

FOR MEMBERS OF THE SCOTCH MALT WHISKY SOCIETY

UNFILTERED

CHRISTMAS GIFT GUIDE + NEW SMWS OFFERINGS + ANGUS MACRAILD
CASK-AGED CIGARS + LINDORES DISTILLERY + IS IT REALLY ALL ABOUT WOOD?

RRP £5.99

NO. 37

NOVEMBER 2017

Take on
whisky road

A SINGLE CASK PILGRIMAGE TO FIRE THE SENSES



THE SCOTCH MALT
WHISKY SOCIETY

ESTD THE VAULTS, LEITH, SCOTLAND



GET A FLAVOUR FOR THE SOCIETY

Experience the delights of a unique SMWS single cask,
single malt at any one of our fantastic partner bars

AUSTRALIA

Rob Roy Hotel, Adelaide
The Gresham, Brisbane
Hippo Co, Canberra
The Odd Fellow, Fremantle
The Lark Distillery
'Cellar Door', Hobart
Eau de Vie, Melbourne
Whisky & Alement, Melbourne
Archie Rose, Sydney
Rockpool Bar & Grill, Sydney
Shirt Bar, Sydney
Shirt Bar Barangaroo, Sydney

AUSTRIA

Hotel Drei Hasen, Mariazell
Hotel Murtalerhof, Stadl an der Mur
The Highlander Pub, Vienna
Rupp's Bar, Vienna

CANADA

Brasserie Kensington, Calgary
One18 Empire, Calgary
Fets Whisky Kitchen, Vancouver
The Grand Hotel Nanaimo,
Vancouver Island
Little Jumbo, Victoria

DENMARK

The Wharf, Aalborg
Highlanders Bar, Aarhus
Charlie's Bar, Copenhagen

Kruts Karport, Copenhagen
Lidkoeb, Copenhagen
SMWS Members' Room, Vejle
Vin & Vin Bar, Viborg

FRANCE

Point Rouge, Bordeaux
Abbaye des Vaux de Cernay,
Cernay-la-Ville
Hopscotch, Toulouse
L'Antiquaire, Lyon
Beaucoup, Paris
Gentlemen 1919, Paris
Les Rouquins, Paris
L'Esquisse, Paris
Night Flight Bar, Paris

GERMANY

Bar am Steinplatz, Berlin
Union Jack, Berlin
Ona Mor, Cologne
Roomers, Frankfurt
The Rabbithole, Hamburg
Bar Gabanyi, Munich
Pacific Times, Munich
Bäckerhof, Nuremberg

HONG KONG

Safe Bubbles & Malt

JAPAN

The Society, Park Hotel, Tokyo

Bar Selene, Ibaraki
Bar Andante, Miyagi
Bar Barns, Nagoya
Bar Keller, Kyoto
Bar Fouque, Hiroshima
Bar Oscar, Fukuoka
Bar Diversion, Hokkaido

MALTA

The Phoenicia Hotel Club Bar

THE NETHERLANDS

JD William's Whisky Bar,
Amsterdam
De Toeter, Groningen
Patrick's Bar, Zwolle

NEW ZEALAND

The Jefferson, Auckland
The Last Word, Christchurch
Scotia Bar, Dunedin
Cophthorne Hotel, Masterton

SWEDEN

Ardbeg Embassy, Stockholm

SWITZERLAND

Marians Jazzroom, Bern
SMWS Members' Room, Schönenwerd

TAIWAN

Kashoku, Taipei
Caffé Libero, Taipei

Marsalis Home, Taipei
East End, Taipei
TCRC, Tainan City
Gallery, Taipei

UK

Musa, Aberdeen
Ducks Inn, Aberlady
Ardshiel Hotel, Campbeltown
Dornoch Castle Hotel, Dornoch
Bon Accord, Glasgow
Islay House, Islay
The Single Cask, Lincolnshire
Mac & Wild, London
Milroy's of Soho, London
Craigellachie Hotel, Speyside

USA

Drumbar, Chicago
Fountainhead, Chicago
Boyd's Jig & Reel, Knoxville
Sage at Aria, Las Vegas
The Homestead, San Francisco
Wingtip, San Francisco
55 South, San Jose
The Barrel Thief, Seattle
Brouwer's Café, Seattle
Canon, Seattle
El Gaucho, Seattle
North City Bistro, Shoreline
Jack Rose Dining Saloon,
Washington, DC

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AT SMWS.COM



**THE SCOTCH MALT
WHISKY SOCIETY**

ESTD THE VAULTS, LEITH, SCOTLAND



WORLD of WHISKY

- The Knowledge**
What makes yeast the most enigmatic of ingredients?13
- Danger distilled**
New thriller takes Sherlock Holmes on a whisky jaunt24
- One of a kind**
Davidoff's master blender on rolling the perfect cigar26
- Distillery profile**
Whisky is running again at Scotch's spiritual home28



WINTER WONDERS
Choose a stocking thriller this Christmas



SMWS

- SMWS news**
The latest from far and wide, plus our hip flask winners4
- New faces**
Introducing our exotic range of new spirits10
- Outturners**
Our picks for the ultimate in festive flavour25
- SMWS partner bar profile**
Warm welcome awaits at Glasgow's Bon Accord34

THINK TANK

UNMASKING THE ORIGINS OF FLAVOUR
Tom Bruce-Gardyne explores the riddle of whisky's unique taste... and makes a surprising discovery



THE LONG WAY ROUND
A whisky odyssey on the NC500

THE COLUMNISTS

HANS OFFRINGA & IAN BUXTON
Reflections on the wider whisky world from our regular contributors



UNFILTERED MAGAZINE



THE SCOTCH MALT WHISKY SOCIETY

ESTD THE VAULTS, LEITH, SCOTLAND

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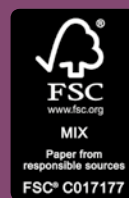
COVER IMAGE

View north from A832 near Drumchork, by Peter Sandground

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HAPPY MEMBERS

Unfiltered is available to members of The Scotch Malt Whisky Society. We bring whisky lovers together across the globe.

To join the SMWS single cask circle, visit us online at www.smws.com

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1 GLOBAL MEDALS OF HONOUR

A GREAT year of awards continued with the Society picking up accolades in both the International Wine & Spirit Competition (IWSC) and the Luxury Masters 2017.

IWSC judges gave gold to *Cask No.35.163: A playful wrestling match*, after it won the equivalent in June's Scotch Whisky Masters. *Cask No.7.152: Deeply absorbed but at ease*, won the Silver Outstanding medal.

In the Luxury Masters, there were awards for *Cask No. G4.9: A blast from the past*, *Cask No. 72.50: A nomad's tent* and the Single Malt – Super Premium Master award for *Cask No. 3.295: Bouquets and spades*.

The accolades followed a number

of other global successes for Society bottlings this year, with prizes in the International Spirits Challenge, San Francisco World Spirits Competition, Ultimate Spirits Challenge, and Scotch Whisky Masters.

"It's great to see even more recognition of the fantastic quality of our single cask whiskies," said Kai Ivalo, spirits director at the SMWS. "It demonstrates our ability to source for our members the best casks from a wide range of distilleries – and often the results might surprise you. You can't judge a book by its cover – which is why we don't show covers – and we urge our members to explore whiskies they might not have sampled before."

2

CHINA FANS FLOCK TO SOCIETY TALKS AT FESTIVAL

THE SOCIETY had a presence at the Shanghai Whisky L! expo in August, our first representation in China.

SMWS master brand ambassador John McCheyne presented five of our single cask malts in several sessions over the three days of the festival.

The SMWS tasting groups also attracted an enthusiastic crowd. "Around 8,000 people attended the festival," said John. "There's so much desire to learn and I think we already have our first new members."

Christina Leung, who is managing the Society's development in China, said: "All the attendees appreciated our insights, stories and flavours."



ABOVE: Christina and John



ABOVE: Pat Lancuba with Alan Wood at 28 Queen Street

3

UK PAT MAKES A FLYING VISIT TO EVERY VENUE

A LUCKY member from Australia celebrated his 60th birthday in style, with a visit to all four SMWS Members' Rooms in the UK in one day.

The whisky-fuelled day out for Pat Lancuba was organised by his two son-in-laws.

"We began with a 9am flight to Edinburgh to visit The Vaults, then explored more fabulous flavours at 28 Queen Street," said son-in-law Andrew Petrino.

"At 6pm we flew back to London and headed straight to 19 Greville Street. We finished the night in Devonshire Square at Kaleidoscope Whisky Bar. It was a great experience."



The Shirt Bar was packed out

4 AUSTRALIA GUESTS GO BATS AT SYDNEY BIRTHDAY BASH

WHILE the Society approaches its 35th anniversary, our Australian branch has been celebrating its own landmark 15th birthday.

The team threw a

party in partner bar Shirt Bar Barangaroo in Sydney in August, launching the first formal tasting of special bottling *Cask No. 73.83: Anzac biscuits and*

cricket bats. Australian branch founders Andre Tammes and John Rourke spoke about the early days, with SMWS ambassador Matt Bailey hosting the event.

5

COMPETITION HIP HIP HOORAY

THANKS to everyone who sent in their own outdoor dramming photos. We had some great entries, from the Three Sisters in Glen Coe to a ship in the Antarctic – a Society hip flask is on its way to our six winners to enjoy their next alfresco single cask adventure.



Burkay Adalig



Tosh Suo



Adam Bradshaw



Paul Gordon

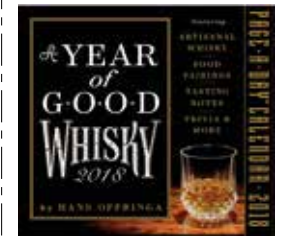


Jo Haraf



Thomas Unterguggenberger

8 BOOKS WORDS ON WHISKY



SMWS ambassador and *Unfiltered* columnist Hans Offringa has written a one-stop guide for anyone with whisky questions. A *Field Guide to Whisky* provides the answers to anything you've ever wondered about your favourite spirit in a straightforward Q&A format. Its companion publication, *A Year of Good Whisky*, also offers whisky-related content for each day of 2018.



SMWS ambassador, Paul Thomson

6

GERMANY KING OF THE COCKTAIL

CONGRATULATIONS to SMWS ambassador Paul Thompson, who has won the German Cocktail Competition 2017 and is now Barkeeper of the Year 2017. Paul wowed the judging panel with his creation "Don't call it buttermilk". If you're in Cologne, pop into our partner bar Ona Mor to try it out!

7

PARTNER BARS NEW FRIENDS WELCOMED TO THE FOLD

THE SOCIETY'S network of partner bars continues to grow, with some outstanding additions in the past few months.

Swedish members and local whisky enthusiasts celebrated the launch of our first partner bar in Sweden – the Ardbeg Embassy in Stockholm.

Swedish members already have access to over 20 casks every month but can now visit the bar to

sample the latest Society dramas at the bar or at regular SMWS tastings.

In Scotland, the Dornoch Castle whisky bar is now on board – read more about it in our NC500 feature on pages 17 to 23 – while in Toulouse, France, new whisky bar Hopscotch has also partnered with us.

Last but not least, in Australia, Hippo Co is a new addition to the partner bar network in Canberra.



Members toast Ardbeg opening



Unfiltered columnist Ian Buxton also has an entertaining new book out. *Whiskies Galore: A Tour of Scotland's Island Distilleries* records his travels from Islay to Orkney, and every whisky-producing island in between. We've got a copy up for grabs to anyone who can tell us:

Who wrote the original novel *Whisky Galore*?

To enter the draw, send your answer with the subject line 'Whiskies Galore' by 24 November to unfiltered@smws.com

9

ANNIVERSARY
SEND US YOUR
MEMORIES...

IN CASE you didn't realise it, next year the Society will be celebrating its 35th birthday. We'll be unveiling plans to mark our middle age throughout 2018, but before we get there we'd like to hear from any members who have been around since we started out at The Vaults in 1983. Send any memories you have about the Society's early days – or even better, whatever pictures you might still have – to unfiltered@smws.com



10
TRIBUTE
FRIENDS RAISE A
GLASS TO KELDA

FAMILY and friends gathered at The Vaults to remember Society member Kelda Henderson, who died suddenly in July at the age of 36.

Family friend Charlie MacLean picked three Society bottlings and

hosted a tasting to pick the favourite. Kelda's friend Robb McAulay designed a special label for the chosen bottle and her family and friends gave her a send-off in style, along with a very special bottle to remember her by.

