



## Object of the Newsletter

*To promote the appreciation of fine Scotch Whisky, the area from which it comes, the people that inhabit the land and it's history. By the way, I do not profess to be an expert, I am merely expressing an opinion on the whiskies I am tasting.*

In this issue; I look at Springbank 15-year-old, from the Campbeltown Region (once proclaimed the 'whisky capital of the world') of Scotland, which I first tasted a few years ago while co-hosting a Whisky food pairing dinner at the Riviera Casino in Las Vegas.

The distillery was founded in 1828 by Archibald Mitchell and is now run by Hedley Wright, Mitchell's great, great grandson, the fifth generation of the Mitchell family to own and manage Springbank.

This is an outstanding whisky, I like this a great deal, highly recommended.

You can buy Springbank 15-year-old for around \$100.00 a bottle.

### Tasting Notes;

**Nose** - Dark chocolate, Christmas cake, almonds, toffee

**Palate** - Raisins, dark chocolate, marzipan & vanilla

**Finish** - Long with vanilla, Oak, sherry & cocoa

*If you have a personal favorite and you would like it to feature in future "Slange" newsletters, please let me know.*

*I can be contacted at my website [www.scot-talks.com](http://www.scot-talks.com)*

*"Slainte Mhath"*

*Paul Bissett*





## Thinking Drinkers: a beginner's guide to single malt whisky

*Struggling to get a foothold in the world of single malt whisky? Here's a primer to help novice drinkers make a choice that suits*

Beginners, eh? Rarely is a word uttered with such reckless and patronising abandon. Preceding everything from shallow-pool splashings to behind-the-bike-shed bunglings, the stigma brands you a novice, an amateur, a *virgin*. But in the world of single malt whisky, beginners are a welcome bunch. Keen, yet not demonstrating any of that gauche geekery; rarely blinded by hype; and stripped of the overbearing adjectives that thwart the satisfaction of a simple sip.

Better the beginner than the whisky snob.

The whisky world occasionally dumps these pompous plonkers at the bar, preaching about an uber-aged bottle that few drinkers will ever see. These dullards detect vanilla and spice and tropical fruit and Grandma's apple crumble and rainbows on the nose.

They sermonise about a short, medium, long finish that sparks memories of a childhood kicking leaves around the park, playing alone and imagining friends. Pretentious as they are intimidating, whisky snobs need to shut up, drink up and do one.

So it pays to be a beginner in single malts, particularly as you don't need to be choc full of knowledge to enjoy a decent dram. Indeed, it only takes a modest repertoire of phrases and titbits to help make the right choice for your palate.

And let's be honest, all we really care about is how it tastes.

Whisky is wonderful stuff and well worth investigating, so if you're not yet moved by the category and prefer a vodka and soda, it's time to man up and give it a go. Look at the state of manufacturing in this country, we don't produce many things here any more, but we do create whisky, so we should embrace it.

