

## A Guide to Nosing & Tasting by David Stewart

As The Balvenie Malt Master for over twenty years, I regularly nose and taste malt whiskies.

This gives me a background against which I can compare whiskies we produce at The Balvenie Distillery, in order to ensure that The Balvenie range is among the finest of Highland Single Malts.

I also nose and taste for sheer pleasure, and many an enjoyable evening has been spent with friends and colleagues exploring different malts including The Balvenie Single Malt Scotch Whiskies - sharing thoughts, opinions and experiences.



All you need to experience the pleasure are a few enthusiasts, some suitable glasses, notepaper and The Balvenie Single Malts you are nosing and tasting.

With a little time and practise you will soon be able to pick out the differences, and the similarities, between The Balvenie Single Malt Scotch Whiskies.

The most popular way of 'nosing' malt whisky is the Glass Method. I would recommend this for sessions where you are keen to compare several different Balvenie single malt whiskies. It is best carried out using a tulip shaped glass which helps concentrate the aromas.

- ~ Add a small amount of water to release the rich bouquet and flavour of the whisky.
- ~ Cover the glass with the palm of your hand and shake firmly, but carefully.
- ~ Put your nose deep into the glass and take two sharp sniffs.

When 'tasting' malt whisky you simply add a small amount of water, take a sip from the glass and swirl it around in the mouth before either spitting it out into a convenient receptacle (as I do when I am working) or swallowing it (much more enjoyable when socialising). You may also find it useful to sip still water between tastings to help cleanse the palate.

You may have difficulty in finding the right words to express what your nose and palate are telling you. It is the aroma, the colour, the body and texture that are the most important characteristics of malt whisky. Look out for the following qualities:

*overall fragrance*

is it light, fresh, delicate, pungent, fruity, malty, smoky?

*smoothness*

is it pleasant, mellow, silky, creamy, rounded, gentle, sharp?

*sweetness*

is it rich, fruity, bitter, spicy, seaweedy, pronounced, honey?

*colour*

is it pale, dark, rich, light, attractive, mellow?

*complexity*

is it balanced, stimulating, well-matured, differing high notes, long aftertaste, deep, well-rounded?

*body & texture*

is it robust, heavy, light, long lasting, full-bodied, good?

Both nosing and tasting skills are needed to appreciate the different characteristics of malt whisky, but perhaps surprisingly, it is the nose which will tell you most and the palate which confirms what the nose has already identified.

I have always found it very rewarding to talk through my thoughts with others and then for future reference note down my opinion of each single malt I nose and taste.

You may find my nosing and tasting notes of each of The Balvenie Single Malts helpful as a starting point for your own thoughts. You can find them by following the links to the individual malts below.

I wish you many hours of pleasure as you explore the delights of The Balvenie Single Malt Scotch Whiskies.

Slàinte Mhath!





## **PRODUCTION**

The raw materials required for the production of Malt Whisky are barley, water and yeast. The production process can be broken down into five stages.

[MALTING](#)

[MASHING](#)

[FERMENTATION](#)

[DISTILLATION](#)

[MATURATION](#)

MALTING [Back to Top](#)

First the barley is MALTED, that is the barley is germinated to convert the starches in each grain into a simple sugar. Distillers look for plump, ripe barley with plenty of starch and not too much nitrogen.

Barley is a food cereal similar to wheat and oats. It has always been the primary raw material for conversion to malt. The preference for barley over other cereals is undoubtedly the fact that the corn or seed is covered with a straw-like husk that is not removed by threshing and protects the grain during the process stages in malting. The husk subsequently serves as a filter in the mashing operations.

The origin of the barley is not important. Although Scottish barley is considered to be the most suitable, due to the soil and climatic conditions, there is not enough to satisfy the industry demand. Barley is imported from England and other countries. Originally the barley was grown locally and malted at the distillery, as evidenced by the familiar pagoda-shaped roofs of the malt kilns visible at some whisky distilleries. Today only a handful of distilleries have their own maltings; these include Highland Park, Glenfiddich, Bowmore, Laphroaig and Springbank. Specialist maltsters can provide distillers with more consistent malt made to their detailed specifications.

A grain of barley consists of two main parts, the Embryo and the Endosperm. The

embryo is the important part of the corn, all the organs which will develop into a future plant being present there in a modified form. The Endosperm is the chief food storage organ of the seed from which the Embryo draws its food supplies in the early stages of germination. Also present in the corn, both in the Embryo and the Endosperm (to a limited extent) are substances known as proteins. Also secreted in the barley are Enzymes, which develop during germination and, in association with other Enzymes formed in the process, degrade the starch hydrolytically to provide simple fermentable sugars.

The object of malting is, therefore, to develop Enzymes and in particular Diastase of Malt and to modify or make friable the starch contained in the grain. This is carried out in three stages, steeping, germinating and kilning or drying. These processes must be affected in such a manner as to provide maximum fermentable matter (Malt Extract), adequate Diastatic Power and ensure minimum malting loss due to respiration etc.

### STEEPING

The steeping cycle in the steep tanks is variable according to the quality of the barley and is, of course, dependent on the time taken for the moisture content of the barley to rise to the desired level. Generally a 60-hour cycle is adequate. During this period the water will have been changed at least three times, air rests, the number and lengths of periods having been first determined, will have taken place and regular periods of aeration of the steep water will also have been carried out.

### GERMINATION [Back to Top](#)

Until recent years, floor malting was operated in the conversion of barley to malt. The disadvantage of this system is the difficulty of removing or counteracting the influence exerted on the malting process by atmospheric conditions. A large amount of space is necessary and the cost of employing the essential skilled workers is high.

Today floor malting is practically non-existent and the germination process is usually carried out in pneumatic maltings either Box Maltings or Drum Maltings. Box Maltings are generally more common and the essential feature is that temperature controlled air, saturated with moisture to a humidity of 100%, is passed through the bed of germinating grain contained in a concrete box and via perforations in the box floor. This system provides ideal conditions for the germination of the barley to proceed irrespective of the atmospheric conditions. The germination period is reduced in comparison with floor malting, production increased and a considerable economy effected in labor.

Turners are provided in the germinating box to ensure that all the grain contained therein is kept free, leveled and receive similar treatment in the passage of air throughout the bed. Having sprouted, the barley is now termed "green malt" and is ready for drying.

### KILNING OR DRYING [Back to Top](#)

Germination having been completed the grain or "green malt" as it is now termed is transferred by screw and elevator to the Malt Kiln for drying. In Kilning, perfect

control as far as is possible, should be established over the temperature of drying and economy in the use of Fuel. The Kiln is a tower shaped structure with a furnace provided at the base. The hot air chamber is located above the furnace. It distributes the heat from the furnace evenly under the wedge wire floor on to which the grain has been spread. The wedge wire floor is so constructed as to allow an easy passage for the hot air to pass through the grain. The upward draught of hot air may be natural but is often assisted by a powered fan.

The furnace is a simple grate in which coke or anthracite and peat is burned. The drying of the grain performs the following functions.

- It stops germination and modification and fixes the Enzymes.
- It reduces the Diastatic Power of the grain which was at its maximum in "green malt".
- It physically changes and forms the malt into a condition suitable for milling or grinding at a subsequent stage.
- It imparts a flavor to the malt as a result of the use of peat in the furnace.

Peat is formed from decomposed vegetable matter and the peat "reek" or smoke given off from combustion is imparted to the Malt. In the early drying stages whilst the grain is in a soft moist condition the peat "reek" permeates into the corns. In the latter drying stages the outer skin of the seeds will also be flavored.

Finally, on termination of the Kilning the Malt is removed to be stored in Bins for five to six weeks. This period of time is necessary to allow the heat to be dissipated naturally. The use of hot Malt is not conducive to the satisfactory function of one of the later functions, i.e., Fermentation.

In preparation for the next stage, Mashing, the malted barley must first be ground and this is carried out on a four-roller mill. Magnets are installed in the Mill to prevent pieces of metal passing through and making contact with the revolving rolls. Such an occurrence could cause a spark within the mill and create a fire and/or explosion.

The quality and consistency of the ground malt or Grist is all important if maximum extraction of fermentable matter is to be obtained in the Mashing operation. An ideal Grist should have as many of the husks as is possible, unbroken in appearance, although they should have been split open to release the starch. Unbroken husks provide a more buoyant Mash and give better filtration in the Mash-Tun by allowing the liquor to percolate through. Husks that have been crushed into numerous small pieces are liable, due to liquid pressure, to pack and thus impair drainage in and from the Mash-Tun.

In so far as the starch is concerned it is the aim of the Millman to break it down into minute gritty particles without creating flour. Some flour is unavoidable but this should be kept to a minimum. Fine grits allow the water to mix readily but flour resists mixing. If too much flour has been produced it creates bad filtration and often "soggy" or "sticking" mashes giving bad drainage. A visual examination of the grist provides an experienced operator with a good idea of the quality.

To obtain maximum efficiency, however, it is essential to know the exact quality of the grind. For this purpose a hand screening box which, when shaken, can separate a sample into three portions is used. Ideal Grist should have the following components.

1. Coarse Materials and Husks 14% by weight
2. Fine Grits 78% by weight
3. Flour 8% by weight

Barley seeds and consequently Malt corns vary in size and it is therefore necessary to close or open the Mill Rolls to ensure that a Grist of the quality described is obtained. This entails regular sampling and checking by the Millman in order to obtain a Grist, which will provide the maximum Mash Tun Extract of fermentable matter.

## **MASHING** [Back to Top](#)

The object of Mashing is to render soluble and to dissolve as much of the valuable contents of the Malt as is possible. This produces a sweet liquid or sugar solution termed Wort containing in addition to the sugars intermediate products.

The materials used in the Mashing process are Water and ground Malted Barley. The quality of the water plays an important part throughout this process and finally in the quality of the spirit produced. All waters tend to differ to some extent in the quantity and type of minerals and organisms contained therein. Generally speaking, hard waters are considered unsuitable and soft waters are preferred. An ideal process water would be one rising from a whinstone or granite strata, acid in nature and flowing through peaty soil with a minimum of metal content.

Springs and burns should be protected, wherever possible, to prevent contamination and water tanks and pipes should be scoured and sterilized frequently. It is undesirable to use water that has lain in tanks and pipes for some time. Such water may well contain bacterial and dissolved metals. In short, poor quality water should never be used in the process and regular analyses can assist in this respect.

The only cereal in the production of Malt Spirit is malted barley. Malt, as stated, contains a high percentage of starch together with enzymes that possess the power to convert starch to sugar when mixed or mashed with water. Enzymic action is influenced to a large extent by temperature, Ph and concentration of the mash.

