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# WHISKY

Celebrating the whiskies of the world

*Magazine*

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**21**  
WHISKIES  
TASTED

## Jewel in the crown

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EDITOR'S WORD  
ROB ALLANSON

## THE BEST OF TIMES

*Changing the guard with the new season*

I wish I'd put some money on it. You know that feeling when you're almost 100 per cent sure you're right? Well, I should have listened to it. No, I'm not talking about whether there will be a second wave hitting the UK before Christmas, although that might be worth a punt – let's face it, who would have thought that curfews would return to a British city?

Instead I'm talking about that moment just after everyone has had their summer holidays (congratulations if you managed something); the kids go back and then the grind starts again, even in this new normal. What happens at that exact moment? The UK gets some of its hottest weather for months. Beautiful clear skies, the mercury rising up into the late 20s (I know nothing compared to some places, but that's not bad for here) and you have to start contemplating shorts in the office again. It happens without fail. The return to work and school heralds a mini heat wave, making September a lovely month. It looks like this is another part of this new normal that we have to get used to.

It's still not my favourite time of year. Those of you that read the last edition will know this is generally October for me, the herald of true autumn weather and birthdays. I guess we have to get used to the fact that here, in the northern hemisphere, September is now going to be at least as warm as August.

Being in quite the reflective mood as I write this, for reasons I will come to, what a three-quarters of the year

it has been. I am fully expecting, as some internet memes have suggested, that the Death Star is round the corner in 2021, or at least a full-on earth takeover by cats. They're just waiting... is one near you right now? Look at it, all fluffy and cute. Wrong! It's waiting to become your overlord. Let's face it, you're already its household staff anyway.

Who would have guessed this time last year that society would have changed so much that, like me, you may

### The whisky world went home and online, with a few torch carriers leading the charge

not have seen family since Christmas? The entirety of transport systems have been reduced to light services and the hospitality and entertainment industries are decimated.

The whisky world went home and online, with a few torch carriers leading the charge to continue the education, the contact and the fun.

I must admit, if this lockdown business has taught me anything, it's that the whisky world really is built on people. People you don't even think about when you open that bottle of Bourbon, Scotch, Irish, Australian, Swedish, or Canadian. Everything from those huge supermarket blends to the tiniest outrun of hand-bottled whisky represents people, a community, a series of hands that looked after that


bottle until you were able to drink it. Now that is a global community.

One thing I'd like to ask you to do next time you open a new bottle, is a little online research into where it came from. Don't get bogged down in mashbills, fermentation times, distillation cuts or wood policy, but instead find out who made it. You may have been to the distillery and met some of the staff, or know them personally. Fill your glass and give thanks to those people, wherever they are. As whisky lovers we're part of this great spirited circle, and sometimes we need to slow down and remember that even with the big blends, these are not just commodities, they are the lifeblood of the communities they come from.

As I said earlier, it's time to reflect. This will be my last missive to you, good readers out there, as from next edition *Whisky Magazine* will be safely in the capable hands of our man, Christopher Coates.

My time at the tiller of this wonderful ship has been immense and filled with joy, friendship, and experiences that will never be forgotten.

We have assembled a writing staff that is second to none, and I really mean that. They are a phenomenally talented bunch of folk, who will keep you all entertained and informed in equal doses.

So if and when our paths cross again, be it in the homelands of Scotland or Ireland, beloved Kentucky, or in a distillery still room somewhere, say hello and let's share a dram. Take care folks, and keep safe. 



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## PLANNING AHEAD

*From Tokyo to Buenos Aires, Pretoria to Sydney, Whisky Live crosses continents*

All our Whisky Live energy is focused on looking to the future. We are setting 2021 dates for real 'Live' events, while refining how Whisky Live 'At Home' is delivered to you wherever you live. Who knows what 2021 will bring, but we know that Whisky Live and Gin Live will, by the unique nature of our ability to present spirits in miniature form, be possible in some format. As we all know, the situation is evolving on a weekly, if not daily, basis and we aim to be as responsive as possible. With each country on a different timeline and with different rules and regulations, it's best to contact your nation's organising team direct.

There may be pop-up Whisky Lives, At Home events could national and international, and we may be able to provide tasters of other great spirits. Our commitment is to provide great choice and keep you informed.

So we continue to thank our partners around the world, and urge you to get in touch with them direct to see what they plan to offer and when. We will be able to bring you the great spirits of the world together under one roof soon – it just may be your own roof. Wherever it is we thank all those who spread the message of great taste around the world for all their incredible work.

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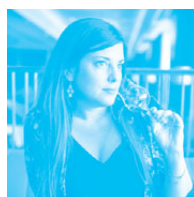
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THOUGHTS FROM  
BECKY PASKIN

## IT'S DIFFERENT NOW

*Looking at the rise of the modern whisky bar*

**L**ike most of us, I didn't grow up expecting to be a whisky drinker. As a teenager living in sleepy Worthing on the south coast of England, whisky wasn't really in my vocabulary. The late 1990s was a time for spiced rum and coke, and Jose Cuervo shots with the gurn-inducing salt and lime combo. Whisky was just something the old blokes down the working men's club drank out of warm tumblers in clouds of smoke.

Despite living just 30 minutes away I hadn't visited my hometown for several years, but recently an old friend convinced me to pop over and reminisce. Have you ever revisited the place you grew up in, decades after you left? It's bizarre, like recalling glimpses of a dream after waking, or bumping into an old flame and wondering what the hell you saw in them. It's nostalgic, but not quite, because things have changed. Bars are closed, shops boarded up and old haunts replaced with car parks or affordable housing.

As my old friend and I wandered the streets, I felt so much sadness for the clubs that no longer existed (we had one on the end of the pier; your heels would get stuck in the wooden slats without fail). The cocktail bar I once worked in – the swankiest joint in town (though that's not saying much) – had become a high-volume burger restaurant. Not much was left of the town I once knew.

Toward the far end of the high street my friend asked, "Are you sure you want to carry on down here?" This was apparently the "dodgy" end, the

bit with the bingo hall, vape shops and broken streetlights. But just as we decided to turn back, something caught my attention. It may have been the warm inviting glow from inside, or the unmistakable scent of angel's share, but there, at the dodgy end of Montague Street, was a home from home. Worthing had its very own whisky bar.

The Whisk(e)y Rooms has been open since spring 2019, serving an evolving selection of Scotch, Bourbon and New

### The discovery of a bar specialising in my passion in the place I grew up is wonderful

World whisky as well as cocktails, wine, local beers and cider. But rather than fall into the stereotype of leather, dim lighting and heavily bound menus, owners Kate Mitchell and Jason Walls have created a modern whisky bar that is oozing with personality.

The bookshelf-lined walls are stuffed to bursting with unrecognisable titles, their names barely legible in the glow of a hundred fairy lights. The furniture is so mismatched, and accompanied by such a random assortment of decorative 'stuff' from deep green Art Deco glass lamps to amputated dolls and dressmakers' mannequins, that you could easily have walked into a Kafkaesque antique store by mistake. The highlight? A Prince Andrew and Fergie Bell's decanter audaciously


centred atop the well-stocked bar.

The discovery of a bar specialising in my passion in the place I grew up is wonderful (especially as it serves food from the excellent Pizzaface next door), but most exciting is that the modern whisky bar concept appears to be catching on outside of London.

In the capital, the modern whisky bar is no longer about kitsch tartan, a million dusty bottles and a drinks list so long it requires its own bookbinder. Thanks to the likes of Black Rock, Milroy's and Merchant's House, they've become trendy hotspots for whisky lovers looking for a side-helping of hip-hop or stand-up comedy with their dram, served by knowledgeable and friendly bartenders.

Up in Glasgow, which prides itself on a clutch of excellent, much-loved and long-established whisky bars, new neighbourhood venue The Gate is modernising the city's offering in its own laid-back approach, with whisky snobbery checked at the door, an accessible colour-coded pricing system and must-try cheese toasties.

The modern whisky bar isn't inspired by the cut 'n' paste iconography and stuffiness that fuelled its stereotyped image for decades. The new generation offers fun and unique concepts that are approachable, welcoming and attractive to younger drinkers and those new to the spirit.

With whisky becoming more popular, there's room for more modern whisky bars around the UK, whether that's in London, Glasgow or the dodgy end of Worthing town centre. 



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THOUGHTS FROM  
LIZA WEISSTUCH

## KENTUCKY DREAMING

*Shopping for paint takes an unexpected turn*

**I**t was a Tuesday morning in mid-August, one of those muggy days when the heat becomes steam on contact with the road and makes the New York City air hazy. I had been very hard at work in the paint aisle at Home Depot because apparently finding just the right shade of white paint is a herculean undertaking.

After about 10 minutes of flipping through samples I lost my focus, forgetting about shading, brightness, shadows, warmth and tint. How can anyone bother with such mechanical technicalities when you're scanning through colours named Wind Swept, Elusive Blue, Touchable, Pearls and Lace, Maybe Mushroom, Tiara, Violet Hush, Twilight Twist, Just Perfect, Ageless, Sterling Shadow, Slices of Happy, Wistful Beige, Pacific Pearl, Oyster Cracker, Fountain Frolic, Willow Springs, Velvetene Crush, Forgive Quickly. What Romantic Age poet runs paint companies' creative departments these days?

The distraction factor intensified quickly because the task was making me hungry. Glazed Pears, Apple Core, Berry Frost, Peach Surprise, Toasted Marshmallow, Touch of Lime, Butter Icing, Magical Melon, More Melon, Tea Biscuit, Pita Bread, Oatmeal, Macadamia Nut, Irish Cream, Hint of Pine, and Horseradish. Hang on a second... do paint companies base their creative departments at Scotch distilleries?

I was in no particular hurry to leave, but my stamina was wearing thin. On the way to check out, though,

an overwhelming smell of raw oak stopped me dead in my tracks and stamped out the slightest imagining of Peach Surprise, Fresh Dough and Malted Milk. In a flash, the Home Depot around me fell away and in its place rose the warehouses of Speyside and the Kentucky rickhouses, where narrow streams of light seep into slender spaces to barely reveal cracks in barrels, through which restless Bourbon escapes.

What can I say? The Behr Paint bards

### With planks of oak stretching skywards and lengthwise, my mind lapsed

had permeated my brain as I paused in the lumber aisle. With planks of oak stretching skywards and lengthwise, my mind lapsed. Next time I'd have to bring a flask, I thought. Or at least a Scotch-soaked hand towel to sniff on.

With the pandemic lumbering on (see what I did there?), the news has been increasingly grim. In August, the Distilled Spirits Council of the US released a study projecting devastation for American craft distilling, a \$1.8 billion industry that generated approximately \$3.2 billion in retail sales last year. But that massive sector is made up of tiny parts. About 60 per cent of the 2,000-plus distilleries sell less than 2,500 cases per year. According to the report, the pandemic will cost craft distillers \$700 million in

annualised sales, a loss of 41 per cent of total business. About 30 per cent of employees, 4,600 people, have been furloughed. Meanwhile, a September headline in the Sunday Times blared "US tariffs put a big dent in whisky sales". On 13 August, a Guardian story announced, "Scotch whisky makers rail against UK government inaction over US tariffs".

Is it any wonder that any faithful whisky lover walks around with a low-grade feeling of mourning these days? When you lose a loved one of any sort, everywhere you turn you're reminded of them. Or it. I realise this is can be construed as a tad melodramatic or even brutishly insensitive. Small distilleries are in crisis and global companies are taking a lashing. But as far as entire industries go, there are others that will take much longer to rebound, if they bounce back at all (see: bars and restaurants, theatre and live music, retail, hotels, air travel, train travel, pro sports and museums). Still, we all miss what's familiar.

I end this column in a way I haven't typically done: with calls to action. Please support small businesses, tip your wait staff and delivery drivers, tip them very well, keep up your safe social distancing and wash your hands. Take advantage of moments that bring you joy, especially if you unexpectedly trip over them in a giant home improvement retailer. Now, if you need me, I'll be flipping through swatches of white paint – Arctic Dawn, Tundra Frost, Silvery Moon, Snowy Mount – and dreaming of winter's chill.





THOUGHTS FROM  
MAGGIE KIMBERL

## ENJOYING THE LUXURY

### *The joys of virtual whisky*

In March I was all set to present at the New Orleans Bourbon Festival before it was cancelled at the last minute to prevent the spread of the pandemic. Since then I have missed countless whisky tastings, events and festivals that I would ordinarily take part in. The last one I attended in person was The Bourbon Classic.

Virtual meet-ups became commonplace as enthusiasts and industry folk struggled to connect with each other under rapidly changing parameters. In the early days of the pandemic it was the bartenders and brand reps leading the way to virtual mixology classes, and people like Molly Wellmann and Sailor Guevara were on livestreams night after night offering people a distraction while mixing up a special concoction alongside a dose of history. It felt like being at a bar.

After a few months of trying to navigate this new world, distilleries and organisations began offering virtual tastings and festivals. For example, Traverse City Whiskey Company celebrated their annual cherry festival with a virtual release of their acclaimed cherry whiskey.

I attended a virtual release party for the new Maker's Mark 2020 Wood Finishing Series Bourbon with Jane Bowie and all the whisky writers I know. Tasting kits were delivered to our doors and we joined a Zoom meeting where we were able to go through all the component whiskies, as well as some of the experimental components that didn't work, in order to really understand how they

went about developing their target flavour profile using wood staves as a finishing tool. Aside from being a highly educational diversion from pandemic life, it was also an exercise that felt oddly comforting, as though the Bourbon world was still out there.

Then The Whisky Chicks took their annual Bourbon Mixer virtual, including an auction that raised \$30,000 for The Coalition for the Homeless. While this isn't the first time the event has raised money for

### As we head into the fall special-release season, I expect to see more virtual events

this charity, it seems considerably more necessary right now. There were virtual sessions and guests from the industry while members watched right from the comfort of their own homes.

I was able to participate in a virtual Bourbon festival myself. Every year, Bourbon Women host the SIPosium, a national conference where members get together to learn about every aspect of the industry.

The production of this festival was unlike anything I've participated in so far this year. Several weeks beforehand we reported to a recording studio to tape segments that would be played for viewers at a scheduled time slot. This took place with surgical precision. Two weeks before the event we scheduled an equipment test to ensure we had

adequate internet bandwidth, good lighting and atmosphere, and that our equipment would work properly.


The day of the festival we dialled in to answer viewer questions that came up during the video. For my segment I spoke with Susan Reigler about pairing whiskey and cigars, as well as what is going on in the craft industry, including trends to be on the lookout for.

The event consisted of more than 10 hours of programming that reached more than 28,000 people with nearly 2,000 active participants watching at home. Dare I say it was almost as good as being there in person. Almost.

As we head into the fall special-release season, I expect to see more virtual events and tastings. Old Forester is already committing to releasing its famed Birthday Bourbon virtually for curbside pickup at the distillery, so as to prevent people from camping out to score a bottle.

I've also seen virtual events where locals can pick up tasting kits and tune in to smaller events, such as The Bourbon Salon at Oxmoor Farm with Michael Veach and Susan Reigler.

Nothing is quite like being there in person, but overall the virtual events I've attended so far have been quite enjoyable and I can see these formats being used in certain circumstances quite successfully once the pandemic moves into the history books.

However, at that point in time it would take a stick of dynamite to keep me out of the next Whisky Live or Bourbon Affair or Bourbon & Beyond. I hope I see you there, too. 





MYTHBUSTERS  
CHRIS MIDDLETON

## THE PAGES OF HISTORY

### *Examining the role of slavery in American whiskey*

**I**n 2020, we are reminded of the historical stigma of slavery, and the lasting economic hardships and prejudice its legacy has on communities. It seems timely to turn the pages of history to examine the role slavery played in the development of American whiskey. Recent revelations by Fawn Weaver on the influential and collaborative relationship between Jack Daniel and Dan Call's slave, Nathan 'Nearest' Green, also provides an exceptional story of the vital role African Americans played in the development of American whiskey.

Before the Green-Daniel partnership began in antebellum Tennessee, in neighbouring Kentucky, a quarter of the population were slaves. At that time, 28 per cent of white families owned slaves and half of those had more than 20 slaves. Kentucky's largest slave market, Cheapside in Lexington, was in the centre of the bluegrass region. At Cheapside, families were broken up, valued according to health, age and sex, with thousands of slaves 'sold down the river' each year to cotton and sugar plantations in the deep South. One of the most productive counties for whiskey distilling in the bluegrass region was neighbouring Woodford County; by the 1850s the county had more slaves than free citizens.

The manufacture of whiskey exemplified the considerable physical demands of many manual workers in the cultivation of grain and labour-intensive tasks. The seasonal sowing of different crops, of corn in spring and rye, barley and oats in autumn, scaled

to a slave economy. In autumn the corn was hand-harvested and the kernels shelled, while small grains were reaped and winnowed in spring, then stored for the distilling season. The farms required maintenance of buildings and fences, care of livestock for food, transport and trade; the bluegrass region was also a leading producer of flax and hemp in America. All these activities were conducted with minimal mechanisation, hence slave labour dictated the economy, profits and scale

### All these activities were conducted with minimal mechanisation


of farming in much of Kentucky.

One of the largest and most famous distilleries in Woodford County was the Oscar Pepper Distillery, now Woodford Reserve, where James Crow improved the novel process of making hand-made sour mash whiskey. The distillery's capacity was 25 bushels a day, with most of the grain mash harvested from his 350-acre farm worked by slaves; Oscar Pepper owned 12 male and 11 female slaves.

