THE THELEN RESERVE

AMERICAN WHISKEY: GRAIN TO GLASS

PART 2 OF 2 · OAK TO GLASS

Follow the barrel choices, maturation and selection behind an American pour.

07 · CHOOSING THE OAK



Charred, uncharred and used oak

WHAT HAPPENS	WHY IT MATTERS	WHAT CHANGES
Bourbon, rye, wheat, malt and rye malt whiskey use new charred oak. American single malt permits new or used oak up to 700 liters.	Char, wood and previous fills change the compounds available to the spirit.	The type sets the barrel path. Corn whiskey may also be unaged.

08 · BARREL ENTRY



Measuring before filling

WHAT HAPPENS	WHY IT MATTERS	WHAT CHANGES
The producer measures the spirit and may add water before filling. The five new-charred-oak types enter at 125 proof or less.	That same cap applies to corn whiskey if stored. American single malt has no separate 125-proof entry cap.	Clear new make begins its time in oak at a recorded strength.

09 · MATURATION



The rickhouse

WHAT HAPPENS	WHY IT MATTERS	WHAT CHANGES
Spirit extracts wood compounds while reactions and evaporation shape it. Heat, humidity and barrel position matter.	A straight designation requires at least two years of qualifying aging. Color and age alone cannot predict quality.	Resting spirit becomes whiskey ready for assessment.

10 · SELECTION & ASSEMBLY



Sampling the barrels

WHAT HAPPENS	WHY IT MATTERS	WHAT CHANGES
The producer tastes individual barrels and selects one barrel or a group to match the intended profile.	Batching the same qualifying whiskey does not by itself make it "blended whiskey." A single malt can combine several barrels.	Sampled barrels become a selected release.

11 · PROOFING & FILTRATION



Proofing tank and filter

WHAT HAPPENS	WHY IT MATTERS	WHAT CHANGES
Water may set the final strength. Producers choose whether and how to filter. Bottling strength is at least 40% ABV, or 80 U.S. proof.	Strength affects aroma and texture. Filtration can remove particles or material that forms haze.	Selected whiskey becomes ready for bottling. U.S. proof is twice the ABV.

12 · BOTTLING & TASTING



The finished pour

WHAT HAPPENS	WHY IT MATTERS	WHAT CHANGES
Bottles are filled, sealed and labeled. Read the type, strength and any age statement, then nose gently and take a small sip.	Grain, fermentation, still and oak all help explain what you find in the glass.	A labeled bottle becomes a tasting experience. Notice what lingers on the finish.

THREE PATHS THROUGH OAK



NEW OR PREVIOUSLY FILLED

Bourbon and the other new-charred-oak types start with a fresh barrel. American single malt can use new or used oak.



THE CORN WHISKEY EXCEPTION

Corn whiskey may go to bottle without oak aging. If stored, it uses used oak or new uncharred oak.

THE TRANSFORMATION

NEW MAKE → BARREL PATH → SELECTED RELEASE → FINISHED POUR

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

SELECTED REFERENCES

[1] U.S. standards of identity, 27 CFR § 5.143.

[2] TTB, American Single Malt Whisky standard of identity.

[3] Kelly et al., Beverages 9, 64 (2023).

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Understand the craft. Explore the flavor.

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