

FOR MEMBERS OF THE SCOTCH MALT WHISKY SOCIETY

UNFILTERED

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ISLAND ODYSSEY + WHISKY EXPRESSIONS + IAN BUXTON

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NO 32

JULY 2016

Still
WATERS



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WHISKY SOCIETY



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THE SCOTCH MALT
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WORLD of WHISKY

Island Odyssey

Weaving our way to the magical Isle of Mull 15

The Knowledge

Why reflux matters 20

Mavericks of Malt

Sonat Birnecker Hart at Koval 22

Distillery profile

Kingsbarns 27

One of a kind

Linn Products 24



SMWS

SMWS news

The latest from near and far 4

Flavour Behaviour

The SMWS scientific experiment goes global 8

Edinburgh's liquid history

Drink in the past and present 11

Outturners

Matt Bailey, SMWS Australia 26

Partner bars

Caff   Libero in Taiwan 34

THE COLUMNISTS

DAMIAN BARR &
IAN BUXTON

Reflections on the wider whisky world from our regular contributors



THINK TANK

WHISKY
EXPRESSIONS

Tom Bruce-Gardyne on new expressions and whether they are innovation, or fad



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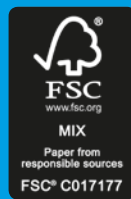
Sonat Birnecker Hart at Koval Distillery. Photo by Chris Neseman

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THE SCOTCH MALT
WHISKY SOCIETY

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Unfiltered is available to members of The Scotch Malt Whisky Society. To join us, contact your local branch

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1 A RIGHT ROYAL MAKEOVER

THE SMWS Members' Rooms at 28 Queen Street in Edinburgh are undergoing a striking overhaul this summer, with a top-to-bottom makeover.

When completed, members will have an exclusive area on the building's second floor, where they will be able to relax and enjoy table service as well as make the most of a special tasting table with SMWS ambassadors and a private snug area.

The ground floor will have a retail space where you can purchase SMWS bottlings, and a bar area open to the public, as well as a new Oval Tasting Bar.

"SMWS members will be able to experience a superlative and exclusive environment on the second floor"

JAN-WILLEM DAMEN

The award-winning Dining Room at 28 Queen Street moves to the first floor, where capacity will be doubled and head chef James Freeman will unveil an expanded menu. The restaurant will also have separate dining areas for private bookings and member parties.

Jan-Willem Damen, operations director UK, said: "28 Queen Street will be welcoming and open to all on the ground floor, and the spiral staircase will draw visitors upstairs to our fantastic restaurant – but SMWS members will be able to experience a superlative and exclusive environment on the second floor."

The refurbishment will take place in stages, so it will continue to be open throughout the process.

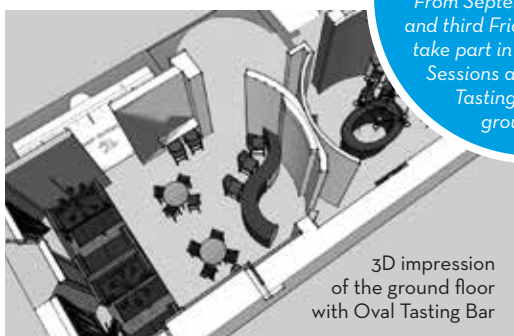
28 Queen Street will hold an Open House on Friday, 5 August to welcome members to their newly refurbished home in Edinburgh.



28 Queen Street is ready for a top-to-bottom makeover, including a

OVAL SESSION

From September on the first and third Friday every month, take part in Outturn Tasting Sessions at the new Oval Tasting Bar on the ground floor



3D impression of the ground floor with Oval Tasting Bar



Members will have a special tasting table to sit at with ambassadors



The expanded Dining Room will have new booth-style seating incorporated into the design



An impression of the exclusive members' lounge on the second floor

2 ADVENTURES OVER THE SEA TO ISLAY FESTIVAL

THE SMWS returned to Fèis Ìle this year to host its open day at Islay House to kick off the festival.

This year's open day, a garden party fiesta, was packed with activities – from three Project Flavour Behaviour test sessions to a chilli eating competition. Guests were also treated to the special 2016 Fèis Ìle release, Cask No. 12744: *Cantina Mexicana*.

Senior brand manager Helen Stewart was at Islay House on the day and said the Project Flavour Behaviour events attracted lots of curious people to participate.

"We enjoyed some great drams with some fantastic people," she said. "Around 95 guests took part in our Project Flavour Behaviour tests and we were thrilled to see so many brave volunteers sign up for our chilli eating competition. We're looking forward to next year already."



Islay House,
venue for the
SMWS's open
day at the Islay
Festival

20%
DISCOUNT WITH
CODE SMWS16

on ticket bookings at
[www.wigtownbook
festival.com](http://www.wigtownbookfestival.com)

3 SCOTLAND BOOK YOUR RESERVATION

MEMBERS can mix literary pleasures with their single cask, single malts at the Wigtown Book Festival this year, as the SMWS sponsors the prestigious event for the first time.

The festival has hosted *Unfiltered's* very own columnists Ian Buxton and Damian Barr in the past, and there will be plenty of whisky involved in this year's programme, with a special SMWS tasting event.

The festival runs from 23 September to 2 October in Wigtown, and members qualify for a 20 per cent discount. Look out for more details when the full programme is announced in August.



The SMWS
will sponsor
this year's
Wigtown Book
Festival

EDITOR'S NOTES

WITH KAI IVALO

An issue packed with flavour

Something for everyone - whatever your personality or preference

Flavour has always been important to the SMWS. It's clear to see we live and breathe it – from the tasting notes on the front of the bottle to our 12 flavour profiles. Back when the SMWS was founded in 1983, it was a little harder to get your hands on quite the variety of whisky that's on offer today. In *Express Yourself* on page 31, Tom Bruce-Gardyne investigates the growing range of expressions on offer to today's whisky drinker for this issue's Think Tank.

We celebrated all things flavour this World Whisky Day on 21 May as the Society

hosted a series of Project Flavour Behaviour events around the world. We searched far and wide for volunteers to take part in our secret test sessions, which took place at partner bars in Vancouver, Washington, DC, and Melbourne and in SMWS venues in London and Edinburgh. Curious whisky drinkers gathered to take a personality test and sample 12 SMWS whiskies – all in the name of scientific research. Read more about the events on page 8.

This issue's Island Odyssey takes us to an often forgotten whisky island, the Isle of Mull. Nestled in the Inner Hebrides, the island may only have one single distillery, but as *Unfiltered's* Richard Croasdale discovers, it's got plenty to offer visitors. Turn to page 15 to learn why Mull

shouldn't be missed. With just one issue left of the series, can you guess which island we'll be visiting next?

In a different distilling landscape, our ambassador Phoebe Brookes visits Koval Distillery in Chicago for this month's Mavericks of Malt on page 22. Phoebe chats to Koval's president, Sonat Birnecker Hart, to learn how she and her husband helped create a craft distilling boom in the Windy City.

We always enjoy hearing from our members so please do share your feedback on this issue by getting in touch via Facebook at www.facebook.com/Unfilteredmagazine, or send an email to unfiltered@smws.com. Also, be sure to check out the SMWS blog at www.smws.com/blog/ for extra *Unfiltered* content and the latest SMWS news. ●

4

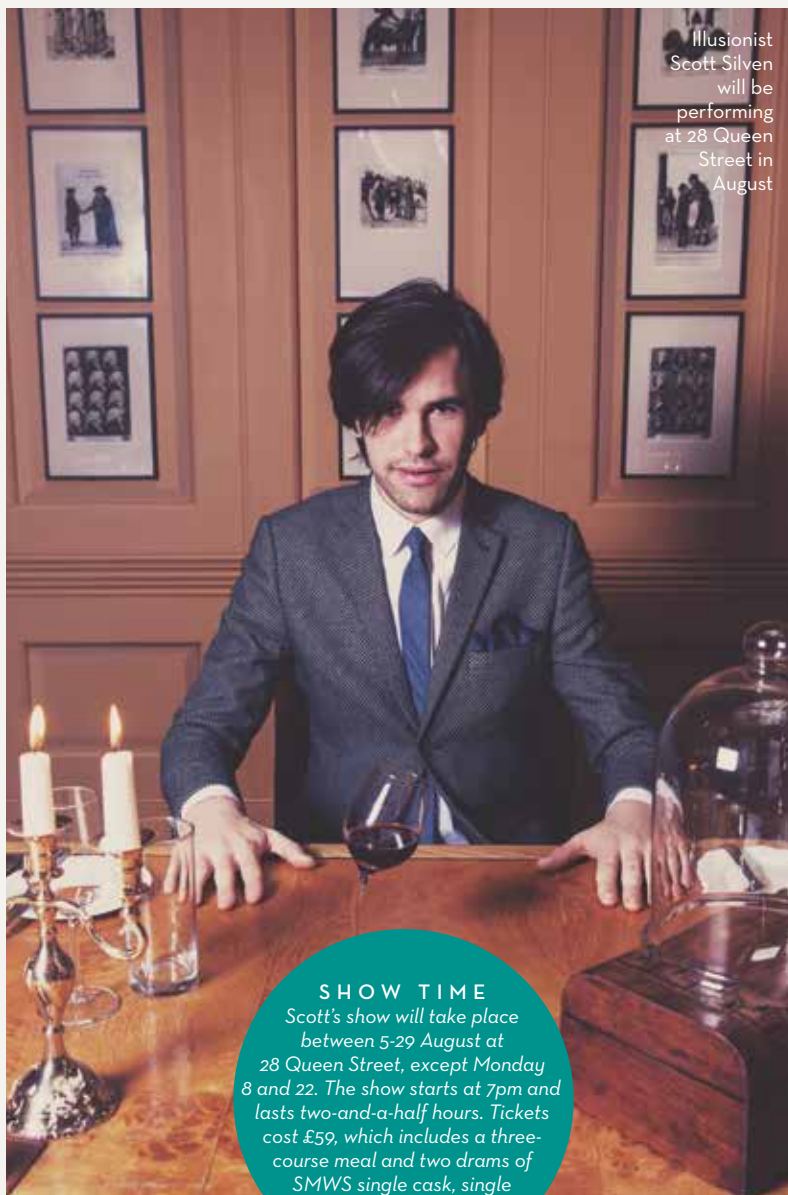
SCOTLAND THERE'S MAGIC IN THE AIR

A TOUCH of magic is coming to 28 Queen Street this summer, as it hosts the Edinburgh Fringe performance of acclaimed illusionist Scott Silven.

