

THE **Rum** UNIVERSITY

Rum Appreciation In the 21st Century

Lesson I



Lesson 1: Origin of Rum - A Brief History

What is Rum?

According to some dictionaries, "Rum is a by-product of the processing of sugar from sugarcane."

Another definition of the word "rum", one from the Jamaican Excise Duty Law of 1941, number 73, defines rum as a spirit "distilled solely from sugarcane juice, sugarcane molasses, or the refuse of the sugarcane, at a strength not exceeding 150% proof."

This would be a very sad world if everything that rum is could be boiled down to these dry, uninteresting definitions.

The purpose of this course -and possibly the reason behind your motivation to take it- is to explore the many faces of rum, from its origins and styles to its uses and lore.

The word "Rum"

It is hard to write about rum without touching on the origins of the word itself. Over the years much has been speculated and written about its origins. One theory offers the possible derivation of the word "rum" from the Latin for sugar, *saccharum officinarum*. Another theory is that it comes from *rumbullion*, which may have been a purely descriptive word or a modified English version of the Dutch and German *roemer*, which refers to a large drinking glass.

Regardless of the origin of the word, there seems to be an agreement that the name Kill-Devil (or Kill-Devill), alias *Rumbullion*, was given to the first beverages in Barbados. They were notably rough and unpalatable and could "overpower the senses with a single whiff," and would "lay them (the men) to sleep on the ground" (Richard Ligon). We are also helped by a quote from the General Court of Connecticut (New England), 1654, which is the earliest known recognition of Barbados rum in the colonies: "... whatsoever Barbados liquors, commonly called rum, Kill-Devill or the like."

Novelist Hervey Allen offered the following definition: "Rum? 'tis the courage of the fighting Dutchmen, and the main brace of the Royal Navy, a potable charge for explosions of friendship, wings on the slippers of Mercury."

In addition to the above, the following terms have also been used to refer to rum:

Barbados Water
Splice the Main Brace
Grog Demon Water
The Pirate's Drink
Navy Neaters
Nelson's Blood
Rum Bastion
Comfortable Waters



How old is rum?

History books tell us that rum was first served aboard British vessels following the capture of Jamaica in 1655. Obviously it had been in production before then, but accounts vary. The oldest rum distillery (still in operation today) is Barbado's Mount Gay Distillery, where rum has been made since 1703, making rum older than whiskey! (Strathisla Distillery, makers of Chivas Regal, established in 1786, claims to be the oldest whiskey distillery in the Scottish Highlands).

Rum: It's More Than Just a Drink

Rum is one of the most versatile spirits in today's bars. It can be served neat (by itself), on the rocks, or as an ingredient in hot or cold mixed drinks. Few drinking-age people are alive today who have not heard about classic rum cocktails such as the Daiquiri, Mai Tai, Piña Colada and the Mojito. It is perhaps due to the popularity of these tropical cocktails that rum is often linked to pirates, trading ships, treasure islands and heavenly paradises.

In most rum-producing countries, rum is more than just a beverage that is created for local and/or foreign consumption. It is somewhat of a national symbol, and as such, has connotations of pride and local identity. Everybody in the Caribbean claims their rum is better than anyone else's...and they are all right! Each distillery skillfully caters to the palate of their local consumers, matching all their expectations.

It seems every rum-producing country's culture has adopted the spirit of rum in more ways than one. Whether you share these popular views on rum or not, it is worth mentioning that few other distilled spirits have impacted complete societies as much as rum. Ask people and they will gladly offer you rum-based advice on how to cure just about anything. In Jamaica, for example, rum is used to cure colds, ward off evil spirits, christen newborns and purify the dead. Have you got a chill? Rub over-proof rum on your forehead! Feel a cold coming on? Mix two ounces of rum with two tablespoons of honey and the juice of one lime, mix it up, knock it back and get in bed. If building a house, you will be advised to sprinkle a bottle of rum around the house after the foundation has been built to keep away the "duppies" (evil spirits).

Rum in Jamaica is in peoples' lives starting from birth (when expectant mothers bring with them a bottle to the hospital), to death, when friends and relatives hold a "Nine Nights" vigil and drink White Over-Proof. In Richard Ligon's "True and Exact History of Barbadoes," he describes the use of a "dram cup" of rum at the plantation's apothecaries to cure chills among "our Negroes" and "our Christian servants too."

