

# W.G. of Chicago

November 2012 Whiskey Gentlemen Newsletter

## Introducing the Isle of Islay, Scotland

The Gents attend the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Chicago Food Film Festival at Kendall College

A glowing purple hue emanated from Kendall College's fifth floor corner windows at 900 N North Branch Street, displaying the location of the Chicago Food Film Festival.

The college's renowned culinary arts program uses teaching facilities suited to a food-centric festival venue. "We need a place that has both an auditorium and a kitchen," Harry Hawk, co-founder of the annual event, explained.

The festival idea originated three years ago in New York City between Hawk and George Motz (co-founder and festival director). They expanded the event to Chicago – a city well-acquainted with food and film. More than 400 food-filled festivals are held in Chicago neighborhoods every year, and since 1980, more than 1100 film and television features have been filmed in the city.

The Food Film Festival combines both passions into a single event, creating a complete sensory experience. During the film screenings, the actual foods and drinks presented on screen are served to the audience.

The film of particular interest to the Whiskey Gentlemen was the Chicago premiere of *Whisky: The Islay Edition*, directed by Olav Verhoeven. The film covers all eight distilleries on the Isle of Islay in Scotland, and we were eager to take part in sampling expressions of each distillery while learning about their origins.



The spirit of Scotland swept the auditorium and raised goose bumps on my arms. Bagpipes played live with steady hums and melodic tones leaping from the drones and chanters. All attention was drawn to the front of the room as the Celtic music filled the air.

Although I have never been to Scotland, the timeless, epic quality of bagpipe music always transports my mind to a welcoming and familiar place across the ocean.

### Sampled Spirits

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|  Ardbeg 10 Year       |  Caol Ila 12 Year                 |
|  Bowmore 15 Year Dark |  Kilchoman<br>Summer 2010 Release |
|  Bruichladdich        |  Lagavulin 16 Year                |
|  Bunnahabhain 12 Year |  Laphroaig Quarter Cask           |

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With the stage set and our mood amply primed, we sat in quiet anticipation for the featured film to begin. A few formalities were first in line.

Films submitted to the festival judges had been evaluated, and a few were chosen for screening during the three-day event. An award ceremony commenced to recognize film-makers in various categories, such as best feature, best short, and best super short (for films under five minutes long). Winners were then bestowed with the Slotted Spoon Award prior to screening.

The Spoon is an actual 18-inch stainless steel utensil engraved with the award title and intended to be used, not displayed, in the kitchen.

Prior to taking our seats, we had milled around enjoying delicious appetizers served by an extremely hard-working staff.

Amid the shuffle and conversation, I overheard high praises of the Islay film. Individuals who had already seen the film weren't shy about expressing how impressed they were by it.

Hence, it was not a complete surprise when *Whisky: The Islay Edition* won the Best Feature Film award.

**Congratulations to Director Olav Verhoeven and everyone involved with the making of the film!**



What *was* surprising on the other hand, and disappointing for the Gents, was the absence of the film's production crew to receive the award or to be interviewed.

Nevertheless, between the positive buzz and the award announcement, my expectations were heightened. I prepared to be either highly impressed or utterly disappointed.



**Experiencing** *Whisky: The Islay Edition* can be equated to sampling one of the isle's whiskies.

Just as nosing a fragrant peated dram hints at the smoky essence to be tasted, viewing the film's opening sequence cemented my high hopes.

At the outset, the visual effects, musical score and production values were on par with any professional film production I have seen.

The artistic visualizations and fantastic sound quality reminded me of Chicago's WTTW Channel 11 high definition productions and the Discovery Channel's *Planet Earth* series. Sweeping shots of Islay's scenery and its distilleries were mesmerizing, reminiscent of the scale featured in *Lord of the Rings*.

The narrator's gravelly brogue rumbled from the speakers and established the distinctive Scottish ambiance for the film.

Visit the [movie trailer](#) on YouTube!

The content of the film, then, was comparable to whisky on the palate: expected flavors interspersed with unanticipated gems, followed up by a lingering, memorable finish.

**Though** not our primary focus at the festival, a number of foods prepared for and served at the event deserve a mention – and we would have liked to try so many others!

A couple of standout favorites were the Scotch eggs and the Scottish meat pies.

The eggs were hard boiled and wrapped in pork, then breaded and deep fried. Sliced into quarters for easy handling, these egg devils were too delicious to have only one.

The meat pies were savory vittles consisting of chicken or minced beef inside a tender pastry shell. We won't admit how many we ate!

Mickle's Pickles is a one-man operation based in Picayune, Mississippi. I sampled the Not Hot Jalapeños, which delivered an explosion of flavor without the heat of a jalapeño. Excellent!



The screening of *Benevolent Butcher: Bacon*, directed by Scott Pitts, perfectly whetted the appetite for the succulent sample that followed.

The gorgeous imagery was crafted with superb lighting and camera work. Close-up shots depicting the art of food prep used spices, bacon, and beef as subjects to generate an outstanding and mouthwatering 93 second film.



Truly, it was a feast for the eyes and taste buds alike!

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Who knew peat can be harvested to a depth of 30 feet in certain fields? Or that the sea water on some of Islay's shores has a peaty flavor? Not I, until I watched this film.



Interviews with a representative from each distillery served as the vehicle for conveying practical information as well as fascinating historical context. The spokesmen provided insight into the stages of distillation and the subtleties of aging whiskey.

Secrets shared about the distillation process revealed how each distillery introduces defining characteristics into their whiskeys. The shape of the stills, the source of the barrels used for aging, the quality of the local air and water – all serve to differentiate one product's flavor from another.