The ground malt or Grist is conveyed to a hopper or bin situated above the Mash-Tun and mashing can commence. The Mash-Tun is a circular metal vessel provided with mechanical stirrers that revolve and rotate to thoroughly mix the Mash of Grist and Water as necessary. A perforated false bottom, to allow the liquor to drain through and discharge to a holding tank termed a Worts Receiver, covers the whole surface of the bottom of the Mash-Tun. Whilst the liquor drains off through the perforations the grains are retained in the Mash-Tun. The process

involves the application of three waters.

### **First Water**

Hot water at a temperature of 156°F and the Grist are brought together simultaneously in a Mashing Machine, situated above and discharging into the Mash-Tun. The mixing of the Grist and the Water combines to give a striking temperature of 148°F - 149°F. When the Mash-Tun has been filled to the required capacity the temperature of the mass should be 147°F - 148°F. At this temperature the desired conversion proceeds rapidly. Great care must be exercised in regulating mashing temperatures, as variations will seriously affect the fermentability of the liquor. The Mash is allowed to sit for 1 hour to ensure maximum conversion at this temperature.

The Wort is, thereafter, drained into the Wort's receiver, cooled through a Heat Exchanger and pumped to the fermenting vessels called Wash Backs. It is necessary to cool the Wort as Yeast, which is added to the sugar solution, will not live or propagate in high temperatures. The Wort is therefore cooled to 72°F at which temperature fermentation is rapidly incited by the action of the Yeast. In cooling the Wort in the Heat Exchanger the cooling agent is, of course, water and the heat from the Wort is transferred to same resulting in warm water at a temperature of 125°F being returned to the Brewing Tanks for further use. This practice effects a saving in steam and consequently an economy in the use of coal.

### **Second Water**

All the First Water liquor having been drained from the Mash-Tun a second Water is added to the bulk of the grains left in the Mash-Tun. No more Grist is added and the Second Water is applied at 172°F giving a temperature of the mixture in the Mash-Tun of 157/159°F. Quantitatively the Second Water is usually about half that used for the First Water. The temperature is raised to further assist extraction and render soluble ant starch particles which had not been dissolved at the lower temperature of the First Water. The Mash, when the Second Water has been added, is again left "sitting" for a period of thirty minutes for conversion to take place. The liquor is thereafter drained, cooled and passed to the Wash Back.

### **Third Water**

The grains left in the Mash-Tun still contain a small percentage of sugars. This is too valuable to lose and accordingly a Third Water raised to a temperature of 190°F - 195°F is applied. The stirrers, in this instance, are used vigorously to ensure thorough mixing and complete the final extraction. The liquor from the Third Water, which is a very weak sugar solution, is termed Sparge. It is returned to the Brewing Tanks to be used as the mashing liquor of the First Water of the next Mash. These operations should, therefore, obtain maximum extraction and minimum loss. The grains left in the Mash-Tun are, after the Third Water liquor has been drained off, removed mechanically and sold to Dairy Farmers. A high milk yield is forthcoming from the use of these grains known as Draff.

**FERMENTATION** [Back to Top](#)

## YEAST

Yeast is a unicellular microorganism, that is to say, it is a living organism whose individual units are visible only under the microscope. It belongs to the planet kingdom and is classified as one of the fungi. There are many different species of yeast but the one normally encountered in the distilling and brewing industries is called *Saccharomyces Cerevisiae*. To give some ideas of the minute size of this micro-organism, three fully grown yeast cells placed end to end will measure only one thousandth part of an inch and in a 1 lb packet of yeast, there are approximately seven billion cells. (7,000,000,000,000).

## REPRODUCTION [Back to Top](#)

**VEGETATIVE:** - The usual way in which yeast reproduces itself is by "budding" i.e. asexual means of propagation. A small protuberance first appears on the cell wall and gradually grows until a new cell is formed. This new cell can have a daughter cell of its own and so on. With ideal growth conditions one yeast cell can produce thirty yeast cells in three days.

**SPORULATION:** - this is also an asexual means of propagation which is very much more rare. When a yeast cell finds itself in a position where growth conditions are adverse, for example, when there is little or no food available, it forms spores.

Within each cell four spores are formed and these eventually rupture the cell wall and escape into the surrounding liquid. Some of these spores are male and some female and when conditions are once again favorable and food is available pairs of spores unite to form new yeast cells.

## ACTION OF YEAST IN WORT [Back to Top](#)

When yeast is introduced into a sugar solution such as Wort there are three ways in which it utilizes the sugar.

1. For multiplication i.e. it uses sugar to form new cell material.
2. Fermentation: - This is an anaerobic reaction in that it occurs in the absence of air.
3. Respiration:- This is an aerobic reaction and occurs if a constant source of oxygen is available.

The action of the yeast when added to the Wort can be divided into three phases.

(1) The lag phase where there is little fermentation. The yeast is busy adapting itself to its new surroundings and this is the period when contaminating bacteria can cause a great deal of damage.

(2) The log phase being the period of rapid fermentation when there is a rapid rise in temperature and fermentation is so vigorous that "switchers", rotating metal blades, must be employed to keep down the frothy head.

(3) Phase of restricted growth where the fermentation slows down and eventually terminates.

Yeast (1% by volume) is added as soon as possible to the cooled Wort being pumped into the Wash Back. This is done in the very early stages in order to quickly establish fermentation. It is more readily accomplished by providing the yeast with the ideal



nutrient, the strong high gravity Wort of the initial liquor from the First Water. A strict control is kept on the Wort temperature and maintained until all the Wort from both the first and second waters has been collected in the Wash Backs. When all the Wort has been collected in the Wash Back the final temperature should be around 72°F. however, if the sugar concentration of the Wort is likely to be high and a very quick acting yeast has been used, the collection or setting temperature should be dropped two or three degrees.

A rise in temperature takes place during fermentation from 72°F - 94°F. If the temperature exceeds the last figure and the temperature rise has been excessively rapid, this can destroy the yeast resulting in a poor fermentation and loss of spirit. Great care must therefore be exercised in the setting temperature and due allowance made for any abnormalities such as high concentration of sugars in the Wort.

The rate of fermentation is variable and is dependent on many factors such as the type of yeast, quantity, its condition, the setting temperature, the temperature in the Fermenter Room, the type of malt, the available Diastase, suspended solids in the Wort, mashing temperatures, purity of water and so on. Sometimes fermentation will appear to be continuing after fifty hours. Generally fermentation after forty-eight hours is negligible.

The cause of poor fermentation can be attributed to a number of factors, some of which are given below.

- (1) The use of Malt low in Diastasic Power.
- (2) Bacterial infected yeast.
- (3) Excessively high percentage of dead cells in yeast.
- (4) Incorrect mashing temperatures.
- (5) Bacterial infection in vessels, pipes, pumps, valves etc.

It is of paramount importance that all vessels in the mashing and fermentation processes be kept 100% clean and free from bacteria. To this end a very strict cleaning and sterilization of all plant is adhered to and no relaxation of the cleaning operations is permissible. Bacterial infection can have a serious effect on the yield of spirit and also adversely affect the quality of the spirit.

## DISTILLATION [Back to Top](#)

Distilling takes place in pairs of copper pot stills with tall 'swan-necks'. One is usually larger than the other, otherwise their shapes, heights and sizes vary from distillery to distillery. The life of a still is between 15 and 30 years, depending on how hard it is used.

The two main operations in distilling are turning liquid into vapor and then vapor into liquid i.e. vaporization and then condensation. Distillation is simply a means of separation by these operations. A liquid can be separated from solids or one liquid from another and either the distillate or the residue collected.

The wash is pumped into the larger of the two stills, called the 'wash still', where it is

brought to the boil. Stills are either heated directly from below (by gas, oil or coal) or from within by steam heated coils, not unlike those found in electric kettles.

The Wash contains solids such as dead yeast etc. from the fermentation process and it is necessary to keep these solids in suspension during the distillation period. This is done by means of a "rummager" inside the still. The "rummager" consists of three rotating arms to which are affixed webs of copper chain and also brass links. The webs scour the bottom and flue plates of the Still. This prevents the adherence of solids and thereby prevents the Still from being burnt.

The temperature has to be carefully controlled to prevent the foaming wash from rising up the swan-neck and into the condenser. A small window in the neck tells the distiller how far the wash has risen.

The alcoholic vapors and steam rise over the neck and into the condenser - essentially a series of pipes in a cold-water jacket. Here the vapors return to liquid at about 21 per cent alcohol and are termed low wines.

The Low Wines, thereafter, flow through the Spirit Safe, which is the control point of distilling operations, to a vessel called the Low Wines & Feints receiver. Inside the Spirit Safe, fabricated of brass or copper and glass and kept securely locked by the Customs & Excise, samples of the running distillate may be drawn and the strength tested by means of a hydrometer located inside the Safe.

They then pass through into the second still, the 'low wines still' or 'spirit still'. The same process is repeated in the second distillation, but this time the distiller watches the spirit carefully as it passes through the spirit safe. The early part of the run (known as 'foreshots') is pungent and impure. He test the spirit by adding water (which turns it cloudy), measuring its specific gravity and watching the clock, and until the foreshots run clear, he directs it back to the low wines and feints charger to be redistilled. This takes between 15 and 45 minutes depending on the size of the still.

When he is sure that the run is clear, the stillman redirects the spout and begins to collect the spirit for maturing. This is 'new make', and will run between two and fours hours, depending on the size of the still, commencing at about 70 to 75 percent alcohol and decreasing steadily down to between 60 to 65 percent.

The precise strengths, the speed at which he operates his still and the length of time he saves spirit (known as the 'cut') is part of his art and influences the flavor and quality of the product. It varies from distillery to distillery but the 'new make' may be about one third of the spirit distilled. Only part of the run is collected, because about halfway through the second distillation, various oily compounds called 'feints' begin to vaporize. They are mild and pleasant at first, lending character and flavor to the whisky, but in time their intensity increases to such a degree that to continue to collect the spirit will spoil the whole batch.

The stillman will again direct the distillate to the low wines and feints charger for re-distillation. Distilling continues until all that is left is 'spent lees' (more or less

water). The distillation of 1,500 gallons (6,800 liters) of low wines and feints normally takes about six hours.

## MATURATION [Back to Top](#)

In this discourse up to this point no mention has been made of whisky. This is simply because the spirit produced cannot legally be termed Scotch Whisky until it has been matured in oak casks for at least three years.

If it is intended to sell the Malt Spirit as a single Malt Whisky then at least eight years maturation or preferably ten to twelve years will be necessitated.

