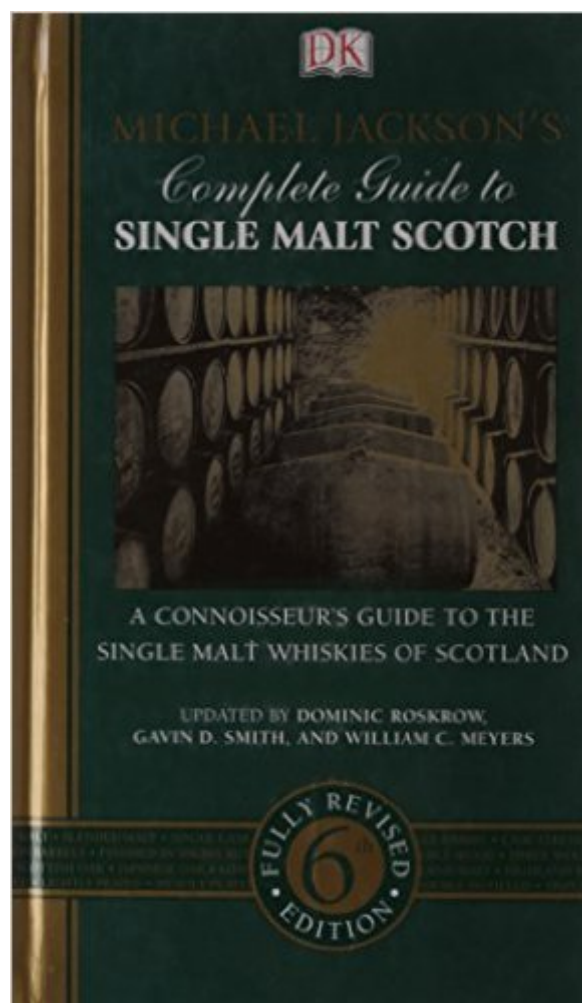


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Michael Jackson's Complete Guide To Single Malt Scotch



Synopsis

Michael Jackson's Complete Guide to Single Malt Scotch, the landmark best-selling malt whiskey companion by the late Michael Jackson, doyen of whiskey writers, has been comprehensively updated by a team of experts. Featuring over 500 new bottlings, reviewed and scored, plus hundreds of revised entries, Michael Jackson's Complete Guide to Single Malt Scotch includes background information on the distilleries, tasting notes on over 1,000 bottlings, and practical advice on buying malts and interpreting whiskey labels.

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Customer Reviews

I consider myself an above-average (although by no means an expert) fan of Scottish single malts, and I own several books on the subject. I find "Michael Jackson's Complete Guide to Single Malt Scotch" to be the most comprehensive, intelligible and above-all useful book in my whisky library. While no book can take the place of sitting down and doing some tastings, buying whisky by the glass for tasting can be prohibitively expensive. If you are buying by the bottle, it becomes an even greater investment, and figuring out your individual tastes will be a considerable investment. Michael Jackson's guide goes a long way in the selection process, leading you to the whiskys most likely to meet your pallet. Each whisky is outlined, explained and graded. It will at least give you an idea of what to expect when approaching an unfamiliar label. This book definitely falls into the "If you only own one book about single malt..." category.

(This is a review of the latest 6th Edition, published in 2010) Michael Jackson died in 2007 and his

book had not been updated since 2004. The malt whisky industry has changed greatly since then. The goal of these three editors was to update Michael's classic book while trying to do it as he would have himself. The layout of the book is in alphabetical order by distillery. There is a short half-page introduction to each distillery, a sentence on the distillery's house style, followed by very short reviews and ratings of several whiskies from the distillery. Many reviews also include a picture of the bottle label. The beginning of the book starts with a general introduction to whisky, left mostly untouched from how Michael wrote it. The editors say that their goal was to keep as many of Michael's original reviews as possible, while updating them with reviews of new whiskies and removing outdated whiskies. The introduction says that two-thirds of the reviews are new, but I also found many of Michael's iconic tasting notes still in the book. The authors have intentionally changed very little in The Macallan section due to Michael's special affection for The Macallan, although they have added reviews of the Fine Oak series. When it came to reviewing the whiskies, the editors say that they tried to stay true to Michael's style. This means that the reviews are terse, ratings are rarely above 85, and also that the editors tried to put aside their own opinions of the whiskies and tried to rate them as Michael would have (based on their reading of his past reviews). They spent 18 months updating the book, each working on reviewing separate distilleries without consulting each other on the reviews. Overall I am satisfied with this book, although I do not own the previous versions. Many recently released modern whiskies are reviewed now, while I was also able to find some reviews that I know to be Michael's originals. The editors hope to continue to update this classic and release new editions, but there are legal issues surrounding Michael Jackson's estate; therefore, future editions of this book are still uncertain.

The discovery by Americans of single-malt whisky back in the 80's and 90's was one of the most interesting stories in the food and beverage market ever. This event by itself probably prevented a number of distilleries from closing, and several, such as the great Ardbeg, which had been moth-balled, were perhaps reopened as a result. Some great but lesser known malts, like Edradour, found new appreciation for their tiny output abroad. Edradour, for example, produces less in a year than some distilleries do in a week, like Tomatin (the Edradour distillery only has 3 employees and only makes 2 barrels a week). Others, such as the Islays like Lagavulin, Laphroaig, and Bowmore, and even the oddly dual-natured Caol Isla, with its both sweetish and phenolic character, were already known in Scotland but garnered new fans here in America. As in Scotland, the Islays are not to everybody's taste, but I know people here who will hardly touch a drop of anything else--an amazing testament to the enthusiasm that has developed in America even for the stronger and

more exotic malts. And probably no book did more to make that happen than Jackson's great little books on single-malt scotch. On a personal note, sometimes even the Scots themselves failed to appreciate how far American sensibilities had come with respect to single malts. I had the experience 20 years ago, when still a young man, of sitting in a bar at the south end of Loch Lomond, and having a well-meaning bartender refuse to serve me some Laphroaig. He insisted on giving me Royal Brackla from an old bottle, itself a great malt. But he thought this young American didn't know what he was asking for, and I think he was worried he might do in a perfectly good, paying customer with a draught of the pungent, phenolic, peaty, and iodine-tasking Laphroaig. These books taught me a lot and I have all 3 editions. They're great for learning to appreciate the particular aspects and flavors of a malt, and as I've been tasting single-malts for 20 years, I've found Mr. Jackson's descriptions to be very accurate and informative. In many cases, after learning from his description, I was able to go on and detect things that weren't even in the book--a great testament to his skill as a teacher and writer. Without his guidance, I wouldn't have been able to educate my sense of taste nearly as expertly. There is no better way to learn about single malts than to take samples of several malts and then taste and compare them using this book. After you're tasted a couple of dozen malts you should be able to get a good sense of what's going on and be able to go on from there. A good way to do this is to pick a couple of classic malts from each category, say a couple of lowlands, a couple of highlands or Speysides, and a couple of Islays, and taste them alongside each other with this book. Some of the malts are just so unique or special that they deserve tasting by themselves--as in the case of Clynelish and Highland Park, or Caol Isla and Talisker, or the often overlooked but wonderful lowland malt, Littlemill, with its sweet cocoanut, English toffee, and creme de caramel flavors. Well, I could go on for a while about interesting things to do for tastings, but I will leave the rest of that to you, hopefully by way of this book, except for one last recommendation. The great Victorian connoisseur and single-malt scotch authority Professor Shaftsbury considered mixing together some Clynelish and Longmorn to be possibly the greatest drink in the world. So you might give it a try sometime and see what you think. Good luck and happy tasting!

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