

# PALM BEACH BELLIES UP TO THE BAR

BY STEVEN STOLMAN



Opposite page, from top left: The famous Crispy Chicken Sandwich; a cocktail in the making; the Old Cuban; the burrata on toast. This page: A friendly welcome at Honor Bar: The Royal Poinciana Plaza, 340 Royal Poinciana Way, Palm Beach, Fla.; 561.209.2799 or [honorbar.com](http://honorbar.com).



locale-aligned Grills (Palm Beach, East Hampton, etc.) that popularized char-grilled artichokes, sticky ribs, and the Silver-Service Kosher Hot Dog, which is inaccurately named because it isn't served from a silver platter at all, but on a plate, albeit by the most spit-polished, clean-cut, attractive servers imaginable. Indeed, good hair and a youthful, slim figure are clearly prerequisites for working at most Hillstone operations. And Honor Bar is no different in that aspect.

What is different is the distinctly casual, spontaneous vibe that is at Honor Bar's core. There are no reservations, only small plates, and no desserts. Diners sit at deeply cushioned stools at a bar as long as a bowling alley, or nestled in cozy,

The room is dark, moody, and decidedly sexy without being louche. Grazing is encouraged, and, to that end, dishes are delivered at breakneck speed. Fortunately, while leisurely dining is not Honor Bar's strongest suit (there is a gently enforced 90-minute time limit), flavor most definitely is. On the menu: chestnuts like Shrimp Louie and deviled eggs and a respectable French dip sandwich, along with towering burgers and Hillstone's popular *chiffonade* Pine Room Salad that appears across several of its brands. But the winning item at Honor Bar Palm Beach is the Crispy Chicken Sandwich, a heaping handful of deliciousness that already has its own hashtag on Instagram (#dingcrispychickensandwich). Inquiring minds

RESTAURANTS ARE like cars. Their novelty eventually wears off as quickly as that evocative "new car smell," and they either become part of one's everyday existence or, heaven forbid, lemony failures. The junkyard gets fuller with each passing season, what with today's farm-to-table, nose-to-tail, bushels-of-kale insistence becoming as ubiquitous as yesterday's sweet potato fries. But every so often, an instant classic is born—one that is destined to withstand the test of capricious diners. Such is Honor Bar, which is surprising given that Palm Beach's most enduring restaurants lean toward the traditional and almost uniformly serve Dover sole. Honor Bar does not. Regardless, in high season, it's

jam-packed with a lively mix of stereotypical Palm Beachers in cashmere sweaters and velvet slippers, tourists, retirees, Lotharios, and very pretty young people who actually live and work in America's storied tropical paradise, along with the occasional Real Housewife.

Tucked into a long, narrow bay of the newly energized Royal Poinciana Plaza, a 1950s architectural treasure of a shopping center that was once chic, then sleepy, and is now more chic than ever, Honor Bar is the sexy, younger sister of the Hillstone family of restaurants. Baby boomers know this successful group as Houston's, home of hot spinach and artichoke dip and the loaded baked potato, or the various

semi-circular banquettes perched on a platform opposite the bar. But make no mistake—it's all about the bar. There is the expected craft cocktail menu, thankfully without the too, *too* schtick of old-timey guys with curious facial hair, tattoos, man-buns, and sleeve garters. Here, the Hillstone preppy staff dress code remains intact. There is also a good, primarily American wine list, although while there is a single French Sancerre offered by the glass, the one French red is only available "for the table," which supposedly is a euphemism for "by the bottle," although surely served at the bar too, should one desire. Two Champagnes are also offered, again only "for the table."

will want to know that "Ding" refers to Hillstone founder George Biel's "Grandma Ding." Her coleslaw recipe, which features a proprietary pickle relish, tops the crowd pleaser in a mountainous heap, along with Swiss cheese and tomato. It is perfectly crispy as promised. Carb-aphobics will appreciate the lovely spinach and cheese omelette, done in the classic French manner—thin and soft. And yes, there is a kale salad. Alas, no restaurant is perfect. ♦

Steven Stolman is the author of several books on design and entertaining. His latest, *The Serial Entertainer's Passion for Parties*, is available at [gibbs-smith.com](http://gibbs-smith.com).

COURTESY OF HONOR BAR