

REB MORDECHAI

PRESENTS

SHERRY CASK USAGE IN THE  
SCOTTISH WHISKY INDUSTRY

AGED **12** YEARS

**ISLAY SINGLE MALT SCOTCH WHISKY**

*Out of sight, in a remote cove near Port Askaig lies Caol Ila, hidden gem among Islay's distilleries since 1846. Not easy to find, Caol Ila's secret malt is nonetheless highly prized among devotees of the Islay style.*

*Caol Ila Distillery, Port Askaig, Isle of Islay.*

*Caol Ila lies close to Loch nam Ban, source of its pure mash water. The sea provides cooling and once brought steamers to collect a whisky appreciated for its balanced style - lighter-bodied than many Islay malts, yet with all their typical peatiness.*

# Sherry Cask Usage in the Scottish Whisky Industry

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This document was produced to accompany the interview conducted by Rav Akiva Niehaus of the Association of Kashrus Organisations (AKO) with me, which took place on the 5<sup>th</sup> Day of Chanukah, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

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## Acknowledgements

My deep thanks go to my Rav, Rav Pinchas (Bernard) Goldberg, Rav Ezra Friedman from the OU, Rav Aryeh Taub from the OK, Rav Zvi Liker from the OK, Rav Nissan Zibell from the RCF and Rav Akiva Padwa of the KLBD, for their practical advice and vital assistance to me in trying to understand the many complex halachic issues involved on this subject.

No less important, I wish to thank them also for their continued encouragement and giving me the confidence to pursue this project.

I also wish to give a very special thank you to David Zibell, Manager and Owner of *Golani* (Golan Heights) Distillery, Israel, for all his indispensable insights and technical assistance.

My sincere gratitude goes to the many experts and those who work on a daily basis in The Scottish Whisky Industry, for welcoming me into their distilleries and dunnage warehouses and for their time and patience whilst answering all my (sometimes silly) questions.

These include Douglas Fitchett, Manager of Glencadam Distillery, Robert Fleming Manager of Tomintoul Distillery, Michael Henry, Manager of Loch Lomond Distillery, Hector McMurchy Assistant Manager of Glen Scotia Distillery, Charles Maclean, Whisky expert and author of many books on the subject, Ruben Luyten, Sherry expert and Ralfy Mitchell, of Whisky YouTube Channel "Ralfy.com".

# Sherry Cask Usage in the Scottish Whisky Industry

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## About the author

**Mordechai Bendon** was born in Essex, England in 1964. He made *Aliyah* to *Yerushalayim* in 1988. He is married with four children and three grandchildren. He lives with his wife in the Orthodox Jewish community of *Mitzpe Nevo*, in *Ma'ale Adumim*, Israel.



Mordechai spent six years learning in the ***Ohr Somayach*** *yeshiva* Evening programme in *Yerushalayim*. He gives a weekly *Gemara shiur* for men and a *Parsha shiur* for women.

Mordechai first became involved in the world of Scotch Whisky when he purchased his first Single Malt in 1988 (A Glen Moray 12-Year-Old), at Heathrow Airport Duty Free. He began his investigation into whisky *kashrus* issues upon his first (of many) Scottish distillery tours back in 1996. There, to his amazement, he saw fresh wet sherry casks waiting to be filled with spirit straight from the pot still. The aroma of the sherry was overpowering. This singular experience prompted him to start asking questions as to how such a whisky, matured in those casks, could possibly be kosher?

Since 2000, Mordechai has travelled to Scotland almost every year and has so far visited every Scottish whisky region (The Lowlands, Southern Highlands Eastern Highlands, Western Highlands, Speyside region, Northern Highlands, Campbeltown, Islands and Islay), which includes over 50 distillery visits, and still counting.

He is in regular contact with some of the world's leading Whisky experts, including distillery managers and warehouse managers, as well as Cask experts, and continues to accumulate knowledge and data regarding the SWI (Scottish Whisky Industry) and in particular, their use of casks for maturation.

"Reb Mordechai" (as he is known to his readers), started blogging on Single Malt Whisky as well as Israeli wine, back in 2010. Today his Kosher Whisky blog, "Reb Mordechai Reviews" receives hundreds of "hits" per day.

<https://rebmordechaireviews.blogspot.co.il/>

Also, of note is his very popular online PDF file containing a list of Scotch Single Malt Whisky with no *Stam Yeinam* influence for those who wish to avoid the whole *kashrus* issue of sherry casks. The latest list can be downloaded here:

<https://rebmordechaireviews.blogspot.co.il/p/single-malt-whiskies-matured-in-casks.html>



The list, representing thousands of hours of meticulous research, is updated every month and is downloaded by hundreds of people every year. The list is used (with permission), as a trusted and authoritative guide by Orthodox *Kashrus* organisations such as **Star-K** and the **CrC**.

Reb Mordechai owns a Single Malt whisky collection of around 300 Single Malts and gives Master Class Whisky lectures on various whisky related topics in Israel and the UK.

He is considered a well-respected Israeli authority on Scotch Single Malt whisky and held in the highest regard by the YouTube whisky reviewer's community for his many contributions. (See YouTube channels *Aqvavita*, "A Dram A Day", "The Malted Man Cave", "No Nonsense Whisky", "Malt Activist", "The Spirit Safe" and many more).

He also receives calls, WhatApps and emails from all over the world on a weekly basis, from *Kashrus* Organisations such as the OU, the OK, other *Rabbonim*, as well as from Orthodox Jews, seeking reliable information on whisky cask maturation.

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## Scotch Single Malt and Blended Whisky

**Preface:** It is vitally important to briefly define some basic Whisky terms as these are, in my experience, often misunderstood by those in the *Kashrus* world. Note that for the sake of brevity, a lot of detail has been omitted.

### Scotch Blended Whisky

A Scotch Blended Whisky (such as Johnny Walker Black Label, Ballantine's, Grants or Chivas Regal), is made by combining or "blending" together, the two different types of whisky made in Scotland. That is, Industrial (Neutral) Grain Whisky and Malt Whisky.

Industrial Neutral Grain Alcohol, usually made from fermented wheat mash (but sometimes from fermented barley or corn mash), is distilled in a continuous column still and then matured in Oak casks for a minimum of three years.

Malt Whisky is made from 100% malted barley, distilled in individually designed copper pot stills and then matured in Oak casks. Every Malt Whisky distillery has its own specific flavour character. It is the job of the Master Blender to take various quantities of selected Malt Whiskies, and blend them into the Grain Alcohol to craft a specific Blended Whisky brand. Despite the neutral grain whisky almost always making up the bulk of the Blended Whisky, it is the combination of the various Malt Whiskies with their individual flavour profiles, which will give the final product its unique flavour and character.

For instance, Diageo's **Johnnie Walker Black Label** is made up of Grain Whisky, blended with some 35 different Malt Whiskies including Single Malts from Caol Ila, Talisker, Cardhu and Linkwood distilleries.

### Scotch Single Malt Whisky

Scotch Single Malt Whisky is made from 100% malted barley, mashed, fermented and distilled in copper pot stills, and then matured in Oak casks for a minimum of three years (but typically 10 years or more). Instead of being shipped to a blending facility to become one of the components of a Blended Whisky (where most malt whisky ends up, even today), it is bottled as a product in its own right.

Every Malt Whisky Distillery uses its own selected malted barley, (whether peated or unpeated), its own types of Mash Tuns and Washbacks (Fermentation tanks), its own choice of yeast and its own unique copper pot stills. This results in every Malt Whisky Distillery producing spirit with its own unique flavour and character.

It is known as "Single" Malt Whisky as the contents of the bottle has originated from a specific or "single" Malt Whisky distillery (and does not refer to the particular grain used as many mistakenly think).

**Note:** The cask maturation, cask vatting and bottling can be done outside the distillery.

## **A Brief History of Single Malts**

It is a common fallacy that Single Malt Whisky has been obtainable in bottles as a product in its own right for hundreds of years. This is simply not true.

Blended Whisky was the only type of Scotch widely available outside of Scotland until the early 1960s. Almost the entire output from Malt Whisky Distilleries went into blending to produce Blended Whisky. Only an insignificant percentage was bottled as “Pure” or “Straight” Malt Whisky (as it was called back then), and this was only available in Scotland or exclusive outlets in London.

[Sources: Charles Maclean. Whisky Historian and Expert, Article in Malt Whisky Year Book 2015, Iseabal Ann Glen, (M.A., Dip. Ed.) in her booklet “The Scotch Whisky Industry (1939-1961), Personal emails with Charles Maclean from September 2020].

Even today, Blended Whisky makes up around 90% of Scotch Whisky sold in bottles.

## **The *Teshuvos* on Whisky from the 1940s and 1950s**

It is important to realise that when all the classic *teshuvos* on Scotch Whisky (which are frequently quoted today), were written back in the 1940s and 1950s, that Single Malt whisky, today sold commonly as a product in its own right, did not as yet exist.

In other words, we can say with confidence that the *teshuvos* which were written on Scotch Whisky and the possible problems with maturation in Sherry Casks back then, were exclusively referring to Scotch Blended Whisky, which (as will be explained below), was matured almost entirely from old Refill casks (which had already been used to mature whisky at least once before), meaning that any Sherry or Wine flavour transfer from those casks into the whisky would have been insignificantly small. (Unlike the situation today!)

## First-Fill and Refill Casks

**First-Fill casks** are casks which have been used for the first time to mature “new-make-spirit” (spirit straight from the pot still), in Scotland to turn it into whisky. These types of casks will include Virgin Oak, Ex-Bourbon, Ex-Sherry or Port, Ex-Rum or even Ex-Beer casks.

**Virgin or New Oak Cask matured:** Usually, whisky is matured in casks which have previously been used to mature another liquid such as Bourbon, Sherry, Port or even beer. An exception is whisky which has been matured in new casks, which have not previously contained another maturing liquid. These virgin casks are heavily charred inside in order to caramelise the wood and remove the bitter flavours of virgin oak which would otherwise ruin a maturing whisky.

**First-Fill Ex-Bourbon** casks (or barrels) are sourced from the United States. The new casks are made from American White Oak (to a volume of 180-200 Litres). They are charred and then used to mature Bourbon Whiskey for two or more years. They are then shipped to Scotland where they will be used for the first time to mature Scotch whisky. Along with the charred wood, they will impart Bourbon flavours into the maturing spirit.

**First-Fill Spanish Sherry** Casks (or butts) which are expressly custom ordered from Spain according to specific requirements of the Scotch Whisky Industry. The casks are built in cooperages in Spain (also mainly from American White Oak) to a typical volume of 500 Litres, where they are toasted and then brought to the Bodegas where they are seasoned with sherry for a period of around 2 years, according to the distillery’s requirement. [Source: **Ruben Luyten**, Sherry journalist and expert]

**Refill Casks** are casks which had previously been used to mature Scotch Whisky and are being used for the second/third/fourth...and even fifth time in some cases, to mature new-make-spirit. Note that the SWI (Scottish Whisky Industry) will still refer to these casks by their original content, that is Bourbon or Sherry casks, even though they may not have contained these liquids for many years, even decades!

It is important to note also that, apart from a handful of Super Premium Blends where First-Fill casks might be employed, all Blended Whisky will have been matured in Refill Casks and so the flavour influence of the original contents of those casks, be they Bourbon or Sherry, will be negligible.

**Hogsheads.** These are cask made in the cooperages in Scotland to the optimum/ideal volume of 250 Litres for the SWI. They are made from staves taken from either Refill Ex-Bourbon barrels to make Bourbon Hogsheads, or Ex-Sherry butts to make Sherry Hogsheads. Hogsheads are actually the second most widely used cask to mature whisky, after the standard American Bourbon barrel.

(From left to right), Sherry Butt (500L),  
Hogshead (250L) and Bourbon Barrel (~180L).





