

# A PASSION CONSUMED

STORY PETER SCOTT

I first met Stuart Gilbert back in 2007 when he was head of Inner Circle Rum – a former CSR rum brand he had nurtured from the point of extinction to become, at the time, the 'World's Best Rum'.

The former Olympic and World Youth Championship sailor, who switched to wind surfing after being selected for the 1984 Australian Olympic Team, had played a key role in resurrecting the Inner Circle brand. But not before he had added a few trophies to his cabinet including eight world windsurfing titles (four individual and four team championships).

After a successful career in real estate, he sold his Sydney real estate business and found he had a little spare time on his hands. Always a passionate rum drinker and observing that his once prized Inner Circle Rum no longer graced the liquor market shelves, Stuart started a campaign to revive the rum, made famous as being made only for the 'inner circle' executives of the Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR).

Stuart's quest and passion to produce the world's best rum led him to acquire the historic Beenleigh Rum Distillery in 2004 and thus began the rebirth of Inner Circle Rum. So successful was the brand that Stuart was approached by multi-national brewer Lion Nathan to sell the increasingly popular spirit brand. The sale was concluded in April 2007 and Stuart remained with the company for 12 months in a consulting role.

Stuart then retired to a quiet family life and

a chance meeting with a liquor industry executive, Tony Stubley at, of all things, his teenage daughter's 'sleepover', sowed the seeds for the development of another typically Australian rum brand.

"I met Tony and we began talking. I said 'What do you do?' He told me he was a director of South Trade International, a major liquor distribution firm and over a quiet lunch, we began talking about my past experience with Inner Circle and my passion to get back into the fray of distilling and blending a rum of distinction.

"One thing led to another and we began planning the launch of our new rum," said Stuart. A keen student of early Australian history, Stuart delved into the pages of Australia's early years dominated by the rum trade, the infamous Rum Corps and the shortage of currency in the developing colonial outpost – the Colony of New South Wales.

In 2008, we celebrated the 200th Anniversary of the 1808 'Rum Rebellion' which was not only a defining moment in the development of our unique Australian character, but also signified the beginning of the end of the 'Rum Corps' and their control over the currency of Australia which at that time was rum.

Coins were scarce in the colony and rum became the preferred currency. In 1793 the NSW Corps took control of all rum arriving by ship and became known as 'The Rum Corps'. Governor Bligh (of The HMS Bounty





fame) tried to halt this enterprise in 1808 only to be arrested by the Rum Corps and sent back to England. In 1813 when Governor Lachlan Macquarie arrived to take charge of the colony, he disbanded the Rum Corps and gave orders to punch 40,000 Spanish coins to create a small coin (The Dump) and a 'Holey Dollar' which became the Colony's official currency, superceding rum.

With such strong historical links and on the anniversary of the Rum Rebellion, Gilbert and Stublely created the Holey Dollar Rum Distilling Company which, in its short history, has established itself as the only remaining Australian owned distiller of quality commercial rum.

So the challenge was born - to yet again create the world's best rum, a challenge Gilbert had thought would not present itself again after he had sold his interests in Inner Circle.

Gilbert used his previous contacts to source suitable sugarcane, the basis of any good rum. Sourced from hand-cut sugar cane in the fertile tropics of Fiji, Gilbert, now the company's master distiller, says "I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to learn first-hand the art of making and blending high quality pot still rum."

Gilbert however turned away from traditional methods of distilling rum from the juice of sugar cane, preferring instead to use fermented molasses as the base for his new rum. Holey Dollar is distilled by a unique wood fired copper pot still. The rum is then aged for three years in small oak barrels, significantly longer than most rum, giving a distinctive rich, dark texture and smooth full bodied flavours.

While Gilbert and Stublely considered the new Holey Dollar rum was an exceptional drop, the real test would come when it was compared to the best rums in the world. They entered the rum in a competition in San Francisco in early 2009 with initial success.

Some fine tuning was done to the blend and the entire range of Holey Dollar rums were submitted for judging at the International Wine and Spirits Competition held in London. As he had done a few years before with Inner Circle, Gilbert had produced a classic rum. Holey Dollar Silver 40% abv; Holey Dollar Gold 57.2% abv; and Holey Dollar platinum 75.9% abv all won Gold Medals and were voted best in their class at the prestigious international competition recently. In addition, their over proof Gold



was awarded the coveted trophy for the Best Rum of the competition - a remarkable achievement in such a short time.

Says Gilbert, "Rum making is a living process, linking nature with human ingenuity: a melding of technology and artistry. It is created by taking molasses, adding yeast, distilling and maturation, the variables within the process are almost infinite. By only using the finest natural raw materials, the best fermentation procedures and the best pot stills available in the world, together with our experience, we achieved a unique rum. This is what sets Holey Dollar Rum apart from other rums, nothing artificial and no expense is spared or quality substituted.

The rum is diluted with Australian water, labelled and distributed through the ALM network nationwide. While output of this

boutique rum has been limited, the popularity of this unique rum is destined to outstrip production.

"It's exceptional rum, available at a price that allows all Australian's to enjoy it," adds Stublely.

"We are also looking at special editions with finer characteristics. With our pot still method, we are able to control the heads and tails of every blend which is essential if the intention is to produce a truly flavoursome and distinctive blend," adds Gilbert.

It is a remarkable Australian success story at a time when many of our iconic national brands have fallen to foreign interests. The driving force behind the Holey Dollar Rum is a man consumed by passion - a successful sportsman and sailor with a true gift for making the world's best rum.