

"There is no cause for alarm. It is not as if we have no Whisky; indeed we have lots of Whisky, but indeed we also have lots of demand."

Public notice from Corio Distillery, Geelong, Victoria, circa 1960.



Nicks Wine Merchant's Australian Whisky Guide.

The last few years have seen a meteoric increase in both the popularity and quality of Australian whisky, yet by world standards, the industry is young. This comes as quite a surprise for several reasons. A taste for spirits arrived with the First Fleet (1788), as did the British Navy custom of trading and rationing spirits (beer and wine didn't keep well on long voyages). Initially, these were mainly rum type concoctions meant strictly for officers and officials and used medicinally or on special occasions. However, they quickly became an article of exchange between all social classes. Convicts and soldiers were often paid with rum, even abstainers received a ration. Given the difficult conditions in the young colony combined with an ignorance of viticulture, it's not surprising that strong spirit became entrenched as the preferred palliative well before wine and beer. Spirits were set to be big business. The privately contracted Second Fleet which arrived in 1790 sought to maximise the material opportunities of the voyage, loading ships with goods to trade at exorbitant prices - including spirits. Recognising 'New Holland' as a lucrative market, visits from other suppliers followed. With them came a diversity of peoples, many of whom brought skills and practises previously unseen to Australia, affording them the opportunity to establish businesses that could supply other immigrants with a taste of home.

One might have anticipated a scenario in early Australia similar to that which led to the birth of American Bourbon and its sister whiskies, when in the early 1700s, a combination of bad economic times and religious unrest against the established Church in Great Britain set off a wave of emigration from Scotland and Ireland. These settlers who came to be known as the "Scotch-Irish" in the new World, brought to North America their religion, their distrust of government control, and their skill at distilling whiskey.

Instead in Australia, the wine industry won out, although many early wineries did produce Brandy (an oak matured spirit distilled from grapes) in large quantities for both consumption and the fortification of wines such as Port, Tokay, and Muscat - all of which were far more popular than table wines until relatively recently. It's also noteworthy that while beer has been an enormous part of Australia's drinking culture for well over a century, whisky has not - despite the fact that the primary ingredient of beer is malted barley, also the key ingredient for Scotland's malt whiskies. One is a logical extension of the other. By contrast, the American whiskey industry was founded by immigrants who made use of surplus local ingredients, namely corn, wheat and rye (in fact, several existing American stills were originally named 'beer stills').

In short, the ingredients (grains), the knowledge (immigrants) and equipment (pot stills & barrels) have been available in Australia for a long time. As to why Australia didn't take to whisky earlier remains uncertain.

Tracing Australia's distilling roots has been a difficult task. Our initial research indicates that grains, some of which may have been malted, were being distilled illegally, and made into whisk(e)y. Ned Kelly and his gang are said to have funded some of their exploits by selling whiskey made in a still hidden in the bush, some distance from their hideout at Bullock Creek, near Mansfield. A small still was installed nearby the Kelly's den as a front so that in the event that the authorities were informed, the main operation could continue unhindered. Kelly's gang grew barley & mange wurzel on their 20 acre plot to produce their whiskey. A fragment of a pot still was recovered in 1968, [pictured below] exactly where Ned described in would be in a letter he wrote to his mother over eighty years earlier.



In the 1880s in Nirranda, a tiny village east of Warrnambool, Victoria, Tom Delaney distilled whisky employing a recipe and technique based on Dr Marcus Lafayette Burn's book *"The Complete Practical Distiller"*. Delaney's whiskey is said to have been called 'Mountain Dew' and was "as smooth as new milk" according to local farmer, Pat Delaney. The whiskey was available to sample at Job Wines' Hotel at Woodford, north of Warrnambool, indicating that there was both a demand, and that it was indeed drinkable. At the peak of production, Delaney is said to have been producing 100 gallons (378 litres) a week. Following his arrest in 1894, production ceased.

Both the Kelly and Delaney families were of Irish descent, and presumably produced whiskies in an Irish style, which is why we've used the 'e' when spelling whisky. The 'e' vanishes from this article now, as in 1928 with the founding of Australia's biggest distillery, the aim became to replicate 'Scotch' whisky, the style that has continued to inspire most of today's Australian whisky makers.



Below: The elements of great Scotch whisky - peat (a primitive form of coal), casks for maturation, clean water and quality grains are all available in Australia.

At right is a sample of 'New make spirit', fresh from the still (courtesy of Bakery Hill Distillery). Whisky obtains its colour from maturation in wood.



The Legacy of Corio

Many older Australians will remember Corio Whisky, a brand with a questionable reputation as the affordable Australian spirit that demanded heavy mixing. It was joked about as been 'COR-10' in reference to a petrol brand of the time, and was so rough and ready that many thought that long maturation normally associated with whisky didn't apply to Corio - it simply took place on board the truck from Geelong to Melbourne!

Corio a suburb of Geelong, Victoria, gave name to a distillery and a whisky, during a time when there was a worldwide shortage of Scotch whisky. The distillery was built with a harbor frontage and good access to rail, essential for the efficient national distribution of the new product. To handle the barley, 60ft high hoppers were built, with 120,000 bushels of holding capacity. These hoppers were connected by conveyor belt to a rail siding, allowing the barley to be easily transported into the distillery. Another building constructed of terracotta walls with a fibro cement roof around a steel frame, housed grist, mash and stills. It was designed to minimise heat absorption and dust influence. On the other side of the railway, a large four story warehouse was built using thick, hollow brick walls aimed at minimising temperature fluctuation as the whisky matured in barrel for a minimum of five years. Storage capacity was a staggering 1,300,000 gallons (almost 5,000,000 litres of spirit). For some perspective, Australia's present largest operating distillery has the capacity to produce 200,000 litres per annum.

Corio seems to have had a period of success in the late 1940's through to the 1960's, with a series of advertisements proudly proclaiming their status as Australia's Champion Whisky, following several trophy wins at various agricultural shows around the country. We are unable to establish what, if anything, was competing against Corio in these competitions. Based on remarks from people who remember the product, chances are, there wasn't any competition of note.

