



Kelowna Scotch & Fine Spirits Society

presents the

September 2020 Tasting: Islay Whisky

Featured distilleries:

Lagavulin

Caol Ila

Bruichladdich

Kilchoman

Bowmore?

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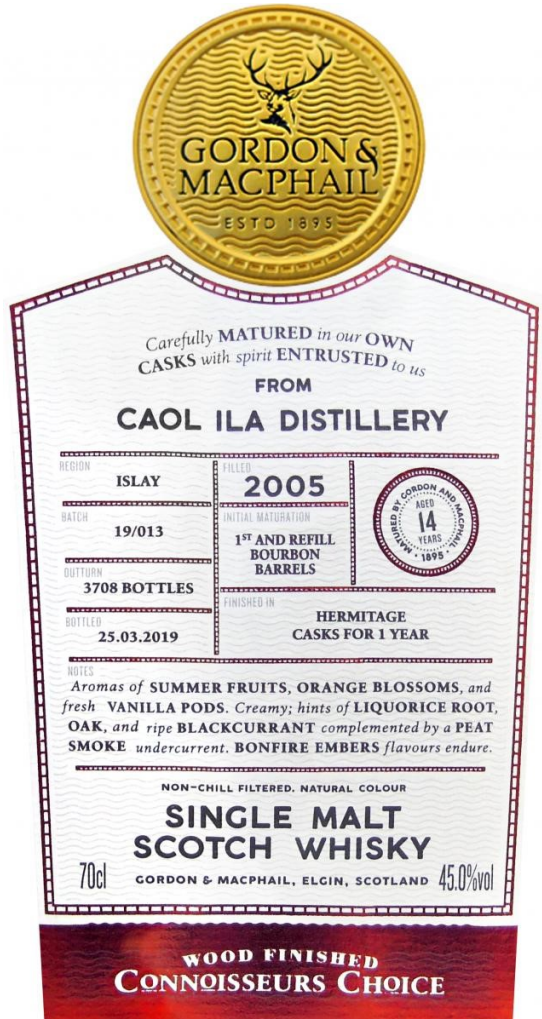
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1. Gordon & MacPhail 2005 Caol Ila Hermitage Finish (45% ABV)

IB: Gordon & MacPhail is an old and storied independent bottler founded and still located in Elgin in the northeast of Scotland. Originally a grocery store (as many IBs start out in Scotland) run by James Gordon and John Alexander MacPhail, they have been bottling whisky since 1895. The company is now run by the third and fourth generation of the Urquhart family, beginning with John Urquhart, James Gordons apprentice. Notable highlights include their Generations line which bottles the oldest single malts recorded. These started in 2010 with a 70 year old Mortlach originally filled on John Urquharts request in 1938, and a 70 year old first-fill sherry butt filled with Glenlivet from 1940, released in 2011. Their latest release was a 75 year old Mortlach in 2015.

Production Details: This is classic Caol Ila peated distillate aged in first-fill and refill bourbon barrels for 13 years, which serves as a canvas for finishing in Hermitage casks for an additional year. In essence this is a red wine-finished whisky. Hermitage is a small French AOC hailing from the Rhône in southeast France. Hermitage are generally highly tannic Syrah wines, and so tend to be very long -aged, earthy wines with notes of red berries, leather and chocolate.

Distillery: Caol Ila is a well-represented distillery amongst IB's, producing the most whisky on the



island of Islay at 3M liters per year. Founded in 1846, it is now a volume distillery owned by Diageo, and provides a large percentage of the peated whisky found in blends such as Johnnie Walker. The current manager is a fourth-generation employee at Caol Ila, Billy Stitchell, with many employees dedicating their lives to the distillery, possibly due to its remote location on the northeast corner of the island. Like many Scotch distilleries, most new distillate is tankered to Glasgow, casked and aged there, with one on-site three-story warehouse containing much of their old stock. It is one of several Islay distilleries also producing unpeated whisky so be careful regarding bottles such as Stitchell Reserve and Caol Ila Unpeated, that you're buying what you're looking for.

2. SMWS Battle Axe (50% ABV)

IB: SMWS is no stranger to this club, but this is the first of their blends we have featured.

Production Details: This is a blended malt whisky, ie. all whisky in the blend is made from malted barley, and there is no grain whisky in the blend. Despite our best efforts, we have no idea which stills this whisky came from, but we do know the youngest whisky in the blend is 8 years old, distilled in 2011, and all of the whisky was matured in refill bourbon hogsheads. 1957 bottles were produced in this 8th blended release, suggesting around 5 to 8 hogsheads or barrels total. One would therefore expect this dram to be light on the barrel character, and heavy on the peat smoke.

Distillery: Completely unknown.



