



K&L Wine Merchants Travel Journey Series...

**A Journey into
Artesan Whisky Making:**

**The Bruichladdich Single Malt
Academy**

By Susan Purnell



As the Spirits Buyer for K&L Wine Merchants in California, I am fortunate to be able to travel and learn about the continually growing world of fine spirits from the men and women who create them. My first trip to Scotland was in May 2004. My partner Aaron and I were looking forward to a whole month of learning about whisky making and exploring the breathtaking beauty of the country. We were to fly into Edinburgh, then head to Pitlochry, Speyside, Orkney, back down to the west coast of Scotland and then island hop from Isle of Arran, Campbeltown and finally the Isle of Islay. Five days into our trip my father died of a sudden heart attack back in the U.S. The loss of my father was devastating. And the cancellation of our plans was extremely disappointing. So a year later, we knew we needed to go back to Scotland for our own healing process and that the Isle of Islay would be our destination.

We headed to Islay via Glasgow on August 19, 2005. Even though it was our first time on Islay, we felt as if we were returning home. There are eight working distilleries on Islay: Ardbeg, Bowmore, Bruichladdich, Bunnahabhain, Caol Ila, Lagavulin, Laphroaig and Kilchoman, which was opened June 2005. The first week was spent visiting all the distilleries (other than Bruichladdich) and the Malting Plant in Port Ellen. It was a great pleasure to experience every distillery, each one distinctive and full of personality. We did find two similarities at every distillery: the great pride of all staff members, from distillery manager to apprentice cooper and the huge amount of interest they have in our view of their products. In the end, we learned a great deal from one another.

The second week was spent attending the Bruichladdich Single Malt Academy. Why spend so much time at Bruichladdich, you might ask? Because of the wonderful opportunity to have a hands-on experience working at a distillery using Victorian equipment dating back to 1881. It was not meant to be a technical school but a place where the students shadow actual whisky craftsmen and share in their vast amount of experience. Participants experience the entire process of whisky making: Milling, Mashing, Fermentation, Distillation, Maturation and Bottling. Needless to say, for someone in the retail sales of whisky, the knowledge gained here is priceless!

So begins our journey into artesian whisky making.....

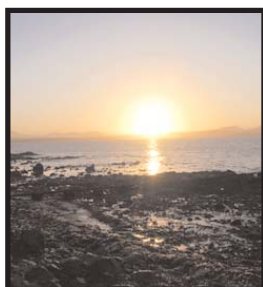
Saturday, August 27, 2005: Arrival To The Academy House

My partner Aaron and I checked into the Academy House where we would stay while attending the Academy. Located directly behind the distillery, it was once the Distillery Manager's home. We took a stroll around the distillery and quickly realized that every nut and bolt is precious at Bruichladdich. It was the week after the end of Bruichladdich's "silent season" and Duncan McGillivray (Distillery Manager) and Jim McEwan (Production Director) were dealing with breakdowns and working out all the kinks to get production up and running. The new Heat Exchangers, salvaged from Inverleven Distillery in Dumbarton, had been refurbished and installed. It is great to see parts of a demolished distillery being used again rather than sent to the scrap yard! This is what Bruichladdich is all about: waste not, want not (well, that and making damn good whisky!). The afternoon was spent enjoying the natural wonders of the Tràigh Baile Aonghais Dunes. We hiked to this two-mile-long sandy beach, hearing only the sound of the fierce wind blowing and the crashing waves of the Atlantic. The solitude and beauty of this beach left us breathless and wondering why we'd want to be anywhere else on earth! Well, there was somewhere else we needed to be that evening, and that was with Barbara and Jim McEwan.

