

# **SINGLE MALT WHISKY APPRECIATION SEMINAR WENATCHEE VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

**THE JOHN HORAN HOUSE - WENATCHEE, WASHINGTON  
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## **DISTILLERY DESCRIPTIONS OF THE SEMINAR WHISKYS**

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### **GLENFARCLAS (SPEYSIDE MALT)**

Glenfarclas was established in 1836 at the Reichlerich Farm on the Ballindalloch Estate by Robert Hay near the junction of the Avon and Spey Rivers. Its name in Gaelic means “glen of the green grassland”. It was acquired in 1865 by the Grant family and has remained in their control ever since. It originally contained a pair of stills which produced about 50,000 gallons of spirit annually and was expanded around 1900 to increase production to over 300,000 gallons annually. The distillery underwent a major refurbishment in the early 1960s.

Glenfarclas currently hosts a very attractive visitors center whose interior paneling is constructed from the elegant oak paneling salvaged from the SS Empress of Australia. Glenfarclas entertains over 80,000 visitors annually – a visit is highly recommended if you’re travelling around Speyside on holiday. Glenfarclas bottles its single malt whiskys in 10, 12, 15, 17, 21, 25 and 30 year old expressions. It also produces the distinctive Glenfarclas 105 bottling that at 60%, is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records as the strongest production bottling of any distillery in Scotland.

Glenfarclas is considered one of the supreme Speyside whiskys and was once described by an enthusiastic taster as ‘going down singing with hymns’. All its whisky is aged in sherrywood casks and none is released to the independents – although rumors surface from time to time about a cask that somehow slips through this restriction. A classic Speyside whisky where every one I’ve ever tried has been wonderful and very satisfying.

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### **GLENMORANGIE (NORTHERN HIGHLAND MALT)**

Glenmorangie takes its name from the location in the Glen of Morangie Burn, which in Gaelic means “glen of great tranquility”. It stands on a site used for brewing since the Middle Ages and like several other distilleries, actually began as a brewery. It was converted to a distillery in 1843 and has been renovated several times since. The distillery buildings date back to 1880s and the inside was rehabilitated in 1979. The staff is made up of the ‘Sixteen Men of Tain’ – all

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local celebrities – who make the whisky and are prominently featured in its advertising campaigns.

Glenmorangie is the best-selling single malt whisky in Scotland and the majority of its malt is bottled as a single – a very unusual practice even today. Its eight stills are the tallest in Scotland at 16' 10.25", a contributing factor many believe is the secret in creating its elegant and complex style. Glenmorangie is also unusual in that it matures all its standard bottlings completely in bourbon instead of sherry casks. They are known for pursuing one of the most rigid wood regimes in the entire industry. They select oak trees in the Ozarks while they are still growing, harvest them at 100 years old and then season the wood for 18 months before filling them with bourbon to condition them. This attention to detail contributes to the whisky's complex yet very subtle characteristics.

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### **SPRINGBANK (CAMBELTOWN MALT)**

Springbank was established in 1828 as the 14<sup>th</sup> of the 34 known Cambeltown distilleries – of which only 2 exist today (the other is Glen Scotia which is currently mothballed). When it was established this location was known as somewhat of a 'distillery row', since Longrow, Rieclachan, Union, Springside and Argyll were located immediately adjacent. The buildings that comprise Springbank today are still the original ones built in 1828 but it has also expanded to encompass all the remaining vestiges of these other distilleries.

Springbank is also the only distillery in Scotland still owned by the founder's family and the only distillery in Scotland that controls the entire production process on-site from malting to bottling. Furthermore, Springbank's owners are direct descendents of the smugglers who originally made their whisky at this location. Today they pride themselves in producing whisky the traditional way, including refusing use chill-filtering and by bottling their many expressions at the more historic levels of 92 proof rather than the more common 82 proof distributed by most other distilleries today.

Springbank is a very unique whisky that is often very hard to find and usually expensive – but always an ideosyncratic and interesting malt. Words used to describe Springbank expressions include smoky, woody, peaty, pronounced, round, sweet, iodine, salty, creamy, balanced, and fresh – among many others. Once a year Springbank also produces a heavily peated malt named Longrow (for it's long-lost neighbor) that is VERY hard to find but well worth the effort.

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### **TALISKER (ISLAND MALT)**

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Talisker was founded in 1830 on the Isle of Skye and is the Island's only surviving distillery. The distillery is one of the few in Scotland whose stills are not "paired" as most are, with two wash stills and three low wine stills. The extra low wine still is used to handle the volume of low wines generated in the first distillation. The existing stillhouse was built in 1960 to the exact specifications of the original following a catastrophic fire. Surprisingly, the whisky from the rebuilt facility was unchanged by the reconstruction.

The stills are great onion-shaped kettles with ever-narrowing swan-shaped necks which gracefully lead the spirit away through the stillhouse wall for cooling. For cooling the distillery uses condensing coils rather than the more modern column condensers. The warehouse windows are wire mesh rather than glass, which allows the damp sea air into the cask storage area. This imparts a unique brininess to the underlying peat in this particular malt.

Talisker is a lightly peated, spicy malt which lies nicely between the lightness of the Highland malts on the mainland to the east and the heaviness of the Islay malts to the south. It is bottled at 91.6 proof in the older more traditional style, similarly to Springbank.

Robert Louis Stevenson penned the following rhyme in 1830 in "The Scotsman's Return from Abroad":

*the king o'drinks; as I conceive it,  
Talisker, Isla or Glenlivet*

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## **LAGAVULIN (ISLAY MALT)**

Illicit distilling had been well established on Islay by the mid-eighteenth century and assisted many crofters and fishermen with survival during the harsh winters when there was little else to do to make a living. By 1740 there were almost a dozen bothies – small primitive distilling shelters – lined alongside a mill in the small hollow along Lagavulin Bay. These later gave way to 2 full-fledged distilleries that combined in 1837 to form Lagavulin. The name comes from the Gaelic expression Lag A' Mhuillin which means "mill in the hollow". The distillery is located near the town of Port Ellen on the southeast shore of Islay.

Lagavulin's history is inextricably entwined with its close neighbor Laphroig and this relationship has often been quite confrontational. Secrets, styles, and even master distillers were sought by each and it's believed that at one point Lagavulin attempted to unsuccessfully mimic Laphroig's characteristic style. Interestingly, Lagavulin was one of the first distilleries to return to marketing its whisky as a single malt in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when blended whiskys predominated the market. This malt was then, and continues to be highly regarded both in Scotland and abroad.

Lagavulin is one of the great whiskys of Scotland that is complex and rich in peat – epitomizing the style recognized worldwide as traditionally Islay. It is a rich, weighty and complex malt that at 16 years old presents an excellent balance and concentration.

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