

Local flavors that add zest to a summer evening

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By KAREN SCHLOSS DIAZ

It's been written about in The New York Times and The Star-Ledger. This paper has covered it, too. So why did it take me so long to discover Brinley Gold Rum?

I met Maryann Brinley at a Women in Communications meeting recently, and she gladly shared news (and samples) of her family's extremely cool venture, owning and operating an internationally award-winning rum company, Brinley Gold (<http://www.brinleygoldrum.com>).

Producing rum made from sugarcane that's indigenous to the island of St. Kitts in the West Indies, the Brinleys are definitely on to something. The vanilla, coffee, and mango rum samples had been staring at me for awhile, so I did what any sane person would do on a day when the heat and humidity levels were off the charts: I mixed up some summer sippers.

The first we sampled was what the family labels the "Brinley Rose" — equal parts Brinley Gold Vanilla Rum and Rose's Lime Juice, topped with soda water (or in our case, sparkling water, which was what we had in the fridge at the time).

Totally refreshing, tart and tangy — but not without sweetness — the cocktail was a hit. There was a subtle kick to the drink, and after several sips I thought to myself, "This is what an 'adult' soda would taste like — if one existed, that is."

Next up: The Brinley Beach (mango rum with pineapple juice and a hit of nutmeg). We doctored that up a bit, adding sparkling water for added fizz and a shot of vanilla-flavored vodka (well, the sample of vanilla rum was long gone by that point!). We had another winner on our hands, also perfect for this time of year.

With recipes available on their Web site, and easily accessible info on where to purchase their product line (including how to get it delivered to your door), the Montclair-based Brinleys have my personal vote for people-whose-house-I-most-want-to-visit-during-my-next-cocktail-hour. Care to join me?

So what other gems have I uncovered around town?

What else is impressing me this summer? There's this: at the always-worth-a-visit Montclair Farmer's Market, I met up with event planner Nicky Mesiah (www.missnickys.com), who was demo'ing some of her typically delicious desserts.

As I scanned her hot-pink menu of "Newest Bittersweet Dessert Additions," my eyes fell on ... "Peppermint Schlossey's: a rich, dark bittersweet chocolate cookie with peppermint and chocolate chunks."

Could it be? A cookie named after me and my well-documented love of mint and chocolate combined? Indeed it was. And not just Peppermint Schlossey's ... but Chunky Peanut Schlossey's, too: "Bittersweet [chocolate cookies] with peanut butter pieces and nuts."

Ah, Nicky, I'm honored but apprehensive: how could you be so cruel as to introduce me to yet another chocolate dessert I can't turn down?

This is turning out to be a pretty scrumptious summer.

In this column:

Brinley Gold: www.brinleygoldrum.com.

Mesiah Event Planners: www.missnickys.com.

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