

THE Rum UNIVERSITY

Rum Appreciation In The 21st Century

Lesson VIII



Lesson VIII - Premium Rums Part I: From the Early Years to Maturity

Vocabulary Primer

Premium

Etymology: Latin *praemium*, booty, profit, reward, from *prae* + *emere* to take, buy. In English, the word “Premium” can be used as both a noun and an adjective. When used to describe a term such as a “Premium Rum” it is being employed as an adjective, and that is the definition we will focus on. As such, it is commonly used to define something of superior quality (meaning “better”) or value (meaning “more expensive”).

Super

Adjective. 1) Very large, great, or extreme, or 2) Excellent; first-rate.

Ultra

Adjective. Immoderately adhering to a belief, fashion, or course of action; extreme.

What exactly is a “Premium Rum”?

As you can see from the above definitions the terms, “Premium”, “Super Premium” or “Ultra Premium” have no intrinsic meaning.

Before we take on the true meaning of a Premium Rum, let us evaluate a few famous quotes on the art of marketing:

“I have discovered the most exciting, the most arduous literary form of all, the most difficult to master, the most pregnant in curious possibilities. I mean the advertisement... It is far easier to write ten passably effective Sonnets, good enough to take in the not too inquiring critic, than one effective advertisement that will take in a few thousand of the uncritical buying public.”
Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), British author. On the Margin, "Advertisement" (1923).

“The trade of advertising is now so near perfection that it is not easy to propose any improvement. But as every art ought to be exercised in due subordination to the public good, I cannot but propose it as a moral question to these masters of the public ear, whether they do not sometimes play too wantonly with our passions.”
Samuel Johnson (1709-84), English author, lexicographer.

“The art of advertisement, after the American manner, has introduced into all our life such a lavish use of superlatives, that no standard of value whatever is intact.”
Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957), British author, painter.

Rum. All Grown Up.



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Reality vs. Marketing

Over the past few years, marketing departments around the globe have been very busy appending superlatives to their products. Terms such as “Premium,” “Super Premium” and even “Ultra Premium” are now used to describe numerous aged rums. In many cases these fancy titles are eagerly appointed to rums that have been around for decades, as if they were long lost relatives of royal families now coming forward to claim their lineage.

The image that these marketing companies are trying to communicate, is that the rum you hold in your hands is “better than normal,” or that it is “above the rest in quality and price.” That, after all, is the definition of the adjectives themselves.

Reality, on the other hand, is simpler and more direct. Rum companies need to adhere to commercial and economic principles just like any other business. They will seek the highest possible margin of profit for their products while trying to maintain and increase their share of the market.

If you’ve been with us since the beginning of this course, you now know very well the benefits and drawbacks of aging rum (refer to Lesson II). As a reminder, the most important benefit is the chemical transformation that alcohol undergoes while inside the barrel. The most important drawback is the loss of rum due to evaporation/perspiration.

Figure I on page 5 shows a simplified model of how any amount of rum decreases over time as it is aged. If aged long enough, all rum will eventually disappear. How long does it take for the total evaporation to occur? The answer depends on many variables including: air temperature, circulation and humidity, condition of the barrels, rum volume vs. barrel surface ratio, etc. The pink box represents an imaginary time frame within which rum companies typically sell their products as “premium rums.”

Let’s take this notion a step further by adding “Profit” and “Quality” variables. The chart now looks like Figure II. As you can see, profits are affected by the quality and the quantity of the product available. When the rum is young, the quality is low, and the quantity is high. As the rum ages, its quality goes up, but, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the volume goes down. Less volume means less rum will be sold to consumers, which means less profit, even if the price of the rum is higher than it was when it was un-aged. In an unrealistic scenario, if the rum was allowed to age until it reached total evaporation, there would be nothing left to sell!

It is the job of the rum producers to evaluate their costs, their aging environmental variables and determine where the Point of Diminishing Returns (PDR) exists for them. Because different companies are located in different regions, each with a slightly different climate and because each uses slightly different production methods, each company’s PDR will be different. But why is all this important? Because, as we mentioned earlier, companies need to keep an eye on the bottom line. They will not sell a product that is not profitable for them.

