vile and industrial rum can overpower the Coke and spoil the drink. H. L. Mencken noted, presumably in jest, that residents of western South Carolina mixed Coca-Cola with denatured alcohol drawn from automobile radiators: “Connoisseurs reputedly preferred the taste of what had been aged in Model-T Fords,” he said. George Jean Nathan — who spent much of the Prohibition editing *Smart Set* with Mencken— introduced a writer for *Gourmet* to the delights of the Cuba libre, evidence that it had also found a home with a swankier crowd.

Rum and Coca-Cola is, by any measure, a drink of inspired blandness, with its two main ingredients both plentiful and cheap. It requires few if any skills to prepare: It is not a cocktail, like the daiquiri, that can be toppled into an overly sweet or tart imbalance with a sloppy pouring hand. It can be made heavy or light on rum, with rum that's either light or heavy. If you have a lime to add a bit of citrusy zest to a rum and Coke, wonderful. If not, no matter. Some early published recipes make lime a mere garnish—a thin slice dropped in at the end— while others call for substantially more. A 1940 recipe calls for filling nearly half a glass with rum, the other half with Coke, and then squeezing in the juice of half a lime. More exotic versions of the Cuba libre include one (popular before Prohibition) that calls for the addition of gin and bitters. But these are mere curiosities. Basic rum and Coca-Cola was the perfect drink for the masses. It would need only the lightning of popular culture to transform it from what cocktail writer William Grimes has called “a harmless invention” into an enduring icon.

THE MAIN ACTION OF World War II unfolded in Europe, Asia, and Africa, but another theater of combat had quietly opened in the West Indies. German submarines had taken to sinking cargo ships along trade routes, and they took an especially keen interest in ships carrying oil from the South American coast and bauxite (needed for aluminum production) from island mines.

Not only did the German submarines inconvenience the war effort, they marked the first direct threat to American shores since the British sacked and burned the U.S. Capitol in 1812. Long protected by two oceans from rival powers, the United States found itself suddenly at risk of attack from a foreign power. As historian Fitzroy Baptiste put it, submarines were a first-generation intercontinental ballistic weapon system, able to bring ruin and mayhem around the globe to American soil with a simple coded message from abroad.

In the summer of 1940, Franklin Delano Roosevelt met with Winston Churchill to address the threat. The deal they hammered out was this: the United States would provide England with fifty Liberty ships and a million rifles to aid the war effort. In return, the United States would get ninety-nine-year leases to construct a first line of defense in the form of bases on British controlled islands that included Newfoundland, the Bahamas, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Antigua, Bermuda, and Trinidad. Within months of the agreement, thousands of servicemen had been deployed to beef up national defenses at the United States' extended eastern perimeter.

The impact of the military influx on island life was abrupt and profound. Bermuda's local population of 31,000 soared by 20 percent almost overnight. Trinidad became home to the largest Caribbean naval base, with American military occupying 34,000 acres and the island population of 400,000 swelling with the arrival of 130,000 U.S. soldiers, airmen, and sailors. The great flood of servicemen to the islands resulted in cross-cultural ferment as the soldiers adapted to local flavors and islanders in turn clamored for American products. On Bermuda, bartenders reported in 1941 that rum was now beating out beer as the drink of choice among the soldiers, in large part for economic reasons— beer cost 30 cents a glass and rum 25 cents. When the newfound appreciation for the spirit led to rowdiness near bases, bars were ordered closed between lunch and dinner, and an 11:00 p.m. curfew was mandated. The U.S. military brass did their part to keep servicemen from causing trouble by reducing the price of beer to 10 cents on the base.

On Trinidad, the U.S. military arrived with fistfuls of U.S. dollars, Chiclets chewing gum, and cigarettes. With the soldiers also arrived case after case of Coca-Cola—war being a prime occasion to boost sales. (During World War I, Coca-Cola ran ads slyly associating itself with patriotism, one ad depicting a hand bearing a glass of Coke in front of the Statue of Liberty, bearing a torch.) When America entered World War II, Coca-Cola moved swiftly, starting with a company commitment that servicemen would always be able to buy a bottle of Coke for a nickel, the same price it cost during World War I. Cocacola sent its own small army of technical advisers abroad to follow the troops. When a region was secured, the advisers would immediately set up bottling operations to ensure that the soldiers were never without Coca-Cola.

The Coca-Cola Company also commissioned studies to show that well-rested, well-refreshed soldiers performed better than tired and thirsty soldiers, and that, in short, war went better with Coke. Some 10 *billion* Cokes were served to soldiers around the globe during World War II. An unusually large number of solders wrote home that they were fighting, among other reasons, for the right to drink Coca-Cola. (In *God Is My Co-Pilot*, Colonel Robert L. Scott wrote that his thoughts when shooting down Japanese fighters were of "America, Democracy, Coca-Colas.")

IN 1943, a trained cellist turned comedian arrived in Trinidad on a tour of West Indian military bases. His name was Morey Amsterdam, and he was winding down from a ten-week USO tour. Rubbery-faced and with a memorably nasal voice, Amsterdam is best remembered as Buddy Sorrell, the comedy-writing sidekick on the immensely popular *Dick Van Dyke Show* in the 1960s. In the 1940s, he broadcast twelve radio shows a week and was known as a "human joke machine" who could spit out jokes on any topic with the speed and firepower of a Gatling gun.

While on Trinidad, he overheard sailors and soldiers singing a catchy calypso song around the base. It was a version of a number

made popular by an island singer named Lord Invader, who had adapted the lyrics of an earlier tune. The original tune was composed in 1906 by Trinidadian musical prodigy Lionel Belasco and originally entitled “L'Année Passé”; it told in French patois the melancholy story of a young country girl from a good family who fell in love with a cad who cast her aside and left her to fend for herself as a streetwalker. Lord Invader altered the song to make it about American soldiers and their off-duty activities. He had recently visited Point Cumaná—a beach near the naval base at Chaguaramas—and here he watched the American soldiers flirting with the island girls and drinking rum followed by a chaser of Coca-Cola. He wrote a calypso about what he saw.

Since the Yankees came to Trinidad,

They have the young girls going mad,

They young girls say they treat them nice,

And they give them a better price.

They buy rum and Coca-Cola,

Go down Point Koomhana

Both mother and daughter

Workin' for the Yankee dollar.

The song was a great local hit with both Trinidadians and sailors. Amsterdam liked it, too, and figured that he might sing a version of it on one of his radio shows. Back home, he sanitized the lyrics somewhat. Instead of “young girls going mad” around the Yankees, he changed it to “They make you feel so very glad.” Yet the mother and daughter remained working for the Yankee dollar, and Amsterdam added some goofy new lyrics, among them:

Native girls all dance and smile

They wear grass-skirts, but that's okay

Yankees like to “hit the hay.”

Amsterdam worked with a pair of professionals to polish the song and help with the scoring: Jeri Sullivan, a singer best known for her work with Mel Tormé and the Mel-Tones; and Paul Baron, then the musical director for the CBS broadcast network. Success remained elusive: eight publishers turned the song down. Then, after singing it on one of his shows, Amsterdam received a call from Leo Feist, who said he'd be honored to publish the tune.

The “Lana Turner moment” didn't arrive for “Rum and Cocacola” until late 1944. The Andrews Sisters, a popular trio of sisters from Minnesota whose stardom was built on hits like “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy” and “Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree,” were in New York to record for Decca Records. LaVerne, Patty, and Maxene had finished up half an hour early one afternoon and, rather than break, decided to record a silly song with a catchy beat they heard for the first time just the night before. It was, of course, “Rum and Coca-Cola.”

“We just threw it in,” Patty Andrews later recalled in *Swing It! The Andrews Sisters Story*. “There was no written background, so we just kind of faked it.” The sisters used the same faux-Caribbean accents they had earlier adopted in “Sing a Tropical Song,” and the whole recording took less than ten minutes. It was pressed on the flip side of a curiously plaintive ode called “One Meat Ball,” a song that Decca expected would be a huge hit.

“One Meat Ball” proved prophetically titled. Although this song edged briefly into the top twenty, it was “Rum and Coca-Cola” that took the single into the stratosphere. This wasn't without complications. Since the song glorified drinking, national radio networks weren't eager to broadcast it to the dry states, making the network a lightning rod for teetotaling critics. Anyway, liquor advertising over the airwaves was illegal, and the song seemed to venture into a murky region between advertising and entertainment. Financial considerations also arose: Why should the networks give the highly profitable Coca-Cola Company a free ride? Shouldn't they be billed for the airtime when the song was broadcast? Then there was the whole mothersand-daughters-working-for-the-Yankee-dollar

thing. That the GIs abroad were hitting the hay with “native peaches” probably wasn't the best morale booster for a nation at war, and no one wanted to be seen as undermining the war effort. (The Andrews Sisters, somewhat disingenuously, said that they never really considered the lyrics, but just liked the rhythm.)

Any objections fell aside as the song proved a force of nature. Sheet music flew off the shelves—by February 1945, nearly a halfmillion copies had been sold, driven in large part by the exotic place names and oddball lyrics behind the hard-to-discern accents. On January 6, 1945, the Andrews Sisters's “Rum and Coca-Cola” broke into the Billboard Top 30, where it would remain for twenty weeks, ten of those in the number one spot. It also hit number one on *Variety*'s “Jukebox Hits” list. (Bacon's Grille in Phoenix banned the record from its jukebox following an uprising of waitresses who refused to hear it played eight hours straight.) Decca could scarcely keep up with demand, and the company had to beg other record companies for shellac, which was in short supply during the war, to keep pressing the disk. The song would go on to sell 7 million copies and be the third bestselling hit of the 1940s, topped only by Bing Crosby's “White Christmas” and Patti Page's “Tennessee Waltz.”

“Rum and Coca-Cola” was a huge hit with soldiers at military bases, and the most requested Andrews Sisters song during their USO tours. The song was called “the National Anthem of the G.I. camps.” And soon rum and Coke became the de facto national drink of many of the troops. During World War II, General George Patton reportedly ensured that the Coca-Cola “technical observers” had unfettered access to get their job done efficiently and quickly, in large part because he demanded a reliable supply of Coca-Cola to mix with his rum.

By 1946, *Gourmet* writer and bon vivant Lucius Beebe would write in his *Stork Club Bar Book* that the Cuba libre, the daiquiri, and the MacArthur Cocktail were as “dominant in their field as Martinis or Scotch and Soda are in theirs.” (The MacArthur, sadly forgotten, was made with rum, triple sec, and a dash of egg white.) Rum and Coke had achieved icon status.

MOREY AMSTERDAM HAD "borrowed" the song without permission and profited from it greatly. This did not go unnoticed in Trinidad. After the song became a smash international hit, a lawsuit was brought by Maurice Baron, a music publisher who had recently come out with a collection of West Indian songs that included Lionel Belasco's "L'Année Passée." Belasco, who was then in his seventies, traveled to New York to testify in the trial. The plaintiffs suggested that Amsterdam brought the song from Trinidad as a tourist might a suitcase full of rum. Amsterdam continued to insist that all the lyrics were his. Yet a number of facts were marshaled to upend his assertion. Among them: The plaintiff's lawyer had soldiers take the stand to testify that throughout the island substantial portions of the song had been sung long before Amsterdam had even arrived. And it didn't help that Amsterdam had earlier boasted to *Time* magazine that he had "imported" the song to the United States. Amsterdam shared the common attitude that calypso, no matter how recently composed, fell under the category of "folk song," and was free to be harvested and exploited by traveling foreigners as they saw fit.

In February 1947, a federal judge prohibited Amsterdam and the other defendants from further profiting. He ordered up an accounting (Amsterdam claimed he had made $60,000 off the song), and said that henceforth all profits would go to Belasco. "There is no doubt in my mind that Amsterdam brought both the words and the music with him from Trinidad, and it was in substantially that form that the song was published," the judge wrote. Amsterdam et al. appealed the verdict, but the courts once more ruled that his "songwriting" was tantamount to theft. The rights and profits from "Rum and Coca-Cola" returned to the island whence it came.

LIKE THE LOSER in a game of musical chairs, the liquor industry found itself stuck with a surfeit of cheap, scarcely potable rum when the war ended. By one estimate, the United States was saddled with a five-year supply in its warehouses and stockrooms. Making things worse, the liquor trade slid into a slump after an initial burst of postwar buying. Rationing on most goods ended, and consumers bought up those things they had long gone without—like stockings

and gasoline. Liquor was overlooked, and sales fell from a peak of 231 million gallons in 1946 to 160 million in 1949. Price wars erupted as distillers and distributors struggled to reduce their inventories. As a result, rum was almost always the cheapest spirit on the shelf, often selling for less than the taxes levied on it. Even Scotch could be had for $5 a bottle, half the wartime price. Even with the prices low, rum's share of the liquor market fell—not only from pumped-up wartime levels, but from prewar levels. It now sat at a dismal 1.3 percent.

Puerto Rico was especially hard-hit, since its tax-free status made it the chief exporter of rum to the United States. The island found itself saddled with some 20 million gallons in storage—the equivalent of a ten-year export supply and more than all the other rum-making nations combined. Of the seventeen distillers that produced rum during the war, ten closed soon after.

This brush with mortality led the rum industry to conclude that something had to change. And two things happened. Rum went further in the direction of Bacardi, defining itself as a light and refreshing liquor. And it embraced techniques of modern marketing.

Puerto Rico took the lead. In 1948, it passed the Mature Spirits Act, which required that all Puerto Rican rums had to be aged at least three years. This had a double benefit. It ensured a higher-quality rum that helped the island establish a stronger brand, and it immediately reduced reserves, allowing supply to drift somewhat closer to demand.

Puerto Rican rum makers also tried to increase demand by launching a multimillion dollar advertising campaign in the United States. For an American in the early 1950s, it would have been hard not to know about rum. Some thirty-five hundred liquor dealers put rum promotions in their windows in 1952 (almost twice as many as the prior year), and the Rum Institute, based in Puerto Rico, ran numerous ads in major American magazines and newspapers. Doublepage ads touted the merits of thirteen brands of rum from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Drinkers were encouraged to ask for “free Rumsters!”—brightly colored cardboard cutouts that an

easily amused drinker could affix to the rim of his or her glass. Rumsters included a tuxedoed man who appeared to be sipping a drink through a straw and a jockey riding the edge of a glass. On the reverse were jingles design to correct misperceptions. One example: "Some people think all rum is sweet/But that's a silly myth./Smooth Puerto Rican rum's a treat/And dry—just try a fyth!" A million Rumsters were distributed in 1950, and demand among liquor dealers for the free novelties pushed distribution to 3 million by 1952.

The new advertising campaign was funded in part by the U.S. government, which hoped to increase its revenues from taxes on rum. The government also underwrote a film entitled *A Glassful of History*, starring Burgess Meredith, to be shown at liquor sales conventions, and paid for a research facility at the island university to improve both quality and production efficiency.

