

# Packing a PUNCH

The rum revival gathers pace, as local producers create new blends fit for royalty BY PETER SWAIN

When Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, accompanied her husband Prince Charles on an official visit last year, she was offered a rum punch by hotelier Richard Lupinacci at Hermitage Plantation on Nevis.

Taking a sip, the duchess exclaimed: “That’s delicious and packs a punch – it’s really alcoholic!”

She was right on all counts, and this, according to her host, was the traditional recipe she was enjoying: ‘One of sour, two of sweet, three of strong, and four of weak’.

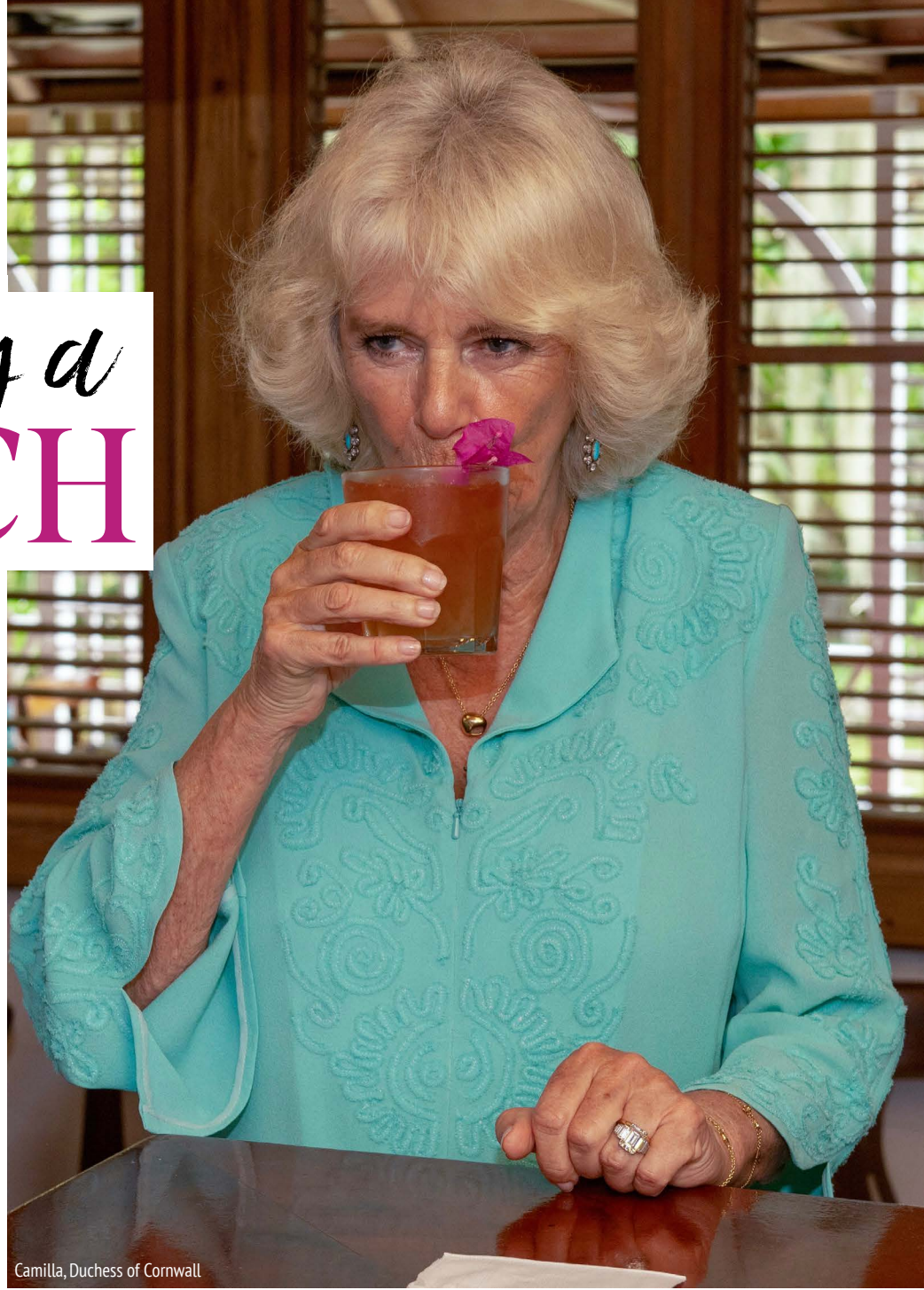
So, one part freshly squeezed lime or sour orange juice, two parts sugar syrup – half sugar, half water, three parts rum – either half white, half dark or all golden, and four parts water (the ice the drink is served over). A dash of brandy also adds flavour.