Scott will hold an evening of fine dining and whisky tasting throughout the world's biggest arts festival in August, interwoven with breathtaking illusions.

The performance will be accompanied by a bespoke menu created by James Freeman, head chef at 28 Queen Street.

Scott says the overlap between whisky and illusion is there for all to see. "Both illusion and whisky delight the senses and challenge expectations," he says. "They complement and transform one another amazingly."



Illusionist Scott Silven will be performing at 28 Queen Street in August

SHOW TIME

Scott's show will take place between 5-29 August at 28 Queen Street, except Monday 8 and 22. The show starts at 7pm and lasts two-and-a-half hours. Tickets cost £59, which includes a three-course meal and two drams of SMWS single cask, single malt whisky

6

CANADA CALGARY FESTIVAL

THE SMWS in Canada participated in Kensington Wine Market's Spring Single Malt Festival in Calgary on 9 June, with a DJ, food and amazing whiskies.



7

SKYE ISLAND ODYSSEY WINNERS

FOUR lucky members will soon be receiving an exclusive signed print from our previous Island Odyssey to Skye. Well done!

5

AUSTRALIA PARTY TIME IN SYDNEY

THE biggest competition in the Southern Hemisphere's whisky calendar is back, as the Australian Malt Whisky Tasting Championship returns for a huge, fun night on 23 July. The event will see someone crowned the Australian Malt Whisky Champion based on their sensory prowess. The event features the whisky



competition, a whisky party, Sydney Cocktail Club Sensory bar, SMWS Single Cask bar and more... all on one night at the incredible Madame Tussauds Darling Harbour in Sydney.



Test your sensory prowess in Sydney

What's the STORY?

*Like enigmatic characters in classic fiction, great whiskies can leave you mulling their many complexities, says **Damian Barr***

If I ask you to name your favourite novels you'll probably come up with three or four or maybe five. Each book will take you right back to the person who pressed it into your hands promising you'd love it or the summer you devoured it, which was also when you fell in love for the first time. You can still see the cover.

If I ask you to name three or four or maybe five truly great novels, the chances are you'd consider more carefully, dwell more on a particular character or theme. Our favourite reads speak to our own lives but literary novels resonate outside ourselves.

They may not be bestsellers, they may not be perfect but they are the stories we can't stop thinking about. Precisely because of their mysteries. Great books, like great whiskies, are not flawless. In fact, they shouldn't be.

Thomas Cromwell, as imagined by Hilary Mantel, lives on in the mind even longer than it took you to read *Wolf Hall*. He is what we would now call a survivor of domestic violence – his blacksmith father was a brute. Yet he helps Henry VIII part Anne Boleyn's head from her body even though he knows she is innocent. Thomas loves the law but bends it to his own ends. He is patriotic but in the service of a bloated despot. We love him and we hate him but, crucially, we never stop caring about him. Consider his wisdom: "It is the absence of facts that frightens people: the gap you open, into which they pour their fears, fantasies, desires."

Great fiction creates this absence – it leaves space for the reader to make up their



own mind. Is Thomas Cromwell a goodie or a baddie? Does he get what deserves? Will you?

Great whisky creates the same space. It lets you think, it encourages you to take a view – your own view. Is this too sweet? Can I take more spice? Do I need to rethink my peat prejudice? A dram that everybody likes is a dram that few people love. A dram that a few people hate is a dram that everybody remembers.

If an author likes whisky, chances are his characters do too. Haruki Murakami has characters down Cutty Sark in *The Wind Up Bird Chronicle*, *1Q84*, and *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki*. "There is no bad whiskey," said classic American crime writer Raymond Chandler. "There are only some whiskeys that aren't as good as others."

The author of *The Long Goodbye* and *The Big Sleep* created Philip Marlowe, the whiskey-loving prototype for all troubled detectives. He's the fictional grandfather of Ian Rankin's Rebus. When he's driving around in his battered Saab 900 on the case of another killer, Rebus tips a wink to the distilleries he passes: Tomatin, Dalwhinnie, Glenmorangie, Glen Ord and Dalmore all get mentions. He's partial to Highland Park. Leave the gin to Poirot.

James Bond gets through Haig & Haig, Johnnie Walker, Black & White and even Suntory. He would certainly savour Cask No. 3.263: *Pretty But Gritty*. Like the man himself, it's sweet to start but stern to finish. Be tempted in by bourbon cask sweetness then nibble smoked roasted almonds while you consider your next move.

I can see Captain Ahab on deck taking a swig of Cask No. 42.22: *Brave the elements*. It'll certainly keep him questing for the great white whale. A whiff of cannon smoke wafts from this feisty 9-year old. It is salty, oily and suggests churned-up green seas. It's as adventurous and merciless as Melville's doomed mariner.

Roald Dahl's writing ranges from *Tales of the Unexpected* to *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. A rich darkness runs through all his books. Dahl is the essence of 48.41: *Pink wafers in a ladies hat shop*. Buoyant with candyfloss and marshmallows, it is all silliness on the surface before descending into complex spice.

Dahl wrote by hand in his shed and this malt even has a woody whiff of fresh pencil shavings. The smell of another story about to be scribbled. ●

♥ *Damian Barr is an author, playwright and host of The Literary Salon. He writes about drinks and the people who love them for The Sunday Times. Follow him on Twitter @Damian_Barr*



WORDS RICHARD GOSLAN

A worldwide mission by the SMWS to uncover the links between personality and whisky preference is well underway, as Project Flavour Behaviour goes global

The SMWS has expanded its experiment exploring the synergies between psychology and single malt, with a series of events taking place across the world on World Whisky Day.

Volunteers at SMWS venues and partner bars in Edinburgh, Islay, London, Vancouver, Melbourne and Washington, DC, all signed up to take part in the Project Flavour Behaviour test on 21 May. In each location, participants carried out a personality test and sampled a selection of 12 single cask, single malt SMWS whiskies.

The experiment is being conducted by the Society in partnership with Dr Adam Moore, from the University of Edinburgh's Psychology Department. He is currently in the process of analysing the data from all the events, to try and uncover the links between personality and preference when

"What I'm really looking at is a connection between personality type and whisky preference"

DR ADAM MOORE, THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH'S PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT

it comes to whisky. The results from the international events on World Whisky Day will be added to information already gathered when 120 volunteers took part in a Project Flavour Behaviour event in Edinburgh in December last year.

"The World Whisky Day events give me

a whole new raft of data from around the world to work with, and when I do the statistical analysis I can check to see what influence being from a particular location has on any relationships that I find," he says. "But what I'm really looking at is a connection between personality type and whisky preference, and personality type doesn't necessarily relate to geographic area. It's a universal aspect of human psychology, so I would expect to get the same distribution of personality traits in Australia as in Islay – but let's see."

Adam's background is in decision making and using individual differences in personality and intelligence to predict the kinds of decisions that people make. He explains that there are five fundamental personality traits that collectively define everybody's personality: openness to experience; conscientiousness; extraversion; agreeableness; and



Volunteers get in the mood at partner bar The Kilburn in Melbourne



Taking the test in Edinburgh

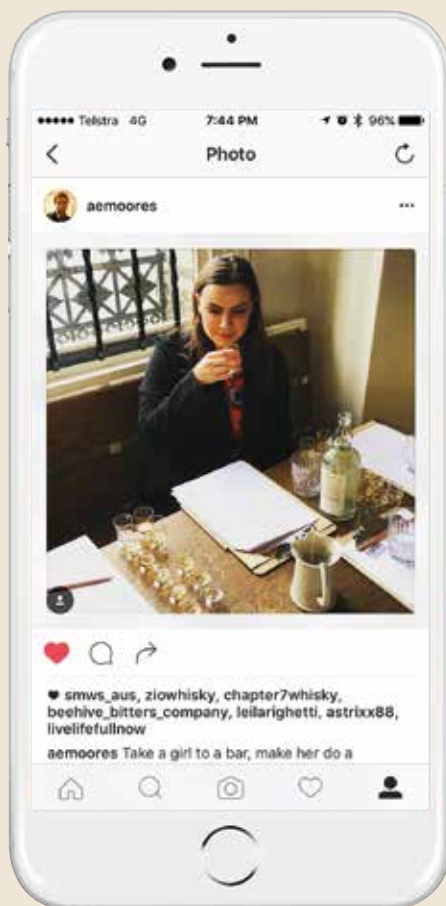


Kindred spirits at partner bar Jack Rose Dining Saloon in Washington, DC



In the zone, below and left, at Jack Rose Dining Saloon in Washington, DC





emotional sensitivity.

“Everybody has varying degrees of all of these traits, and together they help to define your psychological make up,” he says. “There are endless varieties of personality profiles, but there are also hundreds and hundreds of different kinds of whisky, particularly at the SMWS which bottles only unique flavours that you can’t get anywhere else in the world. Our goal is to try to determine a personality profile and map it to the whisky.”