Sunday, August 28, 2005: Day of Rest and Relaxation

After a lovely dinner Saturday night (ending in the early hours of Sunday morning) at the home of Barbara and Jim, we decided a day of rest was called for. We had lunch at The Croft Kitchen in the village of Port Charlotte, which I highly recommend. The day was spent reading, taking walks out to the Bruichladdich pier and writing in my journal. We were told to watch the DVDs at the Academy House regarding whisky production, Scotch Whisky - The Myth and the Magic and The Institute of Brewing - "The Art & Mystery of Malting. One graduate of the Academy from the week before warned us that some of the information we would need for the Big Exam on Thursday was on the DVDs!

Sunrise over Loch Indaal



Never Leave Home Without a Wetsuit!



The beach at Loch Gruinart



Monday, August 29, 2005: The First Day Of School

The Academy normally starts in the late afternoon on Monday with a talk on Health and Safety. But because we arrived on Saturday and were the only two students for the week we started bright and early Monday morning at 8:00 am. We were dressed in our navy blue Academy t-shirts and overalls feeling like children on the first day of school. Well, school it was! And we were ready to start our education.

The Art Of Distillation

For my education on Distillation, I had the great honor to work with Duncan McFadyen, (The Budgie), a Stillman at Bruichladdich for many years. I was taught to use equipment like a Hydrometer to test the true strength of the spirit. But learning to distill by nose and sight alone was even more memorable. The range of aromas that emanated, from foreshots to middle cut to feints, was vast. Starting with Foreshots, the spirit was all acetone and nail polish. In the Middle Cut the spirit became creamy, with sweet custard, fresh apples and pear, grass, hay, oak and then no grass whatsoever. Finally Feints, where the spirit burned my nose with the raw aroma of alcohol and mustiness. In distillation, the design of the still is key. Bruichladdich has quite tall stills with beautiful swan necks and wide hips. Technique is also important. Bruichladdich does a slow Trickle Distillation, and this makes for a very elegant, creamy spirit filled with copious amounts of wonderful oils that will allow the whisky to age in cask through 10 or 20 years of Maturation.

A Mashing We Will Go!

The afternoon was spent learning the process of Mashing with "Young" Peter MacTaggart (Warehouseman and Mashman). Peter had learned the process of mashing six weeks earlier and was mashing for the first time since the silent season ended. Bruichladdich does two five-ton mashes per day. I got to watch "Young" Peter start the second mash of the day.

Once the First Water was resting in the Mash Tun, it would be more than an hour before the Second Water was started. While Mashing, the mashman divides his time between mashing and Milling the next batch of barley for the next mash. I was to learn the Milling Process on Wednesday. With my extra time waiting on the mash, I decided to help out in the Harvey Bottling Hall. If you are ever looking for additional work to do at Bruichladdich, help is always needed in the Bottling Hall. I filled six pack cases to be shipped out with bottles of Moine Mhor Second Edition 3D Peat Proposal, information brochures and lids. Other staff members were patiently working on 50ml miniatures bottles. This is a very "meditative" job and one that makes me never want to purchase another 50ml bottle again!

After a full day at the distillery, we were treated to a lovely three-course dinner created by Rae (an outstanding cook). We were joined by other guests of the Academy House and also by Duncan, the distillery manager. Just about every night someone from the distillery joined us for dinner. It was a great opportunity to relax, hear stories and enjoy staff members outside of the work environment. Duncan was kind enough to take us to see the sunset that evening. We traveled high up to the radio tower west of the village of Port Charlotte. Here the view of Machir Bay, on the west coast of Islay, was absolutely fantastic!

Distillation

Technical Information (information provided by materials given to Academy students)

Two Wash Stills - 12250 liters per still

The Wash, at 6%-7% Alc. is heated, alcohol boils at 80 degrees, vaporizes to give 9187 liters of Low Wines at 22.5% Alc. and 5253 liters of Foreshot/Feints at 35% Alc. The residue that remains in the Wash Still is called Pot Ale.

Two Spirit Stills - 7,200 liters per still

Low Wine and Feints at 27% Alc. is heated and again vaporizes to give 2880 liters of New Make Spirit at 71% Alc. and 6336 liters of Spent Lees at 0.1% Alc. Which is the residue that remains in the Spirit Still.

