

Created by: Debra C. Argen and Edward F. Nesta

Rum Tasting

According to Dale DeGroff's book "The Craft of the Cocktail", one theory on how rum got its name is that the "Latin name for the species of grass we call sugarcane, is *Saccharum officinarum*, both of which words end in rum".

It can be called Rum, but "the Spanish call it *ron*, the Swedes and Russians call it *rom*, and the French call it *rhum*." However you spell it, rum dates back to the 16th century and is made with either sugarcane, molasses or concentrated syrup.

The 125-year old **Castle on the Hudson** (www.castleonthehudson.com) hotel in Tarrytown, New York hosted **RumFest 2004** (www.polishedpalate.com) on November 30, 2004, which benefited **Sky Ranch Foundation** (www.skyranchfoundation.com). What could be better on a cold night than to warm up with a snifter of rum at a castle? **FESTUSA** held their first **RumFest** in 2003, and then added **VodkaFest** and **Spirits of Mexico**, which Luxury Experience wrote about. (Read our articles **VodkaFest**, **Tequila Tasting I**, **Tequila Tasting II** in **Liquor Cabinet**.) The events held in New York, Chicago and San Diego, are definitely worth attending, as they attract some of the top distillers in the industry, as well as new to market products. This year, rum distillers came from as far away as Antigua, Barbados, Puerto Rico, St. Kitts, Guyana, Bermuda, Tahiti, Haiti, United States, Panama, Guatemala, Jamaica and Nepal to showcase their products. There was even a distiller from Brazil that brought Brazil's national alcohol, *cachaça*.

In my article **Wine and Spirits Update** (in our **Events** section), I wrote that "the following spirits are the top contenders as favorites: Country's National Spirit (i.e. Japan – Sake), Vodka, Rum, Brandy, Scotch, Liquors, Gin, Bourbon/US Whiskey, Tequila, and Cognac/Armagnac." However, after RumFest organized by **Dori Bryant** (www.polishedpalate.com) those preferences may vary well change. I also had the opportunity to chat with **Edward Hamilton**, the **Minister of Rum**, (www.ministryofrum.com), and the author of 2 books on rum who agreed that, "Rum is the most under-rated spirit."

Although we were not able to sample every one of the fine rums at the event, we definitely gave it a try. We share some of our highlights of the event.

Debra C. Argen:

As I worked my way around the sampling floor, I felt like I should have had my passport stamped as I visited each country. I started in the United States by sampling Prichard's Fine Rum made in copper stills, which was very smooth and tasted more like brandy than rum, and Prichard's Cranberry Rum a 70 proof liqueur that I sampled over ice that was perfect for the holidays, but with a little limejuice added it had endless possibilities for anytime. Moving along the globe, I visited Barbados and sampled the Mount Gay Rum line of products, Mount Gay Extra Old Rum, Mount Gay Eclipse Rum, Mount Gay Mango Rum and Mount Gay Vanilla Rum, which had me fondly remembering a trip I had taken there. They have been making award-winning rums since 1703. I stopped at Rhum Barbancourt from Haiti, which has been making rum since 1885, and sampled their Rhum Barbancourt Estate Reserve 15 year old Rhum, which was very smooth, and made with hand-cut sugarcane without any molasses. Edward and I both tried Cruzan Blackstrap Rum 2-year old barrel aged rum rich in flavor from added blackstrap molasses. The flavor stayed on the palate and warmed the mouth. At \$15/bottle retail, it was a good buy. On the higher end, I found Gosling's Family Reserve Rum Old Rum, around \$70, from Bermuda to be a great choice, with its old-style replica 1800's champagne bottle, and presented in a wooden box. It was deep in color, aromatic, with mouth-filling warmth. However, my true star of the tasting was from Antigua, English Harbour Antigua Rum 1981 Vintage, which had a deep rich caramel color, was extremely aromatic with nut-like flavors, smooth finish and mouth-filling flavor. Unfortunately, they only produce limited amounts (about 50 cases per year, around \$100/bottle) so you would be lucky indeed to special order a bottle or two to savor over cold winter nights. More readily available is their English Harbour Extra Old Rum, which was very good, but after the 1981 Vintage I was a bit spoiled. Also very nice is their English Harbour 5 Year Old Rum. My last stop was to Brazil to sample Fazenda Mãe do Ouro Cachaça, made from sugarcane. Very nice taste, neat or in the traditional Brazilian cocktail, *capirinha*.

Edward F. Nesta:

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The “international show of rum”, as Debra so accurately described RumFest 2004, was an extremely interesting evening of tasting. There were a few rums that drew a lot of discussion from people at the event, one was St. Croix, U.S.V.I.’s Cruzan Blackstrap Rum, and as Debra noted, this rum is very rich in flavor and would be an outstanding compliment around the holiday season with eggnog or anytime with cola; the most interesting use I felt would be in cooking where the sweet deep molasses flavor would work its way into any marinade or dessert that calls for dark rum. Staying in St. Croix and with Cruzan, I found the Cruzan Single Barrel Estate Rum to have an intense nose with a very smooth and lingering finish on the palate, and with its fruit flavors it had a very Armagnac-like taste on the palate. Moving on to Guatemala, I sampled the Ron Zacapa Centenario 23 Year Old Rum, which had a caramel nose, deep chestnut color with a smooth long finish of vanilla and subtle molasses. Traveling to Guyana, I found the El Dorado 15 Year Old a taste treat that had a deep rich nose of fruits and spices with a soft smooth finish on the palate. I also tasted the El Dorado Gold Premium Rum Cream, which was heaven on the palate, a fusion of aged rum, dairy cream and spices that would enliven a cup of coffee or to sip with friends sitting by the fireplace. Rums to watch for in the future include Khukri Rum from Nepal, and Ron Abuelo 7 Anos from Panama. What I truly enjoy about FestUSA events is the opportunity to sample limited production products, and I agreed with Debra, that my favorite rum of the evening was the English Harbour Antigua Rum 1981 Vintage. This is true sipping rum, so take out your snifter glass, pour a dram or two or three, and take time to linger over the exquisite color, and then slowly sip and enjoy the rich flavors.

Also at RumFest 2004: Bacardi, Sea Wynde Rum, Brinley & Company, Admiral Nelson, Doorly’s XO, Foursquare Spiced Rum, Inner Circle Rum, Velvet Falernum and Noa Noa. There were so many rums, and so little time to taste them all, perhaps at RumFest 2005.

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