11

SCOTLAND
MEMBERS TAKE
TO THE LINKS

WE HAD many aspiring amateur golfers from the Society entering our draw to take part in the inaugural World Masters Golf Championship in September, which the SMWS partnered.

Society members Murray Drummond and Lionel Green from the UK were joined by Eric Fergie – all the way from Vancouver, Canada – to play the links courses at Prestwick, Western Gables and Glasgow Gables, with the chance to play Royal Troon.

A dynamic
SPIRIT

WORDS RICHARD GOSLAN

From the 15th century to a new era of modern-day distilleries, the story of whisky continues to evolve and fascinate in equal measures

There's nothing quite like taking a road trip to stir the senses, and when you have the opportunity to combine sublime scenery with a dynamic whisky environment along the way, it doesn't get any better than that.

Travelling the North Coast 500 route around the Scottish coastline for this issue of *Unfiltered*, I was struck by how much is going on within the whisky

industry here at the moment.

From the now well-established Wolfburn in Thurso, to the recently launched Dornoch distillery, to the imminent launch of GlenWyvis in Dingwall, there's so much to take in as you make your journey around the far north of the country. You could always extend your tour to take in a visit to the new distillery on Raasay, now producing spirit on the island for the first time, and then there's the prospect of more new ventures that already have planning permission which may be up and running in the near future.

Then there's the opening of Lindores Distillery in Fife, on the site of the earliest known written reference to the production of whisky in the country, back in 1494.

Drew McKenzie Smith and his team have created a must-visit experience at Lindores Abbey, with a combination of history and spirit to satisfy all the senses.

That's the beauty of visiting any distillery – it doesn't matter if the raw ingredients are ultimately the same or the production process is similar – the people making the whisky are individual characters and every location has its own story to tell. In this issue we're delighted to bring you some of those tales. Sit back and enjoy the ride. ●

If you have any stories of your own to share, don't hesitate to email me at richard.goslan@smws.com and be sure to follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/Unfilteredmagazine for regular updates and much more whisky knowledge.

ALL THE RIGHT NOTES

Hans Offringa explores the shared evolution and symmetry between his twin loves – good whisky and great jazz

“Jazz was born in a whisky barrel”
– Artie Shaw

I love jazz, especially the bebop variety. Listening with a dram in hand, contemplating the world at large, philosophising, generating ideas for new publications. That is what I used to do with my late friend and mentor, the drinks writer and journalist Michael Jackson (1942-2007), who shared a love for dram and music with me.

One such evening I suggested writing a book in which I could blend both topics. Michael got the idea immediately and told me a nice story about a meeting he'd had with Dexter Gordon, many years previously. Apparently the tall tenor sax player had a fondness for Lagavulin and loved a 'smoky martini' made with that peaty single malt from Islay.

That story not only set the tone for the evening, but also for *Whisky & Jazz*, a book I started researching when Michael was still alive. I found a great quote of clarinettist and author Artie Shaw, showing me I was on the right track. Unfortunately Michael passed away before the book's completion. It seemed only logical to dedicate *Whisky & Jazz* to him.

There are interesting similarities to be found between whisky and jazz. Both were crafted under the suppression of a neighbouring majority that looked down upon the craft as well as the craftsmen. The illicit stills in the Highlands paradoxically flourished due to English suppression and

eventually produced the most appreciated, most powerful expression – the single malt.

Jazz was born out of traditional folk music brought by African slaves to the Americas and first considered a raw and uneducated form of “noise” by the majority of the white population in the US, only decades later to be embraced by that same crowd.



There's also something very specific about jazz and whisky. One has swing and the other has grain at its base. If either core ingredient is missing, it can't possibly deliver a true product.

Different rhythms occur and different streams run from the still into the cask. How to assemble them is the true art. A bad solo can ruin a piece of music, whereas a bad cask can do the same with the whisky inside. The same applies to the opposite:

A good solo and a good dram create true pleasure to the ear and the palate. However, they do not exist solely by themselves. Solos have to be welded into the song, blended with the other instruments on the stage. A single malt only can make a reputation for itself by being compared with others, preferably through a tasting enjoyed in good company.

Both whisky and jazz are acquired tastes, both products created by professional and dedicated craftsmen. On a micro-level, it's about a single malt whisky blended with an individual musician's performance. A deeper dive into the life and times of those great individuals might deliver even more similarities and comparisons and show a true blend of music(ian) and whisky.

The blends I chose for *Whisky & Jazz* are personal preferences, not set in stone. I had a lot of fun with creating these combinations and can recommend you start blending music with your own SMWS bottlings of choice.

Here's one for a start: Cask No. 10.115: *Free the Imagination* with Chet Baker's *Imagination*. Distillery 10 produces drams that match Chet's musical abilities. Gentle, inviting, harmonious and evocative.

Some copies of the coffee table style book *Whisky & Jazz* are still available at Amazon.com, as well as a limited, slightly different paperback edition called *Malts & Jazz*. We also have it on very good authority that the author is planning to do a revised edition of the book. ●

♥ *Hans Offringa is the SMWS ambassador for the Netherlands. He and his wife, Becky Lovett Offringa, are The Whisky Couple, known for their whisky-related books, articles, photography and presentations.*



GOOD GIFT GUIDANCE

Think about what whisky you need: If it's for yourself that should be easy. But if it's for someone else, try and discover their preferences and any favourite drams.

Visit a venue: Drop by a Members' Room and talk to one of our ambassadors at the bar. They love to help and are primed with a variety of options. Even better, time your visit outside of a Friday or Saturday night to get the most time with them.

Try some tasters: We're always happy to let you sample a couple of options at our bars.

Think about any extras: Once you've selected your bottles, don't forget to treat yourself and ask about our stocking filler gifts as well.

Finally: Enjoy sharing the single cask love.

If you're making a list and checking it twice, we have plenty of festive events and flavours to spread that Yuletide glow

WORDS RICHARD GOSLAN



Winter's Wonders

The most wonderful time of year? If you're a whisky lover, that goes without saying. And as a member of The Scotch Malt Whisky Society, the festive season is the perfect period to both appreciate a dram for yourself – and pass on your passion for the spirit. So whether you want to cosy up next to the fire with a Society whisky, or find the perfect bottling for family or friends, here's *Unfiltered's* guide to making the most of Christmas.

UNCORK A CHRISTMAS CRACKER

The SMWS is all about variety, and never more so than over the festive season. That means there's a huge range of options either for you to appreciate your preferred flavour profile this Christmas, or discover an appropriate style to give as a gift.

The festive season starts with the unveiling of our biggest Outturn of the year. The Society's Members' Rooms in the UK also have a bumper delivery waiting for you to give a good home to, and all our staff have been hard at work sampling the whiskies so they can recommend the best one for you.

Throughout November and December, you can sample our whiskies at various Drop-In sessions – check out smws.com/events for details.

Members' Rooms will also have a variety of different bottlings available from those on our website. Ask our venue teams for details and about the offers that will change throughout December.

For our international members, be sure to check with your local branch to find out what special events are planned where you are this festive season.

THE MOST MAGICAL MEMBERS' ROOMS

What better time to get into the mood for Christmas than by visiting one of our beautifully decorated Members' Rooms, with open fires, twinkling lights, festive menus and – most importantly – stacks of new



Enjoy a private event at The Vaults this Christmas

bottlings? This year we start our festivities in venues from Thursday, 16 November, when our trees and decorations go up. There will also be a sprinkling of special touches, with mince pies available in all Members' Rooms from late November. Anthony Delcros and Mike Cook will unveil their latest Christmas cocktails in the Kaleidoscope bars in Edinburgh and London from 20 November, with a two-for-one offer for the first week only.

For members who don't want to waste too much time selecting their first dram, we have created a new online Bar Bible for your smartphone or tablet. It includes the latest list of all the drams in our bars, complete with Tasting Notes and other information. Simply go to www.smws.com and search 'Bar Bible'.

If it's fabulous festive food you're after, The Dining Room at 28 Queen Street starts its Christmas menu on 1 December, so come and see why it won the Restaurant of the Year in Scotland award from the AA this year.

PARTY TIME

The Society is for our members and their guests but this is the time of year to share the joys of our single cask inner circle with as many of your friends as possible. You can book a private event in either the Oval Taster

Bar at 28 Queen Street or The Tasting Room at The Vaults in Leith, and our teams at either of our Members' Rooms will make any occasion a memorable one. We can even offer the use of our full venue at Kaleidoscope at Devonshire Square in London on selected dates, to experience your very own whisky bar for the day. Packages include food, tastings and much more.

Contact the venue teams or discover the latest offers online on www.smws.com

FESTIVE WHISKY COMPETITION

We're planning an advent calendar with a difference this Christmas, but instead of chocolates we're going to crack open a new bottle in each of our Members' Rooms every day from 1 to 24 December.

The bottles will be available for you to try on a first-come first-served basis.

Any member who then posts a photo of themselves on our SMWS UK Facebook page enjoying a dram from one of our festive whisky advent bottles in the venue will be entered into a prize draw to win one of the bottles.

Members not lucky enough to visit our venues can join in by posting a festive pic of themselves with an SMWS dram.



Tuck into the festive menu at 28 Queen Street

FULL FESTIVE EVENTS GUIDE

For a full listing of all our Christmas and New Year events wherever you are, turn to the back of *Unfiltered*



The SMWS is renowned for bringing its members the world's biggest and best selection of single cask, single malt whiskies. However, 2017 has seen the Society reach new levels of creativity, with a raft of exciting new bottles hitting the monthly Outturns. Laura Roberts casts her eye over the new members of the SMWS family



NEW FACES

EXOTIC CARGO

What's that you say...a blended whisky from The Scotch Malt Whisky Society? Can this be true? Well it was, as September saw the release of our first-ever blended malt whisky in the UK and EU. Taking us on our journey into new territory was the aptly-named *Exotic Cargo*, a bold and well-balanced 10-year-old whisky created by SMWS spirits manager Euan Campbell.

The Society has always sought out the best casks from distilleries across Scotland and beyond, so when we sourced a group of exceptional malts which had been blended since birth, the opportunity to experiment with new flavours was too good to miss.

The whiskies were distilled in 2006 and matured in top quality first-fill sherry casks from day one. The final whisky was brought together under the watchful eye of Euan, who tested around a dozen combinations from the casks and at different strengths, before finding the flavour and balance he was searching for. The whisky was presented to the Tasting Panel, who

overwhelmingly approved, describing it as a "sherry-soaked cruise into paradise". But what did our members say about this departure from our single cask, single malt heritage? We put it to you for approval and our 'guinea pigs' responded enthusiastically.

But the proof is in the pudding as they say, and as First Friday rolled around, *Exotic Cargo* sold out in record time. So, if you are lucky enough to come across a bottle, have a try because once it's gone, it's gone forever. Rest assured, the Society's focus will continue to be on single cask, single malt whisky but after the excitement over *Exotic Cargo*, expect to see more experimental bottlings in the future.

SINGLE CASK SPIRITS

It's early August and we're sitting in the atmospheric surroundings of the Society's newest venue, Kaleidoscope Whisky Bar at Devonshire Square in London, where an eclectic crowd is preparing to take an intriguing single cask journey with a difference. Manager Mike Cook takes



Gin queen Geraldine Coates, rum ambassador Ian Burrell, cognac expert Michelle Brachet and bourbon consultant Matthew Hastings gather at the Kaleidoscope Whisky Bar in London

SOCIETY BOTTLINGS

What can be rarer than a unique single cask, single malt whisky from The Scotch Malt Whisky Society? The answer lies in our spiritual home in Leith...

to the stage to introduce global rum ambassador Ian Burrell, cognac expert Michelle Brachet, gin connoisseur and author Geraldine Coates, and drinks consultant, mixologist and all-round bourbon enthusiast, Matthew Hastings.

The gathering of such esteemed experts can only be for a very special occasion – the official launch of the SMWS's Single Cask Spirits collection. The Society reveres the single cask in all forms, not just single malt whisky, and we've included the occasional bottle of different spirits in our monthly Outturn. But until now they've never appeared as part of their own collection... and what a stellar collection it is.

First, Ian introduces five single cask rums, with provenance from the Caribbean to Nicaragua and Panama. True to Society tradition, each one has an imaginative title and Tasting Note, courtesy of Ian. With names like *Paddington Bear's first sip* and *Fruit and nut case*, rum is always going to be a fun and flavoursome start to the evening.

