



# SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW™

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[www.LFW.co.uk](http://www.LFW.co.uk)

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## THE WHISKY TRAIN

It is with some humility that I offer to you, dear customer, this edition's interview feature—but enough people have persuaded me that it was as important to our customers to know about their retailer, as their blender, or whoever.

During the preparation of that piece I realised that this first column is in the habit of picking fights, of being 'outspoken' and that I 'cry a shovel a shuil'. A read of page 2 will describe how this column is a spontaneous thing. On several occasions I have set out to applaud the industry but have been over-ridden by the 'rant' in me.

Let's see if I get on any better this time. Of late a frequent victim of my comments has been Diageo, 'the-company-formerly-known-as-GrandMet' or United Distillers and Vintners, not because they are the worst players in the trade but because this is the company for which there is the most hope. I gave up on the lost causes of Allied Domeq and Pernod/Campbell years ago.

Imagine my delight to observe the result of our UDV 'rep' after having attended a four day seminar on Scotch Whisky at Lochnagar Distillery. I have no idea what they did to him but in went a very acceptable salesman, confident in the selling of spirits and out came a knowledgeable, enthusiastic and enlightened ambassador for the Scotch Whisky industry!

So it can be done with training.

The important thing is to see that the right people are getting the training—not just the foot-soldiers and overseas importers, but the bosses, the company directors and brand managers—those responsible for promoting their product, for preserving the industry's heritage and distilleries which they and their companies are merely custodians.

The core gripe of this column has been that the ignorant are being given control of the industry. If that's the way it's going to be then would someone please enlighten them, rather than have me shouting in a bucket on my own.



## “SNIFF THE INSIDES OF OLD BOATS”

Pip Hill's advice (page 10) gives us an excuse to publish this nice photo in what is otherwise a slow picture season. *Isabella Fortuna* is a 1890 east coast lugger which has been restored by the Wick Society with assistance from Pulteney Distillery.

## RELEASES:

### CULT & POPULAR

This spring sees the return of the cult whisky—Ardbeg 10 years old—with a super-charged, non chill-filtered, 46%, peaty monster to confound your taste-buds! Heated yet inevitable debate amongst aficionados rages as to whether it is as peaty as the old Hiram Walker Ardbeg 10yo. It is proving very successful and you don't have to be a peat-head to enjoy its complexity.

Wm Grant, owners of the World's number one single malt, Glenfiddich, have released the results of 'Project Phoenix'—Glenfiddich with an age statement; not an 8yo as last stated but a very grown up 12yo. This will contribute significantly to rebuilding the brand's status amongst malt snobs who have in the past enjoyed dismissing the popular expression.

## WHISKY FESTIVALS:

### SPEYSIDE...

Upon publication of this SWR there is time for you to organise trips to one or both of the forthcoming whisky festivals.

The massive Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival runs from 28th April to 8th May and features over 250 events involving whisky, food and music.

### ...AND NOW ISLAY!

Feis Ile, the Islay Festival, will include a week-long series of whisky events as well as other island activities.

The programme, deliberately low key, will feature each distillery and distillery manager and give participants unique insight into the production, stories and culture that go into making their favourite dram. Feis Ile runs from 29th May to 3rd June.

More details of both on the back page.



**The February/March issue of Whisky Magazine featured an interview between Editor Charlie MacLean and Loch Fyne Whiskies boss, Richard Joynson.**

**With a little encouragement from our customers, we offer the unpurged version of that long lunch.**

**CM: Why have a shop in mid-Argyll?**

The shop provides us with the means to live in the most beautiful part of the British Isles.

My family bought a holiday house here 30 years ago and I became fully resident in 1985 when, as a fish farm manager, I raised venture capital to create *Atlantic Freshwater plc*. I built and managed a large salmon hatchery on the shore of Loch Fyne. I loved it! It had dams, milllades, large water heaters and exchangers, tanks—just like a distillery! I still regard myself as a fish farmer in real life! Lyndsay joined me in 1990 and when the writing appeared on the wall for salmon farms—a poor market and major disease problems—we cast around for an alternative occupation which in this area mostly involves either a fishing net, a chain saw, or the least likely for me at that time, the tourist dollar.

While considering a shop for sale in Inveraray, eight miles from home, we thought that if we were to sell anything it should be: portable, top quality, Scottish made, well packaged, high value, desirable, non-perishable (fish farmer, remember), doesn't depreciate, have no creditors and have a good profit margin. With the exception of the profit, Scotch, and very little else, fits all the criteria. I knew very little about whisky then except that I enjoyed drinking the stuff, but I was aware of the increasing interest in malts and was surprised to discover that there were only two specialist whisky shops listed in Yellow Pages at that time. I remember handing Michael Jackson's *World Guide to Whisky* to Lyndsay and asking her to count the number of available malts and bottlings while I took the dogs for a walk. We decided that the 170 or so malts that she had noted would be enough to stock a small shop, so we bought it. I then started 'mugging-up' and only

then realised that whisky was such a wide and stimulating subject.

Of the two specialists in the yellow pages, one had gone bust—'oh no!' we thought! The other was Frank Clark's Cairngorm Whisky Centre. When I phoned Frank to discuss our plans, he invited us to Aviemore and gave us buckets of good advice and encouragement. Frank's friendship has been a great asset to our business, particularly if you consider we could be competitors although Frank and I don't see it that way.

We had a ridiculous and unnecessary struggle to get a licence in Inveraray and in the interim we opened a tasting room and shop within a hotel on Loch Lomond—we opened our second shop before our first! That tasting room was the best education I could hope for. Without much outlay I learned what the customers wanted, what I could sell and what was dead stock. We kept the tasting room for a further year but gave it up as it was a time consuming and expensive diversion. The seasonal nature of west coast tourism is why we began the mail order side. Visitor trade and mail order fit well, a busy summer and a quiet pre-Christmas in the shop permit smooth mail order processing. We opened our main shop in Autumn 1993 and started advertising our nascent mail order business.

**CM: How do you attract customers.**

I suspect I am addicted to advertising. It is like a drug; it creates paranoia, is expensive and there are plenty of pushers about. But like Tommy Dewar said, advertise or fossilise. The positive PR is very satisfying because that has to be earned rather than paid for.

Initially the lesson was very expensive. There was no whisky magazine or direct way of reaching enthusiasts. We spent a considerable sum in the Sunday broadsheets in the weeks running up to Christmas and while plenty of people requested our list they then disappeared! We realised that merely sending out a list of weird Scottish words with prices was inadequate, so to try and recover some income from our expensive list of names we had to educate. That's why I began to write the *Scotch Whisky Review*.

**CM: Why has the SWR such a good reputation?**

It beats me! For me it is just the vehicle through which I communicate my own love of whisky in our own way. Lyndsay is a very important factor in its creation which is entirely in-house; we take a disk to a printer and he outputs it.

The SWR has generated a great deal of respect within the industry, some of whom call it the Scotch Private Eye, an undeserved handle and I wish I could do more along those lines. In truth I wish I had never started it—while it has contributed to our success it is a real rod for my back—for a month twice a year I turn into an irritable, neurotic 'editor' in the run up to printing!

Thankfully there are plenty of wise people willing to contribute and assist.

The interview is the most respected part and we are very grateful to the 'victims', all of whom have been very supportive—to date we have had only one refusal. We were spoiled with the first interviewee [UD's Alan Rutherford] and thought it would always be easy but it can be hard to report unique information without alienating the contributor, a difficult balance that requires considerable persuasion at times!

**CM: I enjoy your editorials.**

I get the most comments about that first column. I wish I knew who writes it! The day before I drive to the printers, we proof read and typeset everything and by midnight it's ready—except for the first column for which I haven't a clue what it is going to be about! Sometimes I start a rant about one thing and it turns into a completely different subject, deleting the initial story.

The first column is where I let off steam. I'm very proud of some, they have very well structured arguments—not at all like me!

