

THE **Rum** UNIVERSITY

Rum Appreciation In The 21st Century

Lesson VI



Lesson VI: French Rhums - Agricultural vs. Industrial Methods

Vocabulary Primer

Rhum: French for “Rum”. When this word is found on a bottle label, it is almost a guarantee that the rum inside has been made in the French West Indies and, unless followed by the word “Industrielle”, it indicates the rum was produced from 100% sugarcane juice. The following words are often found following the word “Rhum”:

Vieux: French for “Old” or “Aged”. As in **Rhum Vieux**, “Aged Rum”. The adjective “Trés” can also be found preceding the word “Vieux” as in **Trés Vieux**, meaning “Very Old”.

Agricole and **Industrielle** mean “Agricultural” and “Industrial” respectively. They refer to the raw material employed in the production of the rum. If the rum is produced from 100% sugarcane juice, then it is called “Rhum Agricole”. If it is made from molasses it is called “Rhum Industrielle.” **Rhum Agricole** is also known as **Habitant Rum**.

Ambré and **Blanc** refer to the color of the rum and mean “Amber” and “White” respectively.

Origins of Rhum Agricole

French Rum or “Rhum Agricole” was born in the French West Indies, a group of nations comprised of St. Bartholomew (St. Bart), Guadeloupe, Les Saintes and Martinique. The people of these islands started harvesting sugarcane for sugar production since the French settled in Martinique in 1635.

Around 1650, Father Du Tertre arrived in Martinique and began experimenting with a rudimentary still. In 1694 Father Jean Baptiste Labat continued Father Du Tertre’s labor and shipped a Cognac still from France to Martinique, then set out to modify and adapt the still for the distillation of rum. Some history books incorrectly claim that Father Labat invented the still, which had already been in use for centuries in Europe.

Up until this time, rum was produced using molasses, as the driving force of the economy was sugar export. At the end of the 19th century, however, confronted with the collapse of the price of sugar, alternatives were sought. Here for the first time plantation owners considered producing a new rum by distilling the fresh, fermented cane juice. This was the birth of Rhum Agricole.



Father Labat's Interest In Rum

In 1694, when a young Dominican priest, Father Labat, arrived in the newly founded French colony of Martinique, he found a tumultuous world where pirates ships hunted for Spanish galleons and where kings of France and England battled for control of the new colony. A completely new life had begun for Father Labat.

This young priest, who had been a quiet professor In Mathematics and Philosophy in a Parisian convent, soon became quite an adventurer. He organized several campaigns with his pirate friends and set up secret supply bases for them. As a ship captain, he fought against the British navy. He also discovered new territories and organized sugar production and trading post within them.

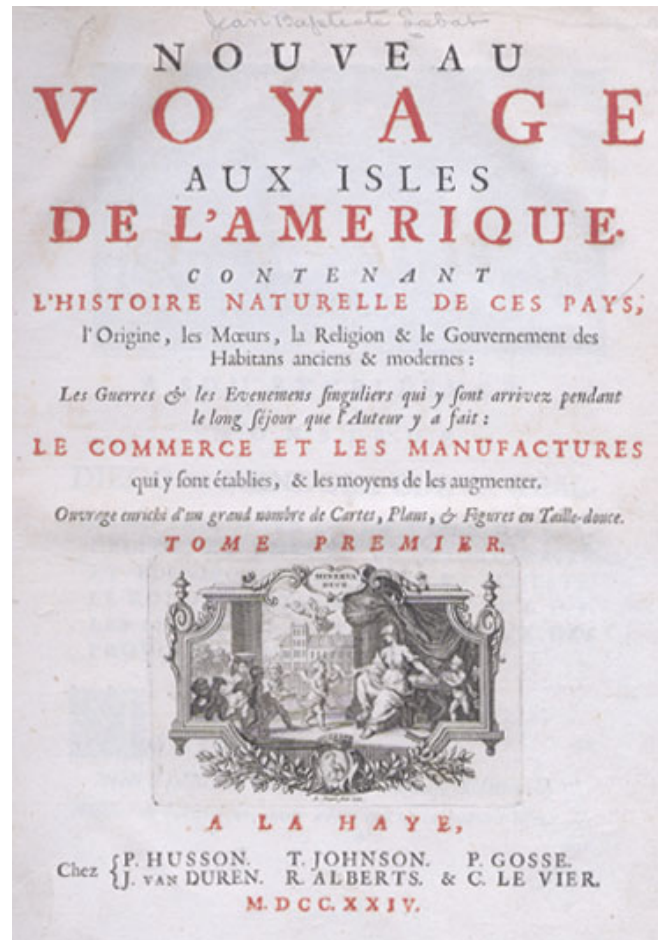
The story of his life is well known since this holy man was a talented writer. His illustrious book "Nouveau Voyage aux Isles de L'Amerique" or "New Journey to the Islands of America", printed in the 17th century, was a best seller in his time, and remains one of the finest testimonies of those troubled times.



