

SPIRITS News

*Mezcal, bourbon, and Scotch—
we’re keeping our Spirits up.*



SEPTEMBER 14, 2020 FEATURES

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2 Small Batch Mezcal | 6 We’ve Still Got Scotch Deals |
| 3 More Single Producer Mezcal | 7 Closeout Classic Malts |
| 5 Single Cask Bourbon | 8 Gems from the Isle of Arran |

Great Spirits At Great Prices—Business as Usual

By David Othenin-Girard

The K&L Spirits buying team has had a complicated year, just like everyone else. We’ve been forced to conduct business in a new way. Instead of traipsing around Scotland’s warehouses, selecting whiskies from their cold casks, we’re organizing our selections via Zoom and receiving hundreds of samples, in tiny vials, to evaluate. We’ll always pine for those special face-to-face experiences. We know they’re crucial to our understanding and ability to transmit our joy for these wonderful products to our valued clients. No trip makes that more evident than this year’s tour of Oaxaca, in the weeks just before the shutdown. You’ll hear all about that trip in the pages beyond, but that’s not all we’ve got for you. We’ve secured exceptional single cask bourbons, in a category that has seen explosive growth, that easily qualify as some of the most

undervalued stocks on the market today. We’ve found a new craft gin from India, the first of its kind being made in the land that gave the world tonic and so many of the other crucial ingredients in that special drink. We’ve located amazing single-barrel, small-batch, and big-name Scotch at ridiculously low prices. We’ve secured the final allotment of one of the very best tequilas ever produced.

And *all* that is before this year’s “Whisky Season” begins at the end of October. Then, you’ll see 30 single casks of Scotch, some of the most exciting and affordable whiskies available anywhere in the world. In spite of all the world has thrown at us, it might be the best Whisky Season we’ve ever had. ’Til then, be well, and drink well.

2013 Fuentesecca Huerta Singular “El Maguey” Blanco Tequila (\$79.99)

Widely regarded as one of the finest blanco tequilas ever distilled, the Fuentesecca takes Tequila terroir to the next level. The incredible Enrique Fonseca selected these agave from one single field on his estate in the highlands of Jalisco. Slow roasted and pot distilled, the vintage batch was rested for years before being put into glass. When we heard the batch was finally coming to the end, we bought every bottle we could.



Nao Spirits Jin Jiji India Dry Gin (\$24.99)

From the spiritual homeland of the gin and tonic comes a gin that feels like a traditional London Dry, but brings so much more to the table. The complexity of black tea marries with classic ingredients like juniper and coriander, while highlighting savory notes of cashew nut and basil. It’s refreshing on its own (for a bone-dry martini) and yet so easy to mix. Try it with Fever Tree Citrus Tonic for an added blast of zip in your next G&T.



Cotswolds Dry Gin (\$34.99)

If you prefer a more classic style of gin, do not miss this one from England’s beautiful Cotswolds region.

The profile is super-classic London Dry, with one exception: instead of the usual lemon or orange peel as the main citrus component, Cotswolds zests fresh grapefruit. The result is that the intensity of the citrus zip goes through the roof. The other striking aspect of the gin is its silky-smooth texture, making it versatile and seamless in a cocktail.





K&L Exclusive: Rare Small-Batch Mezcal from Oaxaca

By David Othenin-Girard

In the Spring of 2020, the K&L buying team embarked on a journey through Oaxaca, seeking knowledge and spirits from Mexico's premiere mezcal-producing region. One of our guides in the weeklong tour was the excellent importer, Pueblo de Sabor, who have quickly established connections with some of Mexico's top-quality mezcal brands as well as created their own label, Mal Bien. The premium line from Mal Bien is the Green Tape series, named for the ubiquitous fluorescent tape that's used to label bootleg mezcal throughout Oaxaca. Their first producers under this wonderful label all come from one village in the underappreciated Miahuatlán area of southern Oaxaca.

Traveling to Mengoli de Morelos was an eye-opening experience. It's not a short drive from Oaxaca City. You travel south a couple of hours on the main highway before veering off into rural Oaxaca. The first sign you've gone the right way, the first and only, is the Japanese Teppanyaki Restaurant. A cinderblock structure with an ornate hand painted sign, it is an absolute oddity in rural Oaxaca. When you pass the large extremely well-constructed federal prison, which the Japanese restaurant seemingly caters, to as there's little else around, you know you're getting close the Mengoli. This far-flung part of Oaxaca, the Highland Plains, is like an agave paradise. Here, the plants grow bigger and faster than anywhere else, it seems. The rolling hills are divided by streams and rivers that feed both the plants and the distilleries for which they're cultivated.

The Ramos family has been doing this for a long time. They've got several beautiful fields that stretch across the landscape, and have a good reputation for producing excellent mezcal. Across the river, a modern distillery is being built, a sign that things in Miahuatlán will not always be like today. But this family is well-positioned to continue to produce excellent mezcal, and we're incredibly honored to have been welcomed into their home and distillery. Our friends and importers, Ben Scott and Anthony Silas, built their company around the people who not only make the best mezcal, but with whom they'd developed a familial connection. Their entire existence is devoted to making life better for their producers, and they've built relationships here that clearly go well beyond business. You can tell instantly the personal connection between the Ramos family and our guides. This is a true partnership, and those relationships have afforded us access to some of the rarest small production mezcal anywhere in the world.

We tasted through dozens of expressions, but the three that struck us were two A. Americana and an A. Marmorata, three of the region's rarest expressions. Each a miniscule batch destined primarily for consumption by the family for holidays and parties throughout the year, these represent some of the finest mezcal we've ever had.

Mal Bien Green Tape "Victor + Emmanuel Ramos" K&L Exclusive Batch 1219 VFR Sierra Negra Mezcal (\$99.99) The rare and delicious A. Americana variant is not typical to the Miahuatlán area where its cousin, Arroqueno, seems to be more available. But the few plants that do grow here mature to enormous size. Nonetheless, the low sugar levels mean that cultivation is rarely commercially viable. This exquisitely tiny batch only yielded 48 liters (likely from only a couple of plants in the oven), and from that a scant 24 bottles have made their way to the States as a K&L Exclusive. When we visited the rancho, we were grateful to taste through their entire lineup of maturing stocks. The only thing not to love about this gorgeous mezcal is the absolutely unbelievably tiny size of the batch. Only 24 lucky customers will get to experience the sublime quality this special mezcal offers. The agaves were cultivated on the family's land below the house, and roasted for six days in the Ramos' underground ovens over encino, palo de aguila, yegareche, and mesquite wood.



*Victor Ramos pauses during his work.
(Photo courtesy of SACRED Agave)*

The cooked agave was rested for another week before being crushed on a horse-drawn tahona, then fermented for eight days in sabino wood tanks, and adjusted only with puntas and colas. Clean and agave-driven, the purity and complexity of this mezcal is significant.

Mal Bien Green Tape "Victor + Emmanuel Ramos" K&L Exclusive Batch 0318ER Tepextate Mengoli De Morelos, Mezcal (\$99.99)

This insane batch of Tepextate was distilled in March 2018 and rested a full two years before bottling, exclusively for K&L. The rare varietal

is already produced in extremely small quantities, and this batch only yielded 65 bottles after being partially consumed over the years by the family, and clients who ventured out to Mengoli to buy a few liters at a time. This bold expression of wild-harvested Tepextate is one of the best we've ever tasted—the dense flavors feel extremely integrated after the exceptionally long resting period.

Mal Bien Green Tape “Victor + Emmanuel Ramos” K&L Exclusive Batch 1119VFR Arroqueño Mengoli De Morelos Mezcal (\$99.99)

The Ramos family doesn't usually have much Arroqueño, but you can see the few massive plants easily as you walk toward as you walk through the fields. The massive sword-like leaves tower above all but the tallest *Salvia karwinskii* shrubs, and their ashy color distinguishes them from other A. Americana in the field. The 2019 harvest only yielded about 100 liters, and the family consumed or sold about half



of it in the four months between when it was distilled and when we arrived. One taste and you'll know exactly why. This excellent example of the already well-liked varietal offers an incredible example of how subtle phenological differences in agave can affect flavor. The Sierra Negra, harvested and distilled just a month later than this batch, and from the same species of plant, offers a completely different profile than the mineral-driven Arroqueño. Only 54 bottles of this exceptional mezcal exist.

In addition to our exclusive mezcals, we stock the entire Mal Bien line, including a rare mezcal from the state of Michoacán, and the other exceptional distillery that Pueblo de Sabor works with in Mengoli de Morelos, the Cortes family.

Mal Bien Green Tape “Victor + Emmanuel Ramos” Batch 0319ER Mezcla 4 Maguey Mezcal (\$84.99)

Mal Bien Green Tape “Felipe + Ageo Cortes” Batch 0415FC Madrecuixe Mezcal (\$84.99)

Mal Bien Green Tape “Isidro Rodriguez Montoya” Batch 1019IRM Alto, Rio de Parras, Michoacan Mezcal (\$69.99)

Single-Producer Mezcal: The Real Thing

By Andrew Whiteley

Rezpiral: Good for Your Gullet, the Community, and the Earth

Mezcal is an extremely difficult market to understand, especially without visiting the towns where these spirits are produced.

Without talking to the people who work hard every day in the fields and the distillery, it's nearly impossible to grasp just how much time, work, land, and resources go into the traditional production of a liter of agave spirit. With the global demand for mezcal skyrocketing, many have been enticed into cutting quality corners to boost production. When a multinational comes knocking, is willing to write you a check for anything you produce, and blends it off into swill with mass-produced, column-distilled cane spirit, it's easy to understand why one might take this route. But if you get off the main road into Oaxaca, and have a guide who knows where to go, you can still track down the real thing.

In our incredible fortune to be able to scour the Oaxacan countryside, we were guided by some of the best-connected importers and brand owners the region has to offer. In the case of the spectacular Rezpiral brand, we were treated to a behind-the-scenes peek at the agave nursery in Santa María del Tule, Oaxaca, with brand creator Alex White. Rezpiral is so much more than just another agave spirits label. With Alex's vision, it's a company that not only selects the highest-quality, traditionally made agave spirits Mexico has to offer, but also partners with the producers to buy and sell them in a fair trade, profit sharing, community-driven, and plant diversity-replenishing way. At the same time, Rezpiral always strives to respect and support the independence and multigenerational knowledge of these families in their production. In short, as a conscientious consumer of agave spirits, there is little more you could ask from a brand.

In the Series No. 5 releases, of which our exclusive batches are a part, Rezpiral is sharing 10% of profits with the families who produced the spirits. 25,000 agaves raised from seeds in the *vivero* (nursery) will be transplanted to lands owned both communally and by individual mezcaleros. An agave nursery guide book will be printed in its second edition, allowing other communities access to the firsthand knowledge necessary to build and sustain a nursery program that supports their own community. In addition to these large goals for the season, there is a never-ending array of work that will be completed at the *vivero*, and on the palenques of the producers in collaboration with them and the surrounding communities.

It's brands like this, which respects tradition and promotes individual differences between palenques, that make mezcal so much fun. Just as each individual batch can vary wildly based on the individual plants that go into it, each individual producer represented by the brand might use completely different cooking, fermentation, and distillation techniques. This is why it's so important to seek out single-producer mezcals.

Rezpiral K&L Exclusive Mexicano Series 5 (Berta Vazquez) San Baltazar Chichicapam Mezcal (\$124.99) This bottling showcases some

of the finest work from Berta Vazquez, one of Mexico's preeminent female mezcal producers. Her life story is incredible. She has been making mezcal since she was about six years old, learning the ways from her grandfather. She's been making some of San Baltazar Chichicápam's best spirits for over five decades. This singular expression comes from 12-year-old Mexicano agaves grown at just under



1,600 meters above sea level. Roasted for five days in a conical stone oven fired with black oak, the agaves were crushed via horse-drawn tahona before being double-distilled on copper alembic stills. The spirit is an amazing combination of power and finesse. The nose and finish feel almost like Islay single malt. It's a deep and saline smoke profile that melts into sweet pineapples and roasted peppers on the palate. Texturally, it's perfectly smooth, but very light. It's like wrapping your tongue in a fine, silk shawl. Only 250 liters were produced in the batch, of which an insanely small 60 bottles made it to K&L's shelves in California.

Rezpiral K&L Exclusive Madrekuish Series 5 (Reina Sanchez) San Agostin Amatengo Mezcal (\$139.99)

The Reina Sanchez bottling of Madrekuish screams of peppermint, rosemary, and green peppers. It's spicy and a bit prickly on the palate, but in an amazingly pleasant way—like Pop Rocks candy. An exceptionally long 15-day cook preceded a machete and axe milling, a physically demanding way to release agave's sweet juices. The effort required to produce this is almost unfathomable. Every drop you savor shows just why it's still done this way. Only 45 liters are available stateside.



Rezpiral K&L Exclusive Espadin & Piñuela Series 5 (Simeon Ramirez) San Agostin Amatengo Mezcal (\$129.99)

The third K&L Exclusive batch from Rezpiral is a bit of an anomaly in modern mezcal. There is precedent for this style of production in the village of San Agustín Amatengo, but it's definitely unusual. The Espadin agaves were roasted, crushed, and fermented with a Mexican fruit known as a piñuela. It tastes something like a pineapple and looks like a chimeric cross between a dragonfruit, potato, and shallot. You can think of the spirit almost like a pechuga, with fruits, nuts, and protein, but produced just like a traditional Espadin, save for the addition of the piñuela. It's the height of agave geekdom, and only 60 bottles made it stateside. The flavors are complex, fruity, and smoky. If your idea of a great night out involves sitting at home picking apart one of the most insanely flavored and delicious spirits you've ever come across, this is a must-have. Only 100 liters produced; only 60 bottles available.

La Medida: One of the Best-Curated Brands Available in California

It's a pleasure to introduce La Medida to our customers. Founded by Julián Vidal Gómez Rodríguez and Don Celso, two legends in the industry, it's a brand that offers a pure expression of place and tradition in each of their expressions. With over 40 years in the industry, Rodríguez and Celso have seen it all. Rodríguez was the first director of the CRM after being tapped by the Mexican government to create the DO of Mezcal. He also worked for years with Ron Cooper in the early days of Del Maguey—essentially introducing millions of Americans to mezcal. In 2009, he met Celso. He wanted him to distill for Del Maguey, but it didn't work out for a variety of reasons. However, he was inspired by Celso and his distillate, and the two decided to launch La Medida.

La Medida Espadin Mezcal (200ml \$24.99; 750ml \$84.99) Don Celso distills only Espadin. While many consumers of mezcal have a preconceived notion of Espadin as the pedestrian variety of agave, Don Celso's distillate is so good it will challenge all of your assumptions. It is the reason Rodríguez left one of the most influential companies in mezcal to found his own startup. Don Celso lives in Ría Golea, a remote region outside of Oaxaca. The harsh mountain conditions mean fermentation times can run as long as three weeks. The Espadin he produces is a reflection of these hard conditions, and the spirit is the better for it. Celso works alone, does everything by himself, and runs the electricity off of solar panels. If you'd like to challenge everything you know about Espadin mezcal, you must try a bottle. It speaks deeply of place, expresses bold fruits, hints of hard Parmesan cheese, and shows unmatched minerality, weight, and earthiness.



La Medida's other expressions come from carefully selected producers, each prominently featured on the bottles telling their stories and production methods. All are available in 200ml and 750ml formats.

La Medida Tobala Mezcal (200ml \$32.99; 750ml \$119.99)

A benchmark Tobala. The tiny plants take forever to grow to maturity and it can take up to three plants to produce one bottle of mezcal. The low yields return big flavors. A great balance between smoke, earth, and sweet fruits, it's not unlike a Thanksgiving yam dish, replete with cinnamon and brown sugar to complement the nuts and roots.

La Medida Tepeztate Mezcal (200ml \$36.99; 750ml \$134.99) These massive agaves produce a complex and sweet distillate. Notes of green bananas, soft flowers, bell peppers, and melons recur in numerous examples, and the La Medida is a benchmark example.

