



## 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.*

I now look at Glen Grant “five decades”, which I first heard of a couple of years ago at WhiskyFest in San Francisco.

I didn't try it that night, as I didn't see it, it was through talking to my friend Ken Misch and asking him what was the best whisky he had tasted all night? His reply was Glen Grant “five decades”.

Damn! Lack of planning on my part caused me to miss out, fortunately a couple of months later another friend Mark Jones walked into my office with a bottle of it.

This whisky was made by marrying together casks of whisky maturing over the past five decades, as a homage to their master distiller Dennis Malcom. Dennis Malcolm, who was born on the distillery's grounds in 1946. At the age of 15, Malcolm began working at the distillery as a cooper, and was promoted to Master Distiller in 2006.

The “five decades” is light and creamy with complex fruity flavors, this Whisky is very “Moreish”, don't know if that's a word or not, but that's what this whisky is, if you try it, you'll want another drink of it.

You can buy the Glen Grant five decades for around \$150.00 a bottle.

### Tasting Notes;

**Nose** - Apricots, honey & toffee

**Palate** - Apricots, peaches, melon, vanilla pudding

**Finish** - As above tastes like pudding/dessert

*“Slainte Mhath”*

*Paul Bissett*





## YOUR WORST WHISKY NIGHTMARE

I should preface this piece by stating up front that it reflects the thoughts of an Australian and the general state of the whisky industry as it presented itself within Australia 10, 20, and 25 years ago. Readers in other countries may have had different experiences and opportunities...

Picture the following two scenarios:

You walk into your favourite bottleshop or off-licence looking to see if there are any new and exciting releases, or simply just to pick up new single malt expression that you'd recently heard about. You head to the whisky section of the store, where there's normally a selection of 30 to 40 different malts and brands to choose from. You get there, only to find that the shelves have been stripped almost totally bare. The only whiskies left on the shelf for you to choose from are Glenfiddich 12yo, Glenlivet 12yo, Johnnie Walker Red and Black Labels, and VAT 69.

Exiting the store in despair, you rush to your favourite whisky bar, in need of a good Scotch to calm your racing pulse. You scan the shelf behind the barman, desperately looking for a juicy, non-filtered, cask-strength dram. Instead, you see only a bottle of Chivas Regal 12yo.

Is this your worst whisky nightmare? No. It's reality.

It's what life was like in 1989.

I am genuinely thrilled and delighted in the boom that the whisky industry is currently experiencing. Whisky is fashionable, it has an audience, it has a market, the distilleries are in full production, and people of all ages and demographics are flocking to its door. There are thousands of web pages, internet groups, and discussion pages devoted to whisky; there are whisky clubs that meet throughout cities and suburbia each night of the week; and there are books and magazines galore. Drinkers who are new to the category have never had it so good. But it wasn't always this way.....

At the risk of sounding like an old fart who begrudges the easier passage that the younger generation coming through are enjoying, I get a little bemused when I read and see some of the discussions and dilemmas that some of today's whisky drinkers get their knickers in a twist about...

*"Oooh, I can't decide whether to buy the sauternes wood finish or the burgundy wood finish"*

*"Jim McEwan is hosting a tasting in town next week, but it's on the same night as my whisky club's quarterly meeting."*

*"The webcam inside the warehouse is really low-res, and I can't get a decent image of the cask numbers painted on the barrels."*



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. This Issue; *The "Naked" Grouse* For more information go to <http://www.glengrant.com>





It's the whisky industry's equivalent of the now-common cliché, "First world problems". The above quandaries would leave a whisky drinker from 20 years ago seriously puzzled! Wood finishes didn't exist and most brands only had one, maybe two expressions available; distillery managers didn't travel the world; suburban whisky clubs didn't exist; and the idea of seeing inside a distillery was limited solely to those who made the effort to get themselves to the small handful of distilleries that were open to the public.