When the distilling season started, male slaves were deployed to assist in the malting and milling of grains at Pepper's water-driven grist mill. The 100 mash tubs in the distillery needed hand-stirring, for cooking corn and mashing small grains, as well as the daily monotony of carrying mash

buckets to the pot still and slops back to acidify the mash. The stills needed constant fuelling and monitoring, and the distillate transferred into barrels for storage. Then the leftover stillage fed 100 hogs and cattle in the farm's livestock yards. In 1850, Pepper's distillery was one of only 49 in Kentucky to have a full-time distiller, where Crow was remunerated with a share of the annual production between 1840 and 1855.

While a few white neighbours were seasonally employed to work at the distillery, Crow also trained one of Pepper's slaves, Albert, to be an assistant distiller. Albert likely continued working at the distillery after Pepper's death when the site was leased to other distillers. As slaves were banned from obtaining an education, his lack of literacy and numeracy skills would have been a significant handicap.

Two months before Pepper died, the Confederacy surrendered to the Union forces in April 1865, and neutral Kentucky came back under the administration of the United States. In Oscar Pepper's June probate, the estate recorded his slaves as assets. Despite President Lincoln declaring the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, slavery was not abolished in the United States until December 1865, when three-quarters of the states ratified the 13th Amendment. Both Kentucky state houses overwhelmingly rejected the Amendment in 1865. It wasn't until March 1976 that Kentucky ratified the 13th Amendment. 





WHERE  
STAR-CROSSED

LOVERS

MEET



WORDS JASON HAMBREY

*Welcome to Starward  
Distillery, where grape  
and grain meet*

Until recently, Australian whisky has taken a back seat to the romance of Australian wine. Finally it is garnering similar interest, thanks to the long and slow efforts of a band of whisky pioneers, and more recent innovators, who have brought a wine sensibility to Australian whisky making.

"We had to create the smallest mining company in Australia," chuckles Bill Lark as he recounts the early days of using Tasmanian peat to make his whisky. If you wanted Tasmanian peat you had to dig it up; however, before you could dig it up, you needed to get a mining permit. Many of the early struggles of the modern Australian whisky scene began with similar peculiarities.

Though it once housed some massive whisky distilleries, Australian whisky production was all but extinct by the 1980s when Bill and Lyn Lark decided to start making the spirit in Tasmania.





At the time, Australian spirits production and consumption was focused on rum. Moreover, Australian laws limited the minimum size of wash stills to a whopping 700 gallons, far too big for whisky-loving entrepreneurs to enter the market. But, no matter: Bill Lark worked with local politicians to change the legislation and allow for a number of new key players to enter the market – Lark Distillery in 1992, followed shortly by the well-known Tasmanian distilleries Overeem, Sullivan's Cove and Hellyers Road.

Today, more than 50 Tasmanian distilleries make gin, brandy, rum and whisky. Tasmania has become the spiritual home of the modern Australian whisky industry and

continues to attract many whisky tourists and customers. The whisky made on this island, off the southern coast of Australia, often focuses on oily distillates and small casks which result in a big, fruity style. This is accomplished, in part, by the extensive use of re-coopered casks which previously held Australian Tawny, a fortified wine made in the same style as port. The barrels are made ready for whisky by scraping wine residue off the staves then re-charring the barrels. This imparts a fruity, rich, woody character to the whisky.

David Vitale got his start making whisky in Tasmania, at Lark Distillery. It was Vitale's wife who drew him to Tasmania. "I said I'd go to the ends of

the earth for her, and I did, literally!" Vitale hoped to start a craft brewery, but was discouraged by Tasmania's remote location and the subsequent impact that significant transit time can have on the flavour of beer. Then one day Vitale stopped into Lark Distillery, and, after tasting the whisky, his dream did an about-face – straight from craft beer to whisky. He quickly convinced Bill Lark to hire him.

A few years later, it came time for Vitale to venture out and create his own distillery, but not in Tasmania. Melbourne, the centre of the booming Australian coffee and food scene, kept calling. "We wanted to be closer to the heart of the food and wine scene in Australia," Vitale explains. "Scotch has its own place, and we wanted to create our own place for Australian whisky."

Starward, Vitale's distillery, was not created on the Tasmanian model. Rather than those cramped, relatively tiny whisky production houses, Starward Distillery is a vast open space







in a massive industrial building, with lofty ceilings high above the bar, a production facility, and thousands of maturing barrels. Visitors have the rare experience of smelling the rich aromas of whisky production, fermentation, distillation, and maturation, while enjoying the whisky itself in the distillery bar.

Just as the huge space contrasts with distilleries in Tasmania, so do production practices themselves. As Vitale will readily admit, “If you want a cask-strength Tawny whisky, go to Tasmania.” He set out with a different aim: to match whisky with perhaps the best-known agricultural product of Australia, wine. “You craft a distillery very differently if you are set

on wine maturation from the start... fundamentally we needed bold and complex flavours in the distillate to stand up well to the rich oak and fruit characters that come from our red wine barrels.” Starward accomplishes this through careful selection of malt, using multiple yeasts, while also integrating high-reflux distillation.

Unlike the typical scraping and re-charring common to preparing barrels for whisky, Starward fills its whisky spirit directly into wet wine casks. The focus isn’t a wine “finish” – a short maturation that adds barrel-soaked flavour into a whisky – rather, the whisky interacts with both the wine and the cask itself as it matures to full term in the wine barrels.

#### Opening pages:

A warm welcome to Starward Distillery.

#### These pages, clockwise from left:

Tasting a dram of Nova; A brief look at the Starward selection; The all-important casks; Taking a chance to enjoy the spirit’s endearing versatility.



# WHAT IS AVAXHOME?



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This use of unmodified or non-re-coopered wine casks is significant because whisky makers and wine makers take different approaches to how they use oak. While whisky makers often leverage oak to completely shape a whisky, wine makers use oak to tame and evolve a wine. Modern whisky makers sometimes use small barrels and barrel staves to maximise oak interaction, whereas wine casks are often many times larger than whisky casks to minimise oak interaction. While whisky casks might be used for decades, most of Starward's wine casks have been filled with wine for just four to seven years. And while whisky casks are often heavily charred, more often wine casks are simply toasted or

charred lightly. As a chef might put it, it's like you're taking a look at a seared product versus a roasted product.

As winemaker Sarah Fagan of De Bortoli vineyard explains, "I have my preferred coopers, forests and toasts that suit our wines... I want savoury, and fruit freshness; integration of oak too. I don't want overtly toasted notes either. Some coopers will be quite intense and I would only use them in small amounts... Some coopers are quite subtle and I can use more.... Over-oaked wine is an all-too-common in Australia... All you taste is the oak. This is not what we are after. We want the oak to support the fruit rather than overpower it."

Starward benefits from the rich





**These pages, clockwise from bottom left:** The distillery's outlook on Tasmania; A sight to behold at the Starward bar; The intricately designed Nova; A close look at where the barrel magic happens.

experience of Australian winemakers such as Fagan in their cask selection and wine character. Vitale is quick to emphasise this, "To me, there's a lovely and quite unique relationship with the winemakers we use. Their intent and purpose in choosing a wine barrel is very different from our intent and purpose in using them. All great Starward barrels are from great wineries that use amazing barrels, but not all amazing barrels make great Starward barrels. So we've developed – with their help – a 'rosetta stone' to decode what works for us. It's about laddering up flavour into the almost-ready spirit, primarily the oak characters which have had the edges taken off while holding wine, but importantly highlighting the wine itself and using alcohol as a flavour carrier, what happens as it's exposed to the elements over time."

Starward's flagship malt, Nova, brings out these characteristics flawlessly. The whisky is a fruit bomb while also displaying characteristics of rich red



wine and sweet oaky caramel. It shows the wine in a particular way, as Vitale adds, "The mid-palate texture is all grape tannin, which is quite distinctive to red wine; it gives it length and body in a different way to standard barrels and I think they are the secret to why it makes such a great drink."

But, enough with the romantic notion of wine cask maturation in Australia – does the whisky actually taste good? The simplest testimonial, perhaps, comes from Cutler & Co., one of Melbourne's premier restaurants. To celebrate its 10th anniversary, Cutler & Co. chose its own private cask of Starward. On release day, the phone was ringing off the hook before the restaurant had opened. Eager customers were lining up for a chance to buy one of the 250 bottles. "It was manic," is how one of the sommeliers described it. Clearly, wine maturation in Australia does more than just satisfy romantic notions. 





*OLD HEAVEN HILL SPRINGS DISTILLERY, INC.  
BARDSTOWN, NELSON COUNTY, KY.*



Think Wisely.  
Drink Wisely.

Heaven Hill Distillery, Bardstown, KY © 2020



# 85 Years of Lifting America's Spirit

In 1933, the end of Prohibition sparked new interest in Kentucky Bourbon. In Bardstown, Ed Shapira and his brothers agreed to invest in a new distillery, and eventually bought it outright. They had no inventory, no warehousing, and no brand. Eighty-five years later, under the same independent, family ownership, Heaven Hill Distillery is satisfying consumer interest as the second largest holder of aging American Whiskey in the world.

HEAVEN HILL®  
EST DISTILLERY 1935



Founding Brothers



WORDS CHRIS MIDDLETON

# THE SENSE OF LAND AND BRAND

*How whisky is connected to its home*





**S**cotch and Bourbon designate different types of whisky; they also represent different national origins. Look further and there are recognised regions, like the Highlands and Kentucky; delve deeper still to find famous districts, valleys and streams, down to the ground level where distillery and locality can become brand in its own right.

The French use the term 'terroir' to describe the role locale directly plays by influencing an agricultural product, notably wine. Wine's terroir is the combination of topographical location, hydrology, climate, soil, sunlight, grape variety, viticultural practices, through to oenological techniques

used to create wines with a distinctive sensory fingerprint traceable to a place, be it a specific hillside or region.

The international wine industry recognises more than 3,000 distinct wine-growing regions worldwide under protected appellations and registered geographical indications. Think Bordeaux (with grape varieties cabernet sauvignon, and others), Burgundy (pinot noir, gamay), Italy's Barolo (nebbiolo) and Brunello (sangiovese), Spain's rioja (tempranillo, and others), etc.

For whisky the species of cereal grain dominates the different whisky styles with American Bourbon (corn and other grains), Scottish malt (malted barley), Irish pot still





(unmalted and malted barley) and Canadian whisky (rye and others).

Whisky's first national and regional styles became conspicuous as the modern industry developed in the late 18th century. In Ireland, the country's whisky characteristics were impositions from the 1770 Malt Tax, the 1771 Pot Still and 1789 Distillation Acts, forcing distillers to adapt to mash recipes using mostly cheaper unmalted barley, oats and rye and restricted to large pot still capacities. The large city distilleries in Dublin made whisky differently to regional poteens like Donegal's Inishowen or Cork's whiskey.

Scotland's whisky differences were cleaved by geography, regulations and tax differentials between the Lowlands and Highlands. Large Lowland distillers mostly manufactured industrial malt spirit for English rectifiers from the 1780s, using rapid distillation technologies fermented by cheap London porter yeast acting on mash of on low-quality grains, even vegetables.

The government's 1784 Wash Act demarcated the Highland Line with a licensing system restricting Highland production to small pot stills, mashing mainly the local bere barley over peat fires and fermented on malt and ale yeast strains. When patent stills came into use from the 1830s, the differences became exaggerated between flavoursome Highland malt and silent spirit from the Lowland distilleries' column stills. At the end of the 19th century, Scotch blenders began aggregating the 150-odd distilleries in Scotland from two into four amorphously geographic flavour regions: Lowland, Highland, Campbeltown and Islay/Islands.

Across the Atlantic, America's whisky industry was also emerging, distilling spirits from predominantly grain recipes of corn and rye. By the late 1820s, more than half a dozen different regional styles were publicly recognised. From Kentucky came the corn-dominant grain bill of Bourbon, better known then as Western whisky.



Pennsylvania's earlier recipes of predominantly rye and malt produced the popular and pungent Monongahela rye whisky compared with lighter, often rectified, Maryland and Baltimore style ryes with higher ratios of corn. By the 1850s the middle Tennessee area was popularising the sour mash method and charcoal filtration, with two competing regional styles of Robertson County and Lincoln County whiskeys (see *Whisky Magazine* issue 166); other regional styles included Virginia's Roanoke rye and Alabama's Tuscaloosa corn whiskey. In all instances, locality influenced style, and these whiskeys commanded a premium due to their appealing flavour characteristics.

Until the mid-19th century, rural distilleries sourced local grain varieties from neighbourhood farms, cultured local yeast strains and, in America, coopered barrels from native forests of white oak. In the second half of the 19th century, whisky was commoditising







**Opening pages:**  
Look out to the  
Glenlivet Distillery.  
**These pages**  
**clockwise from left:**  
The Macallan's  
gargantuan mash  
tun; The landscape  
behind Glenlivet;  
Fishing in the Spey.

and ramping up massive scale in manufacturing with grain varieties becoming homogenised and production industrialised. These escalating outputs forced distilleries to source grain from centralised maltsters, specialist yeast providers and independent cooperages supplying barrels in America. British distilleries imported used casks that previously held brandy, rum and fortified wines.

The competitive imperatives of whisky commerce made it so that reputable and popular whisky brands had to obtain trademark protection under new regulations. Trademark laws only emerged in the second half of the 19th century and, aptly, it was Scotland and Kentucky that initiated proceedings in the two most celebrated court cases to establish brand-to-land precedents: in Scotland, Smith's Glenlivet whisky made at the distillery licensed in 1824; the other Old Crow whiskey, distilled at Glenss Creek, Kentucky since 1840. Old Crow whiskey became the best-selling straight Bourbon in America until Prohibition and The Glenlivet the best-selling malt whisky.

Before Glenlivet, the first Scotch spirit traded by reputation was Forbes' Ferintosh aqua-vitae-style whisky from Dingwall. After enjoying the influential and protected status for more than a century, the Forbes ceased production in 1787. Presaging the modern age of brand management, the clumsily drafted Copyright Act in 1842 prompted distiller George Smith and his son John to file the Glenlivet name at Stationer's Hall for commercial protection in 1859.

The Grants placed classified advertisements warning the public and trade about passing off Glenlivet counterfeits, but the Act proved ineffectual. The Glenlivet distillery's brand reputation started when wholesaler Andrew Usher began taking shipments of 'the Real Glenlivet' in the 1830s, agreeing to become their agent in 1844, and later creating Britain's first commercial whisky brand, Old Vatted Glenlivet whisky in 1853.

Usher advertisements from 1821 indicate they were obtaining illicit 'Glenlivet whisky' from the Smiths from 1817 for several decades before the 1823 Excise Act encouraged the

Smiths to obtain a distillery license. The 1850s were the birth of Scotch brand marketing and led to numerous trademark infringements as the Glenlivet name and locality represented a sweeter, light-flavoured, higher-quality whisky with less 'peat reek'.

In total, 35 distilleries would use a hyphenated Glenlivet suffix: Macallan-Glenlivet, Glenfarclas-Glenlivet, Craigellachie-Glenlivet, Dufftown-Glenlivet, etc. The River Livet ran only 14km through the glen before flowing into the River Avon then joining the River Spey – only three licensed distilleries ever operated along the Livet's waterway. Distilleries across the Speyside region were keen to associate their whisky with this valley. It was jokingly called the 'longest glen in Scotland' and the title certainly seems to have been apt!

As the Copyright Act had no legal teeth for manufactured brands, the passage of the 1875 Trademark Registration Act permitted litigations against brand infringements. John Smith applied for Glenlivet's registration in 1876; however, errors





by his solicitor delayed his ability to prosecute trademark infringements until 1882. Petitioning the High Court of Justice in London, he first charged his main antagonists: Alexander Fraser & Company of Glenburgie-Glenlivet Distillery in Elgin and their London agent, Charles Haig. With multiple offenders plagiarising the Glenlivet name, Smith began prosecuting a series of trademark cases simultaneously.

In May 1884, the court ruled favourably permitting Smith's Glenlivet distillery the right for perpetual ownership to the trademark 'the Glenlivet'. However, it was only a partial victory as the agreement between vexatious parties permitted other distilleries to use Glenlivet as a hyphenated suffix in their trademarks. By the 1980s, 27 distilleries still used Glenlivet in their name, providing perfect evidence of the locality's enduring commercial reputation.

Meanwhile, Congress attempted legislating a national copyright standard in 1870 as half a dozen American states had already passed varying trademark laws. It was not until the Commerce clause in March 1881 that the first enforceable Federal trademark law passed. This legislation resulted in the first distillery trademark case involving 'description of place of manufacture' with 'right of trademark' at the Old Oscar Pepper Distillery, at the original site where Old Crow whiskey was first distilled from 1840 to 1854.

In 1869, three years after Oscar Pepper's death, Gaines, Berry & Co leased the Old Oscar Pepper Distillery for three years and acquired the Old Crow trademark, then built the new Old Crow Distillery a few miles downriver in 1874. Here they continued James Crow's recipe – while Oscar Pepper's son, James, built another Oscar Pepper Distillery 20 miles away in Lexington. Both the Crow and Pepper names had enviable reputations in Kentucky. The original Old Oscar Pepper Distillery and trade name was purchased by Leopold Labrot and James Graham in



1878. James Pepper challenged this contract and lost the case as Labrot & Graham had purchased the trademark with the distillery and land, forcing James to call his new distillery James E Pepper. Old Crow whiskey continued production at the Old Crow Distillery, and the brand became the most litigious whisky trademark in American history, as unscrupulous competitors pirated, passed off and misrepresented it for commercial gain.