Along with the data from the Project Flavour Behaviour events held on World Whisky Day, the SMWS is also creating a specific website where members will be able to take a personality test and find out what kind of whisky they would be most likely to enjoy.

“The test is to give people a fun experience that will get them talking about the experience of whisky,” says Adam. “The online test won’t be as accurate as the kind of formal personality test that I would conduct in my lab, but I can offset that noise in the data by collecting information



from lots and lots of people.

“The more people who participate – and the more whiskies that you sample and subsequently tell us about – the more likely it is that we’ll be able to develop an algorithm that can take knowledge about your personality profile and map it on to any of the hundreds and hundreds of whiskies that you can try.”

The experiment is adaptive, and will continue to develop as more data is collected. That could lead to an intuitive understanding of whisky preference, based both on personality profile and existing whisky preferences.

“Think about it in terms of what services such as Amazon or Netflix do when they suggest new books or movies for you,” says Adam. “By using machine-learning algorithms and regression analysis, we want to be able to set up the perfect whisky flight for everybody.” ●

Discover the perfect SMWS whisky for you by taking your own Flavour Behaviour test at www.flavourbehaviour.com

ABOVE and BELOW:
Australian members get into the social media mood



Kirsty Dunsmore
pulls a pint of
Paolozzi at
the Edinburgh
Beer Factory



WORDS RICHARD CROASDALE // PHOTOS MIKE WILKINSON

HERE COMES THE BOOM

Edinburgh's relationship with alcohol has survived boom, bust, war, prohibition and political turmoil. From drinking-water treatment and surgical spirit to whisky making and craft brewing, it has constantly reinvented itself, shifting with the city's historical tide



Evidence of brewing in the Scottish capital dates back to the late Iron Age, running through to the monastic breweries of the middle ages. In Edinburgh, which was at the time effectively ring-fenced by lochs and waterways, the brewing process was an essential means of turning fetid, contaminated water into something drinkable.

“By the 15th century, the path from the monastic brewery at Holyrood up the hill to the old town – known to this day as the Canongate (literally, the ‘monk’s walk’) – was home to several medium-sized public breweries serving Edinburgh’s growing population,” says alcohol historian John Martin. “The Canongate remained a famous centre for brewing right up to the early 20th century, by which time there were around 25 breweries on and around the street, and a total of 40 within the city.”

However, two world wars and a rash of consolidation in the beer industry over the following 80 years effectively ended this diversity, leaving just two dominant Edinburgh brewers still standing: McEwan’s and Caledonian.

Likewise, distillation in Edinburgh started out as the reserve of monks (again) and ‘surgeon barbers’, who made spirit for medicinal purposes. By the late 1700s though, the capital was awash with spirit. As well as eight licensed distilleries, there is evidence that somewhere in the region of 400 illegal stills were operating within the city walls.

These stills produced rough, raw spirit which was typically consumed without the mellowing influence of maturation. Despite the romantic image of the Highland whisky smuggler working on a remote hillside, Edinburgh was a dirty, smoky place – hence the nickname ‘Auld Reekie’ – making it the perfect spot to conceal an illicit still. In 1777 alone there were 200 convictions for illicit distilling, in a population of around 60,000.

Today, the city has only one licensed whisky distillery. North British is jointly owned by Diageo and Edrington and produces large quantities of grain alcohol for the companies’ blended whiskies.

Distilling within the city is currently enjoying something of a renaissance though, primarily through the success of several new small-scale gin producers. Gin is ideally suited to inner-city production, as it typically doesn’t involve on-site fermentation, wash distillation or maturation, dramatically reducing the amount of space required.

Based in the Summerhall arts complex (alongside the excellent Barney’s brewery) Pickering’s in many ways embodies the new wave of Edinburgh’s small-scale producers. It consists of a couple of small, tiled rooms which were once the kennels

of a veterinary college (several wrought-iron cages remain) and two small, squat pot stills. The distillery’s founders come from a construction and engineering background, which explains the labyrinthine copper pipework coiling around the room, through funnels and taps, and ultimately into a collector fashioned from the bottom of a domestic hot water tank. It is a charming Heath Robinson affair, which ties in perfectly with Pickering’s general air of hand-made Victoriana.

The process, including the all-important mix of botanicals, is based loosely on an old family recipe recorded when the Pickerings left India shortly after independence in 1947, but forgotten about until Marcus Pickering discovered it in a pile of his late father’s belongings. Pickering’s currently produces two styles: a classic London Dry, designed specifically to accompany tonic, and its ‘1947’, an older style with heavy cinnamon spicing, which sticks more faithfully to the original family recipe.

“We’re really proud of what we do and how we do it here,” says Pickering’s brand ambassador Paul Donegan. “Every part of the process is done by hand, right down to

putting the labels on the bottles and sealing the stopper. People love that, and being in Edinburgh city centre, in such a beautiful old building, allows people to come in and see what we’re all about, including Marcus [Pickering] filling each bottle of a 60-bottle batch by hand.”

Whisky production too is set for a return to the Scottish capital, with David Robertson, formerly master distiller at The Macallan, currently seeking approval to establish The Holyrood Park Distillery and visitor centre on the site of an old railway engine shed (see *Unfiltered April 2016*).

A brewing renaissance is already in full swing, riding on the wave of craft beers and ales popping up across the UK. Barney’s, Stewarts, Innis & Gunn and Pilot are well known names in the city, and increasingly further afield.

The latest addition to the pack, the Edinburgh Beer Factory was established in 2015 by the Dunsmore family. It currently



The still room at Summerhall

produces just one beer; a German-style lager named Paolozzi (after Eduardo Paolozzi, the often-overlooked Edinburgh-born father of pop-art) with a smooth mouthfeel, cereal citrus notes and only very subtle hops.

According to Kirsty Dunsmore, the art of Paolozzi has not only influenced the design of the brewery's branding, but also its whole ethos.

"I think people have this view of Edinburgh as being rather stuffy and old-fashioned," she says. "And it does have a lot of great heritage, but there's also this boundless creativity, irreverence and fun about the city. We feel the work of Paolozzi embodies that, and it's the side of Edinburgh that we want to take to the world through our beer."

I ask gently if this approach led to the decision to focus solely on lager – which in the UK is often stigmatised as a 'cheap and nasty' beer – rather than an IPA, Porter, Saison, or other

more fashionable 'craft' style.

"Yes! We want people to think again about lager," she answers with a laugh. "In German 'lager' means 'storeroom' and the style is partly defined by a period of maturation in cold storage. A lot of mass-market lagers are only matured for a few days; we keep ours in cold storage for six weeks. Paolozzi combined contrasting ideas and ordinary objects in his art – something he called 'sublime in the everyday' – and that's really what we're trying to do here, make people reconsider a product that they think they know."

So, after so long in relative abeyance, why has Edinburgh's alcohol production scene become so fertile over the past decade?

First, demand for small-batch, 'craft' drinks with good provenance has grown across the board. Consumers increasingly care about where their booze comes from, who made it and from what ingredients, leading to an explosion of new breweries and distilleries across Scotland.



Second, Edinburgh has been in the perfect position to capitalise on this boom, both because of its historical reputation and – more importantly – because of the world-leading brewing and distilling course at the city's Heriot-Watt University. Students from across the globe come to Heriot-Watt to learn the science behind their craft and, accordingly, you can find its alumni working the levers in many of the most exciting producers the world over (see *Unfiltered Jan 2013*). Needless to say, any new brewing or distilling venture in Edinburgh tends to get its pick of the litter. "You get a head start just being able to associate your brand with Edinburgh," confirms Paul. "And you're already seeing brands flocking to the city because of that; some brands who really have nothing to do with the city are claiming a connection, while others are actually putting some stills here."

Thirdly, Edinburgh has cemented its reputation for outstanding pubs, bars and mixologists. Cocktail scene stalwarts Bramble, The Bon Vivant and The Last Word have been joined in recent years by Panda & Sons, The Devil's Advocate, Lucky Liquor and The Voodoo Rooms. It is arguably the best city in the world to enjoy a whisky, from the old-fashioned charm of The Bow Bar and The Albanach, to the modern luxury of Whiski and The Balmoral's Scotch bar – not to mention the SMWS's own Members' Rooms at The Vaults and 28 Queen Street.

Beer lovers too are well served, with pubs across the city serving casks, kegs and bottles from around the world, including the venerable Caley Sample Room, The Hanging Bat, Jeremiah's Tap Room, Holyrood 9A and Usher's.

This means there is a ready-made base of receptive, knowledgeable customers in the city, who are often keen to support local producers and spread the word.

"It's definitely helped us get established," says Kirsty. "We have relationships with some of the city's specialist beer bars,



The heart of operations at the Edinburgh Beer Factory

LIQUID HISTORY

where we'll often run tastings. We also have our classic Citroen H-Type van, which we use for deliveries in the city. It's a real talking point with people on the street."

Paul agrees: "If you want exposure, the only place you could get more is London. But even then, I think it's easier to be seen in Edinburgh because it's that much smaller."

Paul also points out that getting Edinburgh's pubs and bars on side gives a great long-term advantage, as the city has an unrivalled reputation for training and exporting bartenders and mixologists

"We are to bartending what Brazil is to football; we grow them and everybody else makes use of them," he says. "If you really look at it, all the big guys started off in Edinburgh. We periodically have this clearing out of great bartenders going down to London – they win awards and open up their own places and we get the next lot in!"