There is a very popular rum drink in the Dominican Republic called "Mamajuana" (or "Damajuana"), which, depending on the addition of particular ingredients, can be used as a popular cure for everything from digestive problems to virility.

In St. Lucia (in the British West Indies), it is believed by many that peanuts have aphrodisiac effects on those who consume them. It was only natural that they would combine peanuts with rum to produce a very popular rum cream, known as "Nutz N Rum".

Another aphrodisiac, popular around the Caribbean, is Bois Bandé, which is the bark of the tree Roupala Montana (from the Proteaceae family). People usually mix the bark of this tree with rum, let it soak for a couple of weeks and then filter and drink the rum. This same tree is known in Dominica as "gimauve" or "gommier tree", in Costa Rica as "danto amarillo" or "zorillo" and in Brazil "carne de vaca".



About Sugarcane

Sugarcane is a tall tropical perennial plant of the genus *Saccharum*. It belongs in the grass family (Gramineae), and is native to Asia. Along with the other members (grains like wheat, rice, corn, oats, barley, rye, pasture plants like sorghum and bluegrass, reed and bamboo, etc.), sugarcane makes this the most important botanical family in the world from an economic perspective.

The sugar extraction process is divided into four main stages:

1. Sugarcane production in the fields
2. The harvesting and transportation of the cane
3. Sugar extraction
4. The coordination of the previous three steps

Once it has been determined that the crops have reached maturity, it is time to harvest. The actual harvest can be done manually, which is very labor intensive and slow, or mechanically, which requires expensive machinery but is very fast. Harvesting can also involve setting the cane fields on fire first to facilitate manual cutting of the cane, a practice that is controversial and even discouraged by some companies. While fire burns razor-sharp sugarcane leaves and also drives snakes and other animals away, it also causes the cane to lose some of its internal moisture, making it harder to squeeze the sugar out of it.

Harvest time is known as "zafra" in Spanish-speaking countries. In Barbados, the "Crop Over" festival celebrates the end of a successful sugarcane harvest. It begins with the ceremonial delivery of the "Last Canes" and the crowning of the King and Queen of the Festival, who are the most productive male and female cane cutters of the season. In most countries, the time of the sugarcane harvest is usually planned around the rain season. It should begin at the end of the rain season, and stop when the mud of the new rain makes it impossible for trucks to enter the fields. As the sugarcane approaches maturity, its sugar concentration starts to increase, when it reaches its ceiling (the point of highest concentration), then it starts to decrease. Different varieties of sugarcane will mature at different intervals depending on the weather. To optimize production, crops are monitored frequently as they approach maturity to determine when they have reached the highest possible sugar yield.

When the sugarcane leaves the fields, about 10 to 13.5% of its weight is sugar. It is now ready to have its juice extracted, a process which consists of:

Wash: the cane is washed to remove dirt, dust, or loose material that does not contain sugar.

Preparation: the sugarcane is mechanically chopped into small pieces, then the fiber is removed. The amount of sugar extracted is directly related to the quality of the preparation it receives at this stage.

Milling: the cane is crushed under the weight of large and heavy wheels. During the crushing, water is added to dilute and displace the cane juice. These mills are usually powered by steam engines, which burn the bagasse (remaining pieces of cane left after the crushing), heating water, which in turn generates the steam.

Filtering: the juice obtained from the milling is filtered to remove any cane residue. After the juice has been extracted from the sugarcane, it undergoes a clarification process, where solids in suspension are removed. At this time, the concentration of sugar in the juice is about 16%.



Sugarcane derivatives, such as its juice, virgin honey (cane syrup), and molasses contain a large number of minerals and non-sugar organic compounds. These compounds are essential in the production of rum since many of the flavors and aromas characteristics of rum originate from them. To put it plainly, without sugarcane, there is no rum!

The Sugarcane Revolution: Triangular Trade

The proliferation of sugarcane throughout the Caribbean Islands and the American continent is far from being a story of peace and joy. The demand (mainly European) for sugar fueled the trade of slaves needed to cultivate the sweet grass. Sugar represented the largest source of income for most estates, and slaves were a crucial element needed for the arduous work involved in cultivating sugarcane.

A typical slave trading arrangement followed a triangular pattern. On the first leg of the journey, a ship called a slaver was loaded with salt, cloth, weapons, hardware, beads, and rum. It sailed from a port in Europe to a port in Africa, usually one along the western coast. There, the ship's captain traded the cargo for Africans who had been enslaved. On the second leg of the journey, the grueling "middle passage" that lasted 10 or more weeks, the Africans were loaded into the slaver's hold and shipped across the Atlantic. Often in chains, they were packed so tightly that they could not even lie down. Once in the New World, Africans were either sold immediately to plantation owners or placed in stockades to be auctioned off when the demand was greater. To conclude the triangular trade, exotic plantation products such as sugar, molasses, tobacco, and rum were loaded into the slaver's now empty hold and shipped to Europe to be sold.

The Numbers Game

The number of human beings victimized by the slave trade was very high. Although estimates vary, at least 10 million Africans were supplied to plantations in the Western Hemisphere over a 400-year period, not counting the ones that died along the way--according to estimates, 15 to 25 of every 100 people loaded onto the ships. The greatest numbers were carried to the Caribbean and to Brazil, where the largest plantations were located. Smaller numbers were sent to British North America and Spanish Middle America. Not until the early nineteenth century did the slave trade begin to diminish, thanks partly to growing sentiment against the traffic in human beings and partly to the fact that the technology of the Industrial Revolution was making slavery obsolete. The trade was made illegal in the United States and in Britain's colonies in 1807. In 1833 the British parliament passed a law abolishing slavery in all British territories. Britain tried to force other nations to follow its example by posting British warships to patrol the coasts of Africa and to seize slavers and free their human cargoes. But many slavers continued to slip through the British blockade. The slave trade did not completely end until the New World countries passed laws freeing their own slaves, as did the United States in 1865 and Brazil in 1888.

Types of Rum

Based on sugarcane processing:

- 1) Rums made from 100% pure sugarcane juice. Most French West Indies countries (Martinique, Guadeloupe, etc.) belong to this school of thought. In these countries sugarcane is not cultivated to produce sugar, but rather to produce rum (or "Rhum" as it is called in French). French Rhums will be explored in detail in Lesson 6.
- 2) Rums made from sugarcane derivatives (cane syrup and varying grades of molasses). Most of the rum produced in the world belongs in this category. Sugarcane producers obtain their income first from extracting sugar crystals from the cane juice, then from the distilleries when the remaining molasses is sold to them.



Based on their distillation method:

1) Pot Still Rums (Batch Distilled Rums). When European settlers first arrived in the Caribbean islands, many brought with them knowledge and experience in Brandy making. When these brandy skills were first applied to the sugarcane juice, the result was rum. A basic pot still consists of three parts: the kettle, where the liquid mixture is boiled, the condenser, which cools down the vapors coming from the kettle, and the gooseneck, which connects the kettle to the condenser. The liquid obtained from this type of distillation is also known as "single distillate," since it is processed through the still only once. In order to achieve higher alcohol content and a cleaner final product, this liquid is processed a second time, thus producing a "double distillate". Most pot still rums produced today are double distillates or "double distilled".

2) Column Still Rums (Continuously Distilled Rums). The continuous distillation system was created in an attempt to make the distillation process more consistent. It also reduced the amount of work required to process each batch, thus allowing for higher volumes of alcohol to be produced. A distillation column is constructed much like a vertical maze, made up of a number of horizontal trays placed at different levels throughout the column. Here the fermented liquid mixture is introduced into the column at its highest level while steam is introduced at its lowest level. As the liquid makes its way down the column, it is heated by the surrounding steam, and the alcohol in the mix is vaporized. Once it reaches the bottom of the column, the "wash" contains no alcohol and is removed through a release valve. The saturated steam is collected from the top of the column and is then cooled down, allowing it to condense. Another version of the Continuous Distillation Columns Still is the "Coffey Still," initially developed in 1826 by Robert Stein, but later perfected by Aeneas Coffey. This still consists of two or more columns, one working exactly as described above. An exception is when the saturated vapor released from the first column is condensed and then introduced into the second column and redistilled to achieve a higher level of purity in the alcohol than is possible with a single column.