Next Geraldine takes us on a whirlwind journey through the history of gin, before introducing GN1.1: *Gee-Whiz*, the Society gin from Glasgow. Given that the bottle sells out within minutes in the UK and EU, the guests on the evening consider themselves lucky that they get a taste of this rare bottle.

After a bite to eat, Michelle showcases the diversity of the often-neglected spirit of cognac. The four varying casks released ensure there's something for everyone, and her fascinating introduction leaves everyone keen to learn more – and even to try an XO served straight from the freezer.

Wrapping up the evening, Matthew gives us a sneak-peak of an as-yet-unreleased bourbon cask. Keep an eye out for this, as well as armagnac and rye whiskies, being added to the collection in future Outturns.

THE VAULTS COLLECTION

What can be rarer than a unique single cask, single malt whisky from The Scotch Malt Whisky Society? The answer lies



in our spiritual home in Leith, with the introduction of The Vaults Collection in October. This new offering sees a small number of the finest and rarest single cask, single malts come together, carefully selected from the SMWS stocks. Taking its name from the Society's home, it's fitting that as we approach our 35th anniversary, we delve into our collection to offer a handful of hidden gems, the likes of which are rarely seen and never to be repeated.

So what casks have been unveiled from the depths of the SMWS warehouse, prestigious enough to launch this esteemed collection? The first is Cask No. 25.70 *In a perfumed garden*, a 26-year-old bottling from a Lowland distillery that closed its doors in 1993, meaning products from this once-prolific and much revered whisky-maker are increasingly hard to track down. Our cask yielded only 170 bottles. And what's more, this is our last ever cask from this distillery. It's not only a bottle of whisky, it's a true example of whisky

history. Joining this remarkable cask is 24.129: *Meeting an old master* an absolute gem from this iconic Speyside distillery. Cherished around the world and famed for its sherry influence, this bottling follows the distillery's traditional style and has aged for 27 years in the finest sherry casks. First, maturing in an ex-oloroso butt before being moved to a first-fill Pedro Ximenez cask to give it the complex, rich, layered flavours that have become synonymous with the famous distillery. We know whisky enthusiasts all over the world will be clambering to get their hands on the 414 bottles of these made. Luckily for you, this is for members-only.

Whether it's an experimental blended malt, a slice of liquid history from a closed distillery or a carefully curated selection of different single cask bottlings, you never know what's coming next from your Society. There's always something intriguing around the corner – so keep your Society glass ready. ●

STRAIN

Yeast, alongside water and barley, is one of only three ingredients that creates new make spirit. Yet the extent of its role in contributing to a whisky's flavour makes it the most enigmatic of ingredients, finds Angus MacRaid

In recent years there has been increasing interest in fermentation and questions around the merits or detriments of different yeast strains, particularly around the prevalence of distilling yeasts across the whisky industry. Now a new generation of emerging distillers are exploring how experimenting with strains and fermentation times can influence flavour.

Yeast itself is a single-celled fungus with a variety of species. The species predominantly isolated for alcohol production is called *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* and it essentially feeds on sugars and excretes alcohol and CO₂ as a result. There are many strains of this species of yeast, which perform in different ways to affect flavour creation, the intensity and speed of fermentation, the way the yeast breaks down proteins as well as sugars into amino acids, and the interaction and

'openness' of the yeast to bacterial activity that can catalyse further flavours. In short, the variety, or combination of varieties, along with the way you pitch the yeast and manage the subsequent fermentation, can influence the character of your product.

Distilling yeasts became more potent and more prevalent in Scottish whisky production from the 1950s onwards (although more noticeably from the early 1970s), usurping the various brewing varieties which had been used in previous decades either solely or in conjunction with distilling varieties.

These distilling varieties were bred to offer more powerful, shorter ferments that would leave less room for wild yeasts and bacteria (*Lactobacillus*) to influence the character. They offered commercially-minded distillers a way to make more whisky more quickly and with greater consistency – the watchwords being 'yield' and 'efficiency'. The net result, it



SPOTTING

PHOTOS PETER SANDGROUND



ABOVE:
Jim Leslie at
Glengoyne adds yeast
to the wash

potent as later examples and ferments were generally longer during the first half of the 20th century. In 1952 DCL introduced the M-strain distillers' yeast. This was a formidable, efficient and cost-effective yeast that quickly gained popularity throughout the industry. From the 1950s onwards, many breweries closed and brewing became more centralised. This, in conjunction with the rising popularity of lager – which did not use yeast also suited to distilling – contributed to the popularisation of the M-strain, to the point that almost all distilleries in Scotland used it to some extent by the 1970s.

The M-strain has evolved since the 1950s with speed, efficiency and yield undeniably being the watchwords. It was deliverable in dried, caked or creamed form and was eventually superseded in the 1990s by the MX strain, which proved even more efficient in delivering consistently high conversion ratios. Today MX is common, as is the Pinnacle Distillers' Yeast produced by Mauri and developed from a high-tolerance bakers' yeast.

Among today's new generation of distillers there are those either looking at yeast in a more complex fashion, or shunning the established distilling yeast models altogether. Perhaps most vocal are the Thompson brothers of the fledgling Dornoch Distillery (read more about their operations on page 20). They focus on using brewing yeast varieties and go as far as to propagate their own yeast in-house using their own wort.

“Our theory is that to make a whisky in the style of the 1970s and before, you need to use the materials and methods of this time or develop an approximation,” says owner Simon Thompson. “If we use the same handful of yeast and barley strains as everyone else then we'll produce a spirit that isn't too dissimilar to everyone else's. On our small scale, we can't compete by copying the big boys – we have to seriously differentiate ourselves with flavour, style and quality.”

Another new distiller thinking outside the washback is Lora Hemy, head distiller at Aber Falls Distillery, in Abergwyngregyn, North Wales. She's focussing on incorporating both brewing and distilling yeasts, as well as being more experimental with fermentation temperatures and times.

“Many distillers are thinking more like brewers in terms of innovation now, which echoes the

is argued, is that there was a decline in overt fruit flavour in whisky and a general homogenisation of distillery identity, due to the fact that these kinds of fermentations left little room for malolactic or bacterial activity that longer ferments generally allow. This is an argument that a number of new generation distillers are latching onto in one way or another and exploring in their production techniques.

What is distiller's yeast though? And is it the great bogeyman some would make it out to be? During the emerging commercial whisky industry of the 19th century, distillers commonly used ale yeasts, bakers' yeasts and some early commercial pressed yeasts – most of which were produced overseas, in countries such as Germany. Some distilleries also propagated their own yeasts on site. During the 1880s the Distillers Company Ltd (DCL, now Diageo), began to experiment with its own 'in-house' yeast production. It collected leftover yeast from fermentations and through a series of filtrations, drying and pressing created a basic, pressed yeast suitable for storage, transport and distilling.

This led to large-scale yeast production at Cameronbridge Distillery from 1885. DCL slowly increased its yeast production at other grain distilleries and by the 1920s held the UK monopoly on yeast production, which saw its products widely used by the distilling industry in the UK. Scottish distilleries in the early-mid 20th century were either self-propagating yeast or using a mix of this early pressed DCL yeast and brewing yeasts, which were effectively leftover yeast 'trub' from breweries which would be purchased and used by distilleries – usually in liquid form.

Some distilleries only used brewers' yeasts, others used them in combination with the initial DCL distilling yeast. These early distilling yeasts were not as





ABOVE:
Simon and Phil Thompson take a hands-on approach to fermentation at Dornoch distillery

traditional symbiotic relationship between breweries and distilleries,” she says. “Yeast can provide a means of creating a unique liquid identity for a distillery, and I find the prospect of more distillate-driven characteristics in whisky quite exciting.

“We are looking at incorporating some brewing yeasts into our production fermentations, but a more important consideration has been the cells themselves, how they behave in our process and conditions and how can we optimise those. Distilling yeasts have been developed to be easy to use, so it’s more challenging to incorporate brewing yeasts. They can behave completely differently in fermentation and are generally much more expensive, but in terms of quality, we think they’re worth it.”

It isn’t just the small-scale distillers who are bucking the trend. The new InchDairnie Distillery, in Glenrothes, Fife, has made a point of using a variety of yeast blends to help differentiate its distillates, as managing director Ian Palmer explains.

“We create different spirit styles at InchDairnie and we use different yeast blends as part of the overall process,” he says. “We produce blending malt where we use the standard distilling yeast, as consistency is a key part of this style of malt. We use different yeast blends for the different InchDairnie seasons, to give us different flavour profiles, allowing us to create a single malt with a wider flavour profile in the matured product. Our yeast is just one of the levers we pull to achieve the flavour profile we want.”

On the subject of whether the prevalence of distilling yeasts has been detrimental to the character of Scottish whisky, Ian says: “Historically many of the malt distilleries used brewers’ yeast, which was variable in quality and tended to have a high bacteria level, and this led to inconsistent spirit flavours.

IF YOU ARE SELLING A MILLION CASES OF A SINGLE MALT, EVERY BOTTLE HAS TO BE THE SAME OR YOU’LL LOSE YOUR CORE MARKET. NOT EVERYONE WANTS EVERY BOTTLE TO BE DIFFERENT

There is little point in occasionally producing flavoursome spirit if you are not able to replicate the flavour profile constantly.

“If you are selling a million cases of a single malt, every bottle has to be the same or you’ll lose your core market. Not everyone wants every bottle to be a different experience... not everyone is a member of the SMWS!”

What of the mainstream companies though? Diageo themselves, historically the instigators of distilling yeasts, are also one of the most experimental companies when it comes to whisky production. As Alan Kennedy, science and technology director at Diageo, says: “Over the years Diageo and its forebears have been at the forefront of experimentation with yeasts, to understand more about the critically important fermentation process and the flavour developments that go with it. Each of our 28 malt whisky distilleries produces spirit of a very distinct character, achieved through a combination of raw materials, yeast and production processes.”

Perhaps the fact that Diageo’s experiments with fermentation have not been bottled is the biggest endorsement of their faith in distilling yeast varieties to deliver the best possible outcome. And, as Diageo are often at pains to point out, they are first and foremost blenders who rely on consistency in their base products.

For distillers focussing primarily on single malt, yeast seems to be increasingly viewed in a fresh light. Further experiments are underway at Bowmore, Loch Lomond, Ardbeg and other newer distilling ventures in the UK. For now, it looks likely that discussions about yeast and fermentation are here to stay. Hopefully, the implications for whisky drinkers and for the breadth of character in our whisky are positive. ●

United malts of AMERICA

Ian Buxton welcomes US moves to regulate the 'Wild West' of premium whiskey production

As you may or may not be vaguely aware the better part of the whiskey made in the US – that's bourbon and rye for the most part – is defined in Federal regulations. So, as a consumer, you know what you're getting. Scotch whisky may be more tightly defined than US whiskey, but the extent to which spirits production is regulated is essentially a political decision and, in the Land of the Free, the presumption is for a light touch. However, there are rules and woe betide the producer who ignores them.

But what about that bottle of 'American Single Malt' which you may have seen? Today around 100 smaller 'craft' distillers are producing a product thus labelled and it turns out there is no legally binding definition at all. In theory at least, the 'single malt' declaration on a bottle of US whiskey may not mean very much at all.

However, behind the scenes, work is in hand to change all that. At the 2016 Tales of the Cocktail event in New Orleans, some 60 single malt producers got together to agree some guidelines and, surprising themselves, came up with a working definition quite quickly. So, they decided to form the American Single Malt Whiskey Commission (ASMWC) with a goal to "establish, promote, and protect the category of American Single Malt Whiskey". It's an exciting example of collaboration from a group of folks who might be considered natural rivals.

Their rules borrow from Scotch but adapt the definition to reflect US practice. For example, American single malt is to be the produce of a single distillery; located in the US; and made 100 per cent from malted barley.



The move will protect consumers

So far, so familiar. But the proposed definition doesn't restrict production to the pot still – other still types may be used, as long as the spirit doesn't exceed 160 proof (80% abv). The thinking behind this is to ensure that the essential character of the original malt is preserved. The malt can include roasted barley and barley that has been malted over Pacific peat or mesquite smoke, emphasising that the suggested rules are an attempt to provide a degree of discipline and consumer reassurance without blocking the innovation of the distiller.

Discussions then began with the US Treasury, which was in any event minded to revise the relevant Federal regulations. However, since the election of President Donald Trump, progress has slowed.

