

COMPASS BOX WHISKY COMPANY



ELEUTHERA

Vatted Malt. 100% malt whisky made by blending single malts from different distilleries.

I designed ELEUTHERA to be the most drinkable smoky malt whisky possible. I love smoky malt whiskies, but I find most of them too dry or simply too one-dimensionally smoky to drink more than one glass at a time. The key to ELEUTHERA is to set just the right amount of smoky Islay malt whisky against a backdrop of rich, sweet Highland whiskies. This gives you a very smoky, yet beguilingly sweet and drinkable, dram.

John Glaser, Whiskymaker and Company Founder.

Flavour Descriptors:
Smoky, rich, complex. Amazingly soft on the palate for its strength.
Whisky Sourcing:
Clynelish, Glenlossie, Caol Ila. All matured 12 - 18 years.
Wood:
All from American oak; a mix of recharred and refill types.
Bottling Details:
46%, not chill filtered, natural colour.



INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR
Whisky Magazine
'Three-time winner'

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The Making of A Whisky

You asked for it, you've got it. So many people had said from the beginning of Compass Box, "I love what you're doing. Why don't you make us a smoky Compass Box whisky?"

I capitulated. (And I capitulated again when we made MONSTER, but that's another story!)

But when I make new whiskies, I have to do it on Compass Box terms. So when I was creating ELEUTHERA, I set out to make a smoky whisky that added something to the smoky whisky oeuvre.

Let's face it: there are lots of gorgeous smoky whiskies in Scotland.

I love smoky whiskies. But the Compass Box style is about rich, sweet Scotch whiskies. The question was how to reconcile the two styles.

I decided I would simply leverage the creativity of blending to combine the two styles- to make a whisky with a very smoky profile, but one that had a rich, sweet background to it. I was envisioning something that would end up being a style that appeals to many people's desire for a traditional, smoky Scotch whisky, but one that is more sessionable, one that brings you back for sip after sip. My problem with some smoky whiskies is that after a couple glasses, the inside of your mouth tastes like the inside of a fireplace and all you want is a cold beer! So I set out to try and fulfill this idea...

It took a while. Ask my friends. I've been talking about this and working on it for months. It started out as a blend of malt and grain. My thinking was that to bring the rich and sweet background I wanted, I'd have to set the smoky malt whisky against some gorgeous, soft grain whiskies. Problem was, the heavy, smoky malt whiskies I was using drowned the elegance of the grains. Hmmm.

Then one evening, after several months of experimenting, I got a phone call from a good customer (who will remain nameless, because I think he'd prefer that.) He was talking to me about this gorgeous Islay vatted malt he'd come by at Cadenhead's shop here in London. He was really singing its praises. And I thought to myself, why not a vatted malt?

I began working on it soon after that.

I went back to my tasting notes on my malt samples, from light (Mannochmore, Linkwood, etc) to heavy (Ardmore, Clynelish, etc) and onto the smoky (Caol Ila). I started with some intense refill cask Caol Ila as the heart of the beast, and formed around it refill cask Clynelish for guts, and several soft Speysiders, some from re-charred casks, to counter with suppleness and sweetness.

But nothing was really working-the Clynelish and the Caol Ila were taking over, and fighting with one another.

I went to a sample of my favourite Clynelish, a 16 year-old bottled by Jamie Walker at Adelphi. THAT was the Clynelish character I wanted-rich, smooth, with the typical Clynelish waxiness and marine character-and a nice background lashing of smoke-yet with a richness and roundness. All I had in my sample library were refill casks (that were pristine examples of the distillery character, don't get me wrong, just lacking in "extra dimension") and...wait a minute! I remembered I had several samples of Clynelish from re-charred casks. That is, casks that had been used in a former malt-maturation life 2 or 3 times, then semi-retired and broken down, staves shaved to fresh wood, and re-charred so they were almost like new and could be brought back into the workforce. I had several samples of 14 and 15 year-old Clynelish from re-charred casks, and while these whiskies were soft, sweet and very pretty examples of Clynelish, they seemed to be a bit denuded of the masculine distillery character. What if I blended some of the gutsy refill hogsheads with these soft, sweet re-charred hogsheads?? Then added it all back to the Caol Ila, with a dash of Speyside femininity??

Eureka! I had it. (I thought.)

I assembled the casks in Elgin (Gordon & MacPhail vat and bottle for me) and was ready to go. Until I got the phone call from Ewen. "John, your Caol Ila is a leaker."

Bear in mind that I vat very small batches. This was going to be four casks-Caol Ila, refill Clynelish, re-charred Clynelish and re-charred Linkwood. And the Caol Ila, the heart of the blend, was a leaker. Ewen had it regauged for me and it turned out to be half full. I didn't have other casks of Caol Ila just lying around. (I'm a small company.) What to do?

I asked Ewen to give me a few days to decide.

In my kitchen cum blending lab I acted first on the simplest course of action: what would the blend taste like, I thought, if I vatted it at the current proportions, leaker and all? I did this using what was left of my samples, and ended up with a nice whisky, just not a whisky with the big smoky profile I wanted. The gorgeous "bacon fat" smokiness of that Caol Ila was diminished by everything else. I needed to adjust the balance to bring it back.

So I kicked out the Linkwood. (Do I hear a roar of approval from the Smoky Whisky Club??)

Yes. Oh yes! This worked. This was it. This was more than the original blend. This was better. This was bigger, yet this was balanced. Balanced by those two, opposing styles of Clynelish. Balanced between that bacon fat smoke, that laser beam intensity of the refill Clynelish and the softness and sweetness-(like a friggin' mattress!)-of the re-charred Clynelish.

It worked. "Vat it!" I should have screamed over the phone back to Ewen. But I was probably a little more subdued. After all, this was the north of Scotland I was talking to! ;)

John Glaser, Whiskymaker and Company Founder.