

The Original American Spirit

An Interview with Reiniel Vicente Diaz, Master Blender, Bayou Rum

EDITORS' NOTE *Reiniel Vicente Diaz, second-generation rum maker, joined Bayou Rum in 2013. He controls the entire process of making Bayou's award-winning rums, including raw materials, fermentation, distillation, aging and blending. He was born into the art of rum production in Sancti Spiritus, Cuba, and raised in a city surrounded by sugar cane fields, sugar mills and a rum distillation facility. From a young age, he followed in the footsteps of his father, who was Master Blender of a Cuban rum distillery for 15 years. At age 16, he began working alongside him in the design, preparation, and tastings of fine rums in Dominican Republic, where his father had relocated. His passion for the study of distillates and the processing of rums led him to study chemical engineering at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo. Diaz's extensive experience and talent enabled him to work for several Dominican rum companies where he developed numerous products, before ultimately moving to the United States to develop Bayou Rum.*



Reiniel Vicente Diaz

The difference between now and then is that our rums are 100 percent American, proudly made in Louisiana. Our signature recipe uses local Louisiana sugar cane molasses produced by the oldest family-owned and operated sugar mill in the United States. Our rums are batch distilled using copper pot stills and then aged in a variety of casks, predominantly bourbon casks.

Bayou Rum was founded in 2011.

I joined the team two years later in 2013 and have been Master Distiller since. Bayou was acquired by Stoli Group U.S. in 2015 and has since grown in case size and invested millions of dollars into its distillery, which also welcomes visitors looking to discover Bayou Rums and how they are produced.

Will you provide an overview of Bayou Rum's product offerings?

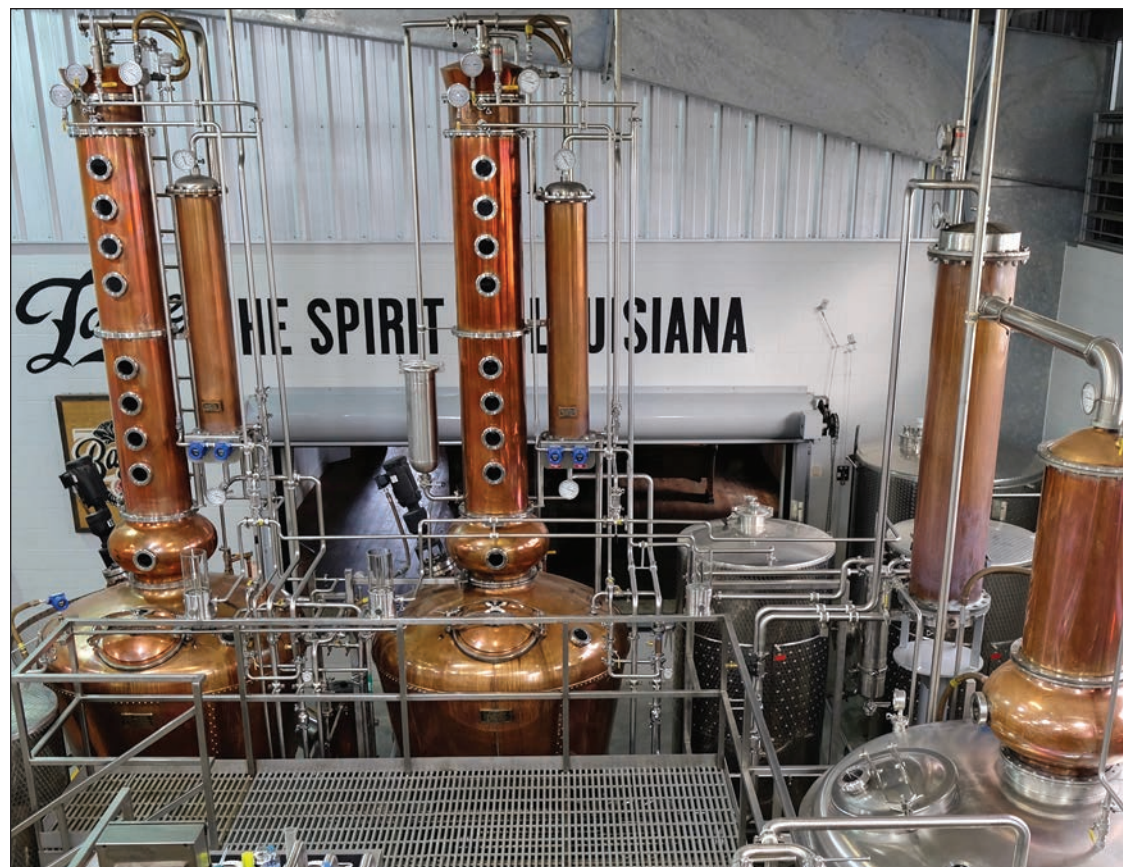


Inspired by the rich history, diverse culinary scene, and celebratory nature of Louisiana, Bayou Rum is made with locally grown sugar-cane molasses in our craft distillery in Lacassine. We offer four core expressions: Bayou White, the purest, unaged expression of our rum; Bayou Spiced, infused with a delicate blend of spices inspired by Louisianan Creole baking, including three styles of natural vanilla, cinnamon, and sweet figs; Bayou Reserve, which is matured in wet ex-bourbon barrels for up to four years and special aging uses the Solera method for a consistent flavor, smoothness, and character. Lastly, there is Bayou Mardi Gras XO, an ultra-premium rum matured in bourbon barrels for up to five years and finished for one extra year in the finest Spanish Pedro Ximenez sherry barrels. This double-cask luxury rum offers complex

