

Esquire

The 12 Best Single Malt Scotch Brands to Drink Now

It's a competitive field, but these are the standout whisky distilleries you should get to know.

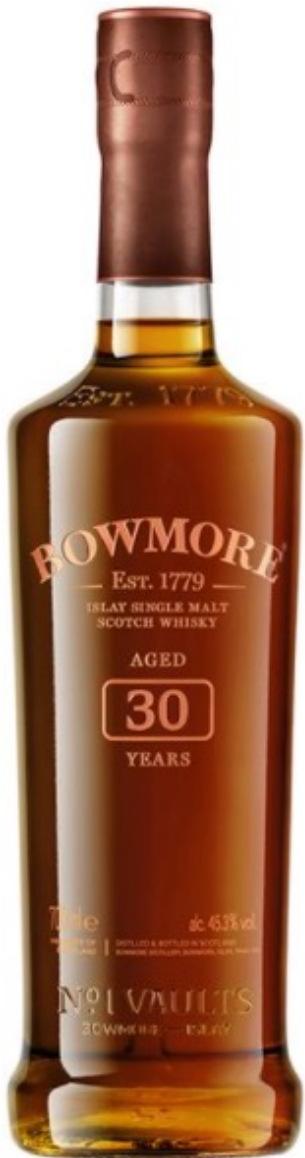


By Jonah Flicker Dec 21, 2020

For some reason, single malt scotch still falls into an elite, rarefied category for a certain kind of whisky drinker. It conjures up images of serious men in tweed thoughtfully sniffing their Glencairn glasses around a roaring fire as they comment on notes of toasted nutmeg and candied fruit. This is nonsense, of course, particularly the bit about scotch being a drink reserved for the boys club. (Although those tasting notes could be dead on.) The concept that whisky is too complicated for everyone to understand and should be tasted by following a series of ridiculous steps that remove all joy from the experience is crumbling. And this past year saw pompous, sexist blowhards like *Whisky Bible* author Jim Murray get called out for outdated, immature, and gender-biased tasting notes. Both mark a welcome shift in the whisky world.

Bowmore

Bowmore is an Islay distillery owned by Beam Suntory, which also owns Laphroaig, but the whisky it produces is very different. The No. 1 Vaults are supposedly the oldest maturation warehouses in the world, or so goes the line from the distillery. Regardless, this is layered, textured whisky that stays with you for quite a while. The 15-year-old spends its last three years maturing in Oloroso sherry casks, while the liquid in the 18-year-old (a standout bottle) spends its life in both bourbon and sherry casks before being blended together. The peat is about half the ppm of Laphroaig, so while it's still noticeable, the fruit, caramel, and spice flavors create a whisky potpourri that unravels as you drink. Bowmore is also known for its Black Bowmore series of ultra-expensive aged whiskies, the most recent of which is called DB5 1964. This 31-year-old whisky was created in collaboration with Aston Martin and limited to 25 bottles selling for \$65,000 each. For something a bit more reasonable, check out the new permanent addition to the lineup, Bowmore 30. The first bottles of this annual whisky release were aged in sherry hogshead and bourbon barrels.



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