By 1952, Puerto Rico had started to reclaim its stature among rum exporters, largely by leading the charge toward lighter and lighter rums. They took the Cuban experience—stripped out the more overbearing tastes and aromas—and built on it.

So, tastes moved away from the distinctive toward the unexceptional, from full-flavored to light. "U.S. Taste Buds Want It Bland" read a 1951 headline in *Business Week*. Rum took notice. It was the era of Wonder bread and iceberg lettuce, when complexity of taste gave way to ease and convenience of preparation. The art of mixing a balanced drink, which never fully recovered from the interruption of Prohibition, was further lost as elderly mixologists in short-waisted scarlet jackets retired from hotel bars. Surveys showed that more people were drinking at home than in bars or restaurants. The preferred cocktails shifted with it. Complex drinks lost favor. Make it easy, Americans said, and make it bland and sweet.

Surveys in the 1950s showed that more than half of all drinkers actually didn't like the taste of liquor. This was especially true in two key markets: women and young men. As that *Business Week* story noted in 1951, "from all the available data it looks as though Americans of the 1950s like their drinks well watered down." Sweet

fell from fashion and dry came to dominate. The dry martinis started to elbow aside the sweeter Manhattan.

And a new kid appeared on the block: vodka. Given its current ubiquity, it's hard to imagine that until about half a century ago, vodka was all but unknown in the United States. A colorless and nearly tasteless spirit distilled from whatever was available (grain, potatoes, molasses), it was an exotic spirit consumed by few Americans. It got a modest boost during Prohibition, since it was easy to doctor up as a fake whiskey. But as late as 1948, the cocktail writer David Embury noted that no imported vodka was available, only a few domestic brands: “It's not exactly what I have called “common liquors.' ”

Vodka would go perfectly with the austere outlook of modernism. The drive was to get rid of the clutter of the past and welcome the clean lines of modern architecture. Vodka was as invisible as the glass walls now cladding the new skyscrapers, as light as the clean lines of the Scandinavian furniture now in homes. The brown spirits —bourbon and rye and rum—were part of the old regime, the spirituous version of an overblown Victorian home. The future belonged to the transparent.

Foremost among the vodka producers was Smirnoff, produced by Heublein—a company that in 1907 got its start making A.1. Steak Sauce and later introduced the breakfast cereal Maypo and the barbecue accessory Sizzl-Spray. (The latter was a spray-on barbecue sauce that had to be taken off grocery shelves because the cans had an unfortunate propensity to explode.) The original Smirnov vodka was produced by an old-line Russian family and favored by the czars. This lineage put it in bad odor when the Bolsheviks came to town, and the family and business moved to France for a time, without much success, before they sold the company to Heublein—which immediately made the name more American-friendly by replacing the “v” with “ff.”

Vodka's glorious rise in the American consumer market can be credited in large part to Heublein's shrewd marketing. It deftly publicized a series of novel vodka drinks, beginning with the

Moscow Mule—a mix of lime, ginger beer, and vodka, and served “by tradition” (wholly fabricated) in a five-ounce copper cup. The Moscow Mule was invented by an executive at Heublein, who leveraged its novelty into a hot national trend, especially among younger and more rebellious drinkers not averse to irking their elders by ordering “a Commie drink.” (Bartenders even organized and marched in New York with placards that read “Smirnoff Go Home. We Can Do Without the Moscow Mule.” Smirnoff reaped the free publicity, and neutered its critics by pointing out that all of its vodka was made at home of patriotic American grain.) Smirnoff later promoted other easy-to-guzzle drinks like the screwdriver, the Bloody Mary, and the bullshot, the latter a mix of vodka and beef bouillon.

Vodka had much to commend it. It not only had the lighter, nearly undetectable taste for which Americans now clamored, but it could be produced and sold right from the still, with no inconvenient aging or prescient market demand forecasts. And it didn't impart a common stigma of a problem drinker—booze breath. Smirnoff's advertising slogan was “It leaves you breathless,” which suggested that an executive might suck back five vodka martinis at lunch without being detected back at work. When distillers of other liquors disputed the claim, Smirnoff hired a lab to run tests. The lab concluded that vodka actually couldn't be detected on the breath just five minutes after consumption, compared to the half hour required for the dissipation of other liquors. Sales of vodka boomed, nearly rivaling gin by the late 1950s. Vodka sales weren't tracked in the 1940s, but by 1955 they had risen to 3.5 million cases. And by 1960, they had soared to 18 million cases, with Heublein's Smirnoff accounting for 30 percent of the market.

Lighter Puerto Rican rum distillers wasted little time in chasing after vodka, claiming in ubiquitous ads that their spirit was “as different from dark rums as Scotch is from brandy.” Rum would go with anything: It was “a regular one-bottle bar!” the ads crooned, adding that “Puerto Rican rum mixes better with everything from coffee to cola to fruit juices.”The distillers'efforts paid off. The island

soon exported to the United States more rum than all other Caribbean producers combined. The improved quality helped, and equally helpful was the island's tax-free status on rum exports. Puerto Rico's Don Q retailed for just over $4 a fifth, or about 30 percent less than Myers's from Jamaica. At a 1952 tasting in New York hosted by the Wine and Food Society, the eleven rums from Puerto Rican far outpaced the entries from other producers—six from Jamaica, and one or two each from islands like Cuba and Barbados.

But a backlash had been quietly brewing against the cult of the bland, the cult of the transparent. The beatnik and the bongo drum were first appearing in smoky clubs and urban parks. And in faux Polynesian bars, rum would find a new and unusual life.

[MAI TAI]

Mix in cocktail shaker *one ounce* good JAMAICAN STYLE RUM, *one ounce* good MEDIUM-BODIED RUM (Cuban or Barbados), *three-quarters-ounce* ORANGE CURAÇAO, *three-quarters-ounce* fresh LIME JUICE, *one-quarter-ounce* ORGEAT. Shake and strain into tumbler with crushed ice. *Garnish* with fruit and fresh mint.

chapter 9

[Mai Tai]

And then, swiftly, came the Plague and the rush of the barbarians in its wake, and all the juices of the orchard went into cocktails.

—BERNARD DE VOTO, 1948

IN DECEMBER 1932, a stylish if somewhat adrift twenty-fouryear-old with a forehead made prominent by his receding hairline arrived in southern California, looking for something to do. A native of New Orleans, his name was Ernest Raymond Beaumont Gantt. Curious by nature and something of a proto-beatnik by choice, he had spent the previous months vagabonding on the cheap through some of the globe's more humid locales: Jamaica, Australia, Papua New Guinea, the Marquesas Islands, and Tahiti. By the time he washed up in Los Angles, his money had run out.

Gantt made do in the Depression economy through his wits and odd jobs—working in restaurants in Chinatown, parking cars at commercial lots, and engaging in a little freelance bootlegging in the months before Prohibition ended. Sociable and charming, he befriended such Hollywood personalities as David Niven and Marlene Dietrich, and through them found occasional work as a technical adviser on films set in the South Pacific. Directors were evidently as impressed by his knowledge of the region as by his collection of South Pacific artifacts, which could be borrowed for set props.

A year after he arrived in Los Angeles, Gantt happened upon a newly vacated tailor shop just off Hollywood Boulevard and connected to the McCadden Hotel. It was small—just thirteen feet by thirty—but Gantt liked the feel of it, and signed a five-year lease

for $30 per month. He built a bar that would seat about two dozen customers, and scattered a few tables in the remaining space. He decorated the place with his South Pacific gewgaws, along with old nets and parts of wrecked boats he scavenged from the oceanfront. He called his watering hole “Don the Beachcomber.”

He approached his drink menu the same way he approached his decor: with an eye toward frugality. Rum was the least expensive of the spirits, and Gantt had already sampled a variety in his travels. He devised an exotic menu of rum-based drinks that complemented the bar's South Pacific theme, and scratched them out on a board behind the bar.

The combination of Gantt's outgoing personality and the intrigue of his drinks proved irresistible to Los Angeles movers and shakers. Among those first drinks was one he named the Sumatra Kula, which cost a quarter. A well-dressed man named Neil Vanderbilt came in one day and ordered one, then another and another. He said it was the best drink he'd ever had. He was a freelance reporter for the *New York Times*, and he soon came back with friends, including Charlie Chaplin. Word of Don the Beachcomber began to spread through Hollywood and beyond. “If you can't get to paradise, I'll bring it to you,” he told his customers. (It didn't work for everyone; in July 1936 a wealthy businessman struck and killed a pedestrian while driving home after a night at Don the Beachcomber. His name was Howard Hughes.) By 1937, the restaurant and bar had outgrown the small tailor's shop, and Gantt moved to a larger spot in Hollywood. He added more South Pacific flotsam and imbued the place with a tropical twilight gloom. The joint became so much a part of his personality that he legally changed his name. Ernest Gantt was now Donn Beach.

And Donn Beach was the inventor of the tiki bar, a new kind of place that, over the next thirty years, would migrate from the cities to the suburbs and beyond.

Beach's reign in Los Angeles proved relatively short-lived. When World War II broke out, he enlisted in the military, and was in a convoy en route to Morocco when his ship was struck by a German

U-boat. Wounded, although not badly, Beach spent the remainder of his enlistment doing what he did best: serving up hospitality. The military put him in charge of overseeing dozens of hotels and restaurants where airmen could rest and recuperate—on Capri, and in Venice, Lido, and the French Riviera.

Beach's ex-wife, Cora Irene "Sunny" Sund, was left to run the business back in California. She proved as able as her ex-husband. When Beach returned home, he found that Don the Beachcomber had blossomed into a small chain with a handful of restaurants nationwide. Beach had little to do but sit at the bar and cash his checks. (The chain would eventually grow to sixteen locations, and was for a time part of J. Paul Getty's corporate empire.) Beach signed on as a consultant and then packed his bags for Hawaii, where he opened his own unaffiliated "Don the Beachcomber"in an up-and-coming resort area called Waikiki Beach.

Hawaiian tourism boomed after the war, as passengers abandoned slow steamships for more efficient air travel. Fewer than 30,000 tourists came to Hawaii annually prior to World War II; that rose to 250,000 by 1959. (It's 7 million today.) The flood of tourists came to bask in the South Pacific sun and style, and a growing army of entrepreneurs arrived to deliver it. Tiki style went wholesale, and restaurants, nightclubs, hotels and luau grounds that could serve pu-pu planters to hundreds at a seating met the demand.

Donn Beach was among those entrepreneurs. His restaurant became an instant landmark—more Hawaiian than most of Hawaii itself. Beach amplified the faux tropical theme with palms and thatch and a sweeping shingled roof, part space age, part ceremonial Polynesian meetinghouse. The noted Hawaiian arranger and composer Martin Denny played at the restaurant's Bora-Bora Lounge for nine months straight. Beach was often at the bar, a genial host wearing a gardenia lei, that, he was quick to note, was for sale at the restaurant's gift alcove. A myna bird presided over the premises, trained to blurt out, "Give me beer, stupid!" In the boozy intimacy of late evenings, a gentle rain would often begin to patter on the corrugated metal roof over the bar—thanks to a garden hose Beach

had installed. (Always the businessman, he had observed that late-night drinkers tended to linger for another round if they thought it was raining outside.)

Donn Beach remained a fixture in Hawaii until he died in 1989 at the age of eighty-one. The *New York Times* ran a short obituary that painted him as a sort of Thomas Edison of the thatched-roof bar, the inventor of eighty-four bar drinks, including one immensely enduring libation called the mai tai.

This was not without controversy. “There has been a lot of conversation over the beginning of the Mai Tai, and I want to get the record straight,” Victor Bergeron—better known as Trader Vic—once said. “I originated the Mai Tai. Anybody who says I didn't create this drink is a stinker.”

VICTOR JULES BERGERON was born in San Francisco in 1902, the son of a French Canadian waiter and grocery store operator. Before he was even six, he had survived the great earthquake of 1906 and a ravaging bout of tuberculosis that claimed his left leg. In 1934, with $300 of his own and $800 borrowed from an aunt, he opened a small beer joint and luncheonette in Oakland. It was called Hinky Dinks, and he sold beer for a nickel and a meal for a quarter.

Hinky Dinks would likely have come and gone like so many other small and largely forgettable restaurants, but Bergeron, like Donn Beach, didn't set low expectations for himself. Prohibition had recently ended, and Bergeron's customers displayed an uncommon curiosity about cocktails—the more outlandish and inventive, the better. In 1937, Bergeron and his wife took a vacation to New Orleans, Trinidad, and Havana, and sampled some of the famous cocktails then in fashion. They drank hurricanes in New Orleans, rum punch in Trinidad, and daiquiris made by the legendary Constantino at El Floridita in Havana. Back in California, an idea began to germinate. He visited a tropical-themed restaurant called the South Seas that had recently opened in San Francisco, and

journeyed to Los Angeles to try out a place that all the right people were talking about. It was Don the Beachcomber.

Bergeron headed back to Oakland and set about reinventing his restaurant and himself. He got rid of the name Hinky Dinks (which he concluded was "junky") and cast around for a new one. His wife pointed out that he was always involved in some deal or trade. Why not Trader Vic's?

Why not? He liked it, and the name stuck. Bergeron hastily spun a whole backstory to go with his new name. He now told his customers that he had lost his real leg in a shark attack—and then would grab an ice pick and ram it into his leg. Like Don the Beachcomber, he filled his newly christened restaurant with South Seas flotsam, lined the walls with dried grass mats, used palm tree trunks as columns, and hung fisherman's floats, masks, and spears—all things that brought to mind the mysterious South Seas islands, none of which he'd ever visited. Bergeron would take the idea launched by Ernest Raymond Beaumont Gantt and upon it build an empire.

TRADER VIC'S BOTH tapped into the zeitgeist and helped shape it. The Pacific theater in World War II drew America's attention to a region of the world they hadn't previously given much thought to. When the war ended, returning servicemen carried home stories and snapshots of exotic Pacific lands and people they met in transit and on leave. The public's imagination was further captured by the tales spun by a talented and evidently underemployed naval reservist, who had spent much of his enlistment typing out stories in a tent in Vanuatu. His name was James Michener, and the book he published was called *Tales of the South Pacific.* It won a Pulitzer Prize in 1948, and made it to Broadway as a musical called *South Pacific*, with songs by Rodgers and Hammerstein. The musical became a movie sensation in 1958; a year later, Hawaii joined the union amid fireworks and hullabaloo, and two years after that Elvis added his own brand of fuel to the South Pacific mania with his movie *Blue*

Hawaii. If it had thatch and tiki torches and little statues (which Donn Beach liked to call his "cannibal gods"), the public would come.

