

Plantation Rums are in Jeff 'Beachbum' Berry's tips on making tiki drinks !

Jeff 'Beachbum' Berry gives mystical tips on making tiki drinks at Tales of the Cocktail

New Orleans' resident tiki god issued spiritual guidance on making rum-based drinks to a crowd of devotees at **Tales of the Cocktail** on Thursday in New Orleans.

"The drink will tell you how it wants to be made," said **Jeff "Beachbum" Berry**, sharing the wisdom of Japanese bartender Kazuo Uyeda during a seminar titled "Which Rum, What Cocktail and Why?"

The answer to "why" is simple, Berry said: "Rum was cheap as dirt."

The liquor grew popular in the U.S. during Prohibition, when whiskey was tough to get and bathtub gin could kill you, he said. In contrast, with rum, "the label glued to the bottle was probably real," Berry said.

"You weren't going to die or become paralytic," he said.

However, after Prohibition ended, Americans returned to their "beloved" gin and whiskey, resulting in a large surplus of unwanted rum.

A response to the "which rum, what cocktail" portion of the title proved a bit more complex and mystical.

Cocktail enthusiasts sometimes try to be purists, striving to recreate certain famed drinks down to the detail, said the seminar's panelists, which also included moderator Philip Duff, Smuggler's Cove owner Martin Cate, and Plantation Rum distiller Alexandre Gabriel.

But recreating exact replicas of cocktails gets tricky when working with rum, a spirit that started as a byproduct and has a history mired in slavery.

"Rum as we know it is not how it began," said Duff, describing how plantations began distilling rum as a means of efficiency.

Rum has changed, palates have changed, and the precise recipes of tiki pioneer Don the Beachcomber remain a mystery.

"He was a master of secrecy," Berry said. "Nobody really knows what went into his drinks."

Berry described Don as a wizard of sorts, who concocted slings and exotic punches, playing with various combinations of rums, juices and liqueurs; in the process, he took a cheap liquor ignored by most and created not just a set of drinks, but a lifestyle and attitude.

"This was new and exciting, and it was a whole new way to drink," Berry said.

That spirit of experimentation must be summoned when facing the "tyranny of choice" presented by the overwhelming rum options available today, panelists said.

"Rum is like wine—the spectrum is enormous," Berry said.

Cate said he has 540 kinds of rum at his bar and another 350 offsite, for example.

"There's the right rum for the right drink," Cate said. "You've got to ask yourself: What would taste good? What would taste right?"

The audience, a generally laidback bunch clad in Hawaiian shirts and tropical-print dresses, got a chance to taste five kinds of rum and then compare and contrast several Mai Tais and two Negronis made with the sample rums. The exercise showed how spirits could be equally admirable but not equally suited for a specific cocktail, Berry said.

To divine the right spirit, "think about how that cocktail wants to be made," Berry said.

He's been taking that advice in crafting a Mai Tai for his planned bar, **Latitude 29**.

"I've been endlessly ripping this drink apart," he said, even varying from the trusty Trader Vic's recipe.

"Let the drink tell you," Berry emphasized throughout the seminar.

"Don't let somebody who **writes a cocktail book** tell you," he added, to laughter from the crowd.

Mai Tai Version 1

Makes 1 cocktail

2 ounces Plantation Rum 3 Star
0.5 ounce Pierre Ferrand Dry Curacao
0.75 ounce freshly squeezed lime juice
0.25 ounce orgeat syrup

0.25 ounce rich sugar syrup* (2:1)

Garnish: Mint sprig

Garnish: Shell of squeezed lime

Combine all ingredients except garnish in a shaker with ice and shake well. Serve in a tall glass over crushed ice. Add garnishes.

*Rich sugar syrup is made with two parts sugar dissolved in one part water. Refrigerate any leftover syrup.

Mai Tai Version 2

Makes 1 cocktail

2 ounces Plantation Rum Jamaica Vintage
0.5 ounce Pierre Ferrand Dry Curacao
0.75 ounce freshly squeezed lime juice
0.25 ounce orgeat syrup

0.25 ounce rich sugar syrup *

Garnish: Mint sprig

Garnish: Shell of squeezed lime

Combine all ingredients except garnish in a shaker with ice and shake well. Serve in a tall glass over crushed ice. Add garnishes.

*Rich sugar syrup is made with two parts sugar dissolved in one part water. Refrigerate any leftover syrup.

Mai Tai version 3

Makes 1 cocktail

1 ounce Plantation 3 Star Rum
1 ounce Plantation Rum Jamaica Vintage
0.5 ounce Pierre Ferrand Dry Curacao
0.75 ounce freshly squeezed lime juice

0.25 ounce orgeat syrup

0.25 ounce rich sugar syrup*

Garnish: Mint sprig

Garnish: Shell of squeezed lime

Combine all ingredients except garnish in a shaker with ice and shake well. Serve in a tall glass over crushed ice. Add garnishes.

*Rich sugar syrup is made with two parts sugar dissolved in one part water. Refrigerate any leftover syrup.

Rum Negroni Version 1

Makes 1 cocktail

1 ounce Plantation Rum Grand Reserve 5 Year
1 ounce Campari
1 ounce sweet vermouth
Garnish: Orange zest

Stir all ingredients except garnish together in a mixing glass. Strain and serve over ice in a rocks glass. Add garnish.

Rum Negroni Version 2

Makes 1 cocktail

1 ounce Plantation Rum Trinidad Overproof
1 ounce Campari
1 ounce sweet vermouth

Garnish: Orange zest

Stir all ingredients except garnish together in a mixing glass. Strain and serve over ice in a rocks glass. Add garnish.

Ice: Rocks