



FOCUS ON SCOTCH WHISKEY

Whiskey is an old man's drink, right? Wrong. Whiskey has some surprising new fans. Younger men and women are getting to know their malts from their blends and their Speyside from their Islay.

Single Malt Scotch Whiskey is the product of one specific distillery. The greatest concentration of malt whiskey distilleries can be found in the Speyside region of northeast Scotland, with Highland, Lowland and Islay being the other main malt whiskey producing zones. Each of these regions has its own particular distinctive style of malt whiskey and although it is not possible for two malts to be identical, even if the distilleries that produce them happen to stand side by side, it is usually possible to distinguish in which region of Scotland a particular whiskey was made.

Blended / Pure Malt Scotch Whiskey (Vatted Malt) will contain a number of malt whiskeys that have been skillfully blended together or "married," to create a consistent whiskey with its own distinct, identifiable character. Such a malt can also consist entirely of malt whiskeys of various ages from the same distillery. However, vatted malts will never contain any grain whiskey. A fairly uncommon type of whiskey, it is often well suited to those who prefer their whiskey to be less challenging, due to the fact that the blender's skill will more often than not produce an unvarying malt with highly definable traits.

Single grain whiskey is the product of one Grain distillery and is usually made from wheat, corn or unmalted barley. There are about 8 operating grain distilleries in Scotland, the majority being in central Scotland with the exception of Invergordon in the northern Highlands and Girvan in the far south. There are of course more grain distilleries, which are now closed or mothballed.

Blended scotch whiskey may contain a combination of whiskeys from over 40 or 50 different malt and grain distilleries. The normal ratio of malt to grain is 60% grain 40% malt. The percentage of malt used will determine the quality and smoothness of taste and character. Each whiskey used in the blending process will normally have been matured for about 5 years, however there are a number of higher aged blended scotch whiskeys available.

In the **production** of Malt Scotch Whiskey the basic raw materials are limited and consist of barley, water and yeast.

The process comprises five distinct stages:

- **MALTING** which converts barley to **MALT**.
- **MASHING** which produces **WORT** (sugar solution) from ground or crushed **MALT**.
- **FERMENTATION** that produces **WASH** (a weak, crude, impure spirit) consequent upon the introduction of **YEAST** in the **WORT**.
- **DISTILLATION** that strengthens and purifies the spirit contained in the **WASH** and also separates the solids contained in the spirituous liquor.
- **MATURATION** that transforms the raw **SPIRIT** into **WHISKEY**.

How to Drink Scotch: There is no right or wrong way to drink Scotch whiskey - it's all down to personal taste at the end of the day. However, here are a few suggestions:

Many who drink Scotch whiskey neat say they do not want to spoil the taste by adding water. However, equally as many will say that adding a touch of water, particularly if it is pure, soft spring water, (ideally the same spring water used in the making of the particular whiskey!) serves to enhance the distinctive aroma and flavor of a whiskey. Tap water may contain high amounts of chlorine and therefore would not complement any whiskey - your best bet is to opt for bottled Scottish mineral water!

Purists will say that adding ice to a whiskey is such a shame because it will only dull the fine taste and wonderful aromas. Similarly, carbonated water is not an ideal accompaniment for whiskey as it may interfere with the aromas. Some would also say that adding mixers such as ginger ale, soda and even coca cola, is a popular trend, however it begs the question - why drink whiskey at all if you need to mask the taste? But, we at Belfair Fine Wines and Spirits believe that what and how you drink is all a matter of personal taste.

Independent Bottlers play an important role in the Scotch Whiskey Industry. Nowadays, consumers are searching for rare, specialist whiskies to satisfy their thirst for knowledge about the fascinating world of Scotch Whiskey and this is where these companies come into their own. Independent bottlers can offer a fantastic range of Scotch whiskies and through acquiring a number of whiskey casks, sometimes from distilleries that are currently 'mothballed' or have been completely dismantled they are preventing certain fine Scotch whiskies from disappearing altogether. The casks will be matured by the Independent Bottler as they see fit, bottled and presented under their own particular label.

Some Independent Bottlers specialize in producing limited editions of rare, premium single malt whiskies from specially selected casks (from brokers or direct from the distillery). Such whiskies are attractive to the real whiskey connoisseur as an opportunity to sample a rare vintage, or a whiskey from their favorite distillery that has been matured in a different type of cask or bottled at a different age from the normal standard production. An increase in demand for more specialist whiskies has seen various independent bottlers extend their range to offer 'Cask Strength Whiskies'. Proprietary whiskies are normally bottled at 40% vol, 'cask strength' means that no water has been added to the whiskey prior to bottling and therefore the whiskey may be over 50% vol. Other attractive bottling features may include 'NO chill filtering or coloring'. It is clear that Independent Bottlers offer a vital service to discerning whiskey connoisseurs all over the world.

Scotch and Food Pairing

Lagavulin, a malt whiskey from Islay, goes particularly well with roquefort, the peaty taste of the whiskey working off the saltiness of the cheese. Peaty whiskies also complement seafood. Indian food suits whiskey too, the fiery and fierce nature of both making them natural partners. And for dessert, ice cream with hot chocolate sauce can showcase whiskey at its best. Take a chilled lighter whiskey and sip it as you eat.

Source: www.scotchwhisky.net