



Kelowna Scotch & Fine Spirits Society

presents the
**September 2021 Tasting:
Highland Park**

Featured bottlings:
Highland Park 12 Year Old Viking Honour
Valknut
Single Cask Series: BCLS Cask #5857
Single Cask Series: BCLS Cask #1780
TWA/3R Tokyo Orkney 1999
The Whisky Agency Orkney 1999

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Highland Park

Welcome to our 7th tasting season. This year we wanted to introduce at least one distillery-focused tasting, which we haven't done in a few seasons now. We chose Highland Park due to the vast array of official, single cask and independently bottled expressions available as well as the fact that the whisky is generally of very high quality, value and regard. There's just a lot to compare!

Highland Park is the most northerly distillery in Scotland (approximately the same latitude as Anchorage, Alaska), and one of the oldest, founded as an illicit still roughly in 1798 on one of the seventy plus islands comprising the region of Orkney. Currently home to just two distilleries, this region is closer to Norway than London, and is one of the earliest regions to be colonized by Vikings during the 800s, who ruled this area until 1468. Highland Park pays homage to this history by including a lot of Norse symbolism in their marketing.

Highland Park whisky is generally lightly to moderately peated, although in a different manner than Islay whiskies. Due to the 100mph winter winds generated in this area no trees survive, although heather grows abundantly allowing the formation of vast peat bogs, 9000 years old and 4 meters deep. All peat is cut from Hobbister Moor, 7 miles from the distillery. Heather peat burns hotter and cleaner and tends to produce an earthier, more herbal, wood-smoke profile compared to Islays damp seaweed-laden peat producing those salty, medicinal, iodine notes.

The majority of the 2.5 million liters of whisky distilled here annually is bottled as single malt whisky, with a significant portion also being blended into Famous Grouse at Glenturret.

Highland Park is one the few distilleries that still use its own floor maltings, impressive for a distillery of its capacity. All the water is drawn from Cattie Maggie's spring, and its mash drives 4 pear-shaped stills with roughly horizontal necks.

American and European oak casks are used, with the vast majority of spirit (especially single casks) being matured in larger Spanish casks seasoned for 2 years with Oloroso sherry. A technique called 'cask harmonization' is used where up to 150 casks of different ages are blended to ensure consistency, similar to vatting. Individual casks are aged on-site in 26 temperate warehouses, mostly earthen dunnage.

1. Highland Park 12 Year Old Viking Honour (43% ABV)

The 12 year old is Highland Park's staple bottling, but not their youngest. Predominantly matured in first fill Oloroso seasoned casks, primarily European oak with some American and a portion of peated malt. This is the middle age of their core line-up which also contains their 10 year old Viking Scars and 18 year old Viking Pride.



2. Highland Park Valknut (46.8% ABV)

Valknut is the second release in the limited Viking Legend series, the first bottling being called Valkyrie. Valknut translates to “knot of

those slain in battle” and is represented by three inter-linked triangles, although it is uncertain if this symbology is a more recent addition to Norse lore. The whiskey itself is non-age stated and matured in sherry seasoned European and American oak casks with a minority share coming from ex-bourbon casks. This expression also uses a portion of locally grown Tartan variety barley arising from an agronomy project in collaboration with Orkney College.



3. The Whiskey Agency / 3 Rivers Tokyo Orkney 1999 (53.1% ABV)

Unfortunately, as is the case with most The Whiskey Agency (TWA) bottlings, what you see is really what you get. TWA is a german independent bottler which doesn't maintain a website beyond a simple placeholder (see for yourself at www.whisky-agency.de), and they don't tend to publish the specifications on really any of their bottles. They often bottle casks for other retailers, Kensington Wine Market being one of them, and Three Rivers Tokyo, a whiskey bar in Japan, being another. This cask was filled in 1999 and bottled 2018 and so is 18 years old. The fact that this was matured in a "hogshead" almost certainly points to an ex-American oak re-manufactured bourbon barrel. Whether it was also sherry seasoned is unknown. Un-chill-filtered, uncoloured and most likely cask strength, with the proof pointing towards cool, damp maturation conditions.



4. The Whiskey Agency Orkney 1999 (52.5% ABV)

Here we are again, with very little information to share on this bottle, although perhaps a little more than the previous. Similar to the Three Rivers bottle, this cask was filled in 1999 and bottled in 2018, making for the second 18 year old whisky tonight. This bottle provides a few more tantalizing details. Firstly, this was “matured in a butt,” pointing to a large, European oak cask purpose built for aging or transporting sherry, so this one is certain to taste more “sherried” than the previous. Interestingly, this release consists of only 120 bottles, which is far fewer than one would expect from even an 18 year old sherry butt built to accommodate 500 liters. More than likely this cask was split with another independent bottler or perhaps Highland Park themselves. In either case, we also don’t know which fill this was, so the impact of the sherry seasoning is left as an exercise to the taster. Once again, unchill-filtered, uncoloured and probably cask strength.



5. Highland Park Single Cask Series BCLS Cask #1780 (62.1% ABV)

6. Highland Park Single Cask Series BCLS Cask #5857 (64.1% ABV)

Interestingly, we have two examples of single casks custom bottled by Highland Park themselves, an emerging trend in Scotch whisky much more commonly seen in American Bourbon. These two 12 year old bottles were released simultaneously, making for an interesting comparison both between the pair, as well as to the 12 year old Viking Honour. These are still available at a few stores around the province. Both are from refill butts, which normally would imply the second fill of whisky after the sherry has been emptied; however, both are powerfully sherried and the cask strength on both is quite potent, curiously stronger than the TWA bottlings adjusting for age. It

may be our recommendation to let these air a while before drinking. Cask 5857 is supposedly the “fruitier” of the two, with 1780 being the “spicier and smokier” of the pair. We’ll let you decide.

