



Top Shelf Tasters

February 17, 2017



Balvenie Madeira Cask 21yr 43% Speyside



Right next door to its sister distillery Glenfiddich, and owned by the Grant family which founded both distilleries. Balvenie was built next to the castle of the same name in 1892, on the back of the success of Glenfiddich. The distillery still uses some of its own malt from barley produced on the Grant family farms. Although Glenfiddich is still the market leader in terms of sales, Balvenie is generally regarded as the stronger of the two in terms of quality across the range, which include some stunning wood-finished whiskies produced long before it became fashionable to do so.

A rare single malt aged exclusively in traditional oak whisky casks for more than two decades, then transferred to casks previously used in the production of fortified Madeira wine for a further period of maturation, The Balvenie 21 Year Old Madeira Cask is the latest in the brand's long line of the world's most handcrafted single malts.

To ensure that just the right amount of character is imparted by the Madeira Casks, Malt Master David Stewart samples the casks regularly to ensure their final notes are characterised with notes of vanilla, oak, and honey, finishing with a luscious layer of rich spice.

Nose: Fragrant fruity and floral, orange blossom, fresh pineapple juice and a touch of spicy ginger finishing on some vanilla syrup.

Palate: A lovely mouth feel with a real juicy edge, exotic fruit salad and barley sugar with runny honey, cinnamon spices and gentle oak vanilla.

Finish: Lingering and luscious, sweet and malty alongside swathes of vanilla and a spicy layer.

Nose:

Palate:

Finish:



Hazelburn Barolo Cask 9yr 57.9% Campbeltown

Hazelburn Distillery was a distillery in Campbeltown, Scotland, which was in operation between approximately 1825 and 1925. In 1886, it had 22 employees and produced 192,000 gallons of whisky per year, making it the largest distillery in the town. The distillery was bought by Mitchell & Co. in 1920, but shut down in 1926. Mitchell & Co. owned two other distilleries, including Springbank Distillery. Since 2005 Springbank Distillery bottles a whisky called Hazelburn Single Malt.

A 9 year old single malt Scotch whisky from the Springbank distillery, released under their Hazelburn name (which they use for their unpeated expressions). It was initially matured in fresh bourbon casks before being finished in refill Barolo wines casks!

Nose: Fragrant with notes of sweet confectionery and fruit salad giving way to sugared almonds, sherbet and soft fruits.

Palate: Peppery with light tannins. The sweetness is continued alongside dried fruits, raisins, and the subtle hint of coconut shavings.

Finish: Dark sugars and chocolate to the fore with pineapple custard, vanilla, stewed fruits, and a touch of bung cloth all present in the medium dry finish.

Nose:

Palate:

Finish:

Aberlour Hand Filled Batch A16 Bourbon Cask 13yr 56.1% Speyside



Aberlour Distillery was founded in 1826 in the town of Aberlour in Scotland's Speyside whiskey region. It sits on the northern edge of Ben Rinnes Mountain which accumulates snow and rainwater across its peaty moors and supplies cold, soft spring water to the distillery. Around a half of the spirit produced from Aberlour's four copper stills is destined for single malts, including the popular Aberlour A'bunadh batched single malt whiskey matured solely in ex-sherry casks. Aberlour offers distillery tours and the distillery is an established participant in the popular Spirit of Speyside Whiskey Festival.

A lovely single malt Scotch whisky from Aberlour distillery, aged for 13 years in bourbon cask before being bottled at cask strength, 58.1%. A hand filled distillery only bottling from Batch A16.

No notes available

Nose:

Palate:

Finish:



Glendronach 1994 Cask 1079 20yr 54.4% Speyside

The Glendronach distillery was founded in 1826 and is one of Scotland's oldest distilleries. The distillery is found in the very small village of Forgue near Huntly. About a decade after Glendronach opened it was destroyed by a fire. The distillery was open until 1996 when it was mothballed by Allied Distillers. Glendronach then re-opened to full production in May, 2002. The distillery was one of the last distilleries to use direct coal fire for their stills. They stopped using coal and changed to steam in 2005. Glendronach is renowned for its rich sherried whiskies. This comes from the high quality Pedro Ximenez sherry butts they use. The butts are hand selected from Spain to ensure the high standards of Glendronach. House Style: Smooth, big, with a teasing sweet-and-dry maltiness. Sherry-friendly. After dinner.

Matured in the finest Pedro Ximenez Sherry cask for over 20 long years in Cask No. 1079. A limited edition and one of only 648 bottles.

Nose: Ripe dates and figs with roasted coffee beans, surrounded by touches of vanilla and Demerara sugar.

Palate: Dark chocolate and rich orange marmalade on the palate, drenched over sweet dates and dried prunes.

Finish: Warm peppery oak and hints of cigar-box adds an intriguing spice note.