During one of his expeditions, Father Labat fell ill with the Maltese Fever. As his fever worsened, one of his clerks decided to give him a medicinal recipe made by the local Caribbean Indians. This tonic, derived from the sugar cane alcohol, was named "Kaniche", and had been fermented in masticated green tobacco leaves. Although the strange Kaniche and tobacco mixture has never been medically proven to cure "Maltese Fever", Father Labat nonetheless quickly recovered.

After his sudden recovery, he put all his energies into studying and refining this rough beverage which he believed saved his life. In a few years, he completely reorganized the method of culturing the sugar cane. He invented a vertically rotating mill for pounding the sugar cane that bears his name. He designed a special copper pot for cane juice distillation. He also organized the process of heating the cane sugar juice in different kettles where it was reduced and cooked before fermentation.

The incredible work of Father Labat can be compared to what Dom Pérignon did for Champagne centuries ago, and makes this unusual man the "Father of Rum".



Father Labat's Traditional Method for Sugar Production

In the traditional method, the chain of operations goes through a succession of six boilers of about four feet in diameter, each with specific name and function : the sugar cane is first gathered in the **Grande**, then it goes into the **Propre** where it is clarified, then into the **Flambeau** where it is reduced a first time, then into the **Sirop** and, finally, the syrup thus obtained is cooked for the last time in the **Batterie**. Once this is done, the liquid sugar is poured into large wooden vats, called "coolers", where it is cooled and where it crystallizes. The cool sugar – or cooked mass – is placed into containers that are pierced with holes to allow the syrup to flow through. At the end of four weeks, the sugar is purged of all its syrup and ready for export. The syrup is collected to be distilled and to produce rum.

Rum and the Battle for Diamond Rock

In 1804, during one of the many wars between Britain and France, the British had occupied a small strategic island located on the southwestern coast of Martinique called Diamond Rock, which allowed them easy access to all incoming vessels. According to history, the British manned the small island against all odds for 17 months. Legend has it that as a last attempt by the French to reclaim the island, casks of rum were set afloat from a local distillery (Trois Rivières plantation) for ocean currents to carry them to Diamond Rock. The British defenders could not resist. They tasted, enjoyed and eventually abused the rum. The following day, when the French battled to remove the British from their prized position, they found very little resistance. Legend or not, the site has been known ever since as H. M. S. (His Majesty's Ship) Diamond Rock.

Rhum Agricole from an Organoleptic Perspective

In previous lessons we discussed the importance of having a high concentration of fermentable sugars in the molasses selected as the base for rum production. When we ferment rum straight from sugarcane juice, the concentration of fermentable sugar is as high as nature allows. Fermenting raw juice, however, has its disadvantages: freshly produced juice starts to ferment naturally almost immediately after being extracted from the cane. The juice does not store well, which means that production must:

- a) take place immediately after extraction and
- b) can only occur during sugarcane harvest season

But despite the disadvantages, producing Rhum Agricole also has its advantages:

- a) It produces an extremely fruity, very aromatic rum with many herbal and floral hints that are rarely found in molasses-based rums.
- b) The cost associated with its production does not depend on the international price of sugar, so cost management is a bit simpler.



Rhum Drinking Traditions in Martinique

(courtesy of www.rhumdemartinique.com)

In accordance with local tradition, rum has earned much respect. During a certain period, there were precise times and names allocated for its consumption. Our elders have conjured up their furthest memories to unveil a few of their secrets.

Early in the morning, before breakfast, at around 5:00 am, the day began with a "décollage" (take-off) or a shot of what was also known as a "mise à feu", (launching) for a bright awakening – a must for starting the day of the Martinican laborer.

By 9:00 o'clock, it was time for the rum "punch". Generally, this is a shot of pure rum, a "sec" or a "feu" (rum plus zest of lime and 13 sugar cubes).

At 11:00 o'clock came the "ti-lagoutte", little drop of rum, a foretaste of the lunch-time 'ti punch' aperitif.

At approximately half past twelve, it was time for tasting the little "ti 50%" at the table with friends, which was supposed to represent half of the preceding drink.

The ritual was constant and had to be executed by the consumer himself (no one ever served a local rum punch to anyone else): the syrup was poured, the zest pressed after which the rum was added. To stir the mixture (this was called "douceir"), the glass was lifted by the ends of the fingers and gently stirred counter-clockwise.

Once the "punch" was drunk (according to tradition, this had to be done in three sips), it was followed by the "crase", the soothing cold after the heat of the fire. When the "décollage" is followed by a coconut water "crase", it's called the "cocoyage" and if it's a cider-like "mabi" drink, this was known as "mabyage". More simply, with still or bubbly water, each had his own technique for calming the rum's fire.

At 3:00 pm, it was time for the "l'heure du Christ" (Christ time) and at 5:00 o'clock came the "ti pape" (little Pope).

But, already in the beginning of the afternoon the "à toute heure" (at anytime) was drunk, as desired. This was also called the "ti-feu", (little flame) or the "ti-sec" (a shot of dry), or a CRS: Citron-Rhum-Sirop (Lime-Rum-Syrup) for the road. And we mustn't forget the "pété-pié" (break a leg), a veritable kick in the shins which led straight to good nap; then the evening "ti-punch" and finally, the "partante"(final departure).

Hence, a typical day in the life of a rum enthusiast in days gone by "an tan lontan", comes to an end. In the present day, rum consumption is, of course, much more moderate, but the "ti-punch" still remains an important part of life and culture in Martinique.



Hands-On Exercise

For this exercise you will need:

2 (or more) types of Rhum Agricole

For each type of Rhum Agricole, one molasses-based counterpart. In other words, if you find a Rhum Blanc and a 3 Year Old Rhum Vieux, then you will also need a molasses-based White Rum and one that is 3 years old.

1 snifter for each rum (minimum of 4 sniffers)

If you completed the Hands-on Exercise from Lesson II you already have some of the rums you need for this exercise. In this exercise we will explore the differences between sugarcane juice-based rum compared to molasses-based rum. As you may have already noticed after simply looking at the rums through their bottles, color is not going to be of much help this time around, as the color can be regulated and controlled independently of the raw materials used.

First we will start with the White Rums. Compare the alcohol strength of both samples. If the strength of both products is very close, then continue. Otherwise you may want to lower the strength of the strongest rum by adding a small amount of tap or distilled water. Based on your personal experience as a result from Lesson II's exercise, you may proceed at around 40% ABV or you may lower the samples down to about 20% ABV.

Pour two ounces of the molasses-based rum into a snifter and cover it. Follow the same steps employed in Lesson II to fully analyze the aroma of this sample (cover, swirl and uncover). When you are satisfied with your assessment of the molasses-based white rum, then repeat the same steps with the cane juice sample.

Keep a piece of paper handy to write down your impressions as you go along. What is the dominant aroma in the molasses-based rum? How about the cane juice one?