Edinburgh has long been a great place to enjoy the very best beer and spirits. But today it is regaining its reputation as a hotbed for innovative, high-quality production. With a new wave of passionate, technically savvy brewers and distillers, the city's long and proud alcohol heritage seems to be in good hands. ●

THE VAULTS – OUR SPIRITUAL HOME

WITH PHOEBE
BROOKES,
SMWS BRAND
AMBASSADOR



The Society Members' Rooms at The Vaults in Leith play a key role in Edinburgh's alcohol heritage. The present building is relatively young, having been erected by the Vintners' Guild of Edinburgh in 1682. But the history of alcohol on the site can be traced back to 1439 – when it was used for wine storage by the Abbey of Holyrood – and some accounts even have it in use from around 1200.

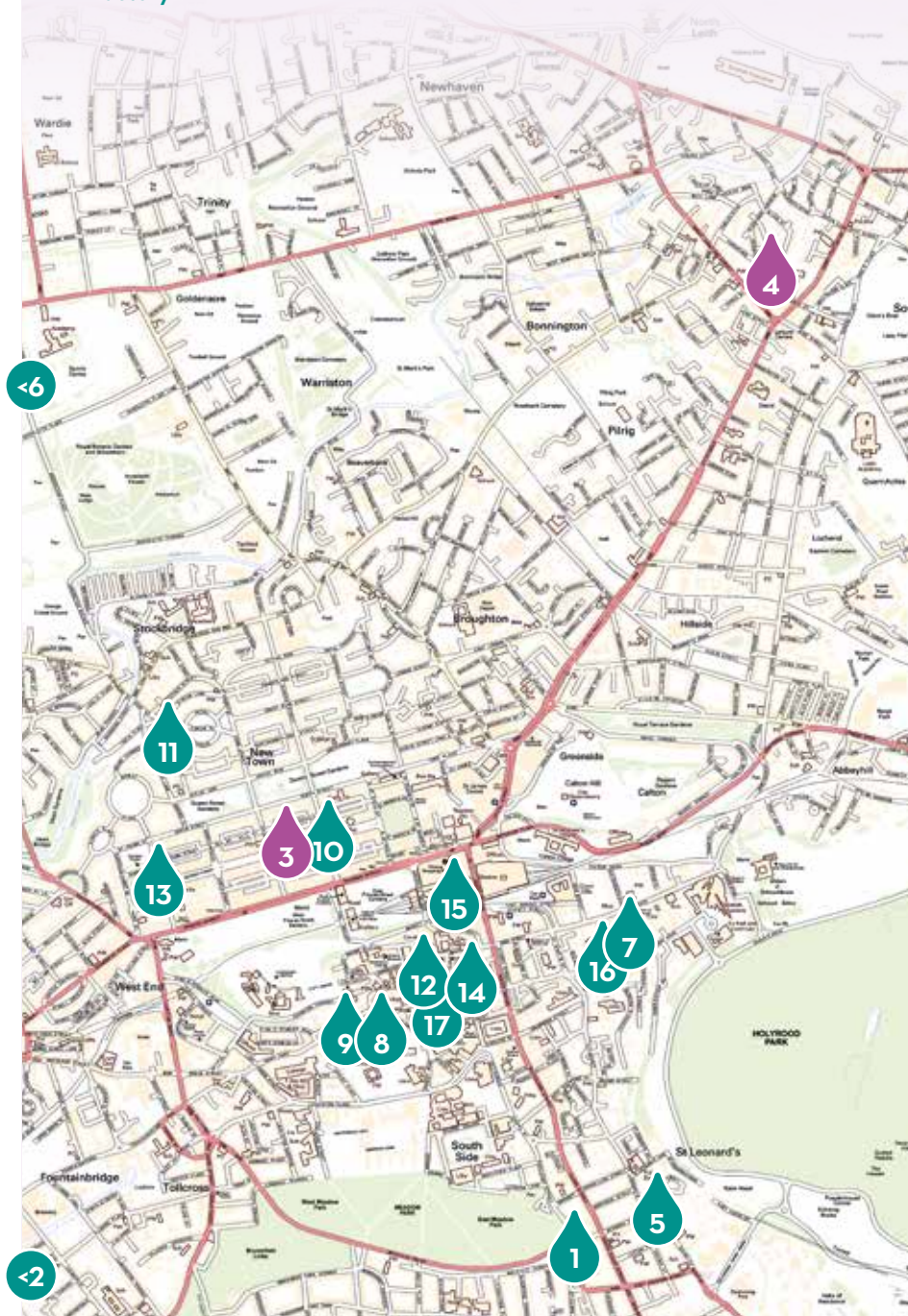
To soak up some of the history at The Vaults, members can visit between Tuesdays and Sundays. To book a private tasting session, contact +44 131 554 3451 or email vaults@smws.com



RECOMMENDED EDINBURGH DRINKS DESTINATIONS



- | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 Summerhall | 7 Canongate | 14 The Albanach |
| 2 North British | 8 The Bow Bar | 15 Scotch at The Balmoral |
| 3 SMWS
28 Queen Street | 9 The Scotch Whisky Experience | 16 Cadenheads |
| 4 SMWS The Vaults | 10 Bramble | 17 Royal Mile Whiskies |
| 5 Holyrood Park Distillery site | 11 The Last Word | |
| 6 Edinburgh Beer Factory | 12 The Devil's Advocate | |
| | 13 Panda and Sons | |



TO MULL

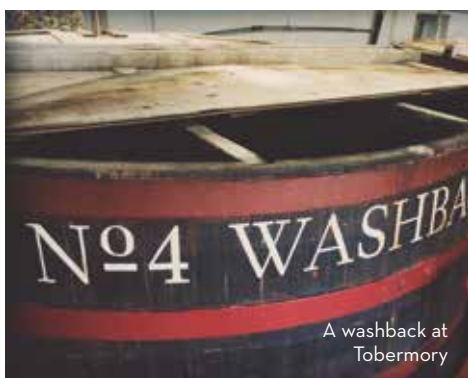
WORDS RICHARD CROASDALE // PHOTOS MIKE WILKINSON



Nestling in the Inner Hebrides, Mull is a short hop by ferry from Oban. As one of the most accessible of the Western Isles, it's a popular destination for tourists, many of whom come to experience the island's single small distillery, Tobermory. *Unfiltered* made the crossing to discover an unsung whisky island with a welcoming heart



Duart Castle on the Isle of Mull dates back to the 13th century



A washback at Tobermory



Single-track roads traverse the island

My arrival on Mull coincides with the first truly sunny day of the year, and the snow-capped peaks of the island's hills are shimmering brilliantly. The port of Craignure is halfway down the east coast, and I am keen to start by exploring the south of the island before heading north to Tobermory and its distillery.

The road to Fionnphort traverses some stunning scenery, and I am full of anticipation by the time I reach Ardalanish Farm – breeders of rare Highland sheep and weavers of high-quality tweeds and other fabrics. Above the clatter of the mill's three 19th century hand-operated looms, head weaver Katrina Crosby explains a little of its history and how someone from Vancouver came to be living and working here.

"About 18 years ago, the farm changed hands and became organic. They started breeding native Hebridean sheep and Kyle Highland cattle," says Katrina. "Because they're small and hardy, Hebridean flocks don't need to be kept indoors during winter, so the owners converted these buildings into a weaving room and shop. They bought these three beautiful old looms from a mill that was closing down and started weaving their own fabric."

"I've been living in the islands for 15 years now. After we married, my husband and I travelled around all the places he'd lived growing up, including Iona. It was supposed to be an eight-week volunteer post, but we're still here!"

"My plan is to return to Canada and open my own woollen mill, but for now I have a great job here, and this incredible view,"

she says, gesturing out of the window. "This place is a bit crazy, here at the end of the road, but the people are wonderful and it's where I feel at home."

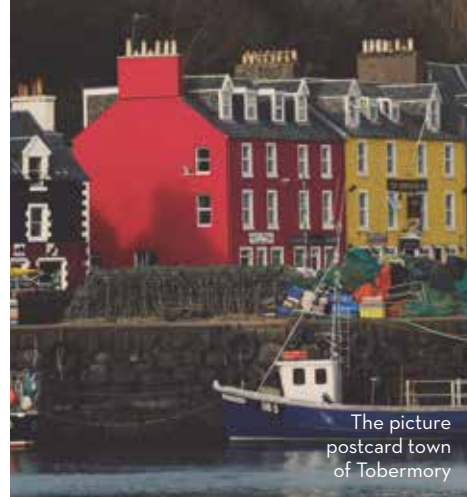
MULL-TIPURPOSE

Katrina's story is far from unique. Mull has a surprising number of incomers, who testify to the island's generosity of spirit. Among those are the Reade family, who moved here from Somerset in England in 1979 to open a dairy farm. When I arrive at Sgriob-ruadh Farm today, with its café, shop and thriving Isle of Mull Cheese business, it's hard to believe the venture began with little more than a tumbledown farmhouse – minus roof – and 10 cows.

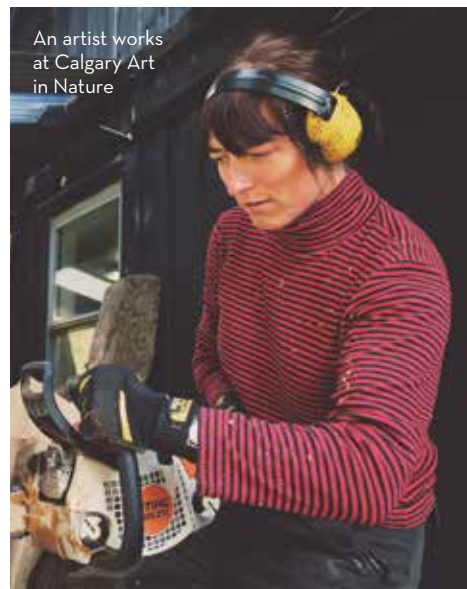
Like the Reade family themselves, Sgriob-ruadh is now thoroughly integrated into the island's ecosystem. The cattle



Katrina Crosby
examines yarn
on the loom



The picture
postcard town
of Tobermory



An artist works
at Calgary Art
in Nature



feed on nutritious draff (waste grain) from Tobermory distillery – which Chris Reade says gives her cheese its distinctive character. Even the metal steps leading to the cheese cellar are reclaimed from one of the distillery’s old bonded warehouses.