"Politics aside, whenever there is a [presidential] election, there's a change in priorities in the Treasury Department," said Matt Hofmann, head distiller at Seattle's Westland Distillery. "It's fallen down the list of priorities, but ASMWC continues to push it forward."

I believe we should wish them well.

Collaborative working of this kind suggests a new maturity and responsibility in the US craft distilling community that can only benefit the industry and drinkers. It marks a coming of age and an acceptance that the consumer is entitled to clear and consistent labelling.

There's no clear timetable for when the proposed rules might be finalised, let alone passed into law. But it's an encouraging and positive move that I believe is good for all, because this has been a murky area.

As we have seen in previous columns, major distillers are now taking a keen interest in the craft sector. In some cases, they are simply buying their smaller rivals or alternatively launching brands that appear to be the product of a boutique distillery but, in fact, hail from somewhere rather larger. There have also been celebrated cases of 'craft spirits' originating from the giant Midwest Grain Products (MGP) distillery in Lawrenceburg, Indiana.

The proposed new regulations are a welcome move to transparency – and something other world whiskies might consider. ●

A rich seam of whisky history runs down the top north-east coast of Scotland, from Pulteney in Wick to Glenmorangie and Balblair in Tain, with many illustrious distillery names in between, all easily accessible from Inverness. But sometimes taking the less direct route can be more rewarding, especially when it involves an epic road trip around the top of Scotland in search of new and upcoming whisky ventures on the way. Take a ride with Unfiltered on the North Coast 500

WORDS RICHARD GOSLAN // PHOTOS PETER SANDGROUND




the long way
ROUND

When your rallying point for a five-day road trip involves finding a pod of bottlenose dolphins frolicking under the Kessock Bridge in Inverness, you can't help but feel things are going to go your way.

I'm here in the Highland capital with photographer Peter Sandground at the start of a route now established as the North

Coast 500 and marketed as Scotland's answer to Route 66 in the US. From Inverness, our journey will snake its way in a 500-mile loop to the west coast, up the far north-west, along the north coast and back down the east to the Highland capital. It's certainly caught the imagination for its wild scenery – but I want to find out what kind of whisky adventures lie along the way.

You might be forgiven for needing a

dram to steady your nerves after making it safely to Applecross. The isolated township is accessed via the first challenging section of the NC500 – the fearsome Bealach na Bà – the Pass of the Cattle. The sign at the foot of the ascent tells you everything you need to know: NOT ADVISED FOR LEARNER DRIVERS. I feel like I should have L-plates on as I grind between first and second gears in the campervan (sorry Peter), straining up gradients of 20 per 

WHISKY ADVENTURE

cent, with me easing the van's bulk around hairpin bends. But fortune is still smiling on us – we reach the summit unscathed and catch our breath with views over to the Isle of Skye and its neighbouring island of Raasay. Visiting the new distillery there would involve quite a detour, but it's good to know that spirit is now running in the stills on the island for the first time – at least legally.

MORE TWISTS AND TURNS

After the Bealach na Bà, the sinuous single-track road heading north from Applecross feels more manageable, despite the volume of traffic. On a sunny morning, the campervans and mobile homes are packing out the passing places and viewpoints, so the only thing to do is adjust your expectations about how long it's going to take to get anywhere. What's the rush anyway? The views only get more and more astounding. At Glen Docherty, looking down on Loch Maree, we stop to take a shot of our travelling companion, *Cask No. 35.184: Twists and turns*. I'm driving, so pass the dram onto a tourist – John from Manchester – an immediate fan of both the whisky and the appropriate bottle name.

Until recently there was a tiny still operated at Loch Ewe, an outhouse at the Drumchork Lodge Hotel at Aultbea, but owners John and Frances Clotworthy have sold up and moved south.

The site is looking fairly forlorn at the moment, but there are potential developments ahead – the Clotworthys sold the estate, including the distillery, to an Indian consortium known as Loch Ewe Spirits Ltd and whose shareholders include an executive from Indian drinks giant

Jagatjit Industries. So here's hoping there will be a whisky-related reason to return in the future.

A DRAM TO REMEMBER

Growing hungry, we stop off in Ullapool, where even on a Tuesday mid-afternoon there's a riotous ceilidh going on in a local bar, road-tripping tourists taking a break to soak up some traditional music and have a go at Highland dancing. We choose to head on, however, into the wilds of Assynt, and the second overnight of the trip at Achmelvich.

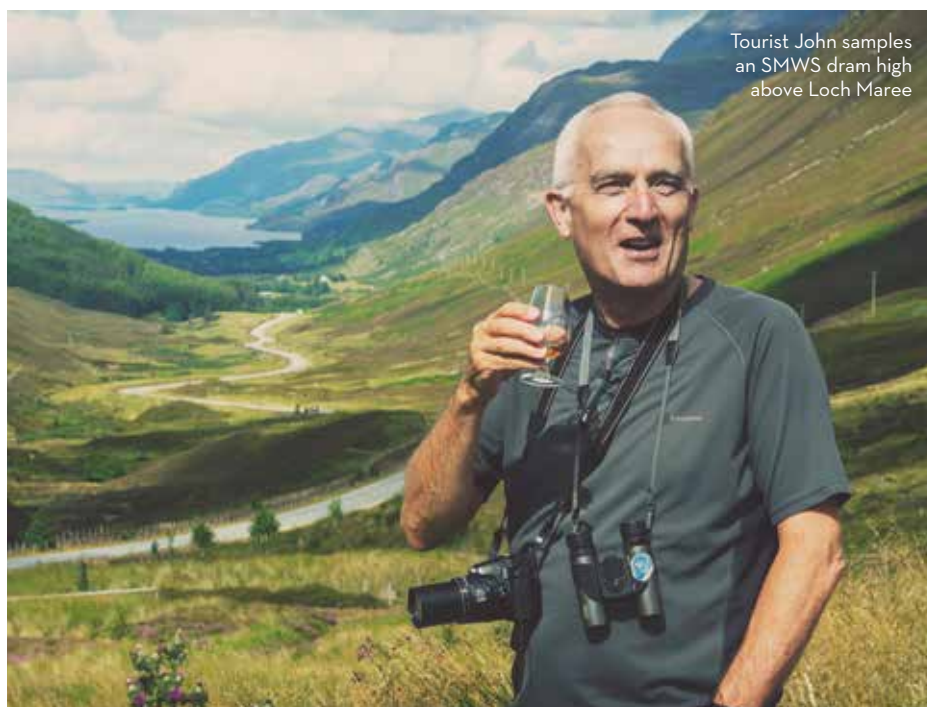
You could probably visit this spot regularly and never get a clear view of the incredible peaks of Suilven or Stac Pollaidh as you approach, or be able to sit on the white sand beach without a soaking. But we time our arrival to catch a glorious sunset, and with a fire quickly built, we can relax and savour a dram of *Cask No. 29.213: Deep, dark and desirable*. When the Tasting Note tells you it has a nose of driftwood bonfires and peat smoke, you know you've found the perfect synergy between liquid and location. It pays to plan ahead and make sure you've selected some suitable SMWS bottlings for the trip.

The next day, we carry on to the north-west corner of the country, where the landscape opens up and we glimpse the huge stretches of sandy beaches that dot this stretch of the north coast. There are also plans afoot for a new distillery at Keoldale, overlooking the Kyle of Durness.

"We want to make it a community-owned project," says David Morrison, a Dundee-based property developer who comes from the nearby crofting township of Sangobeg and is the motivating force



THERE'S A RIOTOUS
CEILIDH GOING ON IN
A LOCAL BAR, ROAD-
TRIPPING TOURISTS
TAKING A BREAK TO
SOAK UP SOME
TRADITIONAL MUSIC
AND HAVE A GO AT
HIGHLAND DANCING.
WE CHOOSE TO HEAD
ON, HOWEVER, INTO
THE WILDS OF ASSYNT



Tourist John samples an SMWS dram high above Loch Maree



Writer Richard enjoys the view from Bealach na Bà



A warming dram on the sands at Achmelvich as the sun goes down



Taking in the views from the Applecross peninsula on the west coast of Scotland

WHISKY ADVENTURE

behind the project. “The school roll has been falling dramatically and it feels like Durness is dying.

“NC500 traffic is a bonus but our plan is to put something back into the area through a comprehensive development.”

We have an appointment to keep, and a lot of miles to get there. So many miles, in fact, and with an irresistible impulse to take the time to appreciate them, that I rearrange our rendezvous at Wolfburn Distillery in Thurso. “No problem,” owner Andrew Thompson tells me by phone. “It’s not the kind of road you should rush – see you in the morning.”

DISTILLING THE DREAM

The next day the sky is gunmetal grey over Thurso as we head to Wolfburn’s home on the outskirts of town. The distillery started running spirit in 2013, taking its water from the same source as the original distillery that operated nearby from 1821 until the 1850s. Distillery manager Shane Fraser has been involved at the new Wolfburn since day one, and clearly relishes his role in creating its whisky.

“It’s been a dream of mine for years to be able to make my own whisky – it’s magic,” he tells me. “I had a flavour profile in my mind from the start, a fruity, light character, so that’s dictated our production process. Our mash is slow and our fermentations are up to 92 hours, so that adds to the spirit’s lighter character.

“We have a lot of head space in our stills to allow a lot of copper contact and we have a slow distillation with a lot of reflux. We also keep the spirit hot to remove any sulphury notes. For me, it’s about doing things slowly and keeping the process consistent. And we’ve got all the time in the world up here.”

BROTHERS IN DRAMS

Shane might have all the time in the world, but we need to push on, past Pulteney in Wick, then Clynelish and its mothballed sibling Brora. We skirt past Dunrobin Castle, where the Sutherland family is planning a single estate whisky and gin distillery in the grounds of the historic castle, and onto Dornoch.

The little town is the kind of location you think the VisitScotland tourism body might have invented specifically to charm overseas tourists. In its centre we find a 12th century cathedral opposite the Dornoch Castle Hotel – home not only to one of the world’s great whisky bars, but now with its own distillery.

The forces behind both are brothers Simon and Phil Thompson, whose parents have run the Dornoch Castle Hotel for the past 17 years. The brothers grew up working behind the bar and learning about whisky, growing the stock from 25 bottles

WE WERE TRYING BOTTLINGS OF BOWMORE AND GLENUGIE FROM THE 1960S, AND THINKING: WHY IS THIS STYLE NOT AVAILABLE ANY MORE?

to around 300. It’s now an SMWS partner bar, with an impressive collection of both new and vintage Society bottlings gleaming on the gantry.

“As our knowledge of whisky grew, we found that the really intriguing ones were the older bottlings. That’s where our passion lies,” Phil tells us.

“We started collecting, going to auctions and tasting events,” says Simon. “We were trying bottlings of Bowmore and Glenugie from the 1960s, and thinking: why is this style not available any more?”

After doing a test run of producing an older style spirit, using the micro-distillery at Strathearn in Perthshire, the brothers decided that if the kind of whisky they relished wasn’t readily available to them, they’d just have to start making it themselves.

Now, they have converted the town’s 19th century fire station – conveniently located a few steps from the hotel bar – into their own distillery, where the experiments are well under way. They have released 12 “experimental batch” bottlings of gin – produced from scratch in a range of styles. Now it’s time for the whisky.

“We’ve filled 12 casks so far, but each new make spirit we’re doing is quite different from the last one,” says Phil. “We’re going to keep it varied for a period of time and see what works best for us.”

“We’re aiming to build in a huge amount of chemical complexity in the beginning and trying to get a whole load of cereal-derived flavours, especially through yeast fermentation, which are now either very low in modern whisky or are completely extinct,” says Simon. “It’s a case of using a mixture of historical research, technical reasoning and our own palates and experience to try and produce an older style whisky. If we somehow magically manage to make a 1966 Bowmore, then maybe we’ll stick with that for a while.”