No reputable distiller would market Malt Whisky or even Blended Whisky at such an immature age as three years. The maturation of whisky i.e. the change from a raw harsh spirit to the smooth, mellow aromatic whisky, so acceptable to most, is to a great extent a closed book. It is known, of course, that the spirit vaporizes and permeates through the cask into the atmosphere and that moisture from the atmosphere is drawn into and mixed with the spirit in the cask. It is also known that, proportionally, the congeners change in relation to their original content in new spirit. This is, of course, due to the variance in vaporization tendencies.

Many millions of gallons of spirit are lost due to the vaporization during maturation. In the past efforts have been made to artificially mature whisky. These efforts, one is glad to state, have proved unsuccessful. Electrolysis, the use of Catalysts and other methods have all been tried but not with any real degree of success. It is to be hoped that no artificial process of quick maturation will be forthcoming and thus ensure that, although more and more chemistry is being applied to the production of Scotch Whisky, it will still remain an art and not a science.

[Back to the top](#)





## A Personal Odyssey into the World of Fine Whisky

This is a list of the whiskies I've personally tasted, and my thoughts on them. Last updated 3/17/99. What's new? Finally, a review of Glenmorangie 18!

You can still find my few notes on [blends at this link](#).

**NOTE** My thanks to those who alerted me that the artwork here was "borrowed", and the webmasters who graciously took it down. The background, banner and icons of this page are all Copyright © 1996, Masayo Noda. Also, my thanks to her for adding a wonderful look to these many dry words.

### The History

I started drinking Single Malt Scotch about 8 years ago. I'm not certain, but I think it started when I had a checkbook but no cash. There was a liquor store nearby, so I bought a bottle of Glenfiddich and wrote out a check for twice as much, getting the change in cash. I still have (half) of that bottle. I call it my cooking Scotch. It offended me when I later discovered that it doesn't list an aging time. I thought for sure it said 12 on it... since then two of my friends have had the same experience. They were certain that Glenfiddich Special Reserve said 12 on it when they bought it... but examining it later (when I challenged them to find it), it wasn't there.

Glenfiddich is a [Single Highland Malt](#) most remarkable for its blandness and lack of character. Some like it that way. Try Glenlivet if you want to try a good Single Highland Malt that is readily available, and not too expensive. Glenfiddich is the largest selling Single Malt in the world, though. To be fair, it is a pure, light Highland without coarse qualities.

Buying the next few bottles was a little stressful. There were so many kinds, and I already felt a little stung that the one bottle I pulled out amongst all the twelves was the one without any 12 on it. I *was* enjoying it enough to want to try others. To my relief, I found the miniatures at a well-stocked store, and began experimenting without needing venture capital backing. I started keeping notes on-line from home, which let me review them from work before stopping by the store on the way home. Those personal notes evolved into this page.

# The Ritual

Sometime after that I made a batch of Tollhouse Chocolate Chip cookies and had it with a shot of Glenfiddich. I was all ready sipping iced 7up alongside (never mixed). Then a wonderful thing happened. While savouring some Scotch, the fumes got up into my sinuses. I usually tried to avoid this. But this time, it carried the chocolate flavour from the cookies with it. My whole face experienced chocolate.

I don't do it very often, maybe once a month or less. One needs a shot of good Scotch, a glass of iced 7up, and a fresh batch of Tollhouse Chocolate Chip cookies, right out of the oven. Eat a cookie, sip the Scotch, savour, letting the fumes carry the chocolate flavour into your sinuses. Wait a moment, wash it down with the 7up. Pause and recover for a minute or two before doing it again.

## Other Methods

Some drink it on ice. To me, this makes it hard to distinguish some of the more subtle flavours, what with a cold tongue. A little tepid water (no chlorine, please) mixed in is the proper way. Some use soda water, to each his own, I don't like making soda-pop out of expensive whisky. I usually sip it neat (except for the cask-strength!), but always with a 7up or cold soda-water chaser. Evian water works well.

**NEW** I just discovered the perfect compliment to Islay Scotch. Forgive me if you already know about this... Lox, on a toasted onion bagel with cream cheese. The smoked salmon is such a great compliment to Talisker and Caol Ila. Wow!

## Experimenting

Buying the little miniatures is the best way to try different types of Scotch without going broke. At 1 to 7 dollars per 50 mL bottle, they provide enough for two or three Rituals and let you experiment with different types. This is how I discovered [Lowland Malts](#) and [Islay Malts](#). Oh, if it comes in a plastic bottle, don't bother (unless you're making Whisky Sours.)

Beware of tricky marketing- I saw a bottle with a big 12 on it last week. It was a blend of 12 Scotch Whiskys. It didn't have an age on it. You better believe none of the component malts were 12 years old.

## Tasting Impressions and Lingo

The stereotype of whisky drinking is like the M\*A\*S\*H episode where the character sips some, gasps, chokes, and then coughs up the word "smooth". Scotch has it's own lingo for tasting, which I avoid using because most of the words were meaningless to me at first, and still are to most of the people reading this page. I do use *smooth*, it means that the high alcohol content is not obvious at first taste, and the initial harsh bite is missing. Smoothness can't hide the alcohol content forever, if you let even the best whisky evaporate into your sinuses, you'll know its there! The opposite of *smooth* is a *sharp attack*. I think that this is the most important single criteria for new Scotch drinkers. Some experienced tasters will forgive a sharp attack if there are other qualities of taste desired and present. *Finish*, which is nothing more than the aftertaste, is an important quality to experienced tasters. I only mention it as *aftertaste* when it is

particularly remarkable. Sherry cask aged Scotch usually have nice, enduring finishes, and Islays sometimes have a smoky, burning finish.

## Note to passing surfers:

This web site, the Scotch Connoisseur Page seems to be a favorite of international users, who then check out the scotch.com page and the Edinburgh page. When finished, please come back, check out my [home page](#) and fill out my [Surfer Survey](#) form and tell me how helpful this page is!

## More Info

For more info, check out the pretty pictures on the [Scotch Web Page](#). A very comprehensive list is also kept at this site in [Edinburgh](#), though being Scottish I think he believes the histories a little too readily, though he pulls no punches about the tasting. For rare bottlings unavailable elsewhere, try [The Scotch Whisky Society](#).

When reading site histories, take them with a grain of salt. Many distillers trace their heritage back to pre-licensing days and post-licensing moonshiners. If the history says, "distillation first began at the *Glen Humber* site 200 years ago," they probably have little more than an arrest record to base it on. Periods of 50 or 100 years, and several owners, may have passed with no product before serious distillation began. Several start-ups in the 50's and 60's bought sites based on their history (*e.g.*, Singleton of Auchroisk, which tastes pretty good BTW) in order to place a claim on antiquity. Part ownership of original families is trumpeted in suddenly-huge advertising budgets when a new majority partner decides to get into the business. Previous distillers on those sites were often no more than small, private-use stills, long-gone moonshiners, or poorly-run stills that couldn't make the single malt grade and sold all their grain or malt production to the cheaper blenders for off-site aging. Only those claims to pedigree that can be backed by continuous production of 10+ year old Single Malt under the same license need be taken seriously.

There was a "baby-boom" of sorts in the 50's and 60's, when small, old distillers began making Single Malts for export. For many, their previous Single Malt fare was reserved for local consumption, or was lesser-aged malts and grains for blending. Before WWII, it was thought that Single Malts were too "strong" for English and Foreign tastes. With the success of a few small distilleries, large companies started buying up small family concerns and redoing them into larger Single Malt distillers. Many had never aged on the premises before, had been making grain whisky, or bought all ready malted barley. To be fair, they put an emphasis on traditional methods, and some of the best 12's and 21's today are from this class of distilleries. It has also contributed to the success of the older, privately owned primarily Single Malt distilleries, by bringing more people into the tasting habit. The point of all this is, there is really no relationship between the age of a distillery site and the quality of the product.

## The List

This is a small list of the Scotch's I've tried. I don't usually drink at the keyboard, so it might demonstrate some lapses in memory. *Your tastes may differ. Your mileage may vary.* Like fine wines, different bottlings (years) provide different tastes, but most do not print the bottling date (Knockando and

Auchroisk do) so you can tell what you are getting. Note, Scotch Whisky connoisseurship is not as finely honed as that of wine, and many distillers don't care to admit that their product differs from year to year. They always have the option of selling the lesser cuts to the blenders, so while the taste may change a little, most Single Malt bottlings are still "good". Of course, I have personally tasted every one of these listed. If you don't understand my notation then click on the [Key to listings](#).

### Aberlour

(10) Rating: 9 A Highland Sherry-cask Scotch. This is much better than any ten-year old has a right to be. Overly sweet, but somewhat smooth and very rich and tasty without much peat or smoke. It's a Sherry-cask scotch but not as winey as Macallan. Very dark for a 10, but that's common for all sherry-cask aged malts. I tried the miniature and came back for the bottle. A good dessert Scotch. This is becoming one of my regulars... but, it ticks me off that they can't bother to put a real cork in it, evaporation is a problem with the useless tinfoil wrap that they try to seal it with. [Edinburgh's review](#).

### Balvenie

(15) Rating: 8 A single cask bottling of Single Malt, Cask Strength, 50.4% (101 US proof). It displays the typical trait of a Cask Strength Scotch of clouding when mixed with water. The bottle is hand-numbered with the cask and bottle number, which means that another cask may taste a bit different, as casks of the same year are not married before bottling. Finding a water worthy of this Scotch has been difficult, all the ones I've tried carry their own flavours with them (chlorine, salt, metallic, etc.) (I've since found Evian.) A rich Highland type Scotch, my only criticism is the *sharp attack* when first sipped, unexpected of a 15 year old. Any Highland drinker should enjoy it though, I do. The bottle may cost a little more but remember you should dilute it some (even if you drink it neat), so you're getting more. A different bottling than the Balvenie Double Wood 12. (I recently saw all 3 in a set of miniatures for US\$ 12.00, a good deal).

### Caol Ila, Cadenhead bottling

(20) Rating: 10 Single Cask-strength Islay Malt. This is a bit of a departure, up till now this page's reviews have been commonly available Scotches. I will probably end up joining the Scotch Whisky Society and getting all kinds of exotic rare scotches, but reviewing them would do the average reader no good, as they are unlikely to make that kind of commitment. Buying a \$40 bottle of 12 y.o. is commitment enough for a beginner! The Cadenhead bottlings bring older vintages of familiar names to store shelves. I have always suspected that a really long aging of an Islay could tame it, and this is my proof. There is no attack upon first sipping it, while it is salty and very smoky there is absolutely no medicinal taste. Very sweet, smoky, warm, and little bit of oak taste too. Not as dark as Lagavulin or Laphroaig, but maybe it is not aged in sherry or bourbon casks? I cannot describe how good this Scotch is, my only tiny criticism is that Cadenhead doesn't provide any background on the distillery.

