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The Making of an All-American Rum

The Caribbean may have a lock on the popular conception of rum, but new distillers are aiming to craft Louisiana sugarcane into a mainland style all its own. Plus: A new Hendrick's gin and a Manhattan recipe.



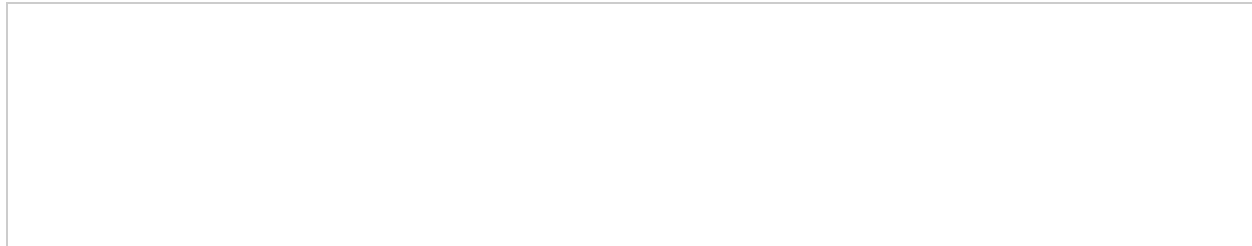
American rums worth seeking out. *Source: Vendors*

By [Kara Newman](#)

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Kara Newman, your Bloomberg spirits and cocktail guide here, with some thoughts about where American rum might be headed, as well as a first look at Hendrick's new gin and a low-alcohol cocktail recipe from a buzzy new bar from a PDT alum. But first some drink links:

- The saga of Uncle Nearest whiskey [continues in court](#).
- Cristalino tequila is booming. [Not everyone is on board](#).
- Think \$20 martinis are pricey? Meet the [\\$50 piña colada](#).



ICYMI: [Why vodka should be a sipping spirit](#). Source: Getty Images

American rum's identity crisis

It's that time of year when March is still more lion than lamb, and many of us would like nothing more than to be sipping rum drinks in some warm-weather locale.

While most of us associate rum with the sunny Caribbean, and Bad Bunny's Super Bowl performance drew the spotlight to Puerto Rican rum, I've lately been finding delight in the growing production of the continental US.

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According to the US Department of Agriculture, Florida grows the most sugarcane, followed by Louisiana. But Louisiana has taken the lead, no contest, in terms of distilling that crop. So when travels took me to New Orleans recently, I made a point of looking up Maggie Campbell, chief executive officer of American Cane, who's working on building a large-scale distillery in the state, potentially creating something akin to the Jim Beam or Jack Daniel's of rum.

TL;DR: She's got quite a journey ahead.



Harvesting sugar cane in Convent, Louisiana *Source: Getty Images*

Over (what else?) rum drinks at Manolito – a Bywater (rum, Averno, green Chartreuse) for me, a toddy-style warmer for her – Campbell laid out her vision.

In particular the field is open for a premium-level US-made rum, she explains. Currently the bulk of rum sales are in the standard (\$10 to \$22) and value (less than \$10) tiers in the US, accounting for about 70% of the market, according to data tracker IWSR. Puerto Rico’s Bacardi behemoth and Captain Morgan, made in St. Croix, in the US Virgin Islands, dominate those tiers – and receive unique tax benefits for producing in the US Caribbean. Malibu, made in Barbados, is the next-most dominant producer, also according to IWSR data.

Campbell and American Cane aim to carve out a niche for premium rum (\$23 to \$31) made in the continental US, with domestic cane distilled on the mainland.



Indeed, aged sipping rums from Jamaica have become popular with high-end bourbon collectors. *Source: Hampden Estate Rums*

As is the case with agave and whiskey, “most of the growth in rum is in premium spirits – nicer, more expensive bottles,” aka sipping rums, she says. “Rum has tons of room to mature in that way.” And with tariff drama continuing to nudge prices higher for imported spirits, a domestically made product is looking more attractive, and it does have historical precedent.

As early as Colonial times, America was a rum-producing country. But its expertise was lost following the triple whammy of Prohibition and two world wars that diverted resources away from distillation (think copper and steel for the military, not for building stills). And with a postwar push toward food and drink that had an “American identity,” including celebrating bourbon, rum fell by the wayside.



American sake is another, perhaps surprising, domestic product having a moment. *Source: Sequoia Sake*

“It’s still seen as an old-fashioned drink from somewhere else as a result of this series of events,” Campbell says. She previously made rum in Barbados as private project leader for Rémy Cointreau’s Mount Gay and as head distiller-president in Massachusetts with Privateer Rum (years before its CEO became infamous for that Coldplay “kiss cam” moment).

With all this in mind, Campbell is working with Louisiana sugarcane farmers and planning toward building an American rum distillery in 2027 – bigger than anything that exists in the US. “This is about giving rum a physical home in America,” she says. The goal is to become a spiritual home of sorts for the segment, akin to how Jack Daniel’s is the “home” of Tennessee whiskey.

Ironically, while building toward that ambitious goal, Campbell has introduced Banter, a line of Caribbean-made rums, under the American Cane umbrella. It includes a crisp white and mellow, lightly funky amber rum, blended with components from Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Guatemala. Both are intended for mixing into cocktails.



American Cane's non-American offering. *Source: Recognition Spirits*

A looming question: Is the US ready for more domestic rum? According to the latest Distilled Spirits Council of the US report, released in February, sales of rum (from all locales) declined 6.2% last year in terms of volume, with only the most expensive super premium tier seeing an uptick, of 2.9%.

Matt Pietrek, a rum educator and historian who publishes the Rum Wonk newsletter, says one of the problems American rum faces is that it lacks a firm identity.

