



THE SPIRIT OF BERMUDA

How a chance arrival became a country's biggest export, By Sarah McArdle

AS MALCOLM GOSLING, 7th generation CEO at the helm of the Bermuda family business of the same name would agree, the age-old Chinese blessing/curse, “May you live in interesting times,” is something of an industry theme these days.

Born and raised in Bermuda, Malcolm began working for the company at the tender age of 14 during his school holidays. With a hunger for learning about the business, and the drinks industry in particular, on graduating high school Malcolm moved to a small winery in California and ended up doing just about every job there was going. He is now the President of Gosling's Export (Bermuda) Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Bermuda's oldest surviving family business, Gosling Brothers Limited, and is responsible for the production and export of the Gosling's portfolio of rums.

He is also the President of Gosling- Castle Partners Inc., a US company that was formed to manage the marketing and sales of the Gosling brand outside of Bermuda. With a focused and forceful plan, Gosling's has more than doubled in international sales over the last five years.

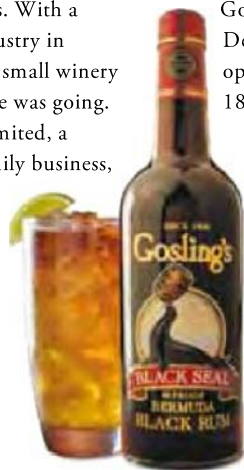
The story Malcolm tells of his success dates all the way

back to the spring of 1806, with London Wine and Spirits merchant William Gosling chartering a ship named Mercury. He and his son, James, loaded it with £10,000 worth of merchandise with the intention of opening a shop in America.

After ninety one days on becalmed seas the charter ran out, forcing Gosling to 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.

By 1820 James and his brother Ambrose, who'd come to join him in the venture, discovered that there was business to be made in the importation of bulk spirits, and in the creation of their own magical blends. In approximately 1850 the first oak barrels of rum distillate arrived in Bermuda. After much experimentation in the blending process, the distinctive black rum destined to be Black Seal was created and offered for sale. There was no bottling line at the time, meaning that the blend was sold by draught only.

When it first went on sale the rum had no name at all, and until the First World War it was sold from the barrel, so folks





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brought their own bottles for a fill up of “old rum”, so called because of its distinctive smoothness. Eventually the black rum was sold in champagne bottles, reclaimed from the British Officer’s Mess, and the corks sealed with black sealing wax. Even though the bottles at the time had no labels, people just asked for “the one with the black seal”. After thirty years of listening to this request, the Gosling’s decided to give their product a name. Eventually a play on words and images gave birth to the little, barrel juggling “Black Seal”, and Old Rum was known as Black Seal forever more.

As demand grew, mainly from tourists keen to take Gosling’s Black Seal Rum home with them, Malcolm saw another opportunity in exporting the Bermuda rum, and so began work on a business model to expand into the global marketplace. In 1980 the first shipment of Gosling’s Rum arrived in the USA, launching the export enterprise. As Malcolm notes, “All markets are important, but we need to focus, we need to be systematic. We look at building each market we enter for the long term. When we enter a new market we do it with a plan for sustained support and growth. We are not simply chasing cases.” Through following this simple mantra Gosling’s has become the largest exporter of a Bermuda made product.

The Gosling’s success can also be linked to the distinct Dark n’

Stormy® cocktail. Bermuda’s national drink had its origins in a ginger beer factory run as a subsidiary to the Royal Naval Officer’s Club, when the purveyors discovered that an added splash of the Gosling’s Black Seal Rum was just what the ginger beer was missing. The name was said to have originated when an old fisherman observed that the drink was the “colour of a cloud only a fool or dead man would sail under,” which was likely followed by, “Barman, I’ll have another Dark ‘n Stormy!”

In an exceptionally rare instance for the cocktail world Gosling’s registered the Dark ‘n Stormy trademark meaning that legally the line is drawn preventing the presence of other rums in any cocktail bearing the Dark ‘n Stormy name.

“If you use a lesser, un-aged version of a caramel-coloured white spirit that’s called a black rum, it’s not going to have the same taste,” Malcolm Gosling insists, “and I don’t want that to be your first Dark ‘n Stormy.”

In contrast, Mr Gosling also invites you to try the delicious ‘Bright ‘n’ Sunny (1 part Gosling’s Gold, 2 parts ginger ale, topped with a splash of tonic and garnished with a slice of lime). With ginger being a flavour very much back in fashion and the resurgence of Tiki bars around the country, the Dark ‘n Stormy and its younger sibling look set to grow ever popular once again on many a cocktail lists.

To this day, award winning Gosling’s Black Seal Rum (Platinum Medal/World Spirits Championships) is made in Bermuda according to the original family recipe from a unique, premium blend of pot still and continuous still distillates, aged independently in used bourbon barrels made from American Oak. The barrels, charred on the inside, contribute to the colour and mellowing of the rum as it ages. The rich, smooth, full-bodied taste of Gosling’s Black Seal Rum is nuanced with butterscotch, hints of vanilla and caramel, and may account for the expanding loyal following – from students to celebrities – all are appreciating of the unique taste of, the Spirit of Bermuda. ●