



PROOF &
PRINCIPLE

Clear, practical knowledge & spirits education
for bartenders and hospitality professionals.

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/06

CARIBBEAN RUM

**RAW MATERIAL,
FERMENTATION & STYLE**

A friendly guide to
how Caribbean rum
is made and why its
styles vary so much.

**One raw material.
Many styles.**

From fresh cane juice
to rich, characterful
aged rum.



ONE PLANT. DIFFERENT STARTING POINTS.

Rum begins with sugar cane, but distillers do not always ferment it in the same form.

Fresh sugar cane juice

Pressed soon after harvest. Often linked to fresh, grassy and herbaceous aromas.

Molasses

A by-product of sugar refining that is diluted with water before fermentation. Often linked to caramel, brown sugar, treacle and molasses notes.

Cane syrup

Some producers also use cane syrup or combine different sugar cane products.



Why it matters:

The form of sugar cane used helps shape the spirit's aromatic direction from fresh and grassy to richer and more caramelised.



FERMENTATION BUILDS THE AROMA

Fermentation helps explain why some rums are light and restrained while others are bold, fruity and highly aromatic.

Short fermentation

The sugary liquid is acidified and supplied with enough nitrogen. Cultured yeast is common, sealed stainless-steel vessels are often used, and fermentation may be completed in about 24 hours. The result is usually cleaner, more restrained aromas.

Long fermentation

The sugary liquid is often not pasteurised. Open-topped wooden fermenters may be used, and ambient yeast and bacteria can contribute alongside selected yeast. Activity may continue for several days or longer, helping build intense, fruity, estery and more complex aromas.



Key idea:

Long fermentation is not simply waiting longer. It creates more opportunity for yeast and bacteria to build flavour.



THE JAMAICAN POT-AND-RETORT STILL

A retort is a copper vessel positioned between the pot still and the condenser.



1 POT STILL

The fermented liquid is heated and alcoholic vapour leaves the pot.

2 LOW WINES RETORT

The vapour bubbles through recycled liquid, heating it and creating another distillation step.

3 HIGH WINES RETORT

The vapour passes through a second liquid charge, where further distillation takes place.

4 CONDENSER

The final vapour is cooled and collected as newly made spirit.

Why use it?

The system can produce a usable, characterful spirit from one pot-still batch while creating extra distillation and reflux inside the retorts.

Retort design, liquid charges and operating methods vary between distilleries.

AFTER DISTILLATION

Unaged

Stored in inert vessels such as stainless steel to preserve the character of the newly made spirit.

Oak-matured

Ageing in oak can add vanilla, spice, dried fruit and colour. In the tropics it happens faster, but evaporation is also higher.

Blended

Different marks, still types, ages and even distilleries may be combined to build a consistent house style.

Adjusted for bottling

Depending on the product and local rules, producers may use charcoal filtration, caramel colour, sweetening and dilution with water.



Important

Colour alone cannot tell you whether a rum is aged. A white rum may have been matured and filtered. A dark rum may receive some or most of its colour from caramel.

THERE IS NO SINGLE CARIBBEAN RUM STYLE

STYLE IS BUILT IN STAGES



1. RAW MATERIAL

Cane juice, syrup
or molasses



2. FERMENTATION

Restrained or
highly aromatic



3. DISTILLATION

High rectification for
a cleaner, lighter style
or low rectification for
a fuller, heavier style



4. AFTER DISTILLATION

Maturation, blending,
filtration, adjustment
and dilution



5. THE RESULT

Countless styles,
from light and clean
to rich and intense

FINAL TAKEAWAY

Geography tells you where the rum was made.
Production choices explain how it tastes.

Rabei Zaitouna

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