Based on their final presentation:

Rums can be grouped into the following six categories, based on the distillation, blending and aging techniques employed in their production: White Rums, Golden Rums, Premium (very old or rare) Rums, Over-Proof (high alcohol content) Rums, Black Rums and Spiced and Flavored Rums.

The Importance of Smell - Following Your Nose to Rum Mastery

Becoming a rum connoisseur requires many different types of skills. The most important one is smell. Olfaction, as the sense of smell is formally referred to, is among the most primitive functions in an evolutionary sense and is present in the lower animals as an essential function for survival. Although olfaction is not usually as critical for human survival, it is essential in the production and in the serious enjoyment of rum.

How does olfaction work?

Nerve endings that are a direct extension of the brain are present in the roof of the interior of the nose and are stimulated by the molecules' odors that are inhaled and contact these nerve cells. The nerve endings then transmit electric impulses to the brain, broadcasting the details of the substance inhaled.



What about taste?

Gustation, as the sense of taste is formally referred to, is performed by specialized cells and taste buds located in the tongue, mouth and throat. Many are located in the bumps and prolongations of the surface of the tongue. Food substance molecules contact these cells and true nerve fibers stimulate the brain to give the perception of taste. Experts differ in their assessments, but the majority suggests that between 80 and 90 percent of taste comes from smell.

OK, so what is a flavor?

The experience of a flavor is the result of a combination of the sense of smell, the sense of taste, and the sense of chemical perception (horseradish's stinging, menthol's coolness or the perceived heat of spices).

Are our reactions to smells learned or are there odors that produce innate reactions on humans?

According to Trygg Engen, author of the book "Odor Sensation and Memory," prior to our initial experience, odors are hedonically neutral, neither pleasant nor unpleasant. The hedonic quality of a particular odor is determined only by the situational context in which the odor was first perceived: an odor becoming forever bound to the pleasantness (or unpleasantness) of that initial experience. An important observation made by Engen is that odors serve as quick and efficient "index keys" for our memory retrieval system. By creating tight bonds between an odor and a particular memory, we can rapidly search our memory database to determine whether a particular odor was previously associated with a positive or negative situation. This allows us to quickly react to stimuli without having to constantly make conscious decisions.

The research on olfaction has enjoyed several breakthroughs, not least because of developments of new methods in neurophysiology, biochemistry and molecular biology. For instance, it has been shown that olfactory cells have receptor proteins in the membrane, which have similarities with the photo pigment in the retina. When proteins in the mucus (surrounding medium) transport odorants, they elicit a cascade of intracellular reactions that trigger the nerve impulses, much like when we observe the world through our eyes.

Why is it important to develop one's olfaction?

Since, as we mentioned earlier, eighty to ninety percent of taste is smell, a well-developed sense of smell can accurately interpret a rum's aroma while detecting and discerning its components. Furthermore, when having to test dozens, even hundreds of samples, the sense of taste can become tired quickly. Anyone having to taste that many samples will also be subject to the unforgiving effects of consuming large amounts of alcohol. For these reasons, relying on a well developed sense of smell is crucial for those seeking to develop an expertise in the world of rum or any other beverage.

Are all rums ready to be smelled right out of the bottle?

Not quite. There are several schools of thought when it comes to testing distilled products. Some people advocate smelling products at their bottle strength, while others always insist in diluting the samples to about 20 percent alcohol by volume. In the rum industry, where the bottle strength of rum is -unfortunately- not yet regulated, it does not make sense to advocate the nosing of samples at bottle strength. Different rums, depending on their style, will have varying bottle strengths, from 12 percent alcohol by volume (ABV) to about 76% ABV.



Hands On Exercise 1

Select one or more bottles of rum from your pantry/bar. If possible use rums with around 40% ABV (80-Proof). Pour two ounces in each of two snifters. Add two ounces of water to one of the snifters and cover both snifters with coasters, napkins or small plates. Next proceed to swirl each sample prior to removing its cover and smelling it. Repeat as many times as necessary until you can detect the different aromas emanating from both samples. If you can't detect any differences, try again with another rum, preferably a non-white rum which has been aged.

