

Bar Hoppin' With Hops
The Keep On Hoppin' Tour
Hops MacBarley's 2014
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar 201:
El Mar Seafood Restaurant
112 Fitzpatrick Street
www.elmarkeywest.com
Friday, 7 February, 9:30 PM

Yuengling (draft) \$0.00!

We -- that would be B&J (you remember them, yes?) and I -- did not set out this night to launch the third Key West Bar Boondoggle, which for now at least, bears the catchy tag of *Keep On Hoppin'*. We knew it was imminent, but we didn't think it would be this soon.

The crosshairs were already on El Mar as Hop 201, but the problem was that we didn't know if it was open or not. The brown paper had been pulled off the windows, and the lighting looked right, but, well, the overhead sign still boldly proclaimed "100 MONTADITOS" in that inscrutable font. If you recall

that Hop (#122), and the degree of success that that franchise enjoyed in this location (i.e., none), it's not a sign that you want to have over your door.



taking the casual three-block stroll to see Lisa and catch some blues music at 90 Mile Lounge (#104). This had become the routine, so we got to monitor the progress of El Mar on a weekly basis.

This time, though, as we began to angle across Fitzpatrick Street for the shortcut alley that Aaron had shown us, we saw some people milling about inside and some new posters taped to the windows. Jan suddenly broke



Our Friday night was in full groove. We had had a Happy couple of Hours at Lazy Gecko (#2), and Brian had added a couple of points to his tally at World of Beer (#101). We were

formation and trotted over to have a look-see. Brian and I maintained course -- it was not unusual for her to dash aside to check a menu or look at a sign that was too far away to read -- but we slowed so her catch-up would be easier. Then, she pulled open the door and went inside! OK, *that's* different.

We stopped in our tracks and stood in the middle of the street, expecting her to emerge in a few seconds -- enough time for a *When will you be open? Next Wednesday. OK, thank you!* conversation. When 10-12 sentences' worth of time passed, we decided to investigate.



As we entered, we saw Jan across the raised dining area, chatting with a couple of tall guys and a woman. We made ourselves at home and joined them. Turns out that they were the head honchos and there was a New England connection. They actually had already opened, without fanfare, and were doing sort of a soft-opening week-or-two, spreading the word largely through Facebook. We told them about the tour, and how we wanted them to be the first bar on the third edition. They agreed heartily and offered us a round of drinks in exchange for a Facebook like. Win-win, for sure.

They actually seemed very impressed by Hops. Way too impressed. They

probably envisioned a glowing review syndicated around the known world and Canada.

The layout of the place was the same as 100M had been, but the interior design was *much* more appealing. There were metallic fishies on the walls, and a light fixture that looked like seaweed -- but it was good-looking seaweed -- and a beautiful moonlight seascape over some very cool white couches. The art and overall coloring *and beer selection* were all so much



better. They still had the Mahou taps leftover, but at least they weren't serving that swill.

As per usual, Jan was into the menu, and the staff were crazy eager to talk about it. Then someone mentioned dessert, and, zimbo zambo, out came the Mellie's Jellies. Oh yaaa.

We have a friend whom we know from bartending -- and from her attendance and splendiferous attire at the Patriots games at Island Dogs. Her name is Mel. At one of the late-season games last year, she came in all excited and bearing a bin of samples of the delicacy that she had been telling us about: Mellie's Jellies. These are Jello shots taken to the next level. Concocted with a variety of liquors and boozes, they are like Jello cocktails. Bailey's, Frangelico, Kahlua, White Russians, Black Russians, she even made some layered ones. Dammnn. And potent! Sometimes you slurp down a Jello shot and think, *Hmm, I just had Jello.* That's not your reaction to these. You can taaaaaste the booze in these babies. They even give you that strong-shot shiver.

And El Mar was carrying them! Yay for Mellie! We toasted her creativity and slurped down a couple. Our hosts were generous indeed.

As we were leaving, the question arose: Is this a bar? Is it a restaurant with a bar, or might it even be a restaurant *without* a bar? This was the same dilemma that its predecessor, 100 Montaditos, faced.



How do you define a bar? By height? By stools? To me, it came down to this: Could I walk in here, ask for a beer, and have it be handed to me by the person who poured it? I didn't need to be seated at a table, and I *could* have been seated at the bar (or maybe it was a counter). As it was -- as it had been with 100M -- we were standing and got our beers handed directly to us with no waiter or

waitress or other food expediter involved in the transaction. It was just me and the booze purveyor.

Gray area, fine line, partly cloudy day, whatever. Stamp it, wrap it, and classify the hell out of it. Bar #201 was now on file, and *The Keep On Hoppin' Tour* was underway.