Tiki began in the cities, but it was too powerful to remain confined there. It moved into the suburbs and beyond. Apartment buildings, bowling alleys, trailer parks, laundromats, and corner restaurants were dressed up with tiki heads and masks, rattan walls, dried blowfish, and electric tiki torches. Plans were even made for a tiki-themed fast-food chain, to be called Tonga Pup, although this regrettably failed to graduate from drawing board to street corner.

The tiki movement was in large part a reaction to the times. It was the era of the Organization Man, the Man in the Grey Flannel Suit, the vodka drinker. Ornament had been buried by a generation of architects and interior designers. Streets were lined with lean glass buildings, and the suburbs sprouted ranch houses with floor-toceiling sliders and sleek, tubular steel furniture. It was all frightfully austere. The tiki restaurant, in contrast, was nothing but ornament; without it, a tiki bar would collapse. Those coming of age after the end of the war were eager to make up for lost time and happy to be entertained. Disneyland opened in 1955, and among its first rides was an ersatz Jungle Cruise, in which boats drifted through a sort of tikenspired, animatronic wonderland. At tiki restaurants, you could enter an exotic world and engage in curious rituals amid hula girls and seductively unfamiliar music. Tiki historian Sven Kirsten calls those who succumbed the "modern primitives." The tiki bar offered escape for those who didn't want to drop out of society and play bongo drums all day, but weren't content with a circumscribed life. *"Warning,"* wrote the authors of the 1957 *Esquire* cocktail guide in offering advice to aspiring hosts. "Do not make up chicken salad, tuna fish salad, mixed-cream-cheese-olive-sawdust-combination salad, spread on bread, cut off the crust, and then slice them into little oblongs or triangles. Your guests will hate you forever, and quite rightly."

Grand tiki temples cropped up throughout the country to meet the demands of the modern primitives—the Mai-Kai in Florida, the

Kahiki in Ohio, the Kowloon in Massachusetts, the Tiki Ti and the Tonga Room in California, and a dozen or more places competing with Don the Beachcomber in Honolulu. Customers typically entered the tiki realm by passing over a low bridge or through a damp grotto, which offered a gentle transition from the harsh and unfortunate reality outside the door. It took a few moments for one's eyes to adjust, as the restaurants were invariably windowless. Who wanted to see the harsh sun, the parking lot, and the road outside? The tiki restaurant existed in a sort of perpetual twilight, lit by propane torches, the fiery eyes of tiki statues, and golden flames licking off the pineapple-and-brown-sugar entrées delivered by a hula girl. There was always the possibility that one might witness an elaborate cult ritual involving cannibalism or sex or both.

IF THERE WAS a cult at the tiki palaces, it was that of the tiki drink.

Few came to the restaurants solely because of the food. (Noting the flaming entrées, the *Columbus Dispatch* once noted of the Kahiki that it "is one of the few restaurants in Columbus in which food can injure you.") The lure was the drinks. Restaurants raced to outhustle one another in concocting the most outrageous cocktails, giving them fanciful names like "Pele's Bucket of Fire," "Sidewinder's Fang," "Molucca Fireball,""Tonga Surfrider,"and the "Aku-Aku Lapu."(Not all bars showed imagination; many saw fit to name their specialty simply "the Mystery Drink.") These South Seas–styled cocktails, first concocted in the 1930s, were a cultural phenomenon that lasted well into the 1970s—"an unprecedented life span for a drink fad," writes tiki drink expert Jeff Berry.

Tiki bars marshaled whole stockrooms of custom-made ceramic skulls, pineapples, barrels, Easter Island heads, and statues in which to serve their potions. Specific drinks were reserved for specific vessels—the "Deep Six," for instance, was always to be consumed "from the horn of a water buffalo" (or a ceramic facsimile thereof), which was often available in the gift shop for a small consideration.

Tiki bars encouraged the shared consumption of drink, which enhanced the effect of ritual. “The Kava Bowl” was a specialty of Trader Vic's in the 1940s; it consisted of vast amounts of various rums and other mixings, and was limited to three per party of four. “The Volcano” at Don the Beachcomber had a central cone filled with flaming overproof rum. Communal drinks came to the table wrapped in ceremony, offering fleeting celebrity to those bold enough to order them. At the Kahiki, an exotic “mystery girl”would bring out a flaming drink for four amid the reverberation of gongs. (“This ritual symbolizes an ancient sacrifice, which reportedly stopped volcanoes from erupting,” the menu claimed.)

The competition for the most elaborate drinks led to CIA-level secrecy, chiefly out of fear that a bartender might leave and take prized recipes with him. A 1948 *Saturday Evening Post* story noted that the bottles at Don the Beachcomber lacked the original labels and had been replaced by new ones with cryptic letters and numbers. Bartenders used coded recipes to mix these anonymous ingredients. “Infinite pains are taken to see to it that the service bar help cannot memorize Don's various occult ingredients and proportions,” the *Post* reported.

Tropical juices and rums had intermingled long before the rise of the tiki bar, of course. Pineapple-flavored rum—made by infusing sliced pineapple in a puncheon of rum—was not an uncommon drink in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Early sailors enjoying shore leave would smuggle rum back aboard by drilling a hole in a coconut, draining the milk, then filling it with rum and sealing it back up. Surreptitiously sipping from the shell was called “sucking the monkey.”

During Prohibition, the corner soda fountains had assumed some of the social role of saloons and trafficked in nonalcoholic exotica. Drinks available legally in the late 1920s included the Hawaiian Special and the Mandalay Delight. When Repeal was passed, bartenders were quick to add alcohol to the fruity potions. A bartender at New York's Hotel Biltmore took top prize at the 1934 International Beer, Wine and Liquor exposition with his Fresco

Cocktail: lime, pineapple, sugar, and Bacardi, shaken and strained into a cocktail glass. Parched soldiers in the Pacific during World War II were singularly inventive when it came to drink. A GI would turn brewer by punching in the three eyes at the end of a coconut, then adding sugar and raisins; a week later one of the plugs would pop, signaling that it was ready to consume. Servicemen in search of the harder stuff rigged up stills made of fuel drums and scavenged copper coils, distilling spirits from whatever they could swipe from the mess hall. It was "considered aged by the time it had cooled," wrote one soldier, Malcolm Anderson, in 1945, and "made you feel as if the top of your head had been jerked up by several inches, or even yards." Tropical juices would make it slide down easier.

The haute tiki cocktail bar took these coarse combinations, tinkered with them, and dressed them up. The juices at the better establishments were always freshly squeezed. "For the life of me I can't see why any bar uses anything but pure fresh lemon or orange juice," wrote Trader Vic in 1948. David Embury, whose drink-making bible was published the same year, was even more emphatic: "It should scarcely be necessary to caution you never, *never*, NEVER to use unsweetened canned juices,"he wrote, and warned of the "exceptionally vile concoctions of the prohibition era" that involved the same. "The first commandment with respect to fruit juices," Embury said, "is to use nothing but fresh fruit, freshly squeezed."

The drinks weren't just fruit juice, of course. They were mostly alcohol. Some special drinks contained as much as twelve ounces of rum, although eight ounces was the more common amount in even the stiffer drinks. Perhaps the most legendary was the zombie, which can trace its lineage, as can so much tiki culture, back to Donn Beach. Popular lore says that Donn himself mixed up several rums and a few other ingredients to help revive a badly hungover customer on his way to a crucial business meeting. When asked later how it went, the man replied he felt like "the living dead." A name was born.

What went into the original zombie has been lost in the blearyeyed mists of time. Beach's widow later published a recipe that involved five rums, including one thirty-two-year-old Jamaican—plus lime juice, bitters, maraschino liqueur, and absinthe. Numerous efforts to re-create it have also been published, including a recipe published in *Here's How Mixed Drinks* (1941) that likewise featured five varieties of rum, along with apricot brandy, brown sugar, lime juice, and pineapple juice. (The recipe's author suggests, “Perhaps it would be wise to locate the coroner before serving this.”)

The zombie was accorded full-fledged celebrity at the 1964 New York World's Fair, where it was a bestseller at the Hurricane Bar at Flushing Meadows. Lucius Beebe wrote that it cost a dollar at the bar and was limited to one per customer, “by a management at once thrifty and mindful of municipal ordinances.” Beebe noted that the zombie craze led to a run on 151 proof rum, which was typically floated on the top of the cocktail, and heretofore had been consumed only by lumberjacks, Grand Banks fishermen, and others who valued the rapid warming qualities of high-proof spirits.

Like any celebrity, the zombie made a high-profile target for spoilsports and other critics. “This is undoubtedly the most overadvertised, overemphasized, overexalted and foolishly feared drink whose claims to glory ever assaulted the eyes and ears of the gullible American public,” wrote Embury. He allowed that he was “allergic to secret formulas,” since “all this mystery, of course, is calculated to inspire curiosity and thus advertise the drink.”

Other critics dismissed such tiki drinks as concoctions appealing only to uneducated palates—to those who preferred sweet to dry, who hadn't traveled Europe and understood that an aperitif was meant to titillate one's appetite, not to sate it with sugar and fruit. Sugar in drinks was for unmanly men and those from the lower ranks of society. “Sweet alcoholic drinks are favored by the young and callow of all classes,” wrote Paul Fussell in his study of American social structure, “a taste doubtless representing a

transitional stage in the passage from the soda fountain to maturity."

Critics overlooked one essential fact: Many tiki drinks were actually very good, even sophisticated. They were drinks taken quite seriously at the better places—like Don the Beachcomber and Trader Vic's—where rum was accorded the honor it deserved.

Donn Beach was the Alice Waters of rum. He showed Americans that the spirit didn't have to be the tasteless, bland commodity of the sort exported in tankers from Puerto Rico. Done right, rum had local variations and nuance. Rum had history, and aged rum especially had an intriguing richness and depth. Beach had a rare nose for the subtle differences among the better rums, and made a point of traveling through rum-producing regions to study the techniques and processes of rum making. On his buying trips, he'd lay in a two-year supply at a time, and he stocked some 138 different types of rum. He was particularly drawn to the more robust Jamaican rums, and established lasting friendships with the makers of both Wray & Nephew and Myers's.

Back home in Hawaii, Beach would blend and test to find the perfect balance and combination of rums, and then layer in additions like lime juice or Pernod or vermouth or pineapple and coax it into the perfect drink. "Donn would sit there all day with his cronies mixing drinks," recalled restaurant supervisor Nash Aranas, quoted in Sven Kirsten's glorious history of the tiki movement. "He would test, test, test like a mad scientist." Even Trader Vic doffed his cap: "I salute Don the Beachcomber as the outstanding rum connoisseur of our country," he said, and printed this accolade on his menus.

Many of the original drink recipes called for a wide range of rums: white, medium-bodied, and aged rums of the sort that you can't find today—and if you could, you'd sip them slowly, as if they were fine cognacs, rather than mixing them with pineapple juice. Beach called for rums from Jamaica, Guyana, and Puerto Rico to

mingle in his Plantation Punch recipe (along with triple sec and falernum), and his navy grog likewise called for three rums, all heavy and dark. It's true that dumping five rums into the zombie was more for show than taste, but two or three rums from different regions complement one another exceptionally well, and made for a far more complex drink than one made with a single rum.

Beach was abetted in his mission to spread the gospel of rum by an unlikely ally: food guru James Beard. In the late 1950s and the 1960s, Beard penned a series of columns for *Better Homes and Gardens* that dwelled on the delicious rums he had discovered and the cocktails that highlighted them best. Beard took global cuisines seriously in an age when ham, brown sugar, and pineapple were deemed exotic and tropical. He brought to the attention of his readers serious wok techniques and authentic South American ingredients well ahead of the trends. And Beard approached rum with the same seriousness.

Beard suspected much of the public was embracing rum because of its novelty in fanciful drinks, like those touted by the tiki palaces. He encouraged his readers to look deeper."Today rum is returning to its rightful place as a general favorite," he wrote in 1960. "We are rediscovering what the colonial knew—that, of all the liquors, rum is the most versatile.... You can drink rum straight, on the rocks, in a highball, in a rum old-fashioned, or a rum sour.

"Each rum has its own special flavor and quality," Beard continued. "Indeed, one of the assets of rum as a drink is the wide choice of types and their versatility." Beard was a pioneer in explaining how rums varied by island and by heritage. This was not news to rum aficionados—Embury had outlined the regional differences in his bar book in 1948—but for those who believed a bottle of Bacardi Silver was the final word in rum, it came as an overdue education.

Cuban rum, distilled at a higher potency, stripped out more of the flavors, and was filtered to refine it further still. Beard noted that Jamaican rums had a different flavor profile than these lighter, more processed rums. Barbadian rums like Mount Gay occupied

terrain between Cuban and Jamaican rums—not quite as full as the latter, but more robust than the former. The Virgin Island rums were finding a niche in the middle, like Barbados rums, and the *New York Times* reported that they possessed “their own peculiar molasses flavor and are at their best when served in mixed drinks of the heavy type, such as swizzles, punches, and coolers.”

Demerara rum had the powerful aromatics of Jamaican rum but an additional flavor of something slightly burned, and was at times flavored with bark. Martinique rums, while less common in the United States (even though the island had thirty-two rum distilleries and a long tradition of rum making), were strikingly different, more aromatic, made as they were from sugarcane syrup rather than molasses. Thanks to Beach, Bergeron, and Beard, a nation that knew how to speak whiskey learned how to speak rum.

And rum began to find its market. In one nonscientific study in 1962, an enterprising reporter tallied the jigger count at a bar near Grand Central Station over the course of a twelve-hour bartending day. The result: straight whiskey remained dominant with 185 jiggers, followed by Scotch (125) and gin (120). But rum was closing in at 90 jiggers, and was still outpacing vodka. Indeed, that year rum sales grew 16 percent. Rum now accounted for 2.5 percent of the liquor market.

One of the remaining landmarks of Waikiki Beach's first tourism boom is a Moorish-style confection the color of cotton candy that rises among palm trees midway down the beach. The Royal Hawaiian Hotel, which opened in 1927, was built by a steamship company to promote Hawaii as a destination. It's now surrounded by charmless high-rises that cast it alternately in shadow and glare, but on the hotel grounds you can still find evidence of the lost era at the outdoor bar just steps off the beach. Here, exceptionally elaborate drinks are served amid tiki torches as you listen to both crashing waves and a crooner with a wireless mike working the tables

looking for guests to sing along. ("Remember that one? It's by a guy named Neil Sedaka.")

This is the Mai Tai Bar, and the namesake drink is a vision to behold. It's served in a glass big enough to house Japanese fighting fish, and is richly but discretely colored, like a hazy sunset. A wedge of pineapple perches on the rim, lording over a shrub-sized sprig of mint, a bright cherry, a purple floating orchid, and a small, colorful parasol. The whole tableau is as lush and tidy as a Victorian conservatory.

