



MALTING, MILLING, MASHING And All That Jazz...

Suneeta Sodhi Kanga spotlights the pleasure of single malts in general and Glenfarclas in particular

WE all distinctly remember our fathers and grandfathers proudly pouring out the highly prized Scotch whisky, usually Black Label, for their special guests during formal celebrations and parties. This generation likes quenching their taste buds on Scotch, too, but seems to prefer single malts not just from Scotland but from other parts of the world as well. Scotch whisky (often referred to simply as ‘Scotch’) is malt whisky or grain whisky made in Scotland. Scotch whisky comes in various categories — single malt Scotch whisky, single grain Scotch whisky, blended malt Scotch whisky, blended grain Scotch whisky, and blended Scotch whisky. All Scotch whisky was originally made from malt (sprouted barley).

Scotch whisky must be aged in oak barrels for at least three years. What is interesting is that any age statement on a bottle of Scotch whisky reflects the age of the youngest whisky used to produce that product.

Glenfarclas, one such producer of Single Highland Malt Scotch Whisky with a heavy sherry influence, has been owned and managed by just one family since 1865.

They produce a wide range of expressions from the mouthwatering freshness of the 10-year-old, to the indulgent 30-year-old. Employing just over 30 people, of whom roughly half are employed in production, Glenfarclas is a relatively small company.

The distillery runs twenty four hours a day and many of the employees have long service records.

The distinctive character of Glenfarclas Single Highland Malt Scotch Whisky is a result not only of three essential ingredients — pure spring water, malted barley and yeast — but also the Grant family’s commitment to using traditional distillation methods.

The unique size and shape of the Glenfarclas copper pot stills; the specially selected oak casks; as well as the style and location of the warehouses also play a vital role.

George Grant, son of John, is the sixth generation of the family and the company’s brand ambassador.

George particularly enjoys introducing whisky lovers to the older expressions of Glenfarclas, those distilled by his grandfather and watched over by his father.

G2 had a chat with him at a tasting that was organised by The Oak League - A World Whisky Fellowship at The Club, Four Seasons Hotel, on his recent visit to Mumbai.

Is this your first trip to India?

No my fourth. It is my second trip to Mumbai.



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Producing the golden liquid

How and when did you choose Prestige to be your distributors in India?

Prestige is a joint venture company originally set up by Glenfarclas, Torres - Family Wines from Spain and Gautam Thapar of the Avantha Group. So it is a European - Indian joint venture. Prestige has been around for 10 years.

Since alcohol advertising is banned in India, what route do you plan to take to promote your brand in India?

Tasting, brand awareness, and word of mouth.

What does the name Glenfarclas mean?

Valley of green grassland.

What is the story behind your brand logo?

Our brand logo is how my great-grandfather wrote the name Glenfarclas, so it is kind of his signature!

Our other logo is the intertwined letters JGG which is our company name John and George Grant.

How would a typical 12-year-old from Glenfarclas be different from the other Glens (Glenmorangie, Glenlivet, Glenfiddich etc) ?

All distilleries differ in the style in which they produce their products. Glenfarclas uses direct fired stills and primarily uses sherry casks to mature the whisky in.

What barrels do you use and why?

We use various types of cask barrels (180 litres), hogsheads (250 litres) and butts (500 litres).

We use a lot of sherry casks — around 60 per cent.

Whisky matures slightly differently in different sizes of casks, so Glenfarclas is a marriage of whisky from different sized casks to give it that wonderful rounded full flavour.

Are your pot stills any different from the other Glen area distillers?

All pot stills are different, although inherently similar in shape. All distilleries will, of course, claim that their special shape is the source of their unique flavour.

Is single malt more expensive to produce than blended whisky?

Yes, malted barely is more expensive than straight barley.

Also grain whisky which makes up 80 per cent of a blended whisky is distilled in a Coffey still which is continuous whereas pot stills are done in a small batch.



Do you produce any blended whiskies?

Yes, though none are sold in India currently. We do a super premium blend in Spain called Highland Dream and our standard blend is called GlenDowan.

Most single malts are owned by large companies such as Pernod and Diageo. How do you survive as a smaller Scotch player?

