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Cape Canaveral,  
Florida,  
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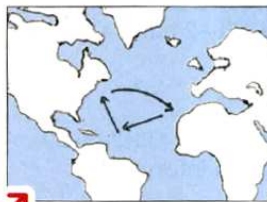
DRINKS

# The Boston Rum Party

Thanks to the work of a new generation of distillers, tea won't be the only drink in New England with a notable history. BY FRANCINE MAROUKIAN

The good citizens of colonial Boston drank just as much rum as tea. Rum was an early economic engine there, strategic to Britain's infamous triangular trade route linking sugarcane and slavery (see right). By the mid-1700s, there were more than 60 rum distilleries in Massachusetts, mostly centered on Boston. The molasses came from tropical sugar houses and was initially duty-free and plentiful enough to become a staple of everyday life in iconic dishes such as Boston's baked beans. However, as other countries settled the Caribbean and planted sugarcane, Britain imposed a tax on imports from sources not under the dominion of the Crown. This restriction turned molasses into a crusade and rum making into a revolutionary act.

Today brothers Will (above right) and Dave Willis (left) are reinvigorating Boston's regional rum legacy at Bully Boy, their distillery in the Newmarket district of Roxbury, one of those transitioning industrial areas that still looks like a good place to dump a body. The fourth-generation New Englanders come from boozy stock. Their grandfather's farm, where they grew up, once had an informal speakeasy in the basement, with a vault that held a cache of Cuban rum. "Seeing those bottles growing up, unwittingly and in a roundabout way, set us on the course to founding Bully Boy," Will says. Their four-step process starts with distillery-grade molasses (55 to 65 percent sugar) in 275-gallon plastic totes, each weighing about 3,200 pounds and delivered from Louisiana. "It's a cheap source of sugar with lots of flavor and tons of aromatics," Will says. "The challenge is distilling without losing any of those foundational aspects." Here's how they do it.



Traders used proceeds from the sale of slaves in the Caribbean to buy sugar, which they sold in New England to buy rum, which they traded or sold in Africa for more slaves.

**STEP 1 THE MIXING POT**

Forty-five gallons of molasses are added to 150 gallons of water and 8 ounces of powdered yeast to create the wash. Because water plays a large part in the final flavor, quality is critical. Luckily Boston has some of the best tap water in the country, with complex minerality and great taste. All Bully Boy does is carbon-filter it to remove particulates and impurities.

**STEP 2 FERMENTATION**

The wash is pumped into a stainless-steel tank in which the yeast first consumes oxygen, bubbling wildly like a sixth-grade science project, and then sugar, giving off alcohol as a by-product.

**STEP 3 DISTILLATION**

The fermented mixture is pumped into the distilling pot, a copper vessel with a stainless-steel jacket wrapped around its bottom half. Steam is pumped into the jacket to evaporate the alcohol. Because different alcohols boil at different temperatures, the speed at which the steam is released determines the burn-off rate. Each stage of burn-off has a name: the head, the heart, and the tail. The steam pushes off the vapor, which is released into the still columns where it collects and condenses. "The art of distillation, and the palate for each distiller, is the manner in which heads, hearts, and tails are combined," Dave says. "We take more at the start, but some distillers prefer the back-end earthy funk of tails."

**STEP 4 FINISHING**

The spirits are diluted with water to bring them to bottle strength, macerated with different elements to introduce new flavors, or rested in barrels to add color and dimension.



THREE GREAT NEW ENGLAND RUMS

**1 Bully Boy Boston Rum 80 PROOF**

This dark, savory rum is double-rested, first in used American whiskey barrels at No. 3 char, letting the subtle sugarcane flavor shine through, and then in used red-wine barrels to add color and a little fruitiness.

**2 Twenty Boat Spiced Rum 95 PROOF**

Twice distilled by Cape Cod's Truro Vineyards, Twenty Boat starts with peppery spices like cardamom and allspice and finishes with a Boston-appropriate undertone of tea.

**3 Rusticator Rum 90 PROOF**

From Bartlett Spirits of Maine Distillery, Rusticator is aged in oak barrels and has flavors of honey, a soft toffee sweetness, and a whiff of smoke.