



SCOTCH WHISKY REVIEW™

EDITION 22

AUTUMN 2004

THAT'S IT! I'M FINISHED!

Our trade spends far too much time contemplating its navel. LOOK UP! Most whisky drinkers (47 million bottles to the UK so far in 2004) don't give a tea-towel what yeast was used, the strain of barley or whether the northernmost, highest, oldest, biggest, rightest or most-unique-selling-pointest...

USPs? Pah! I just don't subscribe to that; nor do my customers, if my observations are any good. SWR readers are not that dim [who is?].

So what's this all about?

We're being led up the path with a overwhelming plethora of bizarre expressions; possibly at the behest of outspoken retailers, whoever they may be.

Eleven years ago, when I came into the Whisky trade I appreciated its simplicity: High-, Low-, Spey-, Islay—for starters, then: Light, dark (Bourb. or sherry), and that was it! An easy ride! Sussing who came from where, who was related to who, some tongue-stretching exercises to get the gutturals and intonations right and lo! Expert! (*or charlatan?—Whatever*).

Then came finishes. The first (from Glenmorangie) were interesting, the Mk 2s were good(-ish), and there it should have rested. But they Won't Go Away. We're swamped with half-baked non-descript whiskies started-up in bizzare wine casks; where's the whisky?

The point about enjoying malt Scotch Whisky is its unique flavours and simplicity of existence, not a multitude of poncey wine tastes, synthesised by novelty obsessed 'master distillers' seeking the ultimate USP, and glory at the International Wine & Spirit Competition. Independent bottlers should know better—but they are the worst! Every cask is a prototype. This retailer's advice to his consumers; don't buy a whisky with a wood-finish, unless you have tried it yourself or trust a recommendation, some are not good. Seek out genuine whiskies that are bottled by proud producers who don't have to tart up their products.



LOGISTICS AT WORK

As part of an ongoing SWR tradition of printing mostly irrelevant pictures of boats, here's one supporting our article on page 10 about the movement of whisky. It also introduces our new specialist indicator of how generally interesting a story is. This one has not too much about whisky so gets just one anorak.

DEFINITIONS—FOR DISCUSSION

(or SO LONG 'VATTED') 

Campbell Evans

of the SWA writes for the SWR.

The Scotch Whisky Association Council has endorsed the recommendations of a working group set up to review and propose appropriate definitions for the following categories within the Scotch Whisky market (note: Scotch Whisky is already defined within The Scotch Whisky Acts and orders):

SINGLE MALT Scotch Whisky

A Scotch Whisky distilled at a single distillery (i) from water and malted barley without the addition of any other cereals, and (ii) by batch distillation in pot stills;

SINGLE GRAIN Scotch Whisky

A Scotch Whisky distilled at a single distillery from water and malted barley with or without whole grains of other malted or unmalted cereals which does not comply with the definition of Single Malt Scotch Whisky;

BLENDED Scotch Whisky

A blend of one or more Single Malt Scotch Whiskies with one or more Single Grain Scotch Whiskies;

BLENDED MALT Scotch Whisky

A blend of Single Malt Scotch Whiskies which have been distilled at more than one distillery (often formerly described as 'vatted');

BLENDED GRAIN Scotch Whisky

A blend of Single Grain Scotch Whiskies distilled at more than one distillery.

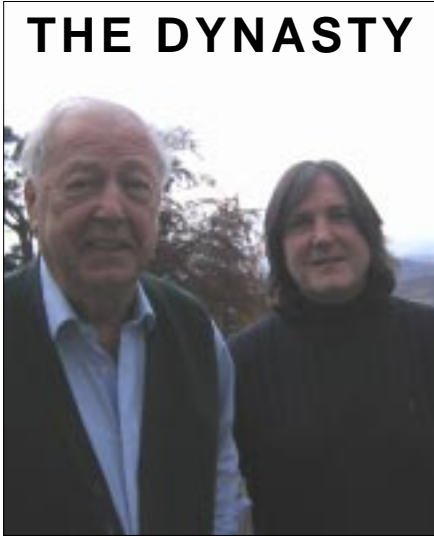
It was also agreed that a distillery name should not be used on any Scotch Whisky which has not been wholly distilled in the named distillery.

These will be subject to wider consultation across the Scotch Whisky industry and with other interested parties. For the present, discussions are continuing on the labelling of the new category descriptions. Once agreed, and following wider consultation, the SWA will seek amendments to existing legislation to enshrine the definitions and labelling rules in law.

We believe the definitions will help inform consumers, as well as give added protection to the Scotch Whisky categories.



THE DYNASTY



Former broker, blender and grain distiller, George Christie (left) established the Speyside Distillery, near Kingussie in Inverness-shire in 1990. His son, Ricky, is sales director for the Speyside Distillers Company Ltd.

On behalf of SWR, **Gavin Smith** went to George's Speyside home to conduct a discussion of a life in the Scotch Whisky industry with them both.

SWR: How did you first get involved in the whisky business?

GC: I was captain of a submarine when the war ended in 1945, and I was going to sit for my Extra Master's ticket, but the exam was only every six months. I had a wife and child to support and needed to get some work to feed them. I knew Gus Paterson, Richard Paterson's father. He'd been in the Merchant service and his father had been in the whisky business since the First World War. Gus was a good friend and a dangerous character! I went to work for Gus for six months, but at the end of the six months I thought that while I'd earn £40 a month if I went back to sea, I could make at least half as much again if I stayed on the beach. So I stayed on the beach. That's how I got into the whisky business. The important thing was getting hold of whisky in those days. If you could get it you could sell it. So we were broking, and Gus and I also acted as agents for Pulteney and Balblair distilleries.

RC: My first job was at Auchentoshan distillery, where I went to learn the ropes, as it were, and after that I travelled around the world. I was in the Merchant Navy and finally I joined the family company in 1972. I currently spend about four months a year abroad. I tend to look after the emerging markets, which are usually further afield, but they're great fun, because you're starting from the same position in many

cases as a lot of your well established competitors.

SWR: So when did you become a distiller?

GC: The way I was built I always looked at distilleries and would say 'one day I'm going to build one of these'. Which I did in 1957. I set up the North of Scotland Distilling Company in the former Knox Brewery at Cambus near Alloa. I put in patent stills and made grain whisky, which was in very short supply at that time. I got three other directors and we all put our money into it.

I ended up making about three million gallons of whisky per year. But by the mid-'60s everybody was building extensions to their grain distilleries. North British were and DCL were, and grain works on the basis that it is relatively cheap to produce, which means that your costs are based roughly on your output. Next door to us was Carsebridge grain distillery, which could make 12 million gallons and North British was up to 15 million. So grain became tremendously competitive. I ended up selling the distillery to DCL in the early 1980s, and they closed it down. Carsebridge is also gone now, of course.

In the meantime I'd been building warehouses in Bonhill, by the Clyde. I got a 40 acre site by the river and I just tanked the spirit through from Cambus and filled it into casks there and stored it. I eventually ended up with around 200,000 casks, covering about 25 acres. If you're going to build warehouses you might as well build big ones, and with 30- to 40,000 square feet, you could get somewhere in the region of 2,000-odd casks in there. If you were getting £4 or £5 a year in rental for a cask you were doing quite well. It was a safe business. Alexander McGavin & Co Ltd was the parent company of the Bonhill operation and the Speyside Distillery & Bonding Company, which I set up around 1955, was quite a separate concern. We were blenders and bottlers, with Speyside being our main brand as both a blend and a vatted malt and we did contract bottling.

