

# THE WORLD OF WHISKY



## Scotch whisky

Scotch is distilled from malted barley and other grain oils, district peat smoke aromas, and aged in American oak barrels. Premium blends use aged grain blenders. Single malts are made only with straight barley malt, at the one named distillery. 'Vatted' Malts are blends of single malts from different distilleries. There are four main classified regions.

**The Highlands**, north of a line drawn from Dundee to Glasgow. The region makes mostly fine, malty, heather-peat scented styles. The 'golden rectangle' of the Speyside, between the south shore of Moray Firth and the mountains, produces most of the better Highland malts.

**The Lowlands**, south of this line, down to the English border. The Lowlands makes richer, broad-flavoured malt styles and also large volumes of malt and grain blenders.

**The Islands**, (Islay, Mull, Skye and the Orkneys). These have more

distinctive peat characters than any other malts.

**Campbelltown**, remote and isolated at the far end of the Mull of Kintyre. They make fine, lightly peated malts, closer to Highland than the big Islay or Lowlands styles nearby.

## Irish whisky

Distilling probably developed in Ireland centuries ahead of Scotland.

Irish whisky, like scotch, is distilled from malted barley in pot stills and aged in oak. Unlike scotch, it has very little peat smoke flavour. These whiskies show the sweet grain oil flavours and are all triple distilled — most scotches and cognacs are only double distilled.

## American whisky

American whiskies are based on rye and corn ferments. Rye was once the most common type of American whisky. Corn, the native American grain, now leads the field. Kentucky and Tennessee have become the heartland of America's best whiskies, mainly based on corn mash. Like 'grain' whisky blenders in Scotland, American whiskies start with a hot mash of unmalted, crushed grain and are mostly distilled in continuous 'patent' stills rather than pot stills.

Corn or rye whisky masses must comprise at least 51 per cent of that grain type. Tennessee distillers originated 'sour mash' ferments, adding spent residues of old ferments to new ones for more flavour complexity.

Most Kentucky distillers now sour-mash their bourbon ferments, also for this extra flavour complexity.

## Japanese whisky

The Japanese malt whisky industry started with Suntory in 1923. Its technology and skills are advanced

by world standards. The Japanese grow and malt barley, have local peat in Hokkaido and other places and grow some of their own cask oak.

They import barley from Australia and get special peats and malt whisky blenders from Scotland. They produce more malt whisky spirit per year than Scotland does, most of it sold and consumed in Japan. Most of their whiskies are lighter in body, with much lower peating than true scotch blends.

Our special this month is "The Macallan" scotch — a single Highland malt, 12 years old, for \$65.00.

— Wayne Nicholls

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