

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

Bar 220:
Shameless Lounge
610 Greene Street
www.shamelesslounge.com
Friday, July 18, 6:15 PM

Founders Annual IPA (draft)
\$3.00 HH



This Hop was another re-do. Solo American Bistro (#108) used to occupy this space, and they seemed to be doing well. Jan loved that place. Brian did too, despite there being no TVs to watch. I think he liked going there because he knew Jan liked it so much.

But the scuttlebutt was that Maria, the owner, got a really good offer for the location and said, you got it. Solo closed up in short order and transition began immediately. It seemed to go a lot faster than most KW rebuilds.



As we set about this Hop, I thought there might be a little pre-dislike -- a bit of resentment, perhaps even a trace of umbrage -- harbored in my co-hoppers; I sensed a little *let's get this over with* vibe. Just my imagination, possibly. Solo was a very nice place, as befits an upscale restaurant and lounge, but it was too quiet for my tastes. That

was fiiiiine with them, I'm sure; my ilk was not the demographic they wanted to woo.

So, I was very willing to give Shameless Lounge a fair shake. I admit that the name didn't really fit, to me, though. Sounded like an after-hours sex club.

I arrived in time for the last 15 minutes of Happy Hour. Most of the bar

stools were taken; most of the tables were not. I, of course, chose the bar. Tables, I've found, are for the kind of people who sit at tables.

I got there a couple of minutes before B& J did. I took the last of three consecutive empty seats and waited anxiously for my co-hoppers to arrive. You know how it is, having to dash peoples' hopes as they reach for the unoccupied chairs. They had spied them from afar and set their crosshairs on them. Now, I have to react in horror and loudly deny access because my two imaginary friends are already sitting there. *Can't you see them?? Go sit at a table.*

Fortunately, nobody came, so my imaginary friends, Ima and Gina, were undisturbed and the bar was spared that ruckus.

Don't you hate when people use *anxious* instead of *eager*? They say things like, *I am so anxious for Thanksgiving dinner!* And I think, *Why? What are worried about? What are you afraid will go wrong? Irascible relatives? Food poisoning? Having your wife and your girlfriend there at the same time -- at your boyfriend's house?* I could definitely understand some anxiety about that stuff, but most people would be *eager* for that delicious feast, not *anxious* about it. I guess they just ain't thinkin' when they say it.

So .. back to Shameless.

The atmosphere had changed quite a bit. The upper reaches were still black, but the walls, formerly kept tastefully blank between the ceiling-high brick pillars, were now decorated with splashy collages of retro and cartoony artwork and a fun array of grayscale facial image printouts. That alone totally changed the vibe of the room. When you walked into Solo, you felt like you should lower your voice and behave; when you walk into Shameless it feels more like lively laughter and happy talk.



It was daylight out still, so I wondered how it would all look late at night. Then I noticed that they actually kept quite a bit of Solo's decor. The



low tables and loose-pillowed chairs and benches were all the same as before, right down to the little glass candles. They even kept a sitting area in back with a piano. If they are able dim the lights on the walls, they could get close to the intimate smoochy-dark atmosphere that used to be in here. It'd be a pretty cool flip if they could pull it off.

Or curtains! Ooh, ya. Tall, long, dark curtains that could roll up to have the bright and lively vibe, or roll down to make the place dim and mysterious. You could bring people here in the afternoon for a few, take them around town, approach from the other side a few hours later and they'd think they were in a different bar. (It would still be just one Hop, though.)

So, uh, yeah. B&J arrived and claimed the two stools next to me. Ima and Gina relinquished their seats to my more corporal cronies and disappeared. (They never say where they go, but they always promise to be back.) Brian got his usual Coors Light and Jan decided to try one of the wines. We all gave the place a critical look-over and passed a few

comments back and forth about this and that. Their assessment seemed pretty much in line with my own. Great minds, and all that, right?

I didn't spend much time looking at the menu -- Jan always does that for us -- but one item among the Happy Hour Apps really grabbed by brain: *Wings with Blueberry BBQ and Goat Milk Mint Cream*. WTF!

Wow, that's a lot to think about! The Goat's Milk part kind of commands your attention, but look at the rest of it. Wings, OK, nothing untoward there, unless they're like seagull wings or something.

Blueberry BBQ. Whoa. Now there are two strange bedfellows. Blueberries are fruit. You put them on ice cream, or in muffins, or pie. In BBQ sauce??

And the Goat Milk alone isn't enough either. It has Mint! Just like Cold Soba did. Maybe Shameless can hit up Kojin's for some baby octopus tentacles if they ever run out of wings.

There were only ten happy Minutes remaining, so Brian and I cranked up our focus and drank with appropriate urgency. Nothings sucks worse than being told, "Ohhh, sorry, mate, but Happy Hour just ended." (Well, OK, almost nothing.) We feared that our barkeep might play the slippery eel on us by wandering to the other side of the bar and staying there till the clock ticked past 6:30. It has happened before, and in this very building, as you'll recall from that paragraph in the middle of The Boathouse hopter (#58).



There were what looked like three barkeeps on duty, but one might have been a meandering server or a trainee or something like that. She wasn't doing a thing except following this other dude around back there. The other barkeep who had taken our order was a kinda-tall, surfer-ish dude, and he

sure seemed to be more interested in the trainee than he was in serving us. Can't say I really blame him for that, but it was 6:26 and counting and Brian and I had glasses to attend to.

He finally did come our way, gave a little hand clap and said cheerfully, "So, all set?" Kind of an odd approach, especially at such an early hour. It sounded like, "Thanks for coming, now go away."

"Uhh, actually, no. We'd like two more beers, please ... assuming we're still on Happy Hour." I knew it was after 6:30. He could have pulled the same *Well, the computer won't accept the HH price after... whatever bullshit malarkey blah blah*, and I could tell that he *thought* about doing that, but he must have known that we had bagged him chasing the skirt, and relented, "yeah! I think I can do that for you." Hey, thanks, dude. It *is* your job, you know.



Surf Dude brought us our beers and put the slip-o-paper in the little cup. Brian pulled it out, looked at it, passed it to Jan, who put on her reading glasses, pursed her lips and handed it to me. I said, in a voice like Dennis Haybert in the All-State commercials, "I cannot read this." (Eyesight is overrated, yes? NO!).

She told me the total, and it sounded really High for HH drinking. We beckoned to Surf Dude to come over for a WTF Conference. He had answers up the ying-yang, all of which sounded slick, but only slick. Slick is not what you want to hear, y'know?

Ohh, yeah, we don't ring in the discount till you're ready to go, cuz it's too confusing for the customer. Right. Maybe you toss the full price on there so the guest will just grab it, glance at it on the way out (since you're off somewhere else), assume it's what they really owe, throw a few double-tip bills on the bar, and shuffle off to wherever.

But we're locals. Potential repeat customers. *Po-ten-tial*, not guaranteed. We looked at each other and all shared the same thought: *Shaaaadyyy*.

He made the correct adjustment. and we paid what we rightfully should have, but our tip was not as generous as it is at other places, and we left with a whole different feeling than if the slip had had the discounted price on it. Just sayin'. Bad business strategy.

So that left a bit of a sour taste in our mouths. Maybe we should have tried the Goat Milk stuff. With bacon.

ADDENDUM: January 2015

Never mind. CLOSED. Didn't make six months. You'll have to get your Goat Milk Mint Cream somewhere else now, I reckon.