We just keep saying no when a larger company comes to purchase us. You can only ever sell something like this once.

Glenfarclas really does flow through our family. It is a company, a brand that we are so incredibly proud of. We also are forever finding new ways to succeed in doing things our way not the way of the crowd.

Could you share with us an interesting story from your experiences as a brand ambassador.

Last year I was travelling to China with my wife and three-year-old daughter. We were going through Amsterdam airport. I was in duty free admiring the pyramid of Glenfarclas 12-year-olds that was on promotion. A gentleman arrived and put a bottle into his basket and walked away to continue shopping. I turned around to hear my daughter scream at the top of her lungs "He's stealing my daddy's whisky." I did what every good person should do and grabbed my daughter's hand and ran away as security guards went rushing past me to intercept the poor customer!

You belong to the sixth generation of Grants in this business. What are the next generation's plans? How many more generations do you think will continue with it?

Hopefully, at least another six. Next on the anvil will be to have a proper presence in India and China. Then we will have to wait and see. ☺



Whisky production: The Glenfarclas way

Pure Spring Water : The water in Speyside is exceptional for producing malt whisky. The melting snows of winter seep down through the peat, deep into the granite below, rising up as pure, crystal clear spring water, soft and slightly acidic, ideal for making whisky.

Malting (Steeping, Germination and Kilning): Newly harvested barley, is steeped (soaked) in water and germinated to start a complex chemical reaction. During germination, enzymes are produced which are vital for converting the starch into fermentable sugars. The green malt is then dried carefully to halt germination, and to reduce the moisture content during kilning. Peat smoke is also filtered through during this stage. Peat smoke contributes to the smoky aromas present in the whisky. During kilning, amino acids and sugars are degraded, or react together to produce distinctive roasted, malty flavours in the barley.

Milling and Mashing: The malted barley is ground in the five roll Buhler mill, into grist. During mashing, hot water is mixed with the grist, enabling the starches present to be converted into sugars. The sugars dissolve in the hot water and are extracted as sweet worts, which are vital for fermenting into alcohol.

Fermentation: The wort is cooled before the 100 per cent cultured distillers' yeast is added to start the conversion of the sugars into ethanol. Two stainless steel fermentation vessels, or wash backs, are used for fermenting the first and second worts extracted from the mash. After at least 48 hours, a malty alcoholic liquid called wash is produced. The wash is eight per cent abv and is often referred to as sour beer.

Distillation (First and Second): Distilled twice, the six traditional direct-fired copper pot stills, the largest on

Speyside, transform the cloudy wash into the crystal-clear new spirit required for maturing into the finest Glenfarclas Single Malt Scotch Whisky.

Maturation: To obtain the title of Scotch whisky, by law, the new spirit must be matured in oak casks, with a capacity no greater than 700 litres, in a warehouse in Scotland, for a minimum of three years.

Glenfarclas is matured in two types of casks: plain oak casks and Spanish sherry casks. Charring the casks releases carbon, which helps mellow the whisky. Lignin flavour compounds such as vanillins, produce vanilla aromas. Simple sugars are responsible for a slight sweetness. In the traditional-style dunnage warehouses, dating from the 1880s, the casks lie sleeping for a minimum of eight years. During this time, the casks are not disturbed, and the spirit evaporates at two per cent volume, which also reduces the alcohol content by an average 0.4 per cent abv per year. This is known as the 'Angel's Share'. Prior to bottling, the casks are emptied into vats, enabling the flavours to marry. By using two types of casks, all Glenfarclas is bottled at natural colour. The alcohol strength is also adjusted with the water. For example, 43 per cent for export and 40 per cent for the UK. It reaches 60 per cent between eight and 10 years of maturation.

Bottling - Glenfarclas is bottled at Broxburn Bottlers, near Edinburgh.

Final creations: Glenfarclas 105 (cask strength), abv 60% is deep peaty-gold, spicity yet amazingly smooth and dry. The finish rich and long lasting.

Glenfarclas 12 years old, abv 43 per cent is an amber-gold offering with delightful fruit, oak and sweet sensations. The finish is long and flavoursome.