In a deposition, Old Crow's owners claimed by 1896 to have instigated more than 2,000 trademark infringement cases. In many of these submissions, they asserted their locality directly contributed to the whisky's flavour, and therefore the locale was integral to Old Crow whiskey. They stressed the importance of the spring source from the chert limestone water, locally grown grain and distilling equipment, describing the area's microflora as contributing 'particular ferments of locality' due to the uniqueness of the Glens Creek


environment, while scrupulously applying James Crow's prescribed formulas from grain to the barrel. They were able to successfully litigate these trademark infringements.

During the past two decades, the field of greatest inquiry and experimentation has been cask wood and maturation; investigating everything from the locality of oak sub-species, a section of the tree trunk, seasoning and kilning methods, to vulcanising stave treatments, cooperage techniques and finishing enhancements, wood management and flavour innovation has been the main focus for incremental new product extensions. Attention is currently refocusing on localisation by investigating the contributions grain and yeast plays in flavour.

These two biological fields complement the two major growth trends in the whisky industry, namely Scottish malt whisky and American straight whiskey, as both categories engage consumer interest with locality and the discernible characteristics



present in some distilleries' whisky portfolios. Distilleries are innovating by exploring heritage and landrace grains, testing localised cerevisiae strains and microflora in search of local 'product authenticity' through chemistry, biology and marketing.

Some distilleries are seeking to discover the extent to which locality, such as Bruichladdich and Kilchoman's efforts on Islay, and specific grain varieties, such as recent projects at Waterford in Ireland, can exhibit noticeable and desirable sensory affinities to whisky. As grain undergoes a succession of destructive and transformative processes – from kilning, fermentation and distillation to long periods of maturation – the question is what palatable qualities persist in imbuing whisky with a sense of place. The organoleptic and perceived criteria on Sense versus Sensibility now has to patiently await consumer judgement. 

**These pages clockwise from bottom left:**  
Welcome to The Glenlivet; Sourcing barley for Kilchoman; The barley behind the spirit; Kilchoman's Islay barley harvest.







WORDS GAVIN D. SMITH

# Celebrating a global phenomenon

*Raising a glass to 125 years of endeavour*

Gordon & MacPhail didn't invent single malt Scotch whisky, but the Elgin-based company can certainly claim a great deal of credit for transforming it from a niche product – even across much of Scotland – into the global phenomenon it is today.

The firm was established in 1895, and is celebrating its 125th birthday by releasing four single cask expressions from 'lost' distilleries. As director of prestige Stephen Rankin explains, "These are extremely special releases for us as they are the last casks from these four distilleries that we own."

The initial releases are a 1972 47 Years Old Coleburn, distilled south of Elgin, and a 1984 35 Years Old Glenury Royal, produced in Stonehaven during the distillery's last full year of operation. Two further 'lost' bottlings will appear before the end of the year.

From the beginning, when James Gordon and John Alexander MacPhail announced the opening of their 'central and commodious premises' on South Street, Elgin, on 24 May 1895, whisky from the heartland of Speyside production was an important part of the business, which also embraced groceries and wine.

When John Urquhart joined the fledgling business as an apprentice it soon became clear that he had

a genuine flair for the selection, purchasing and maturation of whisky from local distilleries, and Stephen – a fourth-generation member of the Urquhart family – cites 1915 as a key date in the history of the firm.

In that year, the Urquharts took control of the business and they have held on to it ever since, following the practice of having their own casks filled with new-make spirit at distilleries in order to ensure the highest-quality mature whisky.

According to Stephen, "Our success is down to the philosophy of our forefathers: always take the long-term view, think what's right for 30 or 40 years ahead, and place huge value on relationships."

"Look after suppliers, colleagues and customers. If you respect your suppliers you will get a good-quality product from them that customers will want to buy. We are here because we've produced a product of outstanding quality, and quality never goes out of fashion."

"My grandfather, George Urquhart, wrote that 'The future is shaped by what we do today, while today reveals what we did in the past.' We have to keep the business strong for the fifth, sixth and seventh generations of the family, so that they can benefit from what we are doing."

It was George Urquhart who launched 





the Connoisseurs Choice range of single malt whiskies in 1968, to the disbelief or amusement of many in the Scotch whisky industry, but he correctly interpreted that there were potential markets of France, USA, Italy and the Netherlands in particular. As Stephen says, "We were at the forefront of driving single malt sales from the 1960s and helped create the demand for single malts that we see now."

Another milestone for the firm came with the acquisition and refitting of Benromach distillery at Forres, a dozen miles west of Elgin, by members of the third generation of the family. The distillery purchase was made in 1993, with distilling recommencing five years later. Stephen notes that, "They wanted a distillery and this was actually a dream going back to before the First World War when John tried to buy one. Benromach was a case of the right place at the right time, after decades spent looking for the right distillery."

"Buying Benromach was to safeguard supplies of good whisky, and it completed the 'wheel' for us. Choosing and filling casks, maturing them, bottling and selling them. Now distilling, too. It has made us more in control of our own destiny."

And now the fourth generation of the family – comprising chairman Neil Urquhart, twin brothers Stuart and Richard Urquhart, and Stephen Rankin – is adding to the firm's distilling capabilities, with work well underway on a new distillery project at Carron, near Grantown-on-Spey.

According to Stephen, "In 2015 we started thinking seriously about a new distillery. That was a key moment

for Gordon & MacPhail. Even during a pandemic, we are creating a new distillery in the Highlands and providing jobs at a time when the world isn't necessarily in a great place. We believe in the area and are investing in it and its people. It's the first distillery within the Cairngorms National Park.

"We've got great distilling knowledge from Benromach, but the new distillery will be modern in design and quite unlike Benromach. It will have one wash and two spirit stills and everything we make there will be bottled as single malt. Ideally, it will be in operation by late 2021."

From new to old, Gordon & MacPhail has been responsible for bottling some of the most venerable whiskies in the world. On 11 March 2010, the company made history by launching Generations Mortlach 70 Years Old – at that time, the world's oldest bottled single malt Scotch whisky.


A year later came a 70 Years Old Glenlivet and in 2015 the oldest release to date, a 75 Years Old Mortlach, appeared. "They were a demonstration of confidence," declares Stephen. "A key to what we do is patience."

In 2018, Gordon & MacPhail announced a total revamp of its existing whisky ranges, streamlining them and offering enhanced packaging. Stephen explains, "Previously, we were so focused on the quality in the bottle that we didn't tell people much about the whisky. Now we have great quality and we give customers more information. Since the relaunch, we've had great feedback about quality and presentation. The Connoisseurs Choice selection in particular has been

incredibly successful.

"The business employs around 160 people, and we do more than 200 releases per year overall, including lots of single casks for various markets. We have stock from more than 100 distilleries represented in our shop, and around 25 per cent of those are from 'lost' distilleries."

Stephen sums up the Gordon & MacPhail philosophy as "Drawing on the experience of the past and planning carefully for the future," adding that, "We're very proud of what the company has achieved in its 125 years – it's always been forward-thinking. Our generation is introducing a new distillery, and it has created new ranges and brought Red Door Gin from Benromach into the stable. Our portfolio is full of very rare and very precious whiskies."

Who can really doubt that in another 125 years members of the eighth and ninth generations of the Urquhart family will still be at the heart of all that is best about Scotch whisky? 

**Opening pages:** Cheers to 125 years of G&M.

**This page from top to bottom:**

The Benromach Distillery has played its part in the story of Gordon & MacPhail; A look at the G&M retail experience.





## MEET THE FOURTH ROSE

Our new Small Batch Select is rich and non-chill filtered with a flavor all its own. The first permanent addition to our lineup in over 13 years, it is composed of six distinct Bourbon recipes, all hand selected by Brent Elliott – Whisky Magazine's 2020 Master Distiller of the Year.



**Four Roses.**  
**BOURBON**

10 BOURBON RECIPES.  
LIMITLESS POSSIBILITIES.









WORDS GREG DILLON

## *There's a relative new kid in Ireland's first city*

I've always been a big fan of Dublin; who doesn't love a Guinness, great food, awe-inspiring street art and the stereotypical craic (that's banter and good times for those not familiar)?

In recent times, visits to Dublin have included trips to the Teeling Distillery and its purpose-built visitor centre, which was as much a consideration when designing the distillery as the stills and equipment to do the actual distilling. Then there's the impressive Jameson Distillery Experience where distilling used to happen, but where nowadays there is an incredible set of experiences, food and whiskeys for all levels of whiskey interest.

Now there's a new distillery on the scene – one that is as beautifully crafted as the spirit running of its stills: Roe & Co. But first, a short history lesson about the brand. When creating the modern-day expression of Roe & Co, the team came up with the idea of talking about the 'greatest story never told': the heritage of Irish whiskey, including the George Roe distillery. It was opened in 1757 but, after having to tackle a number of adverse trading conditions and global challenges such as Prohibition, the 1916 Uprising and the UK's trade embargo enforced on Ireland, it sadly shut its doors.

The distillery design, bottle design and overall brand aesthetic have been inspired by the old distillery and the tower remaining from the original site. Interestingly, the teal and copper colour palette used on the pack, in design detailing and at point of sale are supposed to represent Dublin and the copper used in building work that has oxidised over time.

# THE DISTILLING EXPERIENCE

## *Dublin Style*





The pear drop device has been used to represent the flavour profile – take a look at the bottom of the bottle (yes, put the stopper back in and turn it upside-down) and you'll find the device present there, too.

George Roe's distillery was located a mere 100 metres down the road from Arthur Guinness' world-famous brewery. When it closed, Guinness bought the site, sold the remaining liquid, and eventually sold the site itself.

The new distillery was constructed in a building that used to house the Guinness brewery's power station, but lay derelict for around 18 years after it joined the National Grid. Now fully operational, it has a capacity of 500,000 litres of spirit per year, produced across three pot stills producing single malt for the blend, with grain whiskey being bought in from a third-party supplier.

The fabulous design team at Hearts & Feints in Scotland designed the distillery experience, and have done a superb job. When I visited back in November 2019, I was genuinely taken aback by how much of an immersive and intriguing distillery it was – arguably the most visitor-focused and enjoyable distillery experience in the Diageo portfolio.

The operational side of the distillery is all in one room – both elegant and efficient. On the tour you are taken upstairs whilst being talked through the historical significance of the site, a look at the old tower and a chat about the future of the brand and how the team are working closely with bartenders and mixologists to develop new and interesting flavours to expand drinkers' understanding of Irish whiskey and how it can be consumed.

From there, guests are walked across a glass bridge – something I was told freaked a few people out – where you get full visibility of the whiskey-making process, including the fermenters which are surrounded by heat jackets so that Lora Hemy, Roe & Co's master distiller, has full control over all aspects of the process. This set-up enables her to



**Opening pages:**  
Taking a class in the Roe & Co style.

**These pages, from left to right:**  
Looking over the glass bridge;  
Creating cocktails;  
Service with a smile; The Roe & Co building frontage.







tweak and ‘play’ with the various stages of distillation to get the exact spirit she wants for the various products Roe & Co are looking to produce.

Next stop is the tasting room where, around a Roe & Co pear-shaped table, your senses are awakened as you nose through components of the current blend as well as different key flavour notes. Through this process, guests can begin to understand the brand and flavour story as a multi-layered entity.

The final stop on the tour is the mixology room, where you are invited to make your own cocktails based on a recipe chosen from the outline flavour profiles on the wall – I found these to be relatively sweet, but that may have been down to the balance of whiskey and modifiers that I used.

Once the tour has concluded there is a very comfortable and full bar available at the back of the old power station, with booths for groups to sit around

while enjoying different expressions of Roe & Co and trying more cocktails.

As with other distilleries in Dublin, you now have the opportunity to bottle your own Irish whiskey straight from a cask – or, in Roe & Co’s case, two casks – in the distillery shop, so you have a unique gift to remember your visit by.

All in all it is a rather splendid distillery to spend time in, and a big statement as to the direction the brand is going in: mixology at the heart of the brand and its whiskey’s consumption moments; really interesting releases that are bottled at a higher ABV so that they work in cocktails without losing that ‘whiskey-ness’; and engaging with those who want to take the time to make the recommended pilgrimage to Dublin’s newest distillery. 🍷









# A MAVERICK IN THE MONOLITH

WORDS MARK JENNINGS

*A wildcard distiller is laying down spirit for this new venture*



Something is brewing at Dublin's St. James's Gate, and it's not just the Guinness. A new distillery, set up by a wildcard distiller, is laying down spirit and they are not afraid of tearing up their own rules.

When Diageo sold Bushmills in 2014 many thought it was to be their exit from the Irish whiskey market and at a strange time too, just as things seemed to be hotting up. Then, out of the blue, 'Roe & Co' appeared: a reimagined brand trading on the heritage of one of Dublin's biggest distillery names of old, George Roe.

Behind the brand were bold plans for a new distillery, but unusually it wasn't to be part of Diageo's gigantic whisky empire. You'll find it housed in the former powerhouse of the Guinness brewery, a startup within a corporation.

The distillery isn't set up to just make any old whiskey - the intention is to do something experimental and maverick. To commission and run it they needed someone unique, a non-traditionalist, someone who knows the rules well enough to tear them up. They found this in former art student, DJ and perfumer-turned-distiller Lora Hemy. I caught Lora on a brief holiday before a very busy distilling season.



**How do you think your friends describe you?**

"A wee bit mad. A loner that isn't scared of things. I like the sort of adventures that you can't take your other half with you. I'd be a nightmare really as a friend or partner."

**How did you manage to find your way into distilling?**

"I got into my 30s and was sick of music studios and the nocturnal lifestyle and decided to swap it for another full-on nocturnal life," she jokes.

"I hated school, I found it boring and restrictive and I found my tribe, the freaks and weirdos were all at art school and I had a brilliant time, but I got less interested in painting in two dimensions and got into working with aroma chemicals. It's sculptural really and whisky grew out of that. You can do these cool things, working with abject aromas and make them beautiful."

**When did you know that distilling was your future?**

"It was at Glen Ord, it's a super techy distillery and had a bunch of clever people talking you through the process in quite an unromantic but factual and interesting way. It took me a long time

to work out how to actually make it happen. A 15-year opus."

Lora trained at Herriot-Watt's famous Institute of Brewing and Distilling, graduating just as the gin boom was exploding, "At the time there were loads of startups and lots of opportunities to get involved in distillery-building, and I fell into that by the virtue of being in that place at that time."

She ended up at Halewood International (Whitley Neill, Liverpool Gin) and was part of the team that set up their first distilleries. She then bounced to Atom Group (Master of Malt and the Boutique-y brands).

"They were doing some super cool stuff and were aligned with how I think about new product development and the exploratory side of spirits, 'just try stuff', which is the best way to learn. I fell in love with their thinking. Then I got the call out of the blue."

**Coming from startups, was it a hard choice to work for a big company?**

"I think on paper I'm not the kind of person people would expect to work for a company as big as Diageo, but it's completely the opposite of what I expected it to be, it's a brilliant place to work. We're fairly unique, we don't report up through the distilling and maturation line, we're part of the beer line – we're the only distillery in that part of the business. It's everything you'd expect putting a tiny distillery inside a massive brewery would be."

"In the last 300 years, you'd struggle to find a more important street to the industry worldwide. Thomas Street and James Street back in the day, you'd have the world's largest distillery on one side – the original George Roe, and the other the worlds biggest brewery. You can feel the heritage. I walked in the famous arch at St James Gate... it's hard to say no to something like that."

**Can you describe your role?**

"On paper, it is head distiller, but it can mean anything at the moment. It's



**Opening pages:**  
Lora Hemy.

**These pages, from left to right:**

The Roe & Co still house, Outside the distillery; A line up of the latest expression; Lora Hemy with a dram of Roe & Co.





meant commissioning the new plant for the last two years. The first year was the build and I was very involved with the functional design process. We wrote and then tore up a lot of plans as we went which is brilliant.

"I'm now moving on to organising all of our innovation projects over the next year. We built the distillery to be very much focussed on innovation and doing cool stuff."

#### What's the state of the distillery?

"If you are thinking of building a distillery in an old building, definitely

don't do that. It's so much more challenging," she joked.

"We're in full production but clearly when using a new distillery it's like using a musical instrument, you learn all the quirks of the plant when you put them together, they never do quite what you expect them to do on paper.

"In terms of how a distillery usually runs in Diageo, we don't run like that. We have a very flexible production plan; I write it, which is unusual in itself and we input what we want to make and we just do them. It's like a pilot plant in many ways."


Their still setup is rather interesting. The stills themselves are made by Diageo coppersmiths Abercrombie, in Alloa. This not only gives them access to years of experience but their site is a kind of graveyard for old Diageo distilleries. In fact, part of their intermediate still came from the 1860s and was being used as a flower pot!

They have a high-necked, wide-based wash still with 14,000 litres capacity. The intermediate still, whose top was once a Tanqueray still and has been through perhaps five distilleries, has a double boil-ball still head (tons of reflux), grafted onto a more contemporary body. It's 6,600 litres capacity. Completing the set-up is a tiny spirits still with a very long, skinny neck and 4000 litres capacity.

The triple stills can run as a balanced system or as a rather unusual unbalanced, double distillation system, with the wash still acting as the first stage and the spirit and intermediate acting in tandem as a spirit still stage. Apparently the spirit character is almost the polar opposite of the triple.