The mai tai remains the quintessential tiki drink. It's also a survivor, persisting when so many other concoctions of the era have perished. There's a good reason for its longevity—it's an exceptionally fine drink when made well. (A mai tai was the first thing asked for by Patty Hearst, the Symbionese Liberation Army kidnapee turned coconspirator, upon her release on bail in 1976.) The problem is that it's much easier to make one poorly than properly. A mai tai can easily become unbalanced—too sweet, too tart, too alcoholic—and it's the rare bartender who can craft a worthy mai tai consistently. It's no wonder that mai tai premixes have come to be so popular, and why the mai tai has suffered such a quick descent into mediocrity. A traveler treads into dangerous terrain when ordering a mai tai at an unfamiliar bar—or strip-mall Chinese restaurant.

A classic version starts with the same building blocks of all outstanding rum drinks—lime and sugar (in this case, in the form of grenadine)—which is mixed with at least two rums, a light and a dark, and a touch of curaçao (an orange-flavored liqueur). The secret ingredient, if there is one, is orgeat (pronounced *or-ZHAY*), an almondflavored syrup now often found as a flavoring in trendy coffee shops.

Like any good rum drink, a mai tai enhances and brings out the quality of the rum. In other words, better rums always make a better mai tai. This isn't true of another tropical drink, the piña colada, which I would classify as among the worst examples of the tiki cocktail. The piña colada was invented in 1954 by a bartender at

the Caribe Hilton in Puerto Rico. It was an instant hit—and why not? Pineapple and coconut are the linebackers of the taste world, and can flatten the harshest of rums. It's no great surprise that it was invented in Puerto Rico, where so much rum was meant to be hidden rather than heralded.

The Royal Hawaiian is probably the best-known place to order up a mai tai at Waikiki Beach, but it's by no means the only place. The mai tai is actually inescapable—as unavoidable as the mojito in Havana or the hurricane in New Orleans. The Halekulani Hotel's surfside bar serves a mai tai nicely garnished with a splint of sugarcane. The Kaimana Beach Hotel serves its drinks under gnarled and ancient hau trees, where the whole of the Hawaiian experience has been condensed in a single glass. That the drink was invented in California hardly matters.

THE MAI TAI has more fathers than one can reasonably hope to count. There's a good explanation behind the volume of claims. The Los Alamos–like secrecy that prevailed in many tiki bars meant that no standard recipe rose to the top. Trader Vic Bergeron published two cocktail recipe books at the height of his fame, yet neither included the mai tai. So anyone with access to a few bottles of liquor could throw together anything and call it a mai tai. And they did. Inexplicably, many involved pineapple juice—which Trader Vic's original assuredly did not.

Bergeron spent a fair amount of energy in his later years defending his paternity. That others claimed to be the mai tai's inventor, he said, “aggravates my ulcer completely.” The mai tai arose as many fine cocktails do, he said, as the result of an impromptu mingling of ingredients. It was 1944. “I was at the service bar in my Oakland restaurant,”he recalled in 1970.“I took down a bottle of seventeen-year-old rum. It was J. Wray Nephew from Jamaica; surprisingly golden in color, medium bodied, but with the rich pungent flavor particular to the Jamaican blends. The flavor of this great rum wasn't meant to be overpowered with heavy

additions of fruit juices and flavorings. I took a fresh lime, added some orange Curacao from Holland, a dash of Rock Candy Syrup, and a dollop of French Orgeat, for its subtle almond flavor. A generous amount of shaved ice and vigorous shaking by hand produced the marriage I was after. Half the lime shell went in for color [and] I stuck in a branch of fresh mint …"

He said he first served the drink to friends, a couple visiting from Tahiti named Ham and Carrie Gould. Carrie smiled and said, "Mai tai roa ae"—which means "the best" in Tahitian. Bergeron christened the drink on the spot. It later made the leap from Oakland to his San Francisco and Seattle restaurants. And in 1953, according to Trader Vic, the mai tai was exported to Hawaii when he was hired by the Matson Steamship Lines to create a drink menu at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

The chief countervailing genesis tale comes, not surprisingly, from Donn Beach, who claimed he invented the mai tai at his bar around 1933. The Beachcomber's version started with heavy Jamaican rum and light Cuban rum, then added lime, bitters, Pernod, grapefruit juice, falernum, and Cointreau. A newspaperman who claimed to have been drinking with both Beach and Bergeron in the early 1970s says that Bergeron admitted that Beach was the mai tai's inventor.

Maybe, maybe not. Donn Beach may very well have been the first to apply the name *mai tai* to a drink. But the one served at Trader Vic's is the source of today's classic mai tai, and is far and away the better drink. It deserves to prevail.

By the late 1970s, tiki was tacky. The thatched roofs were ratty, the hula girls passé, and the drinks too potent and elaborate for the emerging era of white wine spritzers. The actor Yul Brynner came down with trichinosis after eating at Trader Vic's at the Plaza Hotel in New York. (He settled out of court for $3 million.) A decade later, Trader Vic's was closed by then-owner Donald Trump, who announced that the restaurant had "gotten tacky."(In 1994, a haute Polynesian restaurant called Gauguin briefly opened in the space

once occupied by Trader Vic's.) Bergeron eventually turned over control of the chain to his children and retired to pursue a quiet career as a painter and jeweler. According to the *New York Times*, he liked to paint "ice-skating nuns and perky otters."

Perhaps the most startling death knell for tiki rang out in 2000, when the glorious Kahiki restaurant in Columbus, Ohio, built in 1961 and featuring a forty-foot-high tiki with a fireplace in its mouth, was demolished to make way for a Walgreen's drugstore.

A tiki revival flourished in the late 1990s, prodded by hipsters who took the so-called loungecore movement in a more ironic direction. Tiki mugs that languished in Salvation Army shops were snapped up and traded on eBay, and tiki aficionados gathered at events and went on road trips to see the remaining icons of the era. A surfeit of tiki cocktail guides made their way into print. At the trendy clothing and gewgaw chain Urban Outfitters, shoppers could buy plastic coconut drink mugs and dashboard hula girls. Wink, wink.

The revival is all about kitsch: the faux-primitive statues, the blowfish lamps, the netting, the thatch over the home tiki bar, the Martin Denny albums. But few seem to have embraced the demanding craft of the tiki cocktail. (The author Jeff Berry is the most rigorous tiki cocktail archaeologist practicing today, and his two tiki cocktail guides— *Beachbum Berry's Grog Log* and *Beachbum Berry's Intoxica!*— offer a small ray of hope.) Getting the drinks right takes a measure of patience and time, not to mention cash to invest in the best rums.

THE COLLAPSE OF the original tiki culture is nowhere as shocking and complete as at Waikiki Beach. Don the Beachcomber's old place has been demolished, and Trader Vic's is gone. All the other tiki palaces have likewise disappeared. The Tahitian Lanai, a tiki hotel and restaurant with individual grass dining huts off a lagoon, was bulldozed for holiday condominiums. (Lost with it was the "Lovely Lovely," a potion of high-proof rum, brown sugar, lemon and lime

juices, and curaçao.) Even the tiki rooms at the larger, more established hotels have vanished. The Mai Tai Bar at the Royal Hawaiian, which was never very tiki, could serve as a backdrop for a Jimmy Buffett album.

I had heard about a surviving tiki bar that hadn't yet succumbed to the times a few miles from Waikiki Beach, and I set out to find it. La Mariana Sailing Club turned out to be north of the city in a grim industrial area of blank concrete walls and dusty roadside debris. It was a low building in a compact, overgrown waterside oasis of palms next to a manufacturing plant that processes crushed aggregates.

I walked inside. It took a few moments for my eyes to adapt to the gloaming. But when they did, I felt like Hiram Bingham at Machu Picchu, stumbling into a lost culture. There was a waterfall behind the tables in the main room, and colored lights twinkled throughout. Corky, an unsocial African gray parrot, performed pitch-perfect renditions of car alarms and digital telephone rings.

As Honolulu's other tiki bars had shut down, owner Annette Nahinu, now eighty-eight, had gathered up bits of the past and installed them in her place. The tables were from Don the Beachcomber; the blowfish lamps from Trader Vic's. The huge clamshells next to the waterfall came from the Hyatt's Tiki Room, and the tiki support posts from the Sheraton's Kon-Tiki. When the Tahitian Lanai shut down, La Mariana acquired not only the woven lauhala walls from the Waikikian, but also Ron Miyashiro, the bar's former pianist. He plays on Friday and Saturday nights, and the place fills up, often with regulars who migrated with him.

I pulled up a stool at the bar and ordered a mai tai. They didn't get many tourists tracking them down, said Tito Calace, the bartender that night. But the locals still came religiously. “They like the aloha,” he said. And then he made up a classic mai tai, redolent of the sun and the tropics.

Sitting out of the mainstream, far from the high camp and layered irony of the modern tiki revivial, I had found what I was looking

for: the perfect tiki moment.

[MOJITO]

Place *4 to 6 freshly washed* MINT LEAVES in tall glass. Add *two teaspoons* BAR SUGAR or simple syrup and *three-quarters-ounce* fresh LIME JUICE. *Muddle* vigorously with MUDDLER. Add *two ounces* of good aged RUM. *Fill* glass with ICE and SODA WATER. Garnish with mint.

chapter 10

[Mojito]

Rum is an American term applied to an American invention.

—*Prohibitionist 's Textbook,* National Temperance Society and Publication House, 1877

Rumors about a man named Stephen Remsberg surfaced early on when I began researching this history of rum. This Remsberg fellow, I had been led to believe, was an attorney who lived in New Orleans and liked rum. He liked rum *a lot.* He had also amassed what knowledgeable people told me was the largest private collection of rum in the world. Naturally, I was intrigued. So when I went to New Orleans (not long before Hurricane Katrina rearranged the city's culture and geography), I tracked Remsberg down and called him up. Yes, he said, he was the Stephen Remsberg who collected rum, and yes, he would be happy to meet with me. He invited me to stop by his law offices not far off Canal Street.

Remsberg is fifty-eight years old and has a slight paunch and an expression that suggests he's often undecided whether he means to express surprise or disdain. He speaks slowly and with some deliberation. His office is clean and tidy, as one might expect of a lawyer who specializes in commercial contracts, and the space is otherwise unremarkable save for the views toward the Mississippi River. A few minor rum graphics are hung here and there, but little else to suggest an unhealthy obsession.

Nor was there anything to suggest that he had arrived at his abiding interest in rum through a long and profound love of tiki drinks. His first sip of a Polynesian-style drink, which he recounted

dreamily, occurred in London in the 1960s. He had gone to visit his older brother, and the two set off for Trader Vic's at the London Hilton. He ordered a vodka drink made with pineapple and coconut —“sort of a beginner's drink” is how he describes it. But his experience at Trader Vic's was not unlike that of an agnostic who visits the Vatican and comes away devoutly Catholic.

While at law school in Washington, D.C., Remsberg spent his weekends unwinding at the local Hilton's Trader Vic's. Later, living in Chicago, Remsberg had the good fortune of residing just around the corner from a Don the Beachcomber restaurant. “I discovered Don's early on,” he said, “and then I found paradise.” Remsberg is perhaps one of a handful of people who not only recognizes that tiki drinks can vary widely in style, but can discourse knowingly about them. “I prefer the Don the Beachcomber's bartending style,” he told me. “Trader Vic's drinks are very good, and I think his mai tai is fabulous. But his drinks are certainly sweeter.”

Remsberg in time became a serious tiki cocktail detective, and devoted hours to cracking codes and re-creating drinks of the era. One major discovery occurred when he was visiting Don the Beachcomber's flagship restaurant in Los Angeles some years ago (it's since closed) and he noticed that the bartender finished his cocktail liturgies at the bar, eschewing the usual custom of slipping into the back and doing it in the sacristy. Remsberg noted he added a few dashes from a pair of unmarked cruets. So he casually inquired what they contained. Pernod and Angostura bitters, he was told. For years, Remsberg had been trying to figure out the “secret ingredients”in the Beachcomber's tiki drinks, and here it was, laid out before him, much simpler than he ever thought. It was as if he was Howard Carter and here was the door to Tutankhamen's tomb.

Remsberg's interest migrated from specific drink recipes into rums in general; one of his early epiphanies was that outstanding tiki drinks required outstanding rums. What's more, many drink recipes he uncovered employed identical juices and sweeteners, and varied only in the types of rums that were used.

So rums became a small hobby of his. Then they became a large hobby. He acquired bottles when he traveled to the Caribbean, and before he knew it he had a growing collection of hard-to-find rums. Friends and relatives started to seek out obscure rums for him on their travels. He started prowling old bars for historic bottles of rum and, more recently, has delighted in what one can turn up on eBay. (“What do you search for?” I asked. “I type in “rum,' ” he said.) As will happen when one embarks on such an endeavor, the collection became somewhat unwieldy. At the time of our meeting, he said he had in excess of seven hundred different rums, although he hadn't taken inventory in some time. And that didn't include the little airlinesized bottles, of which he had maybe twice as many.

We swapped notes about some rums we enjoyed, and speculated on what had happened to once-popular brands. But my time was winding down. I rose to leave. He looked up at me from behind his desk, and I was uncertain if he was regarding me with surprise or disdain. “What are you doing tomorrow?” he then asked. “Do you want to stop by the house?”

Stephen Remsberg's house might be regarded as the Louvre of rum, that is, if the Louvre were built around a small kitchen, and then spilled into a small adjoining room with a thatched-roof tiki bar. It was smaller than I expected, but he had fit much into the space, mostly by attaching to the walls many linear feet of narrow but tall shelves about the height width of, say, a rum bottle.

What's striking about the collection is not the sheer acreage of liquor—which is actually quite impressive—but that it's an active tasting collection. “I don't collect empties,” he said. “I collect rum, not bottles. And I'll open any bottle that I have two of.” As such, Remsberg's house is more than a mortuary of defunct brands. It's a museum of tastes, some of which have been wholly lost.

Strolling around the collection with my knowledgeable tour guide, we visit with some old friends of mine. “This is my one sample of the old heavy rum from Puerto Rico that was especially

made for planter's punch. That would have disappeared around 1950.”He points.“And these are three old Barbados rums, and this”—a bottle of Finest Old Jamaican Rum, dating to about 1910 —“is one of the first two or three rums I believe to be sold as a brand in the bottle.” (Rums before that were invariably sold in bulk from the barrel, he explained.)

Remsberg clears a spot on his kitchen counter, sets out some short glasses, and we work our way through history, an inch at a time. We sample the dense Jamaican Wedderburnand Plummer-style rums, named after nineteenth-century plantations. Both were popular in England, Remsberg said, and neither very popular in North America or even Jamaica. We sample London Dock rums, shipped from Jamaica or Guyana to be aged in the barrel in the cool, damp environs of the London docks, which gave it a rich, mellow taste that was in much demand. We take a brief detour to sip an Egyptian rum, which was curiously floral and not very pharaonic.