### The Edradour

(10) Rating: 7.5 Another Sherry-cask Scotch, pretty good for a 10 year old. A Highland Single Malt. A baby-boom single malt from a old site.

### Glenfiddich

(8-12) Rating: 6. Despite words like Reserve and Select, no age given. I win a lot of bets by challenging people to find the number "12" on their bottle of Glenfiddich. It's just not there. Nice package, though, it has fooled a lot of people. I've heard now from a good authority that it is a

"marrying" of 8 to 12 year olds, including some sherry-cask aged stock. While to some this would seem to be a "blending", or a [vatted malt](#), it is still considered a "Single Malt" because it all comes from the same distillery. Some use the term "Pure Single Malt" for this in-house mixing of different-aged Scotch. Sharp, strong attack, characterless. I've heard the 18 y.o. Glenfiddich Ancient Reserve is good but I've never tried it. The world's best selling Scotch Whisky, probably due to good marketing, absolute consistency and a lack of any strong flavours that might offend someone. It's not the best selling within Scotland, though, that's Glenmorangie.

### [Glenkinchie](#)

(10) Rating: 8. A nice, mild, [Lowland](#), it has so many subtleties I get a different impression every time I drink it. Mellow beyond its young 10 years. Distilled over coal, of all things. Very different from the Islays, fresher tasting, grassy, just slightly dry. This is one of my favourites. Also at [scotch.com](#).

### [Glenlivet](#)

(12) Rating: 8. A good 12 year old [Speyside](#) Single Malt, 80 US proof. A good place to start, and return. Mellow, smooth, some sherry taste. It really has the "scotch" flavour part of butterscotch. There are many distilleries *in* Glenlivet, and they are proud to say so, but there is only one "The Glenlivet" distillery. Owned by Seagrams now, but with a genuine pedigree. It's aroma *really* opens up when mixed with a little water. One of my favourites.

### [Glenmorangie](#)

(10) Rating: 8. A competent 10 year old Highland. It has one of my favourite motto's, "Crafted by the 16 men of Tain". The ad copy on the box is a bit odd. They make a big deal of aging in "American Mountain Oak". There may be such a species, but I've hiked up enough American mountains to know that before you get very high at all, the hardwoods give way to pine, and a little higher, there are no trees at all. That's true of the East Coast's Appalachian range, which are mere foothills compared to the barren Rockies. Anyway, not a smoky, spicy Scotch like the Islays I like, but a lot more complex and flavourful than Glenfiddich. It has a light, delicate flavor, no obvious flaws, though it is a bit sharp at first. If mixed with water or soda suddenly a whole lot of subtle flavours come out. See their excellent web page at [www.glenmorangie.com](#).

### [Glenmorangie Port Wine Finish](#)

(12) Rating: 8. I bought this because I liked the 10 y.o. Glenmorangie so much and I thought a 12 should be even better. An interesting concept, the bottle says that the Scotch is "finished" aging for the last few years in a small barrel formerly used for port wine, after the Scotch's usual oak cask aging. The idea is that 12 years would be too much, the port wine would overpower the Scotch in that period of time. Usually Sherry-cask aging is done for the full length of maturation, but that would be unsuitable for the stronger affect of the Port wine cask. When I first tasted this I was left cold, it tasted too much like red wine, and the subtleties were overpowered. It had little of the "chewy" oak wood taste of the older Glenmorangie miniature I had tasted (18 I think). Since then, I have come to terms with it as a totally different kind of Scotch, and a good one, just nothing like the regular Glenmorangie. There are other wine finish concepts, like Madeira and even Tain L'Hermitage, but I haven't found them on the shelf yet. I think the concept is valid but Glenmorangie was a poor choice to experiment with; it is a Scotch of unusual subtlety and the Port wine flavour just overpowers it, even with the shorter period of exposure. This Scotch seems



seems at its best mixed with water, not my usual habit (which is to drink it neat). The many flavours of Glenmorangie are more distinguishable with water. Having bought the big bottle, I've got plenty to experiment with. My local proprietor is fanatical about this bottling, so it definitely has its followers. I've also found that it is quite popular with the ladies, and no surprise, goes quite well with cheese. Purists, please don't hit me...

### Glenmorangie 18

(18) Rating: 9.5. I took advantage of duty-free on my last vacation and got this for a good US\$10 less than at the liquor store (they make sure its not *too* good of a bargain.) This, like the Port Wine Finish from the same house is also a favourite of the ladies. I tend to drink Highlands neat, but the enormous subtleties of the 18 demand a little pure water, and extra time smelling it (enjoying the nose) before sipping. Everything that is true of the 12 y.o. and more. The boquet is simply wonderful and should be enjoyed for itself. When a friend it compared less favourably to a good, stronger flavoured scotch, I said, "That Scotch is a good time, but the Glenmorangie 18 is a *relationship*." Spending some time getting to know it is worthwhile and rewarding. It is so subtle, it is too easy to dismiss it on the first sip.

### Highland Park

(12) Rating: 9. A Single Malt Scotch from the Orkney Islands. After being recommended to me by many Islay lovers, I expected a very pungent Islay-type Scotch. Instead it is a rich whiskey, dark and a little bit of sherry, but less sherry than Aberlour or The Macallan, and a bit of smoke and peat, but less than Lagavulin or Laphroaig. If you're not sure you're ready for a strong Islay, but you'd like more flavour than most Speysides, try it. Or, if you have Dalwhinnie or another fine, light Highland, and you want to buy only one other Scotch to round out your licquor cabinet, and it has to be good, try it. It is properly bottled by James Grant & Company with a real cork (other bottlers please take note), not overly showy in decor (like Glenfiddich), but with many fine, tasteful touches. Made at the Northern-most distillery in Scotland, which has its own maltings.

### Knockando

(12) Rating: 7. A Single Malt Speyside Highland. A somewhat sharp initial attack but the taste makes up for it. My first taste was from a broken-seal part-empty miniature that probably had lost a good bit of alcohol by evaporation, and led me to a false impression of smoothness. They print the distillation and bottling dates, which I think is very considerate, more distilleries should do this.

### Laphroaig

(15) Rating: 10. An excellent, but expensive Islay Single Malt Scotch, available in 10 and 15 year varieties instead of the usual 12 and 21. Considering the harsher environment of the sea-side bonded aging warehouses, perhaps this is a better pair of times to bottle Islay malts. Labeled "The most richly flavoured of all Scotch Whiskys", drinkers of Lagavulin might dispute this. After trying the 10 year miniature, I sprang for the 15 year old bottle, \$61.99. It's worth it. I recently bought a second bottle, which considering my very slow consumption of Scotch, is my ultimate compliment. A true pedigree. I prefer it over its perpetual rival Lagavulin, with whom its history is interwoven. Peaty, smoky, sweet... and warm. My bottle of 15 y.o. doesn't have the medicinal taste that some tasters complain of. It *is* smoky. The 15 is smoother, sweeter, and a little less peppery than the 10 y.o. Currently, my absolute favorite! Be sure and visit their very nice web site.

### Lagavulin

(16) Rating: 9. The lowest altitude of the [Islay Malts](#), this is the most *character-filled* Scotch I've ever had. Not for the tame. Peaty, smoky, medicinal. I recently retasted Lagavulin and don't find it as medicinal as the first bottle (miniature actually). It may have been an inconsistency in bottling, as my previous impressions didn't match up with many other's opinions. Only available as a 16 year old, it is expensive, but the price is in line with other 15 or 16 year olds. A miniature bottle cost me \$6.99! Licensed in 1816, it has a true pedigree. Also at [scotch.com](#).

[The Macallan](#), also [US link here](#)

(12) Rating: 8. A baby-boom startup in the Single Malt business from an old family-run distillery that was providing spirits for blending. Going public allowed them to fund a high-quality Single Malt. They only introduced their first 21 year old in the 1980's. I'm almost finished a bottle of 12. It is very dark for a 12. A Sherry-cask Scotch, a bit too much Sherry-winey for my taste, but a good introduction to Scotch. A [Speyside](#) Scotch from the *Highlands*. I still have to figure out that geography. Considered one of the best. Good availability.

[Oban](#)

(14) Rating: 8. A Island style "West Highland" malt. A little smoky, but not as smoky as an Islay malt, but rich, peaty, and slightly medicinal. From a distillery right on the coast. I would have given it a ten, if it was not for the medicinal taste. Not for those who prefer light, delicate Highlands (try Glenlivet or Glenmorangie). A genuine pedigree. Also at [scotch.com](#).

Springbank

(21) Rating: 5. I've tried this a few times now, and I've tried hard to like it. It's hard on me to rate such an old Scotch so low. The only excuse I can come up with, is that perhaps the shoddy bottling technique used (no cork, flimsy foil seal that doesn't... well... seal) perhaps spoiled the bottle. It didn't show any evaporation, though (bottle was nearly full when new). It is totally different from other scotches. It's absolutely ridiculous that this expensive scotch isn't properly sealed. I passed up on buying a bottle of 18 y.o. Springbank because it had already suffered from evaporation through a loose foil wrap. I paid extra for the 21, and regret it. Perhaps the 12 is better, or maybe it just needed a cork. I've gotten letters from folks who said that it must have been a mistake, but all the bottles on the shelf were like that; either the distributor, Barrique Wine Company of Chicago IL, or J&A Mitchell & Co. Ltd (the distiller) is to blame. Salty (briney), flat, stale tasting, slightly sour. **Note:** I've received e-mail from the distributor, who is looking into the problem. They said that their warehouse is temperature-controlled, and they've had no similar complaints. Another distributor said that screw-type bottles of Springbank were unknown in the US. More, as it happens. (OK, its been a year now, nothing more happened.)

[Talisker](#)

(10) Rating: 8. The Isle of Skye Single Malt, much like the Islay Malts. The only distillery on the Isle of Skye. A good, rich Islay-style Scotch, smoky, spicy. It comes on a bit strong, I wish I could find a 16 or 21 year old bottling, I think that would be perfect, if it exists. (It does, see next listing!)