## Whisky Matured Exclusively in Fresh First-Fill Sherry Casks (Better known as “Sherry Monsters”)

Most Single Malt Whisky on the market today, is bottled from a vatting or marriage of different casks from the same single distillery. Although most single malt whisky, made for the budget end of the market, is matured in either Refill Bourbon Casks or a combination of Refill Bourbon and Refill Sherry casks, (whose influence from the original contents of the cask will be negligible), it is becoming increasingly common place, (due to customer demand), for distilleries to offer higher-end expressions which have been matured either exclusively in First-Fill Sherry Casks or “Finished” (see next paragraph), in First-Fill Sherry casks, in order to impart a dominant Sherry flavour into the whisky. These Single Malts are often referred to as “Sherry Bombs” or “Sherry Monsters”.

Just take a look at the “New Products” section in the two main Whisky Online stores, “The Whisky Exchange” and “Master of Malt”, and you will see that a large percentage of these new releases are matured in First-Fill Sherry or Wine casks!

### Finishing or “ACE”ing

Finishing or Aceing (Additional Cask Enhancement), refers to a whisky which has been transferred from its original barrel to another highly active cask for additional maturation in order to enhance its flavour and complexity. For instance, “Sherry Cask Finish” refers to a whisky which has been transferred to an active, usually fresh, First Fill Cask in order to impart flavours contained in that sherry cask into the whisky.

Example: Balvenie “Doublewood” 12, (12 Years in American Ex-Bourbon casks and then transferred to Spanish First Fill Ex-Oloroso Sherry Casks for enhanced maturation).



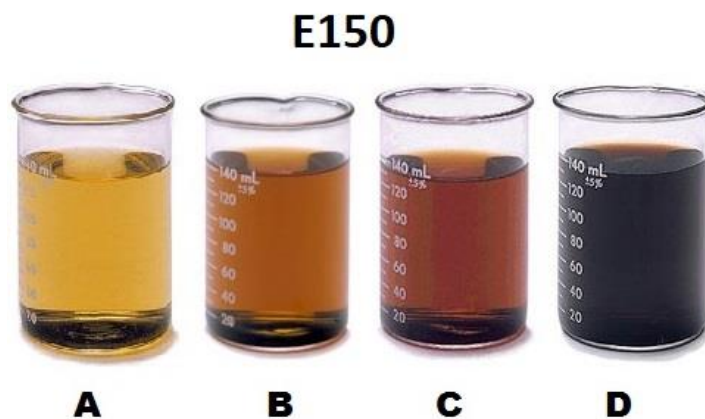
## **You can readily identify the dominant flavour of the Sherry and even identify the actual sherry/Port/Wine itself**

The dominant flavour of the sherry can be readily identified by an experienced Single Malt whisky drinker. Moreover, those who are familiar with Spanish Sherry and Portuguese Port, will be able to identify the actual sherry type which the cask was seasoned with.

[Sources: Top Whisky Reviewers such as Ralfy Mitchel, my own group tasting sessions with Golan Heights Port Cask Matured Single Malt Whisky, Emails from Charles Maclean 09/2020, Emails from Ruben Luyten, Emails from Robert Fleming, manager of Tomintoul Distillery, and Micheal Henry manager at Loch Lomond Distillery].

### **A Note about E150a Caramel colouring and Natural Colour**

Before discussing how to identify Ex-Bourbon from Ex-Sherry cask matured whisky, it is important to note that it is common practice within the SWI to add E150a Caramel colouring to all Blended Scotch Whisky and most Single Malts, before bottling, to give it that “Scotch” Caramel/Toffee look which most people associate with the colour of whisky. If the Single Malt has been bottled at “Natural Colour” then it can be a useful tool in determining the cask type and quality of that cask which was used to mature the whisky.



## Scotch Whisky Cask Flavour Profiles

Although Single Malt Whisky can be matured in a number of Cask types, including heavily charred Virgin Oak casks, Port Casks and Rum Casks, we shall concentrate on the two most commonly used: Ex-Bourbon and Ex-Sherry.

### Typical Ex-Bourbon Colour and Flavour Profile:

If the Single Malt has been bottled at natural colour, then you will see a light yellow-straw/Chardonnay wine colour in the glass. The flavour will be honey, vanilla, pastry, white wine, sultanas, yellow or green fruits (such as apples, pears, honey-dew melon, kiwi), caramel/toffee and spices.



### Typical Ex-Sherry Flavour Profile:

If natural colour, then the whisky will be dark red. The flavour profile will be dark fruits (Cherries, Strawberries, Raspberries, berries), dried fruit, such as Dark Raisins, dates, apricots and figs, slight gun powder/burnt matches perhaps, Rich Fruit cake and dryer spices.

These heavily Sherried or Port flavoured single malts are known as “Sherry Bombs” or “Sherry Monsters”. It is very important to realise that Sherry Monsters, matured wholly or finished expressly in fresh First-Fill Sherry casks, (which imparts a dominant Wine flavour), did not exist outside of small independent bottlings (exclusively available in Scotland), until the 1980s.

[Source: Article “The Beginning of Finishing”. Malt Whisky Year Book 2014].

## Rejuvenated Casks, Re-Seasoning with Sherry and STR Casks

As the purchase of New Spanish Sherry Casks from Spain is becoming increasingly more expensive with demand far outstripping supply, a much cheaper option, which has been rapidly increasing in popularity for the past 20 years now, has been to rejuvenate old casks (either in Scotland or Spain). The process involves taking old worn out inactive casks and sending them to cooperages either in Scotland or sent back to Spain, to be rejuvenated. The wood inside the cask is shaved back and the inside of the cask is either re-toasted, re-charred or both.

### Rejuvenation and then Re-Seasoning with Sherry

Depending upon the distillery's requirements, these Rejuvenated Casks are either sent back from the Cooperages as is (which will impart flavours similar to new Charred Oak Casks) to the distillery for refilling, or they will go through an additional process of Re-Seasoning with Sherry. Usually this re-seasoning treatment is performed on casks which were originally Sherry Casks (but not always!). Rejuvenated Old Sherry Casks will be re-seasoned in Sherry for periods anywhere from 3 to 24 months and is done in order to replace the Sherry character of the original cask.

Rejuvenation and Re-Seasoning is mainly performed on old Ex-Sherry Casks. However, Diageo (and perhaps other companies) have also began rejuvenating and re-seasoning Ex-Bourbon casks as cheaper alternatives to traditional Spanish Sherry Casks.



It is important to note that the distilleries sometimes do not even mention that the casks used to mature their latest "Special Release" has gone through a rejuvenation and re-seasoning process and at least in one case, (see picture above), have even stated on the label "matured in Rejuvenated [American Oak] Casks", with no mention of the fact that they have been seasoned with sherry! It is unclear under the current regulations whether this is technically still considered an Ex-Bourbon cask or in fact has now transformed into a Sherry cask. (In any case, this particular example does not appear to have raised any eyebrows at the SWA).

[Sources: Chats with Lagavulin distillery workers, Lagavulin and Talisker distillery (Diageo) Representatives via various emails August 2020, also see Source 14 below]

## Rejuvenation using Steaming and Toasting

As Michael Henry, Distillery Manager and Cask expert at Loch Lomond Distillery explains: There are two basic methods of Cask Rejuvenation used in the SWI today:

1. Shaving back the old wood, then Steaming and then Charring.
2. Shaving back the old wood, then Toasting and then Charring.

With the Steaming method, they only shave back 5mm. However, with the Toasting method they shave back as much as 10mm.

Typically, old Bourbon barrels will go through the Steaming treatment. Old Sherry butts will go through the Toasting treatment and then as a final stage they will be re-seasoned. Michel explained that the cooperages will often try and re-seasoned the cask with the same type of sherry which it originally contained.

[Source: Email from Micheal Henry December 2020]

## STR Casks - Shaved, Toasted and Re-Charred

The “Classic” use of the term “STR”, was a radically new cask treatment originally developed back in 2006 by the late Doctor Jim Swan for use in new fledgling distilleries which had two advantages over traditional Ex-Bourbon or Ex-Sherry casks.

1. It enabled the distilleries to produce a full flavoured mature whisky in as little as three years.
2. It made use of European Barrique wine casks (also known as French Wine casks, 225-230 Litres in volume) to mature their whisky, being that these type casks are often much more widely available and considerably cheaper to purchase in many countries, as opposed to the traditional type casks used in Scotland.

The problem is that a typical Ex Red Wine cask has already been used to mature Burgundy, Cabernet Sauvignon (or other similar dry red wine), for as much as seven years. By this time, wine has fully impregnated the oak pores of the staves saturating the cask with wine. As well as turning the whisky an unusual bright burgundy red colour, the wine flavour will completely overpower and swamp all those other flavours you typically associate with whisky, such as a biscuit-y malty flavour, honey and oaky vanilla.

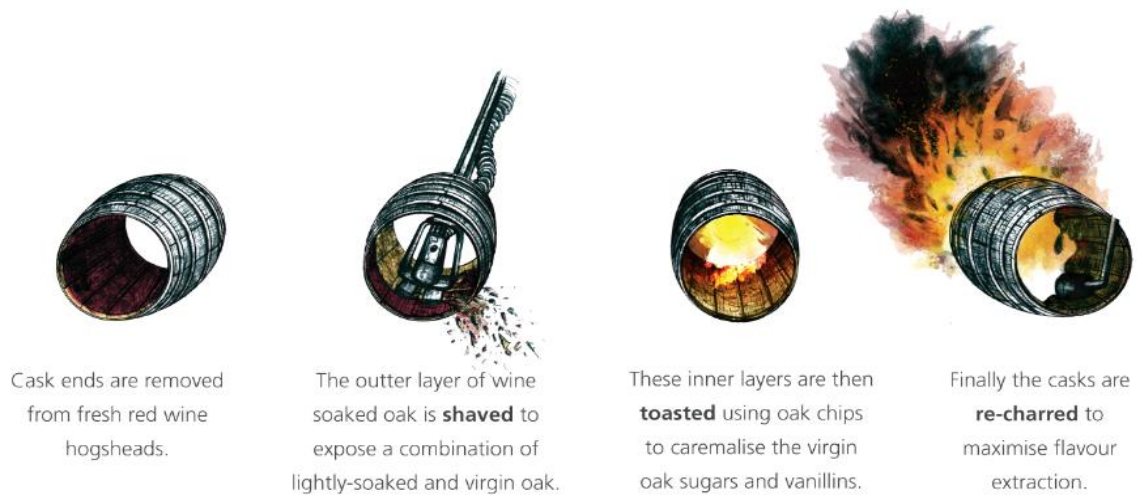
Instead, the “dry”, full bodied and acerbic fruity flavours of the red wine, combined with face puckering heavy wood tannins (like brewed English tea), which the wine draws from the wood), almost entirely obliterates the more delicate flavours coming from the malty grain spirit.

[See: <https://annandaledistillery.com/pages/technical-notes-continued#page-details-block-7>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rMsYJwJe4>]

Professor David Thomson on Dr. Jim Swan and our new Founder’s Selection STR Cask Release – Annandale Distillery]



## STR = Shaved back, Toasted and Re-Charring



(Diagram and below photo taken from Kilchoman Distillery website)

Giving these Red Wine casks the “STR” treatment, enables the distillery to drastically reduce the overpowering wine influence of the cask and allow the whisky to take on more flavour influence from the grain spirit and oak wood, making the much cheaper Barrique Cask a very practical alternative to the far more expensive Sherry Cask.

### The Redefined Definition of the Term “STR”

Many distillery managers around the world, particularly from small craft distilleries such as the “Golani” distillery in Israel, will use the term “STR” today, to refer to any cask type which originally held another maturing liquid, such as Port, Brandy and other types of wine, which then have gone through Jim Swan’s classic STR process, in order to reduce the overpowering influence of the previous contents. (This would seem to me, to be a perfectly reasonable extension of the original red wine STR cask definition).

### STR and Rejuvenated Casks

Due to the fact that the process of Rejuvenating old casks involves a remarkably similar process to Jim Swan’s Red Wine Cask STR treatment, (that is: Shaving back, Toasting and Re-charring casks), many in the SWI have (in my opinion), lazily began to refer to old Whisky Casks which had gone through a rejuvenation treatment, as “STR Casks”!

