

SHOPPING FOR RARE, THREATENED AND ENDANGERED WHISKYS

HINTS AND TIPS

There are hundreds of different bottlings of single malts that are still reasonably available at specialty liquor stores in the United States. In some cases they are even affordable!

Currently there are probably 100 or so “commercial” single malt bottlings that are generally available across the country (the Washington State Liquor Board currently carries 58 bottlings from 34 different distilleries). These commercially available whiskys offer readily and reasonably affordable selections, but there are also other classes of “specialty” whiskys that are much harder to find and accordingly more expensive. Some of these are distributed under distillery labels but many more are only available from Independent Bottlers.

The Independents purchase casks of malt whisky from the distilleries and then bottle them under their own label. These bottlings tend to be more idiosyncratic – often with varying properties between bottles bearing the identical label. These are distributed in much smaller quantities than the commercial distillery releases and are generally more expensive and difficult to find. This is a list of most of the Independent Bottlers currently importing whisky into the United States – unfortunately the Washington State Liquor Board does not carry whisky from the Independents and you’ll need to search elsewhere for their whiskys:

Adelphi
Cadenheads
Connoisseur=s Choice
Cooper=s Choice
Glenhaven
Gordon & MacPhail
Hart Brothers
Michel Couvrier
Signatory
Whyte & Whyte

Cask strength malts

When shopping for single malts, be sure to check for the strength of the whisky when doing comparisons. Many independents bottle at cask strength which can run from 104 to 128 proof. You always have the option of diluting it down to the 40 - 43% level that distilleries generally

dilute their whisky down to before bottling to stretch out your bottles and reduce the price/volume accordingly.

But then again, sipping the cask strength whiskys at full strength also has its own rewards!

Since I've never seen this printed anywhere, I developed this theorem for dilution one evening while drinking malts with my friend Ron. So, Introducing:

Tim's Universal Dilution Formula for Cask Strength Whiskys and Other Substances...

$$(Amount\ of\ Whisky) \times ((\%cask / \%desired) - 1) = Amount\ of\ water\ to\ add\ to\ glass$$

where %cask is the original liquid to be diluted and %desired is the final concentration desired. That's about all there is to it.

Specialty Malt Distributors

Attached in the next section is a copy of a report from my whisky database listing whisky retailers across the country who have large selections of malt whiskys to choose from. Happy hunting!

LOST DISTILLERIES WHOSE WHISKYS CAN STILL BE FOUND

- Bladnoch** est 1814, mothballed in 1993 by UD and converted to museum in town of Bladnoch, Wigtownshire. This is a lowland malt that is scarce, but should remain available in limited quantities for years to come. Rumors that it might go into limited production in 1997 have not been confirmed yet.
- Coleburn** est 1897, closed in 1985, Attempts to convert to housing units were met with resistance in 1996, stalling the project. Distillery remains intact and could be restarted. No predictions here whether or not it will survive.
- Convalmore** est 1894, mothballed in 1985, Lost distillery. Sold to William Grant & Sons (WG&S) in 1987. Distillery equipment stripped out in following years and complex now used as warehousing facilities by WG&S.
- Glen Mohr** est. 1892, mothballed in 1983, demolished in 1986. Lost. A North Highland malt.
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GlenuryRoyal est 1836, rebuilt in mid-1960s, closed in 1985, and converted and/or demolished for residential development in 1992. Lost. An East Highland malt.

Milburn est. 1876, closed in 1985, Lost. Converted to steakhouse named "The Auld Distillery" in 1990. A North Highland malt.

Rosebank est. 1840, survived the largescale DCL closures of 1983 but mothballed in 1993. Considered by many to be one of the finest lowland malts, an excellent whisky and a recommended buy. It's still available in a range of bottlings, although difficult to find. Although it could conceivably be restarted, most consider this distillery to be lost.

MOTHBALLED DISTILLERIES WHOSE WHISKYS CAN STILL BE FOUND

Balmenach est. 1825, mothballed by United Distillers in 1993, still intact and could reopen. I have remnants of a bottle of 11 yo opened in Denver 3/98, available for tasting in my library of malts. This is a very classic speyside malt that should be tasted early in the evening.

Pittivaich est. 1970, mothballed in 1993, will likely reopen. Owned by United Distillers.

Tamnavulin est. 1966, one of the most modern, automated single-malt distilleries on the Speyside, Mothballed by Whyte & Mackay in 1995. Will likely reopen.

RECENTLY REVIVED DISTILLERIES OF NOTE

Ardbeg est. 1815, 1/3 capacity production from 1989 through February 1997 when it was purchased by Glenmorangie. They are reportedly ramping up production and planning interesting bottlings of this excellent single malt. Highly recommended but expensive (I haven't seen any Ardbegs for less than \$70, but there are supposedly more affordable 17yo offerings recently released in the US to mixed reviews.)

Glengarioch est. 1884 (also Oldmeldrum), Mothballed by Morrison Bowmore in 1995 and put up for sale. Reopened in early 1998. Many bottlings available at very reasonable prices -- look for special bottling from 1987! Generally a good, affordable, solid highland malt for everyday drinking.