

## Bar Hoppin' With Hops

The Keep Calm and Hop On Tour  
Hops MacBarley's Ongoing  
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar #309:

### Little Pearl

623 Olivia Street

Saturday 2/2/19, 9:45 PM

*Jai Alai IPA (can) \$6*

Officially, this place is called Little Pearl Fish House | Wine Bar. It is in the small, white, one-story building that was occupied for a long time by Seven Fish (hopped here as #125 and then later in their new Truman location as #285).



7F had done a great biz here — so great that they felt the move was well warranted — but there is a lot to be said for an in-the-know location like this. Your hours are limited (5:10 PM till the last patron leaves, which turned out to be 11:15 on this night), your staff is small, and your rent is probably not that bad. All that adds up to a profitable biznizz *if* your product is good.

Judging by the nearly full-house crowd here at 9:45, the food is indeed good.

Backing up just a tad, I tried to hop LPFWB around 8:00. I had taken the short

walk here from my Old Town abode and had to put on the brakes when I reached the Elizabeth/Olivia intersection. I could see through the window that the four-seat bar was full, that the dining room was full, and that the eight-or-so people hanging near the glass entrance door were clearly awaiting entry. Well done to you, Little Pearl!

So, I went walkabout for a bit, sauntered back here around 8:30, and saw that not much had changed. That just whetted my Hoppetite even more.

I did the Hmmm thing and let Key West tell me where to go. I was fortunate enough to find another bar – yes, who woulda thunk it? – and passed a leisurely hour-plus there.

With a bit more beer in my system, I felt that the Hop stars were now aligned, so I once again took that two-block walk back up Olivia from Duval. Sure enough, I could see that the two bar seats by the door had been vacated. There were, however, two people approaching the entrance. They had position on me, so I could not bust ahead of them to place my hositie on my coveted seat.

Ha. Remember “hosies”? I haven’t used that term in 50 years. The Urban Dictionary helped be out by defining it as: *to call dibs on; out ranks dibs and shotgun; only the high hositie can outrank a hositie call.*

As a wee nip of a Hops back in Beantown, I lived in among dozens of neighborhood kids that were all about hosies. The McC brothers, who lived next door, were intense when it came to hosies. Those bastids would hositie anything, especially that punk Danny, the middle brother. He would hositie rule changes, he’d hositie that goals didn’t count, for no other reason that he hosied so, and he’d even hositie that we couldn’t hositie anything. Big Bro Malt Jr., finally got sick of it and pulled the High Hositie on him, rendering all his hosies — past, present and future — null and void. Malt was an elder among the neighborhood youth, so his word had power. Only Billy McC could have overruled Malt, but he really didn’t like his younger bro all that much, so he just said, “Yeah, fine” and it was done.

This created quite a shift in the strata of the neighborhood, but we moved to the burbs shortly thereafter, so we didn’t really care. And the kids in the



burbs had never heard of hosies, so we kinda packed those away and never thought of them again. Until now. Funny how things trigger, hm?

So, umm, yeah.



The couple went for a table, so I had my seat. A few dishes remained on the bar, the last vestiges of my predecessors. Most barkeeps hate it when you sit down at an uncleaned spot, so I stood behind the seat and politely waited. When the dark-haired woman came over, I asked if it was OK to sit there. I knew it was, and she knew I knew it was, but I was giving her the chance to hold me at bay if she wanted to.

She put up a late-shift-style smile and gathered up the dirties. I waited for the wipe down before effecting the sit down and all was well. I told her I was just here for a drink, but she brought the food menu anyway. It was one sheet of paper. Not the most impressive menu ever, but nothing on it was inexpensive, and it did list Caviar as a featured item.

I flew in the face of convention at this here wine bar and ordered a brew. There had been a moment of concern as I seated myself; wine was very evident, liquor was nowhere to be seen, and there was no immediate indication that beer was an option. My mind began a quick refresher course in wine, trying to deduce which, in this beer-enthusiast's opinion, would be most likely to suck the least.

A casual look around, though, revealed the familiar green tint of a couple of Jai Alai cans on the bottom shelf of the backbar cooler, and I was now fully at ease. I joked with the blonde woman barkeep about keeping a "few of those things" on hand for the husbands of the wine-drinkers.

There was a fish tank on the backbar, which, along with the plain blue bottles that they use for table water, added some nice color back there. I had to wonder, though, about the fish ... in a seafood restaurant. I hope they're stupid. For a couple of reasons.

One, after ten minutes in that tank, you have seen everything it can possibly have to offer, yet you're gonna spend the rest of your damn life in there, so being stupid with a crazy bad short-term memory would be a plus.