This “hijacking” of its original definition has caused no end of confusion and turned the original intent of STR on its head.

The original purpose of STR (as explained above), was to reduce the dominant flavour influence of the previous content of the cask (i.e. the red wine), whereas the whole point of rejuvenation and re-seasoning old casks, is to *dafka* infuse Sherry flavours back into the cask in order to impart a dominant flavour of sherry in to the whisky!

[Sources: David Zibell. Owner of “Golani” Golan Heights Distillery. WhatsApp audio message sent at 11:57am on the 16/08/2020.

Personal email from Doctor Kirstie McCallum, Manager of Glen Moray Distillery, Speyside, Scotland. Sent Thu, 13 Aug 2020, 11:10].



## **A Brief History of the Sherry Cask Usage in the Scottish Whisky Industry**

### **The Transport Sherry Cask**

Up until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, all sherry casks used in SWI (Scottish Whisky industry) were "Transport Sherry Casks".

It is a common myth that these casks came straight from the Spanish Bodegas in Southern Spain where they had previously been used to mature sherry, using the **Soleras** system which blends different casks of ascending age in the Bodegas to produce a balanced blend over a number of years. These Bodega casks would indeed have been heavily impregnated with sherry and would have imparted a dominant sherry flavour.

In fact, the sherry casks which wound up in distilleries in Scotland were not Bodega casks at all, but were, what they called "Transport Sherry Casks" which were filled in Spain with matured sherry and shipped to Great Britain. Their sole purpose was to transport the sherry to either London or Bristol in the UK. The casks were then emptied of their contents and the sherry was bottled in the UK, where it was sold all over the world. These Transport casks were then sold on to the distilleries in Scotland, having typically been used to hold sherry for a few months, which would have been the time it took to get from Spain to the UK and then emptied. Obviously the Sherry flavour influence of these Transport casks would have been a fraction of the actual Bodega casks (or indeed the modern Sherry Casks used in the SWI today).

### **Spain Takes Back its Sherry Industry**

All this changed in 1986. After dictator Franco's death in 1975 and with democracy returned to the Spanish people, the Spanish government in an attempt to take back control of the industry, decreed that sherry must from now on only be bottled in Spain! Thus, the transport cask which the Scottish Whisky Industry had relied upon for generations, overnight, became a thing of the past.

### **The symbiotic relationship with the American Bourbon industry**

During the 1980s and 1990s, the SWI continued to use their increasingly aging stock of old Sherry casks and began to rely more heavily on Ex-Bourbon casks from the United States. Thus began the symbiotic relationship with the American Bourbon industry we know today. It is important to realise that United States Whisky regulations demand that the all casks used to mature whiskey (with an e) must be made from new charred oak and therefore the American distilleries were left with

thousands of used casks which they could not reuse. (United States Federal Standards of Identity for Distilled Spirits (27 C.F.R. 5) Regulations). The Scottish distilleries readily bought them up and so began a decade of predominantly Ex-Bourbon matured Scotch whisky except a few diehard traditional distilleries who continued to import emptied sherry casks at great expense.

After about a decade of most Scottish distilleries predominantly maturing their whisky in Ex-Bourbon casks, when these single malt whiskies were ready to be bottled and entered the marketplace, many began to notice that the flavour of their regular malt whisky had changed in some way. It was found that this change was as a result of a reduction in the use of sherry casks within the industry. So began a campaign to reintroduce Sherry casks (in all their varieties), back into the SWI, which has now morphed into the industry's obsession with Sherry Casks, which continues unabated to this day.

**Sources Used:**

1. Malt Whisky Year Book 2019 Article "The Many Faces of Sherry Casks" by Gavin D. Smith,
2. Article "Sherry Casks in The Whisky Industry" 2017, by Ruben Luyten
3. Articles by, and personal emails with Charles Maclean.



## The Use of Grape Based Syrups in the Sherry Cask Industry

### Paxarette Sherry Syrup used in Cooperages in Scotland

Around the early 1980s, because of the exorbitant cost of importing Ex-Bodega Sherry Casks, the SWI began experimenting with sweet Paxarette Sherry syrup which they injected into the wood to rejuvenate and flavour their old worn out Sherry casks. This had the effect of imparting a massive sweet sherry flavour into the whisky. There are still Paxarette casks being used in the SWI today, although they are becoming rare due to the Paxarette treatment practice being banned by the Scottish Whisky Association's new regulations, published in 1992. After much consideration, it was decided that Paxarette was a step too far and it was considered by the SWA to be an extra flavour additive, and so, became prohibited. (Only E150a caramel flavour additive continues to be allowed today under SWA regulations).

The short lived practice of rejuvenating old Sherry casks by seasoning them with sweet Paxarette sherry jelly in Scotland during the 1990s, created a demand for heavily sherry flavoured whisky. So began an increasing and never ending thirst for these dominant sherry flavoured "Sherry Bomb" whiskies.



### Arrope Sherry Syrup Additive used in Cooperages in Spain

According to the Spanish Sherry regulations, in order to be legally called an "Oloroso Sherry Cask" or a "PX Sherry Cask" etc., the cask must be seasoned in Spain with real sherry of that type at typical alcohol levels of between 15-22% abv.

Just as Scottish distilleries are allowed to add E150a Caramel colouring to their whisky according to the SWA regulations, likewise, Spanish Bodegas are allowed under the Spanish Sherry Regulations (if they so wish), to add "Arrope" (or other similar grape based syrup), to their casks (typically around a litre), as part of the seasoning process.

"Arrope" is made by taking sweet grape juice pulp or "Must" from Pedro Ximénez grapes, boiling it up and simmering it in a tank until it's concentrated into a syrup. It is poured into sherry casks to enhance the flavour of the sherry. (Arrope is also used as a "sherry wine" flavouring in cakes and ice creams).

See: <https://toroalbala.com/en/arrope/>

**Note:** I have come across some so called "whisky experts", who are under the false impression that there are Spanish Sherry casks being used in the Scottish Whisky Industry which have been seasoned exclusively using Arrope (similar in practice to the Paxarette process as described above). According to Ruben Luyten, this is a complete myth. Any such or similar practice would be illegal under the regulations.

[Source: Email from Ruben Luyten, dated 28th October 2020]



## **Myths and Facts of Sherry Cask Usage In The Scottish Whisky Industry**

### **The Myths:**

There are a number of often repeated myths on this topic which need to be dispelled right now.

**Myth No.1** All Bourbon Casks are made from American White Oak and all Sherry Casks are made from European wood. This is where the flavour difference comes from, not the previous contents of the Cask.

**Myth No.2** That Casks are transported dry, in flat packs and re-assembled in Scotland.

**Myth No.3** That Sherry Casks are rinsed out upon arriving in Scotland.

**Myth No.4** That the Casks are left out in the Scottish rainy weather for months before they are used.

**Myth No.5** That the Sherry Casks are re-toasted or re-charred upon arrival in Scotland before being used to mature whisky.

**As will now be explained, all of the above claims are completely false!**

### **Introduction: Custom Made-to-Order Sherry Seasoned Casks**

In order to meet the growing demand for Sherry flavoured Single Malts, using the American Bourbon industry as a blueprint, the SWI began to enter into agreements with Bodegas in Spain to produce custom made-to-order sherry seasoned casks.

Today, it is standard practice for Cask Managers in Scotland to go to Spain and specify the exact type of sherry cask they require. From the type of wood used in the cooperages in Spain, the level of wood toasting used, the specific type of sherry to season the casks in, to the number of months to season the casks, typically around 2 years. [Robert Fleming, Cask Manager for Angus Dundee-Tomintoul/Glencadam, Stuart MacPherson, Cask Manager, Edrington Group. See their emails reproduced below]

### **Myth No. 1: The Wood Used to build Today's Sherry Casks**

It is important to mention the topic of wood types as one of the many myths brought by Jewish "Sherry-Bomb" whisky lovers, is that they try and argue that it is the unique flavours of Spanish European Oak, (as opposed to the American Oak of Bourbon casks), which is responsible for imparting the special dry fruits notes of the whisky, and not the sherry itself.

This myth may well have originated due to the fact that the SWI often (inaccurately) refers to all casks made in Spain as “European” or “Spanish” Casks. This has led to the misconception that Spanish Sherry Casks are made exclusively from European Oak (“Quercus Robur” and “Petraea” or often shortened to “QR/P”). In fact, the vast majority of Spanish Sherry Casks ordered by the Scottish Whisky industry are actually made in the cooperages in Spain from American White Oak (Quercus Alba or “QA”), either grown locally in Europe or imported directly from North America. This is the exact same Oak type which is used in the American Bourbon Industry. (The exception is Edrington Group who order 70% European Oak / 30% American Oak Spanish Sherry Casks from their Bodegas). (Personal conversations with Ruben Luyten & Source 2 below).

### **Myth No.2 & 3: How First-Fill Sherry Casks are transported to Scotland**

All First-Fill Sherry Casks are transported fresh and “wet” to the distilleries and filled with new-make-spirit (spirit straight from the pot still), usually within a few days of delivery “as is”, with no further processing (with the exception of checking for bad or “off” aromas from the casks). (See Sources 7: [Question 6], 8, 12 & 13 below).

The casks are transported with between 5 and 20 litres of actual sherry/port and wine at the bottom of the cask, so that, in the words of many distillery managers, “the casks do not dry up!”. In addition, there will be some 15 or more litres of actual sherry trapped in the pores of the wood, which will gradually be transferred into the spirit as the pores expand and contract throughout the seasons. (See Sources 4, 7: [Question 1] and 9 below).

### **Myths No.4: The Sherry Casks Arrive in Scotland: What Goes on in Practice:**

According to SWA, the distillery is supposed to pour this sherry out of the cask before filling with their new-make spirit. Despite this rule, no one enforces it and it is an open secret that in almost all distilleries, where they mature whisky in custom ordered First-Fill Sherry casks, they do not empty the casks before filling with new-make-spirit.

I have seen this practice at a number of smaller craft distilleries. I have also interviewed Cask managers and distillery managers who have told me outright that they do not empty the casks before filling with spirit, however, no one I asked was willing to state this in an email and only a few (see sources below), were willing to be quoted. (See Sources 1, 3, 4, 5 & 6 below).

### **Myths No.5: Re-Toasting or Re-Charring of Sherry Casks in Scotland**

The absurd claim that all freshly seasoned Sherry casks which come from Spain, are re-charred in Scotland before being filled with new-make-spirit, may have originated from observing the rejuvenation of old Sherry casks. Alternatively, someone may have perhaps witnessed the occasional Sherry Cask which exhibited bad or “off” notes, that was taken away to a cooperage in Scotland for re-charring. (See Sources 7:[Question 6], 10, 11 and 12 below).

## Sample List of Sources

Sources for above statements are from interviews with Distillery Managers, Sherry Expert **Ruben Luyten**, **Robert Fleming**, Cask Expert for Angus Dundee-Tomintoul/Glencadam, **Stuart MacPherson**, Cask expert, Edrington Group, **Charles Maclean**, author and Whisky expert, Email from **Douglas Murray**, Lead Technology Manager, Diageo, **Malcolm Munro**, Manager of Speyside Cooperage as well as others.

### Source 1:

“ [According to] official S.W.A. guidance on what is and isn’t acceptable. All casks must be completely emptied of their former contents so that any characteristics taken on by the new incumbent is derived from the wood alone. Any residual contents would act as flavouring which would be illegal (though whether independent inspections enforce this is another matter). ”

A quote from **The Malt Whisky Year Book 2014**, Article “The Beginning of Finishing”, by Jonny McCormick.