Chris tells me how the entire farm is powered by a complex system of wind power, hydro, biomass and heat exchange from the cheesemaking process. Despite being a power-intensive business, Sgriobruadh manages to produce more electricity than it consumes, and donates the excess to son Joe’s biscuit factory on the neighbouring hill.

I am beginning to suspect that nothing and nobody on Mull has a single purpose. This is confirmed by one resident, who advises me that you shouldn’t ask an islander what they do for a living – the

question is how many jobs they have. That is certainly true for another of Chris Reade’s sons, Matthew, who I track down to the village next to the white sand bay of Calgary.

Matthew is painting his boat in the courtyard of his home/studio/café/gallery/apartment complex. The diverse mish-mash of interests has developed over the course of 28 years, guided by the interests of Matthew and his wife Julia.

“I’ve always been a sculptor at heart, so when our family business was established I began creating an outdoor gallery in the land around the old farmhouse. That became Calgary Art in Nature, and we now have our own studio and gallery building, where we also display work by other Mull artists. I wouldn’t even think about living anywhere else now,” he says with a laugh.

BACK IN BUSINESS

Tobermory consists of a spray of colourful buildings huddled around a picturesque harbour, complete with a fleet of fishing boats. The distillery sits at the south end of the bay, set into a steep hill leading up to sheltering cliff tops.

Although Tobermory has a long history, its fortunes have risen and fallen, along with so many small island distilleries. It was founded as Ledaig in 1798 (which now lends its name to Tobermory’s heavier, slightly peated expression), but fell silent in 1930, following a decade of prohibition in the US.

It reopened in 1972, but by 1978 had gone into receivership and was purchased by a property company, before returning to production between 1979 and 1982. During the 1980s, the distillery’s bonded warehouses were sold off for the



Peace and
beauty at
Calgary Bay



Tobermory's
twin stills



Chris Reade dishes
out the draff



Stillman
Ian Brown

development of flats, along with the majority of its maturing stock.

Burn Stewart Distillers (now owned by Distell) purchased Tobermory in 1991 and – barring a couple of dry summers when the distillery’s private loch ran too low to produce a consistent spirit – it has been in production ever since. With no bonded warehouses, its spirit is sent to another Distell-owned distillery, Bunnahabhain on Islay, for maturation.

Penned in by the geology of the bay, Tobermory is small-scale out of necessity, as well as choice. With three wooden washbacks and two stills in a cramped stillroom, when I visit the manual process is being overseen by stillman Ian Brown.

“There’s no computers here – everything is done by eye and by hand,” he says, modestly dismissing the idea that this is

anything special. “You just do what you do. If you’re not doing anything wrong, you’re doing it right. It’s as simple as that.

“That said, it’s always a little bit different depending on the conditions. Summer will be different, winter will be different, depending on how low we are with the water. Even if we’re making an unpeated malt, if it’s been raining a lot the peat gets churned up and makes it into the water supply. That also makes a difference.”

Ian has been at Tobermory for 10 years – meaning his first single malts will be bottled next year – but his family connection to the distillery goes back much further, with several relatives having worked here during the 1920s. “When I was young there was very little tourism. You knew everyone, the whole street; you knew who their mother was, who their great gran was. Now you can

walk past a person and never see them again.

“But that’s just a change – it’s not bad, and it hasn’t really changed the experience of living here. If you need help, you won’t find friendlier people than on Mull. You’ll never be stuck – even if you’ve broken down on some remote part of the island in the night – because we know we all depend on each other. It’s part of the culture.”

It is arguably this deep sense of interconnectedness that makes Mull unique. Whether you arrived five years ago or five generations ago, if you are prepared to find a place for yourself you will be embraced and cared for. The line from Tobermory’s draff to Sgriob-ruadh’s electricity to the 40 locals employed at Joe’s biscuit factory is clear, and forms part of a web of support that spans this welcoming, resourceful and special island. ●

VOLATILE REACTION

Unfiltered brushes up on the mysterious process of reflux to find out how important it is to the spirit's profile

WORDS RICHARD GOSLAN // PHOTO MIKE WILKINSON

↓ ↑ ↓

Distillers are agreed that the more reflux there is during distillation, the lighter and purer the spirit will be. How they promote that reflux, however, can take many different forms.

"Reflux is affected by various factors including the length of the swan neck, the ambient air temperature around the neck, the strength of low wines and feints charge, and the rate of distillation," says Denis Nicol, whose experience in the whisky industry includes roles as analytical chemist at Hiram Walker & Sons and manager at both Tormore on Speyside and Laphroaig on Islay. "Glenmorangie's tall stills tend to produce a light spirit, for example. They are the shape of typical gin stills, where a light-rectified spirit is usually distilled with botanicals. The height of the stills has the effect of a purifier, sending compounds with high boiling points – such as higher alcohols or higher fatty acid esters – back into the still."

THE LONG AND SLOW

Jura is another distillery with tall wash stills, with a large area of copper in the neck for vapours to condense and return to the pot.

"Our distillation rate is quite high so there is less reflux than in the spirit stills as the vapours have less condensing time on the sides of the still," says Graham Logan, distillery manager at Jura. "In the spirit stills, the distillation rate is far slower, so the vapours have a far greater chance to condense on the inside walls of the still neck and return to the pot. Jura benefits from the large copper area in still necks and the slow distillation rate in the spirit stills. Another factor at Jura is the angle of our lyne arm, which slopes up to the condenser, allowing more vapours to condense, and giving us even more reflux."

Fettercairn takes a unique approach to encouraging reflux, by running cold water down the outside of the still's neck. "The impact gives you a lighter, more floral spirit," says Stewart Walker, distillery manager at Fettercairn. "The angle of the lyne arm will have an impact on the reflux and ultimately the spirit. Also the speed that you drive the spirit off will have

an impact – the harder you drive off, the more heavy notes go over the head of the still. The heavier notes have a more 'sulphury' nose and take away the floral note that we look for at Fettercairn."

THE SHORT AND THE FAST

If tall stills promote reflux due to the distance the vapours have to travel before reaching the condensers, Laphroaig's short stills would appear to have less reflux, promoting a heavier spirit. But the set-up at the distillery is more complicated than that, as John Campbell, distillery manager, explains. "Even though we have these small stills, our lyne arms go up the way and we distil very slowly, about 5.5 litres per second. Because of that and the angle of the lyne arm, we're not pushing the vapours over.

Laphroaig is actually a very light spirit, body wise, because of this, with the reflux giving it fruit and all of these other estery flavours as well, it helps to promote them.

"Our number one spirit still is exactly double the size and shape of the three others, with the lyne arm at the same angle, but we run it faster, at 8.1 litres per second. Because of that, we get a completely different spirit characteristic compared with the three wee ones, with more oily, grassy notes coming through. When the spirits are married, it gives greater depth of flavour and layers of complexity."

Denis Nicol has a final tip, to appreciate the effect of reflux. "Take a glass of newly poured whisky," he says. "Allow it to sit for a while. Lift it to eye level and examine the contents. A centimetre or two above the liquid level you should notice a rippling transparent line of condensate. This is the reflux line, the height of which is affected by temperature and the strength of the charge. Dilute the dram with water up to the level of this line and you have the perfect water and whisky dilution for savouring the bouquet, at around 20-23% abv."

However you end up drinking it, when you take your next dram don't just stop to consider the cask, the age or the provenance of the spirit. Spare a moment to reflect on the unsung effects of reflux. 🍷

SMWS TOP TIP

Let your dram sit for a while. A centimetre or two above the liquid level is a rippling transparent line of condensate extending round the glass. This is the reflux line



THE SCIENCE

WITH BARRY
HARRISON,
SCOTCH
WHISKY
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE



“Reflux is affected by various factors including the length of the swan neck, the ambient air temperature around the neck, the strength of low wines and feints charge, and the rate of distillation”

DENIS NICOL

- 1 High reflux means that more vapour from the boiling liquid in the pot is being condensed on the still neck or lyne arm surfaces and falling back down into the pot. This results in more copper contact for condensing vapours, which allows for sulphur compound removal by the copper.
- 2 Relatively low volatile compounds such as phenols normally distil over towards the end of the distillation (the end of the spirit fraction and into the feints fraction during spirit distillation). With an increase in reflux, they distil over relatively late and this may push them further out of the spirit fraction. At the same time, relatively high volatile compounds such as esters, which distil towards the start of the distillation, may get pushed into the spirit fraction.
- 3 Feints compounds are also pushed out of the spirit fraction and into the feints, reducing feinty aromas and tending towards a lighter spirit.

SONAT BIRNECKER HART

This professor of European Jewish history set out to buy a house – but ended up with a still. SMWS brand ambassador Phoebe Brookes caught up with the co-founder of Chicago's Koval Distillery to find out more about her unusual journey

They may have had high-flying careers in Washington, DC, but when Sonat Birnecker Hart and her husband Robert found out they were expecting their first child, they weren't sure if it was the right place for them to put down roots.

After visiting Sonat's family in Chicago, Robert joked that instead of using their down payment for the house, they should buy a still and set up the city's first craft distillery.

