

**Bar Hoppin' With Hops**  
The Second Century Tour  
Hops MacBarley's 2013  
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar 115:

**Juan Loves Lucy**

124 Duval Street

Friday, 14 June 2013, 7:00 PM

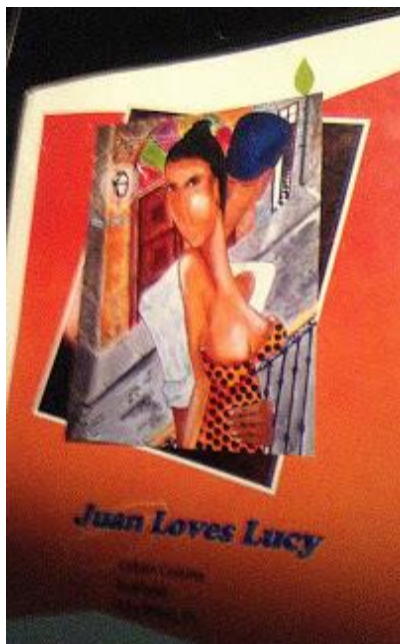
*Heineken (bottle) \$3.00*

There are two round yellow awnings on the 100 block of Duval. One is over the doorway of The Smallest Bar (also listed as 124 Duval -- *head-scratch, head-scratch*) and other is about a van-length up the road, over an alley. That one still bears the words Old Customs House Inn, which, as it happens, is the building that stands between the two, and is the

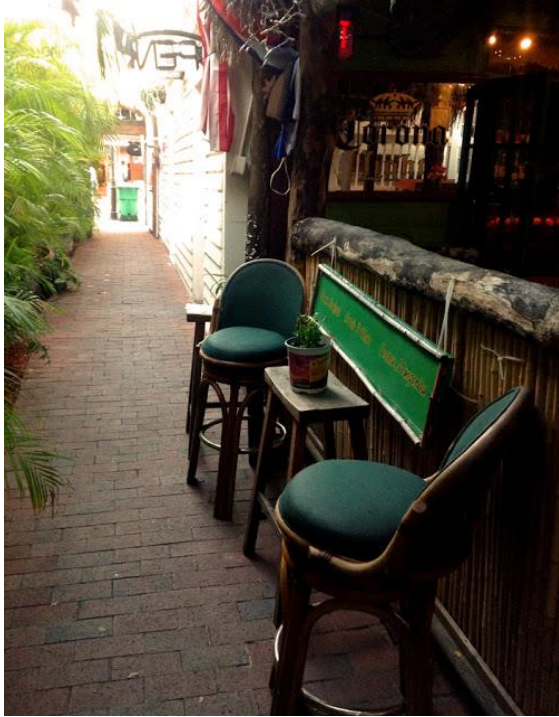
official 124. Smallest Bar is affiliated with OCHI. I'm gonna guess that the other one is independent. The alley itself is OCHI ground, I reckon. I think it still leads to an Inn entrance (as opposed to an Outt exit).



The alley itself has a gate, and it was open. There have been a few different attempts at a restaurant down that alley over the years, and only once before have I gone down to check it out. That time, the sign out front labelled it as the Jungle Bar, and the alley, at night, was a mysterious tunnel framed by fronds and misters. It actually got you a bit damp by the time you got back to the bar. It was pretty cool, I thought, but not cool enough to bring me back, or even to compel me to stay for a beer. Just a quick look-n-leave.



The Jungle went under -- I reckon a lot of other people never went back either -- and now a new place occupies the space. Tough space to promote, though, since passing pedestrians can see nothing of the establishment itself. Unless there's some expensive and impressive signage



out front, there isn't much about a down-the-alley that gives the initial impression of "high quality", let alone safety.

But "high quality" is rarely my quest; my goals are much simpler -- a bar and a beer. Confidence was high that both would be found in the unseen chambers that lay down that alley.

There's some anticipation to an alley locale, I suppose. You walk into it, not really knowing what will be around that corner. This was my first daylight view of the place. Sadly for the owners and staff, it was empty.

The tall, 40-ish, Cuban woman who would be my barkeep was quick to assail me with greetings. She practically leapt from the booth where she and another woman were sitting and cigarettng. With a smile, I waved off the menu that she was pushing at me and assured her that I was simply here for a beer.

They had a Happy Hour going, which made me happy, but their beer selection involved a lot of flavors that I just didn't take a shine to. The Craft Beer Crusade must have missed this alley. My hostess/barkeep -- I'm going to call her Lucy, even though I have no idea if she is indeed the love of Juan's life (whoever Juan is) -- was very eager to please, but she wasn't sappy about it. It was like you just showed up at her house after a long trip and she was all *Have a beer, something to eat, look, I have this and this and this, I cook for you, what you like, eat, drinnnk!* Clearly, she was doing it to put money in the coffer, but it was still good to get such a welcome after



people like the chin-flicker at SoMo Beach Cafe and Sorrowful Sadie at Cheekie Hut.

The bar had the most basic, fundamental stools you can imagine. They're the kind you buy for about four bucks each at a yard sale. And there was a dozen of them crammed side-by-side at the ten-foot long bar. I guess they were expecting a party of 12 stick figures.

After some casual swigging, I got up to snap some pix. Lucy and the elder woman almost immediately were on me to see what they could do for me. It was obvious that I had camera ready, so it seemed as if they were pouncing to intercept me. Almost as quickly, though, they seemed to understand that I was looking to get good views of the place, and not trying to reveal the bad. I hear there were, ummm, "violations" here a few months ago, so I could understand them being a tad edgy about a sly inspector.



Just after I got back to my stool, the bar filled up. Basically, it took a party of four to fill it. They were regulars! Or, at least, returners. They were swarthy folk -- a couple in their 60's and a couple around 40 -- but English was their language of choice (must've pressed "1"), and they had a lively conversation going with Lucy in no time. The patriarch of the group was spinning rip-roaring yarns about the margaritas and other drinks they had last time and how fuktup they all got. They were all laughing their asses off. Pretty funny to observe.

Lucy seemed to be in good hands, so I glugged down the last of my Heinie and shuffled back up the alley to Duval.