### Source 2:

**Ruben Luyten** is a world-renowned expert and lecturer on the subject of Spanish Sherry and Portuguese Port. He is also an expert in Single Malt Whisky. See his article entitled “Sherry Casks in the Whisky Industry” as well as his Internet Sites **SherryNotes.com** and **WhiskyNotes.be**

### The Use of American White Oak and European Oak for making Sherry Casks:

In his article entitled “**Sherry Casks in the Whisky Industry**” he states:

<https://www.whiskynotes.be/sherry-casks-in-the-whisky-industry.pdf?pdf=sherry-casks>

#### “Sherry casks today: tailor-made seasoned casks

...Often a whisky distillery has an agreement with a Spanish tonelería, a cooperage which prepares new oak casks for them. They use American white oak (Quercus Alba) or European oak (usually Quercus Robur). Note that European oak would originally come from Spain (mainly up North in Galicia) but harvesting is now highly restricted and therefore this type of wood is not generally available, except for Macallan, Highland Park and other Edrington distilleries who have a specific supply chain for

Spanish European oak through the Tevasa cooperage. Nowadays most European oak comes from Romania and France.

Distillers are often vague about the provenance of the wood, especially when it comes to European oak. The term Spanish oak cask also seems to be used incorrectly sometimes, even for American oak casks as long as they were processed in a Spanish cooperage.”

### Source 3:

#### “Neglecting” to pour the previous contents:

In direct correspondences with me, he states in an email, that he has witnessed distilleries “neglecting” to pour the previous contents (that is the sherry), out. He goes on to say that why on earth would they pour the sherry out when their whole objective is to impart as much sherry flavour into the whisky as they possibly can!

**The following is a quote taken from a very long Email from Ruben Luyten, 26/02/2018**

“ A few comments and answers:

- Yes, an experienced taster can discern sherry matured whisky or from a Port finish or a Sauternes finish for instance. It’s not always clear, and sometimes the differences are very, very small. But often the differences are clear, so this would essentially debunk the claim that it is all about the wood and not about the type of wine used.
- The difference between full maturation or a finish is just a matter of time. Of course it is less obvious to identify the type of cask when the maturation period was shorter. Same for first-fill, second-fill, etc.
- The alcohol abv level is an interesting question. Indeed there are indications that the strength of the wine, as well as the filling strength of the newmake that goes into the cask, affect the intensity and the specific flavour that is transferred by a cask. Bottom line is that every molecule has a different solubility in alcohol. Especially high levels of alcohol can lead to certain flavours of the wine being transferred less into the whisky.
- Palomino grapes used in sherry are typically harvested with a potential alcohol level of 12% after fermentation. After this grape spirit (typically made from Airén grapes) will be added to get a strength of 15-16% (for Fino sherry) or 17-18% (for Oloroso types). Mind that it is technically possible to create ‘natural strength’ sherry, where all alcohol comes from the grapes and no brandy is required. However this is not legally allowed in the D.O. Jerez (but it is in

nearby zones such as Montilla – Moriles). The kind of sherry used to season whisky casks will always contain more or less the same percentage of brandy, so I don't think this would be a noticeable factor in the resulting whisky.

- The size of the cask will definitely influence the flavour of the whisky (both in terms of oak flavour and wine flavour). Sherry casks in bodegas are 500 litres but nowadays the whisky industry uses more and more sherry hogsheads (250 l). The smaller the cask, the higher the relatively oak surface and quicker the sherry will be extracted.
- Sherry casks are never charred, only toasted. There are different toasting levels but this will mostly influence the oak-related flavours (more vanilla for instance), not so much the wine-related flavours.
- In my experience most distillers pour out the sherry from a sherry cask before filling it with newmake spirit. This is the only legally allowed practice. However I have witnessed myself that this is sometimes not the case. The answer you get from distillery workers are hard to predict, some admit (off the record) they leave the sherry inside and I suppose some who claim they pour it out are only saying this to be in line with regulations. I think it happens frequently, but not in the majority of cases.”

#### Source 4:

In a personal conversation in the **Springbank distillery**, Campbeltown, with the **Tours and Information Manager**, Craig Anderson, (4<sup>th</sup> November 2019), he explained that Springbank have standing orders with Spanish Bodegas to supply them with Fresh First Fill Hogsheads (250 litres) and Octaves (60 litres) which come with between 5 and 15 litres of actual sherry in them. This figure does not include all the sherry soaked into the wood. When I asked him if they pour that out, he replied that obviously they don't, as the sherry contributed to the flavour. (He continued), and besides, each Sherry cask costs them around £1,000 which they buy expressly for the wine flavour which is imparted into the whisky, so they would be crazy to pour out the wine! Moreover, he continued,

“ any distillery manager who says that they do pour the sherry out before filling, is not being, shall we say....100% honest ” .

#### Source 5:

Assistant Distillery Manager of Glen Scotia distillery, **Hector McMurchy** in Campbeltown, on a personal visit to his distillery (4<sup>th</sup> November 2019), told me that they never pour the sherry out of the casks as it is a major contribution to the flavour. He believes that this is standard practice within the industry, even though many do not admit it!



**Source 6:**

**Charles Maclean** is considered the greatest Whisky expert in the world! He has written many books on the subject. In personal email correspondence with me, he writes that, in his opinion,

**“ most of the sherry wine flavours in the whisky come from the flavour of the wood, unless they are First-Fill casks, in which case, the actual sherry in those casks will be the dominant flavour ” .**

When I asked him out right, what the distillery does with the sherry at the bottom of the cask and whether he knows about distilleries who do not pour this sherry out, he replied:

**“ I am aware that some (many?) distillers leave a quantity of sherry in the cask before filling with spirit,....[despite], as you say [that it is] against the regulations ” .**

(Direct quotes from an Email received 6<sup>th</sup> September 2019).

**Source 7:**

**Stuart MacPherson** is Cask Manager for Edrington Group which includes the Macallan and Highland Park distilleries.

**Email correspondence with Stuart MacPherson, 12 November 2018**

**Q1.** Talking about the process of *envinado*, there have been various estimates as to how many litres of sherry are absorbed into the pores of wood whilst the cask is being seasoned / aged in Spain, varying from 12 to 20 litres of sherry. Do you have an estimate?

**SM:** On average you might expect to see an absorption of maximum of approximately 2% volume. So basically 5ltr in a hogshead and 10ltr in a butt, however this can be variable. You also need to consider the fact that when new casks are first filled you will have a higher level of losses.

**Q2.** Typically, I have been told that the aging process in Spain is between 6 and 30 months. How long are Edrington Group Sherry casks aged for, or does it vary?

**SM:** To be classed as sherry wine (Jerez) the wine has to season for a minimum of 12 months, however after that you can season for as long as you want. Typically, Edrington will season our casks between 12 and 18 months

**Q3.** How long does it take approximately, for the cask to leave the Bodega in Spain and arrive at the distillery in Scotland?

**SM:** If coming by sea normally 2 weeks, although by road it could take as little as 4 days.

**Q4.** When shipping to Scotland, I understand that the cask is not totally emptied in order to keep the cask fresh. I have been given estimates of between 5 and 15 litres. Do you request any standard or typical amount to leave in the cask or does it vary?

**SM:** Suppliers previously recommended a small volume of wine be left in the casks, however Edrington requested that all wine should be moved prior to transport. SWA regulations also state that no previous liquid should be left in the casks at the point of filling, apart from the liquid retained within the wood, so theoretically all the transport wine would need to be emptied out of the casks when they arrive at the distillery.

**Q5.** In general, when the casks arrive at the distillery, what is a typical time period before the casks are filled with new make spirit?

**SM:** We do carry stock in case of logistical issues, but typically I would expect casks to be filled within 4 weeks.

**Q6.** When the cask arrives at the distillery, what is the procedure before it is filled with new make spirit? (I assume, like other companies, you simply check for bad or off smelling note like sulphur but that's it?) Is there anything else done to the cask before it is filled? (I ask this in order to disprove the myth that the insides of the casks are washed or rinsed-out before it is filled).

**SM:** No. We will examine the casks internally (off notes) and externally (cracked staves etc) and periodically do random pressure testing to ensure the casks are tight.

**Q7.** Another myth which I wish to debunk is that Ex-Sherry casks are made exclusively from European oak (Quercus Robur, Quercus Petraea or Quercus Pyrenaica). However, when speaking to a sherry expert in Spain, he tells me that the overwhelming majority of the casks used to age sherry for the Scotch whisky industry, are actually made from American oak (Quercus Alba). Can you confirm this?

Why do I ask you this? Because many say that the sweet dry fruity Xmas cake flavours of the whisky are coming from the European Oak wood and not from the sherry in the wood. However, if the wood is actually QA, then this cannot be true! The conclusion therefore is that all those vanillin and maple syrup flavours are coming from the American Oak, and all those Xmas cake and dried fruit flavours in the whisky, must be coming from the sherry!

**SM:** I can't say what other suppliers request in terms of new casks and wood species but from an Edrington and Macallan perspective we use both types of wood species (Quercus Alba and Quercus Robur). I'm happy to discuss this point further, but by phone if you want to call at a convenient time to both of us?

**Source 8:**

**Robert Fleming** is Cask Manager at Angus Dundee which includes the Tomintoul and Glencadam distilleries. Both distilleries carry the **OU Certification** for their non-Sherry matured Single Malts.

**Email correspondence with Robert Fleming:** 12 April 2016

**Question.** I assume when the casks get to the distillery from Spain that any sherry left in the cask (which according to SWA regulations, you pour out of course!) is still drinkable, that is, it is not sour. I say this, because you would usually then directly fill these casks with new-make-spirit without further preparation.

I assume however, that if the sherry had gone sour or bad then it would give the wood of the cask a bad smell and transfer a bad flavour to the whisky, and you would not be able to use that cask without recharring. Is this correct?

**RF:** Correct. Any residual sherry in the cask is emptied prior to filling. The sherry can be nosed to ensure no off odours but all casks are nosed prior to filling. If we get an off odour from oxidation or sulphury notes we would have it recharred. However, some people want sulphury notes in their whisky although not all these aromas come from the cask, some remain in new spirit depending on the distillation equipment i.e. whether condensing through copper or stainless steel condensers.

**Question:** There are unfortunately too many self-appointed experts who claim that there is no sherry flavour imparted, just colour. Even if the distillery says that there is a sherry flavour element in the whisky we don't believe them as its all marketing hype.

**RF:** There will be both a sherry flavour and colour imparted into the whisky. Although less flavour and less colour the more times a cask is used.

**Source 9:**

**Michael Henry is Distillery and Cask Manager at Loch Lomond Distillery**

Date: Fri, 4 Dec, 01:48 2020

[Me] So, my questions which I ask every Distillery manager I talk to, are all about:  
- Why would you choose to mature your whisky in First-Fill Sherry casks (and not Refill)?

[Michael Henry] You get much more sherry flavour influence on a first fill, the first fill of a sherry cask gives much more sherry influence and the second fill gives more wood influence. The sherry alters the structure of the wood (the 15-20% abv sherry hydrolyses some of the compounds in the wood creating new flavours during the seasoning process) and these flavours are then more prominent in the second fill ie

the second fill will give more spice flavours while the first fill gives more sweet and fruit flavours.

Surely it is for the flavour transfer of the sherry which combined with the malty flavours, is what many whisky lovers look for?

Yes – the typical sherried whisky enthusiast likes the sweet flavours of the sherry and to a lesser extent the spicy flavours.

Besides, why else would you spend £1,000 for a fresh Sherry cask?

I agree!

- Regarding casks which come straight from the bodegas, how much actual sherry is there (inside the wood) as well as at the bottom of the cask at the time of filling?

It depends – some casks have been lying around and are dried out. They are not great quality and can leak badly. To keep the casks in good condition sherry is added to them after they have been emptied by the bodega, this is usually done at the cooperage repairing them before they are sent to Scotland. Typically 5 – 10 litres are added to keep the cask moist during transport to Scotland. Most of this is absorbed into the wood but there can be 0-5 litres left in the cask.

- Why would you choose to use a specific type of sherry, eg. PX, Oloroso, Fino, Madeira or Port, if it wasn't for the unique flavour these different sherries produced in the whisky?

