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## FROM THE EDITORS

# CANADA IS A CONTENDER IN THE WHISKY GAME

30 January 2017 by [Dave Broom](#)



January and the first trip of the year: taking the Arctic route (in a plane, I hasten to add) to Vancouver Island for the truly wonderful Victoria Whisky Festival – which, [as Davin de Kergommeaux wrote about last year](#), is not only run for charity, but they'll even drive you home afterwards. Don't you just love Canada?

It also happened to coincide with the inauguration in the US, so there were lots of Americans shuffling around saying variations on the theme of: 'It wasn't me,' and pausing a little too long when passing the windows of realtors.

For me, it also meant a chance to catch up with my old friend and mentor 'Sir'

Mike Nicolson, Scotch industry legend, third-generation distiller and who has settled here in retirement, or rather as retiring as a chap like Nicolson can be, given that he has a blues band and is consulting with a raft of new whisky distilleries across British Columbia, thanks to a (belated) relaxation in legislation allowing small-scale distilling.



*Victoria Caledonian distillery: A memorable whisky for Broom from the Victoria Whisky Festival*

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(I'm not using the c-word. Mark Gillespie of Whiskycast told me that my last rant about it had irritated some people. I don't see why. 'Craft' is an attitude and approach; a philosophy influenced itself by a tradition passed down through generations. It is not determined by size, beard length, or complexity of tattoos. Not that I have anything against any of those things.)

Of the small selection I tried – Shelter Point, Victoria Caledonian, deVine/Glen Saanich (watch out for that 'Glen', guys, the Scotch Whisky Association will be dumping bricks on your lawn) – the quality is clearly already there.

The issue now, for them and their colleagues in the US, is defining what North American single malt whisky is. Does it need a definition? What grains can be

used? Must it be aged, and only aged in oak, and should there be a minimum maturation time?

As an increasing number of single malts appear, so the need for some sort of cohesive concept of what the term actually means becomes that little bit more pressing. It should be an interesting debate.

Some might say no regulations are required. I say look at Japan, where distillers are now becoming, how shall I put this... somewhat *exercised* at trying to write a proper definition because, as it stands, the whole industry is open to abuse.

The other highlight (other than finding an obscure Bunny Wailer Jamaican pressing) was being asked to give some thoughts on a new prestige range of Canadian whiskies from Corby, which is, just to remind you, the largest whisky distillery in North America. Hold that thought.

The current master blender there is Dr Don Livermore (an appropriate name for a whisky maker, I always think) who is wholly geek, boffin, communicator and proselytiser for Canadian whisky.

A quick recap: Canadian whiskies are, predominantly, single distillery blends. Different grains – corn, wheat, rye, triticale, sometimes barley – distilled separately in different still configurations and types, aged separately in a variety of different cask types and then blended. You look at that and say: ‘There’s the building blocks for making complex whiskies.’ (This is also why a definition for single malt is needed.)

*Corby collection: The packs are not yet finished, but the whisky excites Broom*

And yet Canada has been noticeable by its absence from whisky's recent growth as a premium spirit. For Dr Don and (Scottish) brand director Ross Hendry, enough was enough. It was time for Canadian whisky to stand up and say: 'You know what, guys, we can do it too.' The inspiration, Hendry freely admits, came from Classic/Rare Malts, Special Releases and Buffalo Trace's Antique Collection.

Four of the existing range – Lot 40, Gooderham & Worts, Pike Creek 10-year-old and Wiser's 18-year-old – have been given top-end extensions: Lot 40 100% rye into a robust, rosewater and clove cask strength; Gooderham & Worts as a gentle, complex, elegant 17-year-old, which is a masterclass in blending three different distillates (rye, corn and wheat); Pike Creek Speyside Finish 21-year-old, a fine-boned, refined corn & rye blend; and, finally, the mighty Wiser's 37-year-old, a corn-based whisky with some old rye blended in that's lusciously magnificent and complex, and already one of my whiskies of the year. Is Dr Don a craftsman? What do you think?

If these don't make people sit up and take notice, I don't know what will. The only things I disagree with are the prices, which at around C\$100 are too low. They say: 'We are here, we need to be taken seriously, we are different and these whiskies are valid.' Their emergence won't just benefit Corby, but the category.

'What's this got to do with Scotch, Dave?' Quite a lot, I'd say. Canada has always had quality – look at the ages of some of these – it just hasn't had self-belief. Just as importantly, it also has volume (remember, Corby... biggest distillery etc, etc).

It's not the size of this new range that matters – there are only 350 cases of each – it is what it says and what it makes the educated drinker think. There is now

another high-quality alternative. And there's plenty more to come.

Things in the world of whisky have just become that little bit more interesting.

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