

Four to Explore, South Of the Broad

Written by Mark Shaffer

Wednesday, 18 August 2010 10:57



When *Life Behind Bars* first debuted we included a kind of sliding bar scale explained thusly:

“Like the crew of comically dysfunctional regulars holding down the stools at

Cheers

, or the desperate gin-soaked refugees from a world gone mad at

Rick’s

in

Casablanca

, sometimes you want to go where everyone knows your name - or no one does. Or maybe some do and some don’t. Some places are more

Cheers

than

Rick’s

and visa versa while some are a bit of both.” I’m invoking this scale once again, although something tells me this time there may be changes.

Say *WHAT?*

My tin roof...rusted.

The B52’s “Love Shack”

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Bluffton

Captain Woody's Bar and Grill

Calhoun Street Promenade, downtown Bluffton. Phone 843-757-6222. www.captainwoodys.com



There is something quintessentially Southern about the sound of rain falling on a tin roof.

There is also something unmistakably Lowcountry about the scent of salt marsh and pluff mud mingled with storm borne wind and water while sipping a cold beer and listening to rain pound the roof. Indeed, this is an ideal way to pass a stormy August afternoon in the Lowcountry. Line after line of thundershowers blow inland as we sit high and mostly dry at the upstairs bar in Captain Woody's Bluffton location. This is sort of like the bar equivalent – the Norm Peterson equivalent – of taking out a boat for a shakedown cruise, which for a bunch of landlubbers is the nice thing about shaking down a bar in foul weather – bars rarely sink. Although the storm blows so hard at one point the staff is forced to roll down the weather rigging to stop the influx of rain – a first according to the bartender. My friend Richard makes note of the fact that we are “rained in,” which, in this situation, is the opposite of being “rained out.” Still, it's a good thing the concrete floor is equipped with a drain.

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For years the original Captain Woody's Bar and Grill at Hilton Head's Palmetto Bay Marina has thrived with an essential Lowcountry blend of local seafood, proper cocktails, cold beer, and a laid back, casual atmosphere. Visitors are always welcome and regulars are practically family. The newest location in Bluffton's Calhoun Street Promenade brings the Captain Woody's experience a little further inland. In fact, this is a pretty bold move in tough economic times, but one that appears to be paying off. The new store is a rustic, raw-boned clapboard building that brings some much needed character



to the mixed use, residential and commercial development on the north end of Bluffton's historic district. The ground level features plenty of umbrella-covered patio seating, the main restaurant and a smaller "U" shaped bar. The main bar's a flight up and a cut above.

Out on the expansive deck water beats down in sheets while John Fogerty belts out "Who'll Stop the Rain?" "Well, if you've got to be rained-in," someone says, "it's always best to be rained-in during happy hour." Captain Woody's 4 pm - 6pm happy hour is basic but serviceable with \$4.00 well drinks, A buck off domestic beers and 50 cents off house wine by the glass. In an effort to keep costs down there are no taps, therefore no draught beer – I repeat, no draught beer – and no plans for any in the future.

There are plenty of house specialty drinks to aid in that all-important end of the day attitude adjustment. The Captain's Famous Bloody Mary is made with Grey Goose Vodka, Your Mom's Bloody Mary Mix (with a little extra kick) and Old Bay on the rim. The May River Sunset is a local homage to the classic Island Rum Runner. Myers Rum is shaken with a splash of grenadine and "exotic fruit juices." Bar snacks run from fresh local shrimp and oysters to grouper bites (hand cut and fried) and the slightly hyperbolic Ultimate Nachos. Ultimate? Not really, but the platter's pretty impressive and it comes accessorized with your choice of chili, shrimp or chicken and enough melted cheese to fill a fondue set. Not that I would know how to do that.

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This version of Captain Woody's is a full-blown throwback to a time when people gathered in rough-hewn plank shacks and drank cold longnecks pulled from icy coolers in whatever breeze happened to blow off the marsh. This one also happens to have three giant screens behind the bar and plenty of parking – the perfect spot to relax in a fall breeze, or find yourself rained-in.

Cheers or Ricks? Cheers, definitely. Belly up to this bar a few times and claim your stool as a regular, although no draught beer would definitely disagree with Norm.

Corks Wine Company

Calhoun Street Promenade. Phone 843-815-5168. www.corkswinecompany.com Closed Sunday.



Just across the green from Captain Woody's, a simple wooden sign hangs in front of one of the Promenade's nondescript brick facades. The windows and glass doors are blacked out, there's no clue from the outside as to what lies beyond. Walk through the doors and cross the threshold into another world. I've obviously passed through some sort of time/space continuum – perhaps one of those pesky dimensional rifts everyone's always having problems with in *Star Trek*? Just a few blocks off the May River, this could easily pass for Napa or maybe one of the elegant new wine-centric bistros in Walla Walla or the Willamette Valley. Hell, for that matter this might be

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anywhere that appreciates a sophisticated atmosphere with an accent on good wine and all that goes with it.