“And these are my six remaining New England rums,” Remsberg says. His Boston rums date from the last gasp of the Boston rum era, with samples from the early to the mid-twentieth century. They include Caldwell's, Pilgrim, Old Medford, Chapin, Il Toro, and one privately bottled rum that likely was collected by a butler right from the barrel at a distillery. We sample Caldwell's, and it is just as I hoped it would be— dense and cloying and filled with the rich, yeasty taste of molasses. “By 1900 they were making a serious rum in New England,”Remsberg says.

He returns to his shelf and pulls down a bottle of white rum—a rarity here, since he generally prefers dark. “This doesn't look like much,” he says. He's right; it doesn't. It's a bottle of white Bacardi dating from 1925, straight out of the crypt of Prohibition. I wrinkle my nose slightly—I find most white Bacardi harsh and industrial tasting, and I drink it only when nothing else is available.

Remsberg notices and smiles. “You should really taste this,” he says to me. “This would have been the old Bacardi White Label they used to make the first daiquiris in Havana. This would have been aged four years, then they would have stripped the color out of it by

filtering it through charcoal. I don't have limes or I would make you Constantino's El Floridita daiquiri. But you can say this is what started the daiquiri—this rum."

He pours out a bit more than a thimbleful into a glass, and I bring it under my nose. It's not in the least medicinal, but complex and inviting. I sip. My word. It's like tasting in Technicolor—it's full, complex, and not too flowery, but also lacking any trace of unpleasant heaviness. It's unlike any other white rum I've tasted.

Remsberg was grinning at my inability to hide my shock. "So you can see why Prohibition-starved Americans flooding El Floridita would have said, "This is good!' There was something about those early Cuban cocktail rums. They were just better rums than the world had seen. Nobody is producing a white rum today as pleasing as this."

TODAY, VIRTUALLY ALL traces of Bacardi have been erased from Havana, like a Stalin-era apparatchik airbrushed out of a Soviet politburo photograph. When Bacardi left the island in 1961, fleeing before it was nationalized by the Castro regime, the company abandoned millions of dollars worth of distilling equipment, a century of local contacts, and that whimsical tower designed by Maxfield Parrish. But the Bacardi family took what was most important: its trademark. It would rebuild its production and markets abroad, but neither forget nor forgive Castro and his "bearded ones."

Today, old Havana is looking less dowdy and more refreshed than it has since Prohibition days. The Bacardi tower was recently spruced up by the Cuban government as part of its ongoing restoration of the historic downtown. Tourism revenues are replacing sugar subsidies from the old Soviet Union, with investors and travelers coming from Canada, England, Spain, and Latin America. Old Havana is bustling with stone masons perched on wooden scaffolding of questionable safety. Men approach travelers on the street and in halting English offer cigars, women, and rum.

As was the case in the 1920s, a number of bars today exist to serve the tourist, and many of the old cocktail recipes have been resurrected. Old Havana can feel like an alfresco museum of forgotten drinks. Tall men in short-waisted scarlet jackets bustle about outdoor cafes off Obisbo Street, taking orders for daiquiris and Mary Pickfords and MacArthurs and mojitos.

Especially mojitos. If you walk into any Old Havana bar—except for Hemingway's El Floridita, where daiquiri pilgrims make their obeisance—and hold up two fingers without comment, the odds are favorable you'll get two mojitos in return.

Bodeguita del Medio is Havana's mojito mecca. It's a ten-minute walk from El Floridita on a quiet street around the corner from the Plaza de Armas, and you could easily pass by the robin-egg's-blue storefront without giving it a second look. It was first opened in 1942 by Angel Martínez, who called it the Pleasant Storage Room and sold rice, beans, and other staples. He expanded into serving lunch, changed the name to Martínez House, then in 1950 changed it again to Bodeguita del Medio. He served drinks—including very good mojitos, it turns out—and the place became a hipster haven in the 1950s, attracting visiting celebrities like Nat King Cole, Errol Flynn, Pablo Neruda, and an unknown university student named Fidel Castro. The bar survived Fidel's revolution; a black-and-white photo on one wall shows Che Guevara in jungle fatigues sitting comfortably with others, the multiple condensation rings on the table suggesting this wasn't merely a photo opportunity.

Today, drinkers arrive by the busload, ushered through by tour guides who announce that their charges have fifteen minutes to sample one of the famed mojitos before heading to the next attraction. The front room is no more than twenty feet wide, with an L-shaped bar that seats fewer than a dozen (everyone else crowds in or spills out into the street), a compact dining room in the back, and a small upper galleria with some artifacts and photos. A three-man band clusters in a corner and plays songs from the *Buena Vista Social Club* sound track. Where El Floridita strives for elegance, La Bodeguita specializes in a scruffy informality, and drinkers for years

have left their mark by scrawling their names on the walls—Che Guevara's signature is said to be somewhere. (Customers today pen one name over another using increasingly thick markers.) The bar also features the Hemingway stamp of authenticity: a framed inscription evidently written and signed by the man's own big hand reads, “My mojitos in La Bodeguita. My daiquiris in El Floridita.”

The Cuban government, which today owns virtually all the restaurants in Cuba, understands the allure of the bar's name among capitalist marketers, and has licensed other Bodeguita del Medios—in Dubai, Oman, Paris, and Milan. There are also samizdat variations in Miami and Palo Alto, the latter of which has a cardboard cutout of a grinning Ernest Hemingway propped outside to lure in customers to sample their “coastal cuisine with a Cuban influence.” The Palo Alto version serves many rums, although none from Cuba.

Mojitos at La Bodeguita in Havana are made by unflappable bartenders in unfathomable quantities. They line up a battery of tall glasses along the bar during lulls, and preload them with mint, lime juice, and guarapo. When the mojito orders flood in with the arrival of each tour group, a bartender adds a splash of club soda and then pulverizes the whole mess with a wooden muddler the size and shape of a souvenir baseball bat. The process results in a small, frothy geyser, which sprays the bartender and a few patrons. No one seems to notice. Then comes ice. Then rum is lavished on top freehand.

The mojito is a simple drink—it's basically a rum collins with the addition of mint. The drink most likely started as a rural farmworker's favorite in the nineteenth century—the mint, sugar, and lime could divert a drinker's attention from the singular nastiness of cheap rum— and migrated to the blue-collar beaches of Havana. From here, it was a short hop to the more trendy Havana nightclubs that flourished under U.S. Prohibition, when the ice and bubbly water were introduced. The second volume of Charles Baker's *The Gentleman's Companion, Being an Exotic Drinking Book, or Around the World with Jigger, Beaker, and Flask*, first published in

1939, talked of the “greatly improved rum collins” served at Sloppy Joe's bar in Havana, made all the more delectable with a spiral of lime peel wrapped around the ice and garnished with “a bunch of fresh mint.”

Like the daiquiri before it, the mojito set across the Straits of Florida and spread north after Repeal. It cropped up in the teeming post-Prohibition bars: During the 1939 World's Fair in New York, a mojito was featured in a free cocktail guide for visitors to the Cuban pavilion. That same year Trader Vic was advertising mojitos in newspaper ads for his Oakland restaurant. The 1941 book, *Here's How Mixed Drinks*, featured a mojito recipe typical of the era, which called for a twist of lime and a garnish of mint leaves—although not muddled to bring out the richer flavor.

After an initial fling with celebrity, the mojito mysteriously fell out of fashion in America. Maybe it was the requirement of mint leaves, which had to be fresh. During the Spam and Wonder bread era, prepackaged drinks were ascendant—think of the instant daiquiri and mai tai mixes. Or maybe it just met the fate of so many excellent drinks that have slipped from the radar for no discernible cause. Whatever the reason, the mojito reverted to being a local Cuban drink without a broad following overseas.

This state of affairs persisted until the 1980s, when the mojito resurfaced stateside, first at Miami restaurants serving gentrified Cuban cuisine, then around the country, in many cases attached remora-like to the Nuevo Latino fare of chefs looking for the next big thing. Los Angeles became the mojito center of the West Coast (where the *Los Angeles Times* called the mojito, for inscrutable reasons, “a cosmo for the more adventurous,”) and the cocktail raised its profile sufficiently to make cameos in such series as *Sex and the City*. In 2002, the mojito had its biggest scene in *Die Another Day*. Finding himself in Cuba, James Bond orders a mojito instead of his traditional martini. (“Mojito? You should try it,” Pierce Brosnan says to Halle Berry, which admittedly lacks the flair of “shaken, not stirred.”) Overnight, the mojito was everywhere: in Cleveland and Boston and Houston, and then on to the chain bars in the suburban

strip malls. Where this all ends is uncertain, but it seems a safe bet the mojito will land safely outside the boundaries of passing fad and establish itself as an enduring classic cocktail.

For all this trendiness, there's a little secret behind the mojitos you get in Havana bars: They aren't very good. The mojitos I sampled at Bodeguita del Medio and a number of other Havana bars —and I sampled a scientifically valid number—were oddly disappointing, and in much the same way. It was as if they had been manufactured in a centralized tall-drink facility somewhere beneath the cobblestone streets of Old Havana, then distributed via a rusting pipeline. They were insipid, off-tasting, slightly metallic. There was an aftertaste of cleaning fluid. The mint wasn't minty, the lime wasn't limey, and the bubbly water wasn't bubbly. The guarapo may have been sour. I don't know. Some of my disappointment may be ascribed to my American-trained taste buds, which expect bigger, more robust flavors. But even so, I had to force myself to drink them after a day or two. I've had better mojitos at airport bars.

WHILE BACARDI is no longer the rum that defines Havana, the responsibility has been taken up with considerable zeal by Havana Club, a rum manufactured by the Cuban government. The simple, circular logo is splashed on bar signs, umbrellas, swizzle sticks, and cocktail glasses, and is every bit as omnipresent as Cinzano in Italy. The Havana Club Rum Tour is in a historic building at the edge of Old Havana, just across the road from the shipping port. No rum is actually made here, but artifacts of rum-making are on display, and on multilingual tours you cross a catwalk over a Disneyesque model of a sugar processing plant and distillery. The tours end—as is customary on such adventures—at the factory store, where you can buy bottles of rum or T-shirts or cocktail glasses while sampling some of Havana Club's aged rums. (The Havana Club headquarters during Prohibition was on Plaza de Cathedral, but the building is now a museum of colonial art—and, sadly, free rum drinks no longer flow for tourists seven days a week.)

Havana Club rum was for decades produced by the Arechabala family in Cuba. Owner José Arechabala proved not quite as nimble as the Bacardis when Castro came to power; Havana Club—both the name and the facilities—was expropriated by the Cuban government in October 1960. The Arechabalas moved to Spain and left the rum business.

In 1995, the Bacardis came to the Arechabalas and purchased the rights to the Havana Club name, then started producing a Havana Club rum out of the Bahamas. One problem: The Arechabalas technically no longer had any rights to sell. The Cubans had taken it over on the island, and in 1973 registered the trademark internationally after the Arechabalas—believing it no longer had any value— stopped paying fees to maintain it. In 1994, Cubaexport entered into a joint agreement with Pernod Ricard, the French liquor giant, to distribute Havana Club globally. (This, of course, didn't include the United States, which has maintained an embargo on Cuban products since 1963.)

Bacardi's effort to wrest control of the name made perfect business sense. Havana Club's agreement with Pernod Ricard made it likely that the upstart could offer serious competition to the dominant Bacardi brand—the largest-selling single brand of any liquor of any sort today. Havana Club was selling briskly in Italy, Canada, and elsewhere. It didn't require any special powers to foresee that if the United States eventually dropped its Cuban embargo, then Havana Club would be in a good position to make a run at Bacardi's dominance.

And so Bacardi embarked on an elaborate multifront campaign to ensure that Havana Club would never cross the Straits of Florida to America. After claiming that it had legally acquired the name from the Arechabalas, it launched a Byzantine lobbying campaign in the U.S. Congress to block the sale in the United States of any good whose trademark had been expropriated. In 1998, Florida Senator Connie Mack introduced a tiny amendment to the huge four-thousand-page appropriations bill, effectively nullifying Cuban-owned U.S. trademark registrations without the consent of the

original owners—an amendment narrowly tailored to the Bacardi–Havana Club dispute. (Bacardi had been generous donors to Mack's campaign.)

The Bacardis also became entangled with then-prominent Texan Republican Tom DeLay, donating $40,000 to political action committees he supported. Whether by coincidence or design, one of DeLay's Texan allies, Representative Lamar Smith, introduced legislation that would further ensure that Bacardi controlled the Havana Club trademark. (Since it was attached to a defense bill rather than a trade bill, the move sent up red flags and was ultimately killed.)

The war over the trademark moved to the courts. The U.S. courts have regularly upheld the legislation favoring Bacardi's ownership of the trademark; world courts have been mixed. Interestingly, some large U.S. corporations have opposed the Bacardi legislation, noting that it puts at risk long-standing international trademark agreements. (Castro has threatened to start producing a soft drink called “Cocacola” and exporting it worldwide.) The legal outcome is still unclear.

Nonetheless, the tussle has resulted in a fascinating spectacle: two foreign-owned companies battling in U.S. courts for the rights to a name for a product that has no connection with the United States.

And perhaps that's emblematic of what's become of rum. In the mid-eighteenth century, the fight over rum imports to the colonies was based on actual rum or the ingredients to make rum. Today, it's a far more ethereal battle over intellectual property rights, rather more like something in *The Matrix*. Rum disputes have become unmoored from the underlying product, which exists only as a symbol.

Much the same could be said of much of the rum that lines the shelves at liquor stores today. In the taxonomy of rum, two kingdoms exist: the party rums and the premium rums. As with vodka, the taste of the party rums, which dominate the market, is increasingly manufactured by the advertising. Party rums are

generally stateless and islandless, despite their claims to carrying on the best traditions of Cuba or Puerto Rico or Jamaica. They have no geographic anchorage, but find temporary harbors with international conglomerates, which discard and pick up brands for their portfolios like cards in a poker game. The liquor industry went through its most sweeping consolidation in the 1990s, when regional firms were bought by national firms, and national firms by international. The ten largest producers worldwide now own some 70 percent of all liquor brands, and that concentration is certain to rise. Every widely known brand of rum sold in America today is owned by a major international player.

Captain Morgan—the number two rum worldwide—is owned by the world's largest seller of alcoholic beverages, Diageo, which controls nearly one in five of the top-selling premium spirit brands. This includes the number one vodka (Smirnoff), the top two Scotches (Johnnie Walker and J&B), the leading stout (Guinness), the top tequila (Jose Cuervo), and the bestselling liqueur (Baileys Irish cream). Diageo was formed in 1997 by the merger of two European companies, Guinness and GrandMet. The new company was so huge it attracted the attention of antitrust regulators in the United States, which feared a near-monopolistic dominance in the rum market. Regulators required that Diageo divest itself of its Malibu brand.