Nose:

Palate:

Finish:



Innis & Gunn "Vintage Oak Aged 100 days" Bottle Conditioned 7.7% Scotland

We used our own I&G ale malt to impart a rich, well-balanced malty backbone to this beer. This combined with Crystal malt, roasted barley and a little wheat gives a creamy head. The Super Styrian hops add a light bitterness and gentle aromatic character, which complement the flavour of the malt perfectly. We filled it into first fill American Bourbon casks and left it to mature over 100 days, so the brew would mellow and take on lots of rich caramel and vanilla flavours from the wood. The casks also lend a creaminess to the beer, so that it becomes extra smooth and easy to drink over time. We bottle conditioned this beer with yeast, leaving a little sugar in the matured beer, which means that over time, the beer will develop and change, becoming richer and more complex the longer you leave it. This beer is crafted to be enjoyed on the day of release, but because of the yeast that we've included in the bottle, it will continue to condition well beyond its official 'best before' date.

RateBeer™

86

Innis & Gunn Vintage

Innis & Gunn
Edinburgh, Scotland
Beer style: English Strong Ale
Ref: ratebeer.com Jan2017

Common descriptors are

caramel vanilla dark fruit wood sweet
malts brown bitter malty bourbon
carbonation amber oak



Stone "Bitter Chocolate" Oatmeal Stout 9.2% CA

Who knew a worldwide hop shortage in 2008 would give rise to such a memorable, delicious beer? When it came time to craft a commemorative offering for our 12th anniversary, we decided to trade in the bitterness of hops for the bitterness of unsweetened chocolate, and paired that with flaked oats. Featuring a thick, rich, roasty mouthfeel and chocolate-heavy flavors and aromas, this onyx-colored, malt-forward beauty became an instant classic that shares space on our liquid trophy case alongside our hop-focused fan favorites. Rebrewed for our 20th Anniversary Encore Series.

RateBeer™

99

Stone 20th Anniversary
Encore Series: 12th
Anniv. Bitter Chocolate
Oatmeal Stout

Stone Brewing
Escondido, California
Beer style: Imperial Stout
Ref: ratebeer.com Jan2017

Common descriptors are

black thick brown malts dark coffee
roasted



Sixpoint "Bazaar Porter" 5 Beans Coffee Porter 10% NY

The Mad Scientists walked through an ancient bazaar, sniffing out ingredients for their next formulation. The stalls were buzzing with activity as exotic spice vendors promoted their fragrant wares. But what ingredient would make the fabled 5th bean? The enticing aroma of an oily, smoky pod – black cardamom – caught their attention. Now that would turn the Imperial to Bazaar...

RateBeer™

97

Sixpoint 5Beans

Sixpoint Brewery
Brooklyn, New York
Beer style: Imperial Porter
Ref: ratebeer.com Jan2017

Common descriptors are

dark coffee spice black vanilla roasted
chocolate



Founders "Imperial Stout" 10.5% MI

A fine companion to end a meal or relax in front of the hearth with, this robust ale will cellar well for years. Brewed with ten varieties of malted barley this stout is extremely smooth, complex and rich in body. We recommend serving at cellar temperature. Sit back and enjoy its richness and complexity, you're about to drink the ultimate winter warmer.

RateBeer™

100

Founders Imperial Stout

Founders Brewing Company
Grand Rapids, Michigan
Beer style: Imperial Stout
Ref: ratebeer.com Jan2017

Common descriptors are

black brown roasted thick dark malts
hops coffee chocolate bitter fruit
sweet

Highland Park Hobbister nas 51.4% Orkney



Highland Park distillery is a Scotch whisky distillery based in Kirkwall, Orkney. It is the most northerly whisky distillery in Scotland, half a mile farther north than that at Scapa distillery. Highland Park has performed well at international spirit ratings competitions. Its 25 year single malt scotch, for example, received double gold medals at the 2007 and 2009 San Francisco World Spirits Competition. The distillery was founded in 1798, presumably by Magnus Eunson. The name of this whisky does not refer to the area of Scotland known as The Highlands, but rather to the fact that the distillery was founded on an area called 'High Park' distinguished from a lower area nearby. Highland Park is one of the few distilleries to malt its own barley, using locally cut peat from Hobbister Moor. The peat is then mixed with heather before being used as fuel. The malt is peated to a level of 20 parts per million phenol and then mixed with unpeated malt produced on the Scottish mainland. In 1984, Highland Park was the only whisky ever to have scored a rating of 100% by the regular tasting team of The Scotsman, a national newspaper of Scotland. Whisky reviewer Michael Jackson has called it "The greatest all-rounder in the world of malt whisky." Highland Park is available in various proprietary bottlings by year, as well as a special bottling known as Cappella, available only at the distillery. In addition, several independent bottlings of Highland Park are produced. Highland Park is also one of the ingredients of The Famous Grouse blend.

