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TAKING A BREAK FROM WINE

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The summer warmth is the time when heavier red wines are pushed to the side in favor of the lighter white wines and mixed drinks.

Of all the spirits used in mixed drinks, tequila and rum are the standouts.

Rum is the preferred beverage of the tropical Caribbean islands so it stands to reason that it should go over well during our hot, humid summer season.

Rum, a spirit distilled from sugar cane, has taken on a second meaning in the world of mixed drinks.

While rarely taken neat (undiluted), it has become a summer favorite for mixed drinks.

The reason is quite simple; most of the rum in the marketplace are quickly made cheap imitations of the real thing from days of old.

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Better rum can and should be enjoyed without any additions such as fruit, sweet fruit juice, or the abomination of "Rum and Coke."

In the case of the latter, I believe that rum is added to the cola just to add alcohol and a suggestion of other flavors.

Quality rum should be treated in a manner as one would treat a fine cognac or single malt Scotch whisky.

These rums should also be enjoyed in the same way, neat or "on the rocks" so that the extent of their flavor and aroma can be fully enjoyed, however, a better will add a dark sugar flavor and greater complexity to mixed drinks that many of the "house brands" will not.

Among the better of the best are the Dominican Republic Rum made by the prestigious Santiago de los Caballeros and bottled under the name Kirk and Sweeney.

Just FYI, Kirk and Sweeney was the name of a prohibition era rum runner schooner that eluded capture until it was seized in 1924.

I believe that the name was chosen to add a bit of adventure or spice to their rum, which is unnecessary because the rum is in a class by itself.

Kirk & Sweeney 12 Year Rum: This is a well-made rum that can add dignity to any mixed drink but works just as well just as well "straight." The "12 Year Old" in the name indicates that it has aged in wooden barrels for 12 years, which in itself, is a rather long aging period for rum resulting in its dark color and smoothness. Dried apricots, orange peel, vanilla, brown sugar, tropical spices and toast are easily discernible in the aroma. The taste is a well-balanced mixture of chestnuts, pecans, bananas, butterscotch and brown sugar. The years spent in the barrel have resulted in a smooth and mellow beverage; how you enjoy it is strictly up to you, but enjoy it I believe, you will.

Kirk & Sweeney 18 Year Rum: The 18 years of aging results in a mellow, full flavored, dark colored rum with a velvet-like smoothness. While the aroma is multifaceted, the most pronounced are the aroma of butterscotch, toast, walnuts and oak. The flavor is a complex of coffee, cinnamon, walnuts and caramel. There is also the all-pervasive sensation of brown sugar.

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While this rum may taste of brown sugar, it is totally dry. This is excellent rum and it makes a delightful after dinner drink in place of brandy or can add increased depth and enjoyment to mixed drinks.

Kirk & Sweeney 23 Year Rum: This old rum has the smoothness and clear, deep dark amber color of the finest cognac. The aroma is rich and heavy with butterscotch, vanilla, oak and burnt sugar. Its flavor is a very complex blend of orange peel, clove and all spice that ride on an impressive base of vanilla and caramel. These flavors carry over to the finish where they remain on the palate for an inordinately long time. There is little to compare this rum to except those super expensive brandies that are sold in crystal decanters. Kirk & Sweeney 23 Year Old Rum is in a world of its own, it is incredible and worth every penny of its price.

KIRK AND SWEENEY