



## 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. "Slainte."*

In this issue I look at Johnnie Walker "Green Label." Of all the Johnnie Walker bottlings, Green was the only Blended Malt Whisky. All their other bottlings are Blended Scotch Whisky (a mixture of various single malts and grain whisky). The fifteen year old Green is a mixture of four Single malts: Talisker, Caol Ila, Cragganmore and Linkwood (not normally sold as a single malt). All with a minimum age of 15 years. Johnnie Walker is owned by the Diageo company and is not a distiller, but a blender, who blends whiskies purchased from 27 different Scottish Distilleries.

Blended malt or vatted malt or pure malt, how Green Label was previously known, means that the blend contains no grain whisky and it consists of single malt whiskies only. In 2004 the latter two descriptors were reclassified as "blended malt" by the Scotch Whisky Association to standardize Scotch whisky descriptors and to avoid confusion.

You can buy Johnnie Walker Green Label Blended Malt for around \$55.00 a bottle.

### Tasting Notes;

**Nose** - Heather, honey, green apple, banana.

**Palate** - Vanilla, banana & light smoke,

**Finish** - Heather & honey

*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*





## Whisky galore - but which one's best? [www.scotsman.com](http://www.scotsman.com)

WHEN Edinburgh whisky agent Andrew Usher decided to mix his drinks 150 years ago, he couldn't have known how successful his "cocktail" would become - or how controversial. Scotch is now the biggest-selling spirit from any one country in the world, but more than 90 per cent are blends of malt and grain whiskies, a process started by Usher in 1853.

Yet as people raise a glass to our national bard this Burns night, most connoisseurs worth their malt will argue that the best whiskies are single malts - those produced by a single distillery.

Whether their favourite is a gentle Glenmorangie, a heathery Highland Park or a peaty, powerful Laphroaig, they wouldn't dream of letting a blended Scotch pass their lips.

But should they turn up their noses at blends? The perceived wisdom may be that single malts are the kings of Scotch, and blends are for those who can't afford the best, but some experts believe that's just snobbery which actually damages one of Scotland's most successful industries.

Whisky earns the Scottish economy a staggering 2 billion a year and sustains 41,000 jobs. But it's doubtful that it would have overtaken sales of Cognac in France or Ouzo in Greece unless it had been blended by pioneers such as Usher, who was an agent for Glenlivet (and whose family built Edinburgh's Usher Hall).

While the stronger flavors of some malts might be appreciated today, Usher first started blending to make their fiery flavors more palatable. He first combined different malts to balance out their flavors, and later mixed malt and grain whisky to produce a lighter blend. But all of that doesn't mean that blends are inferior, says award-winning master blender Richard Patterson, of Kyndal Spirits, makers of Whyte and MacKay and producers of single malts and blends for Tesco.

"More than 90 per cent of all whiskies are blends. Historically, especially in Edinburgh, where blending first started, blends have been very popular," he says.

"There is no question that in recent years single malts have captured a greater awareness, but as far as the blended whiskies are concerned they are still a force to be reckoned with.

"The quality is entirely dependent on how much you are prepared to pay. From the lower end to the higher end you will get a variation of flavors. It might be lighter because it's got less malt but that doesn't mean that it's inferior."

Barrie Wilson, head barman of Edinburgh's Zinc Bar, says sales of blends and bourbons are more popular but partly because the snobbery associated with malt whisky puts people off.

"People tend to enjoy a malt only at the end of their evening. However, single malts are very popular with the young, chic crowds in London and Paris and, as with most fashionable trends, this is slowly translating itself to the Scottish market.

"Instead of approaching drinking in a hard and fast way, there is a re-emphasis on savoring flavor, which whisky is ideally suited to. Single malts also appeal because they are seen as sophisticated without being showy."