SWR: How did you become a malt whisky distiller?

GC: In 1955/56 I bought Old Milton House, near Kingussie, with the intention of building a distillery the way I wanted to and that's what I did. I wanted something that was a size I could handle and not have to bother with banks and partners, and do what I wanted to do with it.

I got the house, which was a bit of a ruin, and 640 acres, including a let farm. I think they asked for £5,000, I offered £4,500, and we eventually settled on

£4,250! I wanted to build my distillery where the River Tromie ran into the Spey.

The original Speyside distillery had been built in Kingussie in 1895, by the MacPherson-Grants and the eldest son of the family lived in this house. The distillery only lasted until about 1911. When we moved in, the telephone wires across to the distillery were still here. I didn't know about the house's connection with the old distillery when we bought it, I only found out later.

The size of the distillery was really determined by the amount of space I had. Alex Fairlie, the dry-stone dyker, began to construct the building and it was a sleeping project for a long time. It took almost 20 years from start to finish because I had other things to do—and they were making money! The first Speyside spirit flowed in December 1990.

We have one pair of stills, and probably make on average between 400,000 and 500,000 litres of spirit a year at the distillery, which is pretty close to capacity. It's tankered away down to Speyside Distillers' Duchess Road site in Glasgow to be filled.

SWR: Would you build a new distillery from scratch in 2004?

GC: At the moment I'd probably do what the others have been doing – look around for a distillery that has got a decent situation and is for sale fairly cheap. There is a certain amount of cache to buying an existing name, like Bruichladdich, for example. But to start from scratch and build one all you need is a lot of guts and a bit of money. I think if you were going to do it you'd be best doing it in the north, doing it on Speyside somewhere. I reckon you could probably build the place quite cheaply. All you need is four walls and a roof, and you put everything inside it. It costs money when you start buying malt and all the rest of it and it takes a big heart purely and simply because you start off not being able to sell anything.

SWR: Who owns what?

RC: A group of friends and I acquired and changed the name of the Speyside Distillery & Bonding Company Ltd to the Speyside Distillers Company Ltd, and this company owns the site at Duchess Road in Rutherglen, Glasgow along with the brands. Duchess Road consists of cask warehousing, a bottling plant



and blending operation. I'm a shareholder in the company.

GC: We own the distillery and we have a contract with the Speyside Distillers Company Ltd to continue distilling for them for another three or four years. We don't sell to anyone else.

SWR: What are your principal products and markets?

RC: Our principal brands are: The Speyside, at ten and 12 years old; Drumguish, which is also from the distillery and is a younger single malt; and we own a variety of blends, including Scottish Prince, which is probably our best known. We also do independent bottling under the banner of Scott's Selection and Private Cellar. These are a selection of other distillers' makes, done at cask strength in the case of Scott's Selection. Those are our core brands. Our main markets for The Speyside are the USA, Europe, which is growing, and the Far East, but by far and away at this stage, North America.

SWR: Speyside Distillers Ltd was involved a decade ago with Stephen Jupe and his Marshall Wineries company, which sold casks of whisky to investors at grossly inflated prices. Jupe was convicted earlier this year of defrauding investors and creditors. What part did Speyside play in all of this?

RC: We were approached by a filling customer, Jupe and his associates, and we treat such customers very seriously. What we don't do is sell to people we think might end up bottling Speyside as a single malt. We said we were not allowing them the use of our trademark and they came up with the name Grandtully, which comes from an old distillery near Aberfeldy which ceased production in 1910.

We didn't know that wild claims of financial growth from investing in casks of Grandtully were being made. Claims were made that distillers would buy back casks from investors. Why would they buy back casks they had sold unless they had a shortage? We were a new distillery and in our case there was a possibility, and we did underline only a possibility, that if our venture was successful there may be a time when we could have an interest in those casks that had been purchased.

Several other distillers also supplied them and really what they did with the casks having bought them from us was beyond our control.

As far as individuals buying casks as investments, I say to anyone who asks 'well I've been in business for a long time and I haven't been able to gallop off to the South of France and buy a boat.' You



have to be pretty close to what's happening to do at all well.

I think people were paying about £900 a hogshead and if you took all the costs into account, they were probably worth about £500. If you were going to play devil's advocate you could say if you want to buy 100,000 Fords from the factory at Dagenham, or you want to buy a Ford from a garage forecourt to your own specifications, would you expect to pay the same price?

If they were trying to sell a cask of Grandtully to somebody else it would be sold as 'a single malt'. That would probably equate to the market price for somebody that's buying it for blending. Whereas we would look at it and say 'we call it Speyside single malt, because that's what it is.' I think the bottom line is that individuals should not invest in things they don't know about.

SWR: What does the future hold for Speyside Distillers Ltd?

RC: Most immediately we have the new 12 year old expression of The Speyside, and we're very fortunate that there is tremendous interest in single malts. It's a growing sector in the marketplace as opposed to the relatively stagnant sector of blended Scotch whisky. We're well placed to capitalise on that, but last year was a record one for us in Korea, it was fantastic, and the market – for everybody – is down 40 per cent this year. But then another market which has been going steadily suddenly explodes. We have explosions and we have impacts. One market will be up 11 per cent and another down 13 per cent, so it's very difficult to

plan ahead.

GC: Scotch whisky has been going on for a hell of a long time, and at the end of the day all you can do is push the product. Persuade your customer either that he's getting the best damn whisky in the world, or you're giving him a better price and a better back up. In our trade, who you know makes a hell of a difference too. If your agent likes you and you like him, things go remarkably smoothly. With a smaller distillery, there's a very good living to be made and a very good reputation to be made. In my case I can honestly say it's been a hell of a lot of fun!

SWR: What is your desert island dram?

GC: My own personal 17 year old blend. I'm basically a blender and I know about putting a good dram together. Above about 12 or 14 years old, whisky can change a lot, depending on the wood and when you get really old whiskies they are sometimes delicious and sometimes bloody awful.

RC: The Speyside. It's easy for me to sell, because I genuinely like it. It's a very easy single malt, it's a malt for any time of day.

SWR: Thank you both.



DEVIL'S ADVOCATE



Turnbull Hutton

LAST TANGO

IN LOCH FYNE!



My great friend and mentor, John McDonald OBE, late of Tomatin Distillery, is never very far off the mark with his observations of life generally. Over the many years I've known John, I've come to appreciate his often jaundiced view on many topics.

Indeed, a night in John's company can be enlightening, entertaining and, at the same time, educational. Bring in the views of that other renowned Industry philosopher, Alf Bayvel, late of Chivas Bros. and you have enough politically incorrect comments—verging towards anarchy—that scriptwriters would kill for.

Indeed I did wonder if we had been overheard at some point when BBC Television came up with a programme entitled "Grumpy Old Men". All of our prejudices were suddenly being exposed on national television: computers, mobile phones, call centres, smoker's rights, nouvelle cuisine, bloody politicians, Tony Blair, the Nanny State, the horrors of travel, lack of service in shops, the inability of people to construct a meaningful letter anymore! The list is bloody endless—feel free to add your favourites! John McDonald, who is significantly older than either Mr Bayvel or myself, sums the whole situation up, "The Country's fucked!" I think he's right of course, but it may just be the age I'm at.

The whisky industry I was part of was rich in characters. Every company had them. They all know who they are. Whilst we all did the best we could for our respective companies, we also identified with each others issues. There was a lot of trust around and if someone gained what became known as a competitive advantage one year, the cycle would turn, as it always did and you would have your chance to make good in subsequent years.