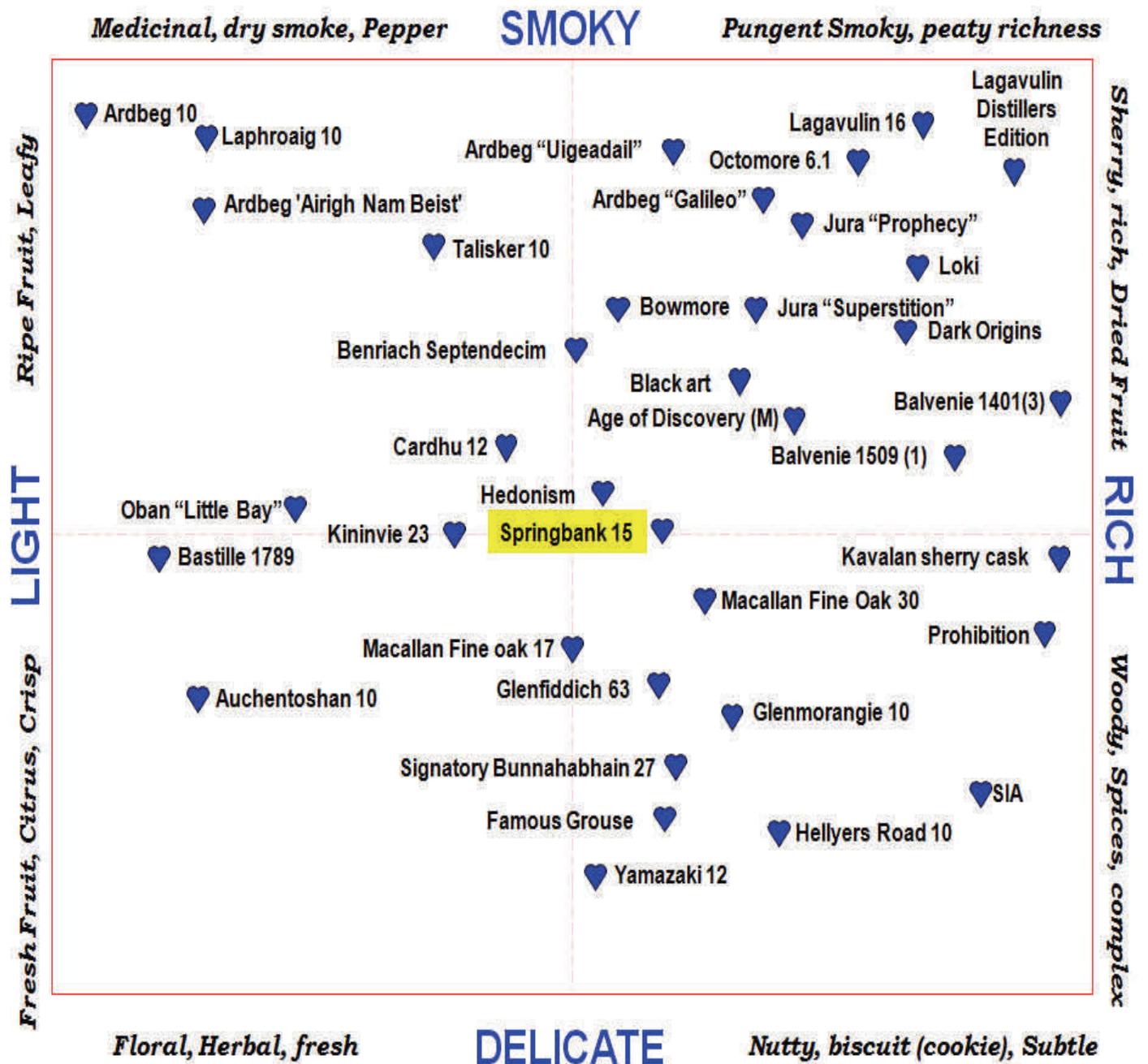
It's British after all. Just like Andy Murray.

Here then is a primer for the single malt neophyte. The first timer, the pioneer and the brave. You're about to embark on a wonderful journey.

Continued on Page 4.



Below is a simple guide to help you choose your single malt Whisky, and the flavor notes you should expect from it. Being Scottish I recommend you find a likely candidate and try it in a bar before buying the whole bottle. With each issue of the newsletter I will add in another Whisky to the flavor map. This Issue; Springbank 15-year-old. For more information go to <http://www.springbankwhisky.com>





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### **What is single malt whisky?**

Whisky is made from cereal that is mashed, fermented, distilled and aged and, in the case of malt whisky, the cereal is barley. Single malt whisky comes from one distillery, must be aged a minimum of three years in oak casks and bottled at a minimum alcohol by volume of 40%. Malt whiskies can vary dramatically, this is all down to the distillery approach to production with different copper pot stills and wood aging programmes impacting on the character. The reasons connoisseurs get their knickers in a twist is because making malt whisky is complex and an art, there's much more to explore and adore once you're hooked.

### **Region**

In single malts we generally consider four: Highland, Lowland, Speyside and Islands. The regions are not prescriptive of flavour, but the Lowland has historically produced lighter whiskies; the Highland region is vast and varied; Speyside is the heart of the whisky world and presents plenty of choice; and the Islands largely refers to Islay, with Skye and Orkney often added to the Highlands region. Islay in particular produces heavily peated whisky. Campbeltown, once a thriving hub of whisky production, is less prolific these days but the region produces slightly salty, dry and smoky whiskies.

### **Profile**

It helps to use top-line descriptors to find what you fancy, so here are four with some examples of brands to try:

*Light* – predominant flavours are fruits, nuts, light grassy notes with a fresh finish: [Glenfiddich 12-year old](#) is the number one selling single malt and for good reason, it's an accessible entry into this world. Elsewhere you'll find the [Glenkinchie 12 YO](#) is very easy on the lips while the [Tormore 12 YO](#) is super light.

