



Rockstar Spirits produces rums flavoured with pineapple, cherry and grapefruit; the SC Dogs distillery on the Isles of Scilly (below and inset)

Gin is reaching saturation point... rum is having its time in the spotlight

of independent UK microdistilleries making craft rums from scratch – rather than using an imported spirit base – to cash in on the booming popularity of the pirate’s spirit.

Recently released figures indicate sales soared during and after lockdown as we enjoyed rum at home in summery cocktails such as daiquiri and mojito – or neat with ice and a slice of lime. Waitrose, for example, said that in one week in August rum sales were up 62 per cent compared with 2019, while Majestic said sales had risen by 25 per cent since April.

Unsurprisingly, many of Britain’s craft rums are distilled in Scotland which has plenty of distilling know-how and now has its own rum festival too. They include Dark Matter; Glasgow’s Wester, and Sea Wolf, created by Jason Scott and Mike Aikman who run Edinburgh’s Bramble cocktail bar.

“Rum is a massive player in the cocktail world,” says Scott. “But when we started looking for a British brand we realised very few British brands are actually distilled here, so Sea Wolf was born. Unlike gin, which we feel is reaching saturation point, British rum is now having its time in the spotlight.”

In terms of the type of rum we’re buying, spiced and flavoured rum has now overtaken white as drinkers seek a novelty tipple that enables them to reproduce the cocktail experience at home. Research by Nielsen for the Wine and Spirit Trade Association found sales of this category rose 22 per cent by value in the 12 weeks to 21 March, the most recent figures available.

UK spiced or botanical rums include Five Hundred Cuts, spiced up with tonka beans, orange peel and cloves by Scotland’s BrewDog, Dark Matters’ long pepper-infused Spiced Rum and Rumbullion! created in Kent by Ableforth’s. Flavoured rums are incorporating flavourings from coffee to pineapple, coconut and even wildflower honey or sloes.

The Cornish Distilling Company, for instance, makes Kalkar, a rum that’s blended with single-origin coffee, Wester makes a pineapple-infused rum, while Manchester-based

Rockstar Spirits produces rums flavoured with pineapple, cherry and grapefruit.

“Rum producers have learned from gin producers that innovative flavours and provenance are key,” says Majestic’s Jack Merrylees. “When we switched to these

rums last Christmas we saw a swing of 46 per cent in volume terms. Customers don’t just want rum, they want a compelling story and ingredients list.”

As with gin, we’re using “posh” mixers too, such as colas from Fever-Tree, Franklins & Sons and Karma, or Coca-Cola’s new Signature Mixers. Also popular is ginger ale, with ice and a slice of lime.

So is rum poised to overtake gin as the new on-trend spirit? Not quite yet, says John Vine, Spirit Buyer at Waitrose. “Gin is still the top spirit in the UK, but this year rum is having its moment in the sun and giving gin a run for its money.”

Take a rum steer

When it comes to cocktails the tipple wins hands down, and UK microdistilleries are now making craft rums from scratch.
By **Clare Hargreaves**



The sub-tropical Isles of Scilly have long been famed for their exotic plants, from waxy rosette-like aeoniums to towering blue echiums and bowl-shaped King Proteas. Now a resident of the Scillonian island of St Martin’s is growing another exotic crop – sugar cane – that he hopes to turn into rum.

Former merchant naval officer Andrew Walder, whose family has lived on St Martin’s for more than 330 years, has planted a trial quarter-acre plot on Carron Farm with encouraging results. Next year he plans to extend it to around four acres to produce enough sugar cane juice to make a Caribbean-style “rhum agricole” – a lighter, grassier version of rum.

Earlier this year Walder launched a white rum and this autumn he’s releasing a golden and spiced rum under the brand name of SC Dogs, which he distils from imported sugar cane molasses. The golden rum gets its colour from the oak casks it’s laid down in, while the spiced rum is flavoured with botanicals from the famous Abbey gardens on neighbouring Tresco. But his dream is to make Britain’s first plough-to-bottle rum. “Our experience of growing scented narcissi, combined with our sub-tropical climate, makes us confident we can make a rum from home-grown sugar cane,” says Walder.

SC Dogs is one of a growing band

