

Book Review

Whisky: Technology, Production and Marketing

Editor: Inge Russell

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This book, edited by Inge Russell (no stranger to readers of this Journal), is the first in the Handbook of Alcoholic Beverages Series published by Academic Press, with series editors Inge Russell, Charles W. Bamforth and Graham G. Stewart.

There is no doubt that it is an important contribution to the literature available on whisky and will be welcomed by all with an interest in this subject. The large demand for glossy coffee table publications featuring distilleries and their products is well, if not over, catered for. But in the area of science and technology the offerings are very limited. The most useful books hitherto have been *The Science and Technology of Whiskies*, edited by J.R. Piggott, R. Sharp and R.E.B. Duncan (Longman Scientific and Technical) and *The Alcohol Textbook*, edited by K.A. Jacques, T.P. Lyons and D.R. Kelsall (Nottingham University Press). The former, published in 1989, is now out of print and is a collection of contributions from international authors covering the world-wide whisky industry. The latter book – its third edition was published in 1999 – covers the much broader field of beverage, fuel and industrial alcohol. In addition for students there is, of course, the Institute of Brewing Blue Book on Engineering published in 1989, which contains a section on distillation.

Whisky: Technology, Production and Marketing is devoted almost exclusively to Scotch whisky and will prove to be an invaluable book for students of distilling and science graduates new to the industry, as well as being a reference text for those working in distilling and its related fields. It is a book for serious scientists; anyone without a scientific background wishing to learn something about the production of whisky would be better directed to *Appreciating Whisky* by Phillip Hills (Harper Collins Publishers).

The subject has been tackled by inviting contributions from a very impressive collection of experts based in Scotland. There are ten chapters and the authors are drawn from the industry, the International Centre for Brewing and Distilling at Heriot-Watt University and the Scotch

Whisky Research Institute (SWRI). The general approach is logical and predictable in that the chapters follow the process – in this aspect it is similar to the earlier *Science and Technology of Whiskies*.

The opening chapter, by George Bathgate, describes the development of whisky distillation and contains brief reviews of the development of the whisky industries of Ireland, North America and Japan. We then move through raw materials and processing for malt and grain whiskies covered respectively by Tim Dolan and a trio of authors from SWRI. Ian Campbell has contributed two chapters, one on yeast and fermentation and the other on grain whisky distillation. Batch distillation is dealt with by Denis Nicol, who has written on this topic in other publications; the maturation and blending chapter is by another group of research scientists from SWRI; co-products are described by Bob Pass and Ian Lambart; and whisky analysis is by Ross Aylott. The final chapter breaks new ground for an essentially scientific book on whisky by dealing with the marketing of the product. Grant Gordon has written a masterly resumé of marketing techniques and their application to the whisky industry. The decision to include marketing in the contents is interesting. It provides a balance to the technology and adds a further dimension by introducing the consumer!

All of these authors provide an abundance of carefully selected references and where appropriate sensibly refer the reader to other publications covering material, which is either more general or peripheral to their specific topic. In areas like malting, wort production and fermentation there is clearly much potential for overlap with brewing texts and these authors have done well to plot their way through by providing general descriptions with supporting references and concentrating on the differences between brewing and distilling, such as peating, cereal cooking and continuing enzyme activity in an unboiled wort. It is fair to say that developments in distillation have been limited in the last couple of decades, but here, I think, the information is more clearly presented than before in a style that is easy to read. Similar comments are appropriate to the maturation and blending material. The co-products chapter offers newly presented material on animal feeds in Scotland, though the emphasis is more on the type of product and where it is produced than the methods of manufacture. Ross Aylott's contribution on analysis is an important inclusion putting together information on laboratory techniques, congener and sensory analysis, and whisky authenticity.

The publication of a book like this presents a problem if there is no single author, or small team of authors, who can work on it together. Brewing has been well served in this way but distilling boasts no full time academic post, which can provide such a focus. The alternative is to invite contributions from a number of experts as in this case (and indeed in the other two books referred to earlier).

This presents an editorial challenge because there is a risk that there may be overlaps and topics missed. By concentrating on Scotch whisky and using a group of authors who know each other, these problems have largely been avoided. The editor has clearly insisted on a uniformity of style and a particular approach to reference material, which has worked excellently.

My only concerns were that packaging was omitted from the production chain (though I understand that packaging will be the subject of a subsequent publication in the Alcoholic Beverage Series) and descriptions of plant could

have been expanded and accompanied by more diagrams in most chapters.

This is an excellent book, which was badly needed. It has a consistent style, reads well and will I am sure become a standard reference and learning text. Effort has been made to minimise the cost of this hardback edition for which we can be thankful. Students of distilling can rejoice!

The next book in this series on malting and brewing is scheduled for publication in 2004.

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