**CM: What is your stocking policy?**

Whisky only—we're specialists. We try to stock everything of interest to us and our customers, an impossible task given the unsupportable injustice of duty-free exclusives and similar scams. I carry all of the proprietary malts of quality or realistic value and where available an independent and a cask strength alternative. We also offer unusual blends of different ages and styles, including our own Loch Fyne, my pride and joy. Finally we have a variety of whisky-ware from whisky marmalade to whisky toothpaste, in case an infidel comes in who doesn't want to buy a bottle.

**CM: How many lines do you stock?**

I don't know. By the time we get to number six or seven we're too intoxicated to count any further with accuracy! I refuse to get into the numbers game, it is not relevant and one specialist offering so many more than another makes them no better. I see these guys now boasting over 1,000 malts to choose from—that's not great, that's confusing to the customer and indicates to me someone who has lost control of his stock and his business! I can get more if required but it never is; everyone seems happy with our offering.

Apart from those in our stock list, we have a stash of bin-ends that never get listed (or sold!) and the 'collector's loft', an arrangement of copper pipes above our heads in the shop supporting a number of oddities and discontinued bottles for our more enthusiastic collectors.

**CM: Do you collect whiskies?**

No, I don't collect anything really—whisky books perhaps, but there is nothing I can't do without, the definition of a collector I suppose.

Life is too short and besides I'm a great guzzler and believe that is why whisky

was given to us, not to revere.

But that's just me, collectors are a very important part of our business and it is important to work hard on their behalf. One of my jobs is to try and communicate to the producers what is wanted. The whole show is customer driven, it has to be. We try to anticipate what people will want and will like and not to get sidetracked by the insignificant.

**CM: Who are your customers and what do they want?**

Tourists, collectors and consumers. I really enjoy the tourists, those who come in for curiosity and in the best of cases we get the chance to talk to them about whisky and invariably sell them a bottle. We all get great pleasure taking on someone who claims they don't like whisky; we argue that most people who drink a few shots of *Long John* when they are fifteen have every right to believe that Scotch is not their tippie. We then coax them with our tasting cupboard and in the majority of instances persuade them that they do like whisky, confirmed with a sale!

**CM: Which whiskies do you use for this conversion?**

It usually only takes one, the trick is knowing which one for which person. The sure fire hit is *Springbank* 21yo and we make a lot of noise about selling a non-whisky drinker a forty-five pound bottle! Just as successful is our first house malt, *Inverarity* 10yo, and believe it or not the *Loch Fyne*, further confirmation that we have a very successful drink there.

**CM: And the collectors and consumers?**

Collectors look for nicely packaged, and often limited edition, variations of mainstream malts, malts which are a real alternative to the original, not just a marketing wheeze or at least the wise ones are a bit more cynical. Collectors buy to keep, for decoration and in the hope of an increase in value.

Consumers can legitimately be called connoisseurs, they look for good or exceptional whiskies to enjoy now. Their needs are far more wide ranging and draw equally from the producers and independent bottlers. The dram is important, not the package.

From the consumer's perspective, the official and independent bottlers are mutually supportive and compatible. I know there are several producers who throw a fit at the very idea of independent bottlers but I don't think they have thought it through properly. Loyalty to one brand just doesn't exist among malt whisky drinkers. I'm a Rolling Stones fan but it's not as if I'll only listen to the Stones; the same with the 'Laphroaig man'. Single Malt Scotch Whisky drinkers seek expressions and not distilleries. It is the ability of those distilleries and the independent bottlers to make available the variety of expressions that confounds the marketing

men who are used to the sanctity of the branded trade mark, fine with petrol or cola but not malts.

Often customers will phone and say "Have you tried this new release? What's it like?" I will open a bottle that I expect will have promise and test it over the counter, gauge the reaction. If good it goes in the tasting cupboard and is a pleasure to sell but I do have a very large number of 'rejects'.

It's a sad fact that our customers keep us much better informed about new and limited edition bottlings than the whisky companies do.

Connoisseurs have their favourites to which they return, but they do like to explore and experiment. Producers have to spend some of the extra profit generated from malts wooing these roving consumers to make sure they get their bite of the cherry.

**CM: Spending profits—the shareholders won't appreciate that!**

I believe that throughout business in the world, inadequate managers are blaming shareholders for their unpopular decisions. I've had very serious, successful institutional shareholders at the fish farm AGMs and they were never so obsessed with their profits that they would not support something more esoteric.

## there's too much caution

**CM: What is your view of the whisky market at the moment?**

The passions which whisky arouses in the consumer are, in my view, not sufficiently catered to by many whisky companies. There is a monstrous imbalance. Although they pay lip service to putting the consumers first and supplying what they need, this is not done.

Few companies seem to be listening. They see what the others are doing and, like sheep, they follow. There is not enough innovation or imagination. It's not about yet more wood finishes but finding or creating market niches, and genuinely new products. Our *Living Cask* for example. For a while and before the take over, United Distillers wacked out a bunch of innovative variations such as *Bell's* ready-mixed with *Irn Bru*, *Bell's* and chillies (*Red Devil*) and *Loch Dhu*—which gained no support from me, a poor spirit too closely aligned with single malts and it defamed Mannochnore Distillery. But I did applaud *Red Devil* (and made no comment about the ready mixes). But now they are all gone! They gave up! You must persevere, if you launch something you should have thought it out.

There's too much caution and too much me-too-ism. And portfolio streamlining, the lazy only want to promote one product for each sector and so they dump great brands without regard for their heritage or potential.

There are managers who are exceptions to this of course, many as passionate as me or my customers but they are getting the 'squeeze'.

**CM: Now we are on the third bottle, any more comments?**

Yes, this one's for the collectors, I alluded to it earlier. Why is the international traveller given access to the duty-free exclusive while the stay-at-home collector is deprived?

Why can't retailers like me have access to the same stock, never mind the price, to supply those who don't travel the world on a frequent basis? At least that way the collector can fulfil his collection without trying to find some one travelling through Rio or wherever.

**CM: Keep going...**

(Cheers!) This nonsense of not supplying 75cl bottles to the home market—Europe requires 70cl (thanks France!), the rest of the world (and duty free), 75cl. "Oh Richard I'd like to sell you some—but it's 75cl stock". So what? Ask the trading standards people and they say the 70cl rule is only a European technicality and they would only be concerned if there were several complaints that we were supplying 75s and, unless there was an attempt to deceive they would not take it any further—sounds reasonable given that it is 7% over the norm. Ask the feeble minded managers and they say they have asked their legal people and been told 'no'. Lawyers have no interest in imagination, customer requirements or profits even. It's much easier to say no and then forget it!

To top all that, some of those that have refused me for this reason have then sold 75s through their distillery—hypocrisy! Fine if they want to cut out the retailer, but let's be honest about it!

**CM: How do you account for LFW's success?**

Simple, treating our customers as we would wish to be treated ourselves. Understanding the importance of the suppliers, (despite my rants), and I must applaud Andy and Laura who work with me in the shop—thanks guys, now get back to work!

**CM: Before you part, what's your desert island dram?**

I'm a beer drinker, a pint of heavy.

**CM: Alright! What's your favourite whisky?**

The (award winning) Loch Fyne.

**CM: Richard! Play the game!**

It's true! Otherwise a well-matured blend. If your offering, Whyte & Mackay 21yo; if I'm paying, Johnnie Walker Black Label's fine—in spirits I prefer the symphony rather than the screaming guitar solo!

## CUNNING COMBINATIONS

Iain Stothard of Highland Distillers successfully refereed the second Loch Fyne Whiskies Heilan' Banquet at the George Hotel in December. On the menu was; A starter of Seared Breast of Pigeon with crispy bacon, green lentils and celeriac chips accompanied by 18yo Highland Park. The fish course was 12yo Bunnahabhain with a trio of Loch Fyne Salmon, bound with whisky and oatmeal cream. Lightly smoked fillet of Scotch beef on a stew of pearl barley with wild mushrooms served on a truffle and red wine sauce was accompanied by the Macallan 18yo and the surprise of the evening was the mating of Poached Pear with vanilla cream pastry and champagne syrup with The Famous Grouse, without doubt the great talking point of the evening!

Wishing to take this wonderful experience of food with the dram further, we asked acclaimed food writer Richard Whittington to give us his pointers on preparing your own whisky banquet at home.