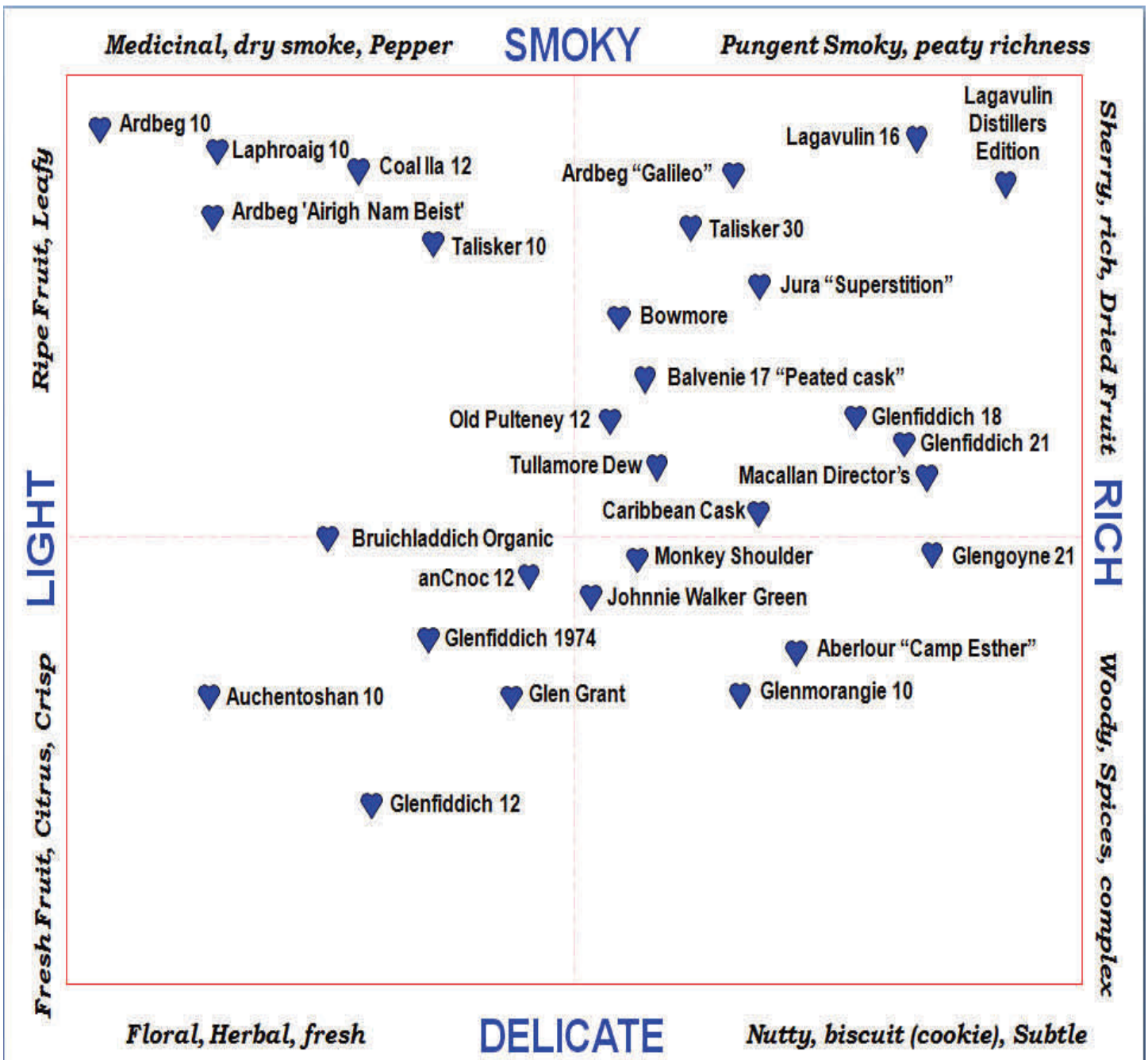
He adds: "Nevertheless, snobbery still exists surrounding the consumption of whisky, and in particular concerning the division between single and blended malts.

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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; [Johnnie Walker Green Label](http://www.johnniewalker.com) For more information go to <http://www.johnniewalker.com>





As the 'Scottish champagne', single malts have appealed to some drinkers as a status symbol because their quality and price connote wealth and as such their more affordable cousins are sometimes looked down on." Professor Geoff Palmer, an expert in brewing and distilling, based at Edinburgh's Herriot-Watt University, agrees. "Quality is a very emotive word - I always say that quality is meeting the expectations of the customer," he says.

"It is all very subjective, and blended whisky is often a very sophisticated product. Your average blend can contain 30 to 50 malt whiskies. One of the most expensive whiskies in the world is Johnnie Walker Blue Label, and that's a blend."

