THE THELEN RESERVE

SCOTCH: GRAIN TO GLASS

PART 2 OF 2 · SPIRIT TO GLASS

Follow the spirit through the stillhouse, the cask and the finished dram.

07 · DISTILLATION



Pot stills and the grain column

WHAT HAPPENS

On the usual malt route, the wash still makes low wines. The spirit still distils them again. Grain whisky commonly uses continuous columns.

WHY IT MATTERS

Copper contact and the shape of a still influence the spirit. Scotch is distilled below 94.8% ABV.

WHAT CHANGES

Wash becomes low wines, then concentrated spirit. Some malts are triple distilled.

08 · SPIRIT SELECTION & NEW MAKE


Inside the spirit safe

WHAT HAPPENS

The distiller selects the middle portion of a malt run, called the heart. Earlier and later portions commonly return for redistillation.

WHY IT MATTERS

The selected fraction sets the character that will enter the cask.

WHAT CHANGES

The heart becomes clear new make. Its familiar amber colour develops in oak.

09 · CASK SELECTION & FILLING



Former bourbon, sherry-seasoned and refill casks

WHAT HAPPENS

New make fills an eligible oak cask of no more than 700 litres. Previous use and fill history vary.

WHY IT MATTERS

Oak, previous contents and the number of fills affect what the cask can contribute.

WHAT CHANGES

New make enters the cask. A first-fill cask is on its first Scotch fill after another drink.

10 · MATURATION & FINISHING



In the dunnage warehouse

WHAT HAPPENS

Scotch matures in Scotland for at least three years. A producer may finish it in another permitted cask.

WHY IT MATTERS

Wood extraction, chemical reactions and evaporation change the spirit over time.

WHAT CHANGES

Spirit becomes mature whisky. Colour alone cannot tell you its age.

11 · SELECTION, MARRYING & BLENDING


Comparing cask samples

WHAT HAPPENS

The blender samples mature casks and chooses a combination for the release. A single malt can draw on many casks from one distillery.

WHY IT MATTERS

Malt or grain content and the distilleries involved determine the Scotch category.

WHAT CHANGES

Individual casks become a selected single malt or blend.

12 · BOTTLING & THE FINISHED DRAM



From bottling line to tasting glass

WHAT HAPPENS

The producer chooses strength and filtration, then fills and labels the bottles. Scotch is bottled at 40% ABV or higher.

WHY IT MATTERS

Strength affects the tasting experience. Single malt Scotch must be bottled in Scotland.

WHAT CHANGES

The finished dram is ready to nose, sip and revisit through the finish.

READING THE AGE STATEMENT



THE YOUNGEST CASK SETS THE AGE

If an 8-year, 12-year and 15-year whisky are combined, an age statement can declare 8 years.



AFTER BOTTLING

Barrel maturation ends when the whisky leaves the cask. Time in a sealed bottle adds no years to that age.

THE TRANSFORMATION

WASH → NEW MAKE → OAK & TIME → SELECTED WHISKY → GLASS

Nose gently. Take a small sip. Follow the finish.

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.