OK, so what are Premium Rums? Premium Rums are products that are as close to the PDR as companies are comfortable approaching. Through passionate and skillful work, the Master Blenders take the financial requirements of the distillery into account and produce the best possible rum. Since each company is different from others, it is impossible to define “Premium” in terms of an actual age or price range. So while marketing campaigns try to convince you that a particular rum is “as good as it gets,” reality tells us instead that the rum is really only as good as the producer can afford to produce it, sell it and still make a profit.



FIGURE I

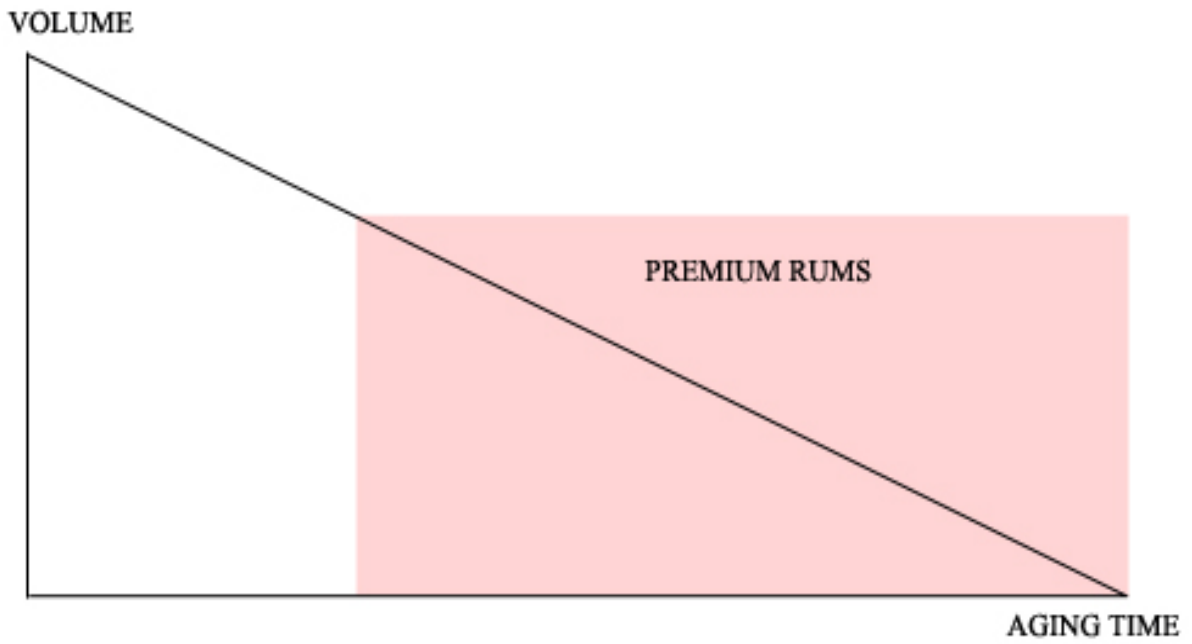
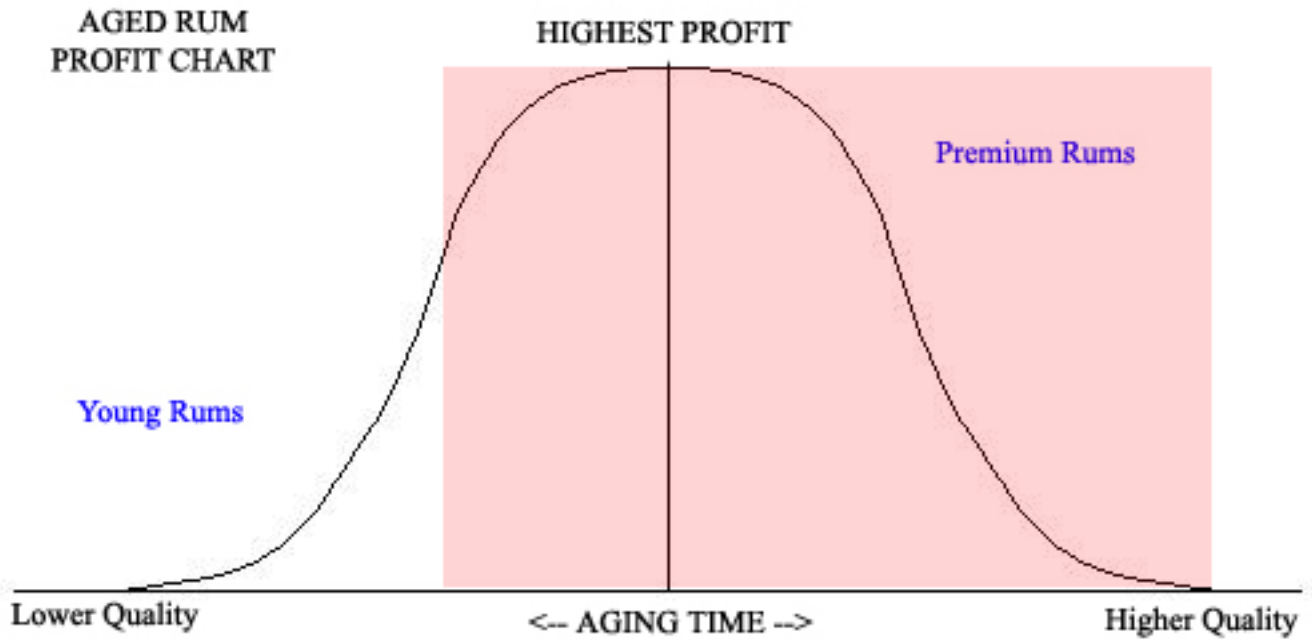