### ADVENTURES IN TASTE

by Richard Whittington

For more than a year I have been exploring the malt whisky dinner, an occasion where malt whiskies are drunk throughout a five course meal. This is far from the dauntingly alcoholic experience it sounds, since only five small measures are served and these, after the first sip, are usually slightly diluted with water. When dinner is over, an unlimited amount of rare cask strength whiskies are available, but that's entirely up to the individual. You build the hangover of your choice or leave virtuous. The choice is yours.

Each malt is served in a different kind of wine glass, a way of emphasising the individuality of each malt while the glasses give a better opportunity to savour their aroma. Every dinner is different—different cultural or national themes and different emphases—but all share the same process of taste discovery. Each brings its own revelations and each reinforces the pleasure of eating and drinking. These are not only dinners of discovery but also hedonistic tastings in which the whisky draws attention to aspects of the food and vice versa.

The sponsor of this year of eating and drinking is United Distillers & Vintners, the dinners being particularly linked to the company's Classic Malts, a selection of whiskies that are representative of styles related to topography and geography. Thus Lowland, Highland and Island whiskies are presented with dishes that balance their unique characteristics.

The dinners have been approached purely on the basis of taste. Although there is no rule book that governs the drinking of spirits, serving them with food allows us to break free from the constraints imposed by received wisdom, the historic hows and whys of spirit consumption. I believe the next decade will see malt whisky dinners taken seriously, for they let people explore their sense of taste in a unique way. They also have a perfectly decent historic imperative. The widespread consumption of wine with lunch and dinner outside wine-producing countries is a comparatively recent phenomenon and, until recently, a habit indulged only within a small and privileged social group.

One of the most important things the project has thrown up has been the identification of "killer combinations"—that is partnerships of food and drink that work so well and appeal so universally to everybody's

tastes that they act almost as revelations to the palate. Examples of this are The Loch Fyne blend with hot-smoked salmon or smoked cods' roe with a warm potato salad accompanied by Talisker, which is also the perfect accompaniment for a jugged kipper. Black Pudding is delicious between sips of Oban while Lagavulin, one of the smokiest and most powerful of the island malts, is superb with salty Roquefort or Lanark blue. Some killer combinations are surprising: Glenkinchie with Japanese-style raw fish is sensational, while Cardhu is the perfect partner for any pudding containing vanilla. Sausages in all their many forms are particularly good with a wide range of malt whiskies and given that a haggis is really nothing more than an over-sized sausage, this is not really surprising. Texture is very important. Pieces of simply treated meat cry out for a glass of wine and as a general rule, wine-based sauces should be avoided. Dinners are only one way of exploring malt whiskies with food. There is also the fast growing enjoyment of what the Spanish call tapas and most of the Mediterranean countries call meze—delicious small dishes designed to heighten the enjoyment of the drink taken with them, foods which are eats-with-drinks. Tapas bars specialize in one or two dishes, leading to constant movement of people eating chicken livers in one and tripe in another, both incidentally happy partners for malt whisky. We tend to think of tapas as being automatically accompanied by sherry and wine, yet whisky is an increasingly likely alternative. In this context it is interesting to note that Spain's malt whisky preference is for Cardhu, a honeyed whisky with identifiable vanilla back-notes, while J & B Rare is the country's number one blended Scotch. Tapas served selectively with malts that partner their unique flavours is an intriguing spin on the larger and more formal whisky dinners. They are really only canapés by another name. Try serving délices au Roquefort—a thick, set cheese béchamel coated in egg and fine crumbs and deep-fried—parmesan shortbread, haggis tarts, spicy sausages and scotched quails eggs with a range of different malts to explore the dining experience in microcosm.

There are no absolutes in all of this and there is no shame in the odd failure for this is something you can only prove by doing it. As they say, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. And of course, in what you drink with it.

## OLD MALT CASK

new bottlings in our list

A new independent bottler has made their way onto our list—we're a bit fussy about who we invite.

Douglas Laing and Co was founded in 1950 and now enjoy considerable success as Scotch Whisky Blenders. Producing the King of Scots and McGibbons whiskies which are sold almost entirely in the export market in premium packaging (ceramics), they won the Queen's award for export in 1990.

Since the days of the company's creation they have been laying down stocks of whiskies for their blends and now, with millions of pounds of stock to hand the sons of the founder have decided this is the time to make some of their best casks available as single malts. For this reason Loch Fyne Whiskies are delighted to list their *Old Malt Cask* range of non-chill-filtered single malts bottled at 50% alc. (The rationale of 50% is to reach parity in duty charges to avoid confusion in export markets and price consistency in the range).

The packaging is consistent with the company's expertise in such matters and the information on the label is complete including the number of bottles being made available from the cask.



### CHILL-FILTERING

In the mid-1960s, the Scotch Whisky industry introduced a policy of chill-filtering their whiskies, this is done by reducing the temperature to minus 8-10°C and filtering through paper filters to remove oils that emulsify at low temperatures, giving the whisky greater clarity and eliminated clouding at low temperatures e.g. when ice is added.

The process also removes many of the quality features of nose and taste from the whisky and now, after the lead set by Pip Hills and the Scotch Malt Whisky Society, very few independent bottlings and many official bottlings (e.g. the new Ardbeg 10yo) are not chill-filtered. This leaves the full body, resonance and glory of the original distillation and the secret of the wood in the bottle.

Similarly there is a movement away from the use of spirit caramel colouring in single malts, employed to standardise colour in the bottle.





# The LOCH FYNE™

Blend of

## SCOTCH WHISKIES



### THE DISTILLERY

Our label depicts the Glendarroch Distillery sited on the Crinan Canal that links Loch Fyne with the Sound of Jura. Also known as Glenfyne, the distillery was built in 1831. A succession of owners held the distillery until 1919 when it came under the ownership of the Glenfyne Distillery Co.

The cameo by Gail Gordon depicts the distillery at the time of Alfred Barnard's visit in 1885. Barnard's detailed description of the buildings enabled us to recreate the floor plan and Gail was able to complete her task from this combined with etchings in his book.

Barnard was clearly taken by the setting, the distillery and hospitality afforded him. His book devotes six pages to his visit, much taken up with details of the buildings e.g. "a new kiln, one of the finest we have seen in Scotland, it is 51 feet square" but also with the location: "It is built at the foot of the Robber's Glen which runs upwards from the banks of the canal into the heart of the hills in the background; this glen was once the haunt of smugglers, and no more romantic spot could have been chosen for the distillery."

Glendarroch was complete and well laid out. Barley was unloaded from the canal direct to the malt barns then moved through the process clockwise around a courtyard to the kiln, tun room, still house and warehouses. Whisky was then shipped to market via the canal. Eight houses were available for the workers and two for the excisemen. There was also Glengilp House and Glendarroch House for the manager and the owner respectively. At the end of his day's visit Barnard's party "donned our 'war paint' and proceeded to Glendarroch House to enjoy the hospitality of the owner".

The distillery closed in 1937, unusually as there was a distilling boom at that time, although the warehouses continued to be used for storing whisky until the mid seventies. A brief life as a joinery followed until the eighties when a salmon hatchery made use of the buildings and water which was also the drinking water supply for Lochgilphead.

In 1990 the Regional Council acquired the water rights and every last trace of the distillery has since been removed.

*Additional Information*

**Brian Townsend, SCOTCH MISSED.**

### THE MALT DRINKERS BLEND™

We're very proud of our unique blend created for us by Professor Ronnie Martin, O.B.E., former Production Director of industry leader United Distillers. Jim Murray included The Loch Fyne in his book *Classic Blended Scotch*, describing it as 'something to celebrate'.

Slightly sweet and slightly smoky, The Loch Fyne appeals to malt whisky fans as an easy-drinking, well flavoured blended whisky; something to drink and enjoy rather than concentrate on. We have given The Loch Fyne to the three top professional tasting writers and while all enjoy it, their tasting notes are completely different—proof that it is something for everyone!

