

Malt Maniacs E-pistle #2011- By ralfy, Isle of Man

This article is brought to you by 'Malt Maniacs'; an international collective of more than two dozen fiercely independent malt whisky aficionados. Since 1997 we have been enjoying and discussing the pleasures of single malt whisky with like-minded whisky lovers from all over the world. In 2010 our community had members from 16 countries; The United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, The U.S.A., Canada, India, Japan, Taiwan, Australia & South Africa. More information on: www.maltmaniacs.org.



Glenglassaugh's revival.

A chat with Distillery Boss, Stuart Nickerson

At a moment in time when expensive marketing dominates the public message of Scotch Whisky it is both refreshing and insightful to have the opportunity to chat with an Industry professional like Stuart Nickerson, Director of Glenglassaugh Distillery near Port Soy in Scotland who covers many roles in his job of running a small, craft-orientated and Independent Distillery which continues to do things the old-school way, something which experienced whisky drinkers are increasingly more aware of in terms of intrinsic quality and worth. I am happy to introduce a wee question and answers session with Stuart which helps to enhance our perspective on what's behind the amber-nectar which we all enjoy so much



- could you introduce yourself to the whisky-fans !

- The story really starts when I left University back in 1979 (BSc in Chemical Engineering from Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh – seems like a lifetime ago (and is) and started working with a company in Fife who, amongst other things manufactured by-products plants for the whisky industry. This led me to visit Convalmore distillery, Bunnahabhain Distillery, Aultmore Distillery and the Combination of Rothes Distillers (which is a large by-products plant owned by the Rothes distilleries.) as well as Cambus and Carsebridge Distilleries. So when I saw a job advertised in Dufftown with Arthur Bell & Sons then I jumped at it.***
- I joined Bells in 1981 as a project engineer and spent the next 3 years with them working at all of their distilleries (Dufftown, Pittyvaich, Blair Atholl, and Inchgower and Bladnoch).***

- *In 1984 I joined Highland Distilleries as distillery manager at Highland Park Distillery and then in 1987 moved to take up the Glenrothes Distillery manager role, still with Highland, and at the same time managed Glenglassaugh which had recently closed but still had an on-site warehousing squad.*
- *I moved to United Distillers (a forerunner to Diageo) in 1989 and spent 15 months with them as a project manager with responsibility for malt distilleries capital investment. The time spent with them probably says something about how much I enjoyed the role there.*
- *In 1990 the general managers role for Wm Grants at Dufftown became available which included managing Glenfiddich, Balvenie and Kininvie and that was my next move. I then spent the next 14 years with Grants, moving to Girvan in 1985 to become general manager of Girvan grain distillery and in 1986 I became Distilleries Director for the group with overall responsibility for all of their distilleries.*
- *I left them at the end of 2004 to start my own consultancy as I had always wanted to run my own business and with my children having left home it seemed the perfect opportunity. In 2006 a new client asked me to carry out on a potential distillery purchase and this chance encounter eventually led to the purchase of Glenglassaugh and my moving into this role.*

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- is there an entertaining story from anytime in your working life that stands out ?

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There have been a few over the years, but one that recently happened was when an un-named person from Switzerland bought a port pipe and came over to fill it with new make spirit for maturing on site at Glenglassaugh. He was carefully filling when I stepped forward with a camera to take a photograph and he lifted his head to look at the camera, unfortunately he also lifted his hands and the spirit from the end of the filling hose hit the edge of the cask and sprayed everywhere including all over my legs. I still have a photograph of wet floor with 2 dry patches where my legs and feet were.

- Is there any time for personal hobbies outside your working schedule, if so, what fills your spare time ?

*I used to do a lot of running but never seem to find the time these days, so a bit of hill walking, as much exercise as I can manage and watching Ice-Hockey and Football on TV or live if I get the opportunity.
I also always have my ebook with me and I enjoy most Scottish authors.*

- What's going on at Glenglassaugh at the moment, and what are your plans for next year ?

*Planning for the bottling of whisky which has been produced since the distillery came back to life and this takes place this Friday on 16th December.
Next year will see the launch of a new product called Revival and from the reaction of whisky lovers in Frankfurt, Vienna and Graz who have all had a foretaste then I think many people will be for a big surprise when it arrives.
We will also continue with some special releases next year, the individual country releases have proved extremely popular and we hope to extend this in 2012.*

- what in your opinion does the Industry need to consider changing in order to enhance the future of Scotch ?

*I think that the industry needs to continue to be vigilant to stop imitators and those that would attempt to cut corners to reduce costs and so I welcome the new regulations and in particular the one that says single malt scotch whisky must now be bottled in Scotland as well as distilled and matured.
Personally I would go further and ban the use of caramel and I would also like to see all scotch whisky bottled in Scotland, but I think that would be a step too far for some.*

I think that we should also review maturation regulations and allow some innovation with extended wood surfaces and even maturing in non oak casks, as long as it was declared on the bottle so that the consumer knew what he was purchasing.

- if you were to give important advice to anyone considering a career in the Industry, or starting a Distillery Business, what would it be ?

If you want a career in the industry then work hard and learn about the industry and not just the product. In this industry you have to learn to make it part of your life but also remember that it is a business and if the business is not run correctly then it will not survive and everyone will be losers, employees and customers alike..

If you want to start a distillery then seek out advice from someone with experience and be prepared to pay to have a well structured and well thought out business plan developed for you. Expect to have to finance an initial large capital expenditure and continually invest money for the first 10 years as you lay down stock and the whisky matures. There are ways to reduce the continual need for investment and at Glenglassaugh we have been innovative and have introduced a number of products that have helped us but don't think that overnight you will have a money making machine.

You need passion, commitment and creativity.

- what causes your single biggest headache when managing the Distillery ?

Cash flow. Simply never having enough cash for all the things that we want to do.

- I have to ask this of course, . . . three tips for choosing and drinking whisky ?

- 1. Choose the right whisky for the right occasion, for me something light in the early evening or before a meal and something heavier at the end of the night The location, the weather and the situation can all impact on choice.*
- 2. Choose what you like – don't allow other to influence you on the "best" whisky or buy or drink one just because it is recommended by a particular book. Find the flavours and whiskies that you like and then explore – by all means listen to others but make your own mind up.*
- 3. Quality not quantity. Drink less but drink better quality. Life is too short to drink vast quantities of inferior whisky when there are so many excellent ones out there, even if they cost a bit more.*

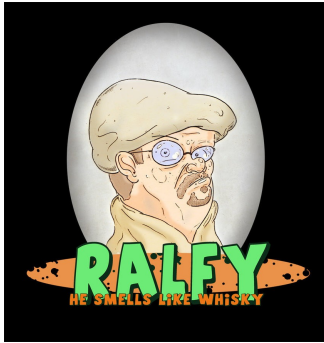
- finally, name a non-whisky spirit you drink and why do you recommend it ?

It would have to be a good Caribbean rum. I was led astray once when I was around 21 and didn't touch the product again for over 20 years and then I visited Guyana, Trinidad, Costa Rica, Barbados and The Dominican Republic and re-discovered the diversity of rums, the complexity within certain brands and the sheer enjoyment that can be had from the drink.

However I still prefer Scotch Whisky and although I have worked in the industry for over 30 years, I am still learning and making new and exciting flavour discoveries every day.

Thanks Stuart, from all the Malt Maniacs and Whisky Fans around the World.





Ralfy looks after ralfy.com WhiskyReviews and WhiskyStuff and regularly mucks up perfectly decent Video-blogs into a shambolic malt-mess which is appreciated by a few punters around the World who don't take whisky too seriously.