It is for the specific flavour of the sherry that casks are chosen, in particular how a specific sherry or wine compliments the flavour of the spirit that will be filled into the cask.

- What is your managing policy regarding the use of sherry syrups like Arope? How are these syrups used and in what quantities?

I am not familiar with the use of Arope. The casks that we are purchasing that we are getting sherry seasoned must use sherry and not any additives.

I think many (including perhaps Ralfy?) think that some casks are exclusively seasoned in these syrups with no actually drinkable sherry used? How true is this?

I think this is not likely as the SWA is very strict on the use of additives.

- I have noticed a new trend (particularly in Diageo and the Edrington Group), that they are now bottling single malts which were matured in rejuvenated casks, re-seasoned with sherry in Scotland or returned to Spain for re-seasoning.

Why would they re-season the casks if it wasn't for the benefit of the sherry flavour transfer?

There is some impact on the wood where the sherry changes the structure of the wood and creates new flavours. This however is secondary to the influence of the sherry flavour transfer on the first fill.

### **Source 10:**

**Email correspondence with Malcolm Munro, Manager of Speyside Cooperage Ltd, Craigellachie, Dufftown Road.**

Date: Wed, 16 Dec, 18:47 2020

[In answer to my question as to whether one would char newly seasoned Spanish Sherry casks which arrive in Scotland or whether he knows anyone in the industry who does...]

Hi,

All customers have different wood policies, all I can say on this is we have never Charred a fresh Sherry cask for any customer, and I am speaking from over 30 years in the job.

### **Source 11:**

**Email correspondence with Charles Maclean, author and considered the world's greatest Whisky expert.**

Date: Wed, 16 Dec, 18:15 2020

[In answer to my question as to whether one would char newly seasoned Spanish Sherry casks which arrive in Scotland or whether he knows anyone in the industry who does...]

My Dear Sir,

I have forwarded your question to a very senior chemist at Diageo, who is also a good friend, and will report back.

Like you, I think the idea of charring new sherry-treated casks on arrival is preposterous!

I am currently working on a book about Blended Scotch for an American publisher. Surprisingly little written about this subject - which, of course, under-pins the entire Scotch whisky industry.

I am enjoying the research.

Blessings to you from a miserable, locked down Scotland, Mordechai, and wishing you a joyful Xmas.



**Source 12:****Email correspondence with Douglas Murray, Lead Technology Manager, Diageo**

Date: 17 December 2020 at 07:56:22 GMT

Hi Charlie,....

Checked on casks and think there has been confusion. As you say new [sherry] casks from Europe are not processed in any way just filled. Where I think confusion arises is that exhausted sherry casks are normally rejuvenated before reuse.

The bodega process does not impact on Kosher status and we have taking the main agencies through our setup. This is because it's a fundamental point that casks must be empty before filling under the SW regs. Therefore by default no sherry remains.

Have a good xmas.

**Source 13:**

Email sent 18<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Hi Mordechai.

Thank you so much for the email, and apologies for not getting back to you sooner. So glad to hear you enjoy Glen Moray, it's a great dram and for me it doesn't get the recognition it deserves.

To answer your questions, when we get nice new sherry casks delivered the first thing we do is inspect them to make sure they are the quality we are looking for, there's a nice sweet sherry note from them and that there are no off notes from the cask, we also check the cask physically to make sure that it won't leak, as we don't want to lose our precious whisky all over the floor.

The casks are generally shipped with around 5litres of sherry in them to keep them moist during shipment, as we really don't want the wood to dry out. Once received this sherry is emptied out and the cask is then filled with either new make spirit or mature spirit for finishing. We try to fill the casks as quickly as possible after we receive them as you get better results with nice fresh casks.

For our sherry casks we have several approved cooperages in Spain we use, these tend to be cooperages which have supplied Glen Moray historically with good quality casks, or cooperages I've used in the past and know the quality of the workmanship. For the Port casks we are very lucky to be part of the La Martiniquaise group who own Porto Cruz port so we have a great supply of fantastic quality port casks.

I've used STR casks seasoned with sherry in the past but not seasoned in Scotland, all our sherry casks generally come from Spain.

Hope that helps if I can be of any more help, please just let me know.

Kind Regards

Kirstie

Dr Kirstie McCallum  
Head of Whisky Creation and Stock Manager  
Glen Turner Company Ltd  
Starlaw Road, Bathgate, EH47 7BW

#### **Source 14:**

I asked Diageo to comment on the fact that they state Rejuvenated Casks on Talisker and Lagavulin labels yet fail to mention that these casks have also been re-seasoned.

Diageo Talisker Case 222591 SB [ ref:\_00D20KaJr.\_5004G2BITDW:ref ]

9 Oct 2020, 18:18

Suzanne Barclay <consumercare.gbandireland@diageo.com>

Dear Mordechai,

Thank you very much for your recent email. It is always good to hear from people with an interest in Diageo and our Brands.

I have forwarded your email to the brand team for their consideration. They have come back with the following information:

**"Yes - a number of rejuvenated casks are seasoned in our Bodega process in Scotland. "**

Many thanks again we hope this information will answer your query.

Kind Regards,  
Suzanne Barclay  
Diageo Consumer Relations

## Percentage of Ex-Bourbon to Ex-Sherry Casks Used in the SWI

**Question: Isn't it true that some 90% of Casks used in the Scottish Whisky Industry Are Ex-Bourbon Casks? Therefore, isn't the problem with Ex-Sherry Casks pretty insignificant?**

**Answer:** While this statistic might be true, it does not reflect reality. This argument is often used by some as a form of misdirection to conceal the *Emes* so it's important to address. We must first differentiate between Blended Whisky and Single Malts. Almost all these Ex-Bourbon casks will be used to mature grain spirits which goes into Blends. However, when we take a look at the Single Malt Whisky market we see a completely different picture. The vast majority of Single Malt releases today are at least partially matured in Ex-Sherry Casks, and a good percentage of them are wholly matured in Ex-Sherry Casks!

### Esquire Magazine: The 12 Most Trending Single Malt Scotch Brands to Drink Now

<https://www.esquire.com/food-drink/drinks/a28248287/best-single-malt-scotch-whisky-brands/>

#### Brands

1. Highland Park 12, 18...
2. Aberlour 12, 16 and A'Bunadh,
3. The Balvenie Double Wood, Portwood
4. Laphroaig
5. Bowmore 15, 18,
6. Macallan Double Wood, Sherry Wood
7. Craigellachie 13, 17, 19, 33
8. Ardbeg 10, Uigeadail, Corryvreckan
9. GlenDronach
10. Bruichladdich
11. Talisker
12. Glenmorangie

#### Maturation

Predominantly Sherry Casks  
 Predominantly Sherry Casks  
 Predominantly Sherry Casks  
 Predominantly Bourbon Casks  
 Predominantly Sherry Casks  
 Predominantly Sherry Casks  
 Both Bourbon and Sherry Casks  
 Bourbon, Wine and Sherry  
 100% Sherry Casks  
 Bourbon, Wine and Sherry  
 Bourbon, Sherry, Rejuvenated  
 Besides the entry level 10, -  
 Predominantly Sherry Casks

#### Results of Trending Brands

Bourbon Matured	1/12
Bourbon and Sherry Casks	6/12
Sherry Cask Matured	5/12

## ScotchWhisky.com Magazine 10 Best Selling Scotch Single Malts 2020

<https://scotchwhisky.com/magazine/features/20897/top-10-best-selling-scotch-malt-whiskies/>

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Matured</b>
1. Glenfiddich	Bourbon and Sherry
2. The Glenlivet	Bourbon and Sherry
3. Macallan	Sherry Casks
4. Singleton	Bourbon and Sherry
5. Glenmorangie	Besides the entry level 10, - Predominantly Sherry Casks
6. The Balvenie	Predominantly Sherry Casks
7. Monkey Shoulder Malt Blend	Bourbon Casks
8. Laphroaig	Predominantly Bourbon Casks
9. Aberlour	Sherry Casks
10. Glen Grant	Bourbon and Sherry Casks

### Results

Bourbon Matured	2/10
Bourbon and Sherry Casks	4/10
Sherry Cask Matured	4/10

## MasterOfMalt.com Online Store New Whisky Releases For December 2020

<https://www.masterofmalt.com/new-arrivals/whisky-new-arrivals/>

Glenglassaugh 10 Year Old 2009	Bourbon Cask
GlenDronach 27 Year Old 1992	First-Fill Sherry Cask
GlenDronach 26 Year Old 1994	First-Fill Sherry Cask
GlenDronach 11 Year Old 2008	First-Fill Sherry Cask
GlenDronach 10 Year Old 2009	First-Fill Sherry Cask
Bruichladdich 28 Year Old	Sherry Casks
Tomintoul 30 Year Old	Bourbon then Finished in First-Fill Sherry
Port Charlotte 2004	Single Bourbon Barrel
Glenlossie 13 Year Old 2007	Sherry Hogsheads
Mortlach 13 Year 2007	Sherry Casks
Speyside 23 Year Old	Refill Bourbon Casks
Royal Brackla 12 Year Old	Sherry Casks
Fettercain 22 Year Old 1998	Single Bourbon Barrel
Royal Brackla 11 Year old 2007	Two Ex-Bourbon Barrels

GlenAllechie 12 Year Old 2007	First-Fill Sherry Cask
Glenlossie 10 Year 2010	Hogsheads then Finished in Port Casks
Auchentoshan 9 Year Old 2010	Single Bourbon Barrel
Glenburgie 8 Year Old 2012	First-Fill Sherry Casks
Arran 25 Year Old	First-Fill Sherry and Refill Bourbon
Bruichladdich 26 Year Old	Mystery, presumed percentage of Sherry Casks
Glentauchers 12 Year Old 2008	Moscatel Wine cask
Glenlossie 27 Year Old 1992	Bourbon Hogsheads
Orkney 15 Year Old 2005	Bourbon Hogsheads
Glengoyne 12 Year Old	Sherry Casks
Invergordon 11 Year Old	First-Fill Sherry Casks
Highland Park 1996	Bourbon Hogshead
Ledaig Rioja Cask	Finished in First-Fill Wine Casks
Caol Ila 2000 2019	Sherry Hogsheads
Dailuaine 13 Year Old	Hogsheads
Linkwood 12 Year Old	Hogsheads
Glendullan 12 Year Old	Hogsheads
Ardmore 11 Year Old 2009	Islay Whisky Casks
Inchgower 9 Year Old 2011	First-Fill Sherry Casks
Glenrothes 23 Year Old 1997	First-Fill Sherry Cask
Caol Ila 10 Year Old 2010	Sherry Cask
Glenmorangie 12 Year Old Malaga	Finished in First-Fill Wine
BenRomach 10 Year Old	Bourbon and Sherry Casks
Nc'nean Organic	Bourbon and STR Wine Casks
Octomore 10 Year Old 4 <sup>th</sup> Ed	Bourbon Casks
Octomore 11.1	Bourbon Casks
Caol Ila 12 2008	Wine Casks

## Results

From 1<sup>st</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020

Bourbon Matured	11/41	26%
Bourbon and Sherry Casks	8/41	
Sherry Cask Matured	22/41	53%

(Out of these, 15 of those 22 were First-Fill Sherry or Wine Matured. That's 37% of the total!)

