

The flavoursome rums of Demerara and beyond: Margaret Swaine visits Guyana

[National Post](#) – Canada. May 4, 2012 – 6:08 PM ET [Comments](#)

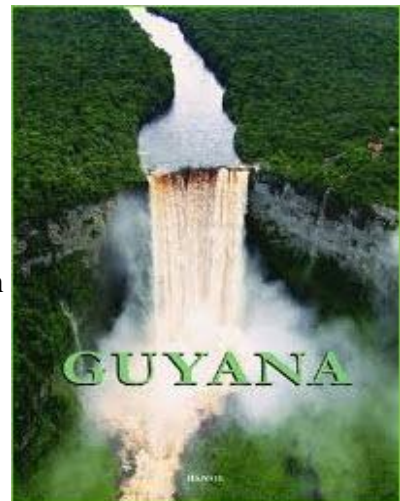
By Margaret Swaine - [WineAlign](#)

Guyana is not a place on most tourists' radar. It should however figure prominently on a rum lover's bucket list. All of the world's fantastic Demerara rum comes from here and from just one distillery, the Diamond Distillery of [Demerara Distillers Limited](#). Demerara gets its name from the river that runs through the capital Georgetown and the region.

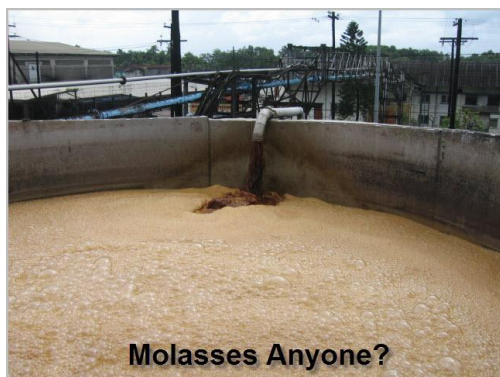
Demerara Distillers makes over two dozen rums for other spirit companies around the world and they sell a lot of young rum spirit in bulk. For example I saw bottles of Pyrat rum (Patrón Spirits Company) being packaged when I was there and pictures of Lemon Hart rum being bottled. I also learned that some American bourbon companies were buying the young spirit to make up the 49% of their product that doesn't need to be corn spirit based.

“The Land of Many Waters” and Rum!

Guyana located in the northeastern shoulder of South America is the only English speaking country on that continent. Rainforests carpet about 80 per cent of the land but there is still space for a considerable amount of sugarcane cultivation. It was the Dutch who centuries ago brought sugarcane to this part of the world and with it the off shoot of rum production. At one point there were an estimated 300 sugarcane estates and perhaps as many distilleries. The by-product of sugar production is molasses. Take molasses, ferment it and then distillate and you have rum. Much of the land in Guyana is below sea level which gives a particular cherished characteristic to the sugarcane and subsequent molasses.



For economic and other reasons the number of distilleries shrunk to as little as a dozen by 1940s. By independence in 1966 there were but nine left and now there is just the one. The challenge for the Diamond Distillery is to maintain the distinctiveness of the many different brands while having them all under one roof. One way they do this is by using a variety of different stills including the only wood stills left in the world. There's quite a collection of old stills from former distilleries – a virtual museum of every kind of still that was every used in the country in the production of rum.



Shaun Caleb, operations manager at the distillery, started my tour right where the molasses poured into the fermentation tanks. It was quite something to see thousands of liters of molasses cascade into open tanks; dark, deep and frothy at the top. Some of the molasses

ferments in closed tanks so that carbon dioxide that's produced during fermentation can be captured to use later in carbonated drinks such as Pepsi made here. But other vats are open to the air, the rain and anything else that chooses to fall into the tank. This just adds character says Shaun and as the fermented molasses is boiled and vaporized to form the spirits, nothing dangerous will survive the journey.

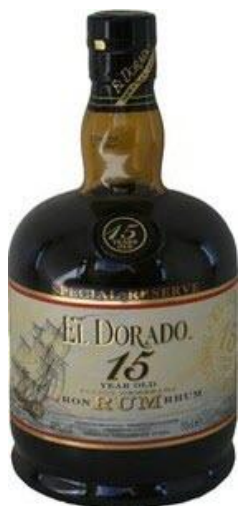
The place is dirty, grimy and noisy with the constant sounds of machinery grinding away. However it's also fascinating with a great bonus of molasses wafting in the air. A sweet mist arises from the hot boiling molasses and you can breathe in the scents of the future rum.