Talisker, Cadenhead Cask Strength Sept 95 bottling

(16) Rating: 10. 62.8%! The first taste will really show the mellowing of time, but the after-taste will then build and build and build until your brain explodes. The peppery, beyond smoky taste is the closest thing to enjoying eating a campfire you'll ever do. A few drops of water will only bring

### Where Malt Whisky is Made

There are discernable differences between whiskies made in one region and those made in another. Traditionally there were four distilling regions: Lowland, Highland, Islay and Campbeltown. Sometimes the latter two were lumped together, and some early writers refer simply to 'Eastern' and 'Western' malts!

### Speyside

The important region of 'Speyside' is a modern sub-division of Highland. Prior to World War II many of the distilleries in this area adopted the appellation 'Glenlivet' (which is a small glen on Speyside) - by tagging it onto the distillery name. The whiskies of Glenlivet had established a reputation by the 18th century - even though they were made outside the law!

Today over half of Scotland's malt whisky distilleries are on Speyside, and as a result the region itself has been carved up by commentators, either according to the rivers running through it or by its principle districts. The latter course has been adapted and the whiskies made in or around Elgin, the Upper Spey, Dufftown and Glenrothes, will be considered as well as Glenlivet itself.

### Highland

In recent times, 'Highland' has been further broken down by broad geographical district: North, East, West and Central.

It is impossible to be categoric about the flavour characteristics associated with each region - especially when the wood the whisky has been matured in makes such a huge contribution. Nevertheless, there are certain salient features which will be identified in this journey around the whisky regions of Scotland.



Malt Whisky Regions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Northern Highlands</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Eastern Highlands</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Western Highlands</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Central Highlands</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Campbeltown</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Lowlands</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Speyside</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Islay</a></li> </ul>



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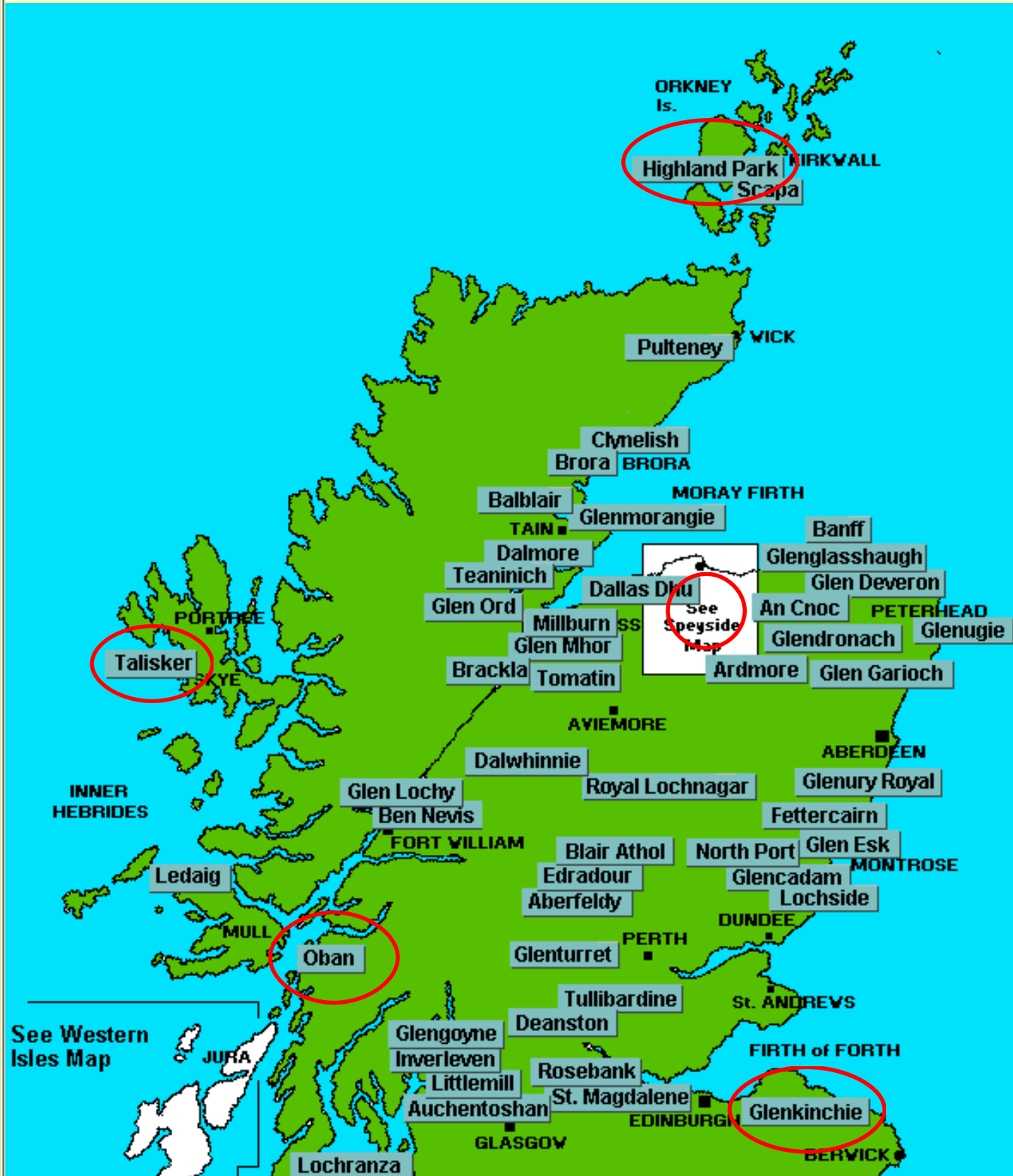
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# Scotland Active map.

Clicking on the tags will give you information about the distilleries



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- [Balblair](#)
- [Banff](#)
- [Ben Nevis](#)
- [Bladnoch](#)
- [Blair Athol](#)
- [Brackla](#)
- [Brora](#)
- [Bushmills](#)
- [Clynelish](#)
- [Dallas Dhu](#)
- [Dalmore](#)
- [Dalwhinnie](#)
- [Deanston](#)
- [Edradour](#)
- [Fettercairn](#)
- [Glen Deveron](#)
- [Glen Garioch](#)
- [Glen Mhor](#)
- [Glen Ord](#)
- [Glen Scotia](#)
- [Glencadam](#)
- [Glendronach](#)
- [Glensk](#)
- [Glenglassaugh](#)
- [Glengoyne](#)
- [Glenkinchie](#)
- [Glenlochy](#)
- [Glenmorangie](#)
- [Glenturret](#)
- [Glenury Royal](#)
- [Highland Park](#)
- [Inverleven](#)
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- [Ledaig/Tobermory](#)
- [Littlemill](#)
- [Lochranza](#)

## The Balvenie DoubleWood<sup>®</sup>, Aged 12 Years



The Balvenie DoubleWood Single Malt Scotch Whisky is a 12 year old single malt which gains its distinctive character from being matured in two woods. During its period of maturation The Balvenie DoubleWood is transferred from a traditional oak whisky cask to a first fill Spanish oak sherry cask.

Each stage lends different qualities to the resulting single malt - the traditional casks, having previously held bourbon, soften and add character, whilst the sherry wood brings depth and fullness of flavour.

In 2001 The Balvenie DoubleWood has won a Gold Medal in both the International Wine & Spirit Competition and the International Spirits Challenge.

### *Tasting Notes*

**Nose** ~ Sweet fruit and oloroso sherry notes, layered with honey and vanilla.

**Taste** ~ A smooth and mellow single malt of beautifully combined flavours - nutty sweetness, cinnamon spiciness and a delicately proportioned layer of sherry - with a long and warming finish.

[Introduction](#) | [Founder's Reserve 10 Year Old](#) | [DoubleWood 12 Year Old](#) | [Single Barrel 15 Year Old](#) | [PortWood 21 Year Old](#)  
[Single Barrel 25 Year Old](#) | [Vintage Cask](#) | [Guide to Nosing and Tasting](#) | [Special Release](#)



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[Tasting](#)



[Blends](#)



[Malts](#)

# Tasting Whisky

## 4. Examples of Tasting Notes

### The Balvenie



### The Balvenie

12 Year Old Speyside, 40% vol

#### Appearance:

Full Gold

#### Aroma:

Aromatic intensity and pungency. Rich.

(straight) First impression: dark cooking chocolate and cocoa. Sherry trifle emerges after a while.

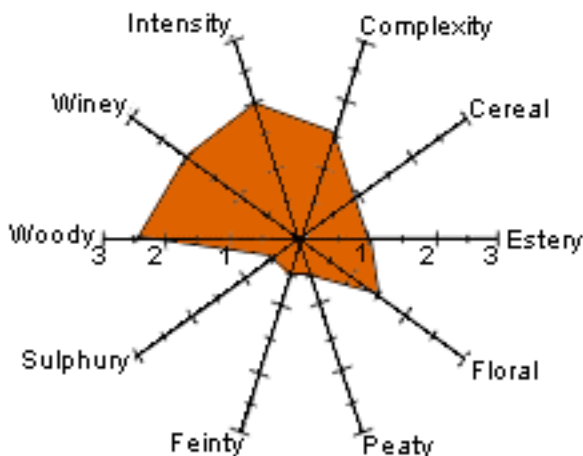
(dilute) Tight aromatic complex, difficult to isolate aromas. Sweet overall with green floral fragrance. Toffee.

#### Flavour:

Mouth warming, sweet, becoming oily. Very smooth. Becoming dry with chocolate and caramel in the finish. Balanced flavour.

#### Development:

Caramel returns after a while, and a distinct and pleasant scent of blow-torch blistered paint.



#### [Distillery Information](#)

### Featured Tasting Notes

# Balvenie 12 year old "Doublewood"

**Distillery bottling, 43% a.b.v.**

Distinctly orangey. Pronounced citrus notes in the nose, with some peat. Sherried, smooth, sweet, honeyed. Flavors of heather, orange, and lemon. The finish is highly reminiscent of bourbon. Orange "honey sticks" late into the finish. Rich, oaky, delicious.

Suggested for: After dinner

[Return to list](#)



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# Glenkinchie

No: 22

Producer: United

Region: Lowland

District: East - [Multimap view](#)

*OS Sheet 66 ; Map reference NT 444 668 ; Latitude 55 51° N, Longitude 2 56° W*

Founded 1830s ; Operating Status (1999): operating

Glenkinchie is near the village of Pencaitland, only about 15 miles from Edinburgh between the soft green Lammermuir hills and the small coastal resorts where the Firth of Forth meets the sea. It is in the glen of the Kinchie a tributary of the Scottish river Tyne (not to be confused with the English one of the same name). The distillery - which has its own bowling green - is set in farmland. In the 1940s and 1950s the distillery manager bred prize-winning cattle, feeding them on the spent grain. In 1968 the former floor maltings were turned into an early museum of malt whisky. Among the exhibits is a beautifully-crafted model of the distillery which was built in 1924 by the firm of Basset-Lowke, known for their model steam engines. It was constructed for the 1924 Empire Exhibition at Wembley, London. The distillery itself was founded in the 1830s by the brothers John and George Rate, was rebuilt in 1890 then again between the two World Wars.