Michael Jackson's note is characteristically analytical;

*Colour: rich, sunny, gold.*

*Aroma: fruity (honeydew melon?)*

*Body: medium, slightly syrupy.*

*Flavours: light heather-honey, grassy, fragrant, smokiness develops, especially in the finish.*

With typical eloquence, Charlie MacLean's tasting note wins by a nose: "The deep amber colour of this whisky, (darker than many blends) implies age and this is supported by the (undilute) nose, which is rich and vinous, with no trace of grain. All the indications of mature fillings. There is an interesting aroma of apple dumpling (suet crust), and this remains when water is added, enlivened by lighter citric notes (oranges and tangerines), and by some oil-related aromas (walnuts, linseed oil). Phenolic notes are slight, and express themselves more as 'roast meat' than peat smoke. Medicinal phenols are present in a very slight trace of oilskins. Overall the nose is subtle and relatively closed. Not much water is needed for this whisky.

The mouth-feel is smooth and well balanced, engaging the whole palate with acidic, salty, sweet and dry flavours, and coming down ultimately on the side of sweetness. The overall impression is fresh and smooth—mellow without being flat. The finish is quick and clean, and surprisingly warming. It is extremely easy to drink. Conclusion: A true premium blend which has clearly used well matured fillings. There is no harshness in it, no cereal notes or feints, no artificial caramel notes. A whisky which is appropriate for any time of the day.

**"Perilously smooth, mellow and easy to drink."**



### IWSC BRONZE 1996

Soon after its launch The Loch Fyne won the bronze award in the blended whisky class at the influential International Wine & Spirit Competition. The Gold Medal went to the world's top selling Scotch, Johnnie Walker Red Label.

More praise comes from Carol Shaw's Collins Gem 'Whisky' which describes The Loch Fyne as 'A malt drinker's blend, full flavoured, with a raisiny, sweet spiced nose, mellow smoothness of taste and a warming finish. A very easy to drink whisky.'

All this praise is supported by the rate of sale in the shop after a wee taster!



LOCH FYNE	70cl	£ 14.60
GIFT PACK + DRAM GLASS		£ 17.60
LOCH FYNE	20cl	£ 5.90
LOCH FYNE	10cl	£ 3.90
LOCH FYNE miniature	5cl	£ 2.60



*“The wonderful thing about whisky, apart of course, from drinking it, is that it contains more bluffing elements than almost any other subject—far more than supply-side economics, more even than wine. Wine breeds envy, discord and snobbery, whisky promotes fellowship, amiability and quiet, unassuming superiority. Supply-side economics produced Donald Trump.”*

**David Milstead**

*Bluffer's Guide to Whisky*

## NEW CUSTOMER PAGE

The busy summer season in the shop gives Loch Fyne Whiskies the chance to welcome new customers to our growing band of happy whisky fans. The following pages are for those who are developing an interest in the marvels of Scotch Whisky. We feature some explanation of the bottlings from our Stock List—OB, A, C, G&M, MM, OMC, S etc., but we'll start with by far the most often asked question:

**I can't remember the name but it came in a dumpy green bottle, can you help?**

Bunnahabhain! (Boo-na-ha-venn).

**What is whisky?**

Literally the alcohol spirit produced by distilling fermented cereals. Whisky is produced in many countries, historically those with climates more suited to growing cereals rather than grape-into-wine production.

*Scotch Whisky* is the world's most popular spirit and by law must be (amongst other things) made and matured in an oak barrel for not less than **three years**

and **in Scotland**, otherwise it cannot be called *Scotch*.

**How is whisky made?**

Easy—mix some processed grain with water, add yeast and let it ferment in the same way that beer is produced. Boil up your beer and collect the steam which will be mostly alcohol. Voilà, whisky! Throw this away as it is probably poison, your hair will fall out—and apart from that it's illegal.

*Scotch* whisky must contain barley and *Malt Whisky* must be made exclusively from water, malted barley, yeast and nothing else.

**What is the difference between a single malt and a double malt?**

A **single malt** is the product of one malt whisky distillery and that one distillery only. There is no such thing as a double malt unless you are with your rich father-in-law at the bar (technically—'a large one'). Single malts are enjoying considerable acclaim at the moment, they are no longer Scotland's biggest secret. Their intensity and complexity of flavours, previously thought to be a handicap to wider sales, are now being sought throughout the world.

Malt whisky is one of four types of Scotch. The most common is **blended whisky**, a mix of many different single malts and grain whiskies prepared by a blender using his sense of smell and years of experience. 95% of all bottled whisky sold is blended whisky and it is appreciated the world over for its satisfying subtlety and complexity.

**Grain** whisky is industrially produced from a variety of cereals including malted barley. The spirit is not fully distilled—a degree of impurity is required to add character. It is also matured in

Scotland in oak barrels for three years or more before being used for blending. Occasionally you may come across a bottle of single grain whisky (which will taste light and slightly oily) but its use is mainly as a carrier for malts in blends. The fourth category of whisky is a **vatted malt** which is a blend of several malts but no grain. Malt bottles lacking the word 'single' may well be vatted; other clues are descriptions such as 'Pure Malt' or '100% malt'.

*A single malt is a happy accident of science, nature and circumstance. Blended and vatted whiskies are one man's opinion of what he thinks you think a good whisky should taste like.* Many members of the industry claim to appreciate blended Scotch the most.

**Why don't you stock a certain brand I had once?**

Whisky brands tend to fade away faster than get created as the industry changes from hundreds of brand owners to just a few. As big companies expand by the acquisition of small they find that they have two brands on the same shop shelf at the same price so one has to go. Some brands are only available overseas because they are better established there than in the UK.

**How many Scotch Whiskies are there?**

The Scotch Whisky Association draws attention to the Clave Vidiz collection in Brazil of over 4,000 bottles of Scotch. Not all of these will be available today and Campbell Evans of the SWA reckons that there are about 200 in the UK and 2,000 around the world.

Loch Fyne Whiskies has the most comprehensive range of UK available malts with examples from about 120 distilleries. There are currently about 85 open and working; others are either mothballed, closed or demolished. There have been about 750 distilleries licensed since Ferintosh in 1689.

**How am I supposed to drink my malt whisky?**

How you like! Although it does seem a shame to mix a £25 malt with a sweet, fizzy mixer. Addition of water (anything from a drop to 50:50, depends on the bottling) often reveals more character because your nose is happier at lower alcoholic strengths, so experiment with each new bottling. Bear in mind you have four senses of taste and these are on your tongue, not in the back of your throat. Plus you have some 30 or more senses of smell so use the schnoz. Ice in malts is a no-no; you put ice on bruises and in blended Scotch in hot climates.

**How do I know which malts I will like?**

Most single malts will have the region of origin on the label, either Lowland, Highland, Speyside or Islay and these give a clue to the character of the contents—but there are many exceptions to the rule. The **Lowlands** are the most gentle; mild, almost wine-like. The



## OFFICIAL, OWNERS OR ORIGINAL BOTTLINGS (OB)

When bottled by the owner of the distillery, we call such bottlings official, owners or original bottlings. These 'official' presentations are examples of the best in quality, packaging and design and a guarantee of consistency and quality. Here is a range of OB sizes, ages, presentations and lavish point-of-sale material for The Macallan.



## THE INDEPENDENT BOTTLERS

**(Where's Cadenhead's/Connoisseurs Choice/Gordon & MacPhail's Distillery?)**

Loch Fyne Whiskies favours five independent bottlers who buy the malt whisky from a distillery by the cask and bottle outwith the supervision of the distillery owner. With all independent bottlings look for the distillery name which will be in smaller print.

### ADELPHI (A)

A relative newcomer to the sector, The Adelphi Distillery Company has no distillery but is very fussy about the quality of the malt they bottle at cask strength, and so their releases are only occasional. Their minimalist labelling allows the whisky to sell itself.

### MURRAY McDAVID (MM)

The most recently incorporated on our list, Murray McDavid is gaining great respect for a small range of excellent and unusual whiskies bottled at 46%. In our view this is the perfect bottling strength, just strong enough to tingle the tongue!

