

SINGLE MALTS VS BLENDED MALTS – THE SIBLING RIVALRY CONTINUES...

Douglas Laing's Fellows are a group of Whisky aficionados from all over the world. Dr. Heinz Weinberger, from Germany, writes his own blog - Whisky-Connaisseur.de - but he also guest blogs for us, and this one delves into the differences between Single Malts and Blended Malts...



When I'm organising tastings or talking to Whisky drinkers, it strikes me that when it comes to Scotch Whisky, everyone tacitly assumes that I'm talking about Single Malts. But as soon as I use the term Blended Malt, many people turn up their noses and say: "Ugh, it's mixed, that's a blend!", and I'm not the only one who notices that. For many Whisky drinkers or connoisseurs, Single Malt is the holy grail of Scotch Whisky. But how is it that a Blended Malt has a worse perception than Single Malt Whisky? Why do people believe a Blended Malt can possibly be inferior to a Single Malt? For me, the answer lies in a lack of knowledge, knowing what a Single Malt and Blended Malt really is. The differences between the two – are there any? Let's have a

look at the official definition. Under the Scotch Whisky Regulations 2009 of the Scotch Whisky Association (SWA), Single Malt Scotch Whisky is a Scotch Whisky distilled at a single distillery (i) from water and malted barley without the addition of any other cereals, and (ii) by batch distillation in pot stills. On the other hand, Blended Malt Scotch Whisky is defined as a blend of Single Malt Scotch Whiskies, which have been distilled at more than one distillery.

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In other words, a Single Malt, quite simply, is the product from one single distillery that makes 100% malted barley Whisky. If bottled from only one particular cask the result will be a single cask Single Malt Whisky. But generally, a distillery – let's take Blair Athol as an example – mixes together a number of different casks of Malt Whisky from their warehouses. For instance, for their 12 Years Old standard bottling they may take casks of different sizes and qualities, sometimes even made of different types of oak, and vat them together to give the desired colour and flavour the customer and Whisky connoisseur is used to Blair Athol 12 Years Old Single Malt. This means that a Single Malt is nothing more than a blend of Malt Whiskies from a single distillery. But what if one discovers that by taking a cask of, for example, Glengoyne distillery, and blending it with the contents of Blair Athol casks actually makes the Whisky more compelling, aromatic and more pleasing to drink, then why shouldn't one do that? If the fruitiness and the sweet and spicy character of Glengoyne imparts another layer of flavour complexity to that Blair Athol and make it more interesting, why wouldn't you do it? Even if you only add one cask of Glengoyne to the many casks of Blair Athol, you would have a Blended Malt and not a Single Malt. But does the result have to be worse than the Single Malt? I don't think so.

I think what bothers people about Blended Malts is the term “to blend”. They suspect something hidden behind it. They may fear that one or a few bad casks could be mixed with good casks, and the entire quality of the mixture would not matter at all for the resulting blend. Perhaps the SWA's choice of the term Blended Malt Scotch Whisky is not the most positive. It can easily be confused with the term Blended Scotch Whisky - a blend of one or more Single Malt Scotch Whiskies with one or more Single Grain Scotch Whiskies. In the past, Blended Malt Whiskies used to be known as Pure Malt or Vatted Malt. To me, this name was clearer and more distinctive than today's definition.

Enhancing flavour profile and complexity by marrying Single Malts from different distilleries is exactly the drive for Douglas Laing for their [Remarkable Regional Malts](#). Companies such as Douglas Laing purchase Single Malt Whiskies from various distilleries, and blend them to create new products with particular characteristics. Their [Timorous Beastie](#), for example, captures the essence of the Highlands – a combination of the best and most typical Scottish Highland Malts including Blair Athol, Dalmore, Glengoyne and Glen Garioch. This Blended Malt emphasises the rich, honeyed sweetness combined with warm notes of fine wood, raisin pastries and spices.



Have you tried [Scallywag 13 Years Old](#)? A fabulous Blended Malt created using only the finest Speyside Malts including, amongst others, spirit distilled at Mortlach, Macallan and Glenrothes distilleries. It embodies all that is Speyside Malt Scotch Whisky: Exuberantly sweet and fruity aromas in perfect balance, with a rich spiciness coming from the sherry casks. A multi-layered, rich and entertaining dram – truly enjoyable and dangerously quaffable.

Want a Blended Malt Whisky from the islands? Watch out for [Rock Oyster](#). The [18 Years Old limited edition](#) is a well put together, rich and lively dram embracing the character of Orkney, Arran, Jura and Islay. A strong, peppery and smoky fine Whisky with a sweet and creamy core of vanilla, barley and heather. Perfect for an autumnal day out on the west coast of Scotland.



Fortunately, more and more Blended Malts are released on the Whisky market. And they are of very good quality! Hopefully, once consumers realise what excellent quality is behind them, Blended Malts will soon be able to compete alongside the Single Malt Whiskies on the market. But the whisky industry, and especially bottlers, must continue to clarify the matter.