

Terry's Tastings – It's All About Taste

“Scotch: Because one doesn't solve the world's problems with a glass of wine.”

Let's begin with a toast to Robert “Robbie” Burns, a Scottish farmer, tax-man, and poet born on January 25, 1759. Although he only lived 37 years, he wrote enough well-known poetry to be widely regarded as Scotland's national poet, and is certainly the best known world-wide of poets who wrote in the Scots language.

“As long as Scot with Scot shall meet,
As long as brothers, brothers greet,
The toast list will not be complete,
Without a toast to Burns.”

It is said that Irish monks came to Scotland around 500 AD and showed the Scots how to distill whisky from beer. The word whisky is thought to have been derived from the Gaelic “Uisge Beatha, pronounced “oosh-key-ba”. This is the Gaelic word for “Aqua Vitae’ or Water of Life. The process of distilling whisky is fundamentally the same today as it was then. The barley is malted (soaked in cold water) and dried on a perforated floor in a kiln, with peat burning underneath the floor as the drying agent. It is then mashed (ground and immersed in hot water). Fermentation takes place with the addition of yeast; distillation is done in single batches in copper pot stills; and finally the whisky is matured, or aged, in oak barrels.

To be called Scotch whisky, the process, including bottling, must take place in Scotland and the whisky must be aged a minimum of 3 years. A single malt whisky must be made from 100% barley and come from only one distillery. A blended malt whisky could come from 2 or more distilleries, and a blended whisky is a blend of malt and grain whiskies. Scotch is known for its peaty aroma and long, lingering finish, but there are distinct regional flavours of Scotch whisky depending on where it is made. The differences are mainly due to the barley used, the water source, and the amount of peat smoke coming in contact with the drying malt.

Lowland – Light-bodied, gentle, malty

Highland – Firmer, spicy, can be dry or sweet and honey-flavoured

Speyside (sub-division of Highland) – Sweet, mellow, often fruity

Island/Islay – Heavily peated, smoky, briny.

This led to the designation of the 6 Classic Malts:

Glenkinchie 12 year – Lowland

Dalwhinnie 15 year – Highland

Cragganmore 12 year – Speyside

Oban 14 year – West Highland

Talisker 10 year – Isle of Skye

Lagavulin 16 year – Islay

The Art of drinking Scotch whisky

1. Pour a wee dram and swirl it gently, noting the colour and legs.
2. Nose the whisky by passing the glass under your nose and check for smoky, salty, or fruity aromas.
3. Take a small sip and roll it around in your mouth. Scotch is designed to sip, not shoot, and this allows you to enjoy the mouthfeel and identify the flavours.
4. Swallow and savour the finish. Add a few drops of water, which reduces the alcohol burn and mellows the whisky.

Slainte! To Your Health!

Scotch picks:

Glenkinchie 12 year – A spicy aroma and spicy, caramel, and vanilla flavours. A medium weight whisky with a dry mouth feel.

Oban 14 year – Nutty, smoky, and spicy aromas. Smooth with flavours of smoke and spice.

Until next time; please send comments or questions to Terry Tait terry@liquoronmcleod.com