### CADENHEAD (C)

Campbeltown in Argyll is home to independent bottler Cadenhead's, who buy and also mature casks of whisky and bottle each cask individually at natural cask strength, occasionally as high as 67% alcohol. At 150 years, Cadenhead's are the oldest bottlers in Scotland.

### GORDON & MACPHAIL (CC, Cask, G&M)

The leading and most respected independent bottler, G&M bottle a bewildering

range of single, vatted and blended whiskies from their Elgin home. G&M are unique amongst independent bottlers in that they mature all their whiskies from new and have done so for over 100 years. G&M still hold stocks of long gone distilleries—history to take advantage of! In 1998 G&M became distillers with the revival of Benromach Distillery. Shown above are examples of their G&M, Cask and Connoisseurs Choice ranges.

### SIGNATORY (S)

For ten years Signatory of Edinburgh have bottled malts at both 43% and at cask strength. They have produced some outstanding and very rare whiskies and are consistently good value.

**Highlands** can be further divided; those from the south are akin to the lowlands, those from the north are fuller flavoured. **Speyside** is a category of its own within the Highlands. These whiskies are complex and half of Scotland's distilleries are found here. The most fully flavoured whisky is produced on the island of **Islay** (pronounced eye-la). Islay whiskies are unguided missiles in the wrong hands—you will either love them or wonder what the attraction is in smelling hospitals.

### How come they taste so different?

Malted (germinated) barley has to be dried before milling and fermentation and traditionally this has been done over an open fire. In Scotland a variety of fuels is found locally including peat (decomposing heather) and coal. The amount of **peat** that is used to dry the barley has a big influence (on Islay it is the only source of fuel). Other influences are the style of apparatus employed in the production, particularly the **still** and how that still is operated by the stillman. The final major influence is the type of oak **cask** or barrel employed to mature the spirit; it could be one of many categories from a brand new barrel to a well-used second-hand sherry or bourbon cask.

### What are 'Cask Strength' Whiskies?

Whisky matures in the barrel at about 65%. Prior to bottling it is diluted to 40% so as to incur the least alcohol duty (originally a wartime measure). Cask

strength whiskies are at natural, barrel strength which provides more impact and immediate flavour. These whiskies should be diluted in the glass after exploratory sips otherwise anaesthesia will numb the pleasure. Because of the variety of casks employed in the industry, each *single-cask* bottling will have the character of the barrel variety as well as that of the distillery so there is great variation.

### Why are some whiskies so expensive?

The first thing to check is the age of the whisky. If it is say 21 years old (the time spent in the cask—once bottled it does not 'age'), it will be dearer because of the additional storage required. Also whisky evaporates in the barrel by about 2% each year so after 21 years only two thirds remain. The other thing to look out for is the degree of alcohol strength as duty is applied according to percentage alcohol. Most whiskies are bottled at 40% alcohol by volume (abv), some at 43% or 46%—15% stronger and so dearer than the 40%. We stock many whiskies with strengths of up to 65% so these are the equivalent of over a bottle and a half!

### Does a whisky improve with age after bottling?

No. Unlike wine, spirits are fixed once in the bottle and there is no benefit in keeping it. You should open and enjoy it as soon as possible!

### How long can I keep the whisky in the bottle?

Unopened, a bottle should stay as good as when bottled assuming the seal is in good condition. Keep the bottle away from direct sunlight, heat or variations in condition. Once opened, oxidation will act on the whisky with a noticeable effect in between one and three years. The balance of characters will change, not always for the worse, but eventually a whisky will become 'flat'—another good reason for enjoying your dram without delay. Saving the last inch of a very special malt is usually disappointing when finally poured, so enjoy it now!

### Books are useful sources of information and we recommend in particular:

Value for money—*Collins Gem Whisky* price £4.99.

Most informed—Charles MacLean's *Malt Whisky* £25.00 or *Scotch Whisky Pocket Guide* £8.99.

The Taster's bible—Michael Jackson's *Malt Whisky Companion* £12.99.

To keep you up to date visit our website: [www.LFW.co.uk](http://www.LFW.co.uk).

*"The proper drinking of Scotch Whisky is more than indulgence: it is a toast to civilisation, a tribute to the continuity of culture, a manifesto of man's determination to use the resources of nature to refresh mind and body and to enjoy to the full the senses with which he has been endowed."*

David Daiches  
*Scotch Whisky, Its Past and Present*







**Who or what is LFW?**

Loch Fyne Whiskies is a small privately owned shop in Inveraray, a popular visitor stop in the West Highlands of Scotland. The business is owned and managed by Richard & Lyndsay Joynson and is not part of a chain, has no shareholders to satisfy and does not have any branches (I hear mutterings of 'one centre of excellence'). We employ Andy Burns and Laura Simpson throughout the year and Darren Pirie joins us for the hectic summer season. Our greeter Donald, pictured above, is 'voluntary' rather than employed; his job is distributing drams of the Loch Fyne.

Our shop stocks all the whiskies in our Stock List, at the published price, as well as a range of other whisky related items — glassware, hip flasks, whisky flavoured confectionery and preserves and the most comprehensive book shelf possible. There is also a gallery of collectors' and rare bottles on display including a selection of whiskies from around the world with such unlikely places as Malta, Poland and Austria represented! Visitors to our shop enjoy our service and most get to do some sampling from our extensive tasting stock before they buy. We pride ourselves on our attention to our customer requirements, principally sound knowledge of our products, a fair price for our goods and a top class and speedy mail order service.

We are proud of our business, the respect we have earned, this newsletter and our blend 'The Loch Fyne'. Our customers are worldwide, are very loyal and very much appreciated.



**THE INVERARITY RANGE**

**adopted as our house malts**

The Inverarity range is bottled by Inverarity Vaults and has been adopted as our house malts because of their quality and great value. There are three malts; two single and one vatted, that complement each other and demonstrate the range of styles in malt Scotch Whiskies.

Our first house malt, The Inverarity 10yo is an all-day everyday dram which our customers have been enjoying for many years. It remains for the moment a bourbon cask matured Aultmore.

Inverarity 10yo, price £ 19.90

**ANCESTRAL FROM BALMENACH**

For Ancestral—the digestif in the range—Inverarity Vaults' Hamish Martin has selected a 14yo sherry cask matured Balmenach. The whisky is extremely smooth with a great strength and complexity, very slightly sherry-cloying in the mouth. A wonderful after dinner dram. The price of Ancestral is £ 27.90.

**INVERARITY ISLAY**

The Inverarity range is completed by Inverarity Islay, a ten year old all-Islay vatted malt made up of four components. Launched at the end of 1999, sales to Islay fans have been fantastic. There is a very emphatic phenolic and medicinal character—peat and iodine— which is classic Islay; a good oiliness, powerful flavours yet also a breeze of fresh air. This is an excellent variation on Islay malts which will provoke much debate among Islay fans as to where the four components come from—and we're not telling!

Inverarity Islay 10 years old is £23.90.



**OUR LOCH FYNE MARMALADE**

The Loch Fyne makes a great whisky marmalade and two are produced for us, a standard (£2.50) and our deluxe thick-cut, dark, spicy *Double Scotch* (£2.90)



Not a single malt, but a living vatting of suitable malts, The Living Cask takes its inspiration from *Notes on a Cellar Book* by renowned connoisseur Professor George Saintsbury, published 1920, in which he writes:

*"...The more excellent way—formerly practised by all persons of some sense and some means north of the Tweed—is to establish a cask,...fill it up with good and drinkable whisky,...stand it up on end, tap it half way down or even a little higher, and, when you get to or near the tap, fill it up again with whisky fit to drink, but not too old. You thus establish what is called in the case of sherry a 'solera', in which the constantly changing character of the old constituents doctors the new accessions, and in which these in turn freshen and strengthen the old."*

And that is what we do. When half drawn down a new malt is introduced and the character changes. Each top up is described as a Volume and this is marked on the 'spine' of our book-style label which has Saintsbury's instructions on the back. Each 'Volume' is bottled as a 20cl sample, dated at the time of drawing from the cask with the prevailing strength noted. As this is the natural strength it is in the region of 60% alc.