DORNOCH TO DINGWALL

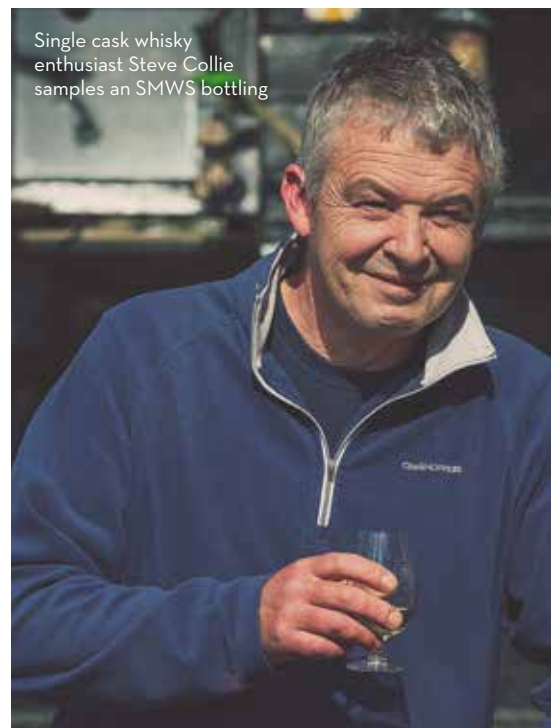
While the Thompson brothers have already realised their dream, a little further



The trip runs past the Pulteney distillery



The former distillery at Drumchork near Aultbea



Single cask whisky enthusiast Steve Collie samples an SMWS bottling



Shane Fraser throws himself into his work at Wolfburn



The only way to travel... weather permitting of course



Remember to stop and smell the flowers in beautiful Applecross

WHISKY ADVENTURE

- down the road on a hillside overlooking Dingwall, a new one is taking shape. When we arrive the next morning, the new copper stills for GlenWyvis distillery are still cloaked in their plastic wrapping from Forsyths while the team, under build contractor James Cameron's lead, are pressing on with the building work.

GlenWyvis is the world's first 100 per cent community-owned distillery, raising capital through crowdfunding and community ownership. The land was leased by distillery founder John McKenzie from his own farm for £1 for the next 179 years, and it's been built using 100 per cent renewable energy, with a combination of solar, wind and biomass technology.

Distillery director Neil Urquhart tells us about the motivation for the project.

"Dingwall has a strong whisky heritage, as the site of the original Ferintosh distillery, which opened in the 1690s, closed in 1784 and was lamented by Robert Burns, among others," he says. "More recently there was Ben Wyvis distillery here in Dingwall, and Glenskiach in



GlenWyvis
director Neil
Urquhart

nearby Evanton. But after a gap of around 90 years, GlenWyvis honours these two late distilleries in our name, and through the distillery we hope to help with the rejuvenation of Dingwall."

GlenWyvis is planning to start running spirit by St Andrew's Day at the end of November – an auspicious date for the birth of the new venture.

END OF THE ROAD

From Dingwall it's a short blast back to our starting point in Inverness. There's no sign of any more pods of dolphins this time – maybe we've used up all our good fortune by this point. On the rest of the drive back down the A9 to central Scotland, we reflect on the journey and vow that we'll be back to do it again. The best road trip in the world? I couldn't possibly disagree. Flavour it with whisky and it's practically perfect. ●



The Thompson brothers in their tiny Dornoch distillery

*Dornoch
Castle Hotel
is now an SMWS
partner bar.
Members get a 10
per cent discount
on all Society
bottlings*

James Cameron inspects things before the covers come off at GlenWyvis



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

TAKE YOUR TIME

You might think it's only 500 miles but the roads are often very small and very windy. Even five days leaves little time for exploring.

BOOK AHEAD

If you're camping or taking a campervan, there are plenty of campsites on the way. If you want a real roof over your head, best to make a reservation.

REVERSE WITH CONFIDENCE

The single-track roads have regular passing places, but there will come a point you'll have to back up into the one you've just passed. Don't end up in a ditch.

PREPARE TO BE INCOMMUNICADO

You're going to be out of mobile and internet range for a lot of the time. Embrace it.

PACK FOR ALL CONDITIONS

Weather forecasts don't count for much in Scotland. You could call it unpredictable.

MORE THAN WHISKY

You can visit Dunnett Bay distillery near Thurso to try their gin and vodka, while there are breweries at the Black Isle, Cromarty, and An Teallach at Dundonnell.

PLAN DISTILLERY VISITS

Wolfburn, Pulteney, Clynelish, Balblair, Glenmorangie, The Dalmore and Glen Ord all do tours, but check their websites for times and bookings.

CARRY SOME ESSENTIALS

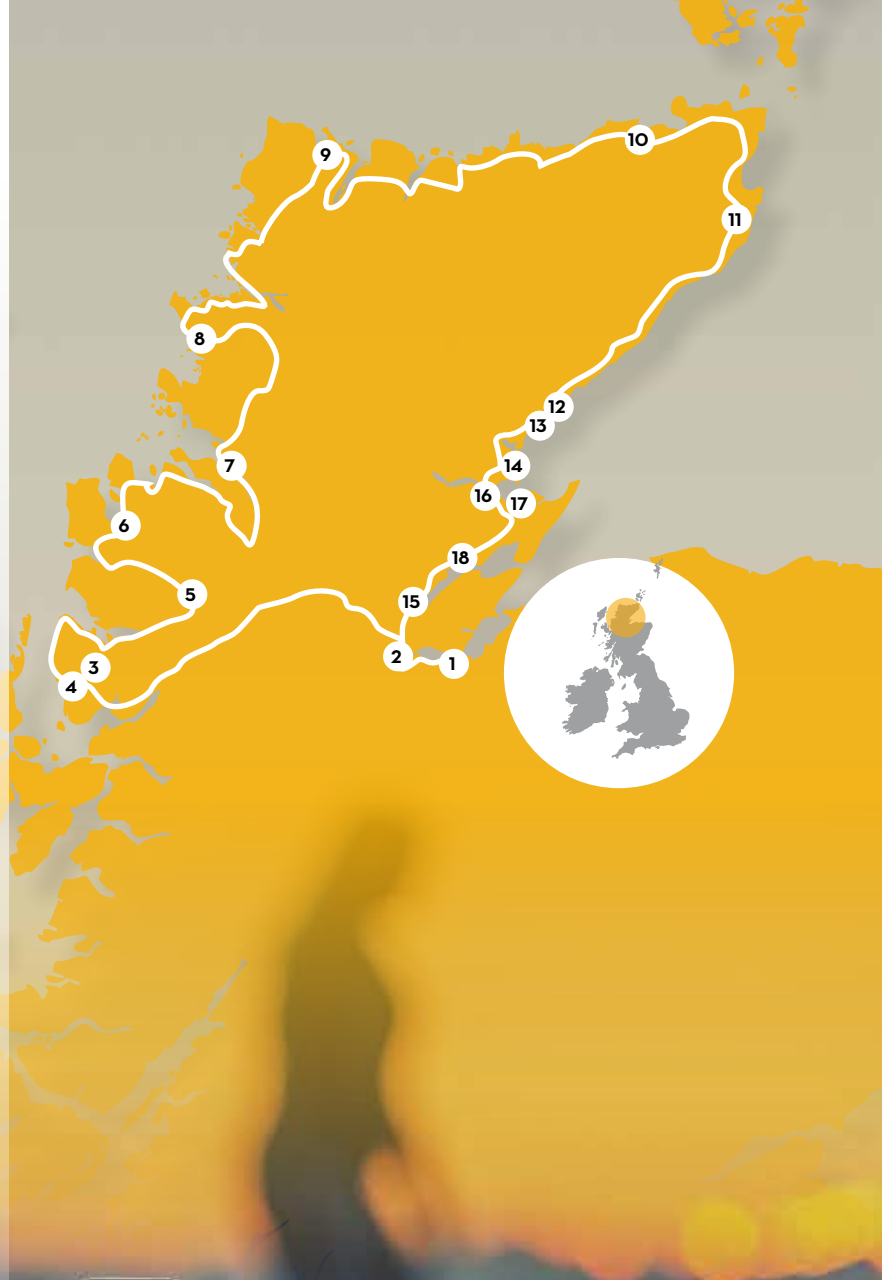
It can be a long way between cafes or restaurants, and if you arrive outside of opening hours you could go hungry.

YOU MAY BE BITTEN

If you travel the route in summer, the notorious Highland midge can make a wind-free evening tortuous. Bring repellent or a midge net.

REMEMBER YOUR SMWS BOTTLES

Once you're parked up for the day, nothing's going to top having a Society dram in one of the most beautiful parts of the world.



KEY TO NC500 MAP (ABOVE RIGHT)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Inverness | 10. Wolfburn distillery |
| 2. Glen Ord distillery | 11. Pulteney distillery |
| 3. Bealach na Bà | 12. Clynelish distillery |
| 4. Applecross | 13. Dunrobin Castle |
| 5. Glen Docherty | 14. Dornoch distillery |
| 6. Loch Ewe distillery | 15. GlenWyvis distillery |
| 7. Ullapool | 16. Balblair distillery |
| 8. Achmelvich | 17. Glenmorangie distillery |
| 9. Keoldale | 18. The Dalmore distillery |



Danger DISTILLED

Spirited mystery takes Sherlock Holmes on a whisky-fuelled odyssey from Baker Street, to France, and on to the Highlands

The phylloxera epidemic that wreaked havoc on French vineyards in the late 19th century was a disaster for the country's wine and brandy industries. But what if the devastating blight caused by the parasitic insects was deliberately engineered, or at least prolonged – and who would stand to benefit most? Perhaps it could have been an entrepreneurial Scotch whisky family, intent on finding new markets for their own products...

That's the opening premise for a new Sherlock Holmes novel, by Bonnie MacBird, who takes Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's detective and throws him into a ghostly adventure revolving around the McLaren whisky family and their drive to win the royal seal of approval for their Garnet single malt.

The action moves from France, and an investigation into phylloxera, to a Highland distillery, scene of all kinds of ghostly goings-on that test Sherlock and sidekick Dr Watson to their limits.

Bonnie comes from a background in screenwriting, with the original screenplay for cult 1982 science fiction movie *Tron* to her credit. She's been a devotee of Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes for most of her life, but admits to being on a steep learning curve when it came to the whisky side of her tale.

"I started out with a notion of ghosts and Scotland, and then the backdrop of whisky came to me and I thought that world would make the perfect setting," she says. "That's where whisky expert Charlie MacLean helped out enormously, guiding my research into whisky and then reviewing the whisky-related sequences once I'd written them."

Visits to Bruichladdich, Glenkinchie and Royal Lochnagar distilleries also helped Bonnie set the scene, as well as inspire some plot twists.

"There's so much danger inherent in distilleries, with the big clawing rakes in the mash tuns, the

MORE WHISKY STORIES DISTILLED

Whisky Galore,
Compton Mackenzie
The granddaddy of all whisky-inspired fiction, Mackenzie's tale is based on the real story of *SS Politician*, which ran aground in the Outer Hebrides with 28,000 cases of whisky onboard.

Smokeheads,
Doug Johnstone
A blood and whisky-soaked thriller set on Islay. Strong stuff, and not just the whisky.

Single Malt Murder,
Melinda Mullet
A journalist inherits a Highland distillery, and soon has to call on her skills to solve the murder of one of her staff, found floating in a vat of whisky.

A Nice Girl Like Me,
Abigail Bosanko
Even the SMWS plays a role in this Edinburgh-set whisky romance by a former SMWS staffer. See if you can identify any of the other characters.

The Whisky Affair,
Michael J Gill
Set against a backdrop of the fictional Isle of Bute distillery – complete with marketing slogan 'What a Beaut' – this is a tale of conspiracy, murder and a blend of whisky fact and fiction.

Scotch on the Rocks,
Roy McCormick
Tensions rise between Glendivot Distillery and the nearby Glenbroom Distillery in a story of rivalry, espionage... and shinty.



Bonnie MacBird

copper stills looking like something out of a Jules Verne novel, the threat of carbon dioxide poisoning, grinding machines and even furnaces in a Victorian setting," she says. "Touring the different distilleries and talking to people such as Adam Hannett, at Bruichladdich, and 'The cask whisperer' Jim McEwan was extremely helpful."

Now Bonnie is as much of a whisky fan as she is a Sherlockian.

"My exploration of the whisky world has converted me to the drink," she says. "It also became apparent to me that whisky making is an art form, but like all good art is has a scientific component, a craft where you have to precisely measure and analyse ingredients.

"Beyond that there's this magic part which no one can explain – whether it comes from the air, the sea, the temperature, no one really knows. In watercolour painting it's called the 'happy accident', and it became clear that distilling is a complex art form that requires both scientific precision, as well as an artistic quality." ●

Unquiet Spirits by Bonnie MacBird, is published by HarperCollins (£14.99)

The SMWS has been setting aside casks throughout the year that we know you will appreciate as a winter warmer. The Society's spirits director **Kai Ivalo** and spirits manager **Euan Campbell** talk us through their pick of what's coming...