Vic Chlebnikowski from Nicks Wine Merchants, a liquor retailer for over 30 years recalls Corio being "rough as guts" and encouraged people to spend the extra couple of dollars to buy the 'genuine article' from Scotland. Tony Evans of Mayerling Cellars, retailer since the early 1970s, also recalls Corio, echoing Vic's sentiment. David Baker of Bakery Hill Distillery cringes with the very mention of Corio. Despite being off the market for many decades, it would seem Corio's legacy continues to dog the industry. Since establishing his distillery in 1999, Baker has frequently faced scepticism when presenting his product from people that have less than fond memories of Geelong's once notorious whisky.

Corio suffered a fate similar to many of Scotland's distilleries in the early 1980s, closing following massive financial losses. The stock is rumoured to have been re-distilled into Vodka. Bottles of Corio's whisky are nowadays very rare and virtually unprocurable. Yet speculation continues that someday, a cask or two may appear to threaten us again. The brand marks a watershed in Australian whisky history. It was a grand investment, that ultimately failed to capture the public's imagination, but left behind a twofold legacy: The first was proof positive that whisky could be made in Australia, and on a large scale; the second was that if it was ever to be done again, the focus would have to be on quality rather than quantity. Thankfully, that's exactly what those in the present day industry have realised.

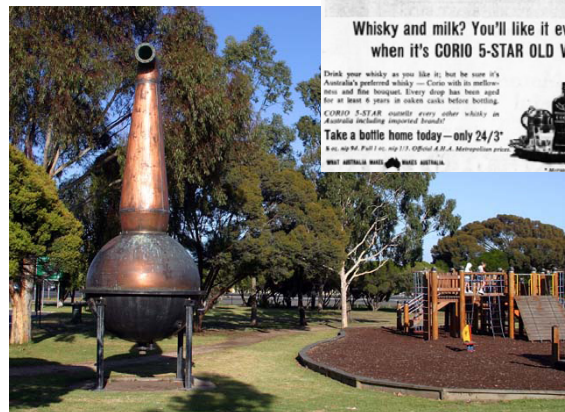
Tasting the fruits of their labours will instantly dispel the myth that great whisky can only come from Scotland.



An image from a COR Petrol advertisement. Commonwealth Oil Refineries (1920).



Whisky and milk? You'll like it even better when it's CORIO 5-STAR OLD WHISKY



Above: The Geelong visitor's centre is located next to a park - which contains an old still from the old Corio distillery located next to the play equipment. This 2000 gallon steam jacket copper pot still was one of the original units imported from Scotland in 1928 by the Distillers Company of Edinburgh, when it established the Distillers Corporation at Corio. It was used to make Corio Whisky until 1949 when it was replaced. The installation commemorates the link between the shire of Corio and the Scottish Disillery Company over a period of 52 years.

Below: A rather amusing public notice issued by the Corio Distillery, c.1960.

PUBLIC NOTICE

RATIONING OF

FIVE YEAR OLD

WHISKIES

Equitable Distribution

In view of the publicity given to the reported shortage of Australian Whisky, the United Distillers Pty. Ltd. desires to announce briefly the facts of the situation as far as Corio Distillery products are concerned.

The Company insists on maintaining its fixed policy of not marketing any of its brands of Whiskies (all of which are produced at Corio Distillery) until they are at least five years old. The Commonwealth Law demands but two years.

The persistently increased demand for Corio Whiskies has now reached an all-time high and the production programme of five and more years ago did not anticipate the present enormous demand.

The Corio Distillery, by far the largest producer of Australian Whiskies, has progressively increased its output and is continuing to do so. During recent years, considerable expansion has taken place and additional modern plant has been installed at Corio, which will greatly help the position from year to year.

There is no cause for alarm. It is not as if we have no Whisky; indeed we have lots of Whisky, but indeed also we have lots of demand.

The Lark Distillery

Est. 1992. Stills: 1600L Wash & 1200L Spirit. Oak Regime: Australian Port & Sherry

Recently we were visited by Lark's founder, Bill Lark, often referred to as 'The Godfather' of the modern Australian Whisky Industry.



It was an epiphany of sorts that led to the birth of Lark's distillery. Bill Lark [pictured left], a keen fly fisherman and Scotch whisky enthusiast was drinking Cardhu with friends whilst cooking the day's catch. The conversation naturally turned to

Scotch, when Bill suddenly recognised Tasmania's untapped potential to produce whisky: Ample clean air and water, some of the world's best barley, as well as peat bogs scattered across the Tasmanian Highlands "ticked all of the boxes."

Lark's distillery was founded in 1992, and has produced whisky continuously since Bill and Lyn Lark succeeded in having Tasmania's century-and-a-half-long ban on distilling overturned. They filled their first barrel with spirit from a hobby-sized 75-litre still. "When we started the idea was simply to see if we could make good malt whisky in Tasmania, not necessarily with the idea to establish an industry" says Lark. "The fact is that the whisky soon proved to be of such good character that the business quickly grew up around us."

Bill Lark has always been adamant that Australia, though Tasmania in particular is a fantastic place to make whisky. "We are lucky in Tasmania that Cascade Brewery still operates its own malting and will sell to other industries" he says. "The quality of their malting is evidenced by the success of Cascade beer around the world. We also use particular dried yeasts (the combination of which is a trade secret), the direct result of research undertaken in the UK on flavour profiling and depth of character achieved through different yeast regimes".

So what makes Lark's whisky different to any other?

"Whilst the laws governing production of malt whisky in Australia are based on the UK legislative requirements to be made only from malted barley, yeast & water, it's natural that there will be some similarities between Australian and Scottish malts" concedes Lark. "However, our distillery is fortunate to own its own peat bog in the central highlands of Tasmania. The peating of our malt imparts a sweetness and smoky character influenced by the decaying forest matter of the Tasmanian native vegetation surrounding the peat bog. The Tasmanian peat character is subtly different from Scottish peat. At lark distillery we've also developed a process of post malt peat smoking in which the Scotch Whisky Industry have shown particular interest. No other distillery in Australia peat smokes their malt using Tasmanian peat in the manner we do". As for barrel maturation, "When Lark Distillery commenced making whisky we made a philosophical decision to mature our whisky in small 'quarter' casks as we had heard stories from Scotland where this had been tried in years past that the small casks deliver a richness of character which is obviously different to the larger cask maturation. We certainly believe this is the case following many, many such favourable comments about our whisky together with the belief that small cask aging contributes to the whisky giving such a big finish to our whiskies. Also at present all releases of Lark whiskies are



single cask releases, this makes them special and different as well".

Typically, 200-300 litre barrels previously filled with Australian Sherry or Australian Port are used.