Total distillation time:

Wash Still - 6 hours and 30 minutes
Spirit Still - 6 hours and 50 minutes total
- Foreshot 40 minutes, Middle Cut 3 hours and Feints 3 hour and 10 minutes.



All ready for our first day at school

Jim McEwan, the Master at work at the spirit safe



Mashing

Technical Information (information provide by materials given to Academy students)

| Process | Quantity | Time Required | Temperature |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Grist Added | 5 Tons | 30 minutes | - |
| First Water | 86 (3466 gallons) | 1 hour 10 minutes | 149 F |
| Second Water | 48 (1944 gallons) | 1 hour | 186 F |
| Third Water | 90 (3690 gallons) | 50 minutes | 190 F |
| Fourth Water | 90 (3690 gallons) | 1 hour | 200 F |
| Druff pumped out of mash tun | | 30 minutes | - |
| Total Mashing Processing Time | | 5 hours | |

Tuesday, August 30, 2005: Mashing, Milling and Vatting

We woke to a beautiful sunrise, full and golden over Loch Indaal. What was the day to bring? More, mashing, milling and vatting? Bruichladdich is a working distillery, and it is important to remember as an Academy student that you must be willing to go with the ebb and flow of whatever is happening at any given time. I started Mashing with "Big" Peter McDermid (Mashman and Stillman). I was also scheduled to spend sometime learning the milling process with "Big" Peter but was swept away to experience the vatting process with James McColl (Head Warehouseman) at Jim McEwan requested. Jim wanted to make sure I had the opportunity to experience all aspects of the distillery.

The Conquering Of Sherry Butts

Bruichladdich has two large Vatting tanks that were once part of the Islay Creamery and used to hold large quantities of milk (Again, no waste here!). I worked with James and "Big" Dave MacLean, who had just started working at the distillery about five months before and was one of the newer members of the Bruichladdich family. Our Vatting project was to emptying fifteen sherry butts containing 1993 Mortlach whisky into Vat #2. The Mortlach was then to be transferred to Guigal Cote Rotie casks where it would enjoy a bit of Aceing (Additional Cask Enhancement). I was a little nervous about moving around filled Sherry Butts (500 liters) for the first time. It is all in the balance and feel of the cask. There is a rhythm in it, rolling casks into place, opening the Bunghole, and pumping the whisky out of the cask and into the vat. The bung is then replaced and the cask is rolled away for storage.

The staff at Bruichladdich has a great ability to adapt to any situation. If a piece of equipment is not working properly (which happens on a daily basis), they put their expertise together and figure out how to fix it. Today was a prime example of adaption in action. The machine that pumps the whisky from the cask to the vat was working extremely slowly. After taking the machine apart and seeing if there was some kind of blockage, James and David Barr (Bulk Stock Controller) decided to take the filter apart. What we found was a lot of black soot. We realized that the burlap around the bungholes created the soot, and that the filter had not been cleaned in two years! Once the filter was cleaned, all went well. Sometimes it's the little things that make a huge difference!

Peter McDermid, Mashman



Cast iron mash tun dating back to 1881



Aaron extracting a bung



Wednesday, August 31, 2005: Filling, Milling and Barrel Rolling Oh My!

At breakfast we enjoyed a nice conversation with Andrew Gray, the sales director of Bruichladdich and Murray McDavid, who was in town for a lunch meeting at the Academy House. Our talk included the unfortunate news of "Links" Pebble Beach and the possible end of Bruichladdich's participation in the Whisky Live Events, which included San Francisco. I was pretty bummed after hearing this and decided to bring the matter up with Mr. McEwan! Duncan happened to be in Jim's office discussing our activities for the day. We would be filling casks, preparing vatting, milling and, last but not least, evaluating a bit of whisky with Duncan in the famous Warehouse #5!