As to future releases, Lora is about to commence the 2020 innovation season where for three months they'll be solely focused on innovation – rotating recipes every few weeks. In terms of liquid releases, there is a coffee cask release imminent, inspired by her trip to Ethiopia, and then two new distillery exclusive releases. This includes one partnering with the Guinness pilot plant using barrel-aged beer casks – one is a *Brettanomyces Citra* IPA finish.

She's tight-lipped beyond that but very excited about the experimental things including a "different approach to maturation."

I must admit, when I first saw Roe & Co launch a blend 'made for bartenders by bartenders' a few years ago, I was a little underwhelmed: the George Roe name has such legacy it seemed a bit weak. Speaking to Lora I feel confident that the history of this great if somewhat forgotten name is in good hands and I'm excited for what's to come. 



WORDS GAVIN D. SMITH

# A Hebridean classic

*The iconic Islay malt is doubling in size – we visit to find out more*

**D**emand for Islay single malts has never been higher, and the distilling scene on the Hebridean island has proved to be incredibly dynamic of late.

In terms of new distilleries, Ardnahoe started production in November 2018, while Diageo's project to create the new Port Ellen Distillery progresses, Elixir Distillers hopes to build a new distillery near Port Ellen, and the much-delayed Gartbreck Distillery project close to Bowmore may now finally go ahead.

But there is also plenty of dynamism around the long-established distilleries, and nowhere more so than Ardbeg. Work began during 2018 to double the potential output to 2.4mla in an attempt to match future demand for the whisky, though coronavirus brought construction to a halt for a significant period of time.

Malt storage capacity is being increased from 60 to 120 tonnes, and a second boiler installed, while a new

stillhouse with spectacular sea views will house four stills instead of the previous two. Four new washbacks are being installed in the old stillhouse and another two in the former fuel store.

As if that wasn't enough, the Ardbeg team has also been busy with new releases, commencing last September with 19-year-old Traigh Bhan, matured in a combination of Bourbon and sherry oak, followed by the 2020 Committee Release Ardbeg Blaaack and, most recently, Wee Beastie. Not only that, they have also found time to create the first ever Ardbeg beer.

Ardbeg Blaaack was bottled in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Ardbeg Committee, founded in the year 2000 and now boasting more than 120,000 members. The whisky has been finished in pinot noir wine casks sourced from New Zealand and, as on Islay, sheep outnumber people in New Zealand, hence the name 'Blaaack'. It was officially launched at the virtual 'Ardbeg Day' of this year's cancelled

annual Fèis Ile festival. Wee Beastie sits at the opposite end of the age range to Traigh Bhan, being just five years old, and like its elder sibling it carries an age statement, in contrast to most Ardbeg releases of recent years, due principally to the large holes in the distillery's inventory.

Ageing has taken place in a mix of ex-Bourbon and oloroso sherry casks. Ardbeg's director of whisky creation, Dr Bill Lumsden, says, "I'm in no doubt that Ardbeggians will love this tongue-tingling expression. The casks chosen for its creation make it ideal for enjoying neat, or as the mouth-watering main ingredient in a smoky cocktail."

Distillery manager Mickey Heads adds that, "A new permanent expression in the core range is always momentous for the distillery, but Wee Beastie is a particularly special dram. As it's a younger whisky, it means we're able to get as close to the still as possible. So, it's safe to say this is a ferociously good wee nip!"



“ But there is also plenty of dynamism around the long-established distilleries ”







Ardbeg's foray into the world of beer came in August, with the limited release of The Shortie Smoky Porter, named after Ardbeg's Jack Russell mascot. It was produced in association with Williams Bros. Brewing Co and Brewgooder, with all profits being donated to charity supporting clean water projects in Malawi.

Heads explains, "Not only is this a hugely important cause – that we're delighted to be a part of – but The Shortie Smoky Porter is of course a first for the distillery. Helping brew a beer may seem like uncharted territory for Ardbeg, but as any whiskyphile worth their malt will tell you, beer and whisky share the same DNA."

Heads has been in charge of Ardbeg since 2007, having been born and raised on Islay, and started his working life in the whisky industry at Laphroaig

in 1979. Prior to his move to Ardbeg, he ran Jura distillery. This autumn, however, sees him step down from his well-loved role of Ardbeg distillery production manager.

He says that, "Being at the helm of Ardbeg for 13 years has been a great privilege. The whisky we make here is of wonderful quality, and being part of the team that creates it is fantastic. Ardbeg has such a long history that I've always seen myself as a custodian carrying it forward for the next generation. So, you just do it as well as you can and with as much passion as you can."

Thomas Moradpour, CEO of The Glenmorangie Company that owns Ardbeg, adds that, "Mickey Heads is a hugely respected figure in the world of single malt whisky and will be sorely missed by Ardbegians everywhere."



There cannot be many distillery managers who combine such a wealth of knowledge, depth of passion and warmth of welcome. His successor will have a hard act to follow."

That successor has now been named as Colin Gordon, latterly manager at neighbouring Lagavulin, and previously operations manager at Port Ellen Maltings. Of his new appointment, Gordon says, "Ardbeg is an iconic name in whisky with an immense reputation. I'm absolutely delighted to be joining an experienced team producing such an exceptional dram. Ardbeg has built a reputation for producing amazing whiskies with Mickey Heads at the helm. He is a huge name in the industry and will be a very hard act to follow. It's a privilege to be chosen to take over the reins from him."

During Heads' tenure at Ardbeg, some 24 different releases have been bottled, and physical changes have included a move to 24/7 operation and the return of cask disgorging and





batch assembly of the whiskies. From the time when The Glenmorangie Company acquired the distillery, casks were transported by road from the warehouses to Glenmorangie's Broxburn base in West Lothian, where disgorging took place, but for the past decade disgorging and the preparation of 'batches' of single malt ready for bottling have taken place at the distillery.

This development involved expanding the distillery team to six full-time warehousemen, and installing large steel vats to hold the various expressions as batches were assembled. The introduction of An Oa in 2017 necessitated additional vatting facilities, as Heads explains, "To produce An Oa, we installed two French oak vats (15,000 litres each) and the main 30,000 litres 'Gathering Vat', where it sits while marrying. Whisky from three types of wood goes into the An Oa recipe – PX sherry casks, charred virgin oak and ex-Bourbon casks."



The term 'derelict' could have been applied to much of Ardbeg not too many years ago, though anyone seeing the gleaming distillery today, producing what is now a cult single malt, might be hard-pressed to believe it. Ardbeg is living proof that distilleries do come

## GETTING TECHNICAL

**Water source:** Loch Uigeadail

**Malt:** peated (peated to 50-55ppm)  
– Laureate and Concerto varieties, 2018 crop

**Mashing:** semi-lauter 5-tonne stainless steel mash tun. 7.5-hour mash cycle. 16-17 mashes per week

**Fermentation:** 8 Oregon pine wash backs (average 36,000 litres capacity, filled with 23,000 litres). Uses 64-hour fermentations

**Distillation:** 1 x wash stills – lamp glass-shaped (charge 11,500 litres)  
1 x spirit stills – lamp glass-shaped (charge 13,000 litres)

**Production capacity** – 1.25mla

### Opening pages:

Looking out from the distillery pier.

### These pages clockwise from bottom left:

A taste of the landscape; The distillery has stood the test of time; Cut peats air drying; A shiny new vat; A look at the team behind the whisky.

back from the dead and that sometimes the experience can make them even stronger than ever.

The distillery was established by John MacDougall in 1815 and operated in private ownership until 1959, when Ardbeg Distillery Ltd was formed. In 1973, Ardbeg was jointly purchased by Hiram Walker & Sons Ltd and the Distillers Company Ltd, with Hiram Walker assuming full control in 1977.

However, when blended whisky was truly king, a little of the powerful, assertive Ardbeg malt went a long way, and with the Scotch whisky industry facing a glut of maturing spirit, Ardbeg was silent between 1982 and 1989, during which period it became part of Allied Distillers Ltd when Hiram Walker was taken over by that company in 1987. Ardbeg re-opened two years later, but production was limited in quantity, and Allied finally closed the distillery once again in 1996.

The future looked less than rosy for the run-down plant, but then in 1997 Glenmorangie plc acquired Ardbeg, investing more than £10 million in the purchase and distillery refurbishment.

The year 2000 saw the introduction of one of the principal core offerings of Ardbeg: the 10 Years Old. Alongside this, Ardbeg embarked on an imaginative and diverse release programme with many products being exclusively previewed by the Ardbeg Committee. Stand-out bottlings have included Supernova in 2009, Ardbeg Alligator in 2011, Ardbeg Galileo in 2012, Dark Cove in 2016, and Kelpie in 2017. Additionally, limited quantities of 21, 22 and 23-year-old expressions were released from 2016 to 2018.

Although this year the whisky world, along with the rest of the planet, has been forced to hold its breath, as it were, once its expansion programme is complete Ardbeg looks set to be in fine shape and ready to face the future with the same determination to survive and flourish that has characterised the entirety of its colourful history over the years. ◻



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WORDS HANS OFFRINGA

# Opening the gateway

*This edition is a mellow pairing of malt and sax*

**T**he 'mellow' man with the astounding, flawless technique and warm, poetical sound was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on 2 February 1927. Soon afterwards, the Gayetski family moved to New York. They had come from the Ukraine at the turn of the century and decided to Americanise their name to Getz.

Stan excelled at school and started to play saxophone when he turned 13, albeit that he would enjoy playing on every instrument he got his hands on. Lester Young was one of his first musical influences. At 14 he was playing in his high school orchestra, which entitled him to get a free tutor from the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

Turning 16 he became the protégé of Jack Teagarden and started to play with famous musicians like Nat 'King' Cole and Lionel Hampton. Via gigs with Benny Goodman he became a soloist in Woody Herman's Second Herd. Their hit 'Early Autumn' boosted his career and from 1950 on Getz would be the leading man in his own quintets and quartets. In 1953 he formed a sextet with Dizzy Gillespie. The two were then later joined by rhythm tandem Ray Brown-Max Roach as well as Herb Ellis and Oscar Peterson.

Starting as a teenager, Stan Getz frequently used alcohol and drugs. He continued to do so until he got arrested in 1954 for an attempted robbery of a pharmacy, needing to score. In an effort to become sober, he travelled to Europe where he stayed in Copenhagen for a while. When he came back to New York in the early 1960s, he teamed up with Charlie Byrd and got involved in Latin jazz. During this period he made one of his most famous recordings, with Joao and Astrud Gilberto, *The Girl from Ipanema*. After his Latin affair he returned to cool jazz for a while. Then he joined bass player Stanley Clarke and keyboard phenomenon Chick Corea in the early 1970s. It meant a step toward jazz-rock fusion, which eventually led Getz to experimenting with electronic gimmicks on his sax like audio delay and echo. The critics didn't like it and slowly Getz returned to acoustic jazz. In the last phase of his life, his music became more esoteric and he turned away from the Bossa Nova style of his 1960s success altogether.

Getz, nicknamed 'The Sound', was often praised for his immaculate control of the saxophone, which he played with seemingly no effort at all. But in reality it meant working hard, as it is very difficult to obtain such a level of

perfection. John Coltrane once said about his colleague: "We would all play like that... if we could."

Stan Getz was not only prolific in a musical way. In between travelling and playing concerts in Europe and the USA, he managed to father six children with three different ladies, two of whom he had married. His collaboration with the Gilberto couple ended after he had enjoyed a love affair with Astrud.

On 6 June 1991, the smooth operator of jazz and women died of liver cancer. In 1998 he was immortalised by a donation of the Herb Alpert Foundation, which made it possible to erect the Stan Getz Media Center and Library at the Berklee College of Music in Boston.

## A dram for easy listening...

A small urban distillery is nestled cosily in the centre of Oban, from which it takes its name. It seemed a rare location for a distillery since the overwhelming majority always liked the countryside better, for obvious reasons. Illicit stills were less easily detected in the hills and mountain ranges, when gaugers and excise men operated their detested practice: trying to find and demolish them.

Not so with Oban. On the contrary. The name, meaning 'Little Bay of Caves'

**These pages from left:** Saxophonist Stan Getz, a.k.a. The Sound; The cosily positioned Oban Distillery; A view out from the 'Little Bay of Caves'.






in English, had been an important port for many centuries to Picts, Celts and Vikings alike. John and Hugh Stevenson took a different approach. They were avid builders and entrepreneurs, raising an entire village around the distillery and the bay. The brothers soon owned various other businesses ranging from a slate quarry and factory to a fishing operation and a brewery, rapidly becoming the largest and virtually only employer in the area around the turn of the 18th century.

In 1821 Hugh's son Thomas inherited the conglomerate and hurried back from Argentina to claim his stakes. Not having the business instinct of his father, he ran into financial debts and had to file for bankruptcy in 1829. Luckily his son John took after grandfather Hugh and saved the distillery, managing to buy it from the creditors for the decent sum of £1,500 and running it successfully for more than 35 years. In 1866 local man Peter Cumstie bought the distillery, probably as an investment, selling it 17 years later to James Walter Higgins, who started renovating and modernising Oban in 1883. During the expansion, workers found human remains and tools in a cave behind the distillery. The findings would later be dated as

stemming from the Mesolithic period, about 6,500 years ago.

After the modernisation, the distillery slowly attracted the attention of larger players in the industry. In 1898 a conglomerate of various business people, among them the powerful Dewar-Buchanan clan, acquired Oban. The latter became part of the Distillers Company Ltd in 1925, which eventually would become an important cornerstone of Diageo.

Between 1931 and 1968, Oban struggled as a start-stop operation, mothballed a couple of times. After elaborate reconstructions, the distillery reopened in 1971 and has not ceased to produce since. At first Oban was bottled as a 12-year-old single malt but that changed in 1988, when Oban became part of the original six Classic Malts. From then on the malt would be bottled as a 14 years old. This expression is still the core version, joined by a Distiller's Edition with an extra maturation in Amontillado ex-sherry casks and Oban Little Bay, a no age statement malt.

Oban is the second to smallest of Diageo's 30-odd distilleries, and there isn't really any room for expansion; it is crammed between other buildings to the sides, the main street and harbour in front and a sturdy rock at its back. 

## BLUE NOTE

Stan Getz earned his nickname 'The Sound' for his immaculate control of the saxophone, regardless of the style he played. He was a front man of the West Coast style, developed by Dave Brubeck. Soon Getz ventured into the hard bop area, adding Bossa Nova to his list of accomplishments in the 1960s, travelling to Europe and experimenting with electronic jazz, but eventually returning to straightforward jazz. His music gently seduces you into listening, maybe in the same way he seduced the many women in his life. Getz was an amazing soloist, but he also performed well with others. This skill showed up in Woody Herman's Second Herd in 1947, which was very influential and helped propel him further into the spotlight. Getz was one of the 'Four Brothers' in the band, joining Zoot Sims, Serge Chaloff and Herbie Steward. Oban developed itself not only as a distillery but also as a whole town, with supporting industries surrounding the grounds, even venturing into beer brewing. Its single malt is a soft seducer with a great balance. Due to its easy access to some of the Western Hebrides, Oban is also called the Gateway to the Isles. Stan Getz in turn can easily be called a Gateway to the Styles.

## RECOMMENDED

### LISTENING

'Blood Count' by Stan Getz

### DRAM

Oban 14 Years Old



2020

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WORDS MARK JENNINGS

# RARE BY NATURE

## — PART DEUX —

*It's that time of year again – get ready for  
our take on the latest releases*

**H**old on, how is it September already? This time of year is marked by two distinct things: the changing of the season and Diageo's annual collection of Special Releases. I'm not quite ready to relinquish summer yet but it seems I must.

Though the hullabaloo was more muted this year – gone was the lavish launch event and in yet another Zoom call (albeit the first one I've had featuring a scratch and sniff pandan leaf) – it was still a moment to enjoy.

### **What is a Special Release anyway?**

The Special Releases, lest you've been hiding in a bunker since 2001, is an annual, highly regarded collection of cask-strength bottlings from Diageo. Over the years there have been some odd bedfellows but it typically features something from a long-silent distillery, something pretty old, and a bunch

of distilleries you know and love but tweaked in interesting ways – from unusual casking to a younger release you've not had before. With price varying from the generally affordable to the 'let me just ask my wife', they are a solid collection of bottles, loosely themed to enable writers like me to pounce on about them in long-form.

Some time ago I'd heard that the Releases were to be culled, but last year they really solidified this theming into Rare By Nature, and this year the theme returns as... Rare By Nature – which might seem a bit lazy to some, but the aim, apparently, is to be a companion to the 2019 releases. I thought the 2019 releases were all superb, so I'm not going to start complaining.

### **This year's collection**

Chosen by master blender Dr Craig Wilson, the eight single malt releases are an encore to last year's and again feature illustrations of the wildlife

and flora surrounding each distillery, rather than their usual livery. You'll find unusual age points, experimental maturation techniques and the first-ever release finished in pot-still Caribbean rum casks. Lovely.

Of the process, Wilson said, "We have a huge inventory in Diageo so it's a painstaking process choosing from millions of casks and using our experience as blenders to look through pockets of stock that we think are very special. It's just a case of nosing hundreds of glasses and picking what we think are the best from each distillery." Tough gig, eh?!

The full collection includes releases from Cardhu, Cragganmore, Dalwhinnie, Lagavulin, Mortlach, Pittyvaich, Talisker and The Singleton of Dufftown 17 Years Old. Let's dive in...

