

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

Bar #184:

**Berlin's Cigar Bar**

700 Front Street, Suite 101  
Saturday, 24 August, 9:00 PM

*Sam Adams Boston Lager (bottle) \$4.75*

This place is *choice!* As **deflated** as we (B&J and I) may have been when we entered The Commodore's rather ordinary bar area, we were seven times as **inflated** when we ventured into Berlin's.



Back up a second first, though. (Ha, *a second first*, did you see that? Ha.) We walked directly here from the Commy, taking the elevated route along the wooden, second-floor walkway. Night had arrived, the black water of the Harbor reflected evasive points of light, and this particular recess had turned on the blues. Blue lights, that is. Bright beams from blue flood lights illuminate the floor-to-ceiling columns along that walkway (see end of previous Hopter). Being a lifelong BKG (blue kinda guy), I was digging the colorful vibe, man. It was swell.



So my mood was on the big upswing as we girded up our loins for yet another *potentially* elitist snob kind of place. I think Brian's loins needed a little extra girding because he balked as we approached the front door.

We were underdressed, as always. Or, at least, our shorts and well-worn t-shirts would have been considered not quite up-to-snuff at most top-end places. Berlin's is the bar attached to A&B Lobster House, perhaps the most famous seafood restaurant in Key West. Alonzo's Oyster Bar (Hop #116) is downstairs. "A" for Alonzo, "B" for Berlin's; A&B, huh? Huh?? Ya think?

So, anyway, our New England upbringing was rearing its formidable head for Brian. We New Englanders have this dumb sense of propriety. If you go into a high-society place dressed like low-level schmuck, then you should, by



all that is good and proper, feel like a total loser, idiot, jackass, scumbag, and douche. It's a rule. Everyone will stare at you, mutter, and grumble. And if you attempt to rise above their grumble, you only exacerbate the offense (which sounds far more erotic than it is).

Thankfully, K-Dub is not like that. In most places, nobody gives a crap how you're dressed -- as long as you're not *smelly*. Shorts and flip-flops are fine for a wedding, so t-shirts gotta be coolo at Berlin's, etc. WTF, at least we had *sleeves*, unlike at Cafe Marquesa (Hop #150).

Still, Brian was hesitant. Fortunately, I had shifted into This Bar **Will** Be Hopped mode,

and flung the door open like Bill Murray in that scene from *Stripes* that would take too long to describe.

Right away, we were impressed. Dark wood abounded on walls and ceiling. You know I have a thing for cool ceilings; there just hasn't been any reason to bring it up lately. It's a narrow hallway that welcomes you. A faint aroma of good tobacco is in the air -- not overpowering at all, but enough to remind you that it's OK to smoke good tabacky in here.