[© Michael Jackson 1994](#)

Glenkinchie has been a component of 'Dimple' Haig. The name 'Kinchie' is a corruption of 'De Quincey', these being the original owners of the lands upon which the distillery is built. The water comes from the Lammermuir hills and is slightly chalky which they claim modifies the characteristic Lowland malt taste, making it drier. Glenkinchie is another distillery which keeps its wooden washbacks.

[o.m.](#)

A copy of United Distillers' own illustrated pamphlet about Glenkinchie can be found [here](#) and there is

further UD-orientated material in their scotch.com InfoCenter, [here](#)

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Distillery rating: 4\*

Pencaitland, nr. Tranent, East Lothian, EH34 5ET

Tel: 01875 342000 / 340333; Fax 01875 342001

Visitor Centre 01875 342004; Fax 01875 342007

[Search the site index](#) for references to Glenkinchie

[Search the Web](#) for Glenkinchie with Harvest

[Search Dr. Do's index](#) for the history of Glenkinchie

Additional [tasting](#) and [general](#) notes from the WhiskyWeb commercial site

There just might be some [news](#) about Glenkinchie in the "Scotsman" archives

# vinifera fine wine tasting notes

A SELECTION OF REVIEWS, IMPRESSIONS AND TASTING NOTES

KEN INGLIS

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Glenkinchie 10 year old Lowland Malt [\[Linked Tasting\]](#)

25th Aug 1998 Price: GBP24 Origin: [Lowland](#) Style: Spirit Colour: Other

[Tasted Blind] Bright gold. Some peat and lots of sweet sherry wood on the nose - wood not yet overwhelming so I would guess quite young. Sweet and rounded with flavours of oak, nuts and vanilla. Smooth but has retained a bit of fire. [Guess: Sherried Speyside] With Game: I was amazed how well the whisky did. Too spirity for the Grouse but it made for a rich, smoky combination - certainly a better match than some of the wines. Excellent with the venison - again a lot of spirit but the flavours combined very nicely and gave a rich finish that lasted for several minutes. Overwhelmingly spirity and unpleasant with the Wood Pigeon and the Rabbit. [Grouse 2, Venison 1, Wood Pigeon X, Rabbit X]

[Top](#)



# vinifera fine wine tasting notes

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## About Whisky

### Famous Malt Whisky

#### Glenkinchie



**Glenkinchie:** Pencaitland, East Lothian

**Owning Company:** United Distillers

**Established:** 1837

**Location:** Near the village of Pencaitland in East Lothian.

**Visitors Centre:** Open all year, Tel: (Scotland) 01875 340451  
Daily opening hours: Mon to Fri 0930 to 1630 (Dec to Feb by appointment).

#### **The Distillery**

Glenkinchie is a Lalland (Lowland Dialect) corruption of 'de Quincy', a family which owned tracts of East Lothian - the 'Garden of Scotland' - in the 14th century.

The distillery was founded by the Rate brothers. They were originally farmers who grew and malted their own barley on the premises to produce a high quality Lowland whisky which has only recently been made available as a single malt (1988/89), as part of United Distillers' Classic Malts range.

In 1853 the Rate brothers were bankrupted and the buildings of the distillery lay empty, being primarily used as a cowshed. In the 1880s Glenkinchie was bought by a consortium of whisky merchants and blenders from Edinburgh and Leith, which re-established production after rebuilding the distillery and maltings.

#### **The Distillery Today**

In 1914 Scottish Malt Distillers was formed with a view to consolidating the interests and resources of Lowland distilleries in troubled times. Glenkinchie was bought and has remained in operation under the license of John Haig & Co. The distillery has always maintained its close associations with local agriculture, and its farm was for many years managed by the distillery manager W. J. Macpherson, who was nationally acclaimed for his championship herd of Aberdeen Angus Cattle.

In 1988 it was chosen by United Distillers for their Classic Malts range.

#### Tasting Notes

#### Featured Malts

# Glenkinchie

Overall rating : **79%**

Score/10 :	Alex	7.5
	Adam	8
	Andy	8
	John	9
	Rob	8
	Stuart	7



Glenkinchie - Lowland Scotch Whisky - 10 years old - 43% vol

This seemed to be one of those malts that won on the night. Every-one really enjoyed it right from the first taste, thus the relatively high scores. For John, this rates as his all time personal favourite. It was very smooth, but with a slightly distinctive flavour to it. As the label says, it is an ideal pre-dinner drink. Although we all agreed that dinner would be replaced by another bottle of Glenkinchie.



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# Tasting Whisky

## 4. Examples of Tasting Notes

### Glenkinchie



### Glenkinchie

10 Year Old Lowland, 43% vol

#### Appearance:

Rich gold - Chardonnay

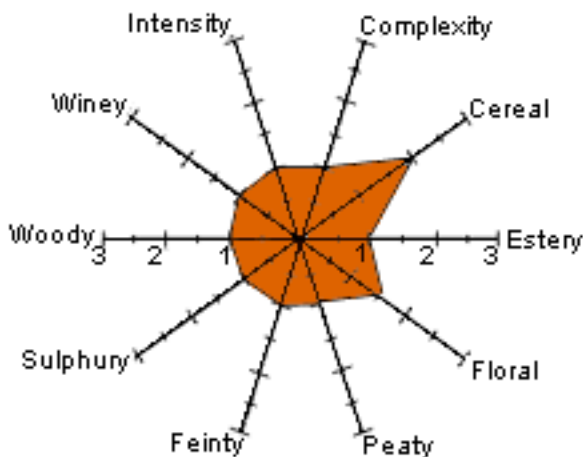
#### Aroma:

Fresh. Citric (tangerines). Green grass, with some moss, hay and light cereal notes. Also faintly floral - like summer meadows.

(dilute) Similar to unreduced nose, but becoming lightly estery (solvent), with a delicate whiff of smoke.

#### Flavour:

Good balance of primary flavours. Fresh and clean; hint of Sugar Puffs (brand) but the overall impression is dry - positive. There is an interesting hint of ginger in the finish, which is dry.



### Distillery Information

#### Featured Tasting Notes

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Ardbeg</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Auchentoshan</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Balvenie</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Bowmore</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Bunnahabhain</a></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Cragganmore</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Dalwhinnie</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Glenfiddich</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Glenkinchie</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Highland Park</a></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Lagavulin</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Laphroaig</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Macallan</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Oban</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Talisker</a></li> </ul> |
|---|--|--|

[Help](#)[Scotland](#)[Speyside](#)[West Isles](#)[Search](#)[Home](#) | [Help](#) | [Scotland](#) | [Speyside](#) | [West Isles](#) | [Search](#)[last](#)[Photograph](#)[next](#)

# Highland Park

No: 4

Producer: Highland Distilleries

Region: Highlands(Island)

District: Orkney - [Multimap view](#)*OS Sheet 6 ; Map reference HY 451 095 ; Latitude 58 59° N, Longitude 2 55° W*

Founded 1790s ; Operating Status (1999): operating

The greatest all-rounder in the world of malt whisky and definitely in an island style. The distillery is set on a hillside near Kirkwall, capital of the Orkneys and at 58.6 deg North is the northernmost distillery in the world.

[© Michael Jackson 1994](#)

It is said to have been founded in the 1790s by Magnus Eunson of Gallowhill and in its early years operated entirely illegally, hiding its output in numerous places including the church pulpit. In 1888, son of the manager of The Glenlivet became managing partner and later owner until Highland Distilleries acquired it in 1937. The distillery has its own floor maltings and malts and kilns about 20% of the barley it uses and imports the other 80%. A well-peated malt is used. The peat is dug locally, from shallow beds that provide a "young" rooty heathery character. Some maltsters traditionally tried to achieve this character by throwing heather onto the fire. The smokiness in Highland Park does seem to vary slightly. The distillery has 12 washbacks and two pairs of stills. It matures about 10% of the whisky in sherry casks and the rest in Bourbon. The ratios differ depending on the destination of the malt and the 12-year old single will contain a much higher proportion of the sherry casks.

[cm](#)[Article](#)

Distillery rating: 5\*

Kirkwall

Tel: 01856-874619 or 01856-873107

## tastings

*SMWS bottling 4.17, 17yo, 111 proof, distilled 3/76*

I avoided reading the smws write-up on this, but I managed to come up with a very similar list of metaphors: smoke, heather, honey. On the other hand, the smws write-up makes what I consider to be an

honey and some flowery overtones. In the mouth it is full but not heavy. It is not sweet, has a find dose of wood and is surprisingly clean. This one leaves the mouth with a feeling that is intense and very long. Yet for the strength it displays, it is well balanced. The group placed this first as I did. Group score: 16.43, My score: 18.0 [tindogs]

*Highland Park 12 yo*

Another peaty, smoky whisky, not too disimilar to Talisker but very different from its near-neighbour in the Orkneys, Scapa. Highland Park's distillery bottlings tend to be quite rounded with hints of vanilla showing through from the usual salty, iodine island character. Another personal favourite. [tr]

[Search the site index](#) for references to Highland Park

[Search the Web](#) for Highland Park with Harvest

[Search Dr. Do's index](#) for the history of Highland Park

Additional [tasting](#) and [general](#) notes from the WhiskyWeb commercial site

There just might be some [news](#) about Highland Park in the "Scotsman" archives



[About](#)



[Clubroom](#)



[Tasting](#)



[Blends](#)



[Malts](#)

# Tasting Whisky

## 4. Examples of Tasting Notes

### Highland Park



### Highland Park

12 Year Old Orkney, 40% vol

#### Appearance:

Bright mahogany, amber notes

#### Aroma:

Complex, tightly integrated nose; some pungency.

(straight) The first aroma is lightly medicinal ('Germoline', brand), then redolent of peat smoke, with a faint whiff of plastic and green sticks.

