



Spotlight on Whisky

by Shawn Soole

Whiskey or whisky as a whole is a daunting area of spirits that can take you down a slippery slope of regions, malting, distilling, and blends with no end in sight to the amount of knowledge you can absorb. Scotch alone has a multitude of small regions, which produce spirits that have distinctive qualities, aromas, and tastes. Canadian and American whiskies are commonplace in most mainstream bars and stores, but introduce Irish, Welsh, Indian, and Japanese and you have a myriad of choices when putting together a whisky list for your establishment.

Of course, when deciding which whiskies to stock you have to take it from the angle of developing a fine wine list. First and foremost, consider if your current clientele purchase these products, or better still, could you attract the clientele to substantiate such an aggressive spirits program? If you are a British, Irish, or Scottish pub it makes sense to have an extensive Scotch and Irish whisky list, while a French bar may not. Scotch and Irish whiskies alike along with bourbon can draw customers to your bar or store in the search for the latest release. However, whisky as a whole is quite expensive, so serious marketing needs to be done to make it worthwhile in the long run.

Scotch Whisky

Scotch, with its geographical regions, is probably the most daunting of all whiskies, where the smallest detail or change in production can result in a huge difference in style. Of course, most bars in BC have a blended scotch in the well with the addition of a few well-picked single malts on the back bar.

Scotch will always have a soft spot in many whisky drinkers' hearts and most customers will happily pay out \$10 plus per ounce for their favourite label. Talk to some regulars that may be purchasing the house Scotch and see if they have a penchant for a classy single malt. You may be surprised to see how many of your regulars are the perfect start for new products.

Irish & Welsh

Irish and now the Welsh whiskies coming into BC are a little less intimidating to the average consumer, but are not popularly advertised or pushed in bars or liquor stores. When deciding which whiskies to stock, the Irish and Welsh contenders shouldn't be overlooked.

Usually light and mildly peated, Irish and Welsh whiskey makes a perfect mixer and a perfect neat sipper with a pint of Guinness or Tetley's as a chaser. The variations in region and style are not as apparent as they are in scotch, but when comparing Bushmill's to Connemara to Penderyn, you can tell the difference. Training the staff and making customers aware of the styles of Irish and Welsh Whiskey can make all the difference to your bottom line.

Canadian

For a greater part of the last century, Canadian Club and Crown Royal dictated what you can expect from Canadian whisky. The turn of the century saw the opening of flood gates with new, quality Canadian whiskies. They are specially made with different blends of grains and aged in various styles of casks. The lack of laws and rules that many other countries have on their whiskies has given distillers a flat canvas to experiment.

Most notable distillers are Kittling Ridge and its Forty Creek range including Barrel Select, which is aged in vintage sherry casks, Double Barrel Select that is aged further in bourbon casks, and the latest aged in port casks. Forty Creek is a strong Canadian whisky that is leading the way in aging and re-casking

to create spirits that are winning awards. Another distiller creating some waves in the industry is Glenbreton Single Malt Canadian Whisky, being one of the only single malts available in Canada; it shows that Canadian whisky can be high-end. There are more and more Canadian examples hitting the market every month, both high-end and entry level. Alberta Premium is one of the only 100% rye whiskies available in Canada, but why is this important to have in the well? As the cocktail renaissance continues, this style is what is called for in classic drinks such as the Manhattan and the Sazerac.

American

American whisky is steeped in tradition, laws, and appellations. From classic bourbons and Tennessee, to the re-invention of rye and the birth of single malt, American whiskies have a lot to offer for reasonable prices. Once you get past the standard entry level Jim

Beams and Jack Daniels, you have a wide choice of bourbons now available in BC. Starting with bourbons like Bulleit and Maker's Mark all the way to the recently released Basil Hayden and Baker's, there is something for everyone. Jack Daniel's released their Gentleman Jack and Single Barrel, a definite upsell from the entry level JD.

While BC and Canada are yet to see any single malt American whiskies such as Stranahan's, hopefully it won't be too long before they make their way over the border.

Whiskies will always be a predominant selection in your beverage program due to the nature of the beast. When you are deciding what to inventory, focus on having a few high-end bourbons, Canadians, maybe some Irish, and even some Japanese and Indian. When it comes to Scotch, make sure you get at least two to three choices from each region. Start slow and small and build your clientele with each new product. As one famous actor said, "Build it and they will come."