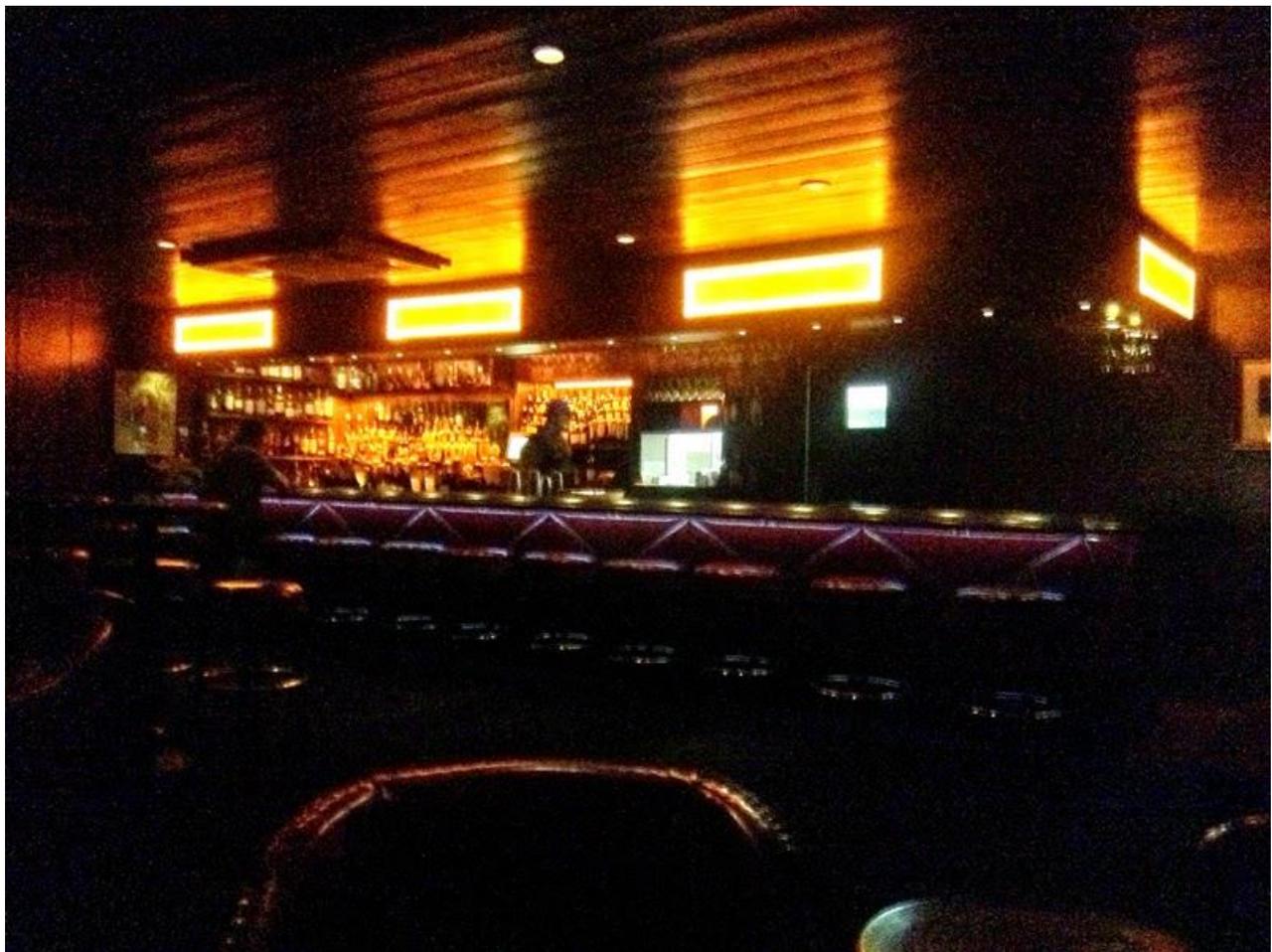
The bar room itself wowed me. It was dimly lit, and the deep mahogany walls and ceiling just devoured whatever light reached them. The room opened up to the left into a good-sized lounge. There was a large, corner picture window that looked out over the island's northwest territory and the black ocean beyond. So cool. Small lamps provided pockets of faint light here and there, and potted palms gave a slight jungly edge to the room.

There were no TV's. Human interaction would have to do.

We approached the bar with something that was kind of like reverence. The backless stools were sturdy, wide, and well-padded with thick, soft, burgundy-colored, leather-upholstered cushions. Sitting on one was such a good feeling that I actually stood back up just so I could sit back down again.

Our barkeep was a thirty-something dude with short dark hair. He wore the standard black pants, white shirt, and dark tie that you'd expect, but he and his co-keeps also wore buttoned up vests. Stylin', boys. When we replied to his "Good evening, gentlemen, what can I get for you?" with "uhhh, a Coors Light, a Sam Adams, and whatever she's having," he caught the cut of our jib and chilled right down to our level: "You got it, guys."

Just because a barkeep keeps a swank bar, that does not always mean he would be a regular customer in that kind of place. This dude may know his



cognacs and brandies and whiskey sours, but I'm betting he's a beer enthusiast just like B and me.