To give the elixir time to mature, most bartenders make up several bottles well ahead of time. Then, to serve, the mix is poured onto plenty of ice in a highball glass, a few drops of Angostura Bitters are added, and it’s all topped off with a grating of nutmeg.

There are, of course, many ‘secret recipes’ using different rums and exotic fruit juices, so no two establishments serve the same punch. As a result, for the dedicated imbiber, there’s plenty to research...

Produced on St. Kitts or Nevis, several new brands of rum have recently appeared ideal not only for cocktails and punches but for sipping on their own.

Roger Brisbane, proprietor of Spice



Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall

**“No two bars serve the same punch, so there’s plenty to research for the dedicated imbiber”**

Mill, has just launched his very own **Hibiscus Spirits** label. “We infuse the magenta-colored calyces of the roselle hibiscus flower – which Kittitians call sorrel – in white rum to create two distinctive bottled rums. Hibiscus Spiced Rum has six island spices added and Hibiscus Coconut Rum speaks for itself.

Demand is so high, we’re encouraging local farmers to grow more – all our hibiscus is sourced right here on St. Kitts and Nevis.”

At regular blending sessions, Roger invites guests at Spice Mill to create their own rum using various spices and infusions, and even design a one-off label, so they can walk away with a bottle they’ve blended and branded themselves.

A deep red colour, with the addition of fresh lime and passion fruit juices, the Hibiscus Spiced Rum makes a fine punch, the Coconut Rum a superb mojito. The two rums, as well as Roger’s Hibiscus Gin and Hibiscus Tequila, can now be found across our islands and – useful for last minute present-buying – at the airport.

Over on Nevis, Rumelier extraordinaire Mark Theron also blends, bottles and sells his own brands, **Clifton Estate** and **Moko Jumbie** – the ‘spirit of Nevis’.

His Clifton Estate Spiced Rum is a bold affair with notes of orange, cloves and nutmeg. Moko Jumbie, now the house rum of the Nevis Four Seasons, comes in three varieties: the Silver is a 40% proof white rum; the same strength Gold is perfect for rum punch or a classic rum and coke; and there’s also a ready-made 9% Rum Punch.

All are available in local outlets including Mark’s own Charlestown shop, L&L – on Upper Prince William Street, a three-minute walk from the ferry terminal – which sells more than 200 different rums from all over the world.

He also conducts rum tastings at hotels on both islands. “I explain the difference between English rum, French rhum, and Spanish ron, with tasting examples of each.” It’s a tough gig, but someone has to do it.

The nectar of the Caribbean has been produced here for more than 350 years,



Clifton Estate



Moko Jumbie

## HAMMOND, AKA MOONSHINE

Until the early 20th century, many sugar plantations on St. Kitts and Nevis made their own rum using copper pot stills. Then new laws were passed and all molasses were shipped off island. Of course, illegal moonshine was still being made, so a commission was created by the British to study the problem, led by a civil servant called Hammond.

His official report seems to have had little effect on the distilling of moonshine, but ever since, the white cane spirit produced in countless unlawful stills across both islands has been called ‘Hammond’. Legend has it that it can still be found by adventurous visitors in a few local bars...



Hibiscus Spirits

**“Guests can walk away with a bottle they’ve blended and branded themselves”**

so this is also an engaging way to hear about our islands’ history.

Then there’s micro-distillers **SK Blenders’** Caramay of St. Kitts Signature Blend Dark 5-year, Superior White 3-year and Handmade Spiced Rums, produced at Conaree on St. Kitts and still only available on island.

**Belmont Estate** Golden Coconut Rum is another recent arrival. This one, which has been described as “candy for grown-ups”, is quite sweet with a pronounced coconut taste, so perfect for piña colada.

The natural spirit of our islands is back, and visitors are invited to join the revolution. After all, time flies when you’re having rum. ♡



Mark Theron