Lark's can boast another first being home to the world's youngest female distiller, Kristy Lark, who has followed on under Bill's careful supervision. Impressed by her results, the International Institute of Brewers and Distillers awarded Kristy a scholarship to visit Scotland, where she had the opportunity to be influenced by the greats of the whisky industry.

"We've come from nothing 15 years ago to where we are today" says Bill. We're now employing some seven full time staff and the same number of casuals in cellar door retailing, production, marketing, exporting and our new venture of whisky tourism. The interest in Australian/Tasmanian malt whisky is growing by the day internationally and whilst the Australian industry will for a long time yet be limited in availability we will be able to secure a place for our whiskies in all the established malt whisky markets around the world. I know the whisky market has been dominated by the large international whisky companies, but I believe the market for hand crafted whiskies will have the strongest growth into the foreseeable future. In ten years time I see my daughter and General Manager, Kristy, taking the world by storm".

Given Lark's commitment to quality, there's going to be a lot to look forward to. "Our method of production is very hands on and traditional in practice, it is time consuming and laborious but we would not change it for quids and never will. If there is a need to increase the level of production that much that we would need to change our production methods then would simply build another distillery and leave Lark Distillery the way it is". For Lark's, the main difficulty of making malt whisky in Australia remains the current taxation and excise regime. "We look forward to the day we the whisky industry can receive a similar tax relief currently offered to Australian wineries."

What a difference time makes in the world of whisky!

Six years ago we were first introduced to the whiskies from a small Tasmanian venture called Larks. Back then, good Aussie whisky seemed well beyond the horizon. We commented "*The Larks tell us that the Scots have been very supportive of this project and given the similar environments Tasmania and Scotland share, one could reasonably anticipate a whisky of some merit. This is a nice whisky in the lighter style, but it is not one of the great examples of the spirit. Time may change this however, and credit must be extended to the Larks for their efforts. Perhaps the Scots are yet to yield all of their whisky making secrets?*" Larks latest offerings confirmed what we'd anticipated in 2003. These are sensational whiskies that are now winning awards and praise world wide with exports to Japan, Singapore, Scandinavia, New Zealand, England and even Scotland!

1 The Lark Distillery Cask Strength Single Cask Single Malt Whisky LD75 (500ml) \$129.99

Tasting note: *Not only unique - an absolute belter of a whisky! Gold colour with pale straw hue. An intense sniff! Assertive notes of salty nuts, plum jam, vanilla, liquorice, manuka honey, orange and grapefruit, above fenugreek, tumeric, pepper and anise. The palate is enormous with a rich, almost oily texture, this time contrasted by tannin from barrel, providing an interesting sideshow to the astonishing array of exotic spices that roar through the palate. The fruits and nuts promised by the nose fight for recognition, and for brief moments, succeed, only to again succumb to the tidal wave of spice. An essay in balance, thrillseekers can safely imbibe without the addition of water. Exceptionally long aftertaste, which again features fruits and nuts early, before being bowled over by the spice. Sherry Cask LD75 Tasted. 58.0% Alc./Vol.*

2 Lark's Slainte Tasmanian Malt Whisky Liqueur (350ml) \$59.99

Tasting note: *A glorious liqueur produced by Mrs Lark (wife of Bill, mother of Kristy) in her 'why should you have all of the fun' 80 litre pot still. The recipe is a closely guarded secret. With results as spectacular of this, who can blame her?! To be frank, this liqueur is not cheap, and was the subject of considerable discussion amongst the buyers at Nicks Wine Merchants. The fundamental issue - will staff be able to resist temptation?... Unfortunately, the price puts it out of reach as an 'everyday' tippie, however, its charms simply cannot be resisted. This is a glorious, indulgent liqueur, which deserves a quiet moment of your time once in a while. Bright gold colour with pale straw hue. A superb nose, offering aromas of Haigh's Chocolate Ginger (a Melbourne delight!), fresh liquorice and a touch of citrus above mountain peppercorn (as seen in Lark's Vodka & Gin). The palate is thick and luscious, showing strong, honeycomb flavours above peppercorn, liquorice and ginger, with hints of milk chocolate emerging. Very spicy back palate. The finish is long and warming, dominated by sweet, spicy, peppercorn flavours. Warm spicy chocolate, orange and honey aftertaste. Wonderful stuff! 37.0% Alc./Vol.*



The Lark Distillery Single Cask Single Malt Whisky LD 88 **Future Release.**

Tasting note: *Pale straw colour with water like hue. Distinctive orange rind top note above toffee and lark's trademark exotic spice. Chocolate and orange drive the palate with a creamy texture and background of exotic spice. A hint of mint emerges towards the finish, and persists into the long, spicy, dried fruit aftertaste. Exceptional balance. 43.0% Alc./Vol.*

The Lark Distillery Single Cask Single Malt Whisky LD 93 **Future Release.**

Tasting note: *Deep straw colour with pale straw hue. The nose is quite restrained and simple without water. However, adding a few drops of water reveals lifted spicy marmalade and liquorice top notes, Indian spices and a delicate hint of marzipan. The palate is enormous. A big assertive whisky, the malt roars through the palate, spice, spice and more spice, the fruits struggle to get a look in. Very long dry finish. Spicy plum and marmalade aftertaste. A heroic whisky, thrills and spills from start to finish. 58% Alc./Vol.*

3 The Lark Distillery Single Cask Single Malt Whisky LD 39P \$89.99

Tasting note: *Golden colour with pale straw hue. A delightful, exotic nose, that requires some gentle coaxing to really blossom. Gentle agitation in the glass, warm it up in your hands, or, add a drop of water, whatever your preference. Some may like to do all three, regardless, the effort well and truly justifies the rewards. Top notes of heavily malted hot chocolate, mandarine, then faint hints of liquorice and spicy plum pudding hover above a distinct spicy layer of anise, fenugreek, turmeric and pepper. The palate delivers a big, richly textured, almost oily mouthfeel. Intense, yet balanced. Flavours take time to wake up, then build into a rich, deep, heavily fruited 'malt bomb', delivering strong port cask influenced flavours of spicy plum pudding, raisins and mixed peel, before giving way to the liquorice and spice lurking underneath. Long spicy plum aftertaste. 43.0% Alc./Vol.*