## Single Malt Stock of Wine Store in a *Chareidi* neighbourhood in Yerushalayim.

Sample Taken December 2020

Brand	Expression Name	Maturation Type
Glenfarclas	21	Sherry
Glenfarclas	Heritage	Sherry
Ledaig	10	Bourbon
Glenfiddich	Fire and Cane	Virgin and Rum
Glenfiddich	XX	Bourbon and Sherry
Glenfiddich	IPA	Beer
Glenfiddich	12	Bourbon and Sherry
Glenfiddich	15	Sherry
Glenfiddich	18	Bourbon and Sherry
Glenfiddich	21	Rum
Jura	Elixir	Bourbon and Sherry
Jura	Origin	Bourbon
Clynelish	14	Bourbon and Sherry
Caol Ila	12	Bourbon
Octomore	8.1	Bourbon
Port Charlotte	Heavily Peated	Bourbon and Sherry
Bruichladdich	Laddie Classic	Bourbon
The Balvenie	21	Port
The Balvenie	17 Double Wood	Sherry Finished
The Balvenie	14	Rum
The Balvenie	12 Double Wood	Sherry Finished
The Balvenie	12 Single Cask	Bourbon
The Singleton Dufftown	12	Bourbon and Sherry
Speyburn	15	Bourbon and Sherry
Glen Grant	Major's Reserve	Bourbon
Glen Grant	12	Bourbon and Sherry
Bowmore	No.1	Bourbon
Bowmore	12	Bourbon and Sherry
Bowmore	15	Sherry
Scapa	Kiran	Bourbon
Talisker	18	Bourbon and Sherry
Talisker	Storm	Virgin Oak and Bourbon
Talisker	10	Bourbon
The Glenlivet	Nadurra Oloroso	Sherry
The Glenlivet	Nadurra Peated	Bourbon
The Glenlivet	Nadurra First Fill	Bourbon
The Glenlivet	15	Bourbon and Sherry
The Glenlivet	12	Bourbon (Predominantly)
Tomatin	Cask Strength	Bourbon and Sherry
Tomatin	18	Bourbon and Sherry



Tomatin	14	Port
Tomatin	12	Bourbon and Sherry
Tomatin	Legacy	Virgin and Bourbon
Auchentoshan	American Oak	Bourbon
Auchentoshan	12 Years	Bourbon and Sherry
Auchentoshan	Three Wood	Bourbon and Sherry
Aberlour	12	Sherry
Aberlour	16	Sherry
Aberlour	Abunadh	Sherry (First-Fill)
Highland Park	12	Bourbon and Sherry
Highland Park	18	Sherry
Laphroaig	SELECT	Bourbon and Sherry
Laphroaig	10	Bourbon
Macallan	12	Sherry
Macallan	18	Sherry
Macallan	12 Double Wood	Sherry
Macallan	12 Triple Wood	Bourbon and Sherry
Dalmore	12	Sherry
Dalmore	15	Sherry
Dalmore	18	Sherry
Glen Moray	Classic	Bourbon
Glen Moray	12	Bourbon
Glen Moray	18	Bourbon
Royal Lochnagar	12	Bourbon and Sherry
GlenDronach	12	Sherry
GlenDronach	18	Sherry
GlenDronach	1993	Sherry
Old Pulteney	12	Bourbon
Old Pulteney	17	Bourbon and Sherry

### Total 69 Bottles

#### Results

Bourbon	19	27%
Other Non	4	7%
Sherry	22	32%
B and S	24	34%

# Technical Facts and Figures about Casks Used in the Scottish Whisky Industry

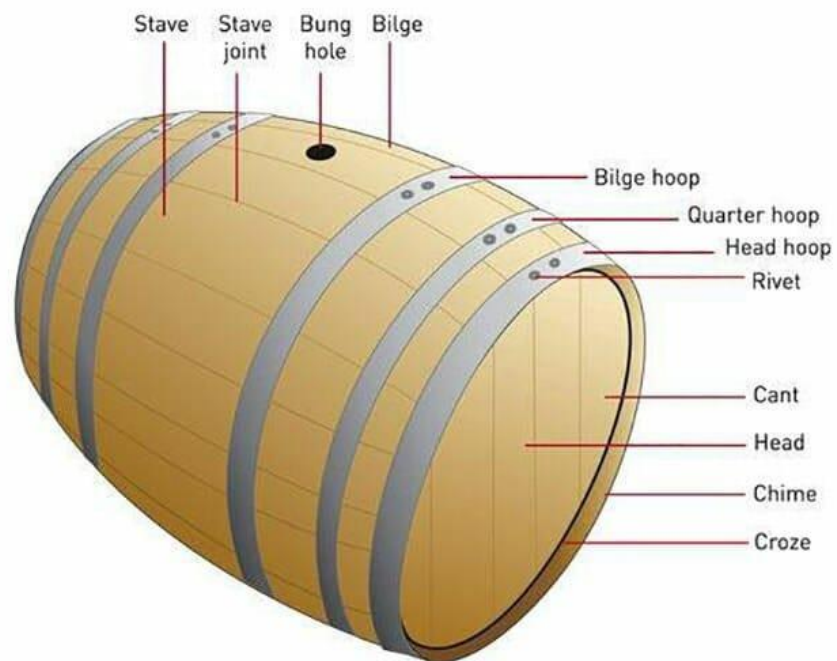
## Their Manufacturing, Types and Dimensions

<https://www.sherry.wine/sherry-cask/the-history-of-sherry-casks>

Include Luyten/s email.....

<https://whiskymag.com/story/the-art-of-wood>

### The Standard Cask / Barrel



## The Wood Used to Make Casks

### The influence of wood on whisky

Many of the flavours and characteristics of whisky are picked up from the wooden casks that it spends its time maturing in. Historically any type of wood could be used to make casks but now, by law, they now must be constructed of oak. Oak is selected for its toughness and yet easy to work with, has tight grain that prevents leaking, is porous and allows oxygen in and out of the cask and it can be bent by heat without splitting.

Wood is full of naturally occurring oils called vanillins. It is these oils that are drawn out of the cask by the spirit and over the period of maturation they add to the whisky's flavour profile. So if all whisky is matured in oak casks, then how can they all be different when tasted? The Barley type used (and whether it is malted with peat or not), the fermentation process, the size and shape of the stills and of course, the previous contents of the cask, all play an important factor, as well as the type of oak cask used for maturation. There are three main types of wood used by the whisky industry.

### Types of wood

Type of wood	Effect on Taste
<b>American White Oak</b> (Quercus Alba) or QA	mellow, soft, vanilla, honey, caramel syrup, sweet resin
<b>European Oak</b> (Quercus Robur and Petraea) or QR/P	Dry spicy (cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom), wood bitter, Wood tannins, brewed tea

There are significant differences between the two major types of oak:

**European Oak** grows all over the European continent far into Russia and Turkey. It grows slower than the American counterpart and is a bit less dense (720kg/m<sup>3</sup>). It contains Gallic acid that is considered a pseudo tannin. This acid in combination with water gives the whisky a slightly bitter note. The European oak has also a lot of other components that also add to the spiciness of the whisky.

**American White Oak** grows in the east of the United States of America and a few parts of Canada. It is one of the fastest growing varieties of oak tree and is therefore less expensive than its European counterpart. Its wood is very dense (770 kg/m<sup>3</sup>) and contains a lot of monogalloyl glucose. This transforms into typical Bourbon vanilla flavours.

Source: <https://www.whisky.com/information/knowledge/production/background-knowledge/types-of-whisky-casks.html>

## **European Oak (Quercus Robur or QR)**

This type of oak has traditionally been used to mature whisky in Scotland and Ireland for nearly two centuries. The first casks were made from English or Scottish oak but these species of oak tree are slow growing and have twisted trunks which made the casks prone to leaking. Later Russian oak was imported as this gave more consistent wood structure due to the trees being fast growing and growing with straight trunks.

The importing of sherry from Spain to the UK started around the 1860s. These casks were used to transport the sherry and were made from European oak with similar properties to Russian oak but were much cheaper. This oak is traditionally grown in the Galicia region of northern Spain. Sherry casks made from European Oak are still highly sought after within the Scotch whisky industry despite American Oak being the preferred Oak to mature Sherry in Spanish Bodegas. Sherry seasoned European Oak Casks cost around 10 times that of an American Bourbon barrel. (About £1,000)

The other type of European oak commonly used in modern whisky maturation is French Oak.

**Flavours: Dry Candied Peel, Spices – (cinnamon, nutmeg, wood), Vanilla, mixed Cake spices.**

## **American Oak (Quercus Alba or QA)**

This type cask has only been used in the whisky industry since the end of the Second World War. At that time, pressure from the American Cooper's Union led to the United States government formulating a law that stipulated that all American whiskey had to be matured in new wooden casks. (This was done to boost the American Coopering industry that had collapsed during Prohibition in the 1920s and 30s). As a result, there was a massive increase in the number of used casks available. The American Bourbon whiskey industry slowly recovered from Prohibition and the Scots and Irish began using their casks for maturation. This was due to the unlimited availability and low price of bourbon casks compared to the more traditional sherry casks, whose availability was dramatically declining with prices becoming exorbitant.

American Oak is seen as perfect for whisky cask construction as the trees are fast growing with tall straight trunks, giving good quality wood and high levels of vanillins. The size of cask produced (known as an ASB - American Standard Barrel) is also considered to mature whiskey at the optimum rate as there is the perfect ratio between the amount of liquid and the surface area of the inside of the cask. The result of this is that nearly 90% of all the world's whisky is now matured in American Oak Bourbon casks. The remainder are matured in American Oak Sherry casks and only a small few from European Oak.

**Flavours: Vanilla, Caramel, Honey, Coconut, Almonds, Hazelnuts, Butterscotch, Fudge, Spices - Ginger.**

### **Why isn't British Oak used for maturing whisky?**

It is interesting to note that British Oak (Scottish or English) is not used for two reasons. 1. As the trunks do not grow straight and produces casks which are prone to leaks! 2. The sap has less of a sweet honey flavour than its American or European counterparts and imparts a slight bitter taste.

### **Cask Types and Sizes Used in the Scottish Whisky Industry**



<https://images.app.goo.gl/YBpZASwbPxxJf4r8>

### **Casks Used in the Whisky Industry, Ordered by popularity**

190L Bourbon Barrels, 250L Hogsheads  
 500L Sherry Butts, 250L Sherry Hogsheads (made in Spain and Scotland)  
 225L Barrique Red Wine,  
 125L Quarter Casks,  
 500L Puncheons, 550L Port Pipes, 650L Maeira Drums.

## Cask Toasting

All Sherry and other wine casks are toasted as part of their preparatory manufacturing process, prior to being filled. This involves exposing the inside of the cask to a gentle heat source over a period of around half an hour or more. **Storing liquid in raw wood will impart very bitter flavours, sap, resin, rubber and rotting damp wood flavours and would effectively ruin the contents.**

(American Bourbon casks go through a much more aggressive heat preparation called “charring”. See Cask Charring).

The raw wood is first prepared by being dried to around 20% humidity level. (This stage takes around two years). The wood is then ready to be made into staves which will be used to make casks in the cooperage. The staves are cut into a precise stave shape with angled ridges, arranged, hammered and jammed around the rings. The cask is then placed onto a wood burner for toasting and shaping. The cask sits over the burner and is constantly humidified by throwing buckets of water (or spraying water) onto it. The warmed staves are slowly bent into shape by use of cables and a pulley system. The burners are fed pieces of wood to keep the flames strong, without getting the temperature too high. This shaping procedure takes around 30 minutes but the casks remain on the fire for further toasting for typically, a further 5-10 minutes, according to amount of toasting required.



(Highland Park Video on Casks Trees to Staves, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXYUu70mC9A>)

Highland Park Video on Casks. Staves to Casks Part II, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHVTqwRfjHo>)

### Toasting Levels

There are basically three levels of Toasting: Light, Medium and Heavy.

Toasting Level	Time (Minutes)	Inside Wood Temp °C	Surface Temp °C
Light	5-10	80-100	150
Medium	20-30	100	200
Heavy	35-45	110	225

The gentle heat process of toasting gives the wood a matt fudge brown colour. The darker the colour, the more toasting has been done. **Toasting will mellow the tannins (the bitter brewed tea flavours) of the raw wood and impart a spice flavours into the whisky. The toasting also releases vanillin from the cellulose in the wood which produces sweet vanilla and fudge/caramel flavours.** The spice and vanilla flavours will vary depending on the type of oak used to make the staves. American White Oak (QA), will give less spicy notes but impart more Vanillin than European Oak (QR).

