

Bloomberg

A New Class of Irish Whiskeys Punches Above Its Weight

Older age statements, innovative techniques, and creative finishings are hallmarks of a liquid that's evolved beyond Jameson.

By [Brad Japhe](#)



This was an underwhelming year for St. Patrick's Day spending, but it remains a spectacular time for Irish whiskey fans. The category is one of the fastest-growing spirits segments in the U.S., with a compound annual growth rate of 13.4% over the past five years, according to IWSR Drinks Market Analysis; domestic whiskey has grown 5.5%, Scotch whisky 0.2%.

Much of that expansion is driven by sales in the super premium range, bottles that cost more than \$30. Americans are not only drinking more Irish whiskey, they're drinking better Irish whiskey. Generally soft and rounded, it's unpeated, with hints of caramel oakiness and a light fruitiness against a cereal backbone. In its finest expressions, the country deftly demonstrates a primary selling point: the sophistication and structure of Scottish single malt bound by the sweeter approachability of bourbon.

And in this especially boozy moment—Nielsen reports that online liquor sales surged 234% in March—Irish whiskey still stands as a bargain compared with its counterparts in Scotland and Japan, making it a sensible alternative for stocking the home bar with high-end product.

Kilbeggan Single Pot Still



A style of whiskey unique to Ireland, "single pot still" must be conceived at one distillery and only from a mix of malted and unmalted barley; 19th century recipes often included a small percentage of oats as a crafty way to skirt punitive taxes from the British crown. (The "pot" itself is a misnomer; as with single malts, it can still be a blend of different barrels of distillate.) Kilbeggan revived the tradition with a burnt honey-hued spirit that's elegant in structure, yielding a creamy mouthfeel from the grain, with a slight grassy finish. \$45