Sullivan's Cove

Est. 1994. Still: 2500L Oak Regime: Australian Port & Sherry

Cambridge, Tasmania

Also known as 'The Tasmanian Distillery', Sullivan's Cove has had a short but eventful history. It was established in 1994 at Sullivan's Cove, the site of the first British settlement of Hobart. The location became the brand name for the whisky. The first distillations began in 1995 and within a few years 163 casks of spirit were produced. Late in 1999 the distillery was purchased by two businessmen from Canberra who went on to distill a further 629 casks of high quality spirit. In November 2003, after a two year halt in production, the barrelled whisky, still and equipment was bought by a third group and moved to Cambridge, on the outskirts of the city. The Tasmania Distillery name was re-registered and the 1860's design Alembic Charentais Copper Pot still put back in production, yielding up to 120 casks of whisky per year. Some of the early efforts left a little to be desired as the inexperienced distillers began their foray into the world of whisky production. However, as experience and knowledge advanced, their results have significantly improved. In fact, some of the seven year-old whisky recently won gold and silver medals at a blind tasting held by the Malt Whisky Society of Australia. A four-year-old won a bronze medal at the same event.

Chief distiller, Patrick Maguire is a fourth generation son of Tasmanians, whose forefathers came to the colony as convicts. Under his guidance using locally grown barley, the pure soft water from the Mt Wellington area combined with the expertise of the Cascade Brewery who brew the wash, Sullivan's Cove Single Malt has come of age. The production process has also evolved as Maguire has combined two cask types (French oak port and American oak bourbon casks) creating a deeper more complex whisky than achieved in only one wood type. The Sullivan's Cove single malt bottled today is selected from only the best barrels and each bottle is filled, capped and labelled by hand. No chill filtering, colours or flavours are used. Being a small business with only two full time employees the emphasis is on quality rather than volume. To further impress the turning point of this brand, the Sullivan's Cove packaging has been recreated with a new bottle and presentation box.

Sullivan's Cove Single Cask Whisky Bourbon Maturation – Barrel HH0281

Tasting note: Very pale dull gold colour with water like hue. Delightful, sweet, spicy pastry and vanilla nose with subtle hints of pear. There's surprisingly little prickle at natural strength. Soft palate entry with intense flavours of vanilla, spice, treacle and stewed fruits. Creamy mouthfeel. Excellent balance. Immensely appealing. The addition of water exposes the fruity undertones that were lurking in the nose. Banana chips, baked apple and toffee, above spice and vanilla. The palate retains it's 'oomph' even when diluted to around 40%. Rich malty finish. Very long malty, vanilla, spice and dry biscuit aftertaste. A top notch example! 60% Alc./Vol.

Sullivan's Cove Single Cask Whisky Port Maturation – Barrel HH0554

Tasting note: Dull gold colour with water like hue. An intriguing nose, initially offering dried fruits, walnuts and spices then offset by burnt rubber and rice cracker characteristic. The palate shows a brief moment of rich spicy glory before the burnt rubber and tar takes over. Water doesn't remedy this whisky's woes. **Note:** This whisky may be illustrative of the trials and tribulations of single cask whisky production. Whilst the spirit coming from the Tasmanian Distillery is generally first class, poor barrel selection or a faulty cask can cause serious faults that are impossible to ameliorate via blending. Our resident winemaker suspects the rubbery characteristics are caused by a sulphidic compound created in the heart of the oak stave when the barrel becomes excessively hot during the re-firing process. Unfortunately, this compound is not detectable until the whisky is matured and bottled.



Sullivan's Cove Rare Australian Double Cask Single Malt Whisky (700ml) \$99.99

Tasting note: As required, distiller, Patrick Maguire selects a single cask of ex-Bourbon and ex-Port matured whisky, aged a minimum of seven years, for vatting and bottling as 'Double Cask.' This process lends itself to some variation between batches. Very pale straw colour with water like hue. Vanilla, cocoa, toffee and spice top note, with a subtle hint of liquorice and pepper. Supple palate entry, delivering chocolate, vanilla and honey flavours over a delicate background of spicy plum pudding - the Port matured component contributing the latter, along with a firmish mouthfeel. Very nicely structured whisky. Perfect balance. Soft vanilla driven finish. Ample aftertaste of vanilla, cocoa and honey. 40% Alc/Vol.

TOP NOTCH!

"WORLD WHISKIES AWARDS - U.K. CATEGORY 'MALT WHISKIES FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD (OUTSIDE SCOTLAND)' 1ST - SULLIVANS COVE BOURBON MATURATION SINGLE CASK. HIGHLY COMMENDED - SULLIVANS COVE PORT MATURATION SINGLE CASK".



Hellyer's Road

Est. 1997. Still: 30000L Oak Regime: American Oak
ex Tasmanian wine barrels.



Burnie, North West Tasmania

In 1996 the Australian Dairy Industry was deregulated. Betta Milk Co-operative then identified a niche in the domestic market for the production of whisky and vodka products. Hellyer's Road Distillery, named after a local landmark and explorer of note, was established and an all new purpose built operation was established on the Betta Milk site in Burnie, Tasmania. A cursory tour of Hellyer's Road leaves no question that this is a serious business, employing state of the art equipment and capable of large scale production. The flagship whiskies are distilled from Tasmanian grown malted barley using local rainwater, then matured in American white oak barrels. New additions to the range include Hellyer's Road Lightly Peated Single Malt and a whisky finished in Tasmanian Pinot Noir casks.

Hellyer's Road Original Single Malt Whisky \$79.99

Tasting note: Very pale straw colour with water like hue. An enticing nose. Primarily fresh, ripe fruits –Peach and cantaloupe above citrus, vanilla shortbread and honey. The palate is stunning. A rich, creamy texture delivers wave upon wave of ripe fruits above vanilla and spice. Texture, delivery, balance all superb. Outstanding value for money. 46.2% Alc./Vol.

Hellyer's Road Slightly Peated Single Malt Whisky \$79.99

Tasting note: Very pale straw colour with water like hue. The malty nose shows notes of grapefruit, prune and raisin toast above honey and vanilla. Rich chewy entry, very malty, grapefruit, prune and camphor above savoury biscuit background. Excellent balance, texture and delivery. A touch of salt and smoke emerges on the back palate and plays second fiddle during the aftertaste, complementing the spicy raisin toast notes. Australia's answer to Highland Park? 46.2% Alc./Vol.