Negotiations invariably took place over long lunches—or even dinner—where surprisingly, strong drink was often consumed! Sometimes it fell to our talented sidekicks to interpret scrawled notes on menus or napkins as to what had actu-

ally been agreed. The results often came as a shock to the participants who were at the meeting!

Over the last 5 or 10 years this civilised way of doing business began to change. Lunch was often frowned upon, drink certainly was. Fizzy bloody water appeared at meetings, as did boring bloody sandwiches. Our colleagues went off on team-building exercises—making rafts and abseiling—and when they weren't bonding with each other they were out bloody jogging at lunchtime.

Don't get me wrong, I know there are still pockets of resistance out there—those who would be none the worse for an old-fashioned whisky industry lunch or dinner—but they seem to be in the minority. It seems to me and to my adversaries over the years, that it sure as hell is different from how it used to be. This could, of course, be errant nonsense. It may be simply a generation thing. When we were in our prime, the generation that preceded us probably shook their heads and wondered where it had all gone wrong.

*make it
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challenging
environment
in which they
now have to
operate*

With rationalisations, mergers and takeovers—the never ending quest for efficiencies—it's all too easy from the privileged position of being happily retired to look in at the Industry as it is now and arrogantly take the view that it will never be as good as it was in our day. And yet I know that there remains in the Industry a generation still young enough to make it happen in the ever challenging environment in which they now have to operate. Whilst they are younger than us old retired farts, they are old enough to know the benefits of real networking—after all they learned at the feet of masters!

So I look to this new generation to carry the baton forward, then they can replace us (after they have buried us) as the next generation of "Grumpy Old Men". They deserve to. Whilst I know many of the new generation personally, there are an increasing number of big hitters in the

Industry that I would not know if I fell over them. These are the ones who have arrived over the last 3 or 4 years. Since I am unlikely to ever meet them, or they me, (certainly not at a boozy lunch or dinner), it struck me that my witterings in the SWR are of absolutely no relevance to them at all.

In consumer terms, I think I have reached the end of my shelf life. I also have a confession: I don't really give a damn anymore as to what the Industry is up to—who is merging with who; what is being rationalised; or who is doing what. Who gives a shit? I could get animated were the pension to be threatened. I do get animated, as we have seen, with my fellow grumps. But more and more one should recognise that nobody gives a stuff as to what I think. That's fine, that's exactly as it should be.

So if my readers haven't fallen asleep by this stage, this has been a long preamble to simply say "That's it, I'm out of here."

I should take this opportunity to allay the fears of my vast army of fans out there to point out that this second "retirement" has absolutely nothing to do with an unfortunate, relatively minor health scare earlier this year. Strangely I had just completed my last piece on the great Cardhu cock-up, worked myself into a good grump, despatched the first draft to "the boss", and was then unable to respond to his minor editorial changes! He did a fine job anyway and he never even docked my pay!

My thanks to Richard for the invite in the first place, it's been fun. The Loch Fyne Scotch Whisky Review is enjoyed by an ever increasing readership—and rightly so. It's fun, irreverent, and never boring. Unlike other serious Whisky Magazines I could mention! I'll bet they eat bloody sandwiches! What is a bloody lye pipe anyway? And who cares?

I'll be a tough act to follow—but then I always was!

I reserve the right, however, to write to the Editor in my now full-time role as a Grumpy Old Man should anything upset me unduly. Don't say you haven't been warned!

Farewell.

Our thanks to The Advocate for his enthusiastic and highly entertaining contributions over the past seven editions of the SWR.

For those of you just joining, Turnbull came to us after a long career in the whisky industry, culminating in his being production director of Diageo's Scottish operations. Latterly, as well as chief contributor to the SWR, he has been chairman of Raith Rovers F.C.

We wish him every possible happiness for the future. As he says,

it's been fun

LOCH FYNE WHISKY PRODUCTS — THE BEST PROCURABLE!



Permit us one page to enthuse about our new product, The Loch Fyne Liqueur, a blend of 12 year old Scotch with natural flavours of chocolate, orange and tangerine. Although these are all that go into it, many people can detect coffee, coconut and banana!

Launched in early July, the response has exceeded all expectations! We gave Robin Sheilds, Manager of Laphroaig Distillery, a 'busty nail'—an equal mix of Loch Fyne Liqueur with Laphroaig 10yo. He declared it 'wonderful!' and posed with Hamish (below).



We took the liqueur to the *Whisky Fringe* in Edinburgh where it was the hit of the event; the top seller and the dram that got even the most ardent I'm-a-malt-fan-I-don't-do-stickies excited!

Respected wine writer Joe Fattorini has been enthusing too. In his Wine Choice column in *The Herald*, 25.9.2004, he wrote, "I challenge anyone—whisky drinker or not—to say they don't like this. It struck me as spicy and warming rather than sickly sweet, with cocoa, or-

ange peel and cake flavours all finished with a dry, smoky, rural character. Buy it now and you'll be set for winter. A treat." Joe later declared the Loch Fyne Liqueur "the most exciting new Christmas drink this year".

Graham Holter, editor of *Off Licence News* said, "Imagine there's a fire at the Terry's Chocolate Orange factory, a few miles in the distance. That's what this liqueur smells like: sweet, rich and a little smoky. Smooth and fruity on the tongue and a very acceptable Christmas present. Thanks!"

Drinking outside the box, champion cocktail mixer Neil Berrie recommends it as a long drink with tonic(!). "Large Gin 'n' tonic ratio (to personal taste), ice, with tiny squeeze of a lime wedge (optional). Simplicity is best". Neil is working on more cocktail ideas (it's a hard life etc...) that you can glean from www.lochfyneliqueur.com along with a list of stockists.

Whisky Detective Archie Bruce (back page) loves the effect of a dram of the liqueur in his coffee, which miraculously brings out strong honey flavours. Watch out for Archie's book to be published soon.

And as if the taste alone wasn't good enough, we have just learned that the liqueur has been short-listed for a Shine Award, the glass industry's showcase for products using glass. The distinctive decanter presentation adds to its desirability as a gift, £28.90.



LOCH FYNE MARMALADES

This year our *Hot Toddy Marmalade* joined the breakfasting range. Made with lemons, stem ginger and a hefty double-dose of the Loch Fyne Blend, it has achieved much acclaim and already has a dedicated following.

Hot Toddy (or yellow label, for those reading in black and white) joins old favourite *Double Scotch* (red label) a chunkier confection enriched with treacle, spices and a double dose of blend (for weekends only). Blue Label is a traditional thin cut marmalade with just one scoop of whisky for daily enjoyment.

Blue label is £2.50, red and yellow £2.90 each, or indulge in the trio for £7.00.



LOCH FYNE FUDGE



Last year our gift of a bag of Loch Fyne fudge was very successful, with many declaring it the best and far too yummy.

Add some bags of fudge to your order for distribution to the below stairs servants; £1.90 per bag, or buy four, get an extra bag to eat yourself!

LOCH FYNE BLEND

Our award-winning flag product that started it all. Exclusively from us, the Loch Fyne Blend has advocates all over the globe, many happy to confirm they prefer it to any other whisky, blend or malt. As it says on the label, it is smooth and mellow ('perilously so, and easy to drink' according to Charles MacLean). Slightly sweet and slightly smoky, it appeals to all. Original marmalade-free product, £15.90.





TROLLEY DASH TIME!

