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DARK & STORMY

Bermuda forecasts rum

Margaret Swaine



06 Dec 2010: The Gosling's Black Seal rum is so synonymous with Bermuda, it's everywhere on this tiny 21 square mile paradise of pink-sand beaches, gorgeous verdant golf courses and turquoise waters. The ubiquitous Bermudian fish chowder; dark, thick with shredded fish and deliciously savoury is served with cruetts of Black Seal and sherry pepper sauce to add to your taste. The minute a roof goes on a house here, it's christened with Black Seal in a "roof wetting ceremony".

It's the Dark 'n Stormy however, the officially declared national drink of Bermuda, that's the island's most famous use of Gosling's rum.

Gosling's rum began seven generations ago – seven stubborn generations ago according to the company's own advertisements. Malcolm Gosling is the first generation to export the rum so the Dark 'n Stormy can be made correctly off the island.

"My father and his brothers and his dad had no desire to get into the export business," said Malcolm. "People would try the drink and want Gosling's rum to make it but they had to come to Bermuda to get it."

Yes indeed with all the rums on the market, there are hundreds of ways to make the cocktail wrong declares the company. And only one way to make it right: Namely, with deep, luscious Gosling's Black Seal Rum.

Anything else is a fake 'n phony. That's the law. In the seventies Gosling's moved to protect its famous drink by getting it trademarked. "Gosling Black Seal rum must be used for a Dark 'n Stormy. It's just not the same with another run," declared Malcolm.

It's a beautiful looking drink that's surprisingly simple to make. You fill a glass with ice and a good natural ginger beer (Gosling's makes one but any good version works) and float Gosling's Black Seal on top.

"The cocktail looks like a dark, stormy night with the colour of a cloud that only a fool or dead man would sail under," said Malcolm. Stir it well before you drink it or your first gulp will be straight rum.

As to the stubbornness of the family; Gosling ads freely declare that besides certain physical characteristics, men of the Gosling family have also passed along strong personality traits; most noticeably, bullheadedness.

With nations begging for more of their prize Bermuda rums, they obstinately refused to accelerate the secret family process in the interest of mere volume. Gosling's Gold rum was their first new product in 108 years.

Gosling's venture in Bermuda began in 1806 when James Gosling, the oldest son of wine and spirit merchant William Gosling, set sail from England bound for America but was becalmed at sea for so long that the charter ran out.

James and his merchandise were unceremoniously dumped off in Bermuda. When James learned the British navy used Bermuda as a stop off point to replenish supplies, rather than continue on he set up shop.

Sailors at that time and until the nineteen forties were given a daily ration of rum.

The distinctive black rum destined to be Black Seal was first formulated in about 1860. As always it's still blended and bottled in Bermuda but comes from several Caribbean islands. Distilleries in Trinidad, Jamaica and Barbados make the Gosling's rum from a base of molasses.

These three distinct triple pot distilled rums are then blended and aged in once used American bourbon barrels. Caramel is added to keep the colour consistent. The result is a dark, deep complex full-flavoured rum.

The Gold first made in 2005 is a blend of continuous and double pot distilled rums. The colour of topaz, it's robustly aromatic and fruity. Family Reserve Old Rum, which for the first 155 years was not made available to the public, has a minimum of 16 years in barrel and is smooth, complex and elegant like a fine cognac.

Total production of Gosling's is only 200,000 cases a year which by world spirit standards is tiny but at least now you can buy it in Canada and elsewhere.

At this time of year Malcolm recommends the Black Seal in hot chocolate with a splash of orange liqueur or as hot buttered rum toddy. He's even made Black Seal pancakes which he said were delicious.

However he advises against adding it to pasta. "I tried Black Seal with fettuccini but no one would touch it. It was disgusting," he said. "I'm not allowed in the kitchen anymore."

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