“No one is defining the North American style,” he says. “There’s no collective movement. Everyone has different ideas about how to make rum.” America is home to a couple hundred rum makers, Pietrek estimates, mostly small craft producers, geographically dispersed and doing their own thing, rum-wise. And 95% of those distilleries also make spirits other than rum, he adds. “They’re not necessarily rum distilleries.”

Pietrek continues: “The only good example of any collective organization is Louisiana rum.” With distilleries including Oxbow, Bayou and Porchjam clustered near sugar fields, the sharing of resources and expertise might be

the path toward creating an identifiable rum style the US can one day call its own. I'll be watching to see how American Cane adds to that narrative.

Until then, here are four domestic rum bottles worth trying. You can also take a peek at the [American Rum Index](#) to find a distillery in your own backyard.

Cotton & Reed White Rum (\$30)

This craft distillery in the nation's capital makes rum near Washington's Union Market, using Louisiana cane. The white rum is a versatile choice for daiquiris and other cocktails.

Lyon Rum Sailor's Reserve (\$45)

In March the American Craft Spirits Association awarded this 100-proof Maryland bottling a "best of class" distinction for the rum category. It's distilled from a mix of Louisiana sugarcane and blackstrap molasses, then aged two years in ex-bourbon barrels, for a heady mix of vanilla and oak.

Montanya Rum Oro (\$43)

Distilled with Louisiana cane and aged for two years in the Colorado Rockies, this unusual high-altitude rum is bold and maple-y, ideal for mixing into tropical cocktails.

Oxbow Rhum Louisiane Cane Juice Agricole (\$50)

For fans of funky agricole-style rums from Martinique and beyond, this is your pour, hailing from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with plenty of ripe banana and a vegetal, grassy finish. It's made with fresh-pressed cane juice rather than molasses (note: some of Oxbow's other bottlings do use molasses).

Bottle of the month: Another Hendrick's gin



Source: *Hendrick's Gin*

Hendrick's has dabbled with quite a few limited-edition expressions over the past few years, such as 2025's Oasium, which focused on desert botanicals, and the super floral Midsummer Solstice. But for the first time in nearly a decade it added a new, permanent release to the lineup. It's called ... wait for it ... Another Hendrick's.

Spotlighting orange blossom and cacao, [this \\$35 bottling](#), packaged in white, is aimed at younger consumers, who are known to prefer sweeter flavor profiles. While it's not far from the traditional Hendrick's playbook – also noted for soft botanicals and relatively low juniper – for this latest iteration, master distiller Lesley Gracie was inspired by a recent trip to Mexico, where she received a drink garnished with a cacao flower. The end result isn't overtly chocolaty, but it incorporates that familiar flavor in a subtle way that even gin neophytes can appreciate. It's an intentional move.

“The global gin market is slowing and to continue to grow and lead the category as Hendrick's has done for 25 years, the brand knows the importance of recruiting a new generation of consumers at a faster pace,” Nora Torpey, global brand managing director, said in an email.

So how is it? The primary ingredients sound like they might suggest chocolate orange segments, but the reality is much more nuanced, with a mild orange scent. The palate is brisk, bottled at 44% alcohol by volume, with a bit of perfumy florality midpalate and finishing with a subtle cocoa powder exhale and a mouthwatering saline tinge. It's not at all sweet, but the cocoa notes give that perception.

While it's not as distinctive as the cucumber-and-rose profile of the OG Hendrick's, not everyone is looking for a spa-like sipper. I think Another will be more harmonious in a drink like a Negroni (cucumber fights with bittersweet Campari, but cocoa and orange are both complementary flavors in the drink). Or you can do as the brand suggests: Mix it with elderflower liqueur and soda water into a fizz-style cocktail, akin to the [Hugo Spritz](#), last summer's “it” drink.

Cocktail of the month: Inverse Manhattan



Kees' Inverse Manhattan. Source: *Eric Medsker*

For those of us who never got to experience midcentury New York icons such as El Morocco, PDT alum Jeff Bell has opened Kees, a subterranean spot with high-end drinks – including this Inverse Manhattan, a lower-alcohol version of the boozy classic.

Although “reverse martinis” (meaning more vermouth than gin, often much more vermouth) show up on quite a few drink menus these days, “you don’t see a lot of low-ABV Manhattan options,” Bell says.

The secret ingredient: a quarter ounce of apricot liqueur, which adds a fleeting hint of “wait, what was that flavor?” and body to the drink. Bell favors Roulot l’Abricot. “It’s expensive but so good,” he enthuses. “It’s made by hand, when the ripened apricots are at their most flavorful point.” (I like Giffard apricot liqueur as an affordable alternative.)

[Play Alphasdots](#)[Play Alphasdots](#)

It's also worth noting that Kees' menu is organized by drink style (Manhattan, Collins, sour, etc.), and for each of the eight sections there's a premium version. That means visitors can follow the easy-drinking Inverse Manhattan (\$22), for example, with a \$42 Big Apple, another Manhattan variation, made with 12-year-old Laird's apple brandy and Jaywalk rye. Bell describes these drinks as "approachable luxury for normal people" and caps their prices at \$50.

Inverse Manhattan

Courtesy of Jeff Bell, managing partner and founder, Kees, New York

2 oz sweet vermouth (Kees uses Cocchi Vermouth di Torino)

1 oz rye whiskey (Sazerac 6-year rye)

0.25 oz apricot liqueur (Roulot l'Abriocot)

2 dashes Angostura bitters

Garnish: apricot leather (Kees gets it at [Kalustyan's](#)) and brandied cherry

Stir all ingredients with ice. Strain into a chilled cocktail glass. Garnish with apricot leather and brandied cherry speared on a cocktail pick.

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