### **Cardhu 11 Years Old, 56.0%**

A small batch from refill, new and ex-Bourbon American oak, for floral





sweetness and spicy intensity.

**Nose:** Waxy potato skins, vanilla stem, leather and wood shavings with hints of orange marmalade – even more juicy orange with water.

**Palate:** Wood chips, caramelised roasted purple carrots, root vegetable crisps, more orange marmalade, then white peppercorn and green cardamom with the addition of water.

**Finish:** Stewed vanilla, apricot and currents, moreish and juicy, peppery right at the tail.

#### **Cragganmore 20 Years Old 55.8%**

An age never before released from the distillery, matured in refill and new fresh-charred casks.

**Nose:** Really overripe fleshy fruit – a big tropical sweetness, blueberries and golden syrup on hot porridge into coloured pencil shavings and a final metallic note.

**Palate:** Quite dry, with dried apricot and frangipane tart, into milk chocolate. With water it's dark chocolate, maybe even cocoa nibs, some char is also coming through.

**Finish:** Salty and peppery at the end but a massive sweetness that wraps it all together and rides it out on a caramel-fueled rocket.

#### **Dalwhinnie 30 Years Old 51.9%**

A venerably aged drop matured in refill hogsheads that were filled in 1989.

**Nose:** An artist's studio with oil paints and turpentine, big green olive oil waxiness, then into yellow grapefruit at the end and kiwi. With water, such a wedge of melon it's almost Midori.

**Palate:** A canteloupe melon sweetness and green apples into salted caramel, then a big dry hit arrives. With water, black peppercorn emerges and it's almost astringent but is just about reined in by the sweetness.

**Finish:** Super long – apricot jam, a woody dryness and a bunch of pepper and dried liquorice root.

#### **Lagavulin 12 Years Old 56.4%**

Soaring and intense, a small batch of

single vintage Lagavulin matured in refill American oak casks.

**Nose:** A buttered crumpet, sun-warmed hay combined with sweet-peated briney pepperiness – unmistakable Laga. Lemon balm too.

**Palate:** Waxy, oily, unctuous – a smash of Barbour wax jackets, well-hung pheasant meatiness, a working harbourside with tar and brine. With water it's fresher, more of the lemon comes through, intense like fizzing sweets. Dark chocolate and coffee appear long into the sip.

**Finish:** Long and saline, into olive oil pepperiness, really chewy.

#### **Mortlach 21 Years Old 56.9%**

Rich in smooth intensity, from a small batch, finished in Pedro Ximenez and Oloroso sherry-seasoned casks.

**Nose:** Orange marmalade, Fruit Salad sweets – so many layers, with honeysuckle, lemon balm and vanilla.

**Palate:** So juicy, so thick and crazy dry – sucks the spit off your tongue. A sunset whisky. Full on. Starburst sweets with a big creaminess that coats the mouth. Water takes the edge off the booze – oddly you feel the ABV on this one over the others but this but just serves to intensify the juiciness. A roasted pineapple that makes you want more.

A nice glycerin-like sweetness to it that lingers in the top of the mouth and then the tannins at the back, all very pleasant.

**Finish:** So long, wave after wave of fruit but dried now and then a tannin and peppery finish. So much presence in the glass even after it's long gone.

#### **Pittyvaich 30 Years Old 50.8%**

A ghost from 1989, and the distillery's first release ever to be finished in ex-Bourbon casks.

**Nose:** Tropical fruit salad, blood orange, lemon verbena – really have to search it out it's so subtle but then it hits you, and it's a fulsome smell. A world of red peppers, later on, nutmeg, resinous like elegant floor polish, the perfumed woodiness of Grandad's cologne.



With water, it's a totally different nose – hibiscus, and grapefruit candy.

**Palate:** A big fat juicy wedge of pineapple. Herby, of thyme and rosemary, Parma Violets and a salty savoury chewiness, sun-ripened tomatoes. With water, it's more tannic, as the wood comes through. More pronounced umami finish. Super savoury.

**Finish:** A salty liquorice thing, buttery and woody but clearly balanced.

#### **Talisker 8 Years Old 57.9%**

A big one, the first-ever release of Talisker finished in pot-still Caribbean rum casks. Here we go!

**Nose:** Cream soda vanilla bomb at first into crème brûlée and then barbeque bananas. Sweet and smoky.





“ With price varying from the generally affordable to the ‘let me just ask my wife’, they are a solid collection of bottles... ”

**Palate:** A big explosion of savoury and sweet. It's dry then a lump of sweet peat and saltiness. The vanilla has gone, a big crunch of black peppercorns surrounds and ushers away the hit of overripe tropical fruits.

**Finish:** This is how I'd imagine licking a hot tyre would be – but trust me, it is in a really good way! Mezcal-like dryness that coats the mouth making you take a pause, before all you want to do is dive in again.

#### Singleton of Dufftown 17 Years Old 55.1%

A characterful release, the first ever to be matured only in refill American oak hogshead casks.

**Nose:** Candyfloss, pear drops and toffee – a real sweetshop. The hot, nail polish acetone morphs into chardonnay and pear eau de vie, buttery underneath. Grassy greenness and straw at the back of the nose, a hint of kaffir lime.

**Palate:** Big stewed pear hit, unexpectedly

dry long into the finish, potpourri dried flowers and nutty. Water gives soft fudge and overripe fruit.

**Finish:** Long and dry.

#### How to get your hands on them?

A slightly mysterious 'Autumn 2020' date was given but the middle of September seems likely, from specialist retailers in Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia, South Africa, selected markets across Asia and in airport duty-free. 🍷



WORDS CHRISTOPHER COATES

# THE COGNAC CONNECTION

*The hallmarks of French spirit are infiltrating the world of whisky*

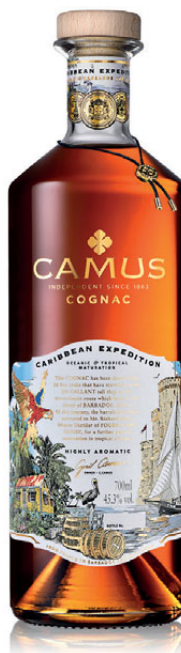
It's probably fair to say that, for a good chunk of the past century or so, two champions of the drinks world have been locking horns in what is surely the greatest booze title fight Europe has ever seen. When it comes to the heavyweight spirits of these two nations, you can forget the 'auld alliance' between Scotland and France: the gloves are off.

Back in the late 18th century, one might have called the result early and bet everything on Cognac. It had an established market in Britain, Ireland, and mainland Europe, and, in spite of the little falling out that had to be settled at Waterloo, imports of French brandy to the UK continued to grow into the mid 1800s. High duties imposed at the time could have hamstrung the Cognacais, but canny smugglers always found a way. Scotch whisky, meanwhile, was mostly the product of illicit distilling and much of it was enjoyed by locals as unaged new spirit. Often pretty rough and ready, it's fair to say that championship material was rare. However, in a meteoric rise from zero to hero, the Scots peasants' hooch became an A-list celebrity after the

Hanovarian monarch King George IV imbibed copious volumes of a whisky called 'Glenlivet' during his famous visit to Edinburgh in 1822. Quality, at least in Speyside, was presumably on the up.

However, a few rounds later (around the 1860s) Cognac was looking strong when a new law allowed for the establishment of named brands as we know them today – previously, bottles had borne the name of the merchant who'd imported the spirit, rather than the producer. Soon after, British customs duties on brandies were lowered and sales of Cognac across the channel tripled in 15 years. It wasn't looking so good for the Scots, but the match wasn't over by a long shot. The Old World was left dumbfounded when the twist of fate that was phylloxera – that pesky root-killing aphid which piggybacked its way across the Atlantic and eviscerated most of Europe's vineyards in the late 19th century – put the French (along with pretty much everyone else with grape vines) down for the count. In the course of a few short years, the scales tipped in favour of drinks made from grains, rather than grapes, and catapulted the underdog

**These pages:**  
The Camus Caribbean Expedition; Casks being loaded for their sea journey.



that was Scotland's national drink into favour with merchants, paupers, professionals, Royals, and just about everyone else.

Cognac was on the ropes. Scotch gloated in triumph during a period of exponential growth, only to trip over its own feet and faceplant to the ground in the calamity that was the 'Pattison Crash' of 1898. Amplifying a contraction of the market and awash with the fruits of overproduction, the industry was brought to its knees. Two world wars and Prohibition in America did neither side any good and it wasn't until the mid-20th century that both fighters were properly back up on their feet.

The battle for the hearts and minds of discerning, image-conscious liquor drinkers continued throughout the following decades, with numerous charges and retreats that led to victories and defeats for both sides. These ducks and jabs were delivered out on the mat of the open market – a clever marketing tactic here or expanded distribution there saw one or the other make gains.

It's worth noting that both sides didn't always play fair. In one notable





episode during the 1990s, the Scotch whisky industry 'flipped' the Taiwanese market from favouring Cognac in just a few years, in part by promoting whiskies as a 'healthier' alternative to the French spirit, which it was claimed were full of sugary syrups – something the Scotch whisky industry would, of course, never even contemplate. Rather conspicuously, this all happened not long after the Scotch Whisky Order of 1990 outlawed all additives in Scotch (including the hitherto liberally used Paxarette syrup), except in the case of flavourless caramel colouring. Thus, the Cognacais were being accused by their opponents of exactly the same practice the Scots had only recently outlawed.

Ancient (if eyebrow-raising) history aside, what one should take away from this whistle-stop tour of the parallel fortunes of Scotch whisky and Cognac is that historically these two products have been competitors in the market. Yet, these days, more and more whisky makers are drawing on the hallmarks of Cognac to promote their products – whether it be the utilisation of French oak, casks that literally once held Cognac, the language of terroir

or simply overt visual cues that are reminiscent of the French 'je ne sais quoi'. These days, rather than simply attempting to outdo one another, there are signs that distillers in both France and Scotland are instead peering over the fence to see what might be learned from their direct competitors in the brown spirits market.

First of all, the recent tendency to embrace increasingly extravagant packaging designs for the most highly valued, old Scotch whiskies is arguably evidence enough that the French are serving as something of an inspiration to Scots distillers. In the past, even the rarest and most highly prized expressions tended to come in quite simple bottles, though the flashier malts and blends might be honoured with a fancy label. One would always expect the most extravagant decanters to emerge from across the Channel but, nowadays, it's hard to decide which category takes the biscuit when it comes to the indulgence of opulent, high-end design and intricate, hand-blown crystal decanters.

More tangible and on-the-nose evidence of cross-category inspiration







is the use of ex-Cognac casks for maturation. Glenfarclas, Glenmorangie, Arran, Douglas Laing, Hazelburn, Kilchoman, Balvenie – all of these and more have utilised these special French oak casks at one time or another. More recently, prominent Cognac cask-matured whiskies in the form of Chivas XV, the name of which is a none-too-subtle homage to Cognac's 'XO' classification, and The Glenlivet Captain's Reserve both traded heavily on their Cognac credentials. Under wraps for now, another Cognac-cask 'hero product' from an equally famous Speyside distiller is set to hit the shelves in 2021 (a year late, thanks to the pandemic) and will draw on both the flavours and the stories of France's preeminent spirit.

Meanwhile, some innovative French producers have adopted the technique of cask finishing to develop very special releases. Oft-used in Scotland, the practice is almost entirely

**This page from top:**

The Camus Port Cask Finish edition; The Camus Distillery in Cognac, where some of the brand's spirit is produced; Vines on the Camus estate in the Borderies cru.

**Following page from top:**

Cyril Camus has been at the helm of his family-owned business since 2004; Drawing samples from a cask.

unheard of in the world of Cognac due to the category's exceptionally tight regulations. For example, in 2016 a controversial release appeared on the scene from Martell that had been finished in Bourbon barrels and, in order to skirt the rules of the Bureau National Interprofessionnel du Cognac (BNIC), the category's governing body, it had to be labelled only as 'eau de vie de vin' rather than Cognac. In late 2017, Courvoisier's Master's Cask Collection Sherry Cask Finish hit the shelves and, upping the stakes further, Camus, the largest independent Cognac company, presented what they say is the very first port cask-finished Cognac.

Though unique to the modern era, Camus believes maturation in port casks did historically occur prior to the tightening of the Cognac production rules in the mid-20th century. Finished in wood that previously held tawny port, this expression was followed by another that enjoyed a secondary

maturation in vessels which previously held Monbazillac dessert wine. These releases toed the line of the BNIC's regulations at the time, as the rules technically stated that Cognac may be matured in a cask that previously held wine or wine-based spirit. However, it's been reported that this loophole has now been closed, so it seems that for now this route of cross-category pollination is decidedly one way and we are unlikely to see Scotch barrel-aged Cognac any time soon. It's a shame; who knows how peated Scotch-cask Cognac might have tasted?

However, beyond these more obvious links, one wonders if perhaps there's room for a more high-minded sharing of ideas and values. Though there's undoubtedly a thing or two many Scotch brands could learn about luxury marketing from the French, surely our friends across the water have something more to contribute to Scotch whisky than merely a penchant for glitzy packaging and a few used casks? The developing conversation about





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distillery terroir, wild yeast, and local barley certainly shows that some Scotch whisky companies have been listening to what our European neighbours have said all along. However, the aforementioned family-owned Camus company is one of the producers that should be watched particularly closely. With the cask-finishing route closed off and keen to respect the BNIC's rules, Camus has looked for more outside-the-box opportunities for innovation that the Scotch whisky category would do well to sit up and pay attention to.


No longer able to use unusual casks and with the growing regions or 'crus' and grape varieties for Cognac production set in stone, Camus looked to the other factor that could still be freely altered: maturation environment. This began with an expression from the producer's Île de Ré range, made entirely from grapes grown and distilled on the quaint island of the same name off the coast of La Rochelle. The Cliffside Cellar expression is blended using eau de vie matured entirely in – you guessed it – a cliffside cellar on the island. Quite precariously perched on a rocky outcrop hanging over a sharp drop to the open ocean, a small storage room in the sea wall of the historic Fort de la Pré has become home to a number of Camus casks. Wet, buffeted by gales and subject to large temperature fluctuations, the character of the Cognac matured in this environment stands apart from the rest of the range, which is matured in inland warehousing.

Inspired by this success, the company's latest release, Camus Caribbean Expedition, saw casks of the company's spirit loaded on board a tall ship to undertake a sea journey to Barbados, replicating the historic transatlantic trade route, where they were unloaded and placed in the warehouses of the Four Square rum distillery. After undergoing a year of maturation in this tropical climate under the watchful eye of Four Square's master distiller Richard Seale, the casks were once again loaded on board a tall

ship for the return journey to France. Exposed to high humidity and salt spray, heat and turbulence, the result of this expedition is a unique Cognac that has been altered by its journey in a way that simply couldn't have been replicated at home.

Though the regulations of the SWA would prevent a similar experiment from occurring in the world of single malt Scotch whisky, the cliffside cellar expression presents an interesting thought. With the renewed focus on concepts such as terroir, there must be a place for Scotch whisky expressions made up of whiskies matured solely in particular hyper-local or non-traditional environments. It's well known that the majority of Scottish distillers mature their spirits in central-belt warehousing, which is more often than not palletised or racked, while simultaneously trading on their distilleries' wild and remote locations, unique local climate and romantic traditional warehousing.

Rather than perpetuating this obfuscation across the board, some intrepid distillers would do well to experiment with 'all matured on site' expressions or perhaps even, for the more innovative brands, whiskies matured in parts of Scotland with climates very different to those found in the vicinity of their distillery. Instead of covering it up, why not try making maturation location a feature to be celebrated that can offer a basis for comparison between different drams produced in varied conditions?

Indeed, whispers of a few up-and-coming distilleries looking into floating warehousing shows that some have evidently also identified the potential of turbulent maturation environments that mimic the time at sea a cask would have traditionally enjoyed during export. Whether these avenues will lead to the next great Scotch whisky, who can say? What's for certain is that there's perhaps more to be learned from Scotland's Cognac connection than a few more cask finishes. 







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WORDS CHRISTOPHER COATES

# TWENTY-ONE YEARS AND COUNTING

*Whisky Magazine has passed a significant milestone*





I don't want to make our most loyal subscribers feel too old (you know who you are), but for the past year this title has been celebrating a rather special birthday. As we look back on 21 years of publishing *Whisky Magazine*, a much-repeated story told by our founder and managing director, Damian Riley-Smith, comes to mind. He often says that, back in those early days, many people remarked that they just couldn't believe there would be enough to write about to justify a regular magazine. They said that the topic of whisky surely couldn't

warrant more than a couple of issues a year and that, whether after 10 issues or 100, we'd inevitably run out of things to say, distilleries to write about and whiskies to taste.

