

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

Bar #177:

LaConcha Pool Bar

430 Duval Street

www.laconchakeywest.com

Saturday, 10 August, 6:30 PM

Sierra Nevada (can!) \$4

One good way to stay out of trouble is to go to a swank hotel and try to sneak into their guests-only rooftop pool bar. What could go wrong there?

Nothing, of course. Just act like you belong. I don't even know if this pool bar is local-friendly or if they prefer to exclude the island rabble, but, as usual, it's best not to ask. So I adopted my best Hotel Guest demeanor and walked on in to Key West's tallest building.



This was the third Hop in this edifice. Jack's Seafood (#37), on the ground floor, and The Top (#28), on the roof, had gone well before. This one was long overdue and might have been even longer overlooked if not for Devin.

She, as you surely recall, was the barkeep at the Southernmost House (#159) -- the maker of the blueberry Margarita. Yeah, that sweetie. When I picked her brain, she instantly brought up this place, boasting that she used to work here. But her face turned from cheery to dreary as a flashback raced through her mind: "That place is a sweat shop; there's not a breath of wind up there!" I don't know if she really used a

semicolon, but I thought I heard one.

I know my way to LaConcha's elevators, so I proceeded there with confidence. I guessed "3" and got off on that floor to seek out the doors to the pool and bar. Wrong. Shoulda guessed "2". Actually, I should have just walked through the lobby and up the stairs beside the check-in desk. That leads right out there too. Live and learn, right?

So, I walk out to the pool deck and the first thing I can't help but notice is the freaking wind. I don't even recall it being breezy as I walked up Duval, but it was ripping through here. Nice call, Devin! Sweat shop indeed.

And I should have known that. The 400 block is notorious as the wind tunnel of Duval Street. The LaConcha seems to grab the wind and hurl it northward down the hill. It's great on a hot day, but a little not-so-great on one of our frigid January nights. Tack a 20+ MPH wind onto that 55-degree air temperature and it's enough to make you wish you wore a long-sleeve shirt. Brutal.



At first glance, I liked this bar design. It looked dang cool. Wide yellow pillars supported a tall wooden beam, which supported the peaked roof. The seats were tall and beige, with aluminum frames and armrests, and soft breathy material stretching from knees to shoulders. Very inviting.

As I approached the bar, another stiff gust of wind shoved a Coors Light bottle right off and sent it hurtling to the stone floor below. Amazingly, it did not smash. The bottle looked and sounded like glass, but it must have been some kind of wonder glass. More likely it was plastic, being served poolside and all that. I picked it up to retrieve it for the barkeep and it felt like glass to me.

The barkeep had seen the tumble coming but he was too far away to do anything but shrug and cringe for the crash to come. He came over and thanked me for my little clean-up. He wore a tag that said "Paul" in large letters and "Colorado" in a smaller font underneath. I wondered if his name was Paul Colorado, the pride and joy of Mr. & Mrs. Colorado, or if the tag

was displaying his passion -- as it did for poor Passion Fruit at the Sunset Deck (#158) -- and he just *really* likes Colorado. I assumed it was the former.



Sierra Nevada in a can sang loud and clear to me. Kind of a rare find, and only fo' dolla! Just fo' dolla! That fine brew, that can-venience, and that friendly price -- ha, that will surely wash away whatever irks ya.

I gave Paul a twenty, and the show began. He looked like some terrible magician trying to conjure different denominations

from each pocket. The tens were in his left pants pocket, the fives were in his right pants pocket, the ones were sticking out of his shirt pocket, he stuffed the twenty in his back pocket. I had to laugh at his antics, and he just grinned and shrugged, "Freaking wind. Gotta keep it from blowing away somehow."

I nodded in assent as I took my first sip, and it wasn't until he walked away that I realized, *heyyy, isn't there a cash register for that??*

Content, with beer in hand, I began scoping out the lay of the land up here on the lower roof. It only took a moment before a couple of not-so-cool aspects manifested themselves. There was a gazebo between the bar and pool -- which also *looked* dang cool -- but it, and a few railings, blocked passage from this north end of the bar to the south end, forcing one to walk all the way around the structure.