This is the kind of place that could easily be attached to a winery. The bistro is an elegant blend of clean lines and right angles wrapped in earth tones and textures, soft, intimate lighting and tempered with cool jazz in the background. There's plenty of exposed brick and dark wood. The bar is a rosy, polished marble and the high backed bar stools and club chairs are richly upholstered and damned comfy. Roll back the antique sliding metal warehouse door near the entrance to reveal a larger yet



equally elegant space used for live music (check the website), special events or nights when there's need for overflow space – which happens pretty regularly these days. Throughout the entire space there is a sense of well-worn comfort and age far beyond that of the address. Owners Josh Luman and Gabby Ferrell cobbled the place together with reclaimed brick, wood and fixtures from wherever they could find them. The sliding door is out of the old Seed & Feed in Savannah. Some of the ancient weathered brick is from Chicago and an old estate in Virginia.

Sure, this is “Bluffton’s neighborhood wine bar,” but the place practically screams “*martini!*” In fact, apart from the massive, yet manageable wine list, premium cocktails are a specialty. In the unlikely event that, say, Alessandra Ambrosio should sashay in I’m betting The Brazilian Bikini would catch her eye. That’s Oronoco Rum with soda and a twist of lime – like Ms. Ambrosio, simple, delicious and scantily clad. A little concoction called The Bluffton Housewife did get our attention. Essentially, this is a very dirty martini packing a mean right cross – Bombay Sapphire Gin, olive juice and jalapeno stuffed olives. Feeling a little retro? Knock back a shot of Macallan whisky old enough to vote while your date goes all Bergman (Ingrid, of course) with a Classic Champagne Cocktail featuring bubbly and bitters spiked with a sugar cube.

Here’s looking at you, kid.

Robert Louis Stevenson once said, “Wine is bottled poetry.” If so, this is a place for poets, indeed, but no place for the usual pretense that so often accompanies both wine and verse. Josh and Gabby say Cork’s is built as much for the novice as the enthusiast. In fact, says Josh,

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wine is a never-ending education and Cork's "Uncorked Flights" present some fine learning opportunities. Each flight showcases a different theme (The Italian Job, A taste of Argentina, Pretty in Pink) and a chance to sample three distinctly unique wines in two-ounce pours. The globetrotting wine list is divided between "blondes" and "redheads" with a large selection available by the glass. Featured pours and specials are listed on the board behind the bar and if you don't see something you want or have a question about a particular wine, don't hesitate to ask.

With good wine comes good food and Cork's offers up a nice selection of what Josh terms "fresh creative renditions of vineyard fare and Italian bites" with "Big Small Plates." Pair a hearty red with the Rustico Antipasto, a mélange of Italian meats, marinated veggies, buffalo mozzarella and parmigiano



reggiano served with warm bread. The Artisan Cheese Plate is a selection of handcrafted Farmstead cheeses from the storied dairy at Flat Creek Lodge in Swainsboro, Georgia, served with organic honey and fruit. There's also wild sockeye salmon, ahi tuna sashimi, fresh and unique salads and local Bluffton barbecue to choose from. "We're not what you'd expect," says Josh.

Corks recently opened a second location on Hilton Head Island in the Publix Shopping Center off of Palmetto Bay Rd. Both locations offer up a pretty irresistible happy hour 4-6 pm featuring \$15 off any bottle of wine, \$2 off chalkboard wines by the glass, American Craft beers on tap for \$4, and \$5 house cocktails. And to get your week off to a proper start – or drown out the screams of a very bad day – every bottle of wine is half price on Monday nights. Go online for more daily specials.

Cheers or Ricks? Okay, so there is draught beer – rotating taps of rare American craft-brewed artistry – but I don't think that's going to tip the scales in Norm's favor. Nope. Any place that serves up a classic champagne cocktail is a place where snappy dialogue might suddenly break out...

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Captain Renault: *I've often speculated why you don't return to America. Did you abscond with the church funds? Run off with a senator's wife? I like to think you killed a man. It's the Romantic in me.*

Rick: *It was a combination of all three.*

Definitely *Rick's*. Which means, of course, *this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.*

Hilton Head

Big Bamboo

Coligny Plaza, oceanside at the end of Pope Ave. Phone 843-686-3443.

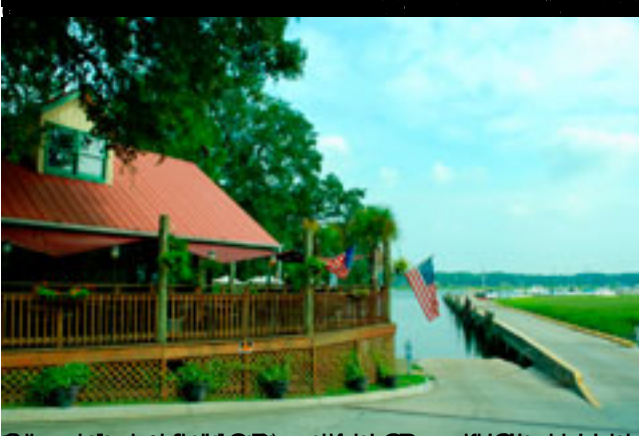
www.bigbamboocafe.com Closed Sunday.

Right off the bat the Big Bamboo is going to force a change in the Cheers vs. Rick's sliding bar scale.

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