La Medida Arroqueño Mezcal (200ml \$36.99; 750ml \$134.99)

The massive Arroqueño, a subspecies of the Agave americana, typically takes around twenty years to mature. Grown wild, the varietal was nearly extinct just a few decades ago, but has recovered in recent years, its population regrowing especially in southern Oaxaca districts like Miahuatlán through the efforts of mezcaleros and conservation activists in the region. Coveted for its high concentration of sugars over decades of growth, the mezcal tends to offer a fruity and fragrant approach, balanced with high proof and a rich body. A rare gem to experience.



La Medida Madrekuish Mezcal (200ml \$31.99; 750ml \$114.99)

These treelike agave are known as "mother agave." Their impressive stature carries a huge amount of both sugar and fibrous material for fermentation. The blend of vegetal and sweet notes is unparalleled.

La Medida Bicuishe Mezcal (200ml \$31.99; 750ml \$114.99) Piney and fibrous, this is for folks who love a green agave. Its blend of jalapeño, green bell, and wet kitchen herb character is softened by its plush texture. A superlative example of the variety.



Meanwhile, somewhere in Kentucky... (Photo: Shutterstock)

Hot Topic: Single-Cask Bourbon Exclusives

By David Othenin-Girard

Nothing is hotter than the bourbon market in our store today. In fact, demand is so high that many of the mainstays in our selection have become highly allocated. This unprecedented scarcity has made acquiring these rarities an unfathomably difficult task. The simple fact that we have not raised our prices on these now-rare offerings has meant that our allocations are now the target of every bourbon hunter on earth. This fervor has extended to our single-cask selections, which sell out in minutes instead of days or weeks. But occasionally, some very special and rare bourbon slips through the cracks, and we get an opportunity to tell you about some stuff that we think should have sold out long ago. Here are a few of our excellent single barrels that are still available — at least for now.

Wathen's Barrel Proof "Barrel #99 SoCal Barrel K&L Exclusive" Cask Strength Single Barrel Straight Kentucky Bourbon (\$79.99)

Wathen's Barrel Proof "Barrel #89 NorCal Barrel K&L Exclusive" Cask Strength Single Barrel Straight Kentucky Bourbon (\$79.99)

Wathen's is one of those interesting brands filled with mystery, yet offering awesome products. Charles Medley has decades of experience distilling in Kentucky. He was for many years the Master Distiller at a plant in Owensboro, and when that plant was closed, Charles was able to acquire some of the stocks and the old facility he ran. He never got the old plant up and running, but had success selling those casks, with his son, Sam, under various labels. His good standing in the bourbon community has afforded Charles the ability to contract still time at an unnamed plant elsewhere in Kentucky, where he distills to his own specifications a small run (presumably several hundred casks), each year. Those are marketed under the Medley and Wathen's names, but it's always been their single barrels that most interest us. After many years, Sam has finally agreed to bottle some of his excellent whisky at full cask strength for us. While we don't have an age, it's safe to assume this is upwards of 8–10 years old. If we sold cask-strength 10-year-old from any of Kentucky's major distilleries



for \$80, it would be sold out in a day. So few of Kentucky's producers are willing to bottle at cask strength that these barrels are a coup by any measure. Yet, since we have little information about the source, these excellent barrels are often overlooked. We have two, and they're both exceptional by any measure: rich and full of sweet dried fruit and spice. Few barrels available beat these excellent bourbons.

Smooth Ambler 5 Year Old "Old Scout" K&L Exclusive Barrel #23849 Indiana Straight Bourbon Whiskey (\$49.99)

After years of pining for the days of bourbon yore, we've finally come full circle to re-release the ol' Old Scout in its original form. There's been a ton of confusion on the market, due to Smooth Ambler's recent release of a large parcel of Tennessee bourbon which was acquired from the famous distillery at Cascade Hollow, but this product is not that. Those whiskies are much loved by certain folks, but show a completely different character than the original Old Scout. The brand became famous for bottling excellent bourbon and rye sourced from the large distillery in Lawrenceburg, Indiana. Those excellent whiskies were once the backbone for our now-extinct Faultline bourbon, and for several years, they haven't had enough aged stock to spare single barrels for our barrel program. Now, with their current stocks finally coming of age, they've re-released these excellent bourbons at a respectable five years of age. This is the very same age that the original Old Scout was when released way back in 2011. We're very lucky to have scooped up a couple of barrels of this initial offering before the rest of the market has realized that these are back on the table. Presumably, as these stocks age, we'll continue to see the age statements on these excellent whiskies increase over the years. But even now, the stupendous complexity of these bourbons at this young and punchy age is extremely satisfying. That lovely combination of power and grace is exactly why we fell in love with the Old Scout brand.



Let's Talk Scotch: Great Deals Now, and a Peek into the Future

By David Othenin-Girard

It's a strange time to be a Scotch lover. We're in the midst of one of the most complex and prolonged periods of upheaval in this special industry. There's still no question that single malt Scotch is still the king of spirits, commanding the highest prices, and offering the most diversity of rare and sought-after products in the world. For the last 10 years, consumption of super-premium single malt has skyrocketed across the world. Now, there is simply little whisky for the world. And, despite incredible increases in capacity effected by many of the big distillers, there's still significant price pressure. We are in the midst of that struggle. We're constantly making decisions about which malts are truly worth their price, and which might have jumped the proverbial shark. These are not new questions. But, since October 2019, another significant hurdle has upended the market for single malts: a massive 25% tariff on single malt Scotch imports to the US, which has driven prices of many of our core items way up.

So, we now search for ways to offer products that have not yet been affected by those tariffs. It's tricky, because products that were imported before 2019 are few and far between.

One solution, which we refer to as the "nuclear option," is to simply stop importing *single malt*. Calm down—that's not to say that we won't be bringing in tons of great Scotch this fall. But, what we've chosen to do for many of our exclusive single casks, is to add a miniscule amount of a different, similarly aged malt. (Even better, we'll add one drop of malt from a nearby distillery.) This causes that whisky to no longer be legally considered "single malt," and thus it is not affected by tariffs—but the flavor and quality will have not been diminished whatsoever. While we won't be able to bottle them with the distillery names on the label, we will be able to describe precisely what has gone into the bottle. The argument for dropping the coveted single malt designation has 100% to do with the advanced level of knowledge in our customer base. Most of our customers love to understand their beverages as much as they love to imbibe them. And so, with a tiny bit of education, we can save everyone a whole lot of dough if they can get behind drinking "blended malt," knowing that those malts will have the heart and soul of a single. And, while you'll be happy to hear that we've got 25 new single casks (blended and single malts) coming at the end of October, you'll also be happy to know that we've been scouring warehouses across this country for stocks that have been imported in advance of the new regulations.

Today we have three incredible single malts that not only were imported pre-tariff, but also given significant discounts from the supplier to move the stocks. These represent the very best deals we've been able to find in single malt, and have yet to be marketed in any other forum. Those who have been paying attention will note that there is still explosive demand in the single malt market, and anything we've put out there that offers value is getting gobbled up as quickly as we can stock it.

2003 Macduff 14 Year Old "The Cooper's Choice" First Fill Single Sherry Butt Highland Single Malt Scotch Whisky (\$69.99)

Elsewhere \$100. There's no question that the world is obsessed with malt aged in dark Oloroso sherry butts. It's been like this for many years, and the trend is not alleviating in any way whatsoever. So, we jump at the chance to sell anything that's nicely aged, and when I tried this the first time, I was ready to pull the trigger on the entire cask. Then I saw that the price would be upwards of \$110 on the shelf, and we decided to hold off. While it's an excellent whisky—and I think it's ultimately worth that, compared to what else is on the market for this price—our customers have been predisposed to expect a much older age statement on independently bottled malt single malt at that over-\$100 price point, even when heavily sherried. So I was delighted when the importer came to us with a deal we couldn't refuse. For \$70, this might be one of the year's best deals. And while every other malt is going up in price, this awesome Macduff is, randomly, 30% less than what it's being sold for elsewhere.



The color is auburn. The nose is a wonderful explosion of rum raisin and dark nut butters. Moving toward the fig compote school of aromas, it also offers up hints of old diesel and bomber jacket. On the palate, a bit of red cherry fruit comes through, along with that deep oloroso nuttiness. There's not a lot of heat at 46% ABV, but the texture is full, and the finish is quite long. For any lover of sherry, there will be very few deals like this going forward—even after tariffs are removed.