Cask Filling

We spent the morning filling second fill bourbon Hogsheads and Barrels with the newly made spirit that we helped to create on Monday and Tuesday. Aaron, "Big" Dave, Josh (one of the shareholder's son) and myself filled casks. Aaron and I had planned to purchase one of the casks, and Jim said to make sure it was a first fill bourbon cask (Buffalo Trace)! Both Jim and Duncan were flying out Thursday afternoon. Jim to Belgium for work and Duncan to Spain for three weeks of vacation! I was a bit relieved thinking they wouldn't be around for the big exam Thursday evening. But no, they decided to push the exam up to noon on Thursday, so they could both be there to participate in the ceremony once we passed. No pressure, really!!

Like vatting, the process of Cask Filling also has a great rhythm about it. We had 90 casks to fill. The feel of the empty cask, the smell of the bourbon still very present in the cask took over our senses. All the casks were painted white, stenciled the day before and put in numerical order for filling. No Paint on the cask means it is a fresh cask. White Paint means the barrel has been filled once. And Blue Paint indicates it has been filled twice. We were to rotate two casks at a time, filling one then the other, making sure they stayed in numeric order. The key to rolling empty casks for filling is that the bungholes must remain up, which takes a bit of practice. All bungholes must be up after filling, when the casks are ready for warehousing. This keeps the spirit from leaking out of the bungholes during maturation. Each cask varies in size. Hogsheads range from 230-270 liters and Bourbon barrels from 165 to more than 200 liters. Our cask came in at 204 liters! We finished filling casks right before lunchtime. A very rewarding morning, as we had done the job well and quickly.

The Milling Process

Later that afternoon we finally got to experience the Milling Process with "Big" Peter McDermid. The barley goes from the bins where it is stored and travels in little wooden buckets up a wooden elevator to the Bobby Dresser where any stones and large bits are removed. Then it goes to down to the Avery Weighting Machine where 125 40kg units are counted. This is the equivalent of 5 tons of barley, which is what is needed for the mash. The barley is milled in the Bobby Mill to the ratio of 15% Husks, 68% Middles, 17% Flour. If you have too many husks, you don't get the sugar extraction that is needed. Too much flour, and the mash is too thick and gluey and again without the proper amount of extraction. It is all a matter of balance. There are two sets of rollers inside the Bobby Mill. The first set crushes the husks of the barley, and the second set grinds it up. Both of these rollers can be adjusted to achieve the proper Milling Ratio. Bruichladdich does two 5-ton mashes a day and only mills what is need for the next mash.

Milling

Technical Information (information provide by materials given to Academy students)

Mill: Bobby - Belt Driven Four Roll
"Two High" - Built In 1913

Weighting: Avery - Built 1881-125
units of 40kgs. Buckets

Dresser: Bobby Rotary Malt

Screen - Built 1881

Milling Ratio: 15% Husks, 68%

Middles, 17% Flour

From top to bottom: the malted barley moving to the mill; no computers here at Bruichladdich; the Bobby mill dating back to 1913



Thursday, September 1, 2005: Warehousing, Whisky Evaluation and THE BIG EXAM

After an unseasonably wet Wednesday (yes, even for Islay), Thursday was just beautiful! During breakfast I studied for the exam, trying not to hyperventilate. No pressure. I was only representing my store, my gender, and my country! Now, don't get the wrong idea; I had been studying for months, and was quite prepared. But every time I thought about the test my brain would flat line and go totally blank! So, to gear myself up for this last Academy day, I traded in my Bruichladdich Academy t-shirt for my bright red Hai-Koo Female Samurai t-shirt with a bright yellow Japanese rising sun blazing. A girl needs a little mojo on a big day like this!



Aaron weighing a cask before filling



Our Cask!

Warehousing Round # 1!

The work team for the day was Benny, Josh, Aaron, "Big" David, James and myself. The first part of the morning was spent rolling out barrels from their storage room across from Warehouse #2 into the courtyard, where they would get a coat of paint in preparation for cask filling the following day. Always something to do here at Bruichladdich!