Hellyer's Road Peated Single Malt Whisky \$79.99

Tasting note: Produced from imported peated malt. Pale straw colour with water like hue. The nose is very similar to those of Islay. Fresh peat smoke, salt, kelp, liquorice, honey, vanilla buttermenthol. A drop of water reveals a layer of fresh apples, very 'Ardbeggian.' The palate is again, very rich and plush. Smoky, salty flavours hover above a subtle layer of apple and cinnamon, the sweetness from the peat very evident. Long smoky apple and spice aftertaste. An astonishingly good tribute to Islay. 46.2% Alc./Vol.

Hellyer's Road Original Single Malt Whisky Pinot Noir Finish \$79.99

Tasting note: Straw colour with water like hue. Floral top note above raisins, chocolate and barley sugar. The palate is a driven by cherry chocolate and dry cocoa, vanilla and honey in the background. Very generously textured and pristinely balanced. Very long cherry chocolate, vanilla and spice aftertaste. An unusual whisky, yet immensely appealing. 46.2% Alc./Vol.



The Nant Distillery

Est. 2004. Stills: 1 Oak Regime: Sherry, Bourbon & Port Casks

Bothwell, Central Tasmania

The Nant Distillery is located on a private country estate at Bothwell in the Central Highlands of Tasmania. First settled in 1821 and listed by the National Trust, the historic convict built sandstone homestead and farm complex are certainly a picturesque place for whisky production. Keith and Margaret Batt bought Nant in 2004 with the intention of breathing life back into the historical estate, restoring each element from the old water-driven flour mill to the homestead and farm. Their vision involved extending the mill's use to include a full production whisky distillery, private tasting room and an atrium lounge and whisky bar. Chris Condon (formerly of Boags brewery) and his wife Kym joined the distillery in late 2007 and live on the estate, with Chris employed as the production manager. "We're trying to make a Single Malt that will be unique on the world stage" says Nant Director, Keith Batt whose first whisky memory was late evening on a track in the Walls of Jerusalem National Park in Tasmania, watching the trout rise with a great dram in hand. "We grow our own barley, malt it, mill it, brew it, distill it on site. Our spirit still is unique to the Australian whisky industry in that we have an onion shaped neck which produces a lot more reflux in distillation. This means that our distillation process is longer than any other distillery producing a very fine and light spirit". It takes around a week to produce from brewing to distilling. Batt is confident that a single malt will be ready for bottling in 2010 while a 'single estate malt' will be ready in 2011. Nant also source grain from the famous Cascade Brewery. Barrels are from Europe and America which have previously held port, sherry or bourbon, while the stills have been made in Hobart to Nant's specifications. The distillery draws its water directly from the historic Mill Pond on the estate which is fed by the Clyde River, flowing from the highlands of the Tasmanian Central Plateau.



Smith's Angaston

Est. 1997. Still: approx. 9000L Oak Regime: French & American oak Hogsheads (approx 300 litres)

Angaston, Barossa Valley, South Australia

For a brief period of time, from the early 1950's to early 70's, Samuel Smith & Son sold a product called 'Smith's Imperial Vat Whisky'. In 1997, the old 1931 pot still was fired up again to produce an Angaston single malt whisky.

The idea came about while Robert Hill Smith, the company's Managing Director, was taking a well earned sabbatical, and the then Production Director, Peter Wall, was standing in as titular head. In his early days with the company, Peter had experienced first hand the activities that took place during Yalumba's period of brandy distillation. As a bit of a nostalgic throw back, Peter thought it a good idea to put a few charges through the ageing pot still [pictured below], before it was de-commissioned.

At the time of Peter coming up with the idea (December 1996), Samuel Smith & Son were distributing a Single Malt Scotch Whisky from Scotland as well as Coopers ales & stouts. It was a nice combination that would see them sourcing information about the finer points of whisky distillation from friends in Scotland and some brewer's wort from Coopers.

Eventually Smith & Son obtained 18,000 litres of double strength malt extract from Coopers, made from Tasmanian Franklin barley and seeded with yeast from wash ale & stout. The brew was fermented in their Angaston cellars then distilled through the original 1931 pot still. A combination of primary and double distillation techniques were used by stillman, David Zimmermann, to distill the spirit into heads, hearts and tails fractions. The fractions were meticulously tasted to identify the best for the assembly of a full flavoured whisky, with a generous proportion of aromatic esters. The first distillation yielded enough spirit to fill barrels nine barrels, being a combination of French & American oak hogsheads which had previously held red or white wine, as well as old Sherry casks. The spirit was matured for a minimum of 7 years. Similar 'charges' were put through the still in 1998 and 2000, before the distillery was de-commissioned in 2001.

To date, Smith & Son have released all but one hogshead of the 1997 as a 7 year old, all but one hogshead of the 1998 as an 8 year old, with the current release being a 1997 Single Cask as a 12 year old cask strength. One cask that stood out with quite an individual character has been reserved in the cellar for release as a 15 year old whisky.

'Lovely malt from a distillery
I'm going to have to keep my eyes on.'

- Jim Murray's Whisky Bible 2008

1998 Smith's Single Malt Whisky Aged 8 Years \$59.99

Tasting note: Matured in a combination of French, American and Sherry oak casks. Very pale straw colour with water like hue. The sweet, delicate nose reveals aromas of passionfruit, citrus fruits and subtle spice above a malty background. Medium bodied malty palate. Pristinely clean and soft, delivering ripe fruit above a layer of dry biscuit/bread. Excellent balance. Very clean, soft finish. Long passionfruit and grapefruit aftertaste.

A terrific interpretation of a clean 'Highland' style and outstanding value for money. 40.0% Alc./Vol.

1997 Smith's Cask Strength Single Malt Whisky Aged 12 Years \$99.99

Tasting note: Straw colour with water like hue. At natural strength, the nose reveals a restrained malty top note above a hint of mandarin and grapefruit with an exotic spice end note. The palate is assertive, with a pleasant prickle and a lovely warm oily texture. Generous, mouth filling, spicy, dried fruit flavours appear before the whisky grips and takes on a much drier savoury tone. Firm dry finish, long bready aftertaste. With the addition of water, the nose yields restrained aromas of banana bread, dried fruits and spice with a hint of pumpnickel. Luscious ripe fruits flow freely from front to back, the spice providing an interesting sideshow. Warm spicy finish. Dryish ripe fruit aftertaste. While this is a very appealing whisky that certainly improves with water, the oak and fruit characteristics seem to be at odds with each other. 325 bottles produced. 53.6% Alc./Vol.