1993 Glen Keith 24 Year Old "Munros" K&L Exclusive Cask Strength Unchillfiltered Speyside Single Malt Scotch Whisky (\$109.99)

The excellent and affordable whiskies from Munros are unique in that they're dumping small batches of two to four barrels. In this case, they've married a tiny lot of "dump hogsheads," which I believe refers to a "dumpy" or "squat" hogshead. This is a barrel composed of slightly shorter staves, giving the barrel a squat look, and typically in a higher oak-to-whisky ratio (210-220 liters vs the standard 250). In any case, the resulting whisky is a lovely, extremely classic Keith. The color is pale gold. The nose is zesty and fresh, with hints of citrus peel, crystal malt, and fresh bitter herbs (hints of wormwood and orris root). Great texture on the palate, with an almost buttery consistency, and now some more vanilla. The citrus fruit leans slightly toward grapefruit, with some fresh stone and orchard fruit coming in as well. The finish brings back some of the tangy herbal quality, but refrains from feeling bitter—dried mint, anise, exotic spices, and orange blossom honey. A truly lovely, drinkable, classic Keith, for an outstanding price.



1995 Tormore 22 Year Old “Munros” K&L Exclusive Cask Strength Unchillfiltered Island Single Malt Scotch Whisky

(\$109.99) The odd and delicious spirit coming off the stills at Tormore is not something we see very often stateside. It is one of the most beautiful new distilleries in Scotland, having been built in 1960. The gorgeous, tall white walls are contrasted by the stunning, varnished green of its copper roofs. And, like the odd dichotomy of the distillery itself, this whisky is another idiosyncratic and understated example of what is produced there. This whisky was aged for 22 years in American oak hogsheads. Let’s see how it tastes: The color is old gold. The nose is packed full of deep red fruit, with a curious orange peel component. Surrounding that is a roasted cereal quality that touches ever so slightly to the nutty aromas. Tiny hints of wood glue are actually weirdly inviting. On the palate, the lower-than-typical proof is not at all to its detriment in terms of texture—instead, we have a round, rich body, along with some wild honey and subtle, floral aromas. The finish is medium-long and satisfying, with some almond extract and vanilla bean showing up. A fun, unique whisky that should not be overlooked because of its low proof or unusual provenance.



1994 Braeval 22 Year Old “Munros” K&L Exclusive Cask Strength Unchillfiltered Speyside Single Malt Scotch Whisky (\$109.99)

Another young, but relatively well-liked distillery, this one is distinct across the Munros line in that it was aged in exclusively ex-bourbon barrels. The already clean and fruity style of the Braeval (previously called Braes of Glenlivet) works perfectly with the round, subtle American oak and sweet flavors imparted by these great bourbon barrels. The color is pale gold. The nose has an enticing blend of yellow and orange fruits, hints of fresh apricots, and mirabelle. Touches of roasted almond and toasted vanilla bean accent the clean fruitiness. On the palate, lemon candies, white pepper, cherry pits, ground clove; and tiniest hints of fresh bread add a yeasty quality. Certainly not a whisky that’s going to scare anyone away, as it’s round and approachable, but it’s by no means one-note or boring. This is as quintessentially Speyside as any malt in our selection right now, and offers incredible value from a relatively rare distillery.



Scotch Staples at Unbeatable Closeout Prices

By Andrew Whiteley

It’s no secret that Scotch prices have skyrocketed since the imposition of tariffs in October 2019. It’s meant that, especially from the larger producers, we’ve seen 25% increases from levies on top of further price increases. It’s insane. Bottles that were previously just 50 or 60 dollars are now pushing or exceeding the \$100 mark. Obviously, we’ve fought tooth and nail to keep every price down as best we can. In some cases, we’ve just had to stop carrying staple products, because they no longer offer the value that our customers expect. In other cases, we’ve looked into alternative packaging and formats.

Enter Diageo’s Classic Malts collection. While we struggle to stock many of these whiskies at today’s prices, we were able to go deep on a couple of old gift packs, produced by Diageo, and that were lingering in their warehouses, to still bring the value we strive for. There are two packs available, with three 200-mililiter bottles each. While these were previously \$80 each, and you paid a slight upcharge for the gift pack, they’re now 50% off, and a screaming deal.