That's exactly what they did. The couple moved into Sonat's old family home with their new baby and invested everything they had in the company, growing it into one of the largest craft distilleries in the country. The distillery, opened in 2008, is independently owned and family operated.

But opening Koval wasn't only a change of career for Sonat and Robert – it had a major impact on the future of distilling in Chicago. At the time, an Illinois law dating back to 1934 prevented distilleries from giving tours or tastings, or selling their products.

Sonat successfully lobbied for a change in the law, and when it passed it launched a local craft distillery boom.

"It changed the entire landscape for the craft industry in Illinois because all of a sudden you had a lot of people who felt compelled to open distilleries," she says.

Luckily for Robert and Sonat, they both had backgrounds that helped them succeed. Robert comes from three generations of distillers in Austria, and both he and Sonat were well-equipped professionally to start advising others on how to set up a distillery.

"People started reaching out to us and, seeing as we are both in our own way educators, we decided to start a consulting company, offering workshops for people," Sonat says.

Together they have educated around 2,500 people via a distillery start-up consulting firm they co-founded, Kothe Distilling Technologies, and have set up 130 distilleries for other people in the US and Canada.



"A lot of the people you see in the craft industry who are quite well established were some of our first students. It's been really nice to see the whole industry grow and develop, not just our own spirits, but through other people," she says.

Eight years later, Koval is producing organic whiskeys, liquors and specialty spirits. Their whiskies are made from oat, rye and millet, and Koval embraces a grain-to-bottle process, sourcing local ingredients and doing everything on site – from milling and mashing to distilling and bottling.

Sonat is adamant they are not afraid of using technology and they do so via their handcrafted still, made in Germany by Kothe Destillationstechnik.

"We believe in artisan practices but we also believe in technology," she says. "We collect big data – there are sensors absolutely everywhere, we see everything that goes on in the still. We can do that from our computer, iPad or iPhone.

"In addition to that we still have the artisan element of it because we make all the cuts by hand. We're able to watch the still so we know when we need to start tasting."

Koval's style is bright, clean flavours that come from only using the 'heart' cut of the distillate, a luxury many larger distilleries can't afford. The tails don't go to waste though – they are redistilled and become the base of Koval's range of flavoured liquors.

"Being able to do things the way we want to do them and at the highest quality is a source of pride," says Sonat. They now have responsibility for different parts of the business – Sonat deals with the marketing and the business, and Robert the production and the consulting.

"Having my own business allowed me to be a mum in the workplace, not just a woman in the workplace.

"I was able to be myself and a mum, and have my kids around. That part hasn't changed and it's been empowering to be a woman and be a mum and run a business at the same time." ●

SONAT'S STORY

After receiving an MSt from Oxford and a PhD from the University of London, Sonat Birnecker Hart was a teacher and lecturer in European Jewish culture and history in both the US and Germany.

In 2008, she gave up tenure to found Koval Distillery, the first in Chicago since the 1800s.

Koval's spirits have won gold medals on both sides of the Atlantic and their distribution now reaches about 25 states, as well as Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Japan, Canada and Australia.

All of Koval's whiskies are single cask expressions aged in 30 gallon charred barrels.

SOUND AND VISION

WORDS RICHARD GOSLAN

It takes a sense of belief to challenge conventional wisdom and continue to follow your instincts, to deliver products that will always stand out from the crowd

ABOVE

An example of the collaboration between Linn Products and luxury textile and interior designers, Timorous Beasties



TIM WRIGHT

Linn Products managing director Gilad Tiefenbrun can't confirm for me the legend that David Bowie had a different Linn system set up in every room of his house.

"That story's been around since before I started working here, and it must have come from one of our retailers," he tells me. "What I can tell you is that I bumped into Lou Reed one day in his hotel near Glasgow, before a gig. I knew he had a Linn turntable so I asked him if he wanted to visit the factory. Despite his intimidating reputation, he was lovely – I gave him a tour, before we sat here and listened to some music – the Velvet Underground, I think it was."

I'm fortunate enough to be following in Lou's footsteps today, with a tour of the Linn factory tucked away in rural Waterfoot on the south side of Glasgow, followed by a chat and listening session with Gilad.

Linn has been synonymous with the best quality music systems in the world since it was founded on the edge of Glasgow's Linn Park by Gilad's father Ivor in 1973. The story goes that when Ivor got married, instead of using the gift money to furnish his home, he spent it all on a top-of-the-range hi-fi – only to find himself disappointed with the quality (there's no record of the new Mrs Tiefenbrun's reaction).

"At the time the prevailing wisdom was that speakers were the only things that mattered in a hi-fi, because that's where the sound comes out," says Gilad. "My father thought he could get a better sound by extracting more information from the vinyl, so he designed a turntable from scratch."

That turntable turned out to be the Sondek LP12, which continues to set the standard for vinyl playback to this day, and was the focus for Linn's business until the early 90s – and the arrival of the compact disc.

"We learned the skills to make a great-sounding CD player," says Gilad. "But although we loved Linn's CD players, we never loved the format. My dad said when CD came out that it would be temporary, until a more universal digital format came out – and he was laughed at. He said vinyl would outlast CDs, and people said that's crazy. And he also told me, don't throw out your vinyl – because we're going to keep making the turntable better and better. He was absolutely prescient in what he said."

Linn pulled the plug on CD players as early as 2009, to concentrate on digital stream players. "We decided to send a message to our customers that streaming was the future. We were way ahead of the game, but it came from an utter conviction and belief that streaming allows you to access any formats,



Every Linn product includes the name of the person who built it

"My father thought he could get a better sound by extracting more information from the vinyl, so he designed a turntable from scratch"

GILAD TIEFENBRUN

including the best sounding original studio masters. You could never do that with CDs."

Gilad admits that the hi-fi world has much in common with whisky when it comes to the perception that it's a man's world. Now, the company is looking to broaden its market through a collaboration with luxury textile and interior designers, Timorous Beasties, with a range of specially adapted fabric designs for the Series 5 speaker systems.

"No one has been able to deliver a fabric-covered system without compromising the speaker's sound, but our intelligent Exakt technology compensates for the material," says Gilad. "We created our own bespoke Linn Fabrik for Series 5, which is then printed with the Timorous Beasties design at Glasgow School of Art's Centre for Advanced Textiles. The speakers look and sound amazing and put us in front of a larger range of people who might not consider themselves hi-fi connoisseurs, but still want great music at home. We believe great speakers are for everybody – just as great whisky is."

Gilad describes a Linn product as a lifetime purchase – which is more than he can say for his whisky. "A bottle of whisky for me is more like a monthly purchase," he says. "I'm interested in it, so I want to try it and share it, and once it's open it's there to be drunk. There's a natural affinity between music and whisky – both take time to appreciate, both can change your mood, and both can enhance your quality of life."

With that, Gilad flicks through his iPad and we sit back to listen to the haunting voice of The Blue Nile's Paul Buchanan emerge from the Linn speakers in front of us, as if the singer was in the same room. All that's missing is a glass of single cask, single malt. ●

For more information, visit www.linn.co.uk



LEFT

Linn's iconic Sondek LP12, over 40 years old and still turning heads

MATT BAILEY

The national ambassador and development manager for the SMWS Australia appreciates a young bottling showing maturity beyond its years

CASK NO. B3.3: TREACLE BUNS IN A SAWMILL

Age is a funny discussion in whisky, or in this case whiskey, but this certainly has to be one of the youngest ever bottled SMWS casks I've had the pleasure of trying.

There's a spicy aroma, initially with sawmills and honey. Aromatherapy oils, pancakes, raisins and fresh prunes. Date biscuits with hot black breakfast tea. The obvious hallmarks of a big bourbon are also on the palate with rich caramel corn cobs and toasted aniseed. After a drop of water, tangy fruits like blackberry and then cinnamon sugar dusting. The finish is long and sticky with the vanilla now evident and very balanced for a whisky with so much youth.



ANDREW PARK

The SMWS ambassador in Edinburgh finds a couple of bottlings perfect for making the most of the summer sun

CASK NO. G4.8: SPINNING HONEY

Call it what you want, sacrilege, blasphemy or the devil's work, but I want to be refreshed on that rare summer's day in Scotland. Adding ice to this superb single grain turns it into an invigorating drink that has me harking back to drinking on a sun-drenched terrace in Melbourne. No flavour is removed by the ice in this unique, understated style of dram. I dare you!

CASK NO. 64.70: THE SPICY CAKE CABINET

This is the first distillery I poured at 28 Queen Street over a year ago.

There's a warm spice and smooth finish to this dram, making it ideal for after a hearty BBQ.

The sweet notes complement glazed pork ribs and sizzling shrimps. When the sun goes down you won't be able to do the same with your glass.

Buy whiskies like these...

To buy these bottles, visit the shop section of our website or call 0131 555 2929. Lines are open 9am to 4.45pm, Monday to Friday. Remember, in the UK, the SMWS releases new casks on the 'First Fridays' of every month.

Regional availability

Cask No. B3.3 is currently available to members in Australia, Austria, Benelux, Canada, Denmark, Poland, Switzerland and the UK. Cask Nos. G4.8 and 64.70 are currently available in the UK, Japan and Taiwan.



For THE LONG RUN

WORDS PHOEBE BROOKES // PHOTOS MIKE WILKINSON

As home to one of the oldest and most iconic golf courses in the world – the Old Course at St Andrews – the Kingdom of Fife is well established on the Scottish tourist trail. But for the single malt enthusiast, there's been less incentive to make an eastern detour on the road north and west

to the main whisky-producing regions. In the past decade, that has changed, with distilleries at Daftmill near Cupar, Eden Mill in St Andrews and Kingsbarns in the East Neuk running spirit.