PHOTO MIKE WILKINSON

OUR WIDE WORLD

Kai: This is looking good, Euan – between our First Friday Outturn at the start of November and Christmas, we'll be offering our widest-ever range of casks and styles of whisky, with almost 100 different bottlings.

Euan: We've tried to make sure there's something for everyone, with a good balance between classic aged refill barrels and hogsheads, intense first fills, peaty warmers and flavoursome ex-sherry casks. Geographically, we have a huge spread of styles from different regions.

Kai: So what's first from your picks?

Euan: *Cask No. 72.51: Pepper-crusted charred roast beef* is a highlight. We've had some of these in the past filled into first-fill white wine hogsheads, and it has a similar effect to ex-sherry casks, giving a lovely dark colour and lots of red fruits. We moved this one into a virgin oak toasted hogshead after that, so it's intensely flavoured, dark and very fruity.

Kai: That's a lovely example of our Deep, Rich & Dried Fruits profile, perfect for this time of year and an interesting style of whisky. One of my favourites is *Cask No. 26.119: Dark and dangerously good* – it's a full-on sherry maturation and tastes fantastic.

Euan: Our Tasting Panel scored 26.119 really highly; there were even expletives about how good it was! It was in an ex-oloroso butt, finished into a first-fill Pedro Ximenez butt after 20 years and kept there for 19 months to add some more depth and complexity.

Kai: It wouldn't be Christmas without a sherry butt, would it!

Euan: We re-casked it with that in mind, with a balanced period of additional maturation.

Kai: *Cask No. 52.21: Tropical breezes fill the sails* is another great winter whisky from our Deep, Rich & Dried Fruits flavour profile.

Euan: We moved this one after 14 years from an ex-bourbon barrel to a first-fill charred

ex-red wine barrique for eight months. By exposing the fresh oak you get a lot of extra flavour and colour added to the spirit.

Kai: What about *Cask No. 7.180: Untold stories?* This is a great example of what I'd call 'old school' whisky, from the refill hogshead. It's a bit of an unsung hero, but at this age the humble hoggie turns out some cracking whiskies, where the distillery character really comes through.

Euan: You get that feeling from this one that only comes from a refill hogshead reaching its peak at more than 20 years.

Kai: And this one's 25 years old – definitely worth the wait.

Euan: *Cask No. 53.243: A fisherman's nightcap* is an interesting one; it's quite a full-on young Islay, and makes no apologies for that...it's really quite rugged.

Kai: We have 50 litres of this maturing in a living cask at The Vaults – well worth a try.

Euan: One that stands out for me is *Cask No. 93.79: Oiled up and frisky*. It's a Young & Sprightly 10-year-old, one of a series of quality young bottlings coming through from this Campbeltown distillery.

Kai: We have variants, depending on its level of peat, but it's a lovely clean expression; salty, coastal and very much a Campbeltown.

Euan: What about a whisky to introduce someone to what we do at the Society?

Kai: I think *Cask No. 73.93: Shades of orange blossom* from our Sweet, Fruity & Mellow flavour profile will appeal. It's not a whisky that people will encounter regularly.

Euan: At 18 years old, and with that flavour profile, it's a mellow and easy experience.

Kai: And well priced if your Christmas budget is getting a bit stretched!

Euan: Another option, if you have pals who are likely to enjoy a peaty whisky, is *Cask No. 10.128: Sea salt & smoked peppered almonds* – a big blast of Islay. ●



DON'T MISS OUT: CASK STRENGTH CHRISTMAS CRACKERS

115.6: Cloutie dumpling in the sauna

Our first bottling from this distillery since 2002.

39.151: A Blue Lady and a Seraph's smile

Transferred at 18 years old from an ex-oloroso butt for 20 months in a first-fill Pedro Ximenez butt.

112.19: Quirky, kooky, funky

An organic whisky with a beautiful balance between

age at 17 years old and an active second-fill barrel.

4.237: Essence of Orkney

A 24-year-old ex-bourbon hogshead, finished in a first-fill US oak Pedro Ximenez butt.

60.26: Mojitos and muscle rub

Another rarity, our first bottling from this distillery since 2002.

ROLL CALL

Eladio Díaz has worked his entire life in the cigar industry, and is now master blender and quality manager for Davidoff. He tells Unfiltered about the art of rolling the perfect cigar, and his collaboration with the SMWS to create the world's first-ever whisky cask-aged cigar

WORDS RICHARD GOSLAN // PHOTOS OETTINGER DAVIDOFF AG 2016

When did you start working in the industry?

My mother sent me to the Diana Cigar factory next to our house [in the Dominican Republic] as a seven-year-old. I started as a sweeper, then they taught me how to strip leaves, then sort them. At 12, I finally got the chance to sit at a table and put together cigars.

Our members are familiar with the term master blender in the whisky world... but what is a master blender's role in creating cigars?

The master blender has to learn about the whole process, from the plantation where the seed is sown right through to the completed cigar. This is essential, as it allows you to acquire a knowledge of the necessary elements along the way, from when a cigar starts out as seed to finally being enjoyed, and how these might be combined to achieve a consummate and fulfilling taste experience.

When I'm travelling and meet new or existing cigar aficionados, I always ask them what they love in a cigar. I often hear that they appreciate a cigar that is medium strong but very aromatic. This is challenging in terms of blending, because the tobaccos need to be perfectly aged and be at their peak to provide all the flavours and aromas.

At the moment, we have access to tobacco grown from some 82 seeds and multiple origins. A master blender is like a chef – it's essential to have access to multiple ingredients to deliver exciting and innovative experiences.

What are the key considerations in being able to craft an exquisite cigar?

When I find new tobaccos from different terroirs or receive the latest tobaccos from the ageing room, I try to come up with innovations, delivering a taste stimulation unlike what I've blended before. I usually put together the first 10 cigars myself, to see how the various elements harmonise with each other.

How important is age in the overall process?

Davidoff is a premium and a luxury cigar. For this reason, the tobaccos used to roll the cigar must be aged at least three years. After rolling, the cigar itself should rest another two to three months.

BELOW:

The Winston Churchill - The Late Hour features a profile of the whisky and cigar-loving leader



How do you enjoy a cigar yourself? With a whisky? Malt whisky is the perfect complement for me.

Where did the inspiration for this whisky-matured cigar come from?

At Davidoff, we are constantly innovating by crafting new blends that provide new taste stimulations. When we started working on the Winston Churchill – The Late Hour, we were inspired by Sir Winston's love for whisky and cigars. When we first tried barrel-aging tobacco, we were delighted and convinced, that with original whisky casks from Scotland, we would be able to create an even more unexpected taste. Plus, the worlds of whisky and of cigars have a lot of similarities, so it made sense to further investigate the idea. As such, we experimented by ageing various tobacco leaves in Scotch casks, and after a year of testing we decided that Nicaraguan Condega tobaccos would age beautifully in whisky casks.

How does the ageing of the tobacco in single malt Scotch whisky casks from the SMWS influence the cigar's flavour?

The cask-matured tobacco suffuses the cigar with a unique complexity, depth and the most heady of flavours. The Late Hour blend contains cask-aged Condega Visus tobacco. Those leaves are firmly pressed inside 10 casks sourced from The Scotch Malt Whisky Society, made of American white oak, which formerly held a Speyside single malt. As the temperature in the closed casks rises, the tobacco enters a fermentation process. After three months, the tobacco is rotated and aged for an additional three months. The tobacco absorbs the aromas of the cask and whisky for a total of six months. Then, it is ready to be integrated into the blend that makes up the Davidoff Winston Churchill – The Late Hour.

What's the perfect way to enjoy a Winston Churchill - The Late Hour cigar?

With a glass of whisky. The chosen beverage should match with the leathery, woody and complex taste of the cigars. Ideally it would be a whisky that is neither too peaty nor too smoky, but rich and complex in aroma and taste. ●

PAIRED PERFECTION

Try a whisky from our Sweet, Fruity & Mellow flavour profile, or Lightly Peated, for the best combination with your cigar. Avoid sherry or port finished casks – a first-fill ex-bourbon barrel is ideal with your smoke

Master blender
Eladio Díaz tests
one of his cigars



**S MOKE
' E M O U T**

*For more information
about Davidoff's
work and range of fine
tobacco products,
please visit
davidoff.com*



The tobacco
leaves are aged
in SMWS casks



WELCOME HOME

Whisky is running again at Lindores, the spiritual home of Scotch whisky. Unfiltered's Richard Goslan paid a visit to find about the site's historical roots – and its whisky-making future

WORDS RICHARD GOSLAN // PHOTOS MIKE WILKINSON

“For a whisky lover, it is a pilgrimage”

MICHAEL JACKSON

When whisky writer Michael Jackson turned up at Drew McKenzie Smith's family farm at Lindores in Fife 20 years ago to ask for a look around, little did he know that he would help to inspire the building of a distillery – and have a quote from his book, *Scotland and its Whiskies*, written large in the visitor centre.

At the time, Drew knew little about Michael, or Lindores Abbey's place in whisky history – the site of the earliest written reference to the production of whisky in Scotland.

The abbey itself dates back to 1191, founded by David Earl of Huntingdon and a site that played host to kings, queens and William Wallace, among others. The Tironensian monks who built and populated the abbey were masons, gardeners, carpenters and farmers, as well as notable brewers and distillers. Among them was Friar John Cor, whose commission by King James IV to turn 'eight



Drew McKenzie Smith worked with whisky consultant Dr Jim Swan to get the distillery details just right

bolts of malt (about 500kg) into aqua vitae' made it into the Exchequer Roll of 1494.

“I had been rather blissfully unaware that Lindores Abbey had this place in whisky folklore, as a place that aqua vitae was being distilled,” says Drew. “To me, the abbey had always been part of the farm, a playground as a kid where I used to scoot around on my motorbike, oblivious to its history. I showed Michael around and thought little more about it until he sent me a copy of his book, mentioning Lindores as a place of pilgrimage for whisky lovers.”

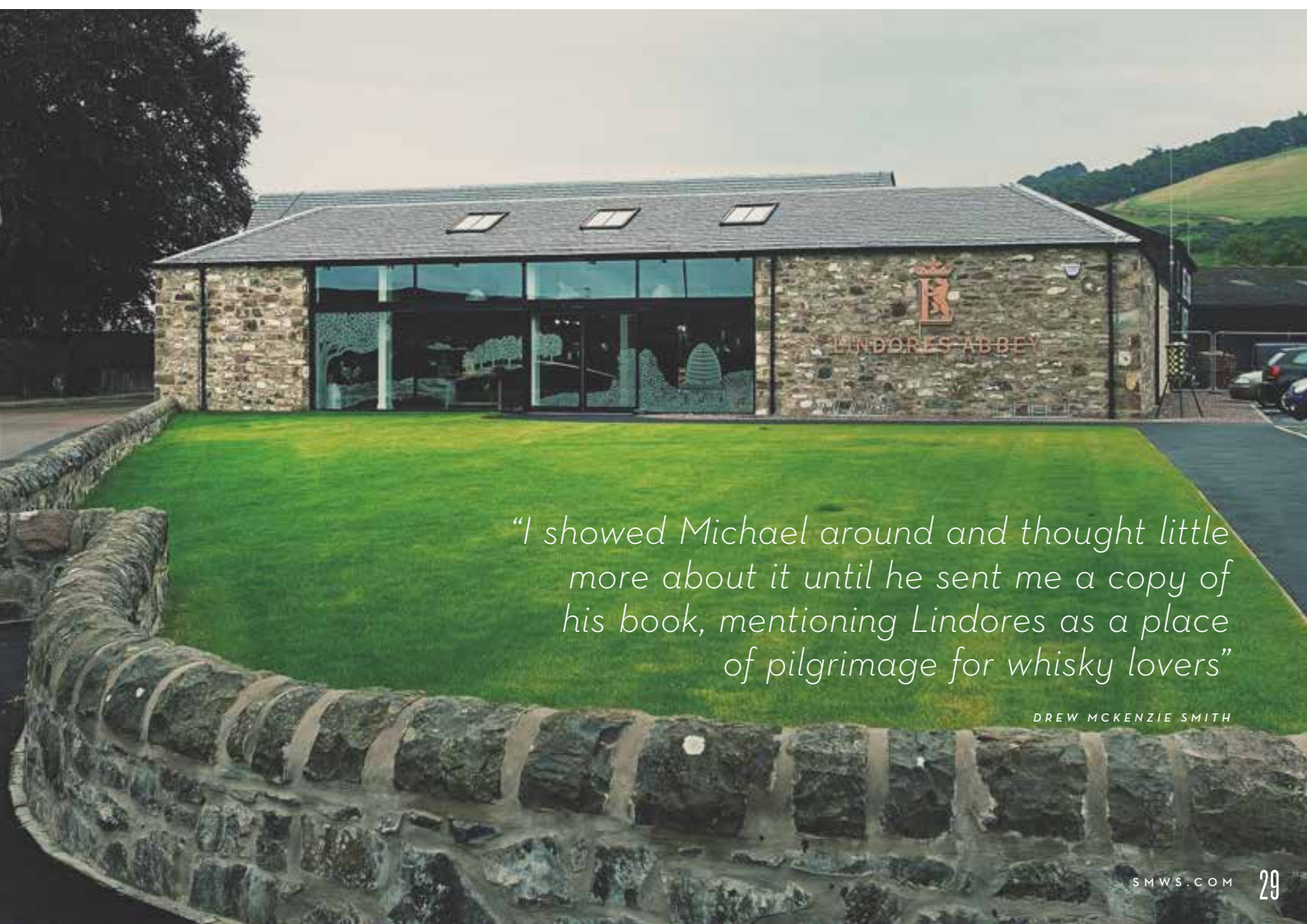
That started a process of discovery for

Drew, researching the abbey's history and beginning to build his vision of bringing distilling back to Lindores after more than 500 years. Now, he's fulfilled that dream, with the gleaming copper stills overlooking the abbey running spirit since October this year.