So Malibu rum, produced on Barbados, was sold to Allied Domecq, the world's second-largest spirits company. (The company's other holdings include Maker's Mark bourbon, Canadian Club, Courvoisier, Beefeater, Tia Maria, and Kahlúa.) A few miles from Malibu's island distillery is the blending and aging facility of Mount Gay rum, now owned by the Rémy Cointreau Group, which was formed by a merger of two venerable French firms in 1991. Malibu's siblings include Cointreau liqueur, Piper-Heidsieck champagne, and Rémy Martin cognac.

The largest-selling rum brand worldwide remains Bacardi, the family-owned company that arguably started the party rum trend nearly a century and a half ago. Bacardi has not only acquired

Bombay Gin and Grey Goose vodka, making it the fifth-largest spirit company in the world, but it has aggressively subdivided its rum category, focus-grouping rums to appeal to every style of drinker.

With rum, as with so many aspects in the life of an American consumer, it's unclear where freedom of choice ends and tyranny of choice begins. When Bacardi began producing rum in the midnineteenth century, only one rum was available; it was called Bacardi. By the early 1960s, Bacardi sold seven kinds of rum in the United States, ranging from the light two-year-old to a six-year-old extra dry introduced to compete with whiskey. With today's market fragmentation, it's hard to maintain a count: there's Bacardi 8, Bacardi Superior, Bacardi Gold, Bacardi Solera, Bacardi O, Bacardi Razz, Bacardi Limon, Bacardi Coco, Bacardi Vanila, Bacardi Anejo, Bacardi Black, Bacardi Light, and Bacardi Reserva. Niche marketing has turned a mass-market magazine age owned by *Time* and *Life* into a thicket of specialized magazines, a three-network television world into a tangle of cable stations, and a walk down the aisles of a liquor store into a confusing, overlapping swamp of rums.

Major rum manufacturers, with state-of-the-art column distillation facilities, are so efficient that they can now strip out virtually all the natural essences of rum, creating a product with the aroma and character of a well-managed medical clinic. The resulting spirit is so free of the natural cogeners that give rum its rich, evocative smell and flavor that something artificial often needs to be added back in to give it character.

And so we see the rise of flavored rums, the fastest-growing subcategory, which now account for about one in every three bottles sold in the United States. These rums come in many flavors, mostly tropical, which play off the spirit's Caribbean heritage. Malibu's coconutflavored rum and Captain Morgan's spiced rum (a sort of cinnamon, cloves, and sugar blend) are among the best known, but most major spirits companies have joined the hunt for the younger drinker brought up on intense, Jolly Rancher–style flavors. Bacardi Limon, introduced in 1995, proved to be one of the most successful spirit launches in history, and now sells around a million cases a

year. Bacardi later added citrus, coconut, raspberry, and vanilla rums to its stable. Cruzan Rum Distillery, which traces its roots back to 1760 and has been quietly exporting a palatable Virgin Island rum for decades, now aggressively markets no fewer than eight tropical flavored rums, including pineapple, mango, banana, and orange.

Infused rums have been traditional in the West Indies and beyond for centuries—and commercially flavored vodkas were offered as early as 1960.(These were pulled from the market because the flavors weren't stable and tended to go off.) The current crop of coconut rums, however, have about as much in common with a coconut as a Glade scented air freshener has with an alpine meadow. It matters little if they're flavored artificially or naturally—they're soft drinks for adults who like the concept of exotic drinks but may never have tasted an actual mango or papaya or fresh coconut. Malibu coconut rum in pineapple juice makes a sort of piña colada; Bacardi O with heavy cream and orange juice makes a drink called a creamsicle.

Where is it all headed? In April 2004, Mount Gay announced that it was teaming up with ScentAir Technologies, which produces promotional scent machines, to roll out a new in-store marketing campaign. ScentAir gives customers sample scents of products for sale, which apparently cause a person to drift into a dreamy reverie and then instantly reach for his or her wallet. ("Just as Muzak provides retail sound, ScentAir scent systems provide retail scent," says the marketing copy.) When you approach a Mount Gay display at select liquor stores, a motion detector signals a small machine to send a dry scent of either Mexican Mango or Madagascar Vanilla your way.

The scent machine is the perfect match for the modern flavored party rum. The aroma is wholly independent of the spirit itself, thrown on like a bright but ill-fitting housecoat. What we have now are bitter fights over brand names, and rums divorced from their island heritages and their natural flavors. It doesn't bode well for a happy future.

But good news can be found. Another powerful trend is making its way through the rum world. Some distillers are happily letting rum be rum—and coaxing the best from it. And serious cocktail drinkers, part of the new cocktail renaissance, are rediscovering how sophisticated rums make immensely sophisticated drinks. It's as if William Morris had appeared with a handcrafted cocktail shaker amid the cogs of industrial alcohol production.

A DRAM OF RUM sits before me. Nearly two dozen years ago, it came out of a still in the lowland tropics not far from Guatemala's Pacific Coast. It was clear as water when it was decanted into charred oak barrels, then it was trucked to the mountains and aged in warehouses at 7,650 feet. The makers employ the solera method used to make sherry, which means that rum lost to natural evaporation is replaced by rum from the following year's distillation. (For instance, rum in a cask aged ten years is topped off with rum from the nine-year cask.) Subtle chemical interactions between alcohol, oak, and oxygen take off the rough edges, the charred barrel gives the rum its pleasing hue, and the varying elevations give it …well, I'm not exactly sure. The mountain coolness slows evaporation from the casks, no doubt, but whatever else happens is a trade secret of the La Nacional, the company that has made Zacapa rum for decades and is said to have one of the largest reserves of well-aged rum in the world.

The casks were deemed ready for consumption when the average age of the rum was twenty-three years old, and then the rum began another journey. It was bottled, and the bottle was adorned with tightly woven dried royal palm leaves. The rum was boxed and put on pallets and shipped north, and eventually it appeared on the table where we sat, some twenty of us, in a ground-floor meeting room of a large and modern hotel on the Canadian island of Newfoundland. With pencils in hand and bland crackers before us, we readied ourselves to sip.

The 2003 International Rum Festival was part industry kaffee klatch, part public debauch (sampling booths were open to the public for two days out of the four), and part competition. An island that keeps close company with icebergs may seem an odd choice for a rum conclave—where are the palm trees?—but not if you know a little about the early history of the Atlantic trade. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, salt cod was shipped to the West Indies to feed the slaves working the sugar plantations where rum was made. The cod was often purchased with rum, which was sent north and eagerly consumed by fishermen to keep warm as they hauled nets in the cold north Atlantic. Newfoundland shipped its cheapest, nastiest salt cod to the West Indies, since it was used mostly to feed slaves. Returning the favor, the West Indies planters shipped its cheapest, nastiest rum north. Newfoundlanders developed a fondness for rum in general, and bad rum in particular. One of those facts that suggests the persistent influence of the past is this: Rum accounts for about half of all spirits sold in Newfoundland today, compared to about 13 percent across Canada and 12 percent in the United States.

Newfoundland's affection for scarcely potable rum evolved into a lasting fling with a rum called Screech, which was made in the West Indies and bottled locally. (The transaction now involves cash rather than cod.) Newfoundland Screech was once famous for being all but undrinkable—strident and overproofed enough to cause a hasty imbiber to involuntarily emit the sound after which it was named. Visitors to bars along rowdy George Street in St. John's are today asked innocently if they've been “screeched in.” If not, an impromptu ceremony is arranged. This involves repeating some nautical jargon, vouchsafing one's allegiance to the island, publicly kissing a taxidermied and well-worn codfish, then downing of a shot of Screech.

Screech is now a trademarked brand marketed by the provincial liquor authority, and it has been greatly tamed and gentrified in recent years. After tinkering with the blend and upgrading the product, the province sells Screech that is now surprisingly smooth and tasty. At the 2003 rum festival, Screech even won a gold medal,

which is awarded to the top-scoring third of all rums in each category.

Preparing to judge the superpremium rums, I now lift the Zacapa rum to eye level in concert with the other judges and admire its rich amber color under the light. Zacapa is considered by many who can (and do) argue at length over such things to be the best commercially available rum today. I have seen bottles of Zacapa hidden on shelves in the offices of competing West Indies distillers, who have sheepishly admitted they were striving to reproduce it, as yet without success. Zacapa achieved a score of 98 points at the Beverage Testing Institute in 2001, and it remains the highest ranking rum ever rated. It won top honors at the festival's rum judging event five years running, and in 2003 the festival coordinators chose to retire it from competition. They enshrined it in a newly established rum hall of fame with the democratic idea of allowing other competitors a shot at the top award. The Zacapa rum we're served this day is not in competition. It is our benchmark rum, allowing us to calibrate our palates for the blind tastings to follow.

I swirl it gently and bring it under my nose. It has a dense, sweet fragrance, an earthy bouquet, like roses grown in a compost of chocolate and cherries. I sip. I close my eyes. The first taste washes over me and brings to mind the scene in *The Wizard of Oz* in which the blackand-white world suddenly bursts into color. A dozen or more sly flavors dart around my mouth—pralines and roasted nuts and vanilla. A gentle warmth spreads from my lower spine slowly upward through my neck. I'm transported to a sunnier climate, far from the icebergs. This is, without doubt, an extraordinary rum.

The pourers circulate through the room with the first of the twenty-three rum samples we'll be judging in this session. Then we'll have a break, and go into the next session, and the next, with the event spread over four days. We'll judge a total of 166 rums, and the event will take us around the globe: a United Nations of sugarcane-based liquor, with representatives from—no surprise—much of the West Indies, but also Nepal, Mexico, Australia, Canada, and the United States. (Notable absentees include the Philippines and China,

which produce vast amounts of rum, virtually all of which is consumed locally.)

Rum judging is a curiously quiet and solemn affair, especially given rum's raucous history. Every judge has his or her own tasting technique. Some put their hand over the top of the glass and gently swirl, to release and capture the subtle scents. Others cup the glass in both hands to allow a little warmth to bring out the liquor's more elusive qualities. Some noses go fully into the glass; some hover an inch above and sniff tentatively. A few judges slurp slightly to allow in some air; most sip silently, then hold the rum on their tongues for several long seconds. Only one judge spits out his samples after tasting; the rest of us swallow. For each rum, judges mark down a score of one to ten for each of three qualities: smoothness, taste, and “extras,” which might include aroma or character. This is then totaled up, for a possible high score of thirty.

Judges were cautioned at the outset not to emit grunts of distaste or sighs of contentment that might influence their colleagues. (This etiquette is discarded when it comes to flavored rums. The judging is then punctuated by gasps, gurgled sounds, and other signs of small distress. The judges take rum seriously, and the invasion of the lollipop flavors cannot be brooked without registering some dissent.)

About two dozen judges, who include master blenders, rum collectors, and connoisseurs, have been recruited for scoring. The number of judges ebbs and flows throughout the four days, hitting a low point when the harsh overproof rums are graded. But nearly every seat is filled when the time comes to rate the best of the rums —the premium and superpremiums—which have been called the “cognacs of the Caribbean.”

These rums mark a bright spot for the industry. Like the lighter party rums, the more densely flavored upmarket rums have also been in demand these days, although among a smaller group of drinkers who are willing to pay more for quality. For decades distillers have hectored U.S. consumers to appreciate the subtley of finer rums—as early as 1952, Bacardi was urging consumers to sip

its aged rum after dinner in a brandy snifter. But rum had that shabby reputation to overcome, and only now does it seem to have shaken loose its sordid past and been allowed from the street into the manor house. More than one hundred varieties of rum sell for upwards of $25 a bottle, about double the number a decade ago. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission now pegs retail sales of premium rum at more than $1 billion per year, and the market has been showing double-digit growth of late. The supply of aged rum is straining to meet the demand; Jamaica's Appleton Estate has seen tremendous demand for its twenty-one-year-old rum and laments that it has only enough to produce about a thousand cases each year.

Rum has arrived. Again.

"Would you like to sniff my bung?" asks Phil Prichard. He's a tall, gregarious sixty-four-year-old with a booming voice and thinning red hair, and he's holding out a wooden plug that was until very recently used to seal up a cask of Prichard's Fine Rum. This line is delivered with a wry smile; he uses it all day long when touting his rum, which he manufactures in a distillery in a shed attached to a disused schoolhouse in Kelso, Tennessee. His whole operation occupies a space about the size of a moderately serious woodshop. State or local laws typically prohibit Prichard from offering samples to passersby at liquor stores and meetings of package store associations, where he spends the bulk of his waking hours signing bottles and talking up rum. But there's no law against sampling the aroma. "People are always interested in history," Prichard says. "When you weave the quality of this rum with its historical aspect, I sell more with sniffs than with tastes."

Prichard is a representative of another welcome trend: the return of the American rum distiller. They no longer number in the hundreds, but a handful have appeared in the continental United States in the past few years, producing spirits in the old tradition. In Delaware, Dogfish Head Spirits produces creditable aged and white

rums. In New Orleans, Cane Louisiana Rum was distilling a foursome of fine rums, both aged and unaged, made of molasses and sugarcane juice. (Hurricane Katrina flooded the distillery and wiped out the aging stocks, as well as much of the distilling equipment; the distillery has said it hopes to produce rum again someday, but it's unclear if that will happen.) Small-batch rum is again being produced near the sugarcane fields of Hawaii.

Prichard's operation, just a short drive from the Jack Daniel's distillery, may be the most unlikely. After whiskey poached on rum's terrain and drove it out two centuries ago, rum now appears to be launching a rear-flank action on whiskey's turf.

At $30 a bottle, about three or four times the cost of a massmarket party rum, getting Prichard's off the store shelf and into the home liquor cabinet has taken some work. Building consumer demand for aromatic, quality rum is a gradual process—one bung sniff at a time. What's more, Prichard has to grapple with a larger, more metaphysical obstacle: He has to convince the consumer that rum isn't solely about sunny beaches and palm trees or swaggering pirates muttering, “Yarrr.” Rum can be pure Early America, Prichard says, as American as white church steeples and New England village greens. When Prichard talks about rum, it's not reggae playing in his head, it's a fife and drum. In his brochures, Prichard even features a rendition of *The Spirit of 1776*, the famous 1891 painting of three bedraggled Revolutionary musicians marching beneath a tattered flag. “We lay no claim to being the only rum made in America,” Prichard explains. “But we do stake our claim that we are producing an authentic American rum. I don't know anyone else who's doing that.”