3. Kilchoman STR Finish Alberta Cask (53% ABV)

Production Details: This cask was picked by Gold Medal Marketing for sale in the province of Alberta. It is a total of 9 years old, over 8 of which it spent in an ex-bourbon barrel. The whiskey was then finished in a shaved, toasted and re-charred red wine hogshead for 9 months. The barley was peated to 50ppm, and 238 bottles were produced. Barrel #233/2011 filled 12 MAY 2011, and bottled 12 MAY 2020.

STR casks aren't necessarily new, but are used by distilleries such as Kilchoman for good reason. Pioneered by Dr. Jim Swan on old red wine casks due to availability, STR is an effort to provide a new flavour profile that had not really been seen before, and more importantly to give a mature flavour at a younger age than previously possible. Usually this procedure is performed on several times used casks and will restore a lot but certainly not all of the original flavour compounds produced by the original charring.

Distillery: From our 2019 tasting notes: Founded in 2005, Kilchoman grows, smokes and mashes their own barley, along with barley from Port Ellen and uses an exceptionally long 85-hour ferment in order to develop a flavourful and unique base spirit, all done by a five-man team. The locally grown barley is peated to 20ppm and the Port Ellen barley is peated to 50ppm (similar to Ardbeg).



4. The Whisky Agency/Three Rivers Toyko Secret Islay 2013 (53% ABV)

IB: As this is a joint bottling, there are two IBs involved here. The first is a rather reclusive German outfit known as The Whisky Agency. The second is a bar named Three Rivers in Tokyo, Japan, known for bottling barrels themselves. To date, they've chosen over 600 casks to bottle under their house label, and are usually only available in Japan. Otherwise, there's not too much information on them. They seem to split a lot of casks with TWA, but they know how to pick, with several large, old numbers including a 1982 Port Ellen, a 1971 Springbank and a 1968 Bunnahabhain.

Production Details: This is a mystery malt, bottled at the feisty age of 6 years old. Distilled in 2013, this spirit was matured entirely in an ex-sherry hogshead of undisclosed provenance and then bottled at cask strength in 2020. The lack of disclosure and price of this bottle suggests a distillery such as Bowmore, but there is scant detail available about where exactly this whisky originates. This whisky has been "roughly filtered", and this is self-evident by the amount of particulate matter present in suspension. These particulates are not overtly harmful, and are most likely simply charred wood.

Distillery: Completely unknown.



5. Elements of Islay Lg₁₀ (57.4% ABV)

IB: Elements of Islay is a marque from Elixir Distillers, who also produce Port Askaig, Single Malts of Scotland, and Black Tot rum and was originally the independent bottler of The Whisky Exchange. Elements of Islay takes a unique science-themed take on showcasing the individual distilleries of Islay through releases of single casks or small vattings of up to 3 barrels. Elements of Islay will readily tell you the year of distillation but takes the stance that disclosing a precise age will somehow skew your opinion of the spirit.

Production Details: This is a batch strength offering from the Lagavulin distillery. It is comprised of 3 ex-bourbon barrels all filled in 2007. Since it was bottled in 2019, we can surmise it is approximately 12 years in age.

Distillery: Lagavulin, meaning “hollow of/by the mill” is one of the quintessential Islay distilleries, nestled between Ardbeg and Laphroaig on the south coast. Also owned by Diageo, it was founded in 1816 in an attempt to copy Laphroaig and produces 1.4M liters per year. Lagavulin is known for using a long fermentation and extremely long second distillation, in order to maximize reflux. The water source filters through peat bogs, and almost exclusively refill barrels (with some sherry barrels) are used in maritime warehouses, producing one of the biggest, smokiest whiskies on Islay. Very seldom seen in independent bottlings, and never blended.



6. Elements of Islay Oc₆ (58.1% ABV)

IB: We have a second Elements bottling featured tonight, this one from the Bruichladdich distillery on the western side of Islay.

Production details: Again, a cask strength vating of ex-bourbon barrels distilled in 2011 and bottled in 2019 yielding 870 bottles of an 8 year old whiskey. This is most likely similar to a x.1 Octomore bottling. Incredibly heavily peated, with this years releases bearing staggering levels of 139 to 208ppm.

Distillery: From our 2019 tasting notes: The famous Octomore line hails from the Bruichladdich Distillery on the southwestern tip of Islay. These whiskies previously were by design as heavily peated as possible, and usually quite young to maintain as smoky a profile as possible. The 10th series aims for a “softer smoke” and a more complex experience. The Octomore lines are coded, with the x.1 being the core bottling aged in ex-bourbon casks; the x.2s having a European oak finishing; the x.3s being single vintage, single estate bottlings of 100% Islay barley and generally matured in a mix of ex-bourbon and ex-European oak; and finally the x.4s often being experimental, or virgin oak matured whiskies. For comparison, 11.1 (the 2020 release) is just 5 years old.