He's right about the price - it retails for around \$200.00 a bottle - and it's doubtful that Gangs of New York director Martin Scorsese would have decided to endorse any old gut-rot brand. Even Johnnie Walker Black Label (a lot cheaper at around \$28.00, still costs almost as much as a single malt) contains 40 different malts, including the fruity Cardhu and the peppery Talisker.

Blending whisky is an extremely complex skill, as flavors have to be carefully balanced to complement and not overpower each other. There is an incredible variety between Scotland's whisky-producing regions, from strong peaty malts in Islay - such as Prince Charles' favourite tippie Laphroaig - to the grassier flavors of Lowland malts like Rosebank.

One of the lighter but more complex is the Highland malt Glenmorangie, the top seller in Scotland, but even its master blender John Smith closely guards the recipe for their top blend, Bailie, Nicol, Jarvie.

"We once had some Swedish visitors who asked us for the recipe after it won an award at a Swedish festival, but we declined to give it out," he says. "We take great pride in our blends as well as our single malts. Bailie Nicol Jarvie contains 60 per cent malt, and we try to project it as the malt drinker's blend. It's quite sweet, it's aromatic with Highland, Speyside and a little bit of Islay."

The regional variation of these malts reflects the diverse geology and geography of Scotland, and has helped make Scotch whisky such a global success. But Julie Hunter, of the Scotch Whisky Heritage Centre in Edinburgh, says we shouldn't underestimate the pioneers of blending such as Usher, Johnnie Walker, William Grant and Tommy Dewar.

"Each bottle of malt will reflect the characteristics of the cask it was matured in and the type of wood, but the skill of the blenders is to use these differences to produce something that is really smooth. Whisky is all about Scotland and its geography, but also the character of its people, and this really shows through in the blends."

And while she agrees that many visitors to the centre aren't keen to sample the welcoming dram when they find out it isn't a single malt, she says many are pleasantly surprised.

"A lot of people think because they are cheaper, they are not so good, but once they have tasted them they often change their minds. We have done blind taste tests and often people pick out a blend rather than a single malt as their favourite."

Sukhinder Singh, of specialist drinks retailers [thewhiskyexchange.com](http://thewhiskyexchange.com), says it is very difficult to say whether malts or blends are better.

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"I think it is more a personal thing - if the whisky has mixers added then it makes more sense to buy a blend. If drinking neat or with a touch of water, then malts have more select flavors. This means that some malts have such unique and exceptional taste profiles that they cannot be compared to any other malt or blend - examples would be Ardbeg, Talisker and Springbank. "Also, there are some malts on the market that are not so interesting and sell by packaging alone. However, these can be blended with other malts to create something quite superb with a nice range of flavors. This could be why many master distillers prefer blends to malts." And it seems the debate about the best of Scotch whiskies is a global argument, as Geoff Palmer discovered while he spent three months as a visiting professor at the University of Kyoto in Japan. "On the first day the principal called all the professors together, and he said to me: 'I have one important question to ask you - which is the best Scotch?' "I just said, you drink what you like and like what you drink . . . there are no bad Scotch whiskies."

#### **TOP MALT WHISKIES:**

**Glenfiddich** - this easy-drinking Speyside malt is the biggest-selling in the UK

**Glenmorangie** - translating as "glen of tranquility", this is Scotland's favourite

**Highland Park** - whisky connoisseur Michael Jackson said this Orkney malt is the best all-rounder

**Laphroaig** - this powerful whisky is the favourite tippie of the Prince of Wales

**Glenlivet** - the malt behind the first of the commercial blends, Old Vatted Glenlivet

#### **TOP BLENDED WHISKIES:**

**Famous Grouse** - the best-selling blend in Scotland

**Bells** - blended from malts matured for at least eight years, this is a UK market leader

**Bailie Nicol Jarvie** - a sweet blend from the makers of Glenmorangie

**Johnnie Walker Black Label** - this complex blend gives the lie to claims of inferiority

**Whyte and MacKay** - remember you don't have to be double mature to drink it

With thanks to the Scotsman Newspaper [www.scotsman.com](http://www.scotsman.com)