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What You Need to Know About > **Scotch**

SINGLE MALT OR BLENDED? ~ HIGHLANDS OR LOWLANDS? ~ ON THE ROCKS OR STRAIGHT UP?
 HERE'S A **PRACTICAL GUIDE** TO UNDERSTANDING *the finer points* OF THAT
MOST MANLY OF LIQUORS

WHAT IS SCOTCH, EXACTLY?

Scotch whisky, like Sean Connery, is Scottish, dammit! It's a distillate mash of malted barley that must be aged in repurposed oak for no fewer than three years; oddly enough, American white oak works best. Blended scotch combines malt and grain whiskies,



the latter usually coming from a more processed, machinelike, continuous still. Single malts come from more artisanal pot stills, which yield fuller flavors. Like American corn-fueled bourbon, scotch is typically distilled twice, which helps it retain its distinct flavor. (Irish whiskies pass through the still three times.) "The more you distill it, the more you strip

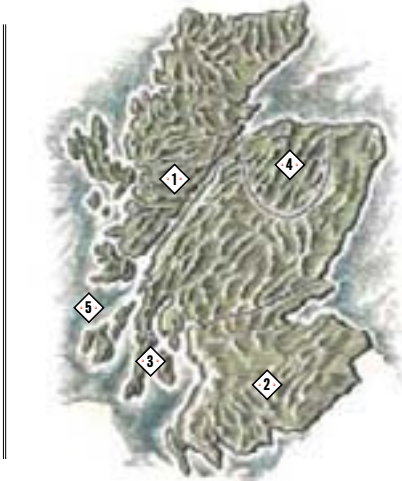
the whiskey," says Richard Paterson, master blender of The Dalmore. "It's like taking a fat man and making him anorexic: He loses his muscle, body, and character."

AGES

Unless you're a pro, stick to drinking scotches that are ten to eighteen years old. You'll get enough complexity in the glass and variety on the shelves to keep it interesting, and you won't look like a jackass for buying a thirty-five-year-old bottle whose subtleties will be completely lost on you.

DRINKING YOUR SCOTCH

WATER: Add just a splash of cool still water to bring the alcohol level down from 40 percent to about 35 percent.



You're not a pansy—some dilution is recommended. If it still burns your mouth, add more water. If it's "cask strength" scotch, it has more alcohol (up to 67 percent), so add even more water to make it palatable. **ICE:** Never by the handful. Too much ice bruises the flavor; making it too cold stunts the taste. Water is the best way to dilute a scotch, but if you must use ice, we suggest one small cube—but you'll only be tainting



a drink that took perhaps eighteen years to craft. **GLASS:** A rocks glass with a chunky bottom works well. Its thickness keeps the warmth of your hand out of the scotch and lets it rest at room temperature. Also, the width of the tumbler really lets you get your nose in there for a full sniff. **TASTING:** "The key to tasting it," says Paterson, "is actually holding it in the mouth, chewing it, and letting the warmth of your tongue release the flavors." If it's not the right strength, he says, "you'll end up blinking and scrunching your face." **SPEED:** It's not a shot. Savor it. "A good measure of scotch," says Paterson, "should take about forty minutes to drink." By "good measure," he means about a quarter cup.

~ Scotch - Producing Regions ~

SCOTCHES, LIKE WINES, REFLECT THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PLACES THEY COME FROM. A BOTTLE FROM THE NORTH WON'T TASTE LIKE ONE FROM THE SOUTH; ONE FROM THE SEASIDE WON'T RESEMBLE ANOTHER FROM THE HILLS. SCOTLAND HAS FIVE SIGNATURE SCOTCH-PRODUCING REGIONS, EACH OFFERING DISPARATE PLEASURES.

1. HIGHLANDS

Fuller-bodied, muscular, and bold—the perfect flask-filler for a tailgate or a hike up a snowy peak.

2. LOWLANDS

Lighter-bodied, elegant, and floral—something you can drink comfortably in front of the fire all day long.

3. CAMPBELTOWN

Complex and rare (Paterson says only three distilleries remain in this coastal area); notes of damp salt and spice; perhaps the best ever homespun palliative for seasickness.

4. SPEYSIDE

A valley geographically within the Highlands but offering a much more finessed product. Not quite as feminine as the Lowland Ladies but soft and lovely nonetheless.

5. ISLAY

Peaty and smoky, like liquid bacon that gets you drunk.

HOW TO WORK YOUR WAY UP THE SCOTCH LADDER

ACCORDING TO *Eben Hemm*, SPIRITS EXPERT AT B.R. GUEST RESTAURANTS

THINK OF SCOTCH DRINKING LIKE TRAINING FOR A MARATHON: YOUR FIRST DAYS WON'T BE BIG ONES, BUT THEY'LL BE PRODUCTIVE ENOUGH. START SLOW. GAIN STRENGTH. IN TIME YOU'LL BE CHUGGING ALONG, READY TO GO ANY DISTANCE. HERE'S A PERSONALIZED SCHEDULE. GO AT YOUR OWN SPEED.

EASY	MEDIUM	ADVANCED	EXPERT
Oban 14-YEAR "Sweet without being too light-bodied."	Auchentoshan 10-YEAR "More oily but still sweet, with a nose of plums."	Balvenie Doublewood 12-YEAR "A great way to taste the art of aging"	Ardbeg Uigeadail "The ultimate in Islay smoke, iodine, and intensity."

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