THE THELEN RESERVE

SCOTCH: GRAIN TO GLASS

PART 1 OF 2 · GRAIN TO WASH

Follow the malt whisky route from barley to fermented wash.

01 · GRAIN & WATER



Barley and water

WHAT HAPPENS

Malt Scotch begins with water and malted barley. Grain Scotch can also use cereals such as wheat or maize.

WHY IT MATTERS

The grain determines the production route and supplies the starch for fermentation.

WHAT CHANGES

Barley for malting, or a grain whisky recipe.

02 · STEEPING & GERMINATION



From raw barley to green malt

WHAT HAPPENS

Barley takes up water during steeping. Air rests and controlled germination let it start to grow.

WHY IT MATTERS

Enzymes develop and the grain changes, making its starch easier to reach.

WHAT CHANGES

Raw barley becomes sprouted green malt.

03 · KILNING & OPTIONAL PEAT


Drying the malt

WHAT HAPPENS

Warm air dries the green malt and stops growth. Some maltsters use peat smoke during drying.

WHY IT MATTERS

Kilning preserves useful enzymes. Smoke can leave aroma compounds on the malt.

WHAT CHANGES

Green malt becomes dried malt, peated or unpeated.

04 · MILLING THE MALT



Husk, grits and flour

WHAT HAPPENS

A mill crushes the dried malt into grist, a mixture of husk, coarse grits and fine flour.

WHY IT MATTERS

Particle size helps hot water reach the starch while allowing the liquid to drain.

WHAT CHANGES

Whole malt becomes grist for the mash tun.

05 · MASHING & WORT SEPARATION


The mash tun

WHAT HAPPENS

Grist meets hot water. Malt enzymes turn accessible starch into sugars, and sweet wort drains away from the spent grain.

WHY IT MATTERS

Yeast needs usable sugar. Cooling the wort prepares it for fermentation.

WHAT CHANGES

Grist and water yield sweet wort and spent grain, called draff.

06 · FERMENTATION IN WASHBACKS


Yeast at work

WHAT HAPPENS

Yeast ferments cooled wort in a wooden or stainless-steel washback, producing alcohol and carbon dioxide.

WHY IT MATTERS

Yeast and fermentation conditions also shape fruity and floral aromas.

WHAT CHANGES

Sweet wort becomes alcoholic wash, ready for the still.

WORT AND WASH



BEFORE THE YEAST

Wort is the sweet liquid drawn off the mash. The spent grain left behind is draff.



AFTER THE YEAST

Wash is the low-strength alcoholic liquid sent to the still. Fermentation is where alcohol first appears.

THE TRANSFORMATION

BARLEY → MALT → GRIST → WORT → WASH

Continue to Part 2, Spirit to Glass.

SELECTED REFERENCES

[1] Scotch Whisky Regulations 2009, regs. 3–12.
[2] UK Scotch Whisky technical file, production process.
[3] Scotch Whisky Association, categories and regional guides.
[4] Kelly et al., Beverages 9, 64 (2023).

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Understand the craft. Explore the flavor.