We might scoff and have a little chuckle at their pessimism now but, of course, none of us can really predict the future – though that's what distillers have to do every day when they decide how much barley to order and stock to lay down, which casks to bottle and when. Early on in my career, I remember being told by one industry veteran that, no matter how much

agonising research one did or how sophisticated the market analysis model one used is, the method of projecting future sales of any given whisky brand still very much boils down to licking one's finger and sticking it in the air. What's more, he said, even those with the most experience almost always get it wrong. With that in mind, I suppose we should be thankful that there were some naysayers and sceptics back in this magazine's early days. If everyone had wished us a long and prosperous future, who knows what might have actually happened.







been written yesterday and have perhaps even become more relevant with each passing year. Today, distillery openings and product innovations are coming thick and fast, keeping whisky journalists like me busier than ever as we scramble to document each new development. Food and beer pairings, cocktails, local barley, microdistilleries, highballs, wine-cask finishes, and even the release of ‘young spirit’ that’s not yet whisky – all have been described by some as disruptive ideas and emerging trends. Yet, there are those of us who find ourselves staring, somewhat bemused, at our screens, as we experience an odd sense of déjà vu. Akin to the bleary-eyed, late-night viewer who feels like the plot of the film they’re watching seems oddly familiar and the protagonists uncannily

Of course, the world was different then. Back in the late 1990s, plenty of people also said the new ‘world wide web’ wouldn’t catch on and the millennium bug was feared to be the great era-defining calamity lurking around the corner. Likewise, one would never have guessed that the historic city of Norwich in Norfolk, England, would become the birthplace of the world’s first and leading whisky periodical but, nevertheless, that’s where it happened. As for when, issue one published on a chilly Friday in winter 1998 (20 November, to be precise) and included features by a host of household whisky names that are still just as prominent today. Charles Maclean, Dave Broom, Jim Murray, Neil Wilson: together, their opening bars set the tone of the title’s coverage for the next two decades.

In his very first opinion column for the magazine, the late, great Michael Jackson extolled the virtues of bold

and pungent flavours in whisky. He described how newcomers to the category would regularly tell him that they’d become hooked on whisky not after trying something “relatively mild in flavour” but by sampling drams that are the antithesis of “light and inoffensive”. He warned the industry not to fall into the trap of making milder, blander whiskies in efforts to appeal to a wider audience (for those customers, he suggested: “Drink Vodka”) and lamented the actions of those marketers he felt were on a mission to “remove all whisky tastes” from our glasses in their efforts to eradicate the flavours of “malt, peat, sherry, salt and seaweed”. Reading the words of the great man, written more than 21 years ago, it’s remarkable how valuable his insight remains today.

Politically, socially, and technologically, 2020 feels almost as far removed from 1998 as it does from 1988, 1978 or 1968; yet, Michael’s comments could just as easily have







recognisable, we ask ourselves, 'Haven't we seen this movie before?'

Sure, things might be done somewhat differently now – social media, digital publishing, clickbait, PR jargon like 'recruiting urban millennials', the climate crisis and new industry rules come to mind – but, in other ways, it almost feels like we're re-treading an old path, returning to how things used to be done as we simultaneously plough a new furrow. It's true that the fortunes of the whisky industry have changed a lot since the 90s, but a quick flick through our early issues shows how so many common themes endure: the influence (or perhaps 'over-influence') of casks and wood flavours, questions about sherry casks and sulphur, the debate surrounding NAS whiskies, discussion of yeast and terroir, all are still as much at the forefront of whisky discussion as they were two decades ago. I find myself mulling over the words of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, whose magnum opus *The Leopard* grappled with the paradox of progress and a rapidly changing world: "Everything must change so that everything can stay the same."

**Opening pages:**

Our 21st birthday celebration line-up.

**These pages from top left across:**

Glengoyne's 21-year-old expression; The Balvenie Portwood 21 Years Old; Jura's 21-year-old Time bottling; BenRiach 21 Years Old.

Thankfully, what has never wavered is the support we receive from our readers and the global whisky industry. In the spirit of this special occasion, 21 whisky brands that have been with us since the early days have kindly gifted a bottle of their 21-year-old expression, distilled the year we began publishing, to 21 of our lucky readers. Chosen at random from our subscriber list, these special bottles have winged their way around the world and are now being enjoyed by very surprised, very happy readers. In the tradition followed since issue one, these whiskies have been tasted blind by us and our tasting notes will be published in the next issue, alongside the kind comments signed by distillery teams in the industry's 'birthday card' to *Whisky Magazine*.

In our early issues, the first blind

tasting reviews analysed whiskies from Highland Park, The Glenlivet, Glenfiddich, Redbreast, Glen Moray and many more besides. That these same distillery names appear on the following pages is a testament to the quality of the spirit they produce and our enduring kinship. Bereft of either, this magazine couldn't have reached its second issue, let alone its 170th. Much has changed since issue one, but we're thankful for every minute we've spent learning and sharing the love of whisky. Beloved bottlings come and go; trends and fads ebb and flow; much-loved friends sadly leave us and we meet others along the way; distilleries expand and contract, open and close – but the passion for whisky always lives on. Here's to friends, the spirit, and the next 21 years. [🔗](#)







WORDS IAN WISNIEWSKI  
PICTURES CHRISTOPHER COATES

## GOING WITH THE FLOW

*Can the layout of a distillery have any significance? Let's take a look*

**S**ome distilleries possess more beautiful exteriors than others, but every distillery has the same inner beauty: shimmering, gleaming equipment that produces new make spirit. How this equipment is laid out varies enormously among distilleries, which raises the question: is there an optimal layout, and what influence can this have?

"A logical layout will always promote efficiency, there's no question, but every site has its own opportunities and challenges. With any new distillery the first question we ask is, how much alcohol do you want to produce annually? From there we work out the size of the mash tun and pot stills to achieve this," says Richard Forsyth, chairman of Forsyths, which provides services including distillery planning, completion and maintenance.

Then it's a case of positioning the equipment within the size and shape of the available space. Greenfield sites are

less likely to impose space restrictions than urban addresses. Similarly, new builds usually offer more scope than adapting existing buildings. But these are of course generalisations, and whatever the space the same criteria still applies.

Richard says, "The only area to partition off is the malt intake and milling, as it produces dust which entails the risk of an explosion. Malt is conveyed mechanically from storage to the mill, and the resulting grist is conveyed mechanically to the mash tun, so they should be as close to each other as possible. After mashing, it's liquid all the way, pumped through pipes to the wash backs, stills and filling store."

With pipework such a significant conduit, there are clear parameters.

"Pipework is expensive, but ultimately it's not the length that matters but how it's laid out. Pipes that turn quickly like a chicane or have a dead leg (dead end) can harbour





bacteria, and lead to hygiene issues and infections,” says Brendan McCarron, Glenmorangie’s head of maturing whisky stocks.

Layout is (arguably) more significant in manually operated distilleries, where operators interact directly with the equipment, rather than automated distilleries, where interaction is more focused on a computer screen.

Stewart Buchanan, global brand ambassador, BenRiach Company, says, “Benriach’s production is basically all on one level and almost open plan, meaning one operator can happily go between each part of the production, milling, mashing, fermenting and distilling, and the timing of each process means the operator is never trying to do two things at once.”

Where production areas are on different levels an operator can clock up abundant mileage on stairs.

“Scapa’s old layout had different levels and required two operators. Refurbishment in 2004-5 brought the grist bins, mashing and fermentation onto one level, which can be operated by one man manually,” says Ewen Fraser, engineering manager at Chivas Brothers.

Different levels can, however, be the only way of making a distillery viable.

“We wanted to produce 400,000 lpa (liters of pure alcohol) annually, and had to fit this into a new building on a site totalling one-third of an acre, which led to the concept of a vertical distillery,” says Paddy Fletcher, co-founder of Port of Leith Distillery (due for completion in 2021). “Milling is on the fourth floor, mash tuns on the third, wash backs on the second, with stills on the first and ground floor. All of the visitor experience space (bar, tasting rooms, shop etc.) then sits at the very top above the process floors.”

Adapting existing buildings can add distinctive features, but also significant constraints. Kingsbarns, for example, constructed a new distillery onto a Georgian sandstone farmstead and dovecote listed by Historic Environment Scotland as category ‘B.’



**These pages**  
**clockwise from left:**  
Kingsbarns Distillery  
in action; A feast  
for the senses at  
Macallan; A moment  
of stillness at  
BenRiach Distillery.

“This listing meant the new production building couldn’t be any taller than the historic buildings, which in turn determined the maximum height of the stills as five metres,” says Peter Holroyd, Kingsbarns Distillery manager.

Regulations that all distilleries must comply with are health and safety, which are also continually evolving.

“One reason for building a new Macallan distillery rather than adapting the existing one was a change in regulations which would make the existing configuration of plant and buildings difficult to comply with. For the new Macallan distillery we also had to devise a drainage system that would extinguish and remove any flammable liquid from the distillery within 20 seconds, and we had to demonstrate that this works,” says George McKenzie, head of engineering at Edrington Group.

So, what conclusions can we reach?

“Layout doesn’t influence production capacity, it just makes it easier to work,” says Stuart Urquhart, operations director at Gordon & MacPhail.

Brendan McCarron adds, “It’s important for the site to be well laid-out and designed from an operational point of view, and for maintaining equipment, otherwise it can compromise the distillery’s efficiency.”

## VISITOR EXPERIENCE

It’s not only malt that arrives in large quantities at distilleries.

“Modern distilleries have tourism at the heart, but this wasn’t even a concept when older distilleries were being built so things such as accessibility and having everything on ground level or having lifts as well as stairs are now a key factor when considering the distillery layout,” says Stuart Urquhart.

A prime example is the layout of Holyrood Distillery in Edinburgh, which was installed in a long, narrow building dating from 1839. Holyrood Distillery founder David Robertson says, “We wanted a city centre distillery and repurposed an existing three-storey building. We thought about the most logical flow for visitors, and formed traffic lanes on one side of the building on each storey, with lifts at either end. This also constrained the diameter of production vessels to no more than half the width of the building, the other half being a traffic lane for visitors, which means the building helped dictate production capacity.”



WORDS ROB ALLANSON

## THAT TIME AGAIN

*A slew of new releases leaves drinkers spoilt for choice*

**H**ere we go... it must be getting close the true heart of Autumn as Diageo has now released its annual Special Releases – and boy do they look good.

I'm still waiting for a Walker blend to end up in this lineup, just to highlight the huge importance of that brand to those releases. Something I try to highlight when people bring up their distaste for blends is that we wouldn't have the capacity for Special Releases if it weren't for global juggernauts like Johnnie Walker. It's a fact worth bearing in mind, while also noting how lucky we are to access liquid of this quality.

There's also been a raft of newly released expressions; we must be leading up to Christmas and the holiday season. New whiskies have appeared from Distell, Glenlivet and Aberfeldy, among others, and let's not forget the continual releases from the independent bottling sector. Plenty to get excited about, and that is before we even step out of Scotland and into the rest of the world. Ireland, America, Mexico, Sweden and other producing nations have turned out some impressive gems of late.

However, for those of you paying close attention, this article is going to seem a little like déjà vu if you were reading this feature in the last edition.

Just as I finally rounded up last year's 2019 Buffalo Trace Antique Collection, this year's selection is announced.

Now that is what I call timing! So let's dive in and see what those wonderful people in Franklin County have waiting for us this time.

For those of you wondering what all the fuss is about, the collection was first launched in 2000 and features five limited-edition releases bottled from rare stocks at the distillery, featuring various ages, recipes and proofs. This quintet is so anticipated that people have been known to line up outside their liquor shops before they open just to get a bottle.

One thing before we start exploring all this loveliness is to bear in mind that next year the collection 'comes of age'. Who knows that this means, but with the stock and experiments going on at the distillery, we can dare to dream perhaps. Personally I would love to

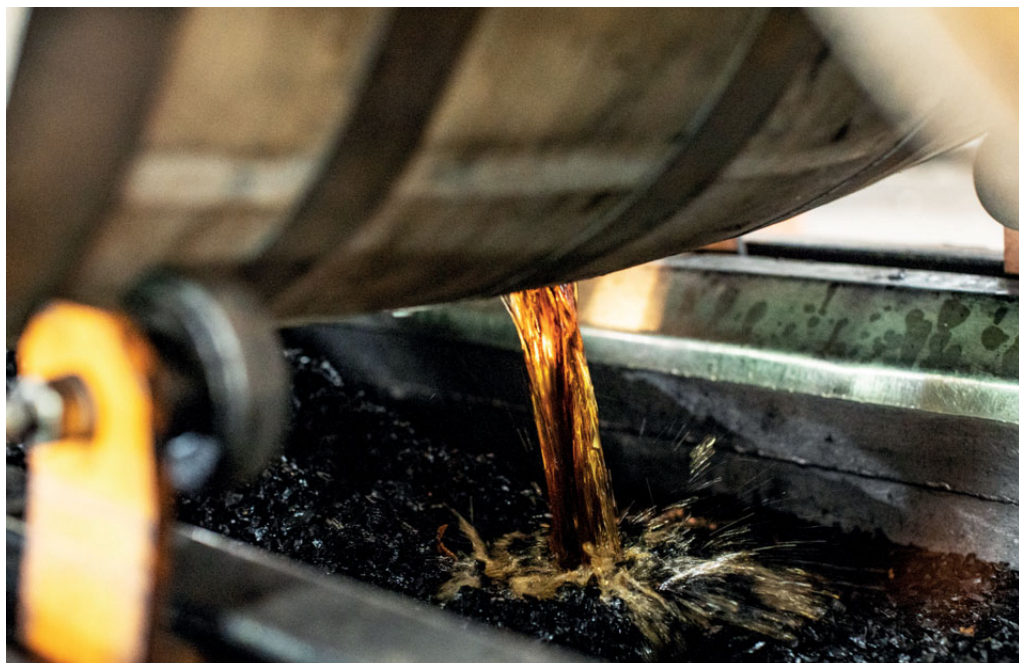
**These pages from below:**

The perfect pour; The 2020 Buffalo Trace Antique Collection.

see a parallel collection of some of the weird and wonderful experiments that are lurking in the warehouses...

So here is the lowdown on what's waiting for you, and perhaps why it's worth getting the sleeping bag out and heading down to Binny's or your own local shop.

Let's start with the ryes in the collection. Thomas H. Handy is an uncut and unfiltered straight rye whiskey. This year's offering comes from a Spring distillation in 2014 and have been assembled from casks aged in K, M and N warehouses. Punching in a 129 proof (64.5% ABV), this whopping rye gives you everything you would expect:





cinnamon spice, black cherry compote and sweetness from honeycomb and chewy toffee.

Its rye stablemate, the 2020 Sazerac Rye 18 Years Old, comes in at a respectable 90 proof (45% ABV). This was distilled back in Spring 2002, and similar to other years, has been gathered from one floor of a warehouse; this year, it is the third floor of warehouse K. You can expect a really intense experience from a rye of this age, one that has been well looked after, and it gives plenty of dark chocolate, caramel-coated coconut, black cherry jam and a pepper and cinnamon spice edge.

From the ryes, let's head to what I often think of as the hidden gem of the collection – William Larue Weller. The 2020 release was distilled in the winter of 2008 and aged in warehouses I and C.

Don't be fooled by the alcoholic strength: this year's is coming in at 135.5 proof (67.25% ABV), a climb from last year's 128 proof, and this is still a stunner. A drop of water and bingo, flavour city; it's subtle and aromatic, too. It takes you into a mint-laden herb garden with a stick of Big Red chewing gum. Buttered sweetcorn and a little prickly chilli heat. More, please!

Finally let's move into Bourbon



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territory and the whiskey that seems to get most people excited: Eagle Rare 17 Years Old.

This 101 proof (50.5% ABV) whiskey, again bottled at the same proof in honour of the brand's roots in 1974, was distilled in Spring of 2002 and was aged again on just one floor, this time the first floor of warehouse P. This belter of a Bourbon has set the bar yet again, offering fruit, cream and hints of oak spices. There's plenty of vanilla and cigar-box tobacco-like notes before toffee and coffee cream take over. There's even a hint of fresh-cut herbs at the end.

Finally we come to what the distillery refers to as its "powerhouse favourite", George T. Stagg, coming in at a punchy 130.4 proof (65.2%) this year. This tour de force Bourbon was collected from a number of warehouses for this year's release, including L, K and Q. The evaporation topped last year's 56 per cent, losing 59 per cent to the angels.

This fan favourite will give you pretty much everything you are looking for in a benchmark Bourbon. It is packed with huge oak tannins, cinnamon spices, vanilla cream and custard notes. There's also chocolate-covered cherries, hints of pipe tobacco and a peppery and chilli spiciness.

Sports fans paying close attention to this year's collection will note that Stagg is back to its punchy self again. For the first time in four years the proof is back up above 130. The Weller as well has climbed up the proof notches



**These pictures from top left:**


Taking a rest in the sun; Inside the warehouse; The power of Buffalo Trace.

this year, so should offer an interesting comparison to other years (if you have any left).

None of these will be easy to find as usual, but if you do, remember to share – that's the best thing about whisky.

For our cocktail suggestion this edition, with these whiskies I think I am going to stick with my steer last edition and go with simplicity: glass and ice, possibly a little water on the side.

Again, following on from last edition, I am going to recommend a pipe with pretty much any of these, but especially with the Weller. If you can find a blend high in Latakia leaf that would be perfect. The campfire note from this style of tobacco will really compliment the Weller. Try some of the Peter Stokkebye blends, or if you can find it, the wonderfully named Presbyterian Mixture.

As I have said often in these articles, slow down and enjoy. These whiskies and tobaccos should be savoured. 





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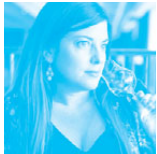


## Taster biographies



### Rob Allanson

Rob is editor-at-large of *Whisky Magazine* and formally held the position as a global brand ambassador for William Grant & Sons' whisky portfolio. His experience in the industry, which has seen him explore whiskies from around the world, has given him a keen and well-versed palate.



### Becky Paskin

Becky has been writing about food and drink for over a decade, after stepping out from behind the bar to take up her pen. For her industry work, Becky has been made a Keeper of the Quaich and is now a freelance spirits writer and co-founder of Our Whisky.