From the ancient wooden pot stills, spirit bubbles out from tiny leaks at the seams of the staves. There's even a wooden column still, a form of continuous spirit production. These old-fashioned stills create very flavourful rums; you need only a pinch of them to add oodles of character. Two new enormous stainless steel continuous stills have been added at a cost of \$25 million and these will help increase production to meet the demands of their many customers.



The El Dorado Rums

Demerara's own brand is El Dorado and they produce about a dozen different and amazingly good rums under this label. All the rums are aged in former bourbon barrels, and they have about 90,000 barrels spread out between three warehouses. The oldest rum they have in cask is over 40 years. As part of my [El Dorado Heritage Tour](#) I tasted through their entire line. These are the ones available in Ontario:



[El Dorado Five-year-old](#) (\$24.95) is a phenomenal value. It's golden coloured, with deep, slightly rubbery, rummy flavors. [Six-year-old Deluxe Silver Demerara Rum](#) (\$29.85) is colourless and clear as the barrel color and perhaps even some of the congeners have been filtered out. It has more of a punch, elegance and spice flavor to it and less of the rummy aspect. [The 12-year-old Demerara Rum](#) (\$35.60) is deeper, darker with more colour. It lingers on the palate and is an elegant rum but also with an over lying sweetness and some vanilla, bourbon, spiced notes to it. The [15-year-old Demerara](#) (\$59.05) is my favorite of the lot in terms of quality, price and character. It's lighter in colour than the 12-year-old, with a real elegance to it. There is a soft rum delicacy and sophistication along with spice and a lively character. The [21-year-old Demerara Rum](#) (\$109.95) is a deep amber colour with dense, concentrated, vanilla sweetness. Very velvety with less spice it's almost cognac like except for that overlying sweet molasses character. It's long, lengthy, with layers of complexity and flavours. It's an incredible bargain.

Of the three single barrel rums which sell for \$99.95 in Ontario only the [El Dorado Single Barrel EHP](#) is currently on the shelves. They sport an average age of 12 to 14 years old. EHP is made in their wooden Coffey still. ICBU is from a French Savalle still. PM is the pot still. The first one, the wooden still, delivers the sweetest, deepest flavours. The French is the lightest in character. The third one has a distinctive flavour to it almost like fresh hay in the meadows. It's the EHP that has the most flavours of molasses and layers of personality and depth. A good one to have available here and a must to add to a rum collection.



Other Notable Rums



Rum is also made of course on most of the Caribbean islands. Each island produces its own distinctive style (though a number do get their young spirit from Demerara Distillers). Appleton in Jamaica produces the broadest and deepest selection of rums after Demerara Distillers. I'll go more into their entire range in another article but for now I wish to mention their [21-year-old Appleton Estate Jamaica Rum](#) (\$149.20). Now presented in a redesigned proprietary decanter and canister, it has interesting aromas of slightly mushroomy, old barrels with notes of orange peel, nuts, coffee beans and more. It finishes spiced oak, dry and firm.

[Barbancourt Four-Year-Old Rhum](#) from Haiti (\$29.95) has the distinction of being made from pure sugarcane juice, not from molasses. It's harvested from a region that produces a unique sugarcane variety that gives a distinctive bouquet and aroma to the rum. It's aged in French white oak barrels. Golden Amber in color, it has a leathery, candied fruit and nuts bouquet. The palate is rounded and spiced with sweet notes, yet still lively. There are just hints of band-aid in the background.

The more expensive rums are best savored in a snifter. However as the weather gets warmer you might try drinking some of the younger rums the way the Guyanese do. One of their favorites is rum with lime and simple sugar syrup. The other is to mix the five-year-old with coconut water. Pour into a glass filled with ice and you have a great summer cooler.

Cheers,

Margaret

Posted in: [Appetizer](#), [Wine](#) Tags: [Guyana](#), [LCBO](#), [Margaret Swaine](#), [rum](#)