Once you are ready to taste the rums, return to the molasses one first, try it, make mental notes if needed and then move on to the cane juice one. What is the dominant flavor present in each one? How about the aftertaste? By now you are beginning to realize just how different these two styles really are.

Once you are done with the White Rums, repeat the same process with aged ones, always starting with the molasses-based product first and finishing with the cane juice one. You may want to rinse your mouth with water in between rounds to make sure your palate has time to relax and clean itself.

Those who've never tried Agricole Rhums before usually have a hard time getting used to the aromas and flavors. It is a common process and, to make you feel better, it also works the other way around: those who have grown up drinking Rhum Agricole also have a hard time adjusting to molasses-based rums. So be patient, be open to new experiences and you will enjoy the result.



From the Rum Bar: Featured Cocktail

Ti-Punch #1

- 1/4 Tbsp. Cane Sugar Syrup
- 1 oz. White Martiniquen or Guadeloupian Rum
- 1 Ice Cube
- 1 Lemon, zested

Place the sugar syrup in a small wine glass, add the rum, an ice cube, and the twisted lemon zest. Yields 1 serving.

Ti-Punch #2

- 1 Slice of Lime or Lemon (squeeze it and throw in the glass)
- 1 Part Sugarcane Syrup (or sugar)
- 2 Parts White Rum

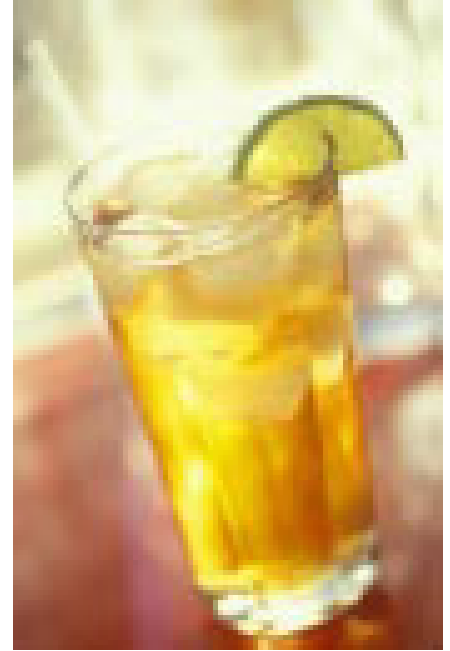
Ti-Punch #3

- 2 oz. White Rum
- 1 oz. Sugar Syrup
- 1 Fresh Lime

Wash the lime, remove top and bottom, and thinly slice into half rings. In an old-fashioned glass add lime pieces to glass and crush with the flat end of a barspoon. Add rum and sugar syrup, top with broken ice, and muddle together. Add a short straw, and serve.

Ti-Punch #4

- 1 Tbsp. Cane Syrup
- 1 Dash Lime (and a piece of zest)
- 2 oz. White or Amber Colored Rum



Lesson 6 Questionnaire

Q: Why was Father Labat so interested in Rum?

Q: Why is Father Labat considered by some to be the "Father of Rum"?

Q: What are some of the advantages of producing Rhum Agricole?

Q: What are some of the disadvantages?

Q: Why is it that one can't tell the difference between cane juice rum and molasses rum just by looking at them?

Q: Which rum has more floral and fruity elements in the bouquet, cane juice or molasses?

Q: What are the key ingredients needed to make a Ti Punch?

Answers to Lesson 5 Questionnaire

Q: Who is attributed with inventing the double boiler?

A: "Maria the Jewess" a great chemist of the 3rd Century. She was attributed with inventing the "kerotakis," which is the earliest form of a double-boiler recorded in history.

Q: Which type of still (pot vs. column) allows for the fastest distillation of alcohol?

A: Column stills, because they do not have to distill each batch individually and allow for the removal of volatile sulfur compounds and other undesirable elements or "fractions", thus the alcohol comes out much cleaner.



Q: Which type of still (pot vs. column) gives the distiller greater control over the characteristics of the final product?

A: The column still because it gives the distiller the ability to remove fractions.

Q: Which type of still (pot vs. column) is less expensive to acquire?

