

Single Malt

Published in the *New Statesman*, London. Summer 2007

By Roger Scruton

Single Malt whisky has joined *Braveheart* and Alexander McCall Smith as a symbol of the new proud Scottish nationalism. As an Englishman who longs to free his country from the Scottish yoke I heartily approve of Scottish nationalism in all its forms, since it is the surest path to the self-government of England. However, I cannot deny the gratification I felt, on discovering that Single Malt can be made just about anywhere, and nowhere more successfully than in our adopted village of Sperryville Virginia.

Our village announces itself to Route 522 with a large sign advertising the most famous local product: *Antique Tables Made Daily*. Behind the advert there is a pile of old sheds, stacked up against the Thornton River, between the Bible Baptist Chapel and the Methodist Church, the Main Baptist Church keeping vigil from the South, the Catholic Church and the Assembly of God looking across from the Northern hillocks. Here, in one of those overgrown corners where snakes and snapping turtles are more at home than people, is the big wooden barn that once housed the cooperative cider plant and apple store, in the days before Prohibition swept across our landscape and wiped away its smile.

And it is here that the puritan outrage is being avenged, for the Copper Fox Distillery, devoted to the production of Single Malt Whisky, is now located in the old apple store. The other day, having nothing better to do short of everything, I pushed open its door, to be greeted by the warm aroma of malting barley, and the heady fumes of distilling alcohol. I knew immediately that I had come home. From the scrubbed wooden floors and pillars, from the few sticks of hill-billy furniture, and from the barrels of whisky maturing against the wall, emanated an atmosphere of quiet rejoicing, clean, guileless and American like a painting by Winslow Homer. A young man appeared from an inner room to inform me that I had discovered Wasmund's Single Malt, a cottage industry run by Rick Wasmund and his mother, who now sell their product in fifteen states around the Union.

Wasmund's Single Malt is produced in the traditional Scottish way, double distilled and stored in barrels with chips of roasted applewood and cherry. The clean, slightly ferruginous water of the Thornton river combines with the burnt fruitwood to produce a drink whose unique tart flavour is gaining converts all over the neighbourhood. Sperryville farmers will now

drive to the state liquor store in Culpeper to buy it, instead of bartering their produce for hill-billy moonshine. Being legal, Wasmund's Single Malt is expensive; and Rick and Mom must cover the excise cost, the moment it hits the road. But we are all proud of them, not least for cocking a snook at those Scottish distilleries, whose '20-year old Single Malts' sold daily at the airports are no more precious than the antique tables made daily in Sperryville.