Living cask enthusiast Jack Magnus writes, "The folks at Loch Fyne Whiskies have cleverly produced a continually marketable and intriguing vatted whisky. I can't wait for the next volume! Thanks to Professor George Saintsbury for his inspiration and LFW for The Living Cask!"

**LIVING CASK™— 20cl**

@ cask strength £14.90

A subscription service for the automatic despatch of each successive volume is also available.





## MAILBAG

Dear Loch Fyne Whiskies,

Monie thanks for sennin me a copie o yer Autumn SWR.

Inby [on p.5] yae thing wants ti be sikkerlie an hinnerlie yirdit/positively and finally buried - *Knockando* as Cnocan Dhu. Knockando is an auld Speyside pairish nem, pronounced bi the natives KNOCK - an-doh, an it daesna mean 'little black hill' onie mair nor: wee blek knowe. On p. 1019 o *Dwelly's Gaelic Dictionary* ye wul fin the Gaelic wey o this nem ti be Cnocan caoruinn - in Scots "The Knowe o the Rowan Trees"; in English "Mountain Ash Hillock". The tap Gaelic place-nem mannie thon time an aye weil regairdit, Prof W.J. Watson, accordit wi Dwelly, sae we hae as near the richt wey as we can get. The furst A ken ti pit forrit this ravel/confusion wes the SMWS's Pip Hills - A wad jalouse/guess - wyced wrang bi sum bodie in the Whisky Tred at thocht the war Gaelic skolars. Please dae yer bit ti sort this out bi pittin a 'correction' in the SWR.

As weil [p. 4] A fair appreciate yer honest, no parritch-moued souch/attitude, maist times ye cry a shovel a shuil\*—no lyke *the WM* an *the SMWS newsletter*—sae A'm content ti tak ti masel the nem o 'idiot' for be-in shair that onie mell o patent-stell speirit an maud whisky is ablo/inferior to the best o maud. For...dae A no hae John Nettleton, Sir Walter Gilbey, Neil Gunn, James Robertson Justice an Raymond Postgate on ma side (thon's a michtie haunfu ti conjure up an forby thrie o thaim is English!!!) whyle ye hae a weil-documentit eidyt an ignoramus, Jim Murray, as yer champion!!!

For aw yer neiborin/alignment wi a bawheid the lyke o Murray, ye shair mak Valentino Zagatti's *Collection* seem a weil-faured ferlie/a weil produced rarity, sae ye hae temptit me ti howk out £80 (+£5.90 p+p) for a copie o the tome—cheque inhaudit. Aefauldlie

Reid Moffat

\*—mynd A thocht ye gied Richard Paterson a saft passage.

Our thanks to Mr Moffat for clearing up any confusion—once and for all. Ed.



The Best Collection of Malt  
by Valentino Zagatti  
2,400 bottles beautifully presented  
in one lavish book.

Example above:

One of 8 spreads devoted to 256 Macallans



## IN THE PARISH OF PEATS

Charles MacLean

Since the 1850s, when Andrew Usher, Snr., produced the first blended whisky, the whisky trade has been passionate about the unchanging consistency of its products. You can understand why. Only when you have a consistent product can you brand it and sell it widely: if the bottle of Johnnie Walker you bought this year in Berlin tastes entirely different from the one you bought last year in Boston, you can forget any idea of brand loyalty.

Malt and grain whiskies had been blended before Andrew Usher arrived on the scene. Familiar names like Johnnie Walker, George Ballantine, Arthur Bell, John Dewar, James Chivas and Matthew Gloag (later of famous Grouse fame) were active in their grocers' shops, with wine and spirits departments, producing blends for sale locally. But Usher is generally given the credit for being the first blender to go for consistency. Changes in the law in 1860, which permitted the blending of malts and grains in bond (i.e. before excise duty had to be paid) made it possible to blend in much larger quantities than previously. Then the phylloxera louse arrived and devastated the vineyards of France, rendering cognac unavailable to British consumers. Blended whisky of consistent quality and flavour was there to replace it.. and thus was born the whisky industry as we know it today.

You can imagine my astonishment recently at Macallan Distillery where the 1982 vintage 18yo was being launched, when David Robertson, the distillery manager and custodian of the whisky's quality not only admitted that each bottling of this highly sought after expression was different, but drew it to our attention in a comparative tasting of 18yos from 1965, 1972, '79, '81 and '82.

They were different, although sharing core Macallan profile, which might be summarised as orange peel, dried fruits, wood resin and spice. The 1965 introduced a fragrant, waxy note (church candles), with cloves and cinnamon; the 1972 was more fruity (pears and plums), with a light medicinal note; 1979 was oilier (linseed oil), with creme brulee and cloves, and a drier flavour; 1981 was a kissing cousin of 1979, but with barley sugar, increased fruits and ginger; and the 1982 had more aniseed, nuts, leather and fruit.

Different and all excellent. But the traditional whisky trade would say: 'different and thus inconsistent from batch to batch, and the essential part of your job, Mr Robertson, is to make sure there is no flavour drift from batch to batch, otherwise how will consumers be able to rely on the Macallan 18yo. Collect your P45 on the way out'.

Of course, we consumers have not been consulted about whether we might prefer slight flavour variations from vintage to

vintage, as is the case with wine. Just so long as there is no slip in quality. Indeed amongst connoisseurs certain bottlings are spoken of in awed tones—the Springbank 1966, the Glenmorangie '63 and '71, two single casks of Glengoyne from '68 and '72, even the Dalmore Cigar Malt—while others of similar age (the Glenmorangie '72, for example, let alone some of the expensive millennium bottlings) do not achieve quite the same legendary status.

To his great credit, David Robertson has always been in the vanguard of disclosure. He has never sought to hide any aspect of production or maturation from those who really wanted to know; he has never hidden behind 'trade secrets' to disguise his own lack of knowledge. In truth malt whisky does not yield up all its secrets, even to scientists. So rather than refusing to admit that there were differences between one 18yo and the next, he set out to discover why there should be such differences. We all know that the chemical structure of the wood in every cask is different, but since the late 1970s Macallan have gone to great lengths to source Spanish oak, cooper it in Spain and season it with sherry, so as to achieve the maturation results they require—and pay around seven times as much for the privilege as they would for a normal, ex-bourbon cask. Why, then, should these whiskies at 18 years be different? The 1965 and 1974 vintages were outside the controlled regime, filled into casks which had been used for maturing and shipping sherry to the U.K., but the others? And we're not talking 'single cask bottlings', here, where the differences between one cask and the next are more apparent: 260 butts of mature malt went into the 1982 expression. David Robertson believes it might be to do with the ambient temperature of the warehouses in which the spirit matures, since the maturation process can be speeded up if the temperature is raised—a fact exploited by many bourbon makers, who warm and cool their warehouses artificially in order to achieve just this result.

Macallan Distillery does not warm its warehouses artificially, and Robertson has discovered that between 1965 and 1999 the average daily mean temperature rose steadily by nearly half a degree. Could this be enough to account for the increase in wood extractives, and therefore the slight difference in flavour over the years?

Whatever has caused it, the point is that the maker of The Macallan is prepared to celebrate the differences from one batch to another. Will other distillers follow his lead when they are bottling old and rare expressions of their malts? Where will it end? While we, the consumers, hope and expect our blends to remain consistent (and this is another matter), I have a feeling that we might take even greater enjoyment in our malts if we were encouraged to look for differences from one batch to the next, just as wine buffs celebrate vintages. But at the moment this is heresy.

## APPRECIATING WHISKY

Pip Hills

### PART I — THE THEORY

Writing is a dull business for the most part. I spent much of last year writing a book about Scotch whisky, and I can think of a lot of things I would rather have done: drinking whisky, for example. However, the writing gave me an excuse to do a fair bit of the latter, and the research was more enjoyable than most. The book is to be published in May, under the title of *Appreciating Whisky*, by Harper Collins.

