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DRINKING & DINING

The rum revolution

Forget its piratical associations, there's never been a better time to savour rum, either as an investment or just to sip at leisure

BY TOM SANDHAM

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The thought of drinking neat rum might shiver the timbers of those harbouring beliefs the spirit will blister tongues and barnacles, but it's time to cast off this unjustified stigma, and dismiss any further tired seafaring clichés, because rum today is a luxurious - collectable even - liquid. The spirit may retain a rustic charm and carnival-cavorting cool, but you can discover serious drinkers commanding a justifiably discerning price tag.

For those who deign rum a fiery fiend, it's worth noting it has a sugar base, which presents a sweet starting point. And its heritage blends effortlessly with modern production when it comes to distilling, with an extraordinary range of distillates from an increasingly wide geographic region, beyond the Caribbean

and into central and South America. But it is the time in the barrel that hones and rounds rum's strengths and, depending on the wood

For nearly 30 years we have

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been able to select from a wider portfolio of aged expressions, and so beyond the luxury we now also have collectable and vintage

and duration of aging, it is this process that presents you with a rich, characterful spirit. Aged varieties deliver aromas and flavours ranging from bold oak, tropical fruit and raisins to mocha coffee, chocolate, cooked banana, coconut and spiced winter fruits.

Having recognised the benefits of careful aging, the world's leading rum producers have long held reserves of quality stock in barrels and are now releasing them, sometimes in limited editions, to the world's best bars and drinks retailers. Prices vary from excellent entry level expressions around the £30 mark up towards £60 and £100 where you'll enjoy some of the best rums in the world.

Those who appreciate all spirits will be well aware of the rum revolution; for nearly 30 years we have been able to select from a wider portfolio of aged expressions, and so beyond the luxury we now also have collectable and vintage. Devotees are prepared to spend a hook and a peg leg on historic

bottles, and Edgar Harden of the [Old Spirits Company](#) is among those leading the charge on vintage rum, the intrigue providing further evidence the spirit has arrived.

“The vintage rums I sell are collectable because they are a taste of history,” says Harden. “An old Bacardi from Santiago de Cuba harks back to the days of pre-Revolutionary Cuba or Ernest Hemingway. They are cleaner, purer and mellower and deliver incredible flavour, wrapped in rich hues. I would recommend an original British Navy rum as served from a flagon for the daily tot; I sometimes have them from 1970 - Black Tot day was 31/07/70 so these are the latest ones, all the way back to the Second World War era. Another suggestion would be Havana Club from the 1970s - fabulous, hedonistic stuff.”

For those simply keen to expand their drinking horizons, here are a few to

convince you this is an unmissable category.

Facundo Collection

The Bacardi distillery is famous for launching a white rum to satisfy a bartender's desire to mix, but beyond this you'll find plenty worth sipping. The Facundo collection arrives in November so interested parties will need to keep an eye out, but this limited release includes four luxury blends from maestro de Ron Manny Oliver who has an incredible 39 years working with the spirit. Amongst the highlights is the Paraiso, which will flutter eyelids at the true rum connoisseur with a subtle blend of the oldest Bacardi family reserves. But for those reaching out for the rich, sweet fruits of rum again, I'd

suggest the the Exquisto for a heavy spicy body from rums as old as 23, that butts a fruity note from the younger rums in the blend. [You'll find it at in selected retailers](#) and the Savoy Hotel Bars in London as of November.

Zacapa

Take a blend of rums made from sugar cane juice that range in age from six to 25 years



El Dorado Special Reserve

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and have been rested in bourbon, Pedro Ximenez and cognac barrels, using a solera method, all at an altitude of 2,300 metres,

and you have an early insight into the quality in this beautiful bottle. Fudge, a touch of coffee, warm spices like cinnamon and vanilla, with a nice dry finish, this is soft, smooth and sexy in the mouth. For those new to sipping rums the [Centenario Sistem Solera 23](#) is an impressive alternative and a lighter but still sweet alternative.

Zacapa XO, £89.95, [Whisky Exchange](#)

Diplomatico

The Venezuelan Diplomatico rums are splendidly sweet, the chocolate at the forefront of the [Reserva Exclusiva](#) presenting a treat for anyone prepared to drink a spirit neat. The Single Vintage 2000 takes these profiles up a notch

and exhibits all the syrupy sweetness while it amps up the spice and dry notes to give a touch of tobacco and nutty nuance.

Diplomatico single vintage 2000, £79.95, [Whisky Exchange](#)



Zapaca is a blend of rums that have been rested in bourbon, Pedro Ximenez and cognac barrels

El Dorado

Using Guyanan demerara sugar at its heart, the [El Dorado 12 year old](#) remains a firm favourite in my own drinks cabinet, but the Special reserve 21-year-old is one to step up to if you're familiar with the younger expressions. The wood influence is apparent with a slight varnish and tobacco aroma but this simply adds a resinous touch to balance rich toffee and vanilla. For collectors there is also the limited 3,000 bottles of 25-year-old to consider.

El Dorado 21 Year Old £72.19, [Master of](#)

Malt

Foursquare

If it's modern and innovative you're after then pioneer Richard Seale blends the tradition of Barbados (where the first mention of rum emerges in the history books), with pioneering distillation techniques. The Foursquare distillery produces rums for a number of brands, amongst them the more recent [Duppy Share](#), which is a useful tropical tasting entry level sipper that also blends in Jamaican rums. Elsewhere the [Doorly's](#) range is an excellent starting point, the 12 year old an excellent exponent. Or the [R.L. Seale's Finest](#), which sees the rum aged in bourbon, madeira and French oak. If

you're dipping your toe into this world then the Doorly's XO is excellent value for money and won't disappoint, delivering a lighter nod to the aroma and flavour profiles identifiable in the more expensive rums mentioned.

Doorly's XO, £26.63, [Master of Malt](#)

Tom Sandham is one of the drinks writing duo the [Thinking Drinkers](#)



Venezuelan Diplomatico rums are splendidly sweet

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