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Rum Judging: A fantasy job, yes, but hard work, too

When Ed Hamilton, [Ministry of Rum](#), asked us if we would like to be rum judges for the **2008 Ministry of Rum Tasting Competition** as part of the [Tales of the Cocktail](#) in [New Orleans](#), we readily agreed to participate.

To the uninitiated, judging rums must sound like a fantasy job, but actually judging requires hard work, concentration, and the ability to distinguish nuances of the spirit on the nose and palate as it compares to others in its category.

However, for us to make the first session of the Rum Tasting Competition on July 15, 2008, which would begin at 11:00 am, required us to wake up at 4:30 am, a supreme effort for us, as we usually do not go to bed until after midnight, and take a 7:30 am flight from New York to New Orleans.

We arrived at the [Hotel Monteleone](#) in the French Quarter at 10:45 am, checked-in, went briefly to our room to drop off our luggage, which left us with a generous 5 minutes to walk the short distance from the hotel to [Arnaud's Restaurant](#) where the 2008 Ministry of Rum Tasting Competition would take place. We signed in, took our assigned judges' numbers, and slid into our seats at round tables of four.

Ed Hamilton explained the rules of the Tasting Competition to the judges, and told us that our task would be to use our senses over the course of two days, for two sessions each day, to judge a total of 60 rums divided into categories of flavored rums, aged and premium rums, gold and aged rums, molasses based rums, and cachaças from Brazil.



Pens and paper in hand, and senses ready, we uncovered the first rum of the session, where the aromas wafting from our Ministry of Rum Competition glasses nudged us out of our reverie in the hushed, library-like ambience where very serious professionals were at work. Remember that we had been awake since 4:30 am, and were now judging flavored rums ... before lunch! We looked at the color of the rum, swirled the glass to release the aromas, moved the glass slowly back and forth under our nose, and only after all these notes were thoughtfully jotted down on our tasting form, were we ready to take a sip of rum. The first sip of rum number one had our palates yelling, (loudly), "What are you doing sipping rum at this hour? Are you crazy?" By the second sip, our palates got acquainted with the nuances so to speak, and we slowly and carefully worked our way through the 19 rums of the first session judging each of the rums on its aroma, initial taste, body, and finish, in order to award them with a ranking which when combined with the scores of all the judges, would determine which rums would receive gold, silver, and bronze medals.



Of course, tasting rums for a competition is not a quick process, and the designated time allotment was 2-hours. Taking a break mid-session, Ed Hamilton had the 20 industry respected judges, a mix of 19 males and 1 female, hailing from all parts of the United States introduce themselves. We mention gender solely to point out that when it comes to rum judging, at least for this tasting competition, the male judges well outweighed the female judges, but (Debra) felt that (she and her senses) were up to the task.

When the last judge turned in their tasting results for the 19 rums, we eagerly took our places next to the bar, where Ed Hamilton, in a moment that deserved a Jazz drum roll, this being New Orleans, uncovered the bottles of rum that we had tasted in the session. Since the tasting is blind, it is always interesting to see how we rated old favorites, rums new to market, as well as international rums.

We returned for the afternoon session, which would run from 3:00 - 5:00 pm, where our task was to judge 12 aged and premium rums. Following the same procedure as the morning session, we carefully worked our way through tasting each of the rums, making notes throughout the process. By the end of the session, the prevailing aromas wafting in the room, combined with the ambience of Arnaud's Restaurant, which has been in operation since 1918, was such a heady mélange that we wished that we could bottle up its unique essence.

One again, Ed Hamilton unveiled the rums that we had just tasted, and as usual, there were some surprises, as well as some "ah ha" moments. We left Arnaud's blinking in the strong sunlight, enveloped by the humid warmth of the day, and congratulated ourselves on surviving Day 1 of the 2008 Ministry of Rum Tasting Competition.



Ed Hamiton 'The Minister of Rum'

Day 2 had us returning to Arnaud's well-rested and ready for the morning session, which would run from 11:00 am - 1:00 pm. Our task for the morning would be to judge gold and aged rums, where for this session, there were 21 judges consisting of 19 males and 2 females. Gold and aged rums are the type of rums that we especially enjoy, so tasting 19 of these rums was definitely an enjoyable undertaking.

For the last session which took place from 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm, we tasted 7 molasses based rums, 4 cachaças from Brazil, and 1 over-proofed rum, brought out in separate groupings to be able to appreciate the nuances of these very distinct categories. By the final day, and the last session of the Tasting Competition, judges had dwindled for the last session of the competition, with a total of 13 judges, which consisted of 12 males and 1 female. (Debra, as the lone female) would have patted herself on the back for her persistence, drive, and stamina, in remaining until the very last rum was judged, were it not for her fear

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of taking her arm out the socket while doing so, which would make any further tasting later on, either for competition or purely private consumption, extremely difficult.



Checking out the Rums

As with the previous rums we had tasted, there were a few confirmations of old-favorites, as well as some new ones to add to our list. There are many reasons that we enjoy being rum judges at Ed Hamilton's Ministry of Rum Tasting Competitions, which include the ability to experience a wide selection of excellent domestic and international rums, some of which may not be available in the United States; meet other rum lovers and be able to share this experience; and to increase our ongoing knowledge and appreciation of the rum category.

A few of the results from the **2008 Ministry of Rum Tasting Competition:**

Name

Result

Abuelo Añejo

Gold

Boca Loca (cachaça)

Gold

Brinley Gold Coffee Rum

Gold

Cabana (cachaça)

Gold

Castries Rum Cream

Gold

Cruzan Single Barrel

Gold

El Dorado 15 year old

Gold

El Dorado 5 year old

Gold

Mount Gay Super Sugar Cane Rum

Gold

Mount Gay XO

Gold

New Orleans Crystal

Gold

Pyrat XO Reserve

Gold

Ron Ricardo Banana Rum

Gold

Temptryst Applewood

Gold

Temptryst Hickory

Gold

Temptryst Maplewood

Gold

Temptryst Natural Dark

Gold

Temptryst Pecanwood

Gold

Temptryst Sugar Cane Rum

Gold

Tropical Light Rum

Gold

10 Cane

Silver

Angostura 1919

Silver

Beija (cachaça)

Silver

Brinley Gold Coconut Rum

Silver

Brinley Gold Lime Rum

Silver

Brinley Gold Mango Rum

Silver

Brinley Gold Vanilla Rum

Silver

Depaz Blue Cane Amber Rum

Silver

Dos Maderos 5 + 3

Silver

Leblon (cachaça)

Silver

Matusalem Gran Reserva

Silver

New Orleans Spice

Silver

Old New Orleans 3

Silver

Ron Abuelo 7 Year

Silver

Ron Atlantico Private Cask

Silver

To see a complete listing for all of the rums, please visit the **Ministry of Rum** website:
www.MinistryofRum.com.

Read other articles on the **Tales of the Cocktail** and **New Orleans** in the **Destinations, Hotels and**

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For information on the **Tales of the Cocktail**, please visit the website: www.TalesoftheCocktail.com. For information on **New Orleans**, please visit the website: www.NewOrleansCVB.com.

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