COMPANY BRIEF *Part of Stoli Group, one of the world's leading premium spirits businesses, Bayou Rum (bayourum.com) is bringing back the lost artisanal art of American rum-making down in Lacassine, Louisiana. Bayou's signature recipe uses local Louisiana sugar cane molasses produced by the oldest family-owned and operated sugar mill in the United States. Each rum is batch distilled using copper pot stills and then aged in a variety of casks, predominantly bourbon casks.*

Will you discuss the history of Bayou Rum and how the brand is positioned in the industry?

Not many people are aware of the fact that rum is the original American spirit. Before there was whisky, bourbon or brandy, there was rum. It was the first spirit to be produced in America. Back then, it was produced using imported molasses from the Caribbean and enjoyed, among others, by America's founding fathers before the American Revolution. Bayou Rum is bringing back the lost artisanal art of American rum-making.



Louisiana Spirits Distillery in Lacassine, Louisiana



The Bayou Rum portfolio displayed in the brand's event center

flavors with hints of orange marmalade and dark stone fruit, bursts of blackcurrant, prune, and oak, and slight sweetness. All of our offerings are handcrafted, pot-distilled and naturally gluten-free.

Will you highlight the Bayou Rum distillery and how it captures the spirit of the brand?

Our beautiful, craft distillery, located in Lacassine, Louisiana, captures the spirit of the brand in a number of ways. We only use locally-sourced sugarcane molasses to make our rum. By using ingredients that are unique to the region, Bayou is able to produce a rum that is truly representative of Louisiana's culture and heritage. The local micro-climate of Louisiana, characterized by high temperature and humidity, is ideal for the aging of our rums and plays an important role in determining their flavor profile. Besides the production aspect, our distillery provides a special visitor experience. This includes tours and tastings which allow visitors to learn more about the distillation process and the great history of rum-making in Louisiana. This immersive experience helps to deepen the connection between the brand and its customers.

What have been the keys to Bayou Rum's growth in the industry?

The quality of our rums has been our main growth driver. Bayou rums have won over 100 awards from renowned international tasting competitions, highlighting our brand's quality credentials. Stoli Group has made great investments in our distillery enabling us to produce our rums in the best conditions and making sure quality and excellence are always our top priority.

Last, but not least, we have developed Bayou's distribution outside of its home markets in the U.S. Our rums are available around the world, and we are constantly opening new markets, highlighting our American origin and quality credentials as part of our brand identity.

How critical is it for Bayou Rum to continue to innovate and where is innovation taking place for the brand?

Innovation is part of our brand strategy and the best way for the rum category to continue its premiumization. Our limited-edition series, Bayou Single Batch, is the best example. We use different types of casks to demonstrate the influence that a specific type of cask aged for a specific amount of time may have on the flavor and taste profile of a rum. Our first Single Batch edition was aged for two and a half years in rye casks. Our second edition was aged for three years in red wine casks from Napa Valley. And our latest edition, Single Batch 3, has been aged for five years in red wine casks as well. The objective is to provide an elevated tasting experience and position super premium rum as an alternative to other premium dark spirits like bourbon, whisky or cognac.

How do you define the Bayou Rum difference and what sets the brand apart in the rum space?

The most substantial differentiating factor is our unique microclimate, as we are placed near the Gulf which makes our area one of the best places to make rum. With its heat and high humidity, the climate is extreme. In the mornings it can be very cold, but in the afternoon it warms up considerably which creates a unique condition that you're not going to find in many other places. Additionally, we choose not to control the temperatures or the humidity in our warehouse at all. As a result, the angel's share is quite something. The angels gulp down 6 to 7 percent of the maturing stocks of rum each year, and because it is so humid the rate of evaporation of water is slightly above that of alcohol. This means that over four or five years, the filling strength of 60 percent ABV will have risen to around 61.5 to 62 percent ABV.

What has allowed you to offer a high-quality, premium product at an accessible price?

Given the fact that we source all of our ingredients locally, we are able to offer quality at an accessible price point for our loyal consumers.

What are your priorities for Bayou Rum as you look to the future?

Our objective is to become the spirit of choice in our home market, Louisiana. We are also looking to improve our distribution nationwide, making sure all Americans who love rum can enjoy our authentic American Rum. Ultimately, we look forward to reinforcing our presence in the rest of the world, making people discover the best America has to offer in the rum category. ●

