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Aged rum gains ground in the U.S. premium spirits market

The segment has declined less than unaged rum because drinkers see sipping value in bottles priced below comparable whiskies.

Tuesday, September 29, 2026



Aged rum is gaining ground in the United States premium spirits market even as the broader rum category continues to shrink, according to producers, distributors, retailers and bar operators who say consumers are buying fewer bottles overall but showing more interest in older and higher-priced expressions.

The shift comes during a difficult period for spirits sales in the U.S. Rum has been among the weakest categories, led by a sharp drop in white rum sold for home consumption. But executives across the industry say darker and aged rums are holding up better because they benefit from the same trend that has lifted other premium spirits: drinkers are focusing more on quality, sipping occasions and authenticity.

Gabriella Ripepi, chief marketing officer of Destilería Serrallés, the producer of Don Q, said the biggest drag on rum has been the contraction in white rum, which has seen the steepest decline in off-premise demand. At the same time, she said, shelf behavior is changing as more consumers move toward dark rums, which are typically positioned at higher prices and marketed as more premium products.

Data from Southern Glazer’s Wine & Spirits show that aged rum has recently performed slightly better than unaged rum, even though both segments have declined. Zach Poelma, senior vice president of commercial intelligence at Southern Glazer’s, said aged rum sales fell 6.1% over the past year, compared with a 7% decline for unaged rum. He said aged rum has shown relative resilience because it offers many consumers an entry into aged spirits at lower prices than comparable whiskies.

That price gap remains one of the category’s biggest selling points. Poelma said aged rum in the upper end of the market is priced on average 27% below whiskies in the same range. In an economy where inflation and household budgets remain a concern, that difference matters to consumers looking for premium products without paying top whisky prices. He also said legal drinking age Gen Z consumers are showing increased interest in rum more broadly as they explore premium spirits at accessible price points.

Retailers say the category is still underdeveloped in the U.S. but is moving in the right direction. Nima Ansari, spirits buyer for Astor Wines & Spirits in New York City, said aged rum is an important and growing segment for the store and now exceeds unaged rum in both number of stockkeeping units and average price. He said the U.S. has trailed Europe in rum connoisseurship, with many Americans still associating rum mainly with seasonal mixed drinks, but that view is starting to change as more iconic bottlings and independent releases reach the market.

Ansari pointed to brands such as Smith and Cross, Planteray, El Dorado and Foursquare as strong sellers, with higher-end labels including Hampden, Alambique Serrano and House of Velier also drawing interest. He said products priced in the $30-$50 range have the clearest path to wider growth, while the category as a whole has been undervalued for years compared with the quality offered in the bottle.

Bars focused on rum are seeing similar demand. Kevin Beary, beverage director at Three Dots and a Dash in Chicago, said aged rum appears in most of the bar's cocktails and in many of its tasting flights. He said quality rums have become much easier to source in Chicago over the past decade and that he is seeing a shift away from cheaply made products or lightly aged rums that rely on color or flavor additives.

Large suppliers and brand owners are trying to turn that growing interest into broader market share. Campari America, which owns Appleton Estate, says much of the U.S. rum business is still concentrated in lower-priced and flavored products, limiting growth in the super-premium and ultra-premium tiers. Allison Varone, head of marketing for Campari America, said the company sees an opening to attract whiskey and Cognac drinkers by emphasizing Appleton Estate's age-statement rums, including its 8-, 12- and 15-year-old bottles. Appleton's lineup ranges from about $22 for a 750-ml. Signature Blend to about $140 for its 21-year-old expression.

Brown-Forman is taking a similar approach with Diplomático, which it describes as the No. 4 super-premium rum label in the U.S. Camille Zahniser, vice president and group director for emerging brands at Brown-Forman, said more consumers are discovering that high-end rum can offer the same complexity and sipping appeal as Bourbon or Scotch. She said Diplomático's price-to-quality position has helped it appeal both to established rum drinkers and to newcomers entering the category.

Maison Ferrand USA, owner of Planteray, is also staying focused on the higher end of the market despite softer consumer spending. Guillaume Lamy, managing director of Maison Ferrand USA, said the company is not trying to chase lower price points and instead plans to support its existing premium strategy with trade outreach, retail activity and stronger shelf visibility through 2026.

Newer brands are also trying to capture demand for sipping-quality rum. Palm Republic, launched in 2024, sells an aged expression at about $50 for a 750-ml. bottle, made from a blend of rums from Panama, Jamaica and the U.S. Virgin Islands aged up to eight years in Sherry casks. Co-founder Brad Parkes said the brand deliberately entered Florida, California and Texas first and has seen enough early sell-through to keep investing in those states before expanding further. He said the most active part of the category is now above the $30 retail mark.

Don Q has been adding to its premium range as well. In November, the brand introduced Don Q Double-Aged Pedro Ximénez Cask Finish Rum, priced at about $50, with only 2,000 bottles released through select retailers and the brand's website. Earlier this year, it also added Don Q Reserva at about $21 and Don Q Reserve Especial at about $40, both aimed at broadening its aged portfolio.

Smaller U.S. producers say education remains the main obstacle. Olivia Stewart, president of Oxbow Rum Distillery in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, said many American consumers still think of rum as either a sweet beach cocktail ingredient or a lower-end spirit tied to earlier drinking experiences. She said her company is trying to reposition rum with the same seriousness given to premium Bourbon by emphasizing transparency, production method and aging. Oxbow's standard line includes Oxbow Barrel Aged Straight Rum at about $50 and Oxbow Single Barrel Rhum Louisiane at about $61.

International producers from outside the Caribbean are also entering the U.S. aged rum market. Camikara, an Indian rum brand launched in the U.S. in 2023, began with a limited 12-year-old release priced at about $100, followed by a 3-year-old at about $30 and an 8-year-old at about $45. Madhu Kanna, head of international business for owner Piccadily Agro Industries, said the brand has found interest among bartenders and consumers looking for additive-free and craft-led spirits, and that the company expects strong double-digit growth as awareness and distribution increase.

The category's supporters say one of the biggest changes is geographic. Ansari said consumers now have access to serious rums not only from established centers such as Jamaica and Barbados, but also from Mexico, Haiti, Australia, Japan and parts of Africa.

That wider range, he said, is helping build the case that rum can stand beside whiskey, Cognac and other aged spirits as a category for collectors, enthusiasts and casual drinkers looking for value.

For now, the numbers still show a market in decline. But within that weaker backdrop, suppliers, stores and bars are directing more attention to aged rum because it is outperforming white rum, carrying higher margins and attracting drinkers who want premium bottles at lower prices than many competing spirits. Across the trade, the main bet is that clearer storytelling, greater transparency and wider exposure will bring more U.S. consumers into the category.