

Irish Whiskeys Sizzle With Contemporary Appeal



There's no such thing as an uninspired Irish whiskey. Collectively they present aficionados a range of whiskeys diverse in style and breadth of expressions with world-class offerings at every price point. Add in that they're highly aromatic and exceptionally easy to drink and you begin to explain why Irish whiskeys have become hot commodities, continuing a growth cycle begun in the late '90s, sales of Irish in the U.S. increased 16.8 percent in 2007.

Part of their attraction is that they are triple-distilled from both malted and unmalted barley, and most lack the peaty smokiness of Scotch. Traditionally Irish distillers develop the character of their spirits in the vat rather than post-distillation blending. As a result, whiskeys are typically light-bodied and brimming with character and intriguing nuances.

Leading the popular resurgence is category bestseller John Jameson & Sons, whose whiskeys are produced at the *Middleton Distillery* in County Cork. The brand's upper echelons include **Jameson 1780**, a super-premium blend of triple-distilled, malted and unmalted barley whiskeys aged 12 years in used sherry casks and bourbon barrels. The higher proportion of sherry-finished whiskeys gives the blend a slightly sweet, fruity and nutty palate.

Jameson Limited Reserve pays homage to the distillery's tradition of aging whiskeys in oloroso casks. After 18 years maturing in sherrywood, the whiskey is finished in charred American oak and has a wafting, sherry-influenced bouquet and a broad palate with nutty, spicy notes. Their suggested retail prices are \$35 and \$85 respectively. (Pernod Ricard)

Not surprisingly, the other global player in the category—Bushmills—has an equally distinguished roster of whiskeys. Case in point is **Bushmills 16 Year Old Irish Single Malt**, a blend comprised of whiskeys matured in ex-bourbon barrels, Port pipes and oloroso butts; the flavorants from each of which contributes mightily to the distinctive character of finished malt.

The portfolio also includes **Bushmills 21 Year Old Irish Single Malt**, an ultra-premium blend of whiskeys aged more than 20 years in charred American oak and Spanish oloroso sherry butts before being finished in Madeira oak drums. The resulting malt has tremendous complexity and sophistication. Priced around \$100, the recently launched Bushmills 1608 is a small batch whiskey triple-distilled with expensive crystal malt; so-called because of its crystalline appearance and revered for its chocolate and toffee flavor.

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Handcrafted Gems

Redbreast Pure Pot Still is another reason to rejoice. The brand is triple-distilled in traditional copper pot stills entirely from malted barley and spring water. Introduced in 1939 by John Jameson & Sons, the whiskey is barrel-aged for a minimum of 12 years in bourbon barrels and sherry casks. It's complex, delightfully assertive and smooth as satin. (Pernod Ricard)

Knappogue Castle Single Malt is produced in limited quantity from malts distilled between 1990 and 1992 and selected by the master blender for their exceptional quality. The whiskey has been aged a minimum of 15 years in American oak and bottled at the traditional strength of 86-proof. Knappogue is also known for their Castle Collection, a series of 6 vintage-dated whiskeys; the first of which debuted in 1990. (Castle Brands)

Another highly esteemed marque is **Tyrconnell Single Malt**, a pure pot still whiskey that dates back to 1762. It's made at the Cooley Distillery in Dundalk using malted and unmalted barley and spring water, and then barrel-aged for 5-6 years. The spirit is full-bodied with a malty bouquet, slightly sweet flavor and a marvelously dry finish. (Gemini Spirits & Wines)

Those seeking more adventure in their lives will want to spend time with award-winning **Connemara Peated Single Malt**. Produced also

at the Cooley Distillery, the small batch whiskey is distilled with malted barley kiln dried over peat fires, which imbues the finished whiskey with a distinctively smoky edge. The Connemara range recently expanded and now includes both a 12-year old and a 115.8-proof Cask Strength expression. (Gemini Spirits & Wines)

Midleton Very Rare is an ultra-sophisticated whiskey triple-distilled in the firm's famed copper pot stills from spring water and malted and unmalted barley. Artisanal in every respect, the vintage-dated spirit is matured over 20 years in American white oak barrels. Bottling of the reserve whiskey is limited to only 50 casks a year. (Pernod Ricard)

Two brands have built their reputations on delivering tremendous bang for the buck. The first is easy-drinking **Kilbeggan Irish Whiskey** from the Cooley Distillery. It's comprised of pot- and continuous-distilled spirits made from malted barley, corn and lime-softened spring water. (Gemini Spirits & Wines)

The other is perennial all-star **Tullamore Dew**, a small batch whiskey aged for a minimum of three years in American oak barrels and ex-Sherry casks. Created in 1829 and now produced at the Midleton Distillery, Tullamore Dew is a premium dram at a value price. (SKYY Spirits)

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