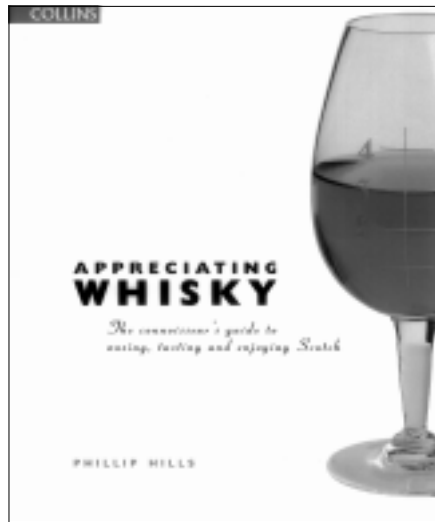
In it I have set out to address a number of issues, of which the one most likely to be of interest to customers of Loch Fyne Whiskies is the matter of taste.

It is rarely these days that one comes across a malt whisky—or a good blend, for that matter—which does not have a description of the whisky. The description is usually in the form of tasting notes which suggest that the taster will experience some rather remarkable flavours, few of which bear much resemblance to what he or she knows as whisky. Tasting notes are one of the current fashions in whisky marketing: their purpose is to impress the consumer, not to enlighten him. The result is merely to confuse a public which is already pretty hazy about what it should be looking for in a whisky. There are a lot of people out there who genuinely want to learn about Scotch whisky; but putting daft tasting notes on (often indifferent) whiskies is not the way to educate them. This is a matter which has concerned me for some years now, as I have watched flavour descriptions become the preferred way of selling malt whiskies. My concern has been on behalf of both distillers and consumers. On behalf of the good guys among the distillers, as the less-scrupulous employ mendacious tasting notes to promote indifferent whiskies. And on behalf of the reasonable consumer, as flavour descriptions become the playthings of nerds and enthusiasts.

The main purpose of my book is to equip the reader with the information and the techniques he requires in order to be able to make the judgement for himself.

If he is to do that, he must know what flavours he is to look for, and how to find them. With the help of friends and colleagues, I have identified those fifteen flavours which are most likely to be encountered in a Scotch whisky. There are hundreds of others, but there is no point in seeking subtleties if you don't have a grasp of the basics—and I find that the basics are what an awful lot of folk don't have. The problem is how to show them those basics. Some are easy and some not so easy to detect. And a lot depends on the concentration at which the flavour is present in the whisky. Anyone can detect the smoky flavour-elements in an Ardbeg or a Laphroaig, but to discern

them in a whisky which uses lightly-peated malt is by no means simple. Or, to take a different example, cereal aromas. These are among the commonest flavours in a well-matured malt, but few people recognise them. It is possible to show most whisky flavours in synthetic, concentrated form. We do this in our Malt Masterclass, using essences, but it is not a course normally available to the amateur. My problem was to de-



vis a DIY method, using readily-available materials.

One course, given the list of flavours, is simply to expose oneself to natural sources of flavour. That means going round sniffing things. If you haven't done it before, people may think you a bit strange, but I can guarantee you will find the experience interesting. For smoky flavours, obviously, you should sniff all sorts of smoke. There are lots of different smoke smells, depending on what was burnt. Bones are not as nice as sandalwood. And of course you ought also to sniff all the smoke-related smells you can find, such as tar boilers and lavatory cleaners and the insides of old boats. Ditto with flowers and fruits—only for preference don't use the flowers from the florist, which mostly won't smell of much, or the fruits from the supermarket, which will have as little smell as they do taste. You have to go to the sources—and for tropical fruits such as mangoes, that means you must go to the tropics, for the scent doesn't travel. Gathering smells is not easy, and how well you can do it depends a lot on how you live your life. Cooking helps a lot: probably the easiest way of exposing oneself to a large range of natural flavour elements is to take an interest in cooking. I keep a jar of caster sugar in my kitchen, in which are immersed two vanilla pods. Their aroma comes as something of a surprise to folk who have never met it, and it is a smell which they will never forget.

It is easy to lead a well-practised nose to whisky odours. But what about the great majority, who don't have any such background? How do we show them what is

in a whisky? The method is known as a difference-analysis. This sounds fancy and scientific, but really it is quite simple, being based on something which almost everyone can do. If I present you with a whisky and ask you to look for the nutty flavours in it, chances are you will find it difficult, for you won't be able to see past all the other flavours to something as subtle as nuttiness. But if I give you two whiskies which are broadly similar, save that one is nutty and the other is not, then by sniffing them alternately and comparing and contrasting the aromas, you should be able to discern the flavour to which I refer when I say that one smells nutty. And I can tell you that it works: we have run this method before lots of people who have neither experience of smells nor interest in liquor. Most of them leave quite astonished, having discovered a faculty of which they were almost unaware, and having used that faculty in a context—the appreciation of fine liquor—which they had assumed would forever be a closed book to them. Having devised the method, the problem was then to find readily-available materials. Happily, malt whiskies have such a range of flavours that it is not too hard to find all you want in a small number of them.

The perceptibility of a particular aroma depends on several things. Firstly, on whether it is present at all—for no whisky is likely to exhibit all of the odours a whisky might have, and some will show only a few. Secondly, on the concentration at which it is present. There is a threshold, which varies with the individual, below which scents are not discernible at all. Technique helps with this, for you can enhance the perceptibility of smells by going about nosing in the right way, and under optimum conditions. Thirdly, on the presence of other aromas. Some smells mask while others enhance. Peatreek, for example tends to mask other, more delicate odours; vanilla typically enhances sweet scents. Technique and experience are again valuable, for they allow us to see what is behind the mask.

The aromas listed lower-right are those most likely to be met with in any Scotch whisky. I have put them in two ranks: the first being scents easy to detect, the second less so. The examples given alongside each category are intended only to give you an idea of the sort of flavour. In practice, most flavours are encountered in combination with others, as compound tastes or smells. Thus caramel and vanilla are commonly experienced together as the odour of toffee or honey. (There is a difference, which is contributed by other flavours which are present in lower concentrations.) Or fruit cake, which may be both of the above together with fruity odours. Or a specific scent such as that of gardenias, which has a flowery fragrance together with slight sourness.

## APPRECIATING WHISKY

### PIP HILLS

#### PART II — PRACTICAL

In the end, we chose five whiskies: Glenmorangie 10yo, Macallan 10yo, Bowmore 12yo, Glendronach 15yo and Ardbeg 17yo. All are top-class malts with a wide range of flavours. What makes them so distinct is that in each case the flavour combinations are different. Among the five whiskies, you can find fourteen of our fifteen basic flavours. Three of them exhibit seven of the flavours, one six and the other four—all at a concentration high enough to be readily detectable. The method then is as follows.

You pour a shot of each into a decent nosing glass and cover with a watch glass. You then proceed to nose the whiskies briefly in pairs—taking care to replace the watch glass quickly, otherwise aroma is lost. Taking a given odour as the quarry, you seek it. For floral notes, look no further than the Glenmorangie on its own, for Glenmorangie has one of the most floral of noses. But once you have the idea of what you are after, try finding it among the other four. The Macallan has it, whereas the Glendronach does not. Likewise the Ardbeg and the Bowmore. What was easy to discern in the Glenmorangie is not so evident in the Macallan, though

indeed it is there. It occurs, too in the Ardbeg, but not in the Bowmore—though you might be forgiven for mistaking it for the fruitiness, which the Bowmore has aplenty. And of course, you must search for the fruity flavour through thickets of peatsmoke, which takes a bit of doing.

In a short article such as this, there is alas no space to describe the odours more fully, or to show you how to obtain an acquaintance with them. The book does so at some length.

There is occupation here for hours, weeks, decades—for beyond the fifteen basic odours there are literally hundreds of others, which you can discover once you have the technique and the experience. And you won't anymore be impressed or dismayed by tasting notes on bottles—unless to wonder what prawn made them up, and why.