This year once more we offer more deals than ever. With every order of a 70cl bottle or more there is a **free copy of Scottish Field Magazine** with its separate whisky feature including the Merchants' Challenge nominations that we are involved in.

There is also **FREE DELIVERY!**—if you buy any four (or more) malts from our Stock List and add two (or more) bottles of the **superb, award winning Loch Fyne** we'll deliver **FREE** to a UK address! (That's buy **FOUR** malts AND two Loch Fyne—yes?).

Other deals may be available on lfw.co.uk, including buy any three OB Caol Ila or any three OB Talisker and get a Malt Whisky Cellar Book (£15.00) **FREE!**

*** SMALL PRINT ***

The Scottish Field gift is while stocks last, one each, and not available in gift orders (those sent to another address).

OVERSEAS CUSTOMERS

Please check lfw.co.uk for delivery deadlines if important. Sorry, but weight may prohibit the inclusion of the free Scottish Field Magazine to overseas buyers.

DEALS & DELIVERIES DEADLINE

All deals offered at lfw.co.uk and on these pages are valid for mail order customers placing orders before **noon on Monday 20th December**. After this date deals may or may not be available.

Last year's most popular deal is repeated:

Buy any two from these 'Classic Malts', get a free bottle of Knockando. PLEASE NOTE Oban and Lagavulin are now excluded from this deal.

| | | | | |
|---------------------|----|-----|---------|---|
| OB CRAGGANMORE — 3Δ | 12 | 40% | £ 23.90 | Buy any 2 for a free 70cl Knockando! |
| OB DALWHINNIE — 2 | 15 | 43% | £ 23.90 | |
| OB GLENKINCHIE | 10 | 43% | £ 23.90 | |
| OB TALISKER — 5Δ | 10 | 46% | £ 25.90 | |

MANY WHISKIES ON OFFER ARE NOT PICTURED

TOP SHELF

| | | | DEAL PRICE | SAVING |
|---------------------------------|--------|-----|------------|--------|
| OB AN CNOG (Knockdhu) | 12 | 40% | £ 18.90 | £ 3.00 |
| OB ARDBEG | 10 | 46% | £ 21.90 | £ 3.00 |
| CC ARDBEG | '94/10 | 40% | £ 20.20 | £ 3.00 |
| G&M ARDMORE | '87/16 | 40% | £ 23.50 | £ 3.00 |
| OB AUCHENTOSHAN — 1 | 10 | 40% | £ 18.70 | £ 4.00 |
| OB AUCHENTOSHAN — Three wood | 43% | | £ 27.50 | £ 6.00 |
| OB AUCROISK | 10 | 43% | £ 27.90 | £ 2.00 |
| OB BALBLAIR — 3 | 16 | 40% | £ 21.50 | £ 2.00 |
| OB BALVENIE — Founder's Reserve | 10 | 40% | £ 19.90 | £ 3.00 |
| OB BALVENIE — Double Wood — 2 | 12 | 40% | £ 21.90 | £ 4.00 |
| OB BALVENIE — Single Barrel | '88/15 | 48% | £ 30.90 | £ 7.00 |
| OB BALVENIE — Port Wood — Δ | 1989 | 40% | £ 22.50 | £ 4.00 |
| OB BENRINNES | 15 | 43% | £ 27.90 | £ 2.00 |
| OB BENROMACH — Traditional | | 40% | £ 16.50 | £ 1.40 |
| CC BLADNOCH | '88/14 | 40% | £ 24.90 | £ 3.00 |
| OB BOWMORE — Legend | | 40% | £ 16.40 | £ 4.00 |
| OB BOWMORE | 12 | 40% | £ 20.00 | £ 4.50 |
| OB BOWMORE — Mariner — 5 | 15 | 43% | £ 23.90 | £ 5.00 |
| OB BOWMORE — Δ | 17 | 43% | £ 31.70 | £ 7.00 |
| OB BOWMORE — Darkest — Δ | | 43% | £ 27.90 | £ 6.00 |
| OB BOWMORE — Dusk (Bordeaux) | | 50% | £ 27.90 | £ 6.00 |
| OB BOWMORE — Dawn (Port Finish) | | 52% | £ 27.90 | £ 6.00 |
| OB BOWMORE — Cask Strength | | 56% | £ 27.90 | £ 4.00 |
| OB BRUICHLADDICH — 3Δ | 10 | 46% | £ 22.90 | £ 2.00 |
| OB BRUICHLADDICH — Δ | 15 | 46% | £ 30.90 | £ 2.00 |
| OB BRUICHLADDICH | XVII | 46% | £ 41.90 | £ 2.00 |
| OB BUNNAHABHAIN — 4 | 12 | 40% | £ 20.90 | £ 3.00 |

MIDDLE SHELF

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----|-----|---------|--------|
| OB CAOL ILA — 5 | 12 | 43% | £ 23.90 | £ 2.00 |
| OB CAOL ILA — Δ | 18 | 43% | £ 33.20 | £ 2.00 |
| OB CAOL ILA | | 55% | £ 29.50 | £ 2.00 |
| OB CLYNELISH — 4Δ | 14 | 46% | £ 23.70 | £ 3.00 |
| OB DAILUAINNE | 16 | 43% | £ 27.90 | £ 2.00 |
| OB DALMORE — 3 | 12 | 40% | £ 20.60 | £ 5.00 |
| OB DEANSTON | 12 | 40% | £ 20.50 | £ 3.00 |



