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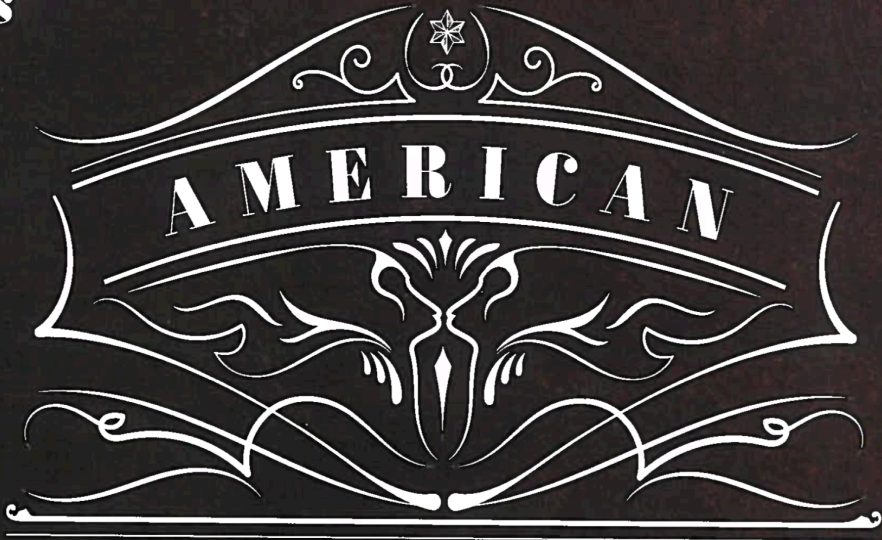


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SINGLE MALT



U.S. DISTILLERS ARE TAKING THIS TRADITIONAL WHISKEY STYLE IN UNEXPECTED DIRECTIONS.



If American whiskey were high school, bourbon would be the wholesome jock—cheerful, friendly, clean-cut, following the rules, making friends. American single malt would be the rebellious iconoclast with a notebook full of moody sketches and a penchant for skipping pep rallies to throw on some vintage vinyl and get high in their friend's garage.

Ten years ago, there were hardly any American single malt whiskeys. Today, the category is one of the most dynamic in all of spirits. There's no formal standard of identity for American single malt, which might be one reason the category is so much fun—and can be so disorienting.

Creative American producers are doing things that would make Scottish distillers' heads spin, like finishing their whiskeys in plum wine barrels or smoking their malted barley with indigenous fuels like mesquite wood.

As the category develops, expect to see a bit more standardization around what constitutes American single malt. The American Single Malt Whiskey Commission, founded in 2016, is working on some guidelines for that standard, but like any rule-making process, it takes time. For now, American Single malt is unfettered, experimental, and highly regionalized. What, after all, could be more American than that?

By Margaret Waterbury

ST. GEORGE BALLER WHISKEY

St. George Spirits; Alameda, Calif.

St. George is one of the founding fathers of the American craft spirits movement, so it only makes sense it would make one of the most visionary malt whiskeys on the market. According to the distillery, Baller Whiskey (so named because it makes a killer highball) is a "California take on the Japanese spin on Scotch whisky." It's made from 100 percent malted barley and aged in used bourbon and wine casks for three to four years before being maple-charcoal-filtered and finished in barrels that previously held a Japanese style of plum liqueur called umeshu. Fruity, crisp, and just a little bit smoky, Baller surprises neat but truly shines with a touch of sparkling water and plenty of ice.

www.stgeorgespirits.com

DEL BAC SINGLE MALT

Hamilton Distillers; Tucson, Ariz.

Stephen Paul built his first successful business crafting fine furniture from local woods harvested from the Sonoran Desert near his home in Tucson, Ariz. One night he wondered: If you could make furniture from locally harvested wood, why not whiskey? He and his daughter, Amanda Paul, founded Hamilton Distillers in 2011 to explore the impact of mesquite smoke on malt whiskey. Del Bac Single Malt is made with a combination of unsmoked and mesquite-smoked malt, all of which is malted and kilned onsite using a custom-built malting system. Fruity and pungently smoky with a cooling, almost eucalyptus-like finish, Del Bac is a whiskey with true southwest terroir.

hamiltondistillers.com

WESTWARD SINGLE MALT

House Spirits Distillery; Portland, Ore.

Founded by former brewers, House Spirits' first big hit was Aviation Gin. Today, the brand is focusing on a distinctly new-world style of single malt matured in new, charred oak casks, just like bourbon. Founder Christian Krogstad says he and his team apply best practices from brewing—think boiled wort and temperature controlled fermentation tanks—to produce a clean, floral new make. Maturation in new, lightly charred American oak casks gives it a touch of that signature spicy-sweet flavor and makes Westward Single Malt the perfect bridge for bourbon drinkers looking to make the transition.

www.housespirits.com

PORT CASK FINISHED VIRGINIA-HIGHLAND WHISKY

Virginia Distillery Company; Lovington, Va.

Founded by an Irish businessman, Virginia Distillery Company takes a traditional approach to single malt production, from its nearly century-old Boby Mill to its choice to skip that pesky "e" when talking about its whiskies. But that doesn't mean its flagship product, Port Cask Finished Virginia-Highland Whisky, is a carbon copy of Scotch. While Virginia Distillery Company waits for its house made malt to mature, it's created this unique combination of whisky distilled at the Virginia distillery and whisky distilled in Scotland, blended together and finished in port casks. Fortified wine fans will find lots to like here, with big notes of raisins and candied nuts paired with a round, voluptuous mouthfeel.

www.vadistillery.com

PINE BARRENS BOTTLED-IN-BOND SINGLE MALT

Long Island Spirits; Baiting Hollow, N.Y.

It's often said that making beer is the first step to making whiskey, but few distilleries take that phrase quite as literally as Long Island Spirits. Pine Barrens whiskey is made from finished barleywine style ale brewed at the distillery—hops, carbonation, and all. Earlier this year, Long Island Spirits released a Bottled-in-Bond version of its Pine Barrens whiskey, the first American single malt ever released under the designation. Look for aromatic, resinous notes of pine, mint, and even cannabis as well as a rich, beery flavor.

www.lispirits.com