When I visit Kingsbarns I find that it's the area's association with golf that provided the motivation for the distillery. Founding director Douglas Clement grew up on a

local farm and was working as a golf caddie at both St Andrews and Kingsbarns. It was on the fairway that inspiration struck.

"I was fed up sending my golfing clients out of Fife to visit a distillery and I thought, surely there's an opportunity to create a distillery close to the golf courses?" he tells me. "My idea was driven not by any substantial knowledge of whisky, ▶

KINGSBARN'S PROFILE

although I always liked a dram, but by trying to make my golfers happy.”

The journey from golf course to whisky cask hasn't always been straightforward. Douglas began by raising a small amount of money from his golf clients to get planning permission. Once that came through in early 2011, bigger investments were required. The turning point came in September 2012 when Douglas secured the Food Processing Marketing and Co-operation Grant Scheme from the Scottish Government, which awarded him £670,000. The grant made the distillery a more attractive proposition and he was able to bring on board the Wemyss family, with their valuable experience in the drinks industry. However, there was something else that set them apart.

“So many Scotch whisky distilleries nowadays are owned by multinational companies and for me, being a ‘Fifer’, it was fantastic to bring on board not just a Scottish owner but one with ancestral routes to Fife,” he says.

Those ancestral routes, and their charming quirks, are highlighted throughout Kingsbarns. The most obvious is the doocot, a pigeon loft familiar to many Fife farm steadings, but now home to the first cask filled with what will one day be Kingsbarns whisky. There's something about the way the cask is sitting there, surrounded by a soundtrack of cooing pigeons, which makes it feel as though it's on a pedestal.

Douglas takes me to meet the production team, and as we watch head distiller Peter Holroyd and his assistant Andy Colman in action, he tells me about the importance of the distillery's water source. It lies 100 metres beneath us, where the water fell as rain decades ago and filtered through layers of rock, purifying it on its journey. Combine that water with locally grown barley and you have a genuine product of Fife.

Douglas's dream may have come from spotting a gap in the market in an area where golf is still the biggest draw. However, since switching from caddying to distilling, Douglas has immersed himself in the world of whisky.

“One of the first things I did was join the SMWS,” he says. “It's been a great education, going into The Vaults and learning about single cask whisky. Then I started travelling all around Scotland.” Although he claims not to be a “whisky geek”, when he starts explaining the importance of the two types of yeast used by Kingsbarns – one from the US and the other from France – I can't help but think he's being modest.



Head distiller Peter Holroyd gives Phoebe a class in how to check alcohol levels using the hydrometer



Assistant distiller Andy Colman under the washback stills



Douglas
Clement in
the doocot at
Kingsbarns



The pot stills
flanking either
side of the
distillery

But does it make a difference? There's only one way to tell, and that's to taste it. The Kingsbarns new make spirit is something special – add a few drops of water and it becomes incredibly fruity; ripe green apples, gooseberries and hay bales – qualities Douglas says come from the French yeast.

Before heading back to Edinburgh, I ask Douglas about the Kingsbarns Founders' Club, an initiative launched in 2015 on the distillery's first anniversary. For Douglas, it was a chance to get people involved in the distillery from the start.

"Other distilleries offer cask ownership schemes but we decided to go for a Founders' Club," he says. "We're trying to bring on board founder members to join our journey and support us. In doing so they'll get all the first bottlings of our whisky – in effect, you'll be tasting all the fruits of our labour over the last seven years."

With that I hit the road. On the journey home, I wonder how the cask is getting on in the doocot, and suddenly feel a little impatient. ●

THE KINGSBARN FOUNDERS' CLUB

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MEMBERSHIP



The Kingsbarns Founders' Club is open to only 3,000 members who want to be part of the distillery's history. After receiving a welcome pack, members will be the first to own the distillery's single malt whisky when they receive a bottle of Kingsbarns Single Malt Founders' Reserve in mid-2018.

Members will be the only ones to receive a further exclusive Founders' Club Reserve bottle, each year until 2022. They will also have access to special events and be able to provide input into key decisions in the development of the distillery and its whisky. Founders' Club membership costs £500 plus delivery charges and is now available to buy.



The luck of THE IRISH

At last, the Jameson market faces a challenge from a resurgent and ambitious whiskey industry

WORDS IAN BUXTON

All of a sudden I'm finding it hard – very hard – to keep up with Irish whiskey. In his splendid review in these pages back in October 2014, Fionnan O'Connor sketched the background to the changes and outlined some of the dynamic and exciting pioneers who are re-making Irish whiskey.

I've recently visited some of the new generation as their stills run hot. But remember that many industry insiders will tell you there are two 'Irish whiskey' markets – the Jameson market and everything else – and the commercial strategies of all of the newcomers, from the tiniest craft distiller to the largest of the new operations, have to take that unyielding commercial reality into account.

Not that everyone accepts it quite as fixed for all time. The new Tullamore

distillery, showpiece for William Grant & Sons, is clearly conceived on an ambitious scale. Their Tullamore D.E.W. brand is the best-selling Irish whiskey in a number of international markets and, though currently a distant second to Jameson, Grants are evidently planning for rapid and significant growth. The distillery actually opened as Fionann's article appeared, initially to make the equivalent of 1.5 million cases of whiskey annually.

When I visited in March I discovered that they had already *doubled* the distillery's capacity and were furiously building warehouses and a bottling plant. Did I mention this was an ambitious venture? Be in no doubt, the world will shortly see a lot more Tullamore whiskey.

Remember Mark Reynier, scourge of the Scotch whisky industry and general renegade, from his work at Bruichladdich? After a short break he has returned to distilling, backed by many of his previous investors, but on a more substantial scale, buying the mothballed Guinness brewery in Waterford and converting it to

a distillery. Remember those old stills that sat in front of Bruichladdich? Mark has them working hard in his new Waterford Distillery, making around one million litres of alcohol, but in his mind's eye, potentially trebling capacity in five to six years' time.

That's when the first Waterford whiskey, all single malt, will reach the market as, remarkably, the project is fully funded to support production without selling any new-make or one-off casks.

The key factor in making what Mark claims will be "the most profound malt whiskey possible" will be the provenance and traceability of the 46 different barley varieties already being distilled, every one of which will remain separate from field until the final bottling.

Finally, back to Dublin. The Liberties was once the beating heart of Dublin distilling and, as such, arguably the most important site for distilling anywhere in the world.

Yet, remarkably – almost incredibly – it was all swept away. The last operating distillery closed its doors in the mid-1970s and Irish whiskey entered a dark period in its long history. For many years, it looked as if Dublin distilling, indeed virtually the whole Irish whiskey industry, would be nothing more than a historical curiosity. Scotch whisky had taken over the world and resistance seemed futile.

Until today as, buoyed by the successful sale of the family's Cooley business, brothers Jack and Stephen Teeling have chosen a site in the heart of The Liberties for their new distillery, the first to be built in Dublin for more than 125 years.

Three gleaming stills are now working overtime and the first Dublin-distilled bottles are on sale.

The Spirit of Dublin Premium Irish Poitin is a 52.5% abv "sneak peek" at the liquid that will be used in the coming years to produce Irish whiskey.

Welcome back, Ireland. It's been a long time! ●

Tullamore D.E.W. distillery, courtesy of Wm Grant & Sons



An apparently endless choice of new expressions and limited editions are being released to meet the demands of consumers for whom individual style will never go out of fashion



WORDS TOM BRUCE-GARDYNE

Express yourself

Hard though it is to imagine, there was a time when people smoked the same cigarettes and drank the same whisky from cradle to grave. Friends and family knew what to buy them at Christmas, and in duty-free, God was in his heaven and life was pretty straightforward. Adding to this simple state of affairs were some deluxe

blends that were later joined by a handful of single malts, all sporting the magic number 12 on the label.

Then, starting with a trickle that turned into a flood, came a riotous profusion of new expressions to dazzle, delight and confuse the whisky drinker. “The reason why there are so many releases is because of all these whisky festivals,” claims Whyte & Mackay’s master blender, Richard Paterson. “If I turned up at a festival with

simply a 12-year-old Dalmore and a 10-year-old Jura, people would go ballistic. The consumer is fickle, and has to be stimulated with different styles to keep his or her attention.” In other words it is a consumer-driven trend, and there are few brand loyalties left.


Prize for unleashing the greatest volume of new releases has to go to Bruichladdich. “I think it was around 430 in 11 years,” says the distillery’s spokesman, Carl Reavey, 



ILLUSTRATION OLGA ANGELLOZ

“It was a combination of genuine interest in variety, a desire to shake up an industry mired in homogenisation... and the fact that we were broke and needed to turn some of that stock into cash”



referring to the period since its rebirth in 2001. Many of the releases were just a single cask, and some were controversial like the 20-year-old pink whisky known as *Flirtation*. Why so many? “Well, it was a combination of genuine interest in variety, a desire to shake up an industry mired in homogenisation, and therefore intent on eliminating variety,” says Carl. “And the fact that we were broke and needed to turn some of that stock into cash in order to pay the wages.”

Bringing Ardbeg back to life in 1997 was a similar struggle for Glenmorangie, who faced large gaping holes in the inventory it inherited. *Very Young Ardbeg* was released in late 2003, followed by *Still Young* and *Almost There*, until finally in 2008 *We’ve Arrived* or *Ardbeg Renaissance* hit the shelves. The man responsible, Hamish Torrie, now Glenmorangie’s head of corporate social responsibility, describes it as “the peaty path to maturity” and says: “The great thing was that it created a sense of anticipation for Ardbeg and kept us front of mind.” As with Bruichladdich, there is a hint of wilful provocation in the distillery’s youthful bottlings and limited releases. “We smashed the convention that whisky had to be old or have an age statement to be ‘good,’” says Hamish, with evident glee.

