



Object of the Newsletter

To promote the appreciation of fine 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 look at the Nikka Coffee Grain whisky, This is not a single malt, but a single grain whisky made with corn. Which I first tasted on this day (17th December) in 2014 at Duke's Waikiki. I remember the day because it's my wife's birthday and it was my first taste of Japanese whisky.

I have to say that I was pleasantly surprised, I liked this whisky a lot and it has become a gateway whisky for me as I have since tasted many Japanese whiskies and I can't say that I've had a bad one.

The name may lead you to think that it has a coffee flavor, but it is made at the Miyagikyo distillery using two Coffee stills that Nikka imported from Scotland in 1963 hence the name.

Would I buy it, yes I would. I like the flavor and the price is reasonable.

[You can buy Nikka Coffee Grain whisky for around \\$50.00 a bottle.](#)

Tasting Notes

Nose - Cereal, herbs & vanilla.

Palate - Grapefruit, melon & vanilla.

Finish - Cereal, honey & vanilla.



"Slainte Mhath"

Paul Bissett



Retracing the Scottish roots of Japanese whisky

The founder of Nikka whisky learned much of his craft in Scotland

By SEAN MURPHY

In Japan, there is an old proverb:-

“Koketsu ni irazunba koji wo ezu - if you do not enter the tiger’s cave, you will not catch its cub.”

Sometimes if you don’t take risks you cannot gain great reward, in 1918 this must have been the spirit with which Masataka Taketsuru set out on the long journey to Glasgow to study chemistry and learn the secrets of distilling in the home of whisky.

A tiger’s cave however, might have been a less daunting option, for Japan was very much an insular country in those pre WWII days and even though Taketsuru was well travelled in his homeland, Scotland must have seemed like a strange and sometimes scary new world.

He must have been an odd sight. A dapper, well-dressed Japanese man walking through Buchanan Bus Station while whistling Japanese folk songs to calm his nerves before setting off by bus to the campus hidden beneath the gothic spires of Glasgow University Chapel.

It was here that he continued his quest for knowledge. The buildings there must have been stunning to him, the strange architecture so different from the small Japanese buildings of his home town.

This would be his base for the next few years and although he would travel north to Speyside, the whisky heartland and south to Campbeltown peninsula (to study at Hazelburn distillery) it was Glasgow he would return to and eventually find his true love.

For having spent his meagre earnings on his travels he was forced to seek cheaper accommodation in the small town of Kirkintilloch, with the Cowan family. It was while living here that he found that whisky knowledge was not all Scotland had to offer, for in the company of the Mr and Mrs Cowan’s eldest daughter, Rita, he found an enduring love. The story is said that one Christmas eve, while the family introduced Taketsuru to the British tradition of the pudding, that when Rita found the ring (a symbol of marriage) and Taketsuru the thimble (the symbol of a blessed life and good luck), this was seen as the traditional sign of serendipity and blossoming love.

Though he and Rita eventually returned to Japan to be married - also where Taketsuru founded Nikka to become the father of Japanese whisky (his teachings still guide Japanese whisky making to this day) - he never forgot his adoptive homeland.



Retracing the Scottish roots of Japanese whisky cont.

Mixology

And so it was in that adventurous spirit that the competitors of the recent Nikka Coffey Blend perfect serve mixology competition must have set out with. Hailing from several major countries in Europe including France, Italy, Germany, Russia, the Czech Republic and the UK, they had indeed come from far and wide. The Competition, now in its 3rd year and traditionally held in Paris (the home of Maison du whisky, the biggest importer of Japanese whisky in Europe) has moved its setting, the organisers deciding to choose Glasgow and the beautiful Blythswood Hotel.

Stanislav Vdrna, the Nikka global ambassador is well aware of why the city was the perfect choice, 'it just relates to the history so well, this is where the whole story [of Nikka] began, this is the birth place of Japanese whisky.' So, it is in front of the impressive gantry of the Blythswood's Salon bar that the competitors gather, a sense of impetus grows as each of them begins to set up their preparations within the bar itself.

Adam McGurk of the Hawksmoor in London won the British heats and wearing a nifty bow tie, cuts a classically English figure, though his demeanour is even cooler than his style. This, it seems, comes with the territory of being a mixologist. Adam isn't nervous; he's been to events like this before though maybe not with the prestige of this one. "I won the Jack Daniel's 150th birthday competition recently, and as the winner I'm off to Tennessee next year." So why wasn't he nervous?

"Simple, I use the teachings of Bruce Lee, I've learned the technique, mastered it and now it's time to forget it and concentrate on the task ahead."

He isn't the only competitor who's confident either, Doreen Philipp of Germany, is the only girl in the competition but she's not bothered by the pressure that brings, "I like to mix it up with the boys," no pun intended, "girls offer a different perspective, we like to pay more attention to detail and presentation. Though, I do think sometimes that girls will doubt themselves more, as boys just don't seem to worry that much."

Cocktails

It is here that the mixologists really come into their own, although the scenarios thrown at them ranged from 'a man stood up on a date', 'a first timer' and 'first drink of the day' the competitors reacted with typical confidence, the highlights being Tommaso's unique 'picnikka' that involved a blanket, Italian [songs](#) and a lot of food (including fresh bergamot), Adam Hrapko's Ice sculpted skull and Ilia's Samovar (a beautiful Russian teapot).



Retracing the Scottish roots of Japanese whisky cont.

After an agonising wait, Stanislav stepped forward to offer the decision and in a twist, he exclaimed that two winners had been chosen. So it was that France's Amaury and Germany's Doreen had been judged the mixologists who had best dealt with the Omakase test. With beaming smiles and the cheering of the gathered crowd and their fellow competitor's they accepted their awards, along with the wonderful prize of a trip to the distilleries of Nikka in Japan next year.

"I am so surprised," exclaimed Doreen, "I barely even heard the prize, I can't believe I'm going to a distillery, I've never even been to one." As a massive fan of whisky and Japanese whisky in particular, it seemed Doreen was delighted.

Although the competition had two winners, it seemed the true winner was Nikka, a fascinating brand, with more than a few amazing whiskies. Does this signify a new, rising trend in popularity for Nikka and other Japanese whiskies like them? Jody Monteith Director of The Liquorists, who's company regularly organises whisky events and who helped organise this one, is a keen believer and reckons they are already well established, "Japanese whisky is just becoming hugely popular, you can see that in the fact that's even available in places like Asda and other supermarkets like it."

Charles Maclean, renowned whisky writer and competition judge, is also a big fan.

He said: "I think in terms of malts, it's the closest to Scotch and though it is lighter, it's just the most wonderful drink. It's cleaner and more transparent than the chaotic beauty inherent in Scotch, a perfect mirror to be held up to the original it imitates."

As the Japanese would say "Douzo – lit. Please try" you won't be disappointed, just remember to toast Taketsuru and his good lady Rita when you do.

"Alcohol is necessary for a man so that he can have a good opinion of himself, undisturbed by the facts."

Finley Peter Dunne