ACE Program and Whisky Evaluation

Jim McEwan interrupted us from our warehousing duties. He wanted Aaron and I to spend some time evaluating whisky with him and Peter Ruch (Editor of Finanz und Wirtschaft) in Warehouse #2. The great thing about Bruichladdich is that they are not afraid to go "Where No One Has Gone Before," breaking the rules, stretching boundaries and creating some innovative whisky along the way. The marriage of whisky and wine casks is stunning. The key is to know how to match what whisky with what wine cask. Timing is also crucial because once you have over-extracted color there is no going back. When you are dealing with a limited amount of casks, there is not a lot of room for error. This is where Jim McEwan's skill as a Master Blender and Distiller really shows. Auchentoshen and Viozier. Glenlossie and Rioja. Mortlach and Port. Second Edition 15 year old Bruichladdich in "Premier Grand Cru Classe" Sauternes and "Islands" Third Edition 20 year old, kissed with Madeira for just five days. Simply beautiful malts! We were also able to experience a whisky that had been put into a cask that was totally exhausted. This 14-year-old Campbeltown malt, aged in a sherry butt should have been showing rich, deep, amber color. Instead, it looked like flat Budweiser. What a total shame! But thanks to the ACE program, Jim will be able to bring this fine malt back to life once again. In addition to the ACE whiskies we were able to try some older malts like a 1984 Lagavulin and 1977 Glenugie. The crème de la crème was the unbelievably vibrant 1966 Lochside! There are limited amounts of these available! The cask Jim opened was only about a third filled, the rest had gone to the angels. The whisky didn't pour into the glass; it oozed! Aged in refill bourbon casks, it had the deep, rich gold color of mature Sauternes. But what stood out were the aromatics: strawberry jam, cranberries, honey and more honey. It was so alive and vibrant. On the palate the flavors just exploded. We tasted many malts, but nothing compared to the 1966 Lochside. I was ecstatic to find out on my return to California that the 1966 Lochside will be bottled under Jim McEwan's Celtic Heartland Series.

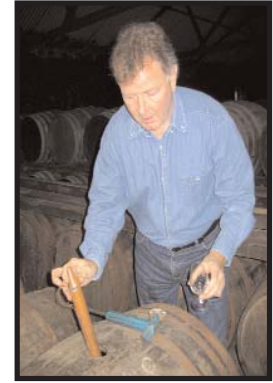
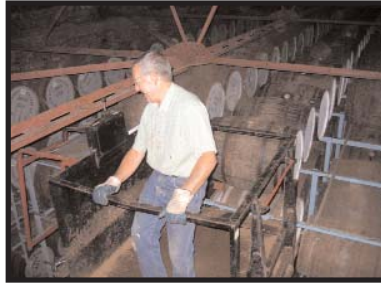