Let's look at some crucial aspects of how the whisky landscape has changed in the last 20 years. In fact, scratch that. No, let's just look at how much it's changed in the last 10 years:

The choice and range before us today is incredible. Look at the diversity within the core-range expressions of most of the mainstream brands. Distilleries like Glenfarclas, Highland Park, Glenmorangie, Glenfiddich, Glenlivet, etc, have as many as 8, 9, even 10 different releases within their core range, before we even start to look at their special or limited releases. Compare this to just 10 years ago when a number of distilleries had just one expression available, and brands like Macallan were considered brilliant because they had three: The 12yo, the 18yo, and the 25yo. Information is not just at your fingertips, but the breadth and depth of knowledge you can now acquire about whisky without even leaving your house is phenomenal. You can go online and take virtual tours of the distilleries, with photos or even live-stream videos showing each stage of the production process. If you have a favourite distillery, you can find out almost anything about it without even having to set foot in Scotland. As recently as a decade ago, most of the distilleries were still shrouded in mystery, and many of them still weren't actually producing an OB of their own product. If you wanted to "do some research" you would buy Michael Jackson's "Malt Whisky Companion" and – if you were a real whisky nerd – you subscribed to a brand new publication just out called Whisky Magazine. Information was hard to come by, and if you had a specific question that you wanted an answer to, you would actually – get this – *write a letter and mail it to the distillery!*

Whisky bottlers have finally seen the light and are starting to bottle whisky the way it should be enjoyed: Cask strength, no caramel added, and no chill-filtration. (Of course, the Scotch Malt Whisky Society has been doing this for over 30 years, but it's nice that other brands and bottlers have finally cottoned on.)

Whisky bars. They actually exist now. 'Nuff said.

We have now given rise to the celebrity distiller. Those on the production side of things are now not only responsible for *making* the whisky, they also have to *promote* it. The distillery managers are obliged to attend whisky fairs, give master classes, make press releases, give tours, host online tastings, and travel the world as a Brand Ambassador. When you look at the amount of time that guys like Bill Lumsden, Richard Patterson, and Jim McEwan, etc spend out on the road (to name merely a few), it's a miracle they actually get their main job done. The point is, you used to have to go to the distilleries. Today, the distilleries come to you.

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My only point here is not to smugly denigrate or belittle the experience and pleasures of whisky enjoyment in today's landscape, but merely just to point out that we're dramming in privileged times.

So before you choose to complain about why a certain distillery's release isn't available in your market; or whinge that the new cask-strength release from Glen Bagpipe costs over \$130 whilst the cask-strength release from Glen Sporrán is only \$110; or complain that there wasn't enough food to eat at the latest whisky expo show you attended; or lament that your favourite whisky bar is always crowded.....just remember that you have access to whiskies, information, events, people, and industry collateral that extends beyond the wildest imagination of what whisky enthusiasts could remotely envisage just 20 or even 10 years ago.

Now, before this starts to read like an opinion piece where everything today is perfect and everything in yesteryear sucked, let me bring balance to the force and outline just a few little things where today's drinking experience suffers compares to what was happening 10 years ago:

Black Bowmore cost \$250 instead of \$5,000 !!

Macallan's whiskies were still made with Golden Promise barley and they were both (a) unbelievably delicious, and (b) affordable and no more expensive than the next brand

You could use the term "vatted malt." Not only did people understand what you meant, but you didn't get a slap on the wrist!

Whisky was made for drinking, not collecting. There was little or no secondary market, and when a distillery put out something really special, it cost five times what a normal whisky would cost, not 125 times the price. The expectation was that people would drink, share, and enjoy their purchases, not look to profiteer from it. It was only a matter of time before the distilleries realised they could cut out the middle man and charge the same price that whiskies were changing hands for in ridiculous auctions anyway. The result now is that there are some amazing, incredible whiskies being bottled and sold at prices that ensure the vast majority of us will never get the chance to taste them. 10 or 20 years ago, those amazingly rare and special whiskies were within the realistic grasps of most punters.

Of course, I haven't even ventured into that most dangerous territory of asserting whether or not whisky was actually better quality 10 or 20 years ago! What do you think? There's no doubt that distilleries today now have a much better understanding of maturation; they have in place quality wood regimes; and the consistency of production on a day-to-day basis is better than ever. But simple laws of statistics enter into things: 20 years ago, one cask in every 100 was being bottled as a single malt, so you were drinking the top 1% of production.

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Today, that's no longer the case, and the pool of casks being bottled for single malt is dramatically bigger – which means, mathematically, the quality has to slip somewhere. And, 20 years ago, we were drinking whiskies made from Golden Promise Barley, and distilled in stills that used direct fired heating (arguably leading to a caramelisation influence on the distillate), AND they were filled into sherry butts that hadn't been tainted by sulphur!!

So – after all that – is it better to be a whisky drinker in 1989 or in 2014?

**With thanks to Whisky and Wisdom;**

<http://www.whiskyandwisdom.com/?p=287#more-287>