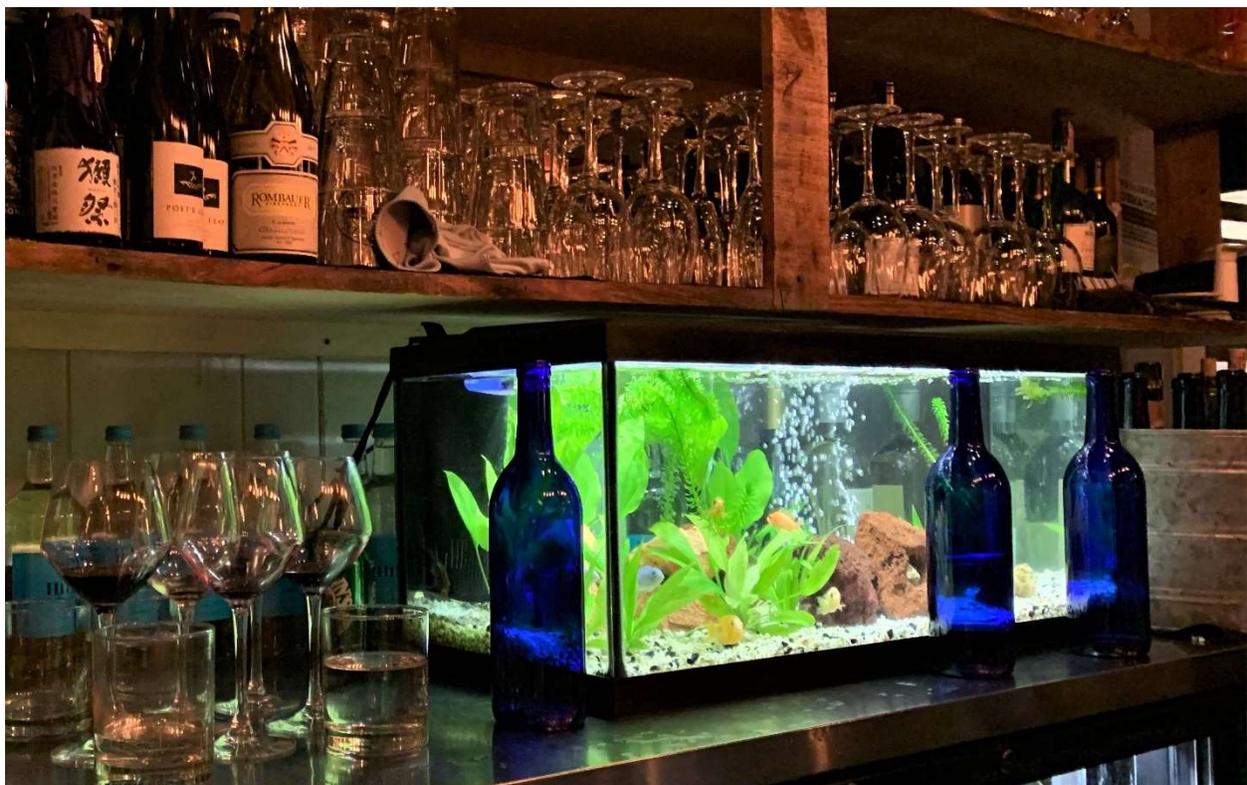
Second, it would be a tad unnerving to know that your species was the specialty of the house. I mean, imagine if you were a dancer in a nightclub, one of those up-on-the-box, lightly clad, on-display kinda dancer, and all the patrons were voracious cannibals.

Speaking of voracious, the very pretty not-yet-middle-aged woman sitting on the other side of

the empty bar seat, having just mmmmm'd her way through her meal, practically scolded me after she heard me say I was only here for a beer. "You MUST try the food here! You MUST!" I told her I had already had my dinner, and she just gave me this exasperated look. It was funny.

The blonde barkeep was much friendlier to me than the dark-haired one. They are all servers, I think, who just share the bar duty whenever they can swerve by this way, or depending on who waited on whom here. Makes sense. No need to pin someone down to four seats here when they can easily be covering a few more parties out there.

The dark-haired waiter looked vaguely familiar, but I knew not why. He came behind the bar one point, pulled a Jai Alai from the cooler and began to pour it into a glass. It all had this end-of-shift-drink look to it and made some comment to that effect. He chuckled, but, with regrets, went off to serve it to a patron.



He did return shortly, though, with the old I-know-you-from-somewhere thing. It took a minute or two, but we soon pinned down our common ground: the local running community. Ryan was his name (still is, I reckon) and he was very active on the 5K race circuit about ten years ago or so. He had done some world traveling since then, including living in Thailand for a good while. He told of insane bargains on meals and drinks, saying that he

ate out almost every night because it was so cheap; the eat-your-fill entrees were like \$6-8 and the beers were under \$2.

He also had a trunkload of tales to tell about his runs with the Hashhouse Harriers, a world-wide brother-and-sisterhood "drinking club with a running problem." They are fundamentally British but are international in scope. The premise of a Hash is a 5-8-mile (or so) training run on a designated course that could wind anywhere – through intense urban snarl or down barely traceable jungle trails – following by what most would call "ritual drinking".

Ryan finally did come back for his shift beer and offered to set me up with one more. I had just knocked down my second JA can and was in call-it-a-night mode, but he got me with, "We'll split one!" Caved like a house of cards.

When that was done, I wished Ryan a hearty good night, gathered up my bag o' tricks, and rose from my seat. To my surprise, the only ones left were the two diners who had come in just seconds ahead of me ninety minutes before, and they had already started their walk to the exit.

Nice job, Hops. Closed another one down! Great to hear that lock click behind me as I head on my way.