FIGURE II



Rum. All Grown Up.



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Identifying Premium Rums

Hopefully by now you've come to the sad realization that the qualifiers "Premium," "Super Premium" and "Ultra Premium" do not refer to any intrinsic qualities of the rums they adorn. But don't despair: many of these rums are really quite good. In this section we will explore the characteristics all fine rums should have in common.

Well-Developed Aroma

As we described in Lesson III, rum's original alcohol based is transformed into more complex and rich substances through the processes of Esterification, Condensation and Oxidation. The fruity presence of esters in the aroma is one of the signs of aging. Basically speaking, the more complex the aroma of a rum, the longer the rum has aged. A "Premium Rum" with no aromatic traces other than ethyl alcohol should not be considered a high quality specimen.

Smoothness

One of the main reasons rum is aged is to mellow its character to make it more palatable. Smoothness then is a great indicator of quality. When judging rums by their smoothness, however, it is very important to always pay attention to the alcohol strength (refer to Lesson III for more information on this subject). The "temperature" perceived as one ingests the rum is one of the factors that determines the overall smoothness of the product. Keep in mind, however, that some distilleries expect, even design their rums to produce a warm feeling in the mouth.

Oakiness

No other sign of aging speaks as loud as oak. The rum may have the most complex aroma and be the smoothest distillate in the world, but if it does not speak and smell of oak, it is not a good aged rum, much less a "Premium Rum." When it comes to rum, maturity is gained in direct proportion to the time spent inside oak barrels.

Aftertaste

A "Premium Rum," like a good book, continues to affect us long after we are done with it. The aftertaste should complement every sense stimulated by the rum, reminding us of the gustatory experience, even tempting us to repeat it.

Age

Do not look at a rum's age (as indicated by the label) to determine its quality. Why not? Because depending on the country you live in, laws may affect which age you see. In the case of "blended" rums (those which are a combination of several different types of rums, which represents the majority of all rums in the market), local laws may allow a distillery to use the age of the OLDEST rum in the blend as the overall age of the rum, or they may force the distillery to use the age of the YOUNGEST (USA laws do this). For this reason many companies that sell their rums in the USA choose instead not to mention the age on the label, because doing so would give the impression that the rum is much younger than it really is. The only time one should look at the age of a rum as an indicator of quality is when one knows the answers to the following questions: a) What are the local laws regulating age statements on rum bottles? b) Where was the rum produced? c) Was the rum aged in the same place it was produced? If not, what is the climate of the place where it was aged? d) What type of rum is this (light type, heavy type, column still, pot still)? And lastly, e) What type of barrel was the rum aged in?



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Hands-on Exercise: Lessons From an Empty Glass

When it comes to Premium Rums, consumers expect more: more aroma, more taste, higher quality, and they are prepared to pay more for these than for their non-premium counterparts. There are rums in this category that are definitely mislabeled, while others are ready to defend their honor any time, much like world-class boxers defending their titles.

A rum's pedigree is defined by what it does for our senses before, during and after the gustatory experience. Throughout the lessons in this course we have explored these organoleptic aspects while developing your knowledge, olfactory and gustatory skills when working with different samples. Each sample we've worked with so far (molasses, cane juice, white rum, etc.) has shared its secrets with us, disclosing the essence of their nature. What else could we look at for additional clues? We need not look further than the glass (or snifter) we have been using to drink rum.