This, then, led to yet another uncool aspect: there was a short wall behind the bar seats on that other side, and there was no room to pass behind them when they are occupied (as they were today). Dumb. I had to walk around *that* wall too, squeezing past the people hanging out by the rail, and then step over it to find myself at the south end of the bar. I *could* have walked around the far end of that little wall, but it would have meant walking way over there, and that's further than I wanted to walk.



Now, I also noticed that those pillars were a little too thick for their own good. Barkeep and customer had to do a little extra shifting around to see each other and interact. Plus, they took up valuable drink room on the bar top. *And* they must have made the bar ten times harder to clean. Maybe eleven. The more I looked at those damn posts, the more they irked me.

Irking would not do. Beer needed. Pronto. Woosh that irk away with a good healthy swaggle. Ahhhhh.

Then there was the pool. It seemed pretty small. I had seen it from The Top and it looked tiny from there, but most things do when you look down from the top of a skyscraper.

What a weird word: *skyscraper*. What jamoke came up with that? It's so tall that it scrapes the sky. Scrapes? Is that like scratches, or claws at? I've never seen any scrape marks on the sky, have you?

What was the first building that "scraped" it? Empire State Building would be my guess. Some NYC rag reporter pulled the word out of his snarky butt, people read it, some liked it and reused it, and it caught on and spread like a virus, only not as virulent. It's a pretty clever word, I guess, though. Makes me wonder what other ones failed. Skyscratcher? Skystabber? Cloudclawer?

Every word started somewhere, and the non-standard words often started by just one person. Somebody out there was the first person to call someone else a *douchebag*. What the hell prompted that? Why would he even have that word cross his mind? And what reaction did he get? *I'm a **what?!?*** It must have been a show stopper. But millions of people use it now. And the dude who coined it isn't getting a penny for it. (Ha, no pun intended.)

And what about *dork*? Most people have no idea what they are saying when they call someone a dork. They think the definition of that word would describe a certain personality. It is freely used everywhere, including schools, television, and conversations with your mom. *He's a nice guy,*

mom, but he's such a dork. He's a whale's penis? Really? What traits of this dude make him one of those??



So, uhh, yeah. The pool. Right. It seemed pretty small for a hotel with this many rooms. How many rooms? I don't know, but look at all those floors and windows. Gotta be lotsa rooms. Lotsa rooms means lotsa people, and you're not gonna fit lotsa people in this little pool. But the designers had to figure that, hey, nobody is gonna actually *swim* here. They're just gonna stand,

float, sit on the edge, booze, and be lazy asses. If they want to swim, they'll go to the damn beach, damn it.

Of the 177 bars hopped so far, this is one of the closest to a pool's edge, but what should only be a three-step walk from water to fresh drink is thwarted by a fence. Yeah, a fence. You have to walk all the way around it and then back up a ramp to reach nirvana. There are way too many dividers round here.

About a dozen people were lounging in and around the pool, which was now in the shadows. The bar still got sunshine, but the sunken pool was in cool shade. A few of the pool deck dwellers looked like they were out for the count: just melted right into their loungers and snoozin' up a storm. That, to me, is making good use of your vacation. Unwiiiiind, baby.

What this place lacked in pool size, though, it made up for in deck space. Multiple levels of deck space. You can wander off a ways, lie in the hot sun for a spell, then stroll on down for a dip and a refill, and head back for another lie-down in your own little niche. Not a bad way to spend an afternoon.

I finished off my Hop with a pass-through of the hotel lobby. Rumor had it that this lobby -- as impressive and as nice as I thought it was -- would soon be done over, so I decided to chill a bit and enjoy it while I could.



It's spacious: several distinct areas, very high ceiling, lots of pillars and tall potted palms. There's a big curved wall of windows wrapping around the upper level "library" area. Best of all for my purposes, though, were the big, cushy, fatass leather couches. Yahhh. Sink right in, do a little Facebooking and other Internet shit on the smartphone, and enjoy the rest of my Sierra. I probably stayed a good half hour. It was quiet, very comfortable, and allowed me the illusion that I could afford that lofty level of accommodation.

I guess I *could* afford it, actually. I was there, wasn't I? As long as I didn't need a *room*, I was getting by just fiiiiiiiine.