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|--------------------------------|--------|-----|---------|---------------|--|--------|-----|---------------|---------------|
| OB DEANSTON | 17 | 40% | £ 26.50 | £ 3.00 | OB LAPHROAIG | 10 | 40% | £ 20.90 | £ 3.00 |
| OB FETTERCAIRN | 12 | 40% | £ 16.90 | £ 3.00 | G&M LINKWOOD | 15 | 40% | £ 24.90 | £ 3.00 |
| OB GLEN ELGIN (New) | 12 | 43% | £ 21.90 | £ 3.00 | OB LOCH LOMOND | | 40% | £ 15.30 | £ 3.00 |
| OB GLENFARCLAS — 3 | 10 | 40% | £ 19.20 | £ 2.00 | OB LOCHNAGAR (Royal) — 3 | 12 | 40% | £ 20.30 | £ 4.00 |
| OB GLENFARCLAS '105' | | 60% | £ 28.30 | £ 2.00 | OB LONGMORN — 3Δ | 15 | 45% | £ 25.90 | £ 5.00 |
| OB GLENFIDDICH — 2 | 12 | 40% | £ 19.90 | £ 2.00 | G&M LONGMORN | 12 | 40% | £ 21.60 | £ 3.00 |
| OB GLENFIDDICH — Caoran | 12 | 40% | £ 20.60 | £ 5.00 | G&M LONGMORN | 25 | 40% | £ 38.90 | £ 6.00 |
| OB GLENFIDDICH — Solera — 3 | 15 | 40% | £ 23.90 | £ 5.00 | OB MACALLAN — 3 | 10 | 40% | £ 21.90 | £ 3.00 |
| OB GLENFIDDICH | 18 | 40% | £ 30.90 | £ 9.00 | OB MACALLAN — 'Fine Oak'—3Δ | 10 | 40% | £ 21.90 | £ 3.00 |
| OB GLENFIDDICH — Havana | 21 | 40% | £ 47.90 | £ 4.00 | G&M MILTONDUFF | 10 | 40% | £ 14.90 | £ 4.00 |
| OB GLEN GARIOCH | 15 | 43% | £ 20.90 | £ 5.00 | OB MORTLACH | 16 | 43% | £ 29.90 | £ 2.00 |
| OB GLENGOYNE — 1 | 10 | 40% | £ 20.90 | £ 2.00 | OB OLD PULTENEY — 4 | 12 | 40% | £ 18.70 | £ 4.00 |
| OB GLENLIVET (The) — 3 | 12 | 40% | £ 20.40 | £ 3.50 | OB SPEYBURN | 10 | 40% | £ 17.50 | £ 3.00 |
| OB GLENLIVET (The) — Δ | 18 | 43% | £ 26.40 | £ 3.50 | OB SPEYSIDE — 2 | 10 | 40% | £ 22.50 | £ 3.00 |
| OB GLENMORANGIE — 2 | 10 | 40% | £ 22.40 | £ 2.50 | OB SPRINGBANK | 10 | 46% | £ 22.50 | £ 2.00 |
| OB GLENMORANGIE — Port — 2Δ | | 43% | £ 24.40 | £ 3.00 | OB TAMDHU — 2 | | 40% | £ 16.80 | £ 1.00 |
| OB GLENMORANGIE — Madeira | | 43% | £ 24.40 | £ 3.00 | OB TAMNAVULIN — 2 | 12 | 40% | £ 17.90 | £ 2.00 |
| OB GLENMORANGIE — Sherry | | 43% | £ 24.40 | £ 3.00 | OB TOBERMORY | 10 | 40% | £ 16.90 | £ 3.00 |
| OB GLENMORANGIE — Burgundy | | 43% | £ 24.40 | £ 3.00 | OB TOMATIN | 12 | 40% | £ 16.50 | £ 5.00 |
| OB GLEN MORAY | | 40% | £ 15.50 | £ 2.70 | OB TULIBARDINE | 1993 | 40% | £ 22.90 | £ 2.00 |
| OB GLEN MORAY | 12 | 40% | £ 18.40 | £ 3.50 | OB FAMOUS GROUSE MALT | '92/11 | 40% | £ 21.50 | £ 2.00 |
| OB GLEN MORAY | 16 | 40% | £ 22.90 | £ 4.00 | OB POIT DHUBH | 21 | 43% | £ 40.00 | £ 5.00 |
| OB GLEN ORD — Decanter bottle | 12 | 43% | £ 23.90 | £ 4.00 | | | | | |
| OB GLENROTHES | '92/12 | 43% | £ 30.00 | £ 5.00 | BLENDED WHISKIES | | | | |
| OB GLENROTHES | '87/16 | 43% | £ 35.90 | £ 6.00 | OB LOCH FYNE — See left for free delivery. | | | | |
| OB GLENROTHES | '84/18 | 43% | £ 43.90 | £ 6.00 | OB ANTIQUARY | 12 | 40% | £ 19.90 | £ 4.00 |
| OB GLENROTHES | '79/23 | 43% | £ 71.00 | £ 6.00 | OB BLACK BOTTLE | | 40% | £ 9.90 | £ 3.00 |
| OB GLENROTHES | '73/27 | 43% | £ 83.00 | £ 6.00 | OB BLACK BOTTLE | 10 | 40% | £ 15.50 | £ 3.00 |
| OB GLEN SCOTIA | 14 | 40% | £ 21.60 | £ 2.00 | OB Johnnie Walker — BLACK LABEL | 12 | 40% | £ 17.90 | £ 2.00 |
| OB GLENTURRET | 10 | 40% | £ 23.60 | £ 2.00 | OB WHYTE & MACKAY | 12 | 40% | £ 14.60 | £ 2.00 |
| OB HIGHLAND PARK — 3Δ | 12 | 40% | £ 19.90 | £ 5.00 | LIQUEURS | | | | |
| OB INCHGOWER | 14 | 43% | £ 27.90 | £ 2.00 | OB DON'T FORGET THE LOCH FYNE LIQUEUR! | | | Nae Deal mind | |
| LOWER SHELF | | | | | OB ATHOLL BROSE | | 35% | £ 18.30 | £ 3.00 |
| OB INCHMURRIN — 1 | 10 | 40% | £ 17.90 | £ 2.00 | OB DRUMGRAY CREAM | | 17% | £ 9.40 | £ 1.50 |
| OB ISLE OF JURA | 10 | 40% | £ 16.90 | £ 5.00 | OB GLAYVA — 50cl | | 35% | £ 12.90 | £ 2.00 |
| OB ISLE OF JURA — Superstition | | 40% | £ 24.90 | £ 5.00 | OB HEATHER CREAM | | 17% | £ 9.90 | £ 1.00 |
| OB ISLE OF JURA | 16 | 40% | £ 26.90 | £ 5.30 | OB OLD PULTENEY LIQUEUR — 50cl30% | | | £ 12.00 | £ 1.50 |
| OB KNOCKANDO | '90/13 | 40% | £ 17.60 | £ 4.00 | TRIO OF LOCH FYNE MARMALADES | | | £ 7.00 | £ 1.30 |
| | | | | | LOCH FYNE WHISKY FUDGE — BUY 4 GET 5 | | | £ 7.60 | £ 1.90 |



LITTLEMILL LOST



Lowland Distilleries are getting even more precious following the loss of Littlemill to fire in September. Littlemill was arguably the oldest distillery in Scotland having been built in 1772. Although silent for ten years and with no plans to distil again, the historic and listed building has been completely destroyed after some youngsters started a fire one Saturday afternoon which took the fire brigade 24 hours to bring under control.

Only Auchentoshan, Bladnoch and Glenkinchie distilleries are capable of production from what was once the most active whisky producing region in Scotland. The lowland region includes Edinburgh and Glasgow where there were many distilleries producing vast quantities of whisky, but with speed and volume being the objective of the distillers, there was a low regard to quality and they fell out of favour with the blenders. Littlemill whisky was never much sought after, being characteristically light with a marshmallow taste. Loch Fyne Whiskies still has bottles for sale and maturing stocks are still being held in cask by the owners at Loch Lomond Distillery—despite a large blaze at their warehouses a few years ago!

PLEASE NOTE

All deals offered at lfw.co.uk and on pages 6 & 7 are valid for mail order customers placing orders before **noon** on

Monday 20th December.



Ordering from lfw.co.uk

On-line orders may not appear to include certain deals but be assured they will be included when serviced, if available.

Merry Christmas and a Good New Year to all our friends and customers.

Once again, thank you for your business.



BOWMORE COLLECTOR CASHES IN!



Dutch whisky collector Hans Sommer has got his own back on a whisky producer, and his money as well!

Hans has sold back his comprehensive collection of over 200 Bowmores which is to be housed at the distillery visitor centre as part of an exhibition on the history of the distillery.

As far as we are aware this is the first instance of a collector succeeding in the realisation of the value of his collection in such a way.

The collection includes three 'Black' Bowmores, that at auction can reach up to £1,500 each; a complete set of 11 Bowmore 'Legend' special edition tins and many Bowmore miniatures, water jugs and old and new gift items.

The collection is considered to be the most comprehensive of Bowmore.

SWR spoke to Hans.

"I started collecting miniatures in 1987, and a few years later (empty) whisky tins. By the end of 1996 I started to sell some of my miniatures and to collect full size bottles of Bowmore. I sold all of miniature collection by 2002 and now my Bowmore collection. I will continue to collect my whisky tin presentations!"