There are varying degrees of toasting—from a light toast to a heavy toast and, as you might imagine, this changes the way the cask will influence a liquid.

**Essentially, the heavier the toast, the stronger the barrel's spicy and vanilla flavours.**



**Sources:**

Difford's Guide "Cask Charring & Toasting",

<https://www.diffordsguide.com/encyclopedia/189/bws/cask-charring-and-toasting>

"The Cask Is King" by Charles MacLean, Malt Whisky Year Book 2016

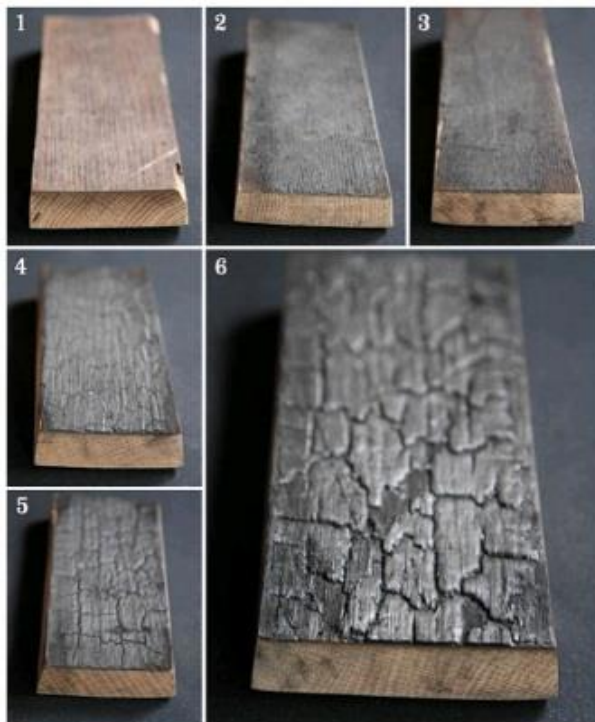
<https://highcoastwhisky.se/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/04/amc-1-1-english.pdf>



## Cask Charring

As part of their preparation, the insides of Bourbon Barrels are subjected to a flame torch blasting known as Charring. The barrels are slowly turned to ensure even charring and are subjected to an intense heat (around 250°C), for typically up to a minute for that classic Bourbon Barrel look. According to the United States Federal Standards of Identity for Distilled Spirits (27 C.F.R. 5) Regulations, all Straight Bourbon and Whiskey must be matured in new charred Oak Barrels for a minimum of two years.

The American Whiskey industry has established various standard charring grades. A #1 Char grade (known as Light Char), is a torching for around 15 seconds and #3 is for around 35 seconds. **The classic Bourbon grade is #4 Char, is a few seconds short of a minute.** Grades #4 Char and above, are known as “Alligator Char,” since after this amount of charring, it produces a shiny carbonated cracked skin wood effect resembling alligator skin.



The Charred barrel looks black, burnt and crinkly inside. The charring thickness will reach to about 3-4 mm into the wood. **Charring acts as a sort of activated carbon filter, which removes sulphur and other smelly compounds from a whisky as well as harsher bitter flavours coming from raw oak.** Charred Ex-Bourbon barrels will impart a light gold or straw colour to the spirit, and if heavily charred, will produce wood smoky notes (which some mistake as peated whisky), as well as **rich toffee, honey and plenty of dry spices** as all those natural wood sugars are being caramelized.

**Charring Levels From Light to Heavy**

<https://www.diffordsguide.com/encyclopedia/189/bws/cask-charring-and-toasting>

<https://www.diffordsguide.com/encyclopedia/189/bws/cask-charring-and-toasting>

<http://www.gobourbon.com/using-oak-barrels-to-age-whiskey/>

“How to flame char a barrel: Jameson Select Reserve Black Barrel”,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yer61iOwy84>

## Sherry Cask Dimensions

### Why is it called a Sherry “Butt”?

The word "bota / butt" does not refer exclusively to a wooden container, but also to a measure of volume, equivalent to 500 litres or 30 arrobas (an arroba is an old measure equal to 16.66 litres).

<https://www.sherry.wine/sherry-cask/the-history-of-sherry-casks>

### Traditional Types of Sherry Casks Used in Spanish Sherry Industry

#### **Bota Jerezana – The Traditional Jerez Solara Ageing Vessel**

600 Litres. 136cm high, 102cm widest point.

Thickness:

Only filled 5/6 capacity (just under 500 Litres), to aid development of yeast fermentation (known as “la flor”) through oxidation, which is a vital element of in the production of quality sherry.

#### **Bota Bodeguera – General Use Solera System Cask**

Often used to mature sherry from the cheaper end of the Sherry market or used to mature the youngest sherry in the Solara system.

566 litres, 135 cm high, 95 cm at its widest point.

#### **Media Bota – Half Butt**

250 Litres, 100cm High, 72cm at its widest point

**Cuarta de Bota - Quarter Cask**                      125 Litres

**Octavo – Octave**                                              62.5 Litres

#### **Bota de Exportación – The (Old) Export (British) Transport Cask**

500 Litres, 128cm high, 93-94cm at its widest point

Thickness: 40mm

#### **The Sherry Butt (as used in the Scottish Whisky Industry today)**

500 Litres, 130cm high, 92-93cm at its widest point

Thickness: 30-35mm

## Cask Stave Thickness

Transport casks were extra thick to protect them when transported in ships and were around 40mm.

Today's typical 500L Sherry Casks are between 30-35mm. (1.2 to 1.4 inches)

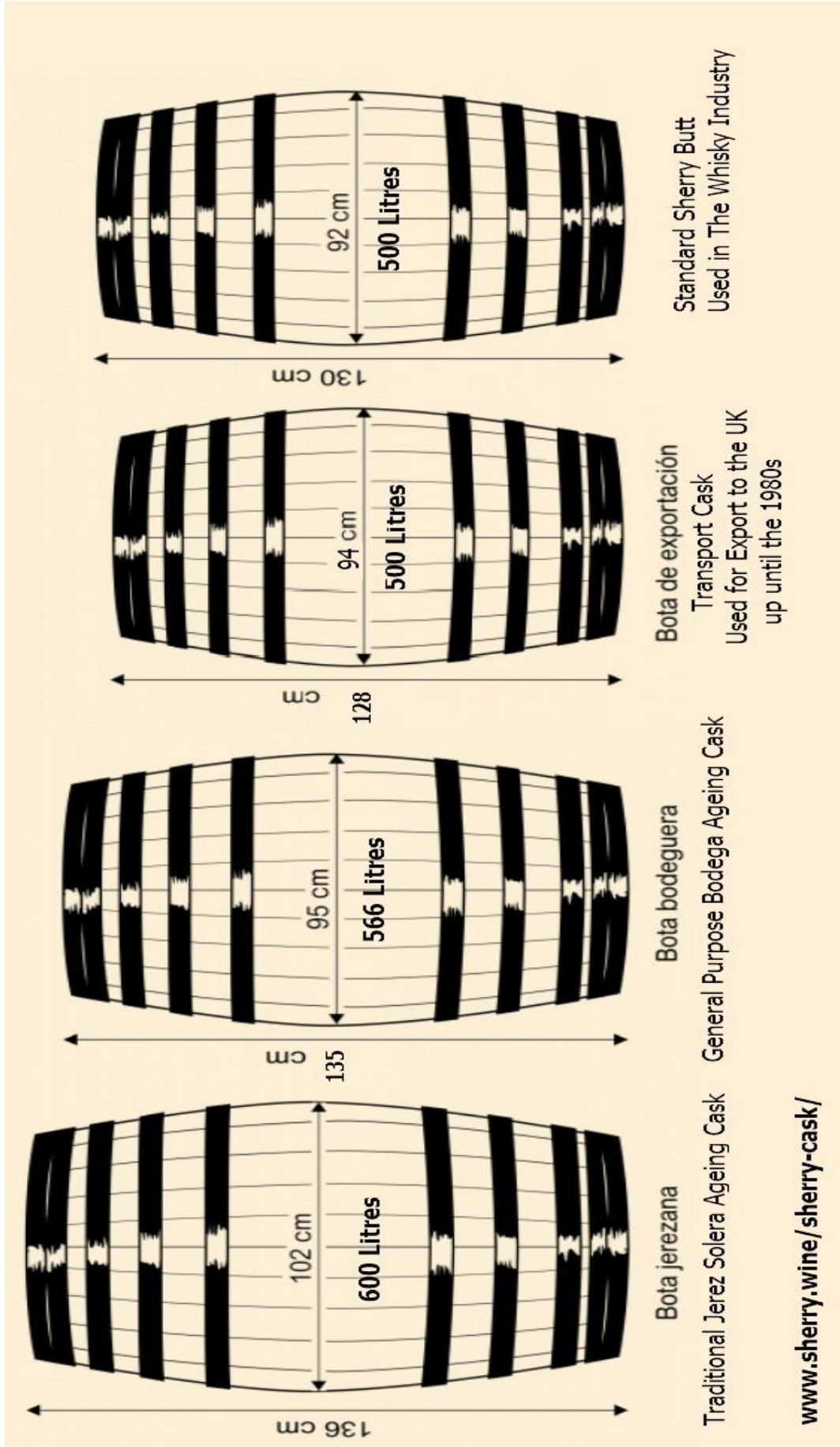
Typical Bourbon Barrels are around 25-27mm, or 1 inch.

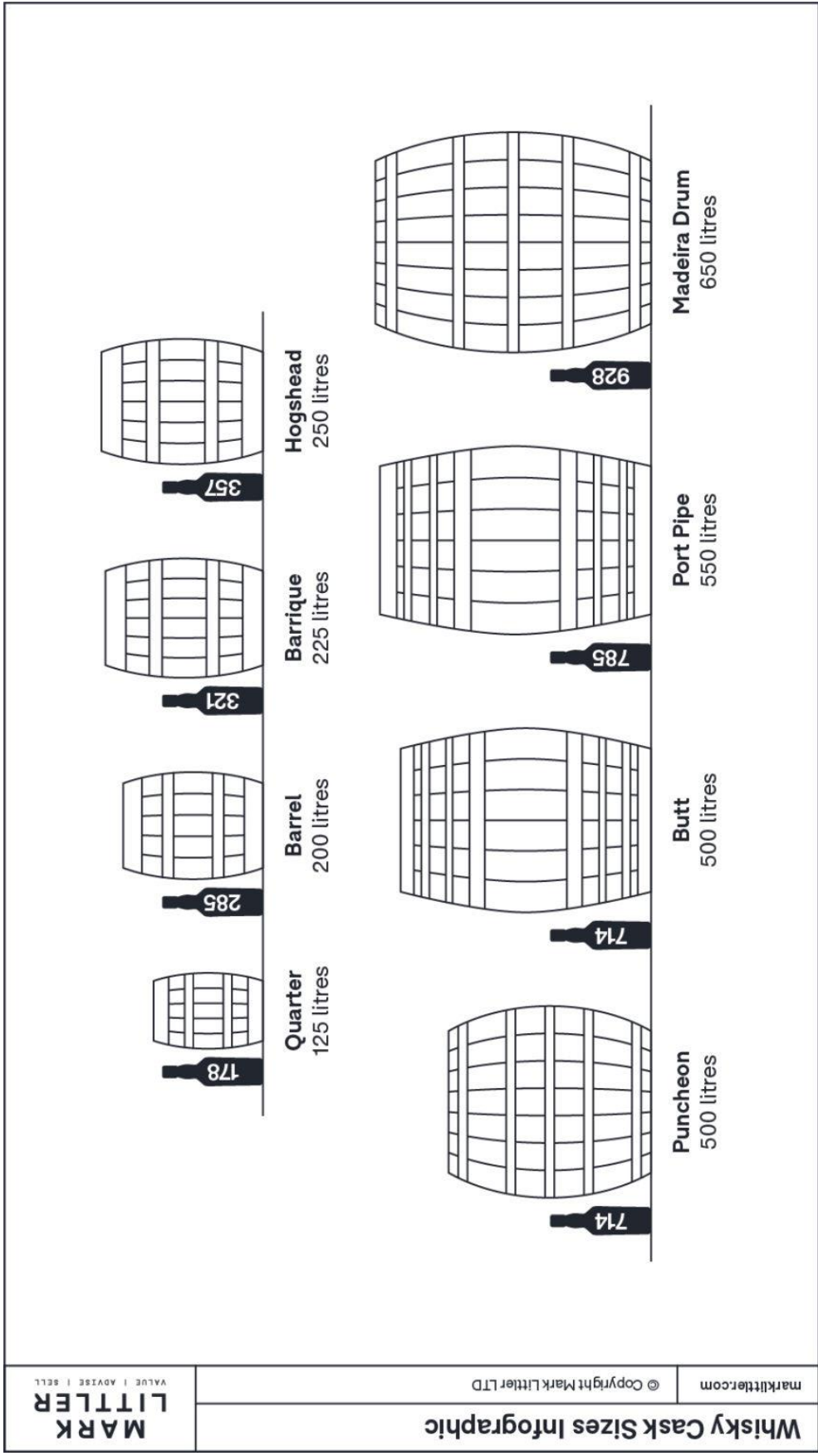
[Email from Ruben Luyten].

