

Entrance to the Big Bamboo Lounge as it faces US 192.
 *Note: Porta-Potty in old package store drive-thru area.
 At right are found Disney character drawings on the back bar.



AFTER-HOURS MAGIC WITH THE DISNEY CAST

Where do you go to escape the "perfect" environment of Walt Disney World? The thought probably never occurred to readers who commute to the magic from points around the country. However, at the suggestion of a cast member, a tour of a favorite Disney watering hole was arranged before its impending destruction.

Officially named The Bamboo Lounge, Disney cast and crew affectionally call it the Big Bamboo. Why anyone would ever have the guts to enter the establishment is a bit of a question in the first place. As the cast member was quick to point out, "it looks like a biker bar" from the outside. The inside looks worse. Yet news about hot spots has a way of spreading, and the word about this place must have been "outrageous"! The TDU photography trip was arranged when the place would be almost empty. That's

a trick in itself. This antidote for Disney chic is normally packed. Friday night crowds are particularly up close and friendly.

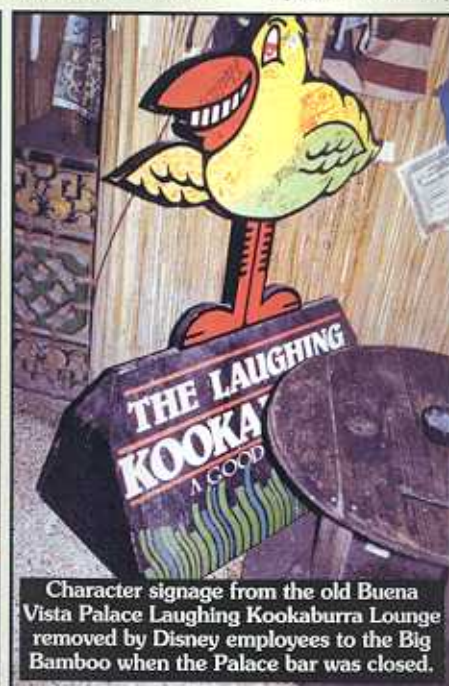
So why is this offbeat place such an attraction?

Well, a tall, cold beer is only a buck during happy hour, and the decor budget savings is otherwise passed along to patrons. When you take into consideration what cast members are paid, it was only natural the two would find each other. Walt Disney would have loved the place. He was a beer-and-chili man. Inside, the Big Bamboo seems similar to descriptions of the bar across from the old Hyperion Studios where animation history was nurtured.

The joint was founded by Bruce Muir in 1977. He had a running battle with the city of Kissimmee planners over the look and operation of his property. His "back porch" and "storage areas"



Ambulance from old M.A.S.H. TV series set and control tower signage assembled with the help of Disney artists.



Character signage from the old Buena Vista Palace Laughing Kookaburra Lounge removed by Disney employees to the Big Bamboo when the Palace bar was closed.



Disney name badges and t-shirts cover the walls and ceilings throughout the Big Bamboo.



Main Big Bamboo lounging room with Disney memorabilia on the walls.



Last year's Stitch Christmas card from one of the Disney buisness groups.



Kevin is the current bartender.



Remembrances from a wide variety of visitors.

were always packed with people overflowing from the immediate bar area. Mysterious truck loads of dirt had a habit of showing up without a permit. The confines once included a drive-thru, but this was abandoned. Flowing mud from the parking area had a way of mucking up business during heavy rains.

It's always Christmas inside; decorations never come down. Couches are Goodwill rejects. Tables are abandon utility-cable reels. On the walls are Disney and other area attraction memorabilia. Spring-training baseball players have visited and left their marks. Predominately, there are Disney name badges. Hundreds of them spanning 25 years of cast regulars who adopted Big Bamboo as a favorite hangout. All of these treasures are covered with dust and nicotine. A few years ago, bras tacked to the wall and ceiling started to appear, perhaps in tribute to special relationships found at the Big Bamboo.

Owner Muir died in 1999. He provided the place should stay

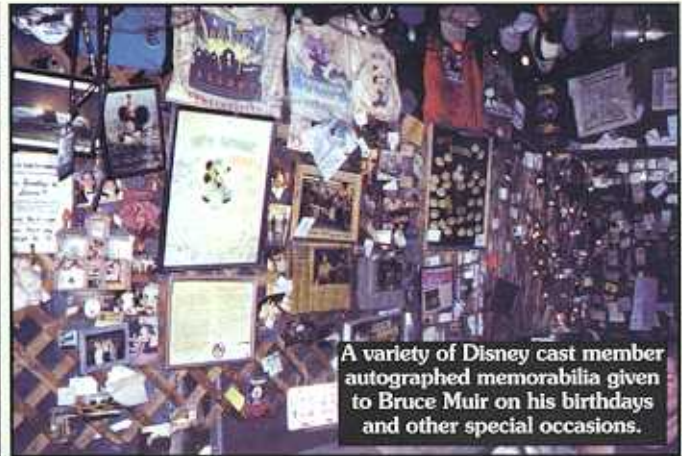
open for at least three years after his death. His property on the intersecting point of US 192 and FL 535 has become a valuable piece of real estate and his heirs have been getting some tempting offers now that the three years are up: Big Bamboo seems destined to become history.

It may be time. The ambulance from the old M.A.S.H. TV set is almost rusted through. The sign Disney artists helped build is deteriorating and the porta-potties in the old drive-thru area are a little too classy for the Big Bamboo tradition.

It's the people, not the place. Bruce Muir built the Big Bamboo tradition on Big Band music, his military service in World War II, and an irascible Scotch heritage. It was a different type of magic. Not the magic of fantasy, rather the unexpected magic of life. Interesting people enjoying being Bamboozled. That's the magical tradition of the Big Bamboo. See it if you can. Before it disappears!



There's always plenty of breeze (and a mist of rain on certain days) in the back porch area.



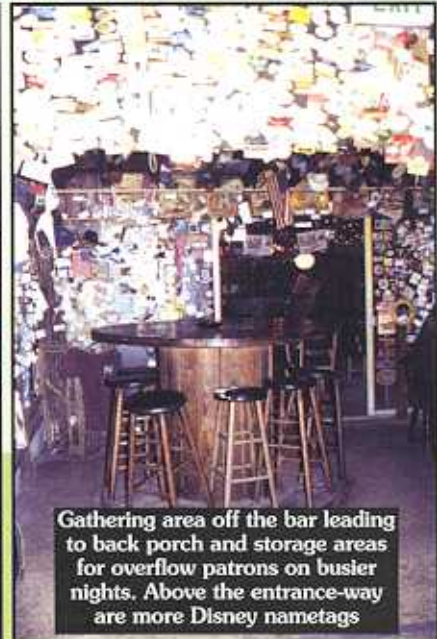
A variety of Disney cast member autographed memorabilia given to Bruce Muir on his birthdays and other special occasions.



Christmas decorations never come down in keeping with the zany traditions of the Big Bamboo



One of the many themed exhibits within the club is this one in tribute to cast member regulars who helped open Disney's Animal Kingdom.



Gathering area off the bar leading to back porch and storage areas for overflow patrons on busier nights. Above the entrance-way are more Disney nametags