For most people, the experience of drinking rum ends when the glass is empty and there is no longer a desire to have it re-filled (or replaced with a new one). Discarding an empty glass because we think it no longer is useful could be compared to watching a movie and skipping the credits at the end. A premium rum's final words are delivered to us by the snifter after (sometimes long after) the last drop has left its confines.

For this exercise you will need:

At least two aged rums, preferably a series of rums with increasing ages (such as 3, 5 and 10 year old rums).

One snifter for each rum

Paper napkins and a pen or pencil (if using more than one rum)

Repeat the following steps for each rum:

- 1) Pour 1 to 2 ounces of rum into the snifter. Cover it with one of your hands.
- 2) Swirl it around for 10 seconds, making sure the rum goes at least halfway up the sides of the snifter. Analyze the aroma, writing down as many details as you can regarding the type and strength of the smells.
- 3) Pour the rum out of the snifter (into a separate glass, a decanter, the original bottle or even your mouth!)
- 4) Place the snifter, uncovered, in a well ventilated area. If you are repeating these steps for more than one rum, place each empty snifter on a paper napkin and write down on it the name of the rum.
- 5) Wait 30 minutes.
- 6) Return to the snifter and analyze the aromas left behind. Make a note of the types of aromas, their strength and how different they are now from the original ones.
- 7) Wait an additional 2 hours and repeat step 6.
- 8) Continue this procedure at 2 hour intervals if possible until you notice a sharp decline in the strength of the aroma. There are some rums that are persistent enough that the sniffers still "talk" about them for days, even a week or more, after being emptied.

What lessons did you learn from this exercise? Did you notice any relation between the lasting effect of the bouquet and the age of the rum? In most cases, the higher the concentration of old rums in the blend, the longer the aroma of oak will linger in the empty snifter. So what does this mean? Based on the discussion about "Premium" rums being as old as economically-feasible for each distillery, the empty snifter test can often reveal the extent to which distilleries are using old (expensive) rums in their blends.



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From the Rum Bar: Featured Cocktail: Piña Colada

A favorite drink of Caribbean cruisers is the Piña Colada. It was invented in 1954 by Ramón "Monchito" Marrero, a bartender at the Caribe Hilton Hotel in San Juan, Puerto Rico. His goal was to capture all the flavors of Puerto Rico in a glass. He experimented for three months before settling on the Piña Colada ("strained pineapple" in Spanish).

Monchito served his famous drink to thousands of hotel guests, including John Wayne and Gloria Swanson. In 1978 Puerto Rico declared the Piña Colada its national drink. An estimated 200 million Piña Coladas have been served since 1954. Monchito's recipe follows. **Note:** that this is NOT a dietetic drink!

Monchito's Original Piña Colada

Source: Islands Magazine (July/August 2000)

2 oz. Light Rum
1 oz. Coconut Cream
1 oz. Heavy Cream
6 oz. Fresh Pineapple Juice
1/2 C. Crushed Ice

Place ingredients in a blender. Blend for 15 seconds. Pour into a 12 oz. glass. Garnish with a pineapple wedge and a maraschino cherry. Add a red straw.

Tip: For the best tropical taste, always use fresh pineapple juice, never canned or mixes.



Piña Colada #2

2 oz. Gold Rum
2 oz. Coconut Cream
4 oz. Pineapple Juice
2 or 3 Ice Cubes
Pineapple Stick
Maraschino Cherry

Combine the rum, coconut cream and pineapple juice in a cocktail shaker and shake vigorously, or whirl briefly in an electric blender. Put the ice cubes in a highball glass, add the liquid and garnish with the pineapple and cherry. Serves 1 drink.



Piña Colada #3

2 oz. Gold Rum
1/2 oz Cream of Coconut
4 oz. Pineapple Juice
One Orange Slice



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Blend rum, coconut cream and pineapple juice in a blender until smooth. Pour over ice into a highball glass. Garnish with an orange slice.

Pina Colada #4

2 oz. White Rum
1 oz. Coconut Cream
4 oz. Pineapple Juice

In a blender add all ingredients with a scoop of crushed ice and blend vigorously. Pour into a highball glass with ice cubes. Garnish with a long spear-shaped piece of pineapple and a cherry then serve.



Lesson 8 Questionnaire

Q: A lot of marketing departments for distilleries are now using the words “Premium”, “Super Premium” and “Ultra Premium” for their more refined aged rums. What kind of message are they trying to get across to the consumers?

Q: Is it in a distilleries best interest to age rums as much as possible? Why?

Q: How long does it take for a rum to be completely lost due to evaporation?

Q: How many variables are involved in determining a rum producers’ profit margins?

Q: What is PDR and what does it mean to a rum producer?

Q: When evaluating a rum solely on its aroma what characteristic is a good indicator of its age?

Q: Can the age statement on the label of a bottle of rum be misleading? Why?

Q: Who was Ramón Marrero?

Q: What are the main ingredients in making a Piña Colada?



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Answers to Lesson 7 Questionnaire

Q: Are all Dark Rums heavier than White Rums?

A: No. It depends on the alcohol content. For example, a dark 80 proof rum is equivalent to an 80 proof white. The "Dark" rum is generally dark because of color such as vanilla, caramel, oak chips and/or tannins. Often times extra color is gained through the addition of caramel, molasses or a combination of both.

Q: In today's market, Spiced and Flavored rums are not necessarily made with "real" rum. What are more correct names for these products?

A: In most cases this alcohol is not refined and is aged only for a minimal amount of time. A correct name for these rums is "sugarcane liqueurs" or "flavored spirits".

Q: What are the methods used to extract flavors for cordials and liqueurs?

A: One of three methods is usually used to extract the flavors needed to produce cordials and liqueurs. They are: a) infusion or maceration, b) percolation or c) distillation. Fruit flavors are extracted either by infusion or maceration. Percolation is used to draw flavor from leaves and herbs while distillation is used to extract flavor from seeds and flowers.

Q: What flavor extraction process is sometimes referred to as "brewing"?

A: Percolation, which is sometimes referred to as brewing, is similar to the process for making coffee. In this process, the flavoring material is placed in the upper chamber of an apparatus which contains brandy, rum or another spirit in a lower chamber. The spirit is then pumped up over the flavoring agent and is allowed to percolate through it over and over again for several weeks or months. The flavor and aroma are thus extracted from the flavoring agent which then undergoes distillation to extract any remaining flavor. The distillate may then be mixed with the percolate which is next filtered, sweetened and bottled.

Q: Vanilla beans were mixed with cacao to make a flavorful beverage only consumed by nobility and the very rich. Where was this done and for how long?

A: In Spain for about 80 years.

Q: Name the four largest producers of vanilla in the world. Which of the four produces a flowery and fruity vanilla bean?

A: Madagascar, Indonesia, Mexico and Tahiti. Tahitian vanilla, grown from a different genus of vanilla orchid, is flowery and fruity, anisic and smooth.

Q: How and when was nutmeg introduced into Constantinople?

A: Nutmeg was introduced into Constantinople by Arab merchants in the sixth century.

Q: Which one of the spices commonly used to flavor rums can be poisonous if consumed in large enough quantities?

A: large amounts of nutmeg may be toxic! Nutmeg contains a substance called myristicin, a narcotic with very unpleasant toxic side effects if taken in large quantities. Ingestion of small amounts of nutmeg is harmless to the body, however the consumption of one to three whole nutmegs (in excess of one teaspoon ground) can cause wild hallucinations, nausea, vomiting, and/or circulatory collapse within one to six hours after consumption. Very large doses can be fatal.

Q: What are the main ingredients used to create a Hot Rum Toddy?

A: Rum, brown sugar and butter.





Rum.
All Grown Up.



EVOLVE



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Appleton Estate Jamaica Rum



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SYNONYMOUS WITH JAMAICA, THE APPLETON ESTATE IS RESPLENDENT WITH TRADITION, HISTORY AND CRAFTSMANSHIP WHERE THE ART OF RUM-MAKING CONTINUES TO EVOLVE TO THIS DAY.

DISTILLED FROM MOLASSES, A DERIVATIVE OF SUGARCANE, RUM IS PRODUCED IN A MYRIAD OF FLAVORS, COLORS, PROOFS AND STYLES.

APPLETON JAMAICA RUMS ARE AUTHENTICALLY DISTILLED IN TRADITIONAL COPPER POT STILLS AND AGED IN OAK BARRELS.

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