#### THE PROCESS

- All samples are blind tasted, with ABV and style the only information disclosed. After scores and notes have been submitted, the identities are revealed and our tasters provide their final comments.
- Samples are tasted individually over a two week period.
- Tasters are provided tasting and scoring guidelines for consistency.
- The top scorer is awarded *Editor's Choice*.
- Scores of 17+ receive a *Recommended* award.

## Balcones Lineage

BALCONES DISTILLING

ABV: 47.0%  
Style: Single Malt  
Region: Texas  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

AMERICA



### Rob

**Nose:** Takes its time, slowly opens up to reveal hot buttered corn with a little chilli heat. There's sweetness with chocolate-coated cherries and pistachio Turkish Delight.  
**Palate:** More corn comes through, almost corn pancakes with chilli jam and black pepper spice. Starts to sweeten with chocolate-coated peanuts and raisins.  
**Finish:** A little spice pucker that fades leaving a jammy sweetness behind.  
**Comments:** A fantastic sip that has some hidden depths behind the shyness.

9.0

### Becky

**Nose:** A big strawberry hit, both under-ripe and the jammy kind. There's bramble fruit in blackcurrants, blackberries and raspberries, tempered by dried ginger, black pepper and toffee cake.  
**Palate:** The berries move straight into the palate but are joined by Jamaican ginger cake and a lovely bready, nutty, mentholic rye spice that elevates it beyond the sweetness.  
**Finish:** Blackberry jam smothered on hot, buttered rye toast.  
**Comments:** So much flavour in one glass, I'm certainly coming back for another.

9.6



## Balcones

### Texas Pot Still Bourbon

BALCONES DISTILLING

ABV: 46.0%  
Style: Bourbon  
Region: Texas  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

AMERICA



### Rob

**Nose:** Fruit, fruit and just a little more fruit, my word; it's a rich, well-stocked soft fruit section of a greengrocer. A good mix of orchard and dark fruits, then a little spice creeps in.  
**Palate:** Deep, dark Cassis syrup, alcoholic red berry squash. Those spices start to take hold, oak, vanilla and a rye pep come through.  
**Finish:** Sweet and fruity and just takes forever.  
**Comments:** Not sure if I said it was fruity. Not a one-trick pony though, great oak and wood spice integration too.

9.3

### Becky

**Nose:** A shy start developing into savoury aromas of cornbread and rye grass with a sweet nuttiness in roasted chestnuts and toffee-coated popcorn.  
**Palate:** More of that crunchy popcorn with seeded rye bread and hot, buttered corn on the cob. That chestnut quality continues too, joined now by some roasted hazelnuts and caramel milk chocolate.  
**Finish:** A touch of cinnamon spice, caramel and nuts.  
**Comments:** A Bourbon that ticks all the boxes. It takes time to open in the glass but this'll be a crowd-pleaser.

9.2



## Berry Bros. & Rudd 16 Years Old, Orkney Islands

BERRY BROS. & RUDD

ABV: 53.6%  
Style: Single Malt  
Region: Islands  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Independent  
Availability: Worldwide

SCOTLAND



### Rob

**Nose:** Huge sweetness rolls in first, caramel toffees and chocolate-coated raisins, then slowly smoke comes through, the fattiness of smoked bacon and black pepper.  
**Palate:** That bacon and black pepper continues with the umami of tomato sauce. A little chilli prickle and then things start to dry out.  
**Finish:** The salt-tinged smoke holds everything together as fruit and vanilla dry slowly.  
**Comments:** Oh yes... this is fine stuff indeed. Well balanced with a gorgeous smoke profile.

9.2

### Becky

**Nose:** Delicately smoky with a creamy, milky aroma, like chocolate melting over a bonfire. Lurking in the background are raisins and a faint meatiness.  
**Palate:** Meaty and fruity with more of that mouth-coating creaminess, but it quickly becomes very dry as spice builds into the mid-palate, stirring up a whoosh of smoke with it.  
**Finish:** The smoke whirlwind subsides, settling into barbeque coals and bacon fat with dried fruit and citrus peel too.  
**Comments:** A tornado of a whisky; buckle in for the ride.

8.5





## Elijah Craig

### Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey

HEAVEN HILL DISTILLERY



ABV: 63.3%  
Style: Bourbon  
Region: Kentucky  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

AMERICA



**Rob**

**Nose:** Opens up with plenty of sweetness, apricot and almond croissants, fresh brioche buns and toffee wafers. There's dark fruits here, plum jam and blackcurrant cordial.  
**Palate:** Follows the nose nicely with those dark fruits leading the way. Then it's the turn of warm buttered muffins and a little spicy edge.  
**Finish:** It has a wonderful aromatic note to it as it dries slowly.  
**Comments:** A stonking Bourbon; that ABV doesn't seem to register at all.

8.5

**Becky**

**Nose:** Things start with milk chocolate, runny caramel and oak spice, then French toast and vanilla-flavoured pancakes topped with fresh blueberries.  
**Palate:** Though surprisingly tame for such a high strength, with more chocolate, caramel and a touch of spice, water brings out a fragrant fruitiness in banana chips and blueberry purée.  
**Finish:** Ending on a spicy note with buttered corn and lightly done toast.  
**Comments:** A solid breakfast Bourbon, but I would add water, and definitely serve it alongside pancakes.

8.6

## Fettercairn

### 12 Years Old Pedro Ximénez Sherry Cask Edition

WHYTE & MACKAY

ABV: 40.0%  
Style: Single Malt  
Region: Highland  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Travel-retail

SCOTLAND



**Rob**

**Nose:** Grainy and malty at the start, fresh loaf crust, a little warm yeast and then a touch of toasted spices begins to come through.  
**Palate:** Dense and lush, with plenty of body. All-butter shortbread sweetness meets hedgerow fruits, quince jam. There's ground allspice and egg custard tarts there too.  
**Finish:** The fresh oak spice really starts to grip and slowly dissipates leaving sweetness.  
**Comments:** Plenty going on despite coming in at just 40% ABV. This is nicely put together.

8.0

**Becky**

**Nose:** Liquorice blackcurrants with a hint of menthol too, alongside toasted oak and baking spice.  
**Palate:** Things become richer, with red bramble fruits and black cherries, while wine gums retain that candied quality from the nose. The oak keeps things grounded and adds a touch of spice with nutmeg, vanilla, cinnamon and brown sugar.  
**Finish:** Oaky and dry.  
**Comments:** Forest walks should always be accompanied by a bag of blackcurrant sweets in my opinion.

8.3

## Glen Moray

### Distillery Edition Burgundy Cask 2004

LA MARTINIQUAISE-BARDINET

ABV: 60.1%  
Style: Single Malt  
Region: Speyside  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

SCOTLAND



**Rob**

**Nose:** A sense of aged casks here at first, baked lemons, vanilla pods and candied oranges. A savoury edge with Yorkshire puddings and creamy mash potatoes appears.  
**Palate:** That savoury edge is still here, Fig Newtons, date slices with golden syrup and roasted hazelnuts. There's a gentle spice note and woodsmoke.  
**Finish:** Hits you first with a ton of sweetness then dries swiftly leaving a grainy edge.  
**Comments:** This is a great Speysider; the ABV doesn't seem to kick at all, suggesting carefully curated maturation.

8.2

**Becky**

**Nose:** Waxy orange skin, then cookie dough and pancake batter with rum 'n' raisin ice cream.  
**Palate:** A wintry buffet of afternoon tea treats: shortcake, gingerbread biscuits and a slice of nutty Christmas pudding. Orange peel and lemon oil lift the honeycomb sweetness and oak spice.  
**Finish:** Dry and biscuity.  
**Comments:** I would recommend adding a few drops of water to experience that buffet. Pass the biscuits.

8.4

“ A tornado of a whisky; buckle in for the ride ”

Becky Paskin

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“Dense, funky and fun, an intriguing Australian treat”

Becky Paskin

## Glen Moray Distillery Edition Chardonnay Cask 2003

LA MARTINIQUE-BARDINET

ABV: 58.9%  
Style: Single Malt  
Region: Speyside  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

SCOTLAND



**Rob**

**Nose:** That ABV hits first, huge alcohol and not much else. Sort of shy but in time releases a buffet of figs, apricots, goats cheese and honey.

**Palate:** Again with that foodie influence, Christmas cake and Cheddar cheese, banana bread with seville orange marmalade. Walnut fondants, milk chocolate and brown sugar syrup.

**Finish:** All heads off toward Christmas, long and lush.

**Comments:** A very lovely whisky with great cask influence. Water really sweetens it up.

8.3

**Becky**

**Nose:** It's a slow opener, but eventually there's dried fruit and caramelised muscovado sugar, toasted nuts and worn leather with plum jam. There's a fierce alcohol nose prickle.

**Palate:** Juicy and fruity with baked apples and dried citrus peel. Water tames the somewhat overwhelming oak and alcohol spice, revealing vanilla, chocolate biscuits, raisins and cooked banana.

**Finish:** Charred hazelnuts, brioche, black treacle and a handful of prunes.

**Comments:** Fruity, warm and comforting, a perfect Autumnal treat.

8.5

## Glengoyne Cuartillo

IAN MACLEOD DISTILLERS



ABV: 40.0%  
Style: Single Malt  
Region: Highland  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

SCOTLAND



**Rob**

**Nose:** Takes its time to reveal all that it's holding, but then it's all meadow grass, corn flowers, apple blossom and hyacinths.

**Palate:** Gentle with an edge of grain and sugar syrup running through it. Starts to move into more savoury notes as it goes, roast honey nuts and tingling spices.

**Finish:** The spices take just a little time to die down, leaving honey and nut cornflakes.

**Comments:** A really gentle yet complex whisky that offers much more once it is left for a little.

8.5

**Becky**

**Nose:** Fresh, breezy and brimming with pears and other ripe orchard fruits. Some dried grass, vanilla and a kiss of oak spice in there too.

**Palate:** Soft and delicate with hay and runny honey, before moving into warm meringue, macadamia nuts and lemon sherbets with more of those now poached pears.

**Finish:** Gentle, more conference pears and a sprinkle of cinnamon.

**Comments:** A light summer dessert dram to sip during the afternoon sunlight.

8.8

## Hammerhead 25 Years Old

PRÁDO DISTILLERY

ABV: 40.7%  
Style: Single Malt  
Region: N/A  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

CZECH REPUBLIC



**Rob**

**Nose:** Full-on woody notes come through at first, opening a wooden chest full of pine cones and damp moss. Earthy. Flapjacks with honey and dark chocolate.

**Palate:** Heads into an almost savoury side of things, tomatoes and soft goat's cheese, but then sweetens up swiftly. Heather honey, blueberry compote and red cherry jam.

**Finish:** The earthy, cedar chest box quality returns to slowly dry out with very aromatic wood.

**Comments:** It's like someone locked you in an old pine cupboard with a packet of oat biscuits. Great fun.

7.3

**Becky**

**Nose:** Super funky, a white wine and rum-spiked cheese fondue and crusty wholemeal bread. It settles into dried fruit (raisins, apple pieces) with rum 'n' raisin ice cream, and the piney note remains.

**Palate:** Very sweet, almost saccharine-like, with fresh apple. There's more green, piney wood notes with some anise and eucalyptus, while the butyric (cheese) creates a waxy texture.

**Finish:** Sandalwood and spice with cheese fondue and dried apple.

**Comments:** Unexpected, but that's what 25 years of maturation in Czech oak does.

7.4



## Kavalan Ex-Bourbon Oak

KAVALAN DISTILLERY

ABV: 46.0%  
Style: Single Malt  
Region: N/A  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

TAIWAN



### Rob

**Nose:** Shy at first but in time there's plenty of tropical fruit, pineapples and peaches mixed with custard and a little vanilla sugar. Hints of baking spices too.  
**Palate:** Again really gentle and shy at first. That tropical fruit note emerges slowly. Blueberry muffins, chocolate macaroons and a freshly baked apple pie.  
**Finish:** Fits the rest of the whisky; it is slow, gentle and vanilla-laden.  
**Comments:** Such a delicate drop, this one. It is quite refreshing.

8.5

### Becky

**Nose:** It takes a little time to get going but there's a lovely balance between gentle, fruity spirit and vanilla spice from the cask.  
**Palate:** Creamy and light, it's all stewed apples and raisins with vanilla ice cream, coconut and the gentlest oak spice. For all its delicacy this could easily be a grain whisky.  
**Finish:** Mr. Whippy ice cream, in a cone, no flake, but with a sprinkle of cinnamon.  
**Comments:** Soft, creamy and just all-round delicious. Kavalan is showing up exceptionally well in ex-Bourbon casks.

8.8



## Label 5 Classic Black

LA MARTINIQUAISE-BARDINET

ABV: 40.0%  
Style: Blended  
Region: Highland  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

SCOTLAND



### Rob

**Nose:** Fresh and youthful with a zip of citrus zest. Plenty of fruit sweetness with the merest hint of smoke. Banana and caramel pie moving into rich chocolate brownies.  
**Palate:** Plenty of grain notes come through first, wheat cereal and hot milk, hot buttered cornbread and then sweetness of strawberry jam and clotted cream.  
**Finish:** Takes its time with corn syrup sweetness and a little apricot jam.  
**Comments:** A good solid whisky with nice balance to it.

7.6

### Becky

**Nose:** Super fresh and vibrant with lots of tropical fruit and a creamy vanilla sweetness. Tutti frutti ice cream, apricot yoghurt, ripe juicy peaches and sticky pineapple too.  
**Palate:** Malty and gristy with a viscous fruitiness like syrupy tinned peach juice. The cereal note continues throughout as bran flakes, alongside toasted brioche and iced cinnamon pastries.  
**Finish:** Gritty, malty and fruity with a little char grip and anise spice.  
**Comments:** Not quite as fruity as I'd hoped but it makes a cracking breakfast whisky.

8.0

## The One Orange Wine Cask

THE LAKES DISTILLERY

ABV: 46.6%  
Style: Blended  
Region: N/A  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

ENGLAND



### Rob

**Nose:** Sweetness up front with a little citrus zip to it. Strawberries and balsamic vinegar. Reduced red fruits, compote-like, but there is a chewy wine gum and jelly note too.  
**Palate:** Those sweet wine gums hit first, the sugar-powdered jelly sweet too. The sweetness slowly fades, making room for orchard fruits and some rich vanilla custard.  
**Finish:** Slowly fades with sweetness and a little fruity red wine edge.  
**Comments:** A soft and gentle drop that has a real winery quality to it, perhaps one for the cheese course?

8.2

### Becky

**Nose:** It starts out a bit rubbery, but settles into a bit of raspberry jam, black pepper and wholemeal toast with a smidge of Turkish delight.  
**Palate:** More of that delicate, rosewater-perfumed Turkish Delight though that rubbery grip is back making things a tad bitter. More black pepper, orange zest and some thick strawberry purée with green apple skins surrounding.  
**Finish:** The after-taste of blowing up balloons spritzed with a little light rose perfume.  
**Comments:** Delicate and floral with a hint of spice there too.

7.7

“An after dinner dram if ever there was one”

Rob Allanson

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## Lark Classic Cask

LARK DISTILLERY

ABV: 43.0%  
Style: Single Malt  
Region: N/A  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

AUSTRALIA



### Rob

**Nose:** Heading into the hay rack on a hot summer's day. Farmyard notes and a little leathery edge. Bonfire night toffee sweets and pomegranate syrup.  
**Palate:** The sweetness backs off a little, opening the way for those bonfire treacle toffee notes, moving to a sticky brown sugar sweetness.  
**Finish:** Long, sticky and it manages to just keep on going and going.  
**Comments:** Really interesting stuff, does make you want more once the finish dies away though.

8.6

### Becky

**Nose:** Funky and earthy like a rum agricole, or sticky toffee pudding left on the floor of a barn. Looking past the funk there's sticky dried fruits – figs, prunes and dates, alongside molasses and black treacle.  
**Palate:** Not quite as sweet as the nose suggests although the mustiness remains. The texture is oily with a tar-like quality, while the palate is treacle and burnt digestive biscuits.  
**Finish:** Thick, rummy and lingering.  
**Comments:** Dense, funky and fun, an intriguing Australian treat with a hint of Tasmanian peat.

8.9



## Mackmyra Brukswhisky

MACKMYRA SVENSK WHISKY AB

ABV: 41.4%  
Style: Single Malt  
Region: N/A  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

SWEDEN



### Rob

**Nose:** Huge and heady with plenty of floral notes, paper bags filled with potpourri and smouldering herbs. There's milk chocolate sweetness here too and raspberry doughnuts.  
**Palate:** Follows on with those sweet fruity notes, plenty of caramel and apple pudding with cream sauce and shaved dark chocolate.  
**Finish:** Takes its time to dry with those fruit notes coming through, before the vanilla and cream takes over.  
**Comments:** Rich and deep, really lovely and shows the strength of whisky coming out of Sweden at the moment.

8.9

### Becky

**Nose:** It's incredibly aromatic. On one hand it's delicate and floral with apple blossom and a touch of rose petal, there's fruitiness with icing sugar-dusted apple strudel, juicy pears and tinned peaches.  
**Palate:** More delicate than expected, big orchard fruits, cooked this time, before vanilla cream washes in with tantalising cask spice.  
**Finish:** A surprising tingle of cinnamon and anise spice with fresh apple pastries.  
**Comments:** A lovely balance between spirit and cask that will make you crave apple pie and ice cream.