Prichard took an interest in rum in the mid-1990s, after a thirtyyear career manufacturing dental implants and running a gift shop with his wife in Vermont. He got the notion of opening a microdistillery, and noticed that sales of premium rums were growing at an appealing rate compared to other liquors. His first thought was to distill a rum made from the sweet syrup of Tennessee-grown sorghum. Federal liquor regulators told him he

was welcome to do that, but he just couldn't label it as rum. By definition, rum sold in America must come from sugarcane or its by-products.

So Prichard scouted around and ended up contracting for molasses from Louisiana. At first, he drove the molasses north himself in a thousand-gallon plastic tank strapped on the back of his truck. But after sliding out of control in a slick intersection one rainy day, he went professional and bought a four-thousand-gallon stainless steel tanker trailer and hired a trucker. Prichard buys a high-quality tablegrade molasses, which he swears is not all different from the stuff American rum distillers imported from the islands in the eighteenth century. He ferments the molasses in three stainless steel fermenting tanks, then double distills the wash in a five-hundred-gallon copper pot still that he bought from a defunct New England distillery. He casks the distillate in fifteen-gallon new white oak barrels that have been charred on the inside. Smaller barrels (most distilleries use a fifty-two-gallon size) mean more barrel surface to each gallon of rum, so the aging process is quicker than in larger casks. As for the charred insides, Prichard says that colonial distillers would have done the same thing, trying to burn out the taste of salt fish or turpentine or whatever else merchants might have shipped before selling the used casks to the distillers. Prichard's rum, about a million dollar's worth at any given time, is aged in a pair of forty-foot steel cargo containers that sit in the distillery's yard surrounded by chain-link fence. Weeds sprout lavishly, stray dogs wander through, and you'd need an exceedingly fertile imagination to conjure up the Caribbean.

Prichard isn't beholden to colonial distillation methods. For instance, he doesn't use the lead pipes that caused the dry gripes, and he pays closer attention to his yeast than his eighteenth-century counterparts would have. (No dung in the fermenting vats.) Before bottling, his rum passes through a series of filters of the sort found in the plumbing aisles of Home Depot. But he stands by his product as the genuine article. “We spend almost every waking hour attempting to define the American rum, versus what we refer to as

the tropical types of rum.” And it does taste different from most of today's West Indian rums—more austere and less sweet, perhaps bringing to mind the better sipping bourbons made just north in Kentucky.

Prichard has a warm chuckle that's a shorthand way of saying, “Get a load of this.” He seems to take a special delight in beating the system and making rum without all the overpriced equipment to which the larger distillers are addicted. His shipping-container warehouses cost just $2,000 apiece delivered, and he bought the still and doubler at a distress sale for less than half of what it would have cost to buy a smaller one new. He designed the gravity-fed bottling line himself, and often fills bottles on Sunday, when he's not traveling the liquor store circuit. His wife sits beside him, gluing individual yellow ribbons over the top of each bottle.

“You know what that is?” Prichard says, pointing to the top of a small Rube Goldbergesque apparatus in a dim corner next to the fermenting tanks. “That's a salad bowl.” Indeed, a restaurant-sized stainless steel salad bowl is inverted atop a restaurant-sized stockpot, held in place with C-clamps. A copper condensing tube extends upward from the bowl's apex nearly to the ceiling, then curves downward through a copper sleeve connected by a green garden hose to a sink faucet. This crude device was Prichard's first experimental still, and he still uses it when brewing up test batches. Prichard's operation has an engaging bootstrap inventiveness that's extremely American, even if the product is more refined than what you would have guzzled in Boston or Philadelphia three centuries ago.

Of course, striving to perfect the rum of eras past would be wholly missing the point. The story of rum is one of change, evolution, and adaptation. Rum resurfaces with each era. It's the true American spirit. Rum has been with Americans since our inception, and like us, rum has learned to work with whatever history gives it.

Rum doesn't like endings. And for a good reason: Rum is nothing but a series of fresh beginnings.

[A Thumbnail Guide to Rum]

Hundreds of rums are available around the world, and their flavor profiles vary so widely that you'll often swear you're sipping different spirits. And that's part of the adventure of rum sampling. While more regulated spirits like bourbon also differ from brand to brand, sipping your way through them is the equivalent of touring from Louisville to Lexington—the view doesn't change all that much. Sampling rums, on the other hand, is like going from Martinique to Maui by way of Medford—you just never know what surprises the next sip will bring. In part, this is because rum is produced in so many places, but also because there is no international oversight board; if it's made from sugarcane or its by-products, it can be called rum. The result is a vast and untidy marketplace of rum products.

When shopping for rum, a few key distinctions should be kept in mind.

Unaged or aged? In theory, white rum is unaged and dark rum is aged. And, in theory, the change in color comes from the inside of the charred barrels.

The reality is different. Some white rums are aged in oak barrels and then filtered to remove the color. And some lightly aged rums are colored with caramel to make them appear darker. (Black rums like Caldwell's or Myers's are rendered black as molasses with additional agents.) Aging also mellows rum, and an older rum tends to have fewer burrs to catch your throat on the way down. A general rule of thumb is that an older rum is a more complex rum (often fit for sipping), and unaged or lightly aged rums have less intrigue and usually can sing just one note (and are often fit for Coca-Cola). The fun comes in finding exceptions to the rule.

Sugarcane juice or molasses-based? The French islands tend to make rum from fresh sugarcane juice, with Martinique the sole supplier of what's called *rhum agricole*.(*Rum industriel* is the French term for rum made from molasses, which is used in the production of most rum worldwide.) *Rhum agricole* has been increasingly making its way into American markets.

Unaged sugarcane rum has a sharply distinctive flavor—you can really taste and smell the sugarcane base. That's largely because sugarcane liquor comes out of the still at a lower

proof than molassesbased rum, allowing more of the distinctive qualities to come through. (Fermented molasses is typically distilled at a higher proof to strip out unpleasant aromas that can carry over at lower temperatures.) Aged sugarcane rums, which mellow and take on the flavors of the barrel, veer closer in taste to that of their aged molasses-based counterparts.

Pot still or column still? Most rums are made in efficient column stills, which allow continuous production and economies of scale. Some boutique rums are still made in pot stills (such as Prichard's), and many rums, such as a number from Jamaica and Barbados, blend a measure of pot-still rum with column-still rum as a flavor enhancer. For the most part, though, improvements in distillation technology and barrel-aging techniques have evened out many of the differences between the two distilling methods, so which still is used today is typically of small consequence. For instance, Ron Zacapa from Guatemala—among the most heavily-bodied of rums—is made in a column still. However, a boutique pot-stilled rum has a distinct if subtle flavor profile prized by many rum connoisseurs.

Listed alphabetically on the pages that follow are some of the rums that impressed me during the course of researching this book. I'm inclined toward the heavier rums and prefer those with denser flavors, so these suggestions probably skew in that direction.

I haven't included rare rums, nor those mythical bottles available only on certain days on certain West Indian islands. All rums listed can be found somewhere in a U.S. liquor store. Selection varies widely by state; some stores are still overseen by a feudal, government-run distribution system, and some are free market. But even among the free-market states, you won't find all the smaller labels, since few distillers have the budget to roll into all national markets at once. The inconsistency can be aggravating, but it also adds a welcome element of suspense when traveling across the United States. My rule of thumb: Never visit a new state without stopping by a liquor store to see what's in stock.

You may notice that I don't include any flavored rums on this list. Some of these may be perfectly fine in some mixed drinks, but I assume that you're interested in rum, not candy.

Appleton [Jamaica]

The Appleton VX is a rich, full-bodied, slightly peppery rum that goes superbly in a mai tai. It's a blend of rums five to ten years old, which benefit from a shorter secondary barrel

aging afterward. It has many of the characteristics of a traditionally robust Jamaican rum but is tempered for a more sophisticated palate.

Rhum Barbancourt [Haiti]

Barbancourt is made from fresh sugarcane on an island with a strong French heritage, but it's technically not a *rhum agricole* (that name is reserved for rums from Martinique). Barbancourt is a sublimely dry rum, wonderfully austere and oaken. (It's aged in French oak, not American bourbon barrels.) Note the stars on the label—three stars mean it's aged four years and five stars for eight years, while the Réserve du Domaine is aged fifteen years. The three-star makes an outstanding mojito.

Ron del Barrilito [Puerto Rico]

The tasty rums produced by Barrilito in Puerto Rico are a good example of crossover rums. Puerto Rico has long been famous for its light, almost vodka-clear rums, and a half-century ago such a fullbodied rum wouldn't be commonly available on the island. But tastes and markets change, and Barrilito has responded well. Aged in used wine casks from Spain, both the two-star and three-star rums have distinct qualities. The two-star is lighter and makes a wonderful mixing rum; the three-star (aged six to ten years) has a slight smokiness to it and is good for sipping as well as for mixing in drinks that call for bringing more of the rum flavor forward.

Rhum Clément [Martinique]

The range of tastes found in Clément rums is impressive. The white rum has a robust and pleasing sugarcane taste. The aged rums, such as the VSOP (aged at least four years), lend themselves to sipping neat. Clément also makes an orange-flavored liqueur called Créole Shrubb, which is traditionally served on holidays. An El Presidente cocktail made with the

VSOP and Créole Shrubb is among my favorites—sophisticated without taking itself too seriously. Also look for Rhum J.M, produced at a separate distillery but also owned by Clément. The aged J.M rums are supple and intricate; the ten-year rums are bottled at cask-strength and are worth searching out. J.M arrived in select U.S. markets at the beginning of 2007.

Cruzan [Virgin Islands]

This high-volume producer of mass-market rums really knows its product—the two-year-old white and amber rums are a great choice for simple mixed drinks when you're more on a budget than in the mood for something special. Priced comparably to Bacardi, Cruzan is my much preferred everyday rum, with more of a rum taste and less of an industrial aftertaste. When you're ready to upgrade, the Estate Diamond Rum (an amber blend aged for five to ten years) will lend your cocktails an extra dimension without breaking the bank. The Single Barrel is better still, with the blend recasked for more aging and to farther mellow and mature. The result is a delightfully creamy and silken rum.

El Dorado [Guyana]

Guyana was the original source of the dense, heavy Demerara rums, the favored tipple among sailors, fishermen, and other disreputable sorts. El Dorado carries on the robust tradition, with a rich molasses flavor, but with an unexpected class that seems to call for a snifter, smoking jacket, and a faithful dog at one's feet. This pot-still rum is produced in five, twelve, fifteen, twenty-one, and twenty-five-year variations and is sold in most major markets and some smaller ones. I'm a fan of the fifteen-year—it has the gentle scent of a freshly unwrapped caramel but with enough rum essence to anchor it solidly in the past. The twenty-one year variation recently arrived in the U.S. market.

Mount Gay [Barbados]

Mount Gay Eclipse has long been my benchmark rum—and I'm not a sailor. It's highly pleasing straight up, but also not so rare or expensive as to be wasted in mixed drinks. Mount Gay and ginger ale with a lime is hard to beat on a sultry summer day when you're not up to mounting a more formidable attack on the home cocktail bar. Mount Gay Extra Old is the premium product from this Barbados distillery, which has been making rum continuously longer than anyone else in the world. The distillery runs both column and pot stills—a small amount of the more aromatic pot-still rum is blended with the more flavorless column-still rum before being barreled and aged. The Extra Old is silky and perfect over ice, with perhaps just a squeeze of lime.

Niesson [Martinique]

When you order a ti' punch in Martinique, the odds are high that the waiter will plunk down some lime pieces, some sugar, and a squarish bottle of Niesson *rhum agricole*, which you then use to build the punch to your own liking. This is a common rum with not much common about it. It has a strong sugarcane aroma and taste to it, which renders it hazardous to use in most cocktails—the taste is just overpowering—but it's ideal in a ti' punch. The older *rhum vieux* is uncommonly smooth. This rum comes from one of the few remaining family-owned small distilleries on the island and the only distillery that uses a slow fermentation method on their sugarcane juice.

One Barrel [Belize]

This is a light gold, molasses-based rum with a highly distinctive taste—is that a hint of coffee? Purists might object that it's got more aromatics than a pure rum should (a touch of peach? a touch of toffee?), but I know others who consider this their guilty pleasure. One Barrel is available in many western states and a few in the east, and it is nicely priced.

Prichard's [United States]

This is a pot-still rum made in small batches by Phil Prichard in Tennessee (see Chapter 10). Prichard's Crystal Rum is delightful and distinctive—a classic unaged molasses white rum that's distilled five times, yet retains an unusual butterscotch taste. Prichard's Fine Rum is aged nearly three years in new fifteen-gallon, charred, white oak barrels, and to my taste it shares the dry and oaken qualities of a great bourbon.

Pampero Anniversario [Venezuela]

Pampero Anniversario is a dense, slightly sweet rum filled with unexpected surprises, like a hint of orange on the first sniff and a touch of vanilla on the first taste. It's a blend of fourto six-year-old rums and is friendly and approachable while full of the tastes of a classic heavy rum. This is an ideal starter rum for those looking to appreciate the joys of sipping, and it will still bring joy to those who have years of rum experience.

Pyrat Xo [Anguilla]

Like Ron Zacapa (below), Pyrat XO is a sipping rum—smooth, slightly sweet, and full of flavor. There are chewy caramel notes, but also a curious hint of orange, which allows it to fraternize nicely with a twist of lemon, lime, or orange. It's not produced on Anguilla, but blended there from various Caribbean rums that average about fifteen years in the barrel. The brand is owned by the same folks who make Patron tequila.

Santa Teresa 1796 Ron Antiguo de Solera [Venezuela]

Relatively new to the U.S. market, this high-end sipping rum is crafted at a Venezuela hacienda that dates to 1796 (hence the name) and where rum has been produced since 1857. This region has long been noted for producing a full-bodied rum, and Santa Teresa

begins there, adding an intriguing complexity (the rum is aged fifteen years in French Limousin oak), with notes of cherry and apricot. This rum should be enjoyed straight.

Ron Zacapa Centenario [Guatemala]

Ron Zacapa, aged twenty-three years in the cool highlands of Guatemala, is to my mind the quintessential sipping rum. It's perfect to take the chill off a cool and damp evening; I wouldn't even taint it with an ice cube, never mind some fizzy mixer (although I'll sometimes spare a teaspoon for a float on a mai tai). Some find it overly syrupy and sweet —tiki drink expert Jeff Berry says he “can't imagine drinking it in anything other than a sno-cone”—but it's consistently won almost every reputable rum-tasting competition. The same folks also market a fine fifteen-year-old rum (called Zaya), which has slightly less depth and richness, but is still delicious. Inexplicably, Zaya is usually priced the same as the older Zacapa.

[When It's Cocktail Time]

RECIPES FOR the main rum drinks addressed in this book are featured at the beginning of each chapter. Life would be extravagantly uninteresting if we were limited to just those cocktails. What follows is a wholly subjective selection of rum drinks that I like. I tend to prefer drinks tart or astringent to sweet, so those who like their libations somewhat sweeter might want to adjust sugar and liqueurs accordingly. These are listed in a rough chronological order, based on when they most likely first appeared.