Bakery Hill

Est. 1999. Still: 1000L Oak Regime: American Oak

Bayswater, Dandenong Foothills, Victoria

With a selection of Scotch whiskies that far outnumber whiskies produced elsewhere in the world, Nicks Wine Merchants has occasionally been accused of being parochial. However, for some time now we've been extolling the virtues of other world whiskies as well as Australian whisky, in particular those from Bakery Hill Distillery. For those who are completely oblivious to this tiny upstart, some background information: David Baker, a former food scientist, began distilling whisky in 1999. *"I was constantly confronted with coffee table book after coffee table book telling me that the only place in the world that could make single malt whisky was Scotland because of the...and the...etc."* complains Baker. *"I thought, if you understand the process at the molecular level then it should be possible to transfer it from location to location. What a challenge!"*

At Bakery Hill, he's achieved just that, employing generally the same process used by single malt distilleries everywhere. *"We mill our malted barley, produce a mash in a mash tun, ferment the wort with our own strains of yeast then double distil in a copper pot still."*

For Baker, the most important element of the distillery is the design of the still.

"When we decided to set up in Melbourne a great deal of thought went in to the still design."

To assist us in this, we went to a number of engineering firms in the UK. It was our opinion that many of these firms have been making stills successfully for a number of generations and their knowledge would provide us with a good starting point. Having selected a reputable company their first question to us was 'what style of spirit would you like to produce?' Every dimension in the still has an effect on the flavour, aroma and body of the final whisky. Having constructed the still, the engineering company even sent out its managing director to supervise assembly and oversee its first batch!"

David Baker's new spirit is put aside for maturation in American Oak casks previously filled with Jack Daniels, which have been re-coopered at Heritage Coopers in Melbourne's Diamond Valley. At the cooperage, the fresh 225 litre barrels from Jack Daniel's are dismantled, then the staves are re-bent and shaped into 100 litre barrels which Baker believes are the ideal size for maturation in Melbourne's diverse climate. Warmer weather causes casks to expand, cooler weather causing contraction - essentially a breathing effect which increases the rate of the whisky's oxidation and oak exposure, leading to accelerated maturation.

Mindful of these variables, David Baker is only too aware that consistency is key to success.

"Like any reputable company, it's not good enough to be able to make a great batch of product from time to time. It must be done each and every time you start off another batch. There are some things that are out of our control like the daily and seasonal temperature and humidity and the variation that is found from cask to cask but overall the products must remain true to type and I think we have achieved just that. In short, the most important lesson is care and attention and scrupulous record taking for the entire process."

Clearly, Baker's diligence has paid off, and he's even managed to avoid the pitfalls common to most start-up distilleries during their early years of production.

Given the abundance of high quality natural resources, the landscape for Australian whisky is set to change enormously, both in terms of quality and quantity. However, *"The real 'ace in the hole' is our wonderful climate"* declares Baker. *"Higher ambient temperatures, large daily temperature fluctuations and relatively low humidity enhance the natural speed of maturation"*.

This is another competitive edge that Australia's northern hemisphere counterparts will have to come to terms with in the near future.

Back in February 2005 when we first tasted David Baker's range we commented, *'Bakery Hill's Single Malts, despite their youth are very promising initial efforts, and as the spirits spend longer in barrel one can anticipate some very interesting results'*. The Bakery Hill whiskies are now well passed the stage of been local curios and offer world class Single Malt experiences.

Bakery Hill Cask Strength Peated Malt Single Malt Whisky (500ml) \$100.00

Tasting Note: *This peated expression is made using imported, peated barley (Victorian environmental laws forbid the burning of peat). Golden straw colour with very pale straw hue. At cask strength the nose shows strong, spicy, baked apple and pear top notes with hints of fudge and very delicate peat smoke underneath, with a gentle prickle. The addition of water tones down the spice, to expose soft silky aromas of stewed apple and pear, hints of malty vanilla and cocoa. At natural strength the palate is a thriller! A very bright, fresh, fruity assault before the malt grips and the smoke wakes up. On the back palate, the barley takes the reins and drives the exceptionally long spicy, gently smoky finish. The whisky gives a slight tingle and prickle, but it's in harmony with the massive array of flavours delivered. Dilution to around 40% alc. causes the whisky to become very rich, silky and creamy.*

Cask 2208 tasted. 59.9% Alc./Vol.



Great Southern Distilling Company

Est. 2004. Still: 1800L Wash Still & 580L Whisky Spirit Still.

Oak Regime: ex-Bourbon, ex-Red & White Wine, Port, Sherry & Brandy

Albany, Western Australia.

Great Southern Distillery is presently Western Australia's only Single Malt Whisky producer. Their product, labelled 'Limeburners' is named after an area close to the distillery, 'Limeburners Creek'. (Not surprisingly, lime burning took place there during convict times).

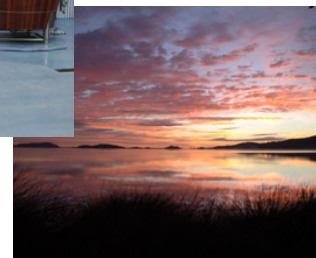
When Cameron Syme established the Great Southern Distilling Company in 2004, he'd done his homework - in fact, fourteen years of it, motivated by an ambition that's seems to be common to all Australian distillers. "Australia makes fine wine and beer and exports all over the world. Australia should do the same for whisky".

Syme's inspiration was drawn from his cultural roots, "...my grandfather came out from Scotland when he was eight, and there are family stories of illicit distilling back in Scotland. I thought there was an opportunity for Australia to make the greatest spirit in the world - whisky, not just rum... we're not trying to make a 'scotch' or a 'bourbon', but rather Australian whisky".

"Our unique points are (1) pristine environment, (2) access to world class malting barley, pristine water, and a cool marine climate for the slow maturation of our whisky" says Symes. "Our first released single malt whisky won a medal at the London Wine and Spirit show in 2008. We believe this is testament to our product".

Bavarian born, Juergen Schludi is the Master Distiller at Great Southern, with more than sixteen years experience in the distillation of spirits, flavours and essences. But Syme also insists on getting involved with the distilling. The production process is unusual in that it employs a 7 to 10 day fermentation period, much longer than most, but at Great Southern, they believe it allows for the development of more fruity characteristics. Small batch distillation takes place in traditional copper pot stills and as with most micro-distilleries, only individual barrel expressions are released. Wood selection is unusual. For example, this years Limeburners release (M6) has been matured in a small Brandy cask, then finished in a French oak ex-Pinot Noir barrel. Bourbon, Australian Port, Sherry, and ex-table wine barrels from Margaret River and Great Southern region are also used.