9.4



## Michter's Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey

MICTER'S DISTILLERY

ABV: 47.2%  
Style: Bourbon  
Region: Kentucky  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

AMERICA



### Rob

**Nose:** Gentle and quite simple at first, aromatic, a little grassy, then vanilla spices and custard cream biscuits. Toffee ice cream.  
**Palate:** Now it really starts to open up, black cherries in dark chocolate, prawns and chilli jam. Cracked black pepper spice tangles, orange candied peel and chocolate orange.  
**Finish:** Really aromatic, exotic spices and dries with those orange oil elements too.  
**Comments:** Wow, serious aromatic elements here, a full-on spice drawer of a whiskey.

9.0

### Becky

**Nose:** Shy though sweetly perfumed, it opens up with water into stewed apples, raisins and fresh butter.  
**Palate:** What starts out as simple caramel popcorn moves into fragrant Turkish delight, cherry blossom, lemongrass and red chilli. Water releases more sweetness in milk chocolate and some toffee pennies.  
**Finish:** Brown butter and cardamom hangs on.  
**Comments:** With its remarkably fragrant character, this would make an excellent accompaniment to a masala or bhuna.

8.5



## Michter's Kentucky Straight Rye Whiskey

MICTER'S DISTILLERY

ABV: 46.4%  
Style: Rye  
Region: Kentucky  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

AMERICA



### Rob

**Nose:** Oh so spicy and sweet, plenty of rye peppered spice, unsmoked bacon and scallops. Then cherry flapjacks, almond croissants, caramel ice cream with dark chocolate pieces.  
**Palate:** Plenty of sweetness upfront but then it turns a little darker with cherries and pomegranate molasses. A little roasted peanut.  
**Finish:** Big, bold and spicy that slowly gives way to a bright, sweet cherry jam.  
**Comments:** A fantastic drop this – so glad rye made a comeback, and this shows why.

9.1

### Becky

**Nose:** It kicks off with a good deal of spearmint, menthol and spice, settling into dense cherry, raisin and nut-packed fruitcake topped with super-sweet icing.  
**Palate:** An initial hit of caramelised brown sugar and baking spices, before more of that rich fruitcake comes to the fore, this time with a nutty, rye breadiness to it.  
**Finish:** Rye bread and butter pudding with rum-spiked custard.  
**Comments:** For all its sweetness there's a lovely balance between the savoury rye and sugary, fruity freshly baked goods.

8.8





## Tamdhu Ambar 14 Years Old

IAN MACLEOD DISTILLERS

ABV: 43.0%  
Style: Single Malt  
Region: Highland  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Travel-retail

SCOTLAND



### Rob

**Nose:** A gentle hint of sherry mixed with some sweet farmyard notes, goats cheese and maple syrup. Chocolate-covered honeycomb and a slight hint of menthol, almost eucalyptus oil.

**Palate:** Gentle at first, with plenty of chocolate eclairs, vanilla toffee and grilled peaches.

Then the spices slowly start to build with cardamom and cumin, as well as a black pepper tingle.

**Finish:** The spices take hold, a slight chilli heat then it dries into sweet vanilla fudge.

**Comments:** A delightful whisky that really makes you smile.

8.8

### Becky

**Nose:** An immediate sense of waxiness, like sweaty cheese and thick, set honey, then chewy toffees, milk chocolate, mint Matchmakers and – quite surprisingly – Moutai baijiu.

**Palate:** Lighter than the nose suggests, with lots of smooth milk chocolate and honey-soaked stone fruit, before chilli spice emerges with green aloe and eucalyptus notes.

**Finish:** Chocolate-covered raisins and dried chilli flakes.

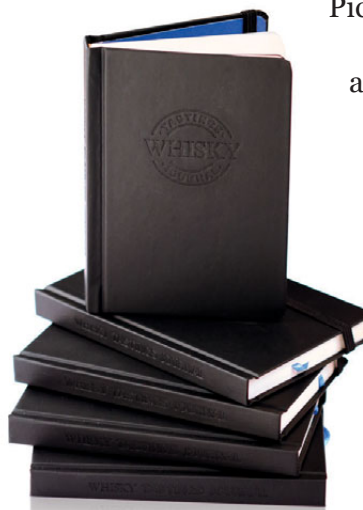
**Comments:** If you couldn't get away for a holiday this summer, this whisky certainly will.

8.4



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## Teeling Whiskey Blackpitts Peated Single Malt

TEELING WHISKEY CO.

ABV: 46.0%  
Style: Single Malt  
Region: N/A  
Price per bottle: ●●●●●  
Bottling: Distillery  
Availability: Worldwide

REP. OF IRELAND



### Rob

**Nose:** Sweet, smoky and with a hint of seaweed and brown sugar.

There's a lovely fruity side to this too, lemon wedges baked with trout, poached apples in cider, spaghetti vongole.

**Palate:** All those fruits come flooding in to the palate, tinned exotic fruit salad, vanilla sugar and then a really salted ham edge takes over.

**Finish:** All the smoke and seaweed from the nose returns to dry nice and slowly.

**Comments:** Initially this is like hugging a wet dog from the sea, but is nicely balanced with this fruity, sweet side too. Great stuff.

9.1

### Becky

**Nose:** The sweet, fruity and estery aroma of well-made new make, gentle maritime smoke and subtle vanilla cask influence. Lemon zest, crisp green apples and cooked pears. Then clamshells and the faint smoke of a bonfire.

**Palate:** More fruits with a creamy texture, like a zesty lemon meringue pie. There's poached pears and vanilla ice cream before the smoke builds to centre stage.

**Finish:** Salty, meaty, all grilled fish and bonfire.

**Comments:** Youthful but with precise balance. A peated Irish single malt to rival the might of Islay.

9.0



“Wow, serious aromatic elements here, a full-on spice drawer of a whiskey”

Rob Allanson



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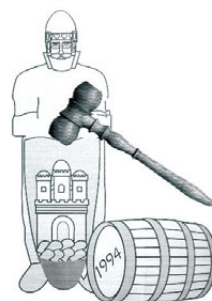
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**"My advice is to understand the importance of scale in this business and to source the biggest kit you can possibly afford (and even bigger, if possible)."**

Daniel Szor, CEO of Cotswolds Distillery

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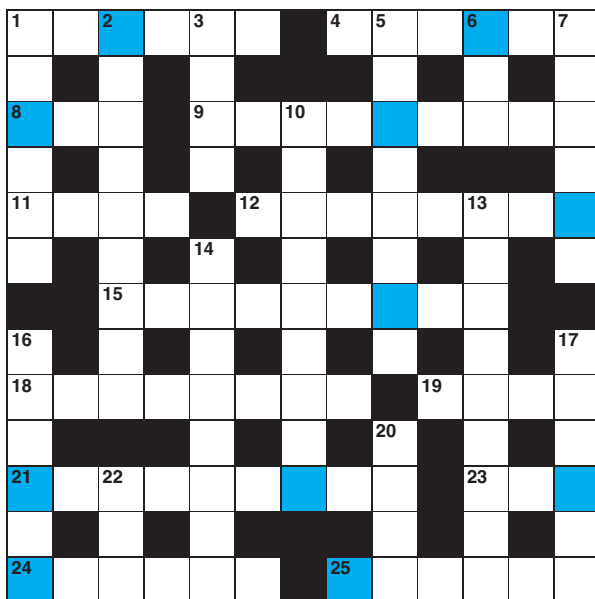
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# PUZZLES

Welcome to our puzzles page. Make sure you enter the Unlock the Whisky Label competition (see below for details) and send your entry to [editor@whiskymag.com](mailto:editor@whiskymag.com) for your chance to win a bottle of great whisky. UK & EU entrants only.

## WHISKY MAGAZINE CRYPTIC CROSSWORD



Finish the crossword and rearrange the shaded letters to spell a Scottish distillery (8).

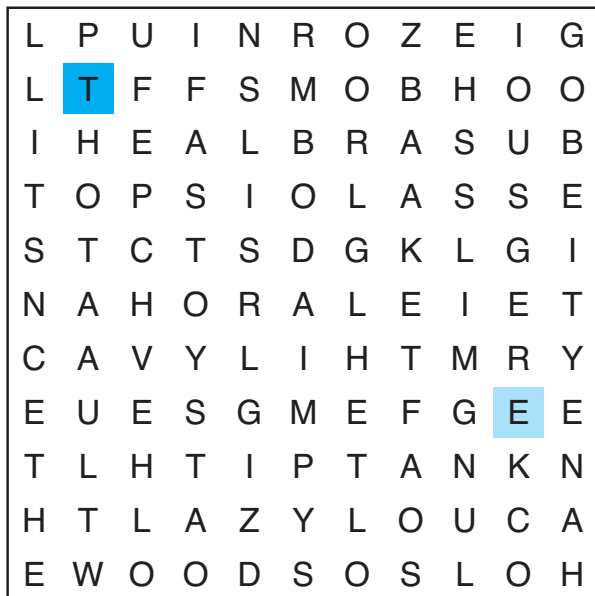
### ACROSS

- 1 Loose change for writer to cope without work (5)
- 4 Slogan of game family (3,4)
- 8 Firm's backing putting label on figure (7)
- 9 Meadow flower round mouth of a bullock? (5)
- 10 Help! I ran hastily from clutches of fish (7)
- 12 Worry about large Cambridge college (5)
- 14 Leaving Alec, crazy and zealous (11)
- 18 Even nuisances hide boredom (5)
- 19 Main pit reorganised for drums (7)
- 21 Moved horse to ring in Wild West activity (5)
- 23 Turning device either way (7)
- 24 Interrogate returning journalist using few words (7)
- 25 Savage heifer? A little bit (5)

### DOWN

- 1 Dance and point, quick! (6)
- 2 Moving pronto, short archdeacon reaches verdict (3,6)
- 3 For example, no good rising to incite (3,2)
- 4 Hazel returns beer cask (3)
- 5 Coaching without a stew of dumplings (7)
- 6 I will shortly be unwell (3)
- 7 Catches sight of Eastern agents (6)
- 11 Turn your gaze from a French green (5)
- 13 Altar base could be a type of gypsum (9)
- 15 Wild boar in one African city (7)
- 16 Grow angry returning qualifications – not great (3,3)
- 17 One king and another in code backing area bordering Cheshire (6)
- 20 Foreign word needs one feminine design (5)
- 22 Dreadfully bad flatfish (3)
- 23 Match official needed, concerning initial foul (3)

## WHISKY TASTINGS WORDSEARCH



Starting with the shaded letter, move up or down or sideways (but not diagonally) to find a path through these UK whisky bars. The last letter of the trail has also been shaded.



## UNLOCK THE WHISKY LABELS

All you have to do is identify the five bottle labels. A clue is that the bottles are shown somewhere within the magazine. Once you have the correct answer email it to [editor@whiskymag.com](mailto:editor@whiskymag.com) and the first correct answer drawn out of the hat will win a bottle of whisky. Good luck! Congratulations to Malcom Campbell for guessing last edition's. Puzzle answers will be shown in WM171. UK & EU entrants only.





WORDS JOE BATES

## THREE STILLs AND A TRAVELLER

*In this issue, Tony Roberts of Three Stills Company Ltd. reveals his tips for travel and his most memorable experiences*

**I**n this edition we meet up with Three Stills Company Ltd. co-founder Tony Roberts, a veteran traveller who's visited more than 85 countries in his career.

**What have been some of the most memorable and interesting countries and places that your work has taken you to over the years?**

I am fortunate enough to have travelled to 85 countries throughout my career. It's a little sad I know, but I still get ridiculously excited when I am about to visit a new country and can add to that total. I love the sense of adventure and the unknown. I absolutely love Canada and Lebanon.

I really enjoy Asia but in particular, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand. I am also a big fan of the African continent. A trip to an African country is a great test for my planning obsession (where absolutely anything that can go wrong, will go wrong!) and also cleanliness. I was once served a very large measure of whisky in Ghana with one big ice cube that had a massive bluebottle fly frozen in the middle! I drank the whisky as quickly as possible to avoid the ice cube melting!

**What whiskies and other spirits do you like to buy in duty free when travelling overseas?**

I nearly always start in the wine section

just in case there are some gems in there, but I am usually disappointed. Le Clos at Dubai Airport is one very good exception to this and it stocks a lot of magnums as well. I always browse the Scotch whisky section, mainly for professional reasons, but occasionally to buy a heavily peated malt for my father (as he won't drink any other style!) and these days I take a good look at both gin and vodka.

**What's the most memorable dram that you've had on your travels?**

In the last 12 months I was lucky enough to be given a small taste of a 30-year-old Springbank Single Cask whisky in a whisky bar in Sofia, Bulgaria



“ I am fortunate enough to have travelled to 85 countries throughout my career ”

– that was very special. However, the most memorable was probably tasting the Glenfiddich 50 Years Old at an event in Calgary, Alberta. An hour after the event, the room was still full of the aroma of the whisky!

**What's your favourite airport and why is that?**

I do like T5 at Heathrow but, internationally, any airport that is efficiently run and minimises your time clearing passport control and customs. That usually means Asia, so [Hong Kong] Chek Lap Kok, [Singapore] Changi and [Bangkok] Suvarnabhumi have all been pretty good in my experience.

**You must spend a lot of time on the road. What travel tips do you want to pass on to our readers?**

My trick is to adjust my watch to the destination time as the last thing I do before I pull on my eye-mask. When I wake, I don't think about the time difference or what the time is where I have come from – but try to bluff my body that I have slept well and it really is now 6am in London.

In the drinks industry, it is quite often required to be out late at night checking out bars and clubs that have our brands. This can be disruptive to sleep, so I have learned to grab 20 minutes sat in the back of a taxi or even at my desk when I worked in Miami and had arrived on the red-eye at 6am from Los Angeles!

**If you had 24 hours to spare, what city in the world would you most like to explore?**

Of all the cities I haven't been to, Tokyo would be the one. Of the cities that I have been to, but not had the chance

to explore properly, it would definitely have to be Athens.

**Once we can all travel again, what Three Stills Co. whiskies available in TR should travellers look out for?**


Our blended malt whisky, Lower East Side, is receiving rave reviews and won Best in Category at the Hong Kong Spirits Awards in 2019. It is a very easy-drinking style of malt.

**Tell us about a funny, strange or unusual thing that happened to you on your travels.**

I was once in a nightclub in Douala in Cameroon where one of my whisky brands was on promotion that night. Suddenly, all the lights in the club were switched on and the music stopped. The club was swarming with soldiers looking for people without the correct paperwork. I had stupidly not taken my passport out with me. I had a soldier jabbing the butt of a semi-automatic rifle repeatedly into my chest and by the look in his eyes I suspected he was on something, so I was very wary that his finger might just twitch a little too much on the trigger!

Fortunately, my distributor managed to smuggle us out of the back door into a waiting car and we got out of there. I can laugh about it now!

**You've been shipwrecked on a desert island. Which whisky would you like to find washed up on the shore?**

If it has been washed up, then hopefully it had been in the sea for quite a few years. With that in mind it would ideally be a bottle of The Macallan 18 Years Old from the 1990s when the whisky was like nectar! 





## ISLAND LIFE

*In each edition we ask one of the industry's great and good to tell us what they would take with them to our island*

**D**ave Broom is no stranger to *Whisky Magazine* readers, I wouldn't hesitate to say to most people in the whisky world. Commentator, writer, star of big and little screen and font of knowledge, it is worth checking out his new website The Whisky Manual [thewhiskymanual.uk] to see what he has been up to.



### WHISKY #1

#### Talisker

57° North

For me, this is as close to the old Talisker 8 Years Old, which was my whisky lightbulb moment and made me fall in love with whisky in the first place. It always has to be there. It is strong and smoky, but also oily and sweet, and is everything you want from a Talisker. I remember drinking the old 8 Years Old one night heading to a ceilidh, in Assynt (the far north-west of Scotland) and it struck me that it was from this kind of landscape. It spoke to me emotionally, rather than simply being a beverage. This was when I decided I had to know more about this because it's magical.

great session drams. But the Johns Lane is the 100 per cent pot still and it's Powers on steroids. It is big, rich, huge fruit, hedonistic deliciousness.

### WHISKY #4

#### Craigellachie

13 Years Old

A great dram, which was pretty much unknown until my dear friend Stephen Marshall masterminded its proper launch. It is magnificent. As a new make it is really sulphury and it takes a while for that to work itself out, but when it does you get this incredible heavy floral character coming through. A good contrast to the others I have chosen so far. It will also remind me of amazing times in this awesome little village that is home to three of the world's greatest whisky bars.

### WHISKY #2

#### Hakushu

12 Years Old

An extraordinary distillery that again seems to distil its sense of place. It is in this amazing forest at the foot of a huge granite mountain. All Hakushus have this intense, green, grassy, mossy fragrance to them, even the smoky ones. It is a great example of a whisky that seems to be fragile and delicate but has a huge amount of complexity to it.

### WHISKY #5

#### Compass Box

Hedonism

A great whisky, blended grain loveliness, all thanks to the genius of John Glaser. Imagine, the first whisky he released after leaving Diageo is a blended grain. No one was bottling grain seriously until he did. It is utterly gorgeous, and I think it changed people's view on how great grain whisky can be, and how complex.


### WHISKY #3

#### Power's

Johns Lane

This is a wonderful single pot still in the old Dublin style. The 'standard' (if you can use such a terrible word) is this ludicrously drinkable, juicy, peachy, but also kind of oily whiskey, one of the

### A BRIEF FINAL LUXURY

A lifetime supply of pens and paper, because I would have to be able to write and sketch. 







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