

RUM DIARIES

CAMMERAY'S STUART GILBERT HAS LOVED RUM FOR AS LONG AS HE CAN REMEMBER. IN 2008, HE FOUNDED THE BOUTIQUE HOLEY DOLLAR RUM DISTILLERY **WRITES POLLY SIMONS**

"Rum was actually the first unofficial currency of Australia. When officers sailed from England, they would exchange goods for rum along the way, and would trade rum for sheep, land, houses, bricks, whatever. That's why the New South Wales Corps became known as The Rum Corps. Then, when Governor Bligh arrived in Australia with orders to curb the power of the Rum Corps, you had the Rum Rebellion of 1808, where The Rum Corps dragged Bligh out from under his bed, arrested, imprisoned and exiled him.

That's one of the reasons we came up with the name Holey Dollar, because holey dollars replaced rum as the official currency. The new governor, Lachlan Macquarie, brought out 40,000 Spanish coins and used a die to create two coins out of one. The outside was the "holey dollar" and the inside the "dump".

Australians drink the most rum in the world and the name Holey Dollar is special. Once people understand it, they pay attention.

I was a consumer originally and we always used to drink Inner Circle Rum. We would take it overseas when we went around windsurfing championships (Gilbert is an eight-time world champion windsurfer and competed as a yachting reserve in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics). At the end of the day, we'd meet

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some other guys and get on the rum, and the next day we'd wake up and wouldn't have a hangover, it was so pure. Later, I used to look around and try and find good rum, like El Dorado (Inner Circle Rum disappeared in Australia in 1986), but it costs about \$250, it's hard to find and nothing ever tasted so good as Inner Circle.

I had a real estate agency in Mosman which I sold in 2000 during the Olympics. I was sitting on the beach one day and wondering what happened to Inner Circle and thought I should find out. That's how I got into it.

When I bought the Inner Circle trademark, I actually asked to speak to Malcolm Campbell, the last Master Distiller at CSR. He was a retired dairy farmer in Taree. The next day we got a phone call: 'Mate, I've been waiting 15 years for your call!'. He still had the yeast in his fridge. His wife had been after him to get rid of it and he'd say that one day someone would come along and want it. So we went over to Fiji with a bottle of Inner

Circle and tried to match it as best we could.

I sold Inner Circle to Lion Nathan Australia in 2007 and started Holey Dollar Rum in 2008. The following year, we won the International Wine & Spirit Competition for World's Best Rum and was named International Distiller of the Year.

When I started out, I was quite naive and I didn't realise Bundaberg (owned by Diageo) owned 95 per cent of the market. It became a bit of a joke, me going around yacht clubs selling rum out of the back of my van. In Australia, there's very little competition and we've never really had a choice. Now I get all these emails saying "thank God there's finally a good rum on the market".

People are becoming more discerning, and in the same way people like a single-malt whisky, people use less rum with Coke now and more in cocktails or at home with ice and a squeeze of lime.

I'm also on the panel of the International Wine & Spirits Competition, which certainly helps me understand the differences in rum.

It's blind-tasted but I can always pick my own. I can just nose it and pick it. It's just a passion. I love rum."

Holey Dollar Rum is stocked at Middle Harbour Yacht Club and 1st Choice Liquor stores nationally.



Stuart Gilbert at Winevault, Artarmon. PHOTO: Jon Attenborough