"The most rare was a Bowmore 25 years old for 'Auld Alliance' at Chateau Lagrange which was limited to 75 bottles only. I had 9 different Bowmore Bicentenary bottlings which were precious to me and other specialities are still available to be seen on my website www.sirbowmore.info.

"No comment on the sale value, sorry!"

We asked if he had any other comments, what is he collecting now, and any advice for other whisky collectors?

"I will continue collecting the tin boxes for the time being".

"My advice would be to build a good network of collectors who help each other. Treat them fairly with fair prices and you will be treated the same way. Be happy with what you've got, don't be unhappy with what you are missing. Don't envy other people who have your missing bottles but praise them with their findings. Don't buy bottles at any price, as with a little patience you might get a better deal some time later. Buy new editions as soon as possible before they increase in value. Display your collection to have more enjoyment from it. Go to see the people at the distillery and meet other collectors in person as well as shops like Loch Fyne Whiskies".

Whisky collectors will be pleased to acquire the second volume of Valentino Zagatti's magnificent collection (still featuring mostly Scotch) price £60. (Small stocks of volume 1 remaining - £80)



BOTTLES—A HISTORY

Charles Maclean



Glass bottles began to be used for holding wines and spirits in the mid-17th century, but they were very expensive, so only the wealthy could afford them. They were mainly used as 'serving bottles' or decanters, rather than 'binning bottles' for storing wine in the cellar.

Glass pads, impressed with the owner's mark or coat of arms, were attached to each bottle, and the bottles themselves were taken to be filled by the wine merchant, or filled in their owners' cellar by the butler (i.e. 'bottler'). Within only a decade or so, the middle classes were also able to afford glass bottles: Samuel Pepys records in his diary of 1663 that he 'went to the Mitre' to see wine put into his 'crested bottles'.



The earliest glass bottles had spherical bodies and long, parallel necks, with a rim at the top to hold down the string which kept the stopper in place. They are known as 'shaft and globe bottles'.

By 1700 the neck had begun to taper and the body to become compressed—these are 'onion bottles'. They continued to be treasured, and in Scotland were commonly used as decanters for whisky in public houses. In the Highlands it was traditional to give them as marriage gifts, crudely engraved with the names of bride and groom, the date of the nuptials and even with an illustration of the event.



Between 1700 and 1720, the onion shape was sometimes exaggerated, so the body became wider than the height, then about 1720 the sides began to be flattened by rolling on a steel plate while the glass was cooling—a process called 'marvering'—in order to rack them in the 'bins' of the cellar.

Early marvered bottles were 'mallet' shaped, where the straight sides tapered away from the base, but over the next twenty years they became taller and more cylindrical, particularly after 1740, by which time the value of maturing wine in the bottle was becoming generally recognised. By mid-century many wine and spirits merchants had their own bottles, with their name or trademark pressed into the glass pad, to be returned for refilling with whatever liquor was available.



The classic French wine bottle shapes familiar to us today had evolved by about 1800—there was a huge growth in the number of glass factories in Bordeaux, particularly, which was producing around two million bottles a year by 1790. Bottles from this period can often be identi-

fied by a slight swelling around the base, caused by the glass 'sagging' while the bottle cooled in an upright position.

Until 1821 bottles were free-blown, which meant that capacities and dimensions were not standardised. So when one reads of hearty drinkers of the late 18th century downing three or four or even six bottles of wine at a sitting—this seems to have been especially common among Scottish judges of the period, who habitually drank claret while sitting in judgement—it might be supposed that the bottles of their time were smaller than those of today. Not so. Research done in the Ashmolean Museum in Cambridge shows that the average bottle size was if anything slightly larger than today!

In 1821 Henry Ricketts, a glass manufacturer in Bristol, patented a method of blowing bottles into three piece moulds, which made it possible to standardise capacity and dimensions. Such moulds left seam marks—the way in which collectors identify them today—but during the 1850s a process was developed to remove these by lining the mould with beeswax and sawdust, and turning the bottle as it was cooling. Until about 1850 all wine and spirits bottles were made from 'black' glass—in fact it was very dark green or dark brown—owing to particles of iron in the sand used in their manufacture. Clear glass bottles and decanters were made, but they were taxed at eleven times the rate of black glass.

Indeed, owing to the Glass Tax, bottles remained expensive, and continued to be hoarded and re-used until after 1845, when duty on glass was abolished. The earliest known 'whisky bottles' were re-used wine bottles. Even after the duty had been lifted and clear glass began to be used more, whisky makers continued to favour green glass bottles, often with glass seals on their shoulders. VAT 69 continues this style of bottle.

Many whisky companies continued to fill into small casks and stoneware jars and offered their goods in bulk. It was not until 1887 that Josiah Arnall and Howard Ashley patented the first mechanical bottle blowing machine, allowing bottled whisky to really take off. In the trade bottled whisky was termed 'cased goods', since it was sold by the twelve-bottle lot packed into stout wooden cases, like top quality wine today.

Bottled whisky, properly stoppered and sealed, was less liable to adulteration or dilution by unscrupulous publicans and spirits merchants than whisky sold in bulk, and during the 1890s cased goods became the commonest way for whisky to be sold, particularly in the off-trade. The use of plastic (polyethylene) bottles, developed during the 1960s and adopted by soft-drinks manufacturers, has largely been eschewed by the whisky industry, except for miniatures supplied to airlines. These bottles are called PETs—

not a reference to their diminutive size, but to the material they are made from: Polyethylene Terephthalate. Their clear advantage is weight, and they began to become commonplace in the 1990s. Concerns about shelf-life, and contamination by oxygen or carbon dioxide have been addressed since 1999 by coating the outside of the bottle with an epoxy-amine-based inhibiting barrier.

Bottle Capacities

William Younger's examination of bottles from between 1660—1817 in the Ashmolean Museum showed the capacity of wine (and therefore whisky) bottles remained relatively constant at around 30 Fl.Oz during this period, in spite of bottles being free-blown.

With the introduction of moulded bottles in the 1820s it became much easier to standardise capacity, and this was soon fixed at 26 2/3 Fl.Oz (or 1/6th of a gallon). About 1900 this capacity was defined by law for a standard bottle—along with 40 Fl.Oz (equal to an Imperial quart—2 pints), 13 1/3 Fl.Oz (half bottle), 6 2/3 Fl.Oz (quarter bottle), 3 4/5 Fl.Oz (miniature). Brand owners were not required to print the capacity on the label until after the Second World War, however, although some did.

Since January 1980 capacities have been expressed metrically on bottle labels, in line with the *Système International d'Unités*, when 26 2/3 Fl.Oz became 75 cl, half bottles 37.5cl, quarter bottles 18.75cl and miniatures 5cl.

In 1992 the standard bottle size throughout the European Community was lowered to 70cl. The United States retains fluid ounces, with the 'reputed quart' remaining the standard bottle size (75cl). In Japan, both 75cl and 70cl bottles are acceptable.

WHAT BOTTLE COLLECTORS ESTEEM

Age—free-blown and moulded (pre 1870) bottles have 'pontil marks' on their bases, created by the iron rod, called a pontil, used to manipulate the molten glass.

Rarity—the fewer known examples, the more valuable the bottle will be.

Texture—variations in glass surface, number of bubbles in the glass, stretch marks, changes in colour.

Colour—unusual, dark or strong colours, or a colour which is rare for that kind of bottle.

Embossed—where bottles are embossed (uncommon in early whisky bottles), the clarity of the embossing, its heaviness (heavier the better), its intricacy, and the interest of the design or words.