Probably the most classic release he was involved in was when someone accidentally vatted a 20-year-old Ardbeg with some 12-year-old Glen Moray. “We couldn’t claim against our insurance and so we were facing a massive write off,” Hamish recalls about the birth of *Serendipity* in 2005. “The key here was to be bold and own up to our fans that we had made a mistake and ask their forgiveness. They did and *Serendipity* sold out very quickly. Launching it on April Fool’s Day added to the fun.”

Among other whacky releases, he is particularly fond of *Blasda* “where we upset peat freaks by deliberately taking the peating level of Ardbeg from 50ppm down to 8ppm and putting it in a white, clear glass bottle”.

When it comes to inspiration for new expressions, beyond the glorious cock-up that was *Serendipity*, Arran’s master distiller, James MacTaggart, says: “Provenance, and products that tell a story, are of particular interest to consumers, and as such our limited editions frequently sell-out. The Isle of Arran still has plenty of stories to tell and we will continue to draw inspiration from the island for our expressions.” Among them, he cites the

peaty *Machrie Moor* named after a nearby moor, and the *Bothy Quarter Cask* inspired by the small barrels once used by local bootleggers. “Our *Smugglers’ Series* is a nod to the covert whisky trade operating between the island and Glasgow in the 17th and 18th centuries,” adds James.

Hamish Torrie still gets involved in the creative process at Ardbeg, and says: “The key is to always keep your fans guessing. ‘I wonder what Ardbeg is up to?’ you see them think, and after each innovation they say: ‘That’s great... and what’s next?’ Anticipation is everything in Ardbeg world!” Over at Bruichladdich, Carl Reavey insists the inspiration for new expressions is: “Very much liquid led. The only problem is that we produce something lovely and exciting – and then we run out of it. C’est la vie... it’s a problem and we’re working on it. We expect to have fixed it in around 10 or 15 years!”



In 2005 the distillery decided to simplify things. Anything labelled Bruichladdich was to be unpeated, Port Charlotte meant heavily peated, while Octomore was “off the scale peated”, Carl explains. “That was great, but then we had a difficult period when we thought we would cut down on the expressions and produce ‘core’ bottlings, of Laddie 10, 16 and 22, for

example. That didn’t work because we ran out of Laddie 10 really quickly and annoyed people.”

Alongside its core range, Ardbeg now does one annual limited release, a special version of which, at a different strength, is offered to Ardbeg committee members first. Arran plans to offer “two or perhaps three completely new releases per year”, says MD Euan Mitchell, who is confident of sufficient demand despite the limited retail shelf space available. He is also planning to open a second distillery on the south of the island at Lagg. Meanwhile Bruichladdich, Port Charlotte and Octomore are releasing around 30 expressions between them, including single cask bottlings and two ‘bottle your own at the distillery’ casks.

For all the industry’s creativity, you wonder if some of the innovation that fuels such endless choice, smacks of desperation? “Not for Bruichladdich,” says Carl. “Not any more. We innovate because that is what we do. It is in our DNA.” He admits in the past as a private company it was a survival mechanism at times. “We still describe those days as a ‘white knuckle ride,’” he says. “Sometimes it was a real struggle to pay the wages.”

As for the idea that things have gone too far on the new release front, he shakes his head. “Not far enough in our view. We would argue that the Scotch whisky industry has historically been slow to innovate because it became obsessed with consistency. Producing brands that always looked and tasted the same became an industry badge of honour. We never joined the club.”

Not everyone agrees, however. Leonard Russell, head of Ian Macleod Distillers, feels there are simply too many new expressions out there. While he praises Ardbeg for doing “an outrageously good job with their Ardbeg committee bringing out limited releases”, you wonder if the emphasis is more on the word ‘outrageous’ than ‘good’.

Too diplomatic to mention names, he believes “some companies have pushed it too far and consumers will revolt. If you start collecting a range and it gets more and more expensive it becomes frustrating. You can’t afford them, and you haven’t got space for them.”

Whether you view it as innovation or an affront to consistency – the consumer has never been quite so spoilt for choice. ●

Visit smws.com to express yourself with your own single cask, single malt

CAFFÉ CULTURE

PHOTOS CC FUN

SMWS partner bars come in all shapes, sizes and styles. In Taiwan, Caffé Libero is the result of a passion for both single cask, single malt – and for a perfectly prepared cup of coffee. Unfiltered caught up with SMWS Taiwan branch representative Eric Huang and café manager Shao-Her to find out more about the Society's Taipei venue

Where did the concept for the bar come from, with its mix of coffee and whisky?

Eric: I've always been into whisky, and I met the owners of the café at a few SMWS tastings. They were fascinated with the aroma and expressions that they experienced with the Society whisky, just as they appreciate the aroma and complexities of fresh roasted coffee beans, or the final outcome of a cup of coffee. Those who enjoy a good cup of coffee, and are particular about its flavours, are likely to enjoy the whisky that the SMWS offers. Our Taiwan branch started to attract members and orders from the coffee shop owners, and then they came up with the idea of including a whisky bar within the coffee shop.

Tells us about your collection of SMWS bottlings

Shao-Her: We normally select younger whiskies, so the price range is more approachable. Also, we found that these whiskies can have a stronger aroma and flavour, which works better in an atmosphere where there's a powerful smell of coffee.

We find it's always helpful to introduce Scotch whisky to those who are new to the world of single cask, single malt by identifying the region it comes from.



Where did the inspiration come from for the café's design?

Eric: The coffee shop's image is aged and sophisticated. The atmosphere is calm and comfortable, with a relaxing aroma of roasting coffee. The building's original decoration was in the style of 1950s and 1960s, so the designer kept much of the original décor, and incorporated ideas that he took from images of the SMWS's home at The Vaults in Leith.

What kind of clientele do you have?

Shao-Her: We've found that many of our customers are in the cultural, media and

art sectors, as well as tourists who are exploring Taiwan. They express their interest in the décor and atmosphere that Caffé Libero provides, and the high quality of the coffee that we serve.

What trends have you noticed when it comes to the whisky world in Taipei?

Shao-Her: Customers often ask us if we have whisky from Islay or Japan or Taiwan. As a result we like to maintain a good stock of whisky from these regions, and our staff are prepared to answer specific questions related to these whisky regions.

Are customers who come in to appreciate a good quality coffee more likely to try an SMWS whisky and appreciate its complexities?

Eric: Yes, definitely. The two drinks both place a strong emphasis on aroma and palate, so customers who are very particular with their choice of coffee are very likely to be interested in trying a dram or two. ●

Eric Huang has been in the whisky business for the past 10 years. He is currently the SMWS Taiwan branch representative and Caffé Libero's whisky consultant. Shao-Her is the manager of Caffé Libero. His passion is in coffee and everything to do with it, and he adjusts the bar selection based on observations from the café's customers. Many thanks to Chloe Chen, general manager at SMWS Taiwan branch, for her help with translation.

♥ Caffé Libero is at No. 1, Lane 243, Jinhua St, Da'an District, Taipei City, Taiwan 106
Phone: +886 2 2356 7129





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VIBRANT EVENTS TODAY

MONDAY, 4 JULY

SPRINGBANK & CAMPBELTOWN
MEMBERS TASTING
The Vaults, Leith, UK

THURSDAY, 14 JULY

CRAFT BEER AND WHISKY PAIRING
The Vaults, Leith, UK

TUESDAY, 19 JULY

WHISKY AND CUPCAKES
Greville Street, London, UK

SATURDAY, 23 JULY

AUSTRALIAN MALT WHISKY TASTING
CHAMPIONSHIP
Madame Tussauds Darling Harbour,
Sydney, Australia

MONDAY, 1 AUGUST

DISTELL MEMBERS TASTING
The Vaults, Leith, UK

TUESDAY, 2 AUGUST

NEW OUTTURN TASTING
Legacy Liquor Store, Vancouver, Canada

WEDNESDAY, 3 AUGUST

NEW OUTTURN TASTING
Legacy Liquor Store, Vancouver, Canada

FRIDAY, 5 AUGUST

OPEN HOUSE LAUNCH OF
NEW-LOOK QUEEN STREET
28 Queen Street, Edinburgh, UK

FRIDAY, 5 AUGUST

NEW OUTTURN TASTING
The Strath, Victoria, Canada

FRIDAY, 5 AUGUST

NEW OUTTURN TASTING
Kensington Wine Market,
Calgary, Canada

FRIDAY, 5 AUGUST

NEW OUTTURN TASTING
Keg n Cork, Edmonton, Canada

WEDNESDAY, 17 AUGUST

WHISKY IN WINE CASKS
Greville Street, London, UK

FRIDAY, 2 SEPTEMBER

NEW OUTTURN TASTING
The Strath, Victoria, Canada

FRIDAY, 2 SEPTEMBER

NEW OUTTURN TASTING
Kensington Wine Market,
Calgary, Canada

FRIDAY, 2 SEPTEMBER

NEW OUTTURN TASTING
Keg n Cork, Edmonton, Canada

MONDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER

KILCHOMAN DISTILLERY
MEMBERS TASTING
The Vaults, Leith, UK

TUESDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER

NEW OUTTURN TASTING
Legacy Liquor Store,
Vancouver, Canada

WEDNESDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER

NEW OUTTURN TASTING
Legacy Liquor Store, Vancouver, Canada

TUESDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER

OUTTURN TASTING SESSIONS
The Oval Tasting Bar, Queen Street,
Edinburgh, UK

TUESDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER

BOILER MAKER TASTING
Greville Street, London, UK

WEDNESDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER

CHARLES HEIDSIECK DINNER
28 Queen Street, Edinburgh, UK