*If you want to know more about the method, the book will be published in May, price £14.99.*



*The five whiskies mentioned here are available from our stock list and also in miniature; price £15.40 plus £3.00 postage if not part of a larger order, order "Pip's five miniatures".*

If we look at objective tasting notes for the five, we can analyse their flavours:

	Glenmorangie 10yo	Macallan 10yo	Bowmore 12yo	Glendronach 15yo	Ardbeg 17yo
Smoky			x	x	x
Fruity	x	x	x		
Floral	x	x			x
Vanilla	x	x	x	x	
Pungent			x		
Cereal	x				
Musty					x
Harsh					
Soapy	x				
Sulphury		x		x	
Caramel	x		x	x	
Nutty		x		x	
Woody			x		
Sour		x	x	x	
Sweet	x			x	x

You will note that there are no entries under Harsh and only one each under Woody and Musty. None of the whiskies we chose could be described as harsh and those which show woody and musty flavours do so in very low concentrations indeed. With those exceptions, though, you ought to be able with a little practice and not a lot of whisky, to discover most of the flavours listed.

#### EASY TO DETECT

Smoky — peaty, phenolic, medicinal  
 Fruity — apples, pears, bananas  
 Floral — heather, rose, geraniums  
 Vanilla — toffee, vanilla pods  
 Pungent — hot, peppery  
 Cereal — hay, grass, porridge  
 Musty — cellars, cork, mothballs  
 Harsh — bitter, astringent

#### NOT SO EASY

Soapy — candles, wax  
 Sulphury — rubber, drains  
 Caramel — toffee, burnt sugar, treacle  
 Nutty — coconut, almond  
 Woody — new sawn timber, resin, pine  
 Sour — vinegar, cheese  
 Sweet — cloying, sickly

## THE RIGHT TOOLS



### GLASSWARE

A traditional whisky tumbler is fine, even a pleasure, for a blended whisky but for malt whisky appreciation there is a better glass for the job.

Our *classic nosing glass* has a generous belly to accumulate aromas, a narrow rim to focus those delights for consideration and a lid to keep them for you rather than the fairies. Engraved graduations allow accurate dilution.

For more relaxed malt drinking we recommend our *port glass*. Its wider rim and better balance aids contemplative enjoyment.

We also enjoy using our simple *water carafe*, far less fuss than a lipped jug.

**Classic Nosing Glass** £7.90  
**Port Glass** £3.50  
**Water Carafe** £3.50

When evaluating a dram it is helpful to have more than one kind in order to prevent familiarity setting in. Sampling in increasing intensity and then going back again will reveal more than concentrating on one alone. Many LFW customers enjoy 'one-to-five' parties where whiskies are selected according to our taste score of 1 to 5 from our stock list for a convivial evening of descriptor bandying.

### LFW Tasting Mat & Cellar Book

The LFW melamine tasting mat is a white, wipe clean mat for five glasses and an aide memoire of descriptors to assist discussion and note taking.

Finally, to record those inspired sensory discoveries, *Neil Wilson's Malt Whisky Cellar Book* is a handsome tome to treasure those thoughts and memories of your most special tasting sessions.

**LFW Tasting Mat** £4.90  
**Malt Whisky Cellar Book** £15.00



**Special! Five classic nosing glasses, a carafe, tasting mat and cellar book** £55.00





[www.LFW.co.uk](http://www.LFW.co.uk)

Until recently the internet policy of Loch Fyne Whiskies has been one of 'hope-it-will-go-away' but in response to the shift of on-line interest from America to the UK we have now embraced the new technology and are enjoying it.

It takes as long to build and maintain a website as it does the Forth Bridge — a never ending task. But we are now in the position of updating the site from the shop without the involvement of any third party webmaster, this means that we are as up-to-date as is possible.

If you are connected up, please visit <http://www.LFW.co.uk> (it's not case sensitive) and leave your name and any thoughts in the comments box—tell us that you called because of the *SWR*. On the same page you can register to go on our e-mailing-list to be notified of any updates to the site.

Many visitors have told us the site is very good with excellent navigation and layout. A left hand frame is always present and when in the 'stock' section a top frame provides additional reference buttons.

#### NEWS & DEALS

The 'news' page is the most popular with visitors checking frequently for new stock lines. This page links on to the 'deals' page—previously we have had to restrict our monthly deals to visitors to the shop, now mail order customers can learn about the savings available. There are also full-case offers unique to the website.

#### BROWSING & ORDERING

On-line browsing and ordering is now live. You can still download our stock lists as before or you can wander through the detailed browsing section making selections. You can then place a secure encrypted order or print a completed order form for faxing or posting with your cheque.

#### NEXT

Our further plans for the site over the next year are for order tracking in conjunction with our carriers, auctions of collectables and some useful links.

If you are a member of a whisky newsgroup please spread the word about our site—[LFW.co.uk](http://LFW.co.uk).



## WOT, NO BOUNCY CASTLES?

The Scotch Tourism & Whisky industry has come a long way since the first "Whisky Open Day" in 1995. Our report then in *SWR4* revealed distillery fun including free drams, pipe bands and bouncy castles but sadly the Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival only has a real castle. (Ballindalloch, near the Telford Bridge above).

## SPIRIT of SPEYSIDE

WHISKY FESTIVAL  
28th April—8th May

The top award-winning Spirit of Speyside whisky festival is now in its third year under the guidance of Aberdeen & Grampian Tourist Board and the programme is packed with over 250 special events for whisky lovers to learn more about Scotland's national product. The events include several opportunities to meet the 'greats' of the whisky world such as Michael Jackson, Wallace Milroy, Charles Maclean or Jim Murray at specialist tastings throughout the festival, some at the Quaich Bar at the superb Craigellachie Hotel.

Gordon & MacPhail are holding a series of tasting courses and blending is demonstrated with practicals at Strathisla Distillery. Glenfarclas is host to several grades of tasting event including a whisky breakfast and another to sample the £1,500 bottle of 40yo with Jacko. The event is a celebration of all Scotland's Whiskies with events focusing on Islay and the Highlands included. There's a whisky widows' haven, comedy from Phil Kay and music from rockers Wolfstone and folkies The McCalmans. The huge program is described in a **brochure** available from the festival office: 01343 542666 or at the festival website; [www.spiritofspeyside.com](http://www.spiritofspeyside.com).

## £ 2.00 OFF VOUCHERS

Because of the increase in distant ordering (internet) we are no longer placing vouchers on our cask strength bottlings but all vouchers you may have will be honoured. The price of all such whiskies has come down.

## FEIS ILE

ISLAY'S FESTIVAL OF MALTS & MUSIC  
29th May—3rd June

Inspired by Islay's great ambassador to the world, Jim McEwan, the first 'week of whisky events and Celtic music' promises to be a much more low key event, expressing the character of the Island. Running concurrently with the music festival Feis Ile—Islay Whisky Festival will involve the participation of all eight distilling enterprises.

Starting with Port Ellen Maltings each distillery will play host on a day-by-day basis, providing 'super-tours' and samplings not just of the Islands malts but also the local food including peat-smoked venison, scallops and oysters. Whisky fans will be treated to film showings (e.g. *The Maggie*), lectures (*Why Islay? A history of industry*), demonstrations (coopering) and practicals (peat cutting with Stormin'-Norman Campbell). One highlight will be tales from the stills, a circle of distillery managers telling stories and experiences from the whisky trade.

A series of ceilidhs, music and bird-watching events will take place concurrently. All income from the event goes to the disabled of the island.

**Details** from [www.ileach.co.uk/festival](http://www.ileach.co.uk/festival) or Bowmore Tourist Information centre telephone 01496 810254.

## MALT MASTERCLASS

The next Malt Masterclass lead by Pip Hills will be at Macallan Distillery. If you are interested; contact Pip at Malt Masterclass, 3 Quayside Street, Edinburgh EH6 6EJ or visit the website [www.maltmasterclass.co.uk](http://www.maltmasterclass.co.uk).

**SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW** is free to all *bona fide* mail order customers. **If you have not bought by mail order from the last (Autumn) catalogue and do not buy from the accompanying (Spring) list then we will not be troubling you again.** We are no longer sending out Stock Lists and *SWR*'s to prospective customers more than once. If you or a friend would like a current stock list please ask and you will be sent one with a back-issue *SWR*. Your name will not be placed on our mailing list for further mailings until you have bought by mail order from us. Your name will not be passed to any other organisation.

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