Classic Malts “Coastal Collection” (Caol Ila 12, Clynelish 14, Talisker 10) Single Malt 3-Pack x 200ml (\$39.99)

Classic Malts “Strong Collection” (Lagavulin 16 Year Old, Talisker 10 Year Old, Cragganmore 12 Year Old) Single Malt 3-Pack x 200ml (\$39.99)



The descriptions really say it all here. Choose between the “Coastal Collection,” offering Caol Ila’s signature fruity, saline, smoky combination, Clynelish’s power and finesse, and Talisker’s bold taste of the sea; or the “Strong Collection,” offering Diageo’s storied houses of Lagavulin, Cragganmore, and Talisker.

This is the time to stock up. While the bottles may be smaller than you’re used to, it’s the perfect time to grab all of your stocking stuffers for the holidays, or pack your bar with staples, since there is no end in sight for the tariffs or future price increases in the Scotch market.



Isle of Arran Distillery with Lochranza Castle in the distance. (Photo: Isle of Arran Distillers Ltd.)

Arran: An Independent Distillery for an Independent Shop

By Andrew Whiteley

When Arran’s Lochranza distillery opened up on the remote Isle of Arran in 1995, Scotch had yet to experience the massive boom that has seen prices skyrocket and stocks depleted over the last decade. Fortunately for Scotch drinkers everywhere, this small distillery remains family owned and operated, and has been able to keep prices in check, as they are not beholden to public shareholders. The only difficulty we’ve had, here in the California, has been the availability of some of their items outside of the core age statement range.

With the recent switch between importers, we were able to snag a pile of cask-strength, unchillfiltered bottlings, with advantageous direct pricing that was previously unavailable in the state. And, fortunately for our customers, these beauties had already landed in a warehouse in New Jersey before the 25% tariffs were implemented. This means that not only are we able to pass on direct pricing, but we didn’t have to include the massive 25% surcharge that all current imports see.

Introducing Arran’s The Bothy, Machrie Moor, and Master of Distilling II, three distinct Island whiskies that offer power, finesse, and exceptional pricing.

Arran “The Bothy” Quarter Cask Cask Strength Single Malt Scotch Whisky (\$79.99) Elsewhere \$100. This beauty drinks like the hallmark of Arran’s Lochranza distillery. It’s clean and bright, and a showcase for their 100% rainwater and Concerto malt distillate. Barley-forward and citrus-driven, the malt blends effortlessly into the first-fill bourbon casks. Reviving a tradition of transport to the Isle of Arran in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Bothy is finished in American oak quarter casks for two years before being bottled without intervention. The result is an extra wood pop of vanilla and cream on the finish that is to die for.

Arran “Machrie Moor” Cask Strength Peated Single Malt Scotch Whisky (\$79.99) Available only from K&L, in California, this has been one of the most requested bottlings from the distillery for years, but was never an option for us to sell. Finally, we were able to get it here direct. Arran has just opened the Lagg distillery on the southern side of the Isle to focus on distilling peated whiskies. Before that launch, however, they made some incredible peaters at Lochranza for a few weeks out of the year, since their inception. This is that Lochranza distillate. A true medium-peat whisky, it still features Arran’s signature brightness, citrus, and clean feel. Unlike any other whisky in the shop, the level of peat is perfect for hot summer nights.

Arran 12 Year Old “Master of Distilling II” Palo Cortado Finished Cask Strength Single Malt Scotch Whisky (\$99.99) One of the most unique finishes in the world—the rare Palo Cortado sherry cask. This singularly complex and nearly extinct wine imparts flavors that cannot be achieved any other way. It’s something of a cross between fino, or Manzanilla, and Amontillado or Oloroso. The impact on the whisky is a highlighting of the natural saline minerality, and intensifying of the citrus of Arran, bringing out the more savory, roasted nut characteristics that are presenting in the older, matured stocks. Blended by James MacTaggart, Master Distiller, to celebrate his 12 years at Arran, this full-proof, unfiltered 12 year old is sublime.



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