I was a good example of that when I barkept at The Westin Resort on Hilton Head Island. Martinis, Manhattans and fuzzy foamy foo-foo drinks up the ying-yang, but I would nae drink a one of 'em. Maybe some Bombay Sapphire and tonic at an open bar reception, or some Myers's Rum and Coke, or Bacardi O Rum with OJ and CJ, but those are pretty ordinary.

Once, we had a fancy-schmancy martini bar set up for some corporate bigwigs or something, and one of the guys -- about 35-40, one of the younger ones there -- came up and said, "Make me one like you were making it for yourself," no doubt figuring that we barkeeps knew all the slicks and tricks for a kickass cocktail. I reached down, grabbed a bottle of Rolling Rock, snapped it open, and put it up on the bar. To his bemused look, I replied, "I make those concoctions, but I don't drink 'em. This is more my style." He ordered a martini some dry-n-twisty way, and I polished off the Rock on the sly as the night wore on.



Berlin's was about half-full. Several people were in here because their dining room tables were not ready yet. There were a few over by the picture windows, settled deep in their armchairs, enjoying their big ol' stogies. Jan and I got into Explore Mode, leaving Brian to play the lonely soul at the bar, while we went Chair Hopping.

We weren't silly or rowdy about it, but we gave a good sit in the big sofa over there, and the fatass chair next to it, and a couple more in the window room -- without infringing on the chamberspace of the smokers. The Fatass Chair was my clear favorite. It rivaled the one at Green Street Cigar Company (#107). Close call for comfort, but this one was definitely

dressier. The GSCC version may have looked like this in its prime, but a fair part of its appeal was its shabbiness and its broken-in-ness.

We eventually went back to Brian at the bar. He and I ordered another round. There were enough T-shirted people in here -- far from all, but enough -- that we lost any trace of self-consciousness, and were settling in quite nicely, thank you.

While we enjoyed the fresh libations, Jan decided that a rest room break was in order. Now, normally I wouldn't mention that. I mean, who cares if she went to the damn rest room. We all gotta go sometime, but rarely do you bring it up.

And movie people almost *never* go. Hobbits must have to hit the head, yes? Darth Vader must have had to use the Dark Side of the Force every day, right? That deeeep, throaty voice grunting away in that Death Star stall next to you. Now that's realism. But it never gets included in the film, for whatever reason.

What do you suppose Death Star WC's would be like? Everyone walks the halls normally, so the dang thang must have its own gravity; you wouldn't need weird air-tight pouches and, ugh, tubes. Nah, let's drop that, hm?

So, why do I bring up Jan's jaunt, then? Because she came back exhilarated. Best Ladies Room ever, she proclaimed, downright giddy about the luxury that she had just experienced. We enjoyed her exuberance, but did not press for details. We didn't want to pressure her to violate the Sacred Secrets Of The Ladies Loo.

Berlin's men's room did not live up to that hype. It was quite nice, but I surmise that the ladies got the better of that deal.

OK. There weren't many similarities between here and Commodore, but one trait they did have in common was the separation from the dining room. Granted, Berlin's doesn't even share the same name with A&B Lobster House (see?), and this place is a cigar bar, which would not mix well with a dining experience, fine or otherwise. Still, a barricade is a barricade, and this one was a closed door with some crazy thick and distorting glass. It was clear glass, and you could kinnnda see through it, but you had no idea what you were seeing. At least at the Commodore, you were allowed a peek.

There was a real **In The Club** feel about this bar. It felt exclusive, yet we had not been excluded. And it wasn't even an oversight on their part. "Feels like Old Money in here," opined the big B. It did, too, but I suspected

that the good ol' boy country club ilk made themselves scarce as soon as people like, well, us started making ourselves welcome.

Vowing that we would return, and with Brian feeling much better about us than when we arrived, we ventured off in search of more Hops. The remaining list is getting pretty short!