Duncan and Jim auto-graphing our cask #1189



Aaron and Susan after filling 90 casks

In the rafters with
John Rennie



Whisky evaluation with
Jim in Warehouse #2

Warehousing Round #2

After slacking off all morning (as the rest of our work team put it) with Mr. McEwan, it was time to get down to some real work! Aaron and I headed up the hill in a lorry with "Big" Peter McDermid to unload and warehouse the last of those 90 casks we had filled on Wednesday. They would begin their maturation process along with our cask in Warehouse #13. There are eight warehouses at Bruichladdich including Warehouse #13 up the hill behind the distillery. I had been looking forward to working with John Rennie (Warehouse Manager) and his warehouse crew of "Big" Dave and "Young" Peter all week. I have great respect for John. He has been in the whisky industry for decades and can run circles around the rest of us! Warehouse #13 was divided into two sections, one consisting of metal racking eight-barrels high, and the other where the racks were twelve-barrels high. The crew was divided into two teams. Aaron and "Big Dave" would roll the casks from the front of the warehouse and prepare them to be lifted in an airlift to whichever row they would ultimately call home. "Young" Peter and myself were located in the rows of metal racking ready to catch the barrel and move it to where it would sit and mature for a good ten years or more. Sounds simple right? Well, there is art and skill to all things, even warehousing. The crucial job belonged to John. Once the cask was loaded and lifted to the location where it would be stored, John had to position the cask just right so when the cask came rolling down the many yards of racking and stop to where it would rest, the bunghole needed to lie between 10:00 and 2:00, otherwise the chance of leakage is too great. "Young" Peter and I were to make sure the cask didn't get stuck along the way and that the cask came to rest with the bunghole in the proper location. If the bunghole ends up at the bottom of the cask, well then you have to get in there and Cut The Cask, moving it side to side, up and down until your target is achieved. To say the least, cutting the cask is not fun. Also something to think about, it is very dark in these metal racks, which in some places go back maybe twenty casks deep. And there are lots of lovely metal bars just waiting to chop off a finger or break an arm. It is also critical to lock the cask in place once the bunghole is in its proper location so it can't roll back off the metal racking. Safety is very important, and the crew at Bruichladdich does a great job making sure that we are completely involved with each process while also remaining safe.

THE BIG EXAM

At noon John notified us that it was time to go back to the Academy House, clean up and then go over to Duncan McGillivray's office for the exam. Again, I had been stressed out about this all week long, but by the time we had showered and were heading over to the offices, I felt calm. I knew I had done all that I could to prepare. Though I wish I could relate the exam process here, it is very much top secret. All I can say is: Be afraid. Be very, very afraid!

The Graduation Ceremony

Aaron and I both passed the exam, thank the Gods above! The graduation ceremony was held in the hospitality suite next to Mark Reynier's office. In attendance were Barbara and Jim McEwan, Duncan McGillivray and Ella Edgar, the Goddess of the Academy who was our key contact person. From the day we signed up to attend the Academy to arranging our drive back to the airport on our last day, Ella was our mother hen, our security blanket, and we couldn't have done it without her!

Jim presented us with our certificates and proclaimed: "That we had successfully completed the Bruichladdich Single Malt Academy and were awarded the title of Single Malt Ambassadors. Which gives us the right to stand up to any audience and say that we have walked the walk, we have been there and done it! So, use it proudly to promote Bruichladdich, Islay, and Scotland." We were then presented with our Academy Valinch bottles by Duncan, which were filled that day and signed by Jim. The Valinch bottles are only available to people who come and fill their own bottle at the distillery.

We were then asked to give a small speech regarding our experiences at the Academy. This was the hardest part of the week and an extremely emotional moment to say the least. We were almost brought to tears during our speeches, thinking of the staff at Bruichladdich and their willingness to open themselves up and allow us to truly become a part of their lives. Words are not enough to express our thankfulness to this wonderful group of people!

Conclusion

The Academy experience at Bruichladdich has changed my perception of the whisky industry. As a buyer for a busy and well-regarded spirits store like K&L Wine Merchants, the opportunity to have hands-on experience working at a distillery is extremely rewarding. I have gained more knowledge in one week about whisky production than I could have found reading a hundred books. And now, I have taken that knowledge back to the U.S. to educate the staff here and our consumer base. Of course, the experience has also made me a better buyer and sales person for K&L. As an advocate for the whisky industry, the more people I can turn on to single malt whisky the better for us all.

For anyone who is passionate about single malt whisky, the opportunity to smell the malted barley, taste the wash fermenting in the washback, see the distillate clear from the still, fill and warehouse the barrels, bottle the whisky that was so carefully created, is absolutely priceless. I will certainly never look at another bottle of whisky in the same way! And I recommend this experience to anyone whether you work in the business, are a lover of single malt whisky or of life. Art is art, whether it lies on a piece of canvas or in a bottle!

**"May your glass be as full as the joy in your heart
And may your life be long enough to enjoy its warmth"
Slainte!**



A very happy Susan
after graduating
The Academy!

**For more information on Bruichladdich contact:
Susan Purnell at susanpurnell@klwines.com**



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