*Delicate* – subtle nuts and floral aromas with sweet grains and light wood: the [Dalwhinnie 15 YO](#) and the [Glenlivet 15YO](#) are all particularly delicate drams.

*Rich* – bold but warm, chocolate, fudge, spiced fruits and biscuit: [Balvenie](#)

[DoubleWood 12](#), [Macallan 10 YO](#), [Glenmorangie 10 year old](#) and [Singleton 12 YO](#) all strong contenders.



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*Smoky* – spices like ginger, heat and smoke with long finishes: the Islay whiskies use peat to fuel the drying of barley, which delivers a potent smoke on the palate. [Highland Park](#) 12 YO from Orkney is a soft smoky sip, and [Talisker](#) 10 YO from Skye is also a subtle introduction. Moving through the gears though, you'll find smouldering smoke in [Lagavullin](#) 16YO, [Ardbeg](#) 10 YO or [Laphroaig](#) 10 YO.

### **Got wood**

Whisky off the still is called 'new make' and is reduced in strength before it cosies up in oak casks. The casks previously contain other booze, usually sherry or bourbon. Bourbon barrels are white American oak and give whisky notes of pine, cherry, vanilla and spice. Sherry is European oak and imparts dried fruit, clove and orange. You'll also discover other finishes, port, rum or wine. The wood allows oxygen in, which rounds off harsh notes in the whisky, at the same time the whisky takes on the characters of the wood such as valuable vanillins. Barrels can be filled more than once, the first fill whisky takes on more wood character, less in the second fill and eventually the wood gives no more and is re-charred for new use.

### **Age**

Age is just a number, right? Yeah man. Except that number is a crucial identifier in determining how old something is. So, really, the number is rather important. It'd certainly be daft to dismiss it in the world of whisky because it reveals how long a whisky has spent in a barrel, which has a huge impact on flavour and, often, price.

That said, approach an age statement with caution. Don't splash out on the old kit for the sake of it - look at the stick Wayne Rooney got. Besides, anything from around 10 to 15 years for single malts gives you great complexity and a fine understanding of the distillery that produces it. Our advice for beginners is to start at this level and explore older age statements as you learn to appreciate a distillery style. A significant trend in the whisky world is the 'No Age Statement'. Amongst the best are the recently launched [Glenlivet Alpha](#) or [Talisker Storm](#).

### **Price point**

The age statements suggested above should give you a very decent return on flavour and at a very reasonable investment ranging between £30 and £50.



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### **With water?**

Contrary to common perception, water is not only allowed, but also encouraged in certain whiskies, particularly those of cask strength - those higher in alcohol than the minimum 40%. Just a few drops can open up aromas and soften a dram. Alcohol burn is something you'll need to become accustomed to over time, but you'll enjoy yourself trying. As a warning though, ice chills the drink and dulls some of the aromas and flavours.

### **Key words**

It helps to drop a few factoids into your bar chat:

Angels' share – the whisky lost in evaporation during aging – around 3% a year.

Cask strength – when the whisky has finished maturing it will be around 50/60% abv and is then reduced with water. Cask strength whiskies might be your next step.

Dram – a measure of whisky, size varies according to generosity of host.

Finish – how long the flavour sticks around in your chops. A long finish is only useful if you enjoy the flavours. Most of us simply want a happy finish.

Hogs Head – The 250 litre/63 gallon cask most commonly used in maturing whisky.

Nose – a physical protuberance converted into a verb – "to nose" simply means to smell. Daft.

Peat – carbonised soil. It's like a mix of mud and coal.

Single cask – single malt comes from one run off a still at one distillery but can be placed into and taken from a mix of barrels. Single barrel simply means it came from one barrel.

Stills – where the whisky is distilled. Each distillery has its own and it gives the new make its distinctive character.

Obviously we've only skimmed the surface here and while we don't advocate snobbery, there's plenty to celebrate in whisky. It's easy to become an enthusiast. There's also scope to muck about with some truly glamorous gear, we recently enjoyed the Lagavullin 37-year old, a special release that retails for £1,950 and is top banana. So once you're locked in, don't hold back. Added to which there's a world of whisky out there, this column doesn't address blends, Japanese, or indeed Irish and American and all deserve mention. They'll come along in future columns...

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/the-filter/10430685/Thinking-Drinkers-a-beginners-guide-to-single-malt-whisky.html>