Personal style and zeal are not to be overlooked, however. Perched high in the racks of aging barrels, his legs dangling free, Bruichladdich's spokesman described his "love affair" with casks of Spanish and French origin.

As the audience chuckled, he likened his experience of becoming familiar with the casks' shapes and features to the process of discovering women's individual qualities.

His appreciation for the significance of barrels stems in part from an understanding that 60 percent of a whisky's flavor comes from the barrel during the aging process.

Over a million barrels have shipped

to the distillery from the United States. But, important as the bourbon or other casks are to whisky's flavor, he also credits the permeation of salty sea air into the casks as they age.

He added that barrels have been used as a vessel to ship countless types of cargo around the world for ages.

In the Bowmore distillery, the spokesman sat in a leather chair upon a mountain of barley, or so it appeared to the laughing audience. The grain was merely blanketing the entire floor producing an illusion, and the visual gag had its intended effect.

The humor served to hold our collective attention, as did occasional breaks in the narrative for a lesson.

A sophisticated, well-dressed Scottish

gentleman seated in a chair atop railroad tracks (!) studied the whisky in his glass. Later, he was situated on the seashore, carefully assessing the color, texture, aroma and flavor of the spirit as the narrator described the techniques for doing so.

During these portions of the film, a sample of whisky was distributed to the audience in little plastic pill-cups. They were not the proper bulb style glasses recommended by the narrator – and we were not expecting glasses – so naturally they did not provide much air volume to aerate the subtler aromas. The samples were poured sufficiently for a decent tasting.

Part of the film's purpose was to encourage a slow, meaningful appraisal of the whiskeys. With that in mind, Rick and I felt the time allotted during these pauses was too brief.

We recognize that not everyone shares our delight for the delicious drink, but a few extra moments may have encouraged beginners to experiment with the sampling techniques.

To be fair, the risk of losing a less-than-rapt audience was avoided by keeping the pace brisk.

**Would you recommend it to a friend?** This ubiquitous survey question encapsulates a person's level of satisfaction with a product or service.

With regard to the Chicago Food Film Fest, our answer is a definite "Yes!"

We loved the idea of sampling food and drinks shown in the films. The energy and enthusiasm of the contributors and organizers created an upbeat, fun and educational experience we'd be happy to repeat!

Kendall College is half as big as they need it to be, Hawk admitted, but the booking for next year is already set. Despite the space limitations intrinsic of a classroom-hosted event, the facility and staff were exceptional.

Having a packed house for an event in only its third year is what I call a high quality problem! Visit [thefoodfilmfestival.com](http://thefoodfilmfestival.com) for more details!

Many thanks to the festival organizers for inviting us as Press!

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The film was educational, contained material appropriate for neophytes and the knowledgeable, and managed to smoothly communicate a great deal of material about the whisky-making process in an hour.

With whisky, a long finish – the essence that lingers on the tongue and palate after swallowing a sip – is punishment if the flavor is poor. Conversely, a peppery or peaty finish marked by nuanced and complex flavor compounds can be enjoyed and relished as a well-deserved reward.

*Whisky: The Islay Edition* presented the process of making fine whisky in an accessible and entertaining film, complete with a humorous twist. For anyone, especially those who revel in all things whisky, this film provides much to savor!



## Whisky Trivia

- ♣ Whisky is essentially beer that gets distilled and aged in barrels
- ♣ Unlike wine, whisky bottles are stored upright to avoid contact between the cork and whisky. Smell the cork to detect any damage.
- ♣ Whisky is the lifeblood of Islay, sustaining culture and economy
- ♣ Scotch is distilled twice; Irish whiskey is distilled three times
- ♣ Warehouse humidity levels affect the “angel’s share” – the alcohol that evaporates during aging. The dryer the warehouse, the higher the alcohol retention.
- ♣ The *only* grain used in a single malt whiskey is (malted) barley

**When** sampling more than a handful of different Scotches, and just a sip or two of each at that, we seek out distinguishing characteristics between them rather than developing a full profile for each whisky.

### Ardbeg 10 Year

Heavily peated, just as we recall!  
Reviewed in [March 2012](#)

### Bowmore 15 Year Dark

Distillery ownership changed hands several times over more than two centuries. Established in 1779; owned by a Japanese distiller since 1994. Credits flavor to uniquely shaped stills, “top quality” wood and barley. Aroma of dry grapes and nuts. Cacao and violet flavors on the pallet. Light mouth-feel, citrus-like brightness in tone, and low peat finish.

### Bruichladdich

The only non-peated Islay whisky.  
The only Islay distillery with its own bottling hall.  
Oily, spicy on the palate

### Bunnahabhain 12 Year

Distilled with clear water sourced from their own spring. Stainless steel stills (lower iron content). Large volume batches of 66,500 liters at a time. Barley is washed in progressively warmer baths, first at 60 degrees Celsius, then at 70 degrees, then a third bath at 80 degrees.  
Traces of the sea and white wine on the nose.  
Clean sweet taste, on the oily side. Very low smokiness on the finish.

### Caol Ila 12 Year

Crisp, “5 stars” from Rick. Strong peated scent but not flavor; long finish.  
Reviewed in [April 2012](#)

### Kilchoman Summer 2010 Release

A single malt aged in bourbon casks from the United States.  
Light, delicate mouth-feel with a pleasant, spicy kick and a smoky finish.

### Lagavulin 16 Year

Perhaps the most well-known Scotch in the world.  
**The Whiskey Gentlemen’s favorite among this selection of eight!**  
Sugary on the nose; very light, easy drinking

### Laphroaig Quarter Cask

Distilled in small copper stills.  
Reviewed in [October 2011](#) and [April 2012](#)