Shape—the aesthetic quality of some bottles.

Labels—any item with its original label, contents, carton or box is of more interest than an 'empty'.

This article is just one of many from

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BEYOND DISTILLING part IV

Richard Joynton.



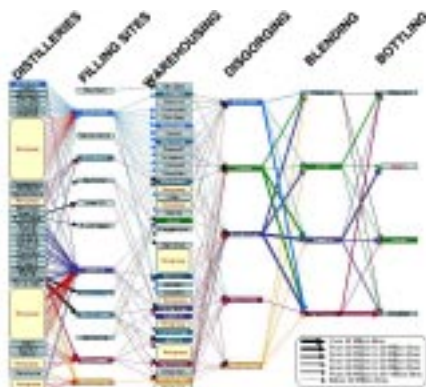
[Editor's warning: Purist whisky fans of a sensitive nature may wish to pass over this article—it contains scenes of cruelty to whisky and offensive language right from the start.]

The Whisky industry is big. You may think space is big but.....

As your leading journal dedicated to all matters Scotch we thought we would investigate the practicalities of blending for a world brand. Those of us who have been on a distillery tour will know that making Scotch whisky is a relatively simple craft process involving a stream of water, a sack of barley, a bag of yeast, an oak barrel and some bottles.

The bulk handling [language!—Ed.] of Scotch is not part of the traditional skill-and-craftsman imagery perpetuated by isolated London-based marketeers. Their belief is that if the imagination of a whisky drinker is allowed to stray beyond the glens and into Scotland's central belt the enjoyment of their brands' unique features will be spoiled. Those fans who subscribe to this theory (yet wish to persist in reading this piece) should console themselves with their appreciation of the product, despite the handling it is subjected to. The pleasure, quality and enjoyment is why we are here.

Your reporter's thoughts on the vulnerability of Scotch during its journey from field to bottle are well documented; creation of the Loch Fyne blend (married after blending) and observations from our own Living Cask are supported by Master Blender Richard Paterson's comments in *Beyond Distilling II* (SWR17), "we try not to rush the various stages, allowing the whisky time to settle. You have to be as gentle as possible". Richard is responsible for Whyte & MacKay, a blend that famously describes itself as 'double matured' referring to a second period of returning to cask for a period of marrying once the final blend of malt and grain whiskies is assembled. Such time consuming and costly care must have a beneficial effect otherwise the cost and profit police (aka accountants)



would have outlawed it by now.

Consider the world's leading whisky brand, Johnnie Walker. Red Label sells 6.8million cases each year. In shoppers' terms that's 87m 70cl bottles. The older sibling, Black Label, sells half that quantity while J&B, the number 2 brand, achieves 77m bottles (per year mind). These three brands alone would float the new Queen Mary II and are part of a portfolio of over 100 Scotch whisky blends produced by the world's biggest spirits company, Diageo.

Diageo was formed 7 years ago (220m seconds) [all right - that's enough!—Ed.] by the merger of Guinness and Grand Metropolitan. Guinness begat United Distillers in the late '80s after the acquisition of the mighty DCL—the Distiller's Company Limited—which in turn arose from the merger of the pioneering whisky giants of the late 19th century, principally: Walker, Dewar, Buchanan, Mackie (White Horse) and Haig.

The result of the merger is a streamlined cost-efficient giant, with Diageo concentrating globally on Johnnie Walker and J&B Scotch, Smirnoff vodka, Tanqueray gin, Captain Morgan rum, Cuervo tequila and Baileys cream thingy. Other brands with regional focus include Bell's, Buchanan's, White Horse, Old Parr, the Classic Malts & Cardhu, Gordon's gin and Archer's schnapps.

After the merger, Turnbull Hutton, currently principal guest columnist for your Scotch Whisky Review, was director of Spirit Supply and established the current regime of spirit production in Scotland located across 45 sites. Facilities include 27 malt and 2 grain distilleries, 4 maltings, 4 cooperages, Abercrombie the coppersmith, 3 animal feed plants, 7 major warehousing sites, 4 blending centres and 3 bottling halls. In Scotland Diageo employs 3,800 people and produces over 650 million bottles of spirits (half Scotch, 200m white spirits (gin and vodka), 100m 'ready to drink' (Smirnoff Ice, Archer's aqua) and 6m bottles of rum). (See also SWR15 interview with Turnbull Hutton and SWR16 *Beyond Distilling I*.)

So you want to produce a world blend? From the simple process described above and done well you should make a profit and expand your business. In time you may even become a challenger to Diageo, but before this investor considers buying shares you have to show that you can handle 400,000 tonnes of grain, (180,000t of malting barley and 220,000t of wheat—incidentally 95% of all their grain requirement is from Scottish farmers, the balance sourced from the east of England because of a favourable earlier harvest).

On a distillery tour you may have been shown a yeast store of 25kg sacks. Well 400,000 such sacks of yeast are on Diageo's shopping list! One million oak casks are filled each year. Boggled? Just



wait! To move that lot about the country requires a fleet of 200 articulated lorries and 250 forklift trucks. Quality is assessed by the utilisation of 3 million 10cl sample bottles every year.

Coordinating the movement of this lot is Pru Jowett, Logistics Manager for Spirit Supply Scotland. Pru is neither grey nor bald as may be expected of such a seemingly neurosis-inducing task but is in fact a sensible, cheerful biochemistry graduate of 14 years service with the company. Her remit is the planning and movement of new make spirit (malt and grain), blended spirit and casks (full and empty). Pru also handles imported rum in bulk for maturation, blending and forwarding to packaging and the movement of GNS, grain neutral spirit, produced at Cameronbridge distillery for onward production to vodka, gin, other white spirits and 'flavoured' products.

Central to all Scotch movements are the warehouses. New spirit from most distilleries is tankered to one of 13 filling stores where casks are filled and moved to a nearby warehouse, the selection of which is 'it's nearby and has space' or technically 'locality and vacuity'. This may be a distillery site or more likely on this scale one of 7 massive warehousing sites located in the central belt, the biggest of which is Blackgrange, 49 houses near Alloa holding 3 million casks. At any one time Diageo has over 7m casks maturing (1.1 billion litres of pure alcohol—3.6bn 70cl bottles at 43%—enough to flood an area the size of Wales to a depth of... [Stop it!—Ed.]), both their own make and part of an ongoing spirit trading agreement with the rest of the industry.

Talking with Pru about her job is vastly entertaining and inspiring as the scale of the operation becomes apparent.

Imagine 7 million casks in 500 warehouses across Scotland; imagine a blend requirement of typically forty components of differing specification—distillery, age and wood type. Now go and find those casks in the most efficient manner. While you are at it you had better find the casks to make up the other blends you will be bottling in the next week. Now go get those casks, empty them and blend and transport the whisky to the bottling hall. Be careful to get the proportions as specified by the blender and ensure you never mix the



wrong casks. If you do—run away! Each warehouse is a monstrous three-dimensional rack and tier chess set, so many casks high, umpteen wide and ohmygosh deep. Each cask and each cask location is identified with a barcode and every movement is logged constantly. Every drop has to be accounted for to HM Customs & Excise (yes, there is a greater entity than Diageo). A recent demand for a manual stock check at Leven bond fingered all one million+ casks recorded, many of which were entered on manual ledgers long before computers and barcode zappers, to a negligible error.