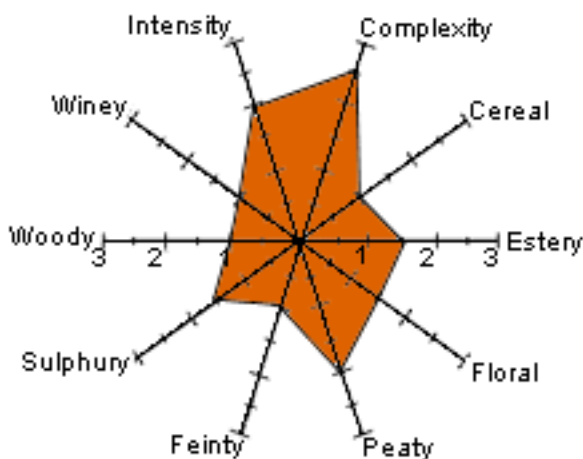
(dilute) Plastic emerges first when water is added, but disappears, and is replaced by a clean hospital aroma. Then comes a delicious apple tart scent, with cinnamon and short-crust pastry. The 'green' aromas noted earlier remain in the background and lend freshness.

#### Flavour:

The mouthfeel is smooth and full, and affects all areas of the palate. The start is surprisingly sweet, but dries out, with a sharp, peat-reek catch in the finish - a characteristic of Highland Park.

#### Development:

After an hour there is little change, with medicinal phenols in the foreground and smoky notes behind.



### [Distillery Information](#)



# Highland Park 12 year old

**Distillery bottling, 43% a.b.v.**

Without a doubt Highland Park would rate in my top three favorite distilleries if I were to compose such a list. The twelve year old is very smoky without being hot; in fact, it is smoky without even being peaty. The smoke is reminiscent of something else entirely: bonfire, maybe, or a fireplace. Incredibly rich mouthfeel. Enormously pleasant notes of orange, honey, heather, and Drambuie-like herbalness. Finish shows an ocean swell of saltiness, like hearing the call of the sea. Without a doubt in the Island style and superbly delicious. One of my favorites.

Suggested for: After dinner

[Return to list](#)

[Help](#)[Scotland](#)[Speyside](#)[West Isles](#)[Search](#)[Home](#) | [Help](#) | [Scotland](#) | [Speyside](#) | [West Isles](#) | [Search](#)

# Oban

No: 216

Producer: United

Region: Highlands

District: Western Highlands - [Multimap view](#)

*OS Sheet 49 ; Map reference NM 85 29 ; Latitude 56 24° N, Longitude 5 28° W*

Founded 1794 ; Operating Status (1999): operating

The story of [Oban](#) is told on the label of the 14-year old malt. This version is replacing the 12-year old which was put into a bottle that looked as though it contained perfume.

The traveller returning from the islands of Mull or Iona, or from Fingal's cave sees Oban as a Victorian town, with the distillery growing out of the cliffs. The distillery is said to have been founded in 1794 (longer than most of the town) though the present buildings probably date from the 1880s. The stillhouse was rebuilt in the late 1960s and early 1970s and there was further work in 1991. Work in 1890 involved cutting into the cliff behind the distillery, revealing a cave with human bones and implements, now at the Scottish Museum of Antiquity. The Oban malt whisky has contributed to various John Hopkins blends, including one romantically called Old Mull.

[smws/mj/o.m](http://smws/mj/o.m).

A copy of United Distillers' own illustrated pamphlet about Oban can be found [here](#) and there is further UD-orientated material in their scotch.com InfoCenter, [here](#)

See also article in SMWS Spring 95 newsletter

[Article](#)[SoundClip](#)

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Distillery rating: 4\*

Stafford Street, Oban, PA34 5NH

Tel: 01631-564262

I visited this distillery in August '94 but unfortunately chose a busy day and could not afford to wait the two hours till the first available visit. (others, note!) The tour costs œ2.00 but there's a œ3.00 voucher against whisky purchases in the distillery shop. There is a small exhibition about Oban and the distillery (free). Everything was well appointed and atmospheric and the staff were very friendly, especially when it became obvious I was truly interested in malts. [jhb]

## tastings

*Oban 14yr.*

The colour was pleasantly golden with a sweet nose. The taste was delightful, a medium body malt with a malty, slightly smoky palate and a spicy finish. I would rate it an 86. (as compared to my rating of Aberlour at 82). [cf]

[Search the site index](#) for references to Oban

[Search the Web](#) for Oban with Harvest

[Search Dr. Do's index](#) for the history of Oban

Additional [tasting](#) and [general](#) notes from the WhiskyWeb commercial site

There just might be some [news](#) about Oban in the "Scotsman" archives



[About](#)



[Clubroom](#)



[Tasting](#)



[Blends](#)



[Malts](#)

# Tasting Whisky

## 4. Examples of Tasting Notes

### Oban



### Oban

14 Year Old West Highland Malt, 43% vol

### Appearance:

Amber

### Aroma:

Medium pungency and rich overall.

(Straight) Cognac-like, with some sulphur and a whiff of peat. Sulphur disappears, and the spirit becomes sweeter (icing sugar) with some acetone and seaside salt.

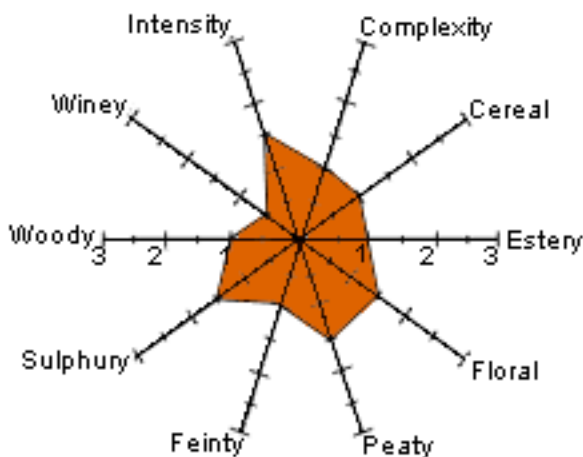
(Dilute) These aromas remain when water is added, but reduced. Some bubblegum and a light hessian scent. Fresh and faintly floral (bog myrtle).

### Flavour:

Medium mouthfeel, smooth; easy to drink, with a good balance of primary flavours. Starts sweet, engages the whole palate and finishes dry, with faint but distinct peat- smoke in the finish.

### Development:

Mulch, chicken mash.



### [Distillery Information](#)

# Oban 14 year old

**Distillery bottling, 43% a.b.v.**

Very pleasant aroma, with notes of chardonnay, peat, sturdy Highland malt, and a good whiff of the sea. Palate is salty and cerealy with honey and malt notes. The texture is fantastic: pebbles, maybe, or sand; something to give it a slightly abrasive, grainy texture. This is accomplished, however, without any unpleasant roughness or "scouring" feeling. Distinctly salty, perhaps notes of caramel. A lot of toffee and some warmth in the finish. Not a world-class malt, but without a doubt quite enjoyable, especially as an aperitif to seafood or alongside oysters on the half shell.

Suggested for: Aperitif

[Return to list](#)

[Help](#)[Scotland](#)[Speyside](#)[West Isles](#)[Search](#)[Home](#) | [Help](#) | [Scotland](#) | [Speyside](#) | [West Isles](#) | [Search](#)[last](#)[Photograph](#)[next](#)

# Talisker


No: 14  
 Producer: United  
 Region: Highlands(Island)  
 District: Skye - [Multimap view](#)  
*OS Sheet 32 ; Map reference NG 377 319 ; Latitude 57 17.9° N, Longitude 6 21.5° W*  
 Founded 1831 ; Operating Status (1999): operating

The Cuillins are the the dramatic hills of Skye, the island home of Talisker. Talisker House is the seat of the eldest son of the MacLeod clan and takes its name from the Norse name for the mountain Thalass Gair or Sloping Rock. The distillery is on the exposed west coast of the island, on the seaweedy shores of Loch Harport.

[The distillery was founded in 1830 by two doctor's sons, Hugh and Kenneth MacAskill]. After a number of false starts on other sites, the distillery was established in 1831 at Carbost and expanded in 1900 at which point it had its own pier, tramway and tied cottages. It even had its own currency, denominated in days worked]. In those days Robert Louis Stevenson ranked Talisker as a style on its own, comparable with the Islay and [Glenlivet](#) whiskies. It switched to double distillation in 1928 and was partly rebuilt in 1960 after a fire. It still retains the tradition of using wooden fermentation vats or washbacks. Water for the process comes from Hawk Hill, beside the distillery. The distillery has five stills (a relic from the days when all Talisker whisky went through triple distillation) and the wash stills are unusual in having U-shaped lye pipes to take the vapour. A small secondary pipe recycles some of the vapour back to the still. The wooden tubs for the condensers ('worms') are outside the building and survived the fire in 1960 courtesy of a last-minute change in the wind.

Talisker is the only distillery on Skye though the island is the home of a company making a vatted malt called Poit Dhubh, and a blend, Te Bheag. Both are said to contain some Talisker and you can find [an account of them](#) and [other Gaelic whiskies](#) in the Web pages of the [Sabhal Mor Ostaig](#) (the Gaelic college on Skye). A blended whisky called Islae of Skye is made by the Edinburgh merchants Ian MacLeod & Co. The style of whisky liqueur represented by Drambuie is said to have originated on Skye though that product is now made in Edinburgh by a family-owned company.  
[smws/mj/jhb/o.m.](#)

A copy of United Distillers' own illustrated pamphlet about Talisker can be found [here](#) and there is

further UD-orientated material in their scotch.com InfoCenter, [here](#) 

(Hit the "next" button to join a tour of the other island distilleries)



[About](#)



[Clubroom](#)



[Tasting](#)



[Blends](#)



[Malts](#)

# Tasting Whisky

## 4. Examples of Tasting Notes

### Talisker



### Talisker

10 Year Old Island (Skye) at 45.8% vol

#### Appearance:

Full gold, bright and shot with pink

#### Aroma:

Pungent and complex; sweet overall, but dries out.

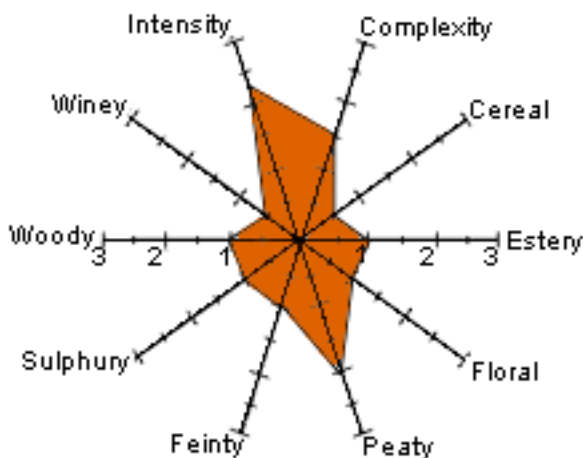
(straight) Noticable peat smoke and even iodine. Very light sulphur, toffee and faintly fishy.