In ten years time Syme sees his company as being a leading Australian distiller. The chief obstacles at present are an unreasonable degree of excise, and secondly, Australian's perception of their own product. "Let's make sure we appreciate the fact that we have world beating whiskies here, and it doesn't all go overseas to export markets who know that we've got a good thing." He adds with confidence, "The fact that we're all friends in the industry means we work to make sure that new entrants produce a quality product... I've only tasted one Australian whisky I didn't like. I wish I could say the same of other countries!"



Great Southern Distilling Company Limeburner's Single Malt Whisky Barrel M15 (700ml)

Tasting note: Dull gold colour with water like hue. The nose is expressive with fresh florals, mixed peel, and toffee above characteristics above a distinctive exotic spicy background. The palate reflects the nose to perfection. Almost voluptuous in texture, delivering, vibrant, fresh citrus and apricot backed by peppercorn, treacle, and cinnamon. Gentle prickle. Very well balanced. Terrific oak & fruit integration. Ripe fruits continue into the long aftertaste. 43.0% Alc./Vol. Past bottling.

Great Southern Distilling Company Limeburner's Single Malt Whisky Barrel M6 (700ml) \$125.00

Tasting note: Straw colour with very pale straw hue. At room temperature, the nose is very disappointing, particularly considering the quality of previous releases. It offers simple floral and spice characteristics. The palate is very straightforward, slightly sweet and spicy. Otherwise uninspiring. Particularly disappointing given the recent price rise. Whisky can appear to be muted and dull, infrequently, but often enough to recognise it and attempt to find a remedy. This sometimes happens through the addition of water, covering the glass and letting the whisky sit, or through warmth. Warmth can be applied a number of ways. The most obvious method is to use body warmth, hold the bowl of the glass and the whisky more often than not will gently unfold. The less obvious, but more extreme method is to run the outside of the glass under some hot water, while the whisky is inside. M6, after such treatment, the nose offers an astonishing, perfumed array of fresh spices, which charge through the palate, offering a booming finish and dominating the exceptionally long aftertaste. Once the whisky cools back down to room temperature, the show is over. Much more astute cask selection is required to justify this price point and to capture the market's attention. We know this distillery is capable of much better outcomes and look forward to future releases. 43.0% Alc./Vol.

Timboon Railway Shed

Est. 2007. Still: 600L. Oak Regime: Australian Port & Tokay (50-90 litres)

Timboon, South West Victoria.

The South West Coast of Victoria has a colourful history of illicit distilling. We mentioned one of the most notorious distillers in the Timboon district in our introduction. When the Government decided to stamp out the practice, the man chosen to round up the 'Nirranda Distillers' was Detective Inspector Christie, champion boxer, champion sculler of Victoria, and one time personal bodyguard of H.R.H. Prince Alfred. Christie was also a master of disguise. Posing as a travelling tinker, he set out to catch Delaney and his associate, Jim Love.

Shots were fired, the distillers escaped, but not for long and soon enough, whisky distilling in the area came to an end. Until now. Sixteen kilometres inland from the famous Twelve Apostles, a small micro-operation has sprung up: Timboon distillery. Proprietor, Tim Marwood has reluctantly submitted to the excise man and set himself the challenge of making a spirit in the tradition of the locals in days gone by. *"The scale of our production is relative to the niche market for our spirit"* comments Marwood. *"Our aim is to produce quality not quantity".*

The grain employed to produce Timboon is Joe White Pilsner malted Barley. The actual still was produced by Knap Lure Engineering in Moonah, Hobart and is essentially a scaled down version of the kind of still used at the world famous Macallan distillery in Scotland. Barrels are sourced from both Rutherglen, Victoria and Tasmania. We asked Marwood what makes Timboon's whiskies distinctive?

"So many factors contribute to the development of complex flavour congeners and esters"

"Malt, yeast, fermentation, still, distillation, time, the previous tenant in the maturing barrel, and more time. We use ex port/tokay barrels to age our spirit and generally use 50 and 90 litre barrels to expediate the ageing process. This way more wood is exposed to less spirit. We also use a wide vat fermentation process (greater surface area for vigorous oxygenation of wash)."

Marwood's experience in the art of distillation has not been without a degree of trial and error, with the odd disaster too. His biggest mistake ended up down the drain. On another occasion he set the still timer to auto to start at midnight. He arrived to do a spirit run early in the morning to find the still dry! His most important lesson? *"Don't trust still timers!"*

Despite competing in a market place saturated with imported whiskies and having to deal with the lack of quality local barrel stock for differing maturation styles, Marwood has high hopes for his little venture and looks forward to enjoying his first ten year old release with good friends. He acknowledges there's a need to further educate the consumer on the benefits of Australian Malts. *"Australian whiskies are developing a greater international appreciation due to the commitment and passion of people like Bill Lark. The Australian Whisky market is developing and has great potential to grow and sustain this emerging micro industry. Our high evaporation rates contribute to a uniquely Australian style of malt".* While the whisky is maturing, Marwood maintains cash flow by selling other exotic delights including a Coffee Cream liqueur, Strawberry 'Schnapps' and a premium Vanilla Vodka - all well worth a taste.

A visit to the "Railway Shed" also offers a complimentary set of food experiences.