Some items worth stocking that you might not have at hand:

- *Bitters (both Angostura and Regan's No. 6 Orange Bitters)*
- *Maraschino liqueur*
- *Simple syrup (boil one cup sugar with one cup water; let cool and refrigerate)*
- *Bar sugar (sold as “quick-dissolving sugar” or*
- *“superfine” at many supermarkets; never use confectioners' sugar)*
- *Muddler (something like a miniature baseball bat used to mash mint and fruit to extract essential oils)*

FISH HOUSE PUNCH

Perhaps the most famous “secret”rum drink recipe, made since the eighteenth century at an august Philadelphia fishing club.

- *2 ounces rum*
- *1 ounce cognac*
- *1 ounce lemon juice*
- *2 teaspoons sugar*
- *½ teaspoon peach brandy*

- *sliced peaches, for garnish*
- *water or club soda*

Mix the ingredients together in a glass with ice. Top up with water or club soda and garnish with freshly sliced ripe peaches.

ADMIRAL HOMOTO

A neocolonial maritime drink enjoyed at sea when nothing else is at hand, as recorded by tippling sailor John Carroll.

- *2 ounces rum (Mount Gay works best)*
- *2 ounces black tea*

Pour the ingredients together in a glass or mug and serve at room temperature without ice.

HOT BUTTERED RUM

This recipe is intended to be prepared at first frost and kept in the freezer, providing the base for delicious hot rum drinks throughout the winter.

- *1 pound butter*
- *1 pound brown sugar*
- *1 pound granulated sugar*
- *1 tablespoon ground cinnamon*
- *1 teaspoon ground cloves*
- *1 teaspoon nutmeg*

- *1 quart vanilla ice cream*

Bring the butter to room temperature and mix all the ingredients except the ice cream. Add slightly softened ice cream and mix well. Store mixture in freezer. To make drinks by the mug, add 1½ ounce rum, 1 tablespoon of ice cream mix, then fill mug with boiling water.

MEDFORD RUM PUNCH

A punch recipe as it appears in the 1887 edition of *Jerry Thomas's How to Mix Drinks, or the Bon-Vivant's Companion*, the first bartender's manual. Thomas calls specifically for “Medford rum,” suggesting the persistence of this Bostonarea rum. Substitute any full-bodied rum.

- *1 ounce Medford rum*
- *1 ounce medium-bodied rum*
- *1 teaspoon lemon juice*
- *1 orange slice, cut into quarters*
- *Seasonal berries and a lime slice, for garnish*

Shake the ingredients and pour with ice into a tumbler. Garnish with seasonal berries and a slice of lime, and serve with a straw.

TI' PUNCH

Short for “petit punch,” this popular drink is served throughout much of the French-speaking West Indies. It's also extolled loudly by Ed “Minister of Rum” Hamilton. The proper ingredients can be hard to come by but are essential. (Rhum agricole, distilled at a

lower proof, has a more fragrant character; it also tends not to have happy results in any cocktail other than ti' punch.)

- *wedge of lime*
- *2 ounces rhum agricole blanc (sugarcane rum, preferably from Martinique)*
- ½ *teaspoon sugarcane syrup* (sirop de canne)

Squeeze the lime wedge into a short glass and add the rum, the syrup, and the ice. Stir briefly, then allow the drink to sit several minutes to chill and blend before drinking.

RUM TODDY

From the *Stork Club Bar Book* (1946). Another guide (by Charles Baker, 1939) also recommends the addition of clove: "The result is quite aromatically happy."

- *1½ ounces Jamaica rum*
- *1 teaspoon sugar*
- *2 cloves*
- *slice of lemon*
- *pinch of cinnamon*
- *boiling water*

Put the ingredients in an old-fashioned glass; add the boiling water.

RUM OLD-FASHIONED

The bourbon or rye old-fashioned is a nineteenth-century classic. The rum old-fashioned I find even smoother and more agreeable. A medium-bodied rum like Mount Gay or Appleton works best.

- *orange peel*
- *1½ ounces rum*
- *¼ ounce simple syrup or bar sugar*
- *2 dashes Regan's Orange Bitters*
- *orange slice and maraschino cherry, for garnish*

Lightly muddle the orange peel with the rum and the simple syrup. Remove the peel. Add the bitters and the ice and stir until chilled. Pour over fresh ice in an old-fashioned glass with the orange slice garnish and a cherry. (Regan's Orange Bitters makes a simple rum seem even more regal, but if you don't have it at hand, Angostura bitters is a perfectly fine substitute.)

BACARDI COCKTAIL

Use Bacardi rum lest the lawyers hound you.

2 ounces white Bacardi rum

- *1 tablespoon lime juice*
- *1 teaspoon simple syrup or bar sugar*
- *½ teaspoon grenadine*
- *lime slice, for garnish*

Shake the ingredients with ice and strain into a cocktail glass. Garnish with a slice of lime.

PIRATE'S COCKTAIL

A simple, elegant rum Manhattan from the *Esquire Drink Book*.

- *3 ounces dark rum*
- *1 ounce sweet vermouth*
- *1 dash Angostura bitters*

Stir the ingredients with ice and strain into a short glass.

PLANTER'S PUNCH

David Embury's recipe from 1948.

- *3 ounces Jamaica rum*
- *1 ounce sugar syrup*
- *2 ounces lemon juice*
- *2 or 3 dashes Angostura bitters*
- *soda water*
- *fruit, for garnish*

Shake the ingredients vigorously with crushed ice and pour, without straining, into a tall glass. Pack the glass to the top with more crushed ice, fill to within one-half inch with soda water, then churn with a bar spoon until the glass starts to frost. Decorate with fruit.

RUM BRONX

The original Bronx—once almost as famous as the Manhattan—was made with gin. This rum variant is sometimes called a Third Rail.

- *2 ounces medium-bodied rum*
- *½ ounce orange juice*
- *¼ ounce sweet vermouth*
- *¼ ounce dry vermouth*
- *orange peel, for garnish*

Shake the ingredients with ice and strain into a cocktail glass; garnish with an orange peel.

RUM COLLINS

- *1½ ounces white rum*
- *juice of ½ lemon*
- *1 teaspoon bar sugar*
- *club soda*
- *orange slice and maraschino cherry*

Shake the rum, the lemon, and the sugar in a cocktail shaker; strain into a tall glass of ice. Top off with club soda. Garnish with an orange slice and a cherry.

CUBA LIBRE

The liberal use of lime juice separates this from its more pedestrian cousin, the rum and Coke.

- *juice of ½ lime*
- *2 ounces rum (Cuban if you can get it)*
- *Coca-Cola*
- *lime wedge, for garnish*

Squeeze juice from half a lime into a tall glass. Add rum. Fill with ice and Coca-Cola. Garnish with a lime wedge. (Optional: add a dash of Angostura bitters.)

MYRTLE BANK PUNCH

Trader Vic's interpretation (1948) of a famous punch served to Prohibition-era tourists on the porch of one of the best hotels in Kingston, Jamaica.

- *1½ ounces dark Jamaican rum*
- *¾ ounce fresh lime juice*
- *1 teaspoon bar sugar*
- *½ ounce grenadine*
- *club soda*
- *½ ounce maraschino liqueur*

Shake the rum, the lime juice, the sugar, and the grenadine in a cocktail shaker with ice. Strain into a tall glass filled with fresh crushed ice, fill with club soda, and top with float of maraschino liqueur.

MACARTHUR COCKTAIL

In 1946, Lucius Beebe considered this one of the top rum cocktails.

- *1½ ounces light rum*
- *½ teaspoon dark rum*
- *¾ ounces triple sec*
- *dash of egg white*

Shake the ingredients with ice and strain into a cocktail glass.

HEMINGWAY DAIQUIRI

Said to be created for Ernest Hemingway by Constantino Ribalaigua Vert at El Floridita in Havana.

- *1½ ounces rum (lighter rum is better)*
- *¼ ounce maraschino liqueur*
- *¾ ounce simple syrup*
- *½ ounce grapefruit juice*
- *¾ ounce lime juice*

Shake the ingredients in an iced shaker until good and frosty, then strain into a chilled cocktail glass.

EL FLORIDITA DAIQUIRI

From the 1934 *Bar La Florida Cocktails* guide.

- *2 ounces rum*
- *juice of ½ lime*

- *1 teaspoon bar sugar or sugar syrup*
- *1 teaspoon maraschino liqueur*

Shake the ingredients (or blend in blender) with crushed ice and pour into a cocktail glass.

MARY PICKFORD

Popular in Cuba during Prohibition, and better than it sounds.

- *1½ ounces white rum*
- *1 ounce pineapple juice*
- ¼ *teaspoon grenadine*
- ¼ *teaspoon maraschino liqueur*

Shake the ingredients vigorously with ice and strain into a cocktail glass.

EL PRESIDENTE

Another Havana drink from the Prohibition, named after Cuban President Mario García Menocal.

- *1½ ounces white or amber rum*
- ¾ *ounce orange curaçao*
- ¾ *ounce dry vermouth*
- ½ *teaspoon grenadine*

Stir the ingredients with ice until chilled; strain into a cocktail glass. (Curaçao may be omitted.)

DARK AND STORMY

The classic Bermuda highball.

- *2 ounces dark rum (Goslings, if available)*
- *(ginger beer*
- *lime slice, for garnish*

Mix the ingredients in a tall glass with ice and garnish with a slice of lime.

HURRICANE

This was invented during World War II at Pat O'Brien's in New Orleans and has likely contributed to more foggy memories of the French Quarter than any other drink. Most hurricanes today are made of mixes and artificial ingredients, but this is a fresher variation.

- *2 ounces light rum*
- *2 ounces dark rum*
- *2 ounces passion fruit juice*
- *1 ounce orange juice*
- *½ ounce fresh lime juice*
- *1 tablespoon sugar or simple syrup*
- *1 tablespoon grenadine*
- *maraschino cherry and orange slice, for garnish*

Shake all the ingredients in a cocktail shaker with ice and strain into a hurricane glass. Garnish with a cherry and an orange slice.

DON THE BEACHCOMBER'S MAI TAI

Either “the original” or “the alternative,” depending on your reading of the tiki scriptures.

- *1½ ounces dark rum (such as Myers's)*
- *(1 ounce medium-bodied rum (like Appleton or Barbancourt)*
- *¾ ounce lime juice*
- *1 ounce grapefruit juice*
- *¼ ounce falernum*
- *½ ounce triple sec*
- *2 dashes Angostura bitters*
- *1 dash Pernod*
- *mint leaves and pineapple slice, for garnish*

Shake the ingredients in a cocktail shaker with cracked ice and pour without straining into a double old-fashioned glass. Garnish with mint leaves and a pineapple slice.

ZOMBIE

David Embury notes (1948), “Twenty different bars serving this drink will probably put out eighteen to twenty versions of it.” He adds, “This is undoubtedly the most overadvertised, overemphasized, overexalted, and foolishly feared drink whose claims to glory ever assaulted the eyes and ears of the gullible American public.” Jeff Berry defends the original drink as unfairly excoriated. The original Don the Beachcomber recipe that Berry

unearthed is similar to this, although it substitutes passion fruit syrup for the apricot liqueur.

- *1 ounce white rum*
- *2 ounces amber rum*
- *1 ounce dark rum*
- *1 teaspoon simple syrup*
- *¾ ounce lime juice*
- *¾ ounce pineapple juice*
- *2 teaspoons apricot liqueur*
- *dash of Pernod*
- *dash of Angostura bitters*
- *fruit, mint leaves, and powdered sugar, for garnish*

Shake the ingredients with crushed ice and serve with ice. Garnish elaborately with fruit, the mint leaves, and a dusting of powdered sugar.

HAI KARATE

A tiki concoction invented by Jeff "Beachbum" Berry.

- *2 ounces amber Virgin Islands rum*
- *1 ounce lime juice*
- *1 ounce pineapple juice (unsweetened)*
- *1 ounce orange juice*
- *1 teaspoon maple syrup (grade A)*
- *1 dash Angostura bitters*
- *lime wedge, orange slice, and a maraschino cherry, for garnish*

Shake the ingredients with ice and pour into a tall glass. Garnish with a lime wedge, an orange slice, and a cherry.

PIÑA COLADA

If you must. Like the so-called modern martini, the piña colada is well suited to creative adaptation—Robert Plotkin's *Caribe Rum* lists thirty variations. This is a fairly generic version.

- *1½ ounces light rum (cheap is fine)*
- *1 ounce dark rum*
- *2 ounces Coco López or other coconut cream (not coconut milk)*
- *4 ounces pineapple juice*
- *pineapple slice, orange slice, and a maraschino cherry, for garnish*

Blend all the ingredients with three-quarters cup of crushed ice in a blender for 10 to 15 seconds. Garnish with the pineapple, the orange, and/or a cherry.

PARISIAN BLONDE

- *An orange-flavored after-dinner drink.*
- *1 ounce rum*
- *1 ounce triple sec*
- *1 ounce cream drop of vanilla extract (optional)*

Shake and strain. Dale DeGroff suggests garnishing with a drop or two of vanilla extract for added flavor.

MEXICAN BLONDE

The Parisian Blonde meets the White Russian, by Dale “King Cocktail” DeGroff.

- *1½ ounces light rum*
- ½ *ounce coffee liqueur*
- ½ *ounce curaçao*
- *1 ounce cream*

Shake all the ingredients in a cocktail shaker with ice and strain into a cocktail glass.

CAIPIRINHA

Made with cachaça, a rough-edged Brazilian sugarcane liquor that's inexplicably coming into vogue in the United States.

- ½ *lime, cut into quarters*
- ¾ *ounce brown sugar syrup*
- *2 ounces cachaça*

Muddle the lime and syrup in an old-fashioned glass, then mix in the cachaça and ice.

GINGER MOJITO

One of my favorite variations of the refreshing Cuban tall drink.

- *4 to 6 mint leaves*
- *1 teaspoon bar sugar*
- ¾ *ounce lime juice*
- *2 ounces white or medium-bodied rum ginger ale*
- *mint sprig, for garnish*

Muddle the first three ingredients in a collins glass. Add ice and the rum, then top off with ginger ale. Garnish with a mint sprig.

THE LYTTON FIZZ

Created for a rum competition in 2005 by bartender and cocktail sleuth John Myers. It's a great mix of classic and modern tastes.

- *4 fresh mint leaves*
- *3 Thai basil leaves*
- ½ *ounce falernum*
- ¼ *ounce lime juice*
- *2 dashes Angostura bitters*
- ½ *ounce dark rum (Cruzan Black Strap recommended) ginger ale*

Muddle the first five ingredients in a collins glass. Add ice and the rum, top off with ginger ale, and stir.

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