The distillery has been created in the old farm steading, itself constructed from abbey stone, with an imposing glass frontage from the stillroom looking across to the ruins of the abbey itself. Drew worked with whisky consultant Dr Jim Swan to design the distillery and refine its production



Richard and Drew discuss distilling in the shadow of the stillroom



"I showed Michael around and thought little more about it until he sent me a copy of his book, mentioning Lindores as a place of pilgrimage for whisky lovers"

DREW MCKENZIE SMITH

DISTILLERY PROFILE

process, and it's Jim's legacy that is now in place following his untimely death in February.

"Jim was instrumental in how we've set up the distillery," says Drew. "We were going to go for two stills but he was waxing lyrical about Annandale's new make from its three stills, so we've gone for a large wash still and two smaller spirit stills, to allow for greater copper contact and a clean, delicate Lowland flavour profile.

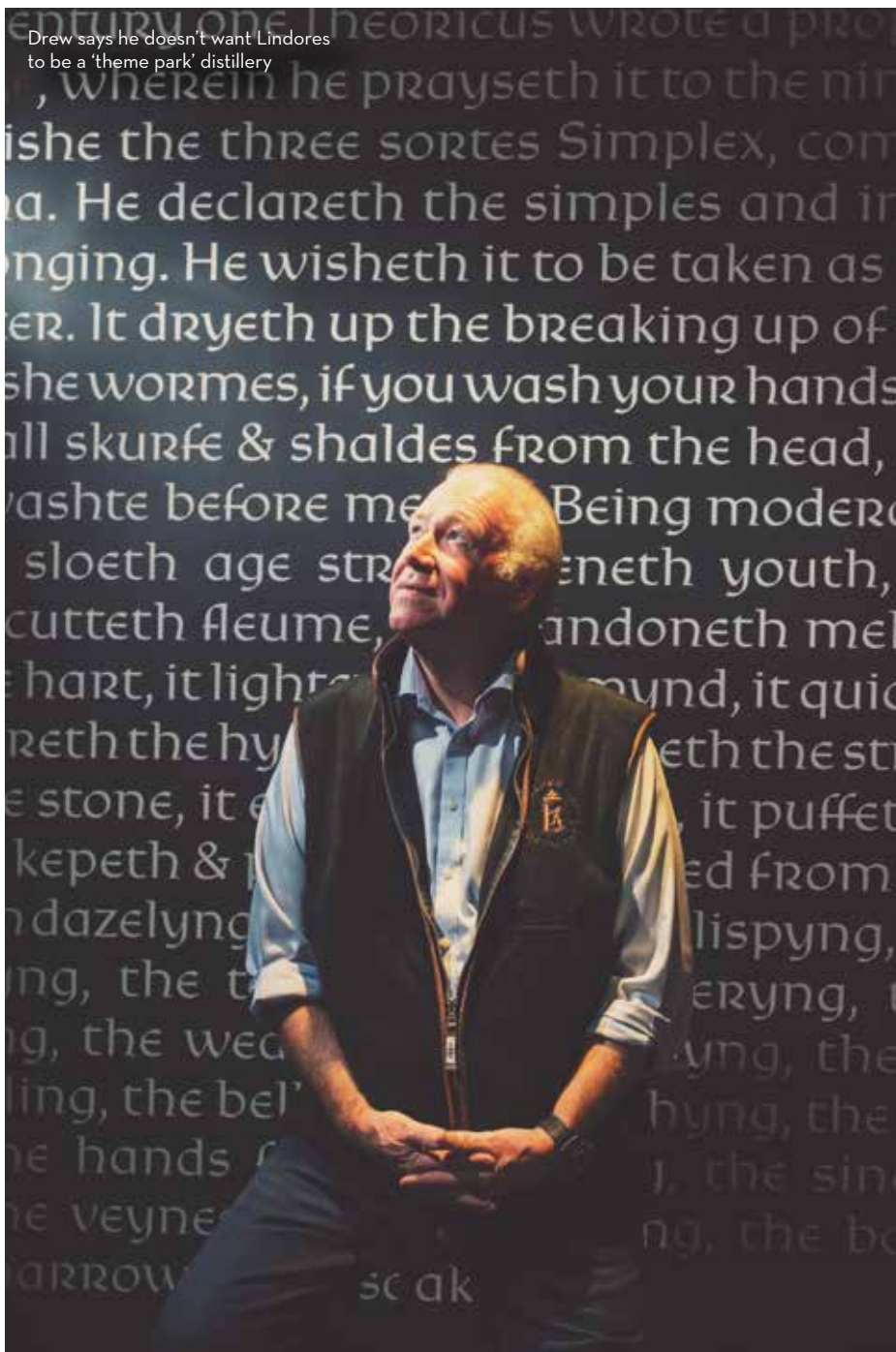
"Jim also wanted to experiment with maturation by heating part of our warehouse, so we're combining traditional dunnage with a racked area and a heated area to see how it affects maturation."

About two thirds of Lindores' casks will be ex-bourbon, 20 per cent ex-sherry and a

small proportion will be the STR (shaved, toasted, recharred) casks that have been used successfully by distilleries such as Kavalan in Taiwan.

Barley is being sourced exclusively from Fife, and there are also plans to experiment with an ancient local strain of yeast, developed in collaboration with the Institute of Brewing and Distilling at Heriot-Watt University.

"We have lots of exciting plans, but first and foremost we want to get a great and consistent spirit coming through the stills," says Drew. "The whisky is the business end of all this and we don't want this to be a kind of theme park distillery where people come and buy one bottle as a novelty but don't buy any more. Our focus is very much



Drew says he doesn't want Lindores to be a 'theme park' distillery

"We're combining traditional dunnage with a racked area and also a heated area to see how that affects maturation"

DREW MCKENZIE SMITH

on making the whisky work."

While that new make spirit is maturing, however, instead of turning to gin to bring in some revenue, Drew and the team have channelled the spirit of the Tironensian monks to produce modern-day aqua vitae.

"We've created our own apothecary, where you'll be able to create your own aqua vitae, even using local herbs like sweet cicely that you can forage for on the banks of the River Tay," says Drew. "We'll be able to use fruit from the orchard we're putting in, and even honey from our own bees to sweeten and infuse the spirit. By using a rotary evaporator to mix the aqua vitae we're also using the very latest technology – while at the other end of the distillery it's all about copper still tradition."

With so many new distilleries coming online and each one looking for a back story to help attract interest, Lindores is spoilt for choice when it comes to both its history and genuine whisky heritage.

"It feels almost surreal now that the distillery is up and running," says Drew. "For me it's been a journey of 20 years to get here, but in a far bigger way it's been about bringing distilling back to Lindores after more than 500 years. What would Friar John Cor make of it? I think he'd be pretty chuffed, and if he's looking over my shoulder, I hope he'd raise a glass." ●

UP IN SMOKE



TOM BRUCE-GARDYNE UNCOVERS THE ORIGINS OF WHISKY'S UNIQUE FLAVOUR...AND REVEALS THAT IT MIGHT NOT BE ABOUT THE WOOD AT ALL

What would Dr Bill Lumsden, Glenmorangie's wood guru and now director of distilling and whisky creation, come out with next – a Baskin-Robbins or a Brent Crude finish, perhaps? Yet Glenmorangie had the last laugh by pushing its rivals off the shelf with its ever-growing brood of extensions

PHOTOS CAROL SACHS



Dr Bill Lumsden

“**W**hat gives Scotch whiskies their flavour and bouquet?” asked a pamphlet published by the Scotch Whisky Association (SWA) in 1959. Well it was “a great mystery”, and apparently one that all the spirit’s “imitators the world over, would give a fortune to know”. The SWA then went on to explain that: “Water is probably the most important single factor in deciding character and flavour.”

There was no mention of maturation in an oak cask – that universal container used for centuries to store everything from wine and whisky to fish and nails. Whisky was crafted in the distillery, and what happened thereafter in some hand-me-down barrel in the dark was of little import. But that was then, for nowadays we know better than to talk up the raw ingredients – least of all water!

‘Wood makes the whisky’ is the present day mantra of the Scotch industry, where

distillers will happily tell you that at least 60 per cent of the character of their brands comes from ageing in oak.

A clear, barely-formed spirit undergoes a complete transformation after years in the warehouse to emerge full of undreamt of complexity, richness and flavour. In that age-old philosophical debate of nature versus nurture, there is no question who’s won when it comes to whisky – it’s nurture all the way.

Every aspect of maturation has been studied in microscopic and forensic detail, down to the diameter of the pores in the wood. The sourcing of the barrels and their previous contents has become almost a fetish for many brands, drowning out everything else. But has the pendulum swung too far away from nature, or in this case, distillery character?

Diageo’s master distiller Dr Jim Beveridge would like to rebalance the debate. “I think the distillery character is really important, but it needs to be aged in the right sort of cask to achieve the right

level of maturity,” he says. “But that’s really all the wood has to do. In terms of getting to that mature point, the wood is absolutely essential. In flavour terms it doesn’t need to be there at all.”

If not heretical, that is certainly a refreshing view, although Diageo probably has more cause to trumpet distillery character than most since it owns some 28 malt distilleries, way more than any of its rivals.

“At heart we’re a blending company,” says Jim. “As a blending company, we want to have lots of diversity of flavour.” Those with far fewer distilleries are likely to lean the other way and talk up maturation. That was certainly the case at Glenmorangie with its pioneering range of finishes.

Sounding like the Forestry Commission, Glenmorangie used to obsess about wood management while competitors would wonder what weird and wonderful new finish would emerge. What would Dr Bill Lumsden, its wood guru and now director of distilling and whisky creation, come out

with next – a Baskin-Robbins or a Brent Crude finish, perhaps? Yet Glenmorangie had the last laugh by pushing its rivals off the shelf with its ever-growing brood of extensions.

“I have huge respect for Glenmorangie,” says Jim, “but what they’ve done is they’ve kept their distillate constant and played tunes in wood, and done so with great success. An alternative might have been to have played tunes with the distillery character and left the wood constant.”

Hamish Torrie, who spent years looking after Ardbeg before becoming Glenmorangie’s director of corporate responsibility, insists it was never just about maturation. “The Nectar d’Or, for example, is Glenmorangie Original plus two years in a Sauternes barrique,” he says. “That imparts extra flavour, but you can still taste the underlying character of the whisky.”

Yet with the profusion of cask finishes from every distiller, the story invariably revolves around wood.

As my fellow *Unfiltered* contributor and whisky consultant, Angus MacRaidl, puts it: “As long as the core part of whisky making – the creation of the distillate itself – is honed in the name of efficiency to the point of homogenisation, then the language of promotion, marketing and education will always revert disproportionately to wood.” To which Hamish retorts: “That may be true of others, but we spend an inordinate amount of time with experimentation into the nuances of fermentation and the copper to spirit contact in the still.”