Timboon Distillery Single Malt Whisky

Pre Release Sample. 25L port barrel Sept 09

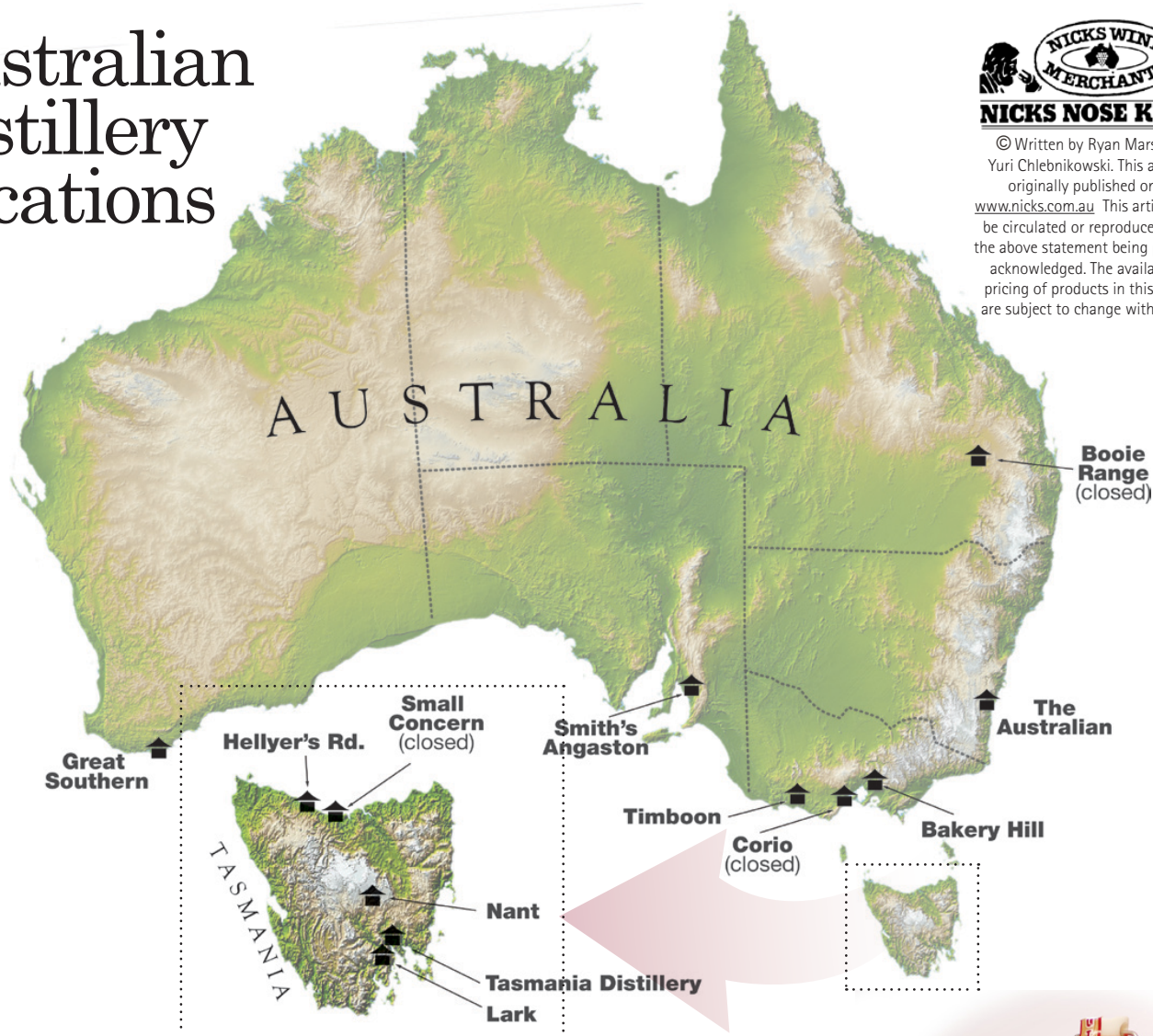
Tasting note: Deep gold colour with pale gold hue. Lifted notes of marzipan, pepper, spice and talc on the nose. The palate is rich, bold and flavoursome. Even at natural strength this whisky is remarkably well balanced. The addition of water to around 45-50% alc/vol reveals chocolate and honeycomb, exotic spice, a touch of mint, cedar marzipan and raisin. The palate is rich and robust, delivering huge chocolate and raisin toast, marzipan, manuka honey and spice flavours with a gentle prickle. Very long raisin and spice aftertaste. The influence of the 25 litre barrel is really felt, despite the whisky being very young, small cask port maturation happens quickly. This whisky is rapidly reaching it's peak. An outstanding debut. Watch this space! 69.9% Alc./Vol.



Australian Distillery Locations



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Great Outback Distillery (500ml) \$90.00 Australia's Most Mysterious Whisky?

Whilst researching our Australian Whisky Guide it was impossible to ignore Jim Murray's gushing review of 'Great Outback Rare Old Australian Single Malt' purportedly produced by 'Tasman Distillery' which we have since discovered, no longer exists (if indeed it ever did). Jim Murray also wrote '...you can't find it outside of Australia....' Having been bitten by the curiosity bug, we set off in pursuit of this mysterious malt. Naturally, we first consulted those in the know: Industry figureheads, wholesalers, distributors and whisky collectors of nation-wide renown. While most of them had heard of this elusive whisky, no one had worked out where it was actually from. After hearing dozens of rumours and considering every reasonable speculation, the only thing that became certain was the degree of contradiction. We were all the more intrigued but at a loss. Combining every story, one could conclude that this whisky was distilled inbetween 1960 and 2000; that it was distilled somewhere in between Perth, Western Australia and Ulverstone, Tasmania; that a portion of it is 'leftovers' from the now closed Corio distillery, and that it was apparently barrelled and shipped to Darwin for maturation. Another source is convinced it was never distilled in Australia at all! (Crikey!) Hours of 'off the clock' research went into tracking the source, covering countless false leads before a decisive clue was stumbled upon. We were delighted. Immediately a phone call was placed to the source, who was reluctant to sell any material or confirm any of the previous stories, instead offering another unlikely story (Buzzer!) After a week, the wholesaler decided to offer us a six pack of their 'Superior Blend Australian Whisky' as apparently all stock of 'Great Outback Rare Old Single Malt' is sold out, as are the next four years' allocations. Strewth! It would seem that the chances of this 'supposedly' fantastic single malt whisky ever being available to the Australian market are similar to that of finding Bunyips and Yowies dancing with the Nullabor Nymph underneath the Min Min Lights en route to Speewah. Well, what's it taste like?

Tasting Notes: *Dull gold colour with pale straw hue. A peculiar nose, offering subtle mountain peppercorn top note, above mint and grass clippings, a hint of toffee. The palate is again unusual, very peppery, but clean spirit, somewhere in between a Rye whiskey, Agave Tequila and soft Bourbon. Pepper and toffee again feature in the short aftertaste. An inoffensive though intriguing flavour profile. 43.0% Alc./Vol.*



On Tasting at Nicks Wine Merchants Armadale Store...

A selection of great Australian Whiskies (and much more), including whiskies from Sullivan's Cove, Bakery Hill, Larks, Smith's, Limeburners, Hellyer's Rd & Great Outback.