As with many recent bottlings of Highland Park, there was also a bit of fuss surround the release of the 'Hobbister'... The fuss, however was a bit more of a technical kind. Only 1200 bottles was released of this one and it was only available at the distillery itself and/or online in the distillery webshop. The web traffic generated when the bottles went online made the Highland Park website crash so you couldn't finish your order. People were also queueing outside the distillery to get a bottle, so what a start for this bottling, eh? :) Bottom line is that it sold out in a flash when the website was working.

The 'Hobbister' is named after the moor where Highland Park cuts its peat used in about 20% of their production. The whisky itself is supposedly made up of 6yo Highland Park from 1st and refill ex-bourbon casks, mixed with some 12yo.

Nose: Quite upfront with lots of burning twigs and leaves, like burning your garden cuttings, but underneath you get some very nice tropical fruit and quite a bit of floral notes, like fabric softener. After a while the peaty smoke notes retreats somewhat allowing a more citric and malty edge to peak but also revealing a few notes of young whisky... this, however, comes and goes and is never uncomfortable in any way and I fell it somehow carries the floral forward

Taste: A good burst of floral peat and honey to start with, then lots of crisp malt and a brown sugary note... There's also some vanilla pods and hint of smoked pineapple here. The sherry influence is coming through a bit more here with hints of candied apple and charred oak. The floral peat pops back up mid- to end palate

Finish: Leaves a taste of something pleasant reminding me of kissing my grandmother on the cheek, like a mix of perfume and cigar. :)

Nose:

Palate:

Finish:



Laphroaig Cairdeas Madeira Cask nas 51.6% Islay

Laphroaig distillery is an Islay single malt Scotch whisky distillery. It is named for the area of land at the head of Loch Laphroaig on the south coast of the Isle of Islay. The meaning of the toponym is unknown, but a commonly suggested etymology includes the elements "lag" (Gaelic: hollow), "breid" (Norse: broad) and "vik" (Norse: bay), implying an original Gaelic form something like "Lag Bhròdhaig" (the hollow of Broadbay). The name may be related to a placename on the east coast of Islay, "Pròraig", again suggested as meaning "broad bay". The distillery and brand are owned and operated by Beam Suntory, the American subsidiary of Japan's Suntory Holdings. The Laphroaig distillery was established in 1815 by Donald and Alexander Johnston. The Johnstons who founded Laphroaig were from the Clan Donald and are likely to be from the MacIain of Ardnamurchan branch of the clan. The family anglicised their name to Johnston. The last member of the Johnston family to run the distillery was Ian Hunter, a nephew of Sandy Johnston, who died childless in 1954 and left the distillery to one of his managers, Bessie Williamson. The distillery was sold to Long John International in the 1960s, and subsequently became part of Allied Domecq. (continued below...)

The Laphroaig Cairdeas Madeira Cask has been matured for about 8 years in ex-bourbon barrels before being married together in Madeira seasoned traditional hogsheads for a further two years.

The finish is not made in 'real' Madeira casks then, but rather casks that have been seasoned with Madeira. Nothing wrong with this, and I applaud Laphroaig for stating the facts in this matter. From what I understand, getting your hands on 'real' Madeira casks is very difficult, and certainly in the quantity that would be needed for a release from Laphroaig.

Nose: Rich, sweet, peaty and delightful. It has the familiar bourbon cask base – the creamy vanilla notes, as well as the softly medicinal smokiness. The maritime notes are quite hidden on this one though. In addition to this we get a lovely, deep sweetness, that surely must be from the Madeira cask finish. I find sweet oranges, orange juice, licorice, red berries and lemon zest.

Palate: Rich, creamy, and oily mouthfeel. Peppery with lots of ashes and wood smoke. Salty, medicinal and sweet. The lovely sweetness from the nose is here as well, but in addition we have the warm, almost glowing base of pepper and hot ashes.

Finish: Medium long finish. Peppery spices and rich sweetness (now more reminiscent of honey and fudge) work together in near perfect harmony.

Comments: This, for me, is one of the best Cairdeas releases. I really loved this dram! The Madeira finish is a very good match for the Laphroaig style of whisky.

(...continued from above)

The brand was in turn acquired by Fortune Brands in 2005, as one of the brands divested by Pernod Ricard in order to obtain regulatory approval for its takeover of Allied Domecq. Fortune Brands then split up its business product lines in 2011, forming its spirits business into Beam Inc. Beam was then purchased by Suntory Holdings in April 2014. Laphroaig has been the only whisky to carry the Royal Warrant of the Prince of Wales, which was awarded in person during a visit to the distillery in 1994. The 15-year-old was reportedly the prince's favourite Scotch whisky.

Nose:

Palate:

Finish: