

Rum specialists mixing it up

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Caribbean, and maybe particularly of Cuba, once the home of Bacardi, now the home of Havana Club and also where some of the best-known rum cocktails originated including the Cuba Libre, the Daiquiri and the Mojito.

Apart from the main white rum from Bacardi – its Carta Blanca, which is the world's biggest selling spirit but which is just one of several rums in an extensive Bacardi range – the best-known rums in Scotland include OVD, Black Heart, Watson's and Havana Club.

But one of the most interesting developments on the rum scene is the growth of smaller brands and specialist rums.

And SLTN spoke to some of the firms involved in the production and distribution of those rums.

One of the biggest players among the specialists is Jamaica's J Wray & Nephew.

Its flagship brand Appleton Estate V/X has grown distribution in recent years and the company has been particularly busy in trade educational work.

Brand manager James Robinson said he thought that overall the UK rum market was in good health, with golden rum leading the way with 10% year on year volume growth. White rum remains dominant as a mainstream spirit, but dark rum was starting to experience decline, he reckoned.

Both its golden Appleton Estate V/X and its overproof Wray & Nephew White rum were growing he said particularly in style and cocktail bars.

"Within the UK, drinking habits are especially entrenched and, as such, changes to consumer perceptions and habits evolve slowly over time," James said.

"Whilst rum is traditionally stereotyped as either a naval drink or as a drink only consumed with cola, brands such as Appleton Estate V/X are making significant progress with regard to educating both the trade and consumers regarding the premium aged golden rum market."

Both Appleton and Wray & Nephew have run training days for bartenders in Scotland this year, educating them on the different types and styles of rum and on their use in cocktails. There are more training days planned for 2006.

And last week Appleton and



Pictured, top, a class in session at the Appleton Academy, as bar staff learn more about rum. And, above, www.classicum.com where there are said to be rums that taste of floral notes and rums that taste like Islay malt.

Wray & Nephew's master blender, Joy Spence, flew into Edinburgh from Jamaica to host a series of blending sessions for Scottish bar groups as part of the educational programme.

According to the firm, golden rum in particular is having an increasing presence on the cocktail menus.

"We recently ran a survey of top bartenders in Scotland," said James Robinson.

"It revealed that some Scottish bartenders know more than 100 cocktail recipes reflecting the growth in cocktail culture." Classic gold rum cocktails like the Mai Tai, Mojito, Mule and Voodoo are all growing in popularity, the company argues. It reckons the versatility of rum over other spirits as a cocktail base is a major factor within the steady growth of golden rum in the on-trade.

But it isn't all about cocktails, there are distinct signs that a

rum aficionado scene is developing.

It may not yet be as significant as malt whisky but rum is one of those spirits, perhaps a bit like tequila, which has lots of hidden treasures – different styles and ages, unusual bottles, rare products and even some stuff just sitting maturing that someone still has to think of a purpose for.

John Barrett, managing director of the Bristol Spirits Company has sourced a good number.

And they're beginning to be seen in specialist wine merchants and off-sales and on the back bars of smart bars in Edinburgh, London and elsewhere.

"We're not exactly niche more super niche," he said.

The collection, on which more info is available at the dedicated website www.classicum.com, contains many aged, single estate rums.

The company says there's

much more to rum than most people think. And it has set out "to discover rare rums from every part of the Caribbean – from single stills, on estates lost in the forests of Eldorado, aged in oak for up to 21 years, rivaling in complexity the great cognacs and malts."

The collection which includes many single still rums, often aged for 12 years and upwards is distributed by London-based firm McKinlay Vintners and stockists in Scotland included Raeburn Fine Wines.

But many of the firm's rums go abroad to developing enthusiasts' markets in the far east and in Europe.

"Our London-based distributor has done a great job in bars on the cocktail shaker circuit," John Barrett said.

"I sometimes think that is a mixed blessing, but I'm not complaining.

"We're not the only one doing this, Cadenheads and Gordon & Macphail also feature interesting rums."

Like John Robinson of J Wray & Nephew, John Barrett sees golden rum as doing particularly well. But he thinks there's a place for all the different types: those made in Nicaragua; rums made from free run cane sugar juice in the French Caribbean style, on islands like Martinique; and the product of the Rockley Still – close your eyes when you drink it, he says, and you might think you're on Islay.

Bairds Wines is a Scottish stockist of a number of Martinique rums (the French spelling) from the La Mauny range imported by Emporia.

The range includes: La Mauny Rhum Blanc Agricole; La Mauny Rhum Vieux Agricole "Eleve sous Bois"; and La Mauny Rhum Agricole 8 year old.

Specialist rum contacts

J Wray & Nephew bartender education programme, call 020 7378 8858

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