Hands On Exercise 2 - The Rum Essence Kit

It is strongly recommended that all students either create their own Rum Essence Kit or purchase one from the Campus Store. If you'd like to make your own kit, follow these directions:

You will need:

Six small jars, approximately 4 ounces each
One bottle (750ml to 1 Ltr) of White Rum, preferably Puerto Rican or Cuban style
Oak chips (enough to almost fill the entire jar)
1 fresh vanilla bean
Food-grade molasses
1 Cinnamon stick
Assorted dry fruits (raisins, currants, pineapple, etc.)

Directions:

Fill the first jar with white rum by itself, this will be your "base" aroma. Label this jar "White Rum".
Fill the second jar with the oak chips. Then add enough rum to cover the chips. Label this jar "Oak".
Place the vanilla bean, folded or in pieces, inside the third jar. Add rum and label this jar "Vanilla".
Add 2 ounces of molasses to the fourth jar and fill with rum. Label this jar "Molasses".
Place the cinnamon stick, whole or in pieces, inside the fifth jar and fill it with rum. Label this jar "Cinnamon".
Add the assorted dry fruits to the last jar, fill it up with rum and label it "Fruit".
You may create additional jars following the above steps for items such as: Nut Meg, Butterscotch, Raisins, etc.

Allow approximately 1 week for the rum to extract essential oils and essences from the ingredients in the jar. We will refer to these jars throughout the next 11 lessons.

From the Rum Bar: Featured Cocktail (Rum And Coke, Cuba Libre)

Perhaps the easiest rum-based cocktail, the "Rum and Coke" is also one of the least understood. Most bars that serve it use only white rum. Some people argue that using anything older or more sophisticated is a waste of rum. Well, depending on the quality of the white rum used, sometimes a poorly made "Rum and Coke" is a waste of Coke too!

The perfect "Rum and Coke" will vary depending on the alcohol strength desired by the consumer. For the most part, 1 1/2 to 2 oz. of rum (80-Proof) will be mixed with 6 oz. of Coke. The drink will be poured and served on the rocks. Try both



combinations (1 1/2 and then 2 oz.) and determine which one you like best. Once you determine your preferred alcohol strength, substitute the type of rum used. Try a white rum, followed by a golden rum, then a dark and finally a spiced or flavored rum. When trying several rums in succession, it is very important to always go from light to dark, from less sweet to sweeter. If you use rums with different alcohol strengths (such as Over-Proof rums), you will have to alter the proportion of rum to coke to maintain the strength of the final product. For example, using 2 oz. of 80-Proof rum with 6 oz. of Coke, gives you a total of 8 oz. of liquid with a final strength of 20-Proof. Here is a mathematical way for you to calculate the strength of a cocktail:

$$\text{Strength of Cocktail} = [\text{Proof of Rum}] \times [\text{Oz. of Rum}] / [\text{Total oz. in finished drink}]$$

If you want to maintain the same strength while using a 151-Proof rum, you'll have to modify the equation slightly:

$$\text{Oz. of Rum needed} = [\text{Strength of Cocktail}] \times [\text{Total oz.}] / [\text{Proof of Rum}]$$

Which gives us: 1.05 oz. of Over-Proof needed.

So what is a "Cuba Libre"? It is a "Rum and Coke" with a twist, literally. Simply add a twist of lime to the finished drink and your "Rum and Coke" is instantly converted into a "Cuba Libre".

Lesson I Questionnaire:

1. What are the six categories rum can be grouped in based on distillation, blending and aging techniques?
2. After the juice has been extracted from the sugarcane, what is the next process? What occurs in this process?
3. When the sugarcanes leave the fields, how much of their weight is actually sugar?
4. By now we know that rum is older than Whisky, but is it older than Brandy?
5. If you owned your own sugarcane fields and distillery, which type of rum would be the most expensive to make? Which would be the cheapest?
6. Why is it important to work with a Rum Essence Kit?

The answers to these questions will appear on Lesson II.



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- 1) To educate people around the world about the many faces of Rum.
- 2) To help rum Distillers, Blenders, Importers and Resellers spread the word about their wonderful products.
- 3) To promote the responsible and sensible enjoyment of what is perhaps the world's most underrated distilled spirit today.