A: A pot still because they are smaller, simple and easy to maintain.

Q: Can pot stills and column stills be combined?

A: Yes, you can combine a pot still with a rectifying column.

Q: In terms of alcohol strength, are "Light" rums weaker than "Heavy" rums?

A: Absolutely not! Regardless of type of rum consumed, as long as the alcohol strength is the same then they will have the same effect on the body. For example, a light 80-Proof rum has the same effect on the body as a heavy 80-Proof rum.

Q: In Lesson 2 we listed the top four rum brands in the USA. How many of these companies use pot stills and how many use column stills to produce their rums?

A: Bacardi, Captain Morgan, Castillo and Ronrico all use column stills.



*The
Bermudaful
Spirit*



BLACK SEAL
BERMUDA
BLACK RUM

The Legend of Black Seal

In the spring of 1806 London Wine and Spirits merchant William Gosling chartered the ship Mercury, loaded it with his son James and £10,000 worth of merchandise, and sent them off to America. After ninety one days on becalmed seas the charter ran out, and they put in at the nearest port - St. George's, Bermuda. Determined to make the best of uncertain circumstances, James opened a shop on the King's Parade, St. George's, in December 1806.



Around 1850, after much experimental blending, a distinctive black rum was offered for sale. Smooth and flavorful, at first it was simply called, "Old Rum". Until the First World War it was sold straight from the barrel. Eventually, Old Rum was offered in Champagne bottles reclaimed from the British Officer's Mess, with corks sealed with black wax. Soon people began asking for the rum with the "black seal". Thirty years later, a play on words gave birth to the little, barrel juggling "Black Seal" and a tradition got its name.

Over the centuries Black Seal has become synonymous with Bermudian culture. It is used to christen newly constructed buildings in a ceremony called a Roof Wetting; it is an essential ingredient in Bermuda fish chowder, adds the island flavor to Bermuda Rum Swizzle, and is the tempest in Bermuda's favorite cocktail – the Dark 'n Stormy.

Dark 'N Stormy

Bermuda's "national drink" had its start in the highly successful ginger beer factory run as a subsidiary to the Royal Naval Officer's Club. It wasn't long before it was discovered that a splash of the local black rum was just what the piquant ginger beer was missing. The name is said to have originated when an old sailor, holding aloft the thunderhead in a glass, observed that the drink was the "color of a cloud only a fool or a dead man would sail under." Probably followed by, "Barman, I'll have another – Dark 'n Stormy".

If you've never experienced the taste sensation of a Dark 'N Stormy, now is the time to try! Just put ice cubes in a highball glass, add 1.5 oz of Black Seal, and top with ginger beer.

Cooking with Black Seal

Black Seal is a vital ingredient in many culinary dishes from appetizers to deserts. Bermuda's Curious Cook (Ed Bottone), has recorded many of Bermuda's traditional recipes along with some new Black Seal recipes and published them in the cookbook "Spirit of Bermuda". Black Seal adds its particular flavour to enhance hundreds of recipes. It is essential in Bermuda Fish Chowder, adds fire to barbecue sauces, and creates a sumptuous Dark 'N Stormy flambé when combined with ginger beer and bananas.

Unique Among Rums

Black Seal has consistently been "highly recommended" and "No. 1" in rum tastings all over the world. It has regularly out-scored products such as Bacardi 8, Bacardi Select, Cruzan Single Barrel Estate, Mount Gay Extra Old, Myers's Rich Rare and Pompero Aniversario. Black Seal Rum was awarded GOLD in both the Rum Fest 2001 and 2002. In the WORLD SPIRITS CHAMPIONSHIPS, conducted by the Beverage Tasting Institute, Gosling's Black Seal Rum was awarded a Platinum Medal In a blind taste test consisting of an extensive collection of world class rums, Black Seal was rated "96" out of a possible "100" and "Best Buy".

Black Seal is now widely available in the United States, Canada, Japan, the UK and Italy. For more distributor information, please contact us through our web site www.blackseal.com.