Also see: <https://www.oak-barrel.com/sherry-hogshead-staves-d150071.html>  
Sherry Cask Types Diagram adapted from:

<https://www.sherry.wine/sherry-cask/sherrycask-the-cooperage#:~:text=Types%20of%20Sherry%20Casks,-In%20Jerez%20the&text=This%20type%20of%20cask%20is,long%2C%20by%2092%20cm%20wide.>

## Sherry Cask Dimensions







## The Sherry Transport Cask



Sherry Transport Cask, London Docks, 1896

From Sherry.Wine Article: <https://www.sherry.wine/sherry-cask/the-history-of-sherry-casks>

**“Although they were simple transport casks (or “export casks” of 500 litres), the wine usually remained in them for many months, even years in some cases.**

**These casks were certainly impregnated with the intense and marvellous flavours and aromas of the wine they contained; a fact that did not go unnoticed by the British merchants.”.**

The specially ordered casks for the Scottish Whisky Industry try to reproduce the profile of these casks as much as possible, even surpassing them in their flavour.

<https://www.sherry.wine/sherry-cask/sherrycask-the-cooperage#:~:text=Types%20Of%20Sherry%20Casks,-In%20Jerez%20the&text=This%20type%20of%20cask%20is,long%2C%20by%2092%20cm%20wide.>

As explained above, the availability of Transport Casks from Spain dried up in the mid-1980s when new Spanish Sherry regulations were introduced, banning the export of sherry in casks.

**A Spanish Cooperage or “Toneleria” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century**



Detalle del «Trabajadero»



## Depth of Affected Sherry/Wine into the Stave



Email from Ruben Luyten, 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020

**“The sherry will seep into the wood to around 3-5mm!**

**Amount of sherry contained in the pores of the wood will be at least 15 litres of liquid.**

**Added to that, you will have another 5-20 litres at the bottom of the cask.”**

**The two liquids will interact within the cask as the temperature changes throughout the day and seasons.**

Roy Duff of YouTube channel **Aqvavitae**, describes a trip to Loch Lomond distillery where he spent a day with Michael Henry, manager. It was a hot summer’s day. They had emptied the excess sherry from a fresh sherry cask in order to sample sherry. (It tasted fresh and sweet). The next day they came to fill it with new-make-spirit (spirit straight from the pot still), and they were surprised at just how much sherry had seeped out of the pores and was now sloshing around at the bottom of the cask.

## Tasting Notes for Kosher Port and Sherry Cask Matured Single Malt

### A Crash Course Introduction to Sherry

#### Fortified Wine

Fortified wine is regular wine made from fermented grape juice but then married with and “fortified” with distilled grape based spirit (known by the generic term “brandy”). Regular wine using only the fermentation process to produce alcohol can never produce a wine of usually more than 15-16% abv (alcohol by volume) whereas the distillation process can produce much higher alcohol volumes. Consequently, the alcohol content of fortified wine can be anywhere from around 15.5 abv up to as much as 22 abv, producing a very robust liquid that was traditionally diluted and drunk by soldiers in the battlefield when clean water was unavailable. It was also used in the field to clean wounds as it acts as an antiseptic and mild anaesthetic.

Sherry is the Anglicised name for “Xeres” (Jerez), the most famous of fortified wines, made from varieties of white Spanish grapes (usually Palomino grapes) and produced in the region of southern Spain, an area known as “The Sherry Triangle”. Maturation in Sherry casks uses the Soleras technique which blends different casks of ascending age to produce a balanced blend.

Other well-known fortified wines include Port, from Portugal, Madeira, from the Madeira Islands and Marsala from Italy.

#### What does Sherry taste like?

There are actually many different types of Sherry which range from light to heavy, dry to ultra-sweet, some fruity and others quite sour in nature. Please note that I am not talking about Cream Sherries (as drunk by your Great Aunty Esther), made for the sweet English palate, which is more like a liquor. I will concentrate on those sherry types which are typically used to season casks, bound for the Scotch whisky industry.

**Fino** - This type is sometimes produced without fortifying with brandy. During the fermentation process, the sherry is starved of oxygen and the yeast is allowed to go crazy. It results in a light (yeasty dough like) sour fruitiness.

**Oloroso** - Medium bodied, is oxidized sherry and can range from dry to sweet. It is probably the most versatile of sherries and the one most commonly used to season Sherry casks, bound for the Scotland.

Copper Red in colour. Typical flavours of dry nutty aromas (especially walnuts), combined with sweet and sour red balsamic vinegar, fresh dark fruits (especially cherry), dried fruits (dates, figs, prunes, apricots) with a touch of rhubarb, hints of cocoa chocolate, toasted bread, tobacco and autumn leaves. Often flavours of truffles and seasoned leather on aged bottlings.



**Pedro Ximenez** - (or PX for short), is a heavy dark syrupy sweet sherry and is becoming increasingly popular as it imparts a dominant sweet fruity flavour to the whisky, which is unmistakable.

Blackcurrant red in colour. Sweeter and syrupier than Oloroso. Ultra-sweet aromas of cooked dark fruit (raisins, raspberries and cherries), candied figs. Figs and dates in syrup, tin peaches, sweet chocolate, coffee, Cinnamon pastry, candied ginger, liquorice, sweet almonds and other spices.

Sources: "Types of sherry wines" by Ruben Luyten

<https://www.sherrynotes.com/sherry-types/>

Other types of Sherry commonly used to season sherry casks are Amontillado and Palo Cortado.

### **Israeli Port Style Wines**

There are, *Baruch Hashem*, an increasing number of wineries here in Israel, who are producing some excellent Kosher Port style fortified wines, matured for around two years, and will give you a very good introduction to the whole genre. Please bear in mind though that Port style wines are more like PX Sherry, lacking that quintessential sour fruity flavours you get from most Spanish Sherries.

## Golan Heights (Golani) Distillery Cask 8, matured in a Golan Heights Winery "T2" Port Style French Oak Cask 2011



First, let's sample the actual Port style fortified wine, and then compare this to the whisky which was matured in these casks:

### Golan Heights Yarden "T2" Port Style Wine 2011, 18.5% abv

#### Aroma

Black dark red fruits. Partially black cherries. Loads of dried fruit. Definitely rich goeey sweet dates, plump ripe figs, some "Sabra" Orange and chocolate liquor. Loads of sweet "dry" spices, the "Mixed Spices" you put in cakes. Vanilla pods, prune juice and pomegranate wine.

#### Tasting

The "T2" tasted exactly as its aroma. Loads of black cherries, prunes, dates, figs, fig seeds, pomegranate juice, up front sweet "bitter" chocolate, vanilla ice cream, glazed oranges, sugared orange rind, black treacle molasses and raisins.

#### The Finish

The wine coats your tongue with a concoction of dried fruit compote, dark intensely sweet cooked fruits preserve in syrup.

## **Golan Heights Cask 8 Port Cask Matured Single Malt, 46% abv**

### **On the Nose**

Rich Dundee dried fruit cake in syrup. Dark Cherry jam. Pomegranate wine. There is a very interesting and unusual sweet Menthol freshness and hops beer aroma. Sweet chocolate custard vanilla sponge cake. Black Licorice Allsorts and toffee fudge ice cream. Dry wood spices.

### **In the Mouth**

Wow! What a mouth fill experience. It coats the tongue and sticks to the insides of your mouth with a tsunami seismic tidal wave of dark fruity syrupy flavours.

Ripe Figs and crushed fig seeds. "*Majoul*" fat Dates. Glazed Oranges. Ripe Black Cherries. Dark bitter Chocolate. Black Cherry jam. Moist Fruit Cake, Plum Brandy pudding. Vanilla ice cream and chocolate syrup. You can taste that slight menthol, eucalyptus fresh sweetness. Creamy porridge with a dollop of black treacle molasses, honey and plump raisin jam. The black Licorice Allsorts comes through on the palette.

### **The Finish**

A grand finale of all of the above which remains in the mouth as long as a heavily peated Islay, except, instead of peat, it's ripe rich dark fruits and old red wine.

### **Conclusions made from the comparison:**

There was no doubt in anyone's mind that there was a direct, wholly identifiable, clear, unambiguous and very dominant flavour character of the Yarden "T2" in the Golan Heights Cask No. 8 Single Malt whisky.

## Milk And Honey Distillery Elements Sherry Single Malt Whisky

### Matured in a combination of:

55% American Ex-Bourbon Barrels  
 40% Kosher Spanish Ex-Sherry (First-Fill)  
 Butts  
 5% Kosher STR (Israeli Red Wine, First-Fill)  
 French Oak Casks

### On the Nose

Initial reaction was a blast of sweet and sour dark fruits with digestive biscuits and honey. After spending some time with the glass, sniffing the whisky over 20 minutes or so, I came up with this list of aroma notes:

Perfume-y musk.  
 Sweet and sour stewed Rhubarb  
 Sour Red Grapes  
 Musky sweet glazed cherries  
 Bazooka Bubble-gum  
 Polished Mahogany wood  
 Cocktail Cabinet smell.  
 Toffee Red Apple  
 Red slightly sour wine.  
 Dry fruit.  
 Cherry liquor  
 Wine Gums  
 Cherry liquor with chocolate  
 Dried Fruit Cake with Brandy



### Tasting

Swirling this around in the mouth, the Milk and Honey will trigger many unusual, varied and exciting flavours to those who have, up until now, only ever drank Ex-Bourbon matured Single Malts.

My first impression was a red fruitiness with a sour fruit yeasty note like fruit just beginning to rot in a barrel; the same sourness you might get with homemade cider or slightly sour red wine? (I know it doesn't sound very appetizing but it actually is)

Other flavour notes from this Milk and Honey, were Musky sweet glazed cherries, Bazooka Bubble Gum, polished wood, toffee apples, cherry liquor, wine gums and dried fruit with brandy cake.



## Finish

There is a fascinating combination of sweet, sour and dry sensations left in the mouth after you swallow. Sensations which ought to contradict and clash with one another, yet strangely marry rather well together.

Sweet and sour rhubarb and plums, yeasty wine cask. honey, figs, plump sultanas, musky wine cellar, dry vanilla cream, nutmeg and dry walnuts. Quite delicious and very moreish.

## Conclusions

Is it simply a kosher alternative to Macallan, Dalmore, GlenDronach etc, or is it more than this?

After having tried the Israeli Tura winery's Fino style sherry, (which I did not particularly enjoy), I nevertheless found it very educational and an essential asset which enabled me to better comprehend the source of all the flavours coming from Milk And Honey Elements Sherry. This gave me a far greater appreciation for what the distillery management is trying to achieve. Above all though, this is a delicious whisky and one which has become an essential bottle in my collection.