To find out more I caught up with Angus, who reckons the trouble began with the

growth in new, emerging markets when, in his view: “Producers started to say, ‘How can we make more whisky more quickly?’ They were looking at what types of wood would help speed up maturation, and I think more and more active American oak was seen as the answer.” In doing so, he feels: “We’ve arrived at this lop-sided reliance on the cask to give character, rather than on a distillate that’s rich in character in the first place.”

Of course, the proof is in the pudding, or rather the whiskies themselves. According to Angus: “There were some great proprietary bottlings at 5, 8 or 10 years-old, matured in relatively inactive casks, that still yielded beautifully characterful, flavoursome complex whiskies, because the distillate had a lot of identity and character.” That was before, “the big groundswell of oak arrived”, as he puts it.

But it was not just whisky that succumbed to that sweet hit of vanilla and coconut. Wine drinkers had discovered New World Chardonnay and despite being bludgeoned by a 4x2 plank of new oak with every sip, they kept coming back

Despite being bludgeoned by a 4x2 plank of new oak with every sip, they kept coming back for more

for more. Glen Moray on Speyside even brought out its own Chardonnay cask finish. With Chardonnay those creamy cask flavours could hide a multitude of sins, but eventually the tide turned in favour of subtlety and even unoaked wines.

Clearly you cannot have unoaked Scotch, given that the rules stipulate three years minimum ageing in an oak cask. But Jim makes a good point when he says: “If you have great wood character and not very compelling distillery character, it stops being Scotch and starts to become like some of those other international whiskies.”

Back in 1959 there may have been bourbons keen to imitate Scotch, but you wonder if the trend has been reversed in some cases with blends hoping to release their inner Jack Daniels.

If the Scotch whisky industry were able to pull its collective head out of the barrel for just a second, it would do well to look around at other drinks. New oak is frowned upon in certain wine circles and within the so-called ‘natural wine’ movement it is all about mother nature and the vineyard. Craft brewers are forever experimenting with different hops and malts. If whisky distillers could be half as innovative with types of malt, strains of yeast and perhaps even varieties of barley, it would broaden the diversity of new make spirit and therefore distillery character no end.

Yet maybe the SWA was right all along, by suggesting the answer to this nature versus nurture debate does not lie in the warehouse, the still room or in those fermenting washbacks. Perhaps it really is the water that makes the whisky. ●



GLASGOW'S BONHOMIE

WORDS RICHARD GOSLAN // PHOTOS PETER SANDGROUND

The warm and welcoming Bon Accord bar has come a long way since just two lonely malts huddled together on the gantry – and it's all thanks to the vision of experienced owner Paul McDonagh

You know that feeling where you walk into a pub and think: “I wish my local was like *this*.” That’s the best endorsement I can give for the Bon Accord in Glasgow, home to more than 400 whiskies, an impressive shelf full of Society bottlings, an ever-changing range of real ales – but perhaps most importantly, domain of irrepressible owner Paul McDonagh.

Paul has been in charge at the Bon Accord for the past 17 years, since he took over a failing ale house in the city’s Charing Cross district with only two bottles of malt on the gantry and set about building an outstanding whisky bar.

“We went from two bottles of malt to 30 in that first week,” Paul tells me. “But to grow it to the level we’re at now doesn’t happen overnight, it takes a lot of time and



a lot of money – I’ve always looked at the process as being a marathon, not a sprint.”

Paul brought his experience as a publican in Glasgow and Edinburgh to his family-owned business, with son and daughter Thomas and Maria also working behind the bar and wife Denise running the kitchen.

As host, Paul concentrates not only on looking after his regulars but in welcoming whisky drinkers from around the world. “First and foremost I’m a proud Glaswegian – I love the place and I think it’s the world’s best city, warts and all. So forget about business, I want people to have a good time in Glasgow and I want them to come back.”

For anyone with any interest in whisky, there is a never-ending list of reasons to make a return trip to the Bon Accord. The gantry is heaving with intriguing bottlings, including more than 20 Society bottles.

“People come from all over the world to this pub, and a lot of those visitors might struggle to find a bottle from some of these distilleries in their own countries, so it’s amazing for them to come here and try a dram from so many different bottles.

“The Bon Accord is also home to five different whisky clubs, and they love the fact there are different Society bottlings to sample. The first club I started here

is almost 10 years old and we have six drams once a month, but we never do repeats. That’s a lot of whisky, so when our members see a green Society bottle they know they’re going to get something different and a great dram as well.”

Only the most excessive or extravagant will be forking out for the most expensive whisky behind the bar. Carefully positioned out of immediate reach on the top shelf is a bottle of 70-year-old Glenlivet from Gordon & MacPhail’s Generations range, one of only 100 bottled – and selling for £900 a dram.

“I could have bought my wife a nice family car, instead I bought a bottle of whisky and shoved it on the shelf,” says Paul of the £13,500 teardrop shaped bottle. “I’ve sold four measures from it, but it’s a great

talking point, and is probably the most photographed bottle of whisky in the country.”

The £900 dram fits in with Paul’s philosophy of the pub as a place where the conversation is in your hand, whether it’s real ale or any good whisky, at any price level.

“We’ve worked hard to create the right environment for people to socialise in, and to make the Bon Accord a destination in its own right. But it’s not finished – the work continues on a daily basis.” ●

The Bon Accord is open until midnight seven days a week. You can receive a discount on all SMWS drams by producing your member card

♥ The Bon Accord is at 153 North Street, Glasgow G3 7DA. Tel: 0141 248 4427. www.bonaccordpub.com



Paul behind the bar at the Bon Accord



£900 gets you a dram of 70-year-old Glenlivet



FIND THE PERFECT PLACE FOR A WINTER WARMER
 Whether you're welcoming in the New Year in style, raising a glass of festive cheer, or staying cosy as the nights grow darker, we have the occasion and location to match



UNMISSABLE EVENTS FOR THE SEASON

Check your local website for all your festive and New Year events

- AUSTRALIA - WWW.SMWS.COM.AU • CANADA - WWW.SMWS.CA • DENMARK - WWW.SMWS.DK •
- HONG KONG - WWW.SMWS.COM.HK • JAPAN - WWW.SMWSJAPAN.COM •
- NEW ZEALAND - WWW.SMWS.CO.NZ • SWITZERLAND - WWW.SMWS.CH •
- TAIWAN - WWW.SMWS.COM.TW • UK & EU - WWW.SMWS.COM • USA - WWW.SMWSA.COM •

UK

The Vaults, Leith
THURSDAY, 14 DECEMBER
SMOKY ALL THE WAY

Celebrate all that is smoky with our last peated whisky evening of the year. Rich, deep whiskies are our focus, paired with a sophisticated meal.

The Vaults, Leith
FRIDAY, 22 DECEMBER
'T WAS THE DRAM BEFORE CHRISTMAS...

Whiskies that are sweet, rich, spicy and chocolatey will be the theme behind this selection of five drams. A reduced menu will be on offer should you like to recharge.

The Vaults, Leith
SUNDAY, 31 DECEMBER
HOGMANAY AT THE VAULTS
 See in 2018 in style at The Vaults Hogmanay party, a fantastic evening with live music, great food, bubbles and drams for only £65 7pm-1am.

28 Queen Street
11, 18 and 25 NOVEMBER
AUTUMN TEST LUNCHES

Prepare for the rugby with a three-course lunch served with a flight of whiskies or wines before you head over to watch Scotland in the Autumn tests. We will kick off at 11.30am to ensure you get to the game in plenty of time.

28 Queen Street
THURSDAY, 30 NOVEMBER
ST ANDREW'S DAY TASTING
 Celebrate Scotland's national day with our three-dram tasting, three-course meal and entertainment to showcase the very best of Scottish culture.

28 Queen Street
HOGMANAY AT 28 QUEEN STREET
 Join us to welcome in the Society's 35th anniversary year with a night of Hogmanay food, drink and entertainment. Tickets £89, early bird £79 for The Dining Room, £69 and early bird £59 for the Members' Room.

Kaleidoscope Bar, London
THURSDAY, 30 NOVEMBER
ST ANDREW'S DAY IN LONDON
 Celebrate St Andrew's Day with a night of whisky, food and live music. Tasting begins at 7pm until late, cost is £28pp

Kaleidoscope Bar, London
SUNDAY, 31 DECEMBER
HOGMANAY AT KALEIDOSCOPE
 Our first ever Hogmanay celebrations in London... join in the new year celebrations with a fantastic event at our Kaleidoscope Bar. Welcome drink, dinner and music with some traditional Scottish elements added. Tickets £69, early bird £59.

Both London venues
11 - 23 DECEMBER
12 DRAMS OF CHRISTMAS
 Visit either venue in London for 12 nights in the run-up to Christmas for a vertical tasting of varied flavour profiles from the same distillery. Price is £15 for members, £20 for non-members.

CANADA

18-21 JANUARY
VICTORIA WHISKY FESTIVAL

Shake off the January blues at Canada's top whisky festival, with a strong SMWS presence.

UNITED STATES

THE WHISKY EXTRAVAGANZA
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10
 The Rainier Club, Seattle, WA
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 16
 The Millennium Biltmore Hotel, Los Angeles, CA
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7
 The Marriott Harbor Beach Resort & Spa, Fort Lauderdale, FL
 Use promo code SMWS20 for 20% discount on all Whisky Extravaganza tickets

SWITZERLAND

CHRISTMAS MEMBERS' TASTINGS
THURSDAY, 30 NOVEMBER, BERN
FRIDAY, 1 DECEMBER, BASEL
SATURDAY, 2 DECEMBER, ZÜRICH

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THE SCOTCH MALT WHISKY SOCIETY

ESTD THE VAULTS, LEITH, SCOTLAND



What a great time to be a whisky drinker – it's turned cold outside, you're tucked up by the fire, enjoying a dram with friends or family, and the SMWS has been setting aside casks throughout the year that we know you're going to appreciate. The Society's spirits director **Kai Ivalo** and spirits manager **Euan Campbell** sat down by the fireside at The Vaults in Leith to talk us through their pick of what's coming to the United States this winter

PHOTO MIKE WILKINSON

Kai: We've selected some exciting whiskies for our friends in the US to explore and enjoy this holiday season – or maybe even to send as a gift to friends or family.

Euan: Yes, there's something for everyone, with a fantastic balance of ages, flavour profiles and a spread of styles from different regions.

Kai: One region in particular shines through for me – there are some fantastic Speyside malts with a nuance that only comes with ageing. *Cask Nos. 7.164: Carefree contentment*, *39.130: Zing like the ping of a musical string* and *39.139: A most luscious remedy* are all great examples of what I'd call 'old school' whisky, from the humble refill hogshead. It's a bit of an unsung hero, with so much attention going to first fills, second fills and sherry butts, but at this age the humble hoggie turns out some cracking whiskies, where the distillery character really does come through.

Euan: You get that feeling in these bottlings that only comes from a refill hogshead reaching its peak at 20 years or more, and bringing that harmony to the whisky that comes with age.

Kai: And these are 23, 26 and 20 years old – definitely worth the wait.

Euan: Another pair that caught my attention are *Cask No. 4.224: Evocations of time and*

OUR WIDE WORLD

place, which is a 20-year-old from our Lightly Peated flavour profile, and *Cask No. 73.79: 'Hopped-Up!'*, which is a 16-year-old Spicy & Dry bottling.

They're very different expressions, but were both finished for almost two years in Sauternes hogsheads, and it's interesting to see how that sweet Bordeaux wine complements the different styles of whisky.

Kai: There's a good selection of older whiskies, but one of the younger bottlings that stood out for me is *Cask No. 36.118: Cavorting in flower meadows*. This comes from a distillery that traditionally produces a meaty spirit and uses worm tub condensers for a heavier style. But after 12 years in a first fill barrel, it's interesting to see how the maturation irons out those heavier notes.

Euan: It's a great combination of cask and spirit.

Kai: And it wouldn't be the festive season without a sherry butt, would it – and *Cask No. 73.78: Zingy, effervescent and intriguing* is a cracking dram.

Euan: Our Tasting Panel scored it highly and there were even some expletives about how good it was. At 14 years old it's at the younger end but it's been in a refill sherry cask which has retained its vibrancy and created a lovely winter warmer. ●