(dilute) Sherry and kippers; wax paper and candlewax; iodine, hemp, pine resin. Fresh.

#### Flavour:

Full bodied. The primary taste is sweet and salty, with a powerful peat-smoke 'catch' in the finish, which is relatively short. Other flavours are of resin and burnt butter. Development:

Becomes sulphury when exposed to the air for a while.



### Distillery Information

### Featured Tasting Notes

# Talisker 10 year old

**Distillery bottling, 45.6% a.b.v.**

I hold a special place in my heart for Talisker. Peaty, island-style aroma. On the palate, the mouthfeel is medium and silky with a tasty maltiness and a good kick of salt and pepper. As you hold it in your mouth, tasting it, the pepperiness increases and increases until it you cannot leave it in your mouth any longer. So you swallow, which will make the pepperiness go away, right? Wrong. The pepperiness in your mouth continues to escalate, getting hotter and hotter, mercifully stopping immediately before your head explodes. Talisker is truly fantastic: as a tasty malt, as a fascinating spirit, and as a sheer endorphin rush. Truly delicious, but far hotter than its (significant) 45.6% alcohol content would suggest. I love it.

Suggested for: Oh, I don't know! When you are freezing to death in the snow, when you are feeling vaguely masochistic, or when you get a sudden craving for it at 11 p.m.

[Return to list](#)





## A VIRTUAL TOUR Strathisla Distillery

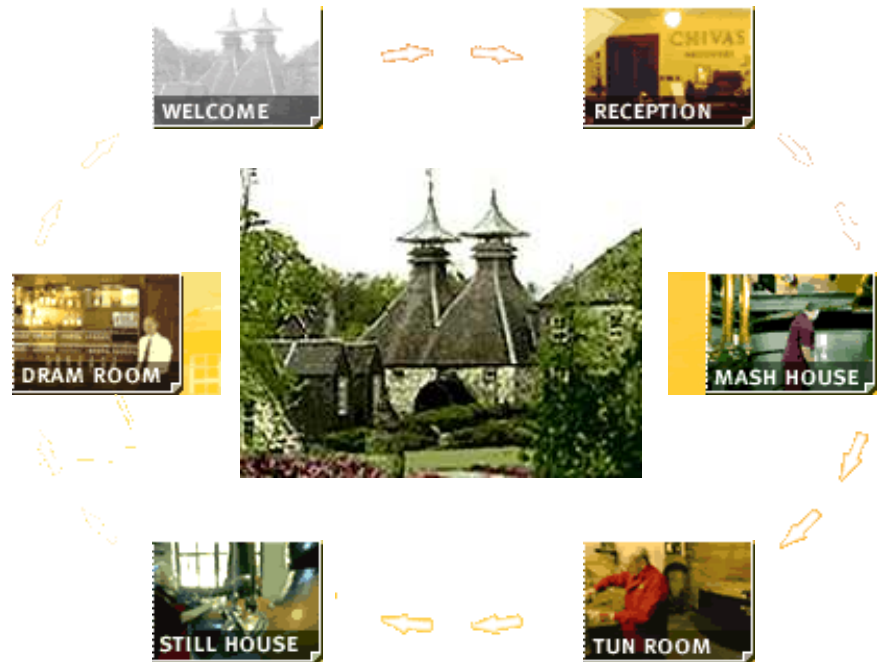
Welcome, here we are, outside Strathisla Distillery in the historic, peaceful town of Keith in Speyside, Scotland, and it's a place as unique as the whisky we produce. The distinctive pagodas, cobbled courtyard and old stone buildings make our Distillery one of the most charming in Scotland. It's certainly the oldest working one in the Highlands, being built way back in 1786 and still going strong.

Today, Strathisla Distillery treasures many of the traditions and distilling methods first laid down over 200 years ago. The same care and attention is given to the selection of the finest raw ingredients, and the same respect is shown in the care and upkeep of the timber vats and gleaming copper stills.

Such dedication to creating a whisky of unsurpassed quality and consistency ensures that Strathisla Distillery is worthy of its title as "The Home and Heart of CHIVAS REGAL."

The Strathisla Distillery was built near to the ancient Fons Bulliens well (translated means "bubbling spring") that dates back to the Dominican monks of the 12th century. This pure spring well is the source of the clear, fresh water used in the making of Strathisla, the single malt Scotch whisky at the heart of CHIVAS REGAL.

Then just across the courtyard is our reception - come inside and be our guest.



To experience the history and beauty of the Strathisla Distillery, home of CHIVAS REGAL, simply click on the appropriate picture. You'll need QuickTime VR to see the Distillery in full. If you do not have it installed yet, you can download it now by clicking on the 'Get QuickTime' button.

CHIVAS REGAL  
12



Nearly 200 years of distilling & blending excellence have made CHIVAS REGAL 12 Year Old one of the world's leading premium Scotch Whiskies.

Like all true classics, CHIVAS REGAL is created from the best things in life. Nearly two centuries of experience, [triple blending](#), a minimum of 12 years maturing in oak casks, the meticulous selection of fine malt and grain Scotch whiskies, and the unique skills of [Master Blender Colin Scott](#), all give CHIVAS REGAL 12 Year Old its rich and fruity taste, smooth finish and deep amber colour.

But it's not just how we make our whisky, it's also where we make it. In the beautiful Scottish Highlands lies the [Strathisla Distillery](#), the oldest working distillery in Scotland. Situated on the banks of the River Isla in magical Speyside, it is here the rare single malt which forms the foundation of CHIVAS REGAL is distilled. The clear, cold water from the ancient well and the fresh Highland air that breathes into every hand-picked cask as it matures give a depth and flavour to the malt in every bottle of CHIVAS REGAL 12.

CHIVAS REGAL 12 has the fullest, smoothest, most generous taste sensation with a lasting finish. Perfect on its own, with ice, or in one of our delicious [Chivas Classics](#).



## Strathisla

### Comments:

Strathisla is one of the older distilleries in Scotland, dating back to 1786. It was purchased by Chivas/Seagrams in 1950 and plays a major part in the *Chivas* blends.

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### Distillery Bottlings:

The official distillery bottling is a **12-year-old** and bears the name "Chivas Brothers Strathisla". It is gold in color with a wonderful nose -- toffee, toasted sugar, cereal grain, and oak. The palate is rich and complex with layers of vanilla, chocolate, and slight tobacco leaf notes. Sweet on the tip of the tongue, it becomes drier as it travels through the palate. Very smooth.



### Merchant Bottlings:

In the UK there are a number of bottlings under the Strathisla name, bottled by Gordon & MacPhail. Occasionally some of these are available in the US.

---

### Information:

Ownership: Seagram Distillers PLC (Pernod Ricard)  
Telephone: 01542-783044  
From the US: 011-44-1542-783044  
Tours: Visitor center with scheduled tours.

---

## Strathmill

### Distillery Bottlings:

Strathmill is not distributed in the US as a single malt. Most of the output from the distillery goes into *J&B* blended whiskies.

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### Merchant Bottlings:

An 11-year-old Cadenhead, bottled in 1992 (60.6 vol.) had a light, yellow-gold color with a very slight greenish cast. The nose has a cereal/grain tone with underlying pine and citrus. The body is somewhat thick, tongue-coating, and gives the palate a sweet, honey-like quality. As it develops it becomes drier with a slight citric tartness. Very enjoyable.



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Hart Brothers has released a cask strength 25-year-old (1973).

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### Information:

Ownership: Diageo  
Telephone: 01542-885000  
From the US: 011-44-1542-885000  
No visitors.

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Chivas  
Regal

[back to brands](#)

## Chivas Regal Becomes Flagship Brand

Chivas Regal is the Number One priority brand of Pernod Ricard, the world's third largest Scotch whisky producer. Scotch whisky is the world's largest premium spirits category, accounting for approximately 80 million cases. One of the main markets for Chivas Regal is North America.

Created in the late 19th century, Chivas Regal is globally recognized as the best of the premium blended Scotch whiskies, setting a standard of excellence for all distilled spirits. With its complex yet smooth aroma and smoky taste balanced by a mellow flavor, Chivas Regal has become a favorite of connoisseurs.

Each of the many single malt and grain Scotch whiskies in the blend brings its own unique characteristics to Chivas Regal. One of the principal malts used in the blending is Strathisla, a well regarded single malt in its own right.

The aging of these whiskies – all matured for a minimum of 12 years in oak casks - enhances Chivas Regal's final flavor and smoothness, and a skilled Master Blender brings them together to create the only Scotch worthy of the Chivas Regal name. Chivas Regal is available in several forms, including Royal Salute, a super premium whisky matured for 21 years.

From a single grocery store established on King Street in 1841 in Aberdeen, Scotland, James Chivas and Charles Stewart built a reputation as consummate blenders of fine Scotch whisky. The first brand, Royal Glen Dee, proved highly popular, and the firm's reputation soon spread beyond Aberdeenshire to the United Kingdom. The firm became known as Chivas Brothers when John Chivas joined the firm in 1857. Chivas Brothers blended whiskies exceeded all expectations as new brands were introduced – Royal Strathysla 10-year-old, Magna Charta, and Loch Nevis 20-year-old.

In the 1890s, the heirs of the Chivas Brothers created Chivas Regal, a blend that would live up to the exceptional standards set nearly half a century ago. In the 1950s, Chivas Brothers LLP (incorporated in 1936) found a secure supply of fine malt whisky at the Strathisla Distillery in Keith, the oldest distillery in the Highlands; the highly praised Strathisla Single Malt Scotch Whisky is now at the heart of Chivas Regal. Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Ltd. acquired Chivas

Brothers in 1949. The famous brand became the flagship brand of Pernod Ricard in 2001.

Here's what Richard Burrows, Pernod Ricard's Managing Director, said about the company's plans for Chivas Regal in a recent interview: "Chivas Brothers Limited will be the new brand owning company, headquartered in Paisley, Scotland, with offices in Hounslow, London. The new management structure will encompass the operations of the former Chivas Brothers and Campbell Distillers. There will be a new commercial team and marketing team of significant size, reflecting the global reach of Chivas Regal and the priority we are giving it."

Newly acquired Scotch whiskies will complement Pernod Ricard's existing Scotch portfolio by providing the group with a broad and well-segmented range. Chivas Regal is joined in the Pernod Ricard USA portfolio by single malt whiskies The Glenlivet, Aberlour, Edradour, Benriach, Glen Keith, Longmorn and Strathilsa. Chivas Regal is available in 12-year-old (flagship), 18-year-old, or Royal Salute.

 [back to top](#)

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[The Century Council](#) supports responsible decision-making.

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