

## HOW'S YOUR DRINK? by Eric Felten

### Bermuda High: Rum and Ginger

**A** RIOT OF FLAGS flapped and fluttered at the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club marina the last Saturday in June. Wedged into the docks were the finishers, big and small, of the centennial Newport-Bermuda Race. There were massive racing yachts, such as the New Zealand boat "Maximus," and little sailboats that you'd think twice about taking on a lake in foul weather. (The race, first sailed in 1906 from Brooklyn, N.Y., has a long history of preposterously dinky boats thrashing their way to the island.) Up and down the marina, crews flew an alphabet soup of signals in their boats' rigging—and stowed cases of Gosling's Black Seal rum below deck. Well, mostly below deck: I saw one small yacht loaded so heavily with boxes of Black Seal that there wasn't room for anyone to reach the helm.

Gosling's rum is one of two essential ingredients in Bermuda's national drink, the Dark and Stormy. The other half of the equation is a ginger beer made in Bermuda by the local soda distributor, Barritt's. I was introduced to the Dark and Stormy by a friend who had for many years bummed his way into the Newport-Bermuda race, catching a berth on any boat he could find that needed an extra hand. He would bring home as much Gosling's and Barritt's as he could, and then he'd enjoy Dark and Stormys until the supply ran out. The drink is good enough that such an effort is less extravagant than it might seem; but now such rumrunning is no longer necessary. As sailors' taste for Dark and Stormys has spread to stateside landlubbers through word of mouth, Gosling's has responded by improving its distribution in the U.S.: It's available in every state. Barritt's, however, can still require some searching to find.

The vagaries of sailing are responsible for Gosling's rum business in the first place. In 1806 a London liquor merchant named William Gosling put his son James and a hold-full of fortified wines, brandy and whiskey onto a ship called the Mercury, bound for Virginia. They never made it. "After 96 days of calm out in the Atlantic, the charter ran out," says Malcolm Gosling, one of the seventh generation of Goslings running the family business. The nearest port was St. George's in Bermuda, and that's where the captain of the

Mercury left James and his cargo. That stretch in the doldrums turned out to be a happy accident. James found himself at a port full of British Navy ships, the officers and crew of which seemed to be suffering a drought of drink. James soon had to send for more liquor, and Gosling's was established as Bermuda's main importer of spirits.

The Goslings never did forsake their merchant roots for the business of distilling liquor themselves. Water-starved Bermuda isn't exactly a prime spot for the big sugar-cane plantations needed for rum's raw material. The company developed a trade importing rum to the island from Barbados, Jamaica and



Dark and Stormy

1½ oz Gosling's Black Seal rum  
4 to 6 oz Barritt's ginger beer  
■ Build on ice in a highball glass.

other spots in the West Indies. By the mid-19th century, the Gosling family was blending those rums into their own proprietary product. They would fill champagne empties with their "old rum" and seal the tops with the black wax that ultimately gave the brand its name. Though Gosling's rum is Bermuda's most successful export, the island is really just a way station. Rums aged for Gosling Bros. on islands around the Caribbean are then shipped to Bermuda, where they are blended. To meet growing U.S. demand, the rum is then shipped in bulk to Kentucky, where Gosling's Black Seal is bottled.

There are few drinks that depend so totally on specific brands of ingredients. You can make a Gin and Tonic with any of dozens of available gins, and though

one drink may be better than another, each is still recognizably a Gin and Tonic. The Dark and Stormy, by contrast, is dependent on the distinctive taste of Gosling's Black Seal rum. Use another brand and you have something that doesn't quite taste like a Dark and Stormy. The same goes—to a somewhat lesser degree—for the ginger beer. Jamaica's style of the brew is much spicier than the mellow Bermuda stuff. But even when the correct ingredients are in play, one can be disappointed.

My wife, Jennifer, and I were in Napa Valley a month ago and were surprised to find a classic cocktail culture thriving in the land of the grape. Napa's many excellent restaurants boast ambitious wine lists, of course, but they also offer savvy states of drinks. That doesn't mean they always get the drinks right, however.

One night we ate at Bouchon, a bistro that is the little sister of the celebrated French Laundry restaurant. Jennifer saw that they had a Dark and Stormy on the menu, which promised the drink was made with Gosling's Black Seal and Barritt's ginger beer. When the drink came, it looked a little pale—neither dark nor stormy enough.

Jennifer took one sip and put down her glass with a look of consternation. "That's awful," she said. "It tastes like they put lime juice in it."

Curious, I took the drink back to the bartender, who told me that Bouchon's recipe involved Gosling's, Barritt's and, yes, fresh lime juice. He happily made another, omitting the offending citrus, but I don't think he believed me that the lime juice not only doesn't belong in the first place—it ruins the flavor.

"Lots of bars want to put their own spin on the drink," says Malcolm Gosling. And you can't blame a bar chef (as the more ambitious mixologists like to be called) for trying to add a fresh ingredient to what is otherwise the product of two bottles—where's the artistry in that, after all? But the original Dark and Stormy, in all its simplicity, is not a drink that benefits from tinkering. When Gosling's went to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to reserve rights to the name "Dark 'n Stormy," the accompanying recipe calls for Gosling's and Barritt's on the rocks and nothing more. Mr. Gosling allows that a slice of lime may be added as a garnish if one really must. But please don't squeeze it into the glass.

Next Saturday, "How's Your Drink?" moves to the Pursuits Food & Drinks page. Write to Mr. Felten at [eric.felten@wsj.com](mailto:eric.felten@wsj.com).