



## 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 am merely expressing my opinion on the whiskies I am tasting, as you know, everybody has one.*

I now take a look at the Glen Keith "Distiller's Edition," this is a no age statement NAS whisky and was the first release by the distillery after being re-opened in 2013.

It has been matured in American white oak casks and bottled at 40% ABV.

What did I think of it?

Taste; Not dissimilar to a Glenfiddich 15-year-old, which is a very good thing, there are similar flavors there, unfortunately, this would be Glenfiddich-lite. Yes, the flavors are there, just not as well pronounced, this needs a few more years in the cask to deepen its flavors.

Also the finish is a bit short, again more aging would improve that.

Would I buy it? I do love the similar flavors to the Glenfiddich 15, but I think I would rather pay an extra \$20.00 and get the real thing rather than a pale imitation. I do intend to try a few other Glen Keith's as I believe there is potential there for good whiskies.

You can buy Glen Keith "Distiller's Edition" for around \$35.00 a bottle.

### Tasting Notes

**Nose** - Sweet fruit

**Palate** - Honey, pears & vanilla

**Finish** - Short with oak and a little heat

*"Slainte Mhath"*

*Paul Bissett*





## Whisky Is Becoming Over-Complicated

by Becky Paskin

‘What’s the difference between a first-fill cask, an ex-Bourbon cask and a fine oak cask?’ This seemingly complex question, posted by a curious mind in one of Facebook’s many whisky groups recently, along with its equally confused responses, couldn’t be more appropriate in its timing.

*‘What’s a fine oak cask?’*

*‘Some have fine oak written on the label.’*

*‘That’s not really a thing.’*

*‘Isn’t it the opposite of coarse oak?’*

If you weren’t already aware, ‘Fine Oak’ was the name given to a line of *Macallan* expressions matured in a combination of Sherry-seasoned European and American oak casks, and ex-Bourbon casks. The range was *renamed in April 2018 as Macallan Triple Cask* to reflect the three types of cask used during maturation, and as a means to simplify whisky terminology for puzzled consumers.

It’s no wonder we’re confused. The whisky industry uses so many different terms for cask types, and several even to describe exactly the same thing – first-fill, ex-Bourbon, American oak, whisky cask, traditional cask – all apparently denote a barrel used once by America’s Bourbon industry and shipped to Scotland to be filled with Scotch. Yet perky marketing departments continue to believe there’s a need to invent new ways to describe an ex-Bourbon cask, presumably because us whisky drinkers don’t understand the concept of refilling a barrel.

