail would have been comically useless to a



medieval knight, unless some fiend was attacking his left hand. To the shuckers, though, who have to guard against knife slippage on stubborn oysters, it is vital equipment.

It's kind of a concession that your shuck attempts will inevitably fail from time to time, but, still, I had to wonder how many times these dudes would have a clear night, when the blades never slashed at the metal mesh even once. Do shockers boast and taunt about such things? Seems like they'd



have a right to. I would, arrogant bastard that I supposedly am.

The retired man sitting two stools to my right spoke up to offer me his last three oysters. The cynic in me wanted to growl, *Why, what's wrong*

with them? But I didn't need to ask that because I don't like oysters anyway. I think they're so gross. So, I politely declined. He was amazed. *Someone comes to an oyster bar and turns down free oysters?* I smiled at his reaction and assured him that the next person to claim the empty seat between us would surely take them off his hands.

A moment later, a younger dude took the seat. He wasn't there ten seconds before the old man offered him his remaining oysters. The dude happily accepted and we both cracked up laughing. The kid had to think something was seriously up.

After a while, I got a phone **dinggg** at about the same time I saw good neighbor Jack walk in. His text was succinct: "I'm here." Then I watched as he walked around the corner of the bar, right past me, then back again. I suppose I should have intercepted him, but he would have done the same to me and let roam me around like a dumbass. What are friends for?

I sent him a text and watched as he got it: *You just walked right by me.* He looked and figured it out. I had me a drinking buddy, but he had no seat. We relocated to the middle of the bar when two people left, and

found ourselves next to a couple of New Yorkers. The husband was huge, she was on the small side. Both were 40-ish. They were Mets fans, and had story after story. They were pretty funny tales, but the funniest part was watching them laugh their silly asses off as they told them to us.

One tale was about a rain delay that they went through once at Shea Stadium. The game hadn't even started, but the park was open and so were all the concessions. She spoke of the outrageous ballpark prices -- \$13 for a glass of wine, \$8 or more for beer, and God-knows-what for food -- and how they got on a crazy roll with these other friends of theirs as the rain delay dragged on and on for more than three hours. I couldn't even understand a good bit of what they were saying because they were laughing so hard and talking over each other. She slapped the bar hard as she guffawed, *Our fuckin' bar tab was seven hundred fuckin' dollars!! And then we went in to the fuckin' game!! Fuuuccck!* They were hilarious.

I gnawed my wings to bare bone. They were delicious; cooked just right, with plenty of meat. Niiice. Our glasses were empty, and we had another bar to try to Tour before the hour turned unhappy, so we bid our favorite Mets fans farewell, tipped Joe well, and moseyed out to the docks.