Whiskies destined to be single malts tend to be stored at traditional distillery warehouses ('in the north') with a steady turnover of stock all the time. Throughout the year, housekeeping is performed by eight warehouse flying squads, teams of three men who will hit a site and attempt to rearrange casks for efficient removal when required. It is worth avoiding having to remove an entire row of 30 casks simply to pick the mature one at the back—a process known succinctly as 'minimising the non-goers'.

Once a plan is created for the next year's spirit production, Pru's team will establish the requirement of each distillery to achieve its goals. Spirit from the stills is filled into on-site tanks and her job is to ensure that there is always space to take spirit while also transporting it away in the most efficient manner.

NOW ASSEMBLE YOUR BLEND.

Pru is at the beck and call of the bottling and packaging units who in turn respond to orders. It is her job to see that blend is available on demand for bottling.

Generally for a Diageo blend there can be up to 40 components. The blend quality team will have advised Pru the quantity, type of whisky, age and wood type used for maturation for each blend and she can then source those specifications. Each week she will assemble a blend-



ing programme based on the bottling requirements. This will be a fiendishly complicated mix of standard blends, deluxe blends and single malts, typically 26 separate products including for example: a Walker Black Label to be blended and bottled at Kilmarnock, a J&B blended at Blythswood and then bottled at Shieldhall (near Renfrew), a standard 4yo to be blended at Cambus, bottled at Leven and some single malts vatted and bottled at Leven. However before they can be blended they have to be emptied and this would be at one of 5 dedicated disgorging units (DU) only two of which are at blending sites.

As Pru said "Oh dear I've lost you". [*Just a bit—Ed.*]

"Okay. For example, for a 'recipe' involving 4 grain whiskies and 36 malts that we have selected from 12 warehouses across the group, a cask may be selected at Inchgower's warehouse near Buckie on the north-east coast. That cask is then allocated to a blend operation number that determines its future as part of the blend. The cask (and others) will be transported to the DU at Auchroisk 20 miles away, where it will be joined by other casks selected from distillery warehouses throughout the north for that week's blending programme. All casks with the same operation number will be tipped into a trough and vatted ready for transport to a blending site. If there are more casks than a road tanker can hold then these will be transported to a site where they can be added to another component of the blend; we don't like moving tankers unless they are full.

"This 'part blend' from Auchroisk may be tankered to one of our four blending sites or tank farms, let's say Blythswood, where it may be joined by 3 part blend tankers from the DU at Blackgrange (including casks from say Talisker and those spares from Auchroisk) and 3 from Leven and 1 from Bonnybridge. These ten tankers would fill a 250,000 litre vat and is now a full blend. The large part of the result could then be tankered to the bottling hall at Shieldhall, some to Leven that can handle miniatures and half bottles and some to Kilmarnock that handles larger and odd shaped bottles. "Once at the bottling hall the blend is reduced and packaged. The Leven bottling lines are also able to handle smaller volumes, such as our single malts.

The planning process operates in a five week window but from cask selection to bottling generally takes five days.

"My team is responsible for 4,500 new make tanker movements, 5,250 part-blended and 4,650 fully blended (tanker) movements. In a year we will blend 110m litres of pure alcohol and transport 1m casks from disgorging to filling store to warehouse.

"This is all bread-and-butter to us."



It is here that the true skill of logistics becomes apparent. Does it run smoothly? "Yep! Compared to the complexity and the volume we are doing I suppose it goes wrong very rarely. With the people and checks in place screw-ups are picked up very quickly, long before they become a problem. Incidents such as snow blocking the north A9 route for example are managed as they present themselves. It is important that each tanker turns up at the right time in order to fill the right blending vat. They have a 30 minute time slot and if a driver is late he becomes a statistic for discussion later. I've even done air freight once but I don't want to do that again!

"Contamination among whiskies is prevented in tankers, pipes and vat by water flushing and special colour coded seals. Transport is contracted out and most regular visitors to Scotland will recognise those companies involved in moving the world's favourite spirit.

Anticipation of the Christmas leap in demand means that by the end of August every storage vat is filled with blend or part blend ready for finishing at the bottling hall. Preparation for this starts during the first six months of the year to minimise overtime and the job peaks with the movement of 4 million litres of spirit per week."

Once Pru's tankers have done their bit it is up to packaging who bottle and prepare the whisky for despatch to a thirsty market. One of the 8 lines at Shieldhall fills 600 bottles every minute, enough to keep one drinker guided by the government's recommended daily intake happy, and smug, for 29 years.

So here's to Pru and her team, great unsung whisky heroes. How do they do it? I asked Richard Paterson, who rates Black Label as his favourite 'away' product. "I guess it's the number and quality of the individual components that they start with—quality is of paramount importance. Whatever it is, I have the utmost respect; they are doing a great job."



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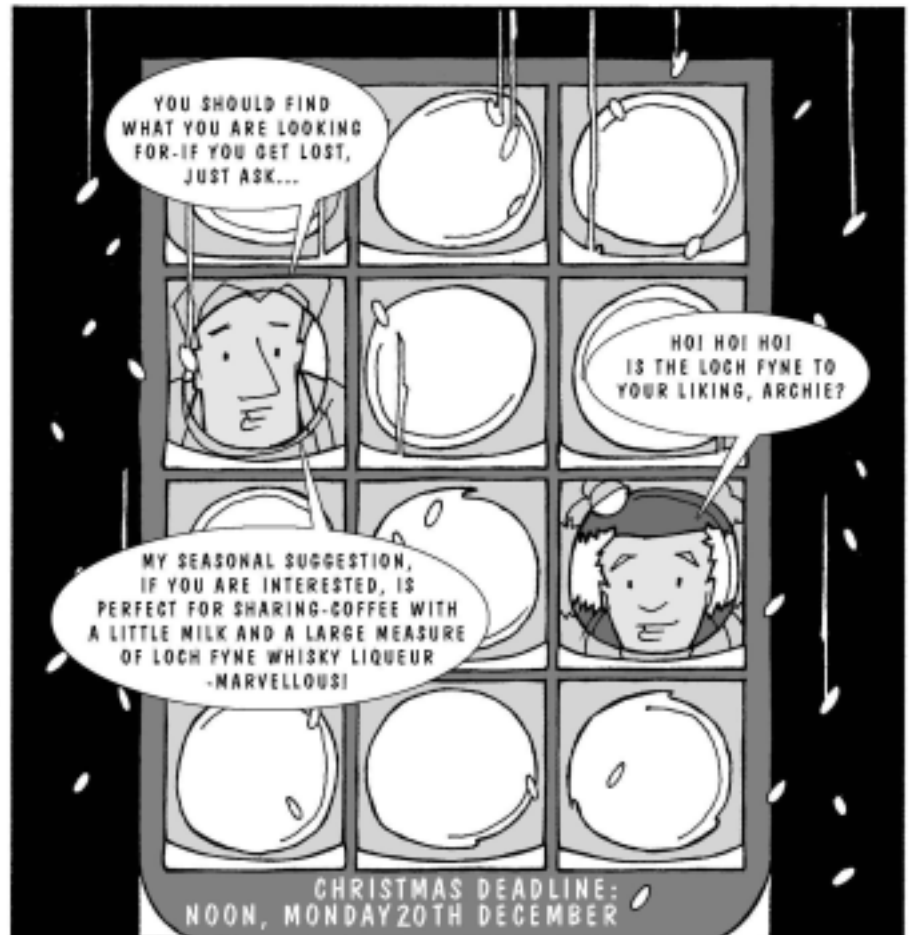
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