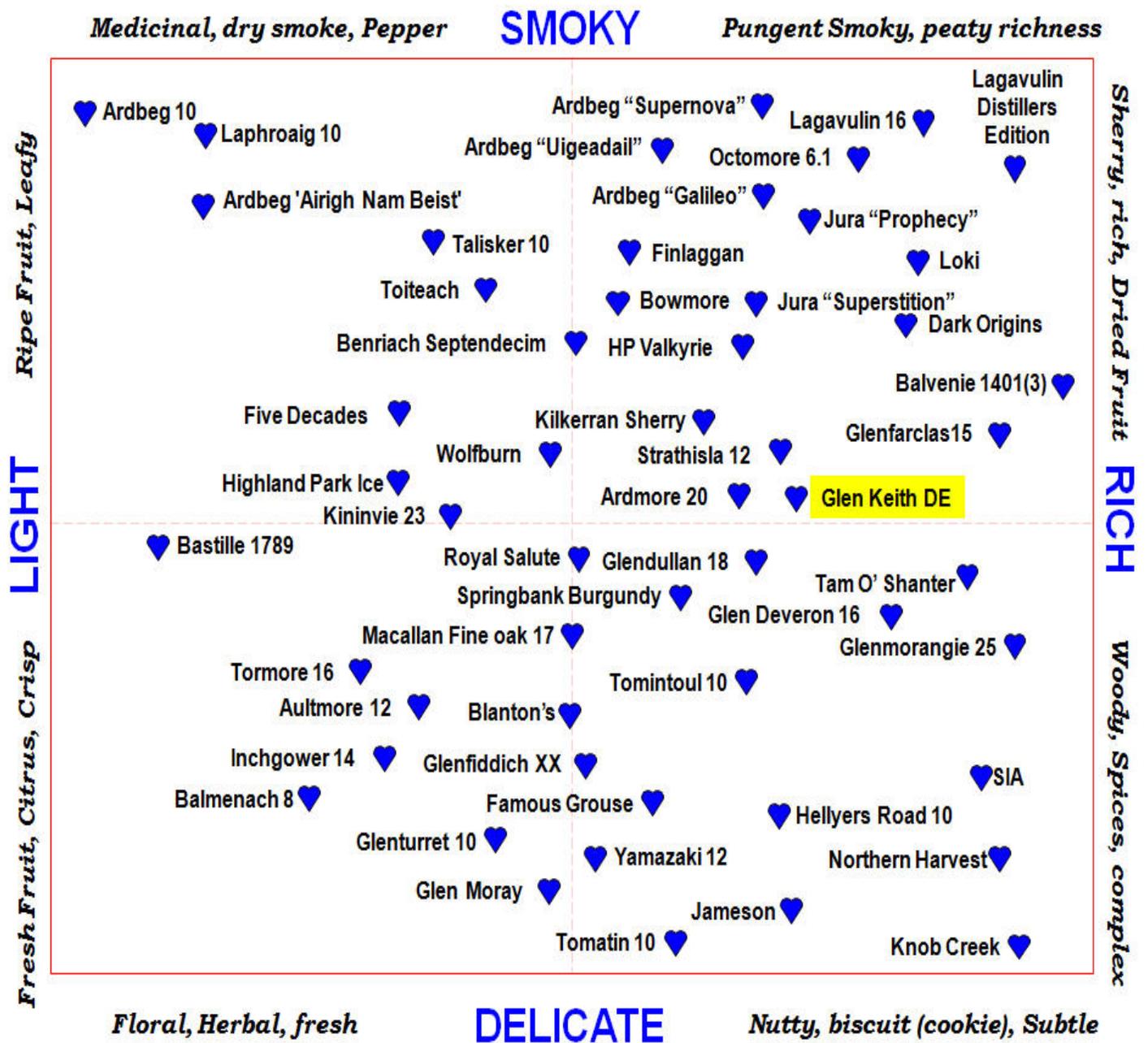


*For beginners:*

*Aerstone’s Sea Cask and Land Cask are designed to demystify language associated with Scotch*



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; [Glen Keith "Distiller's Edition."](#)





## Whisky Is Becoming Over-Complicated cont.

For well-heeled whisky enthusiasts, navigating this minefield of ‘clever’ marketing terminology has become second nature (do you guys understand what all these terms mean, or are you making educated guesses?). But wouldn’t it be nice to be able to purchase a whisky without having to consult a thesaurus?

Every few weeks *Scotchwhisky.com* hears about a new malt or blend introduced for a ‘millennial’ audience who are new to whisky. The flavour profile is inoffensive, the branding bright and engaging, and occasionally some ‘witty’ new way to explain whisky is introduced for obtuse shoppers who don’t go to bars, use Google, or have a mind of their own. All this with the aim of simplifying what has become infamously known as an ‘intimidating’ drink.

The latest attempt at recruiting the new whisky drinker comes from William Grant & Sons’ *new single malt brand, Aerstone* – a fictional name fusing the Gaelic word for ‘air’ and the word stone, denoting the earth. Two expressions have been launched as Tesco exclusives in the UK, with names designed to represent the flavours found within the whisky: Sea Cask and Land Cask.

‘A lot of people new to single malt are confused and intimidated by all the language around it,’ Kevin Abrook, global whisky specialist for *William Grant* told me. ‘They want to know more but they find it a bit overwhelming, so we wanted to launch a single malt that appealed to those people breaking down the barriers, focusing very much on flavour.’

Although both expressions are distilled at the *Ailsa Bay* distillery in Ayrshire, *one is peated, the other isn’t*. One might assume that because many coastal distilleries produce a smoky malt, the Sea Cask expression is the peated one, but not so. Peat comes from the land don’t you know, so Land Cask is the peaty one.

So what does Sea Cask mean? Surely it’s not matured under the sea... ‘This whisky develops its character from the time spent ageing in warehouses located close to the sea on the Ayrshire coast, giving the whisky a subtle salty note on the finish,’ says the press release. However the casks used for Land Cask are also matured at the same site at Girvan, albeit slightly further inland where the salty sea air supposedly has less of an impact on the cask.



## **Whisky Is Becoming Over-Complicated** cont.

OK, so what we're really talking about here is terroir, that the location of a cask has an impact on a whisky's flavour, even if it's a few metres apart. Individual casks mature differently, even within the same warehouse, imparting unique flavours depending on the cask's size, prior filling, treatment, age, location at the top or bottom of the warehouse or – in Aerstone's case – its proximity to the sea. That's pretty in-depth stuff, isn't it? For a new whisky drinker cask terroir represents a new world of whisky geekery that has to be intimidating, surely.

Furthermore, by only communicating the location of a cask as a signpost for flavour (alongside a 10-year-old age statement I should add), William Grant & Sons – perhaps inadvertently – is telling new whisky drinkers that terroir is a cask's most important contribution to flavour.

In its defence, Sea Cask and Land Cask feature flavour notes in smaller typeface on each bottle, respectively 'smooth and easy' and 'rich and smoky'. This I understand – this is easy for anyone to understand (let's not start a debate on the loose meaning of the term 'smooth' though). Why confuse things by inventing whisky names that could be mistaken for new cask types?

When I, like many others, began my whisky journey I was initially taught how the two main types of cask used to mature Scotch – ex-Bourbon and ex-Sherry – influence flavour. One gives it vanilla fudge flavours, the other spicy, dried fruit and Christmas cake notes. Simple enough to understand, and any blender, distiller, whisky maker will agree the cask type has an impact on flavour. By prioritising cask terroir as the primary flavour contributor, and introducing new 'cask types', Aerstone is arguably starting new whisky drinkers off on the wrong foot. Soon Facebook forums will be filled with questions about why other distilleries aren't using 'land' or 'sea' casks. Perhaps, as Brian Kinsman, master blender for William Grant told me, the whisky landscape 'would be bland if everybody says this is Bourbon and it gives you vanilla, and this is a peated malt and that gives you smoke'.

From conversations I've had with new drinkers, many believe whisky is distilled in barrels, without really understanding what distillation is. Those of us fluent in Scotch have to remember beginners' level of knowledge is low – ultimately the only thing they're looking for when choosing a whisky is 'what does it taste like?' 'Will I enjoy it?' The industry needs to appeal to consumers' fundamental understanding of flavour with a uniform approach to common whisky terms that doesn't lead to confusion later down the line. The invention of marketing gumpf to promote a single brand is short sighted.

But maybe I'm reading too much into it. Maybe I'm the one over-complicating things.

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