

From Virginia McKenzie: Do you age your whiskey near our shoreline to capture the salty sea air flavors? I know that's part of the flavor profile in the Islay, Scotland.

We age our whiskey in storage warehouses out in Hoquiam at the moment and we're building two new ones in the Skagit Valley. Both are relatively close to the ocean though definitely not right next to the water like they are on Islay. But the really important thing is that we let the Pacific Northwest influence these whiskies completely by utilizing zero atmospheric controls. Essentially, whatever the temperature and humidity is outside, the inside of the storage warehouses will be the same. This gives us our climate a huge influence on the whiskey and the way it matures. For example, when humidity is high like it is for most of the year here, more alcohol evaporates from the cask than water (totaling 3% by volume per year), impacting how the flavors come together. When the temperature is high you get flavors from the cask like vanilla, caramel, coconut, and baking spices. When the temperature is cold you get more flavor development from the malt and fermentation, so more chocolates, pastry, orange marmalade, cherry pies, things like that. Our climate is closer to Scotland than Kentucky, but really, it's quite unique. The most important thing is that we don't interfere.

From Jevon Powell: How long do you age your whiskey? What's special about 12 years for so many Scotch whiskeys?

We age our whiskies a minimum of three years. There's no minimum age requirement in America for any whiskey, but we find that the ideal balance between flavor from our raw ingredients and the flavor from the cask is just about right at 5 years for most whiskies we create. When we age some of our whiskies in older barrels it can lengthen the amount of time to get to the "sweet spot."

Most Scottish whiskies focus on length of time in cask as a primary point of differentiation. This is because they are really focused on the cask and the length of time maturing being the main source of flavor impact. Most distilleries over there will say now that 70-80% of flavor comes from the cask. But we look at whiskey the way you might look at really good wine or cuisine. The wine industry puts more focus on how the grapes were grown and what varietal they are than they do for the winemaking technique. We tend to think more like that. Indeed, the Washington wine industry was really influential to our thinking the same way that the craft beer industry is.

From Caroline Bobanick: What do you suggest for people who are just getting started with whiskey?

Easy: Enjoy yourself! It can be an intimidating subject to jump into if you're new to it but there's so much to explore once you do. The whiskey industry used to be pretty insular but now that it's hit the mainstream there's a ton of people out there willing to help out or give advice. Trust your palate and keep trying to define what you taste and smell, even if what comes to mind seems bizarre. For example, I've tasted multiple whiskeys where my first impression wasn't a flavor at all, it was a color, like purple!

One big thing that helps if you're new to whiskey but maybe are familiar with wine: don't treat it the same way. Some people will stick their nose in the glass and take a huge breath like you would with wine, and it can stun them. Whiskey is concentrated flavor, let it come to you rather than trying to hunt it down, if that makes sense.

Don't be afraid to add a few drops of water to a glass of whiskey, too. It helps to lower the alcohol content if you struggle with that part, but also opens up a lot of aromas that you might not get otherwise.

Finally, cocktails are a great way to get into the category as well. I know I'm biased but I genuinely swear that our "American Oak" expression makes the best Manhattan in the world!

From Rod Waldbaum: What is the difference between the varieties Westland sells?

Our three Core Range whiskies are American Oak, Sherry Wood, and Peated. All three will have the core influence from the roasted malts, brewer's yeast, and new American white oak barrels for aging. You can imagine American Oak as the metaphorical trunk of the tree, with Sherry Wood and Peated as branches. Sherry Wood adds used sherry wine casks from Spain for maturation, a very popular aging technique most notably utilized by distilleries like Macallan. Peated uses peat-smoked barley, though it is much more balanced compared to some of the big names in Scotland. All three of these are 46% alcohol by volume, non-chill filtered, and are very consistent batch to batch. If you like bourbon or American rye whiskey, you are probably going to really enjoy our American Oak expression. If you like Macallan or GlenDronach, try out Sherry Wood. If you like Oban, Lagavulin, or Highland Park, give our Peated expression a go.

Garryana uses casks made from our native oak species here in the Northwest. Each edition is different. We also have some stuff you can only buy at our tasting room or from us online, including single casks (bottles filled from one cask only, at whatever alcohol content they are coming directly out of the barrel).

From Beth Knox: What future product are you experimenting with now for future development?

The use of new varietals of barley is pretty massive for us leading up to our first release of Colere in Spring of 2021, though that's already bottled and on its way to stores around the world as we speak. Solum, our peated whiskey made with Washington State peat, is due out in 2023. That's the next big project we're working on.

The biggest "future development" goal in general for us is to keep increasing our percentage of malted barley that is Certified Organic or Salmon Safe.

From Roberta Nestaas: How peaty is the flavor...on a scale?

For most of our whiskies the answer is "not at all." Our American Oak and Sherry Wood expressions don't use any peat. Our Peated expression would qualify as "medium-peated," something like Oban perhaps. If you really like traditional peated whiskies such as Octomore, Port Charlotte, Laphroaig, or Ardbeg, you might be interested in the heavily peated whiskey we release once per year called "Peat Week." We have a festival in January that's all about Peat and this is the only release that we make that compares with the heaviest of peated whiskies from Scotland.

From Sten Crissey: How much acreage of barley is needed to produce one bottle/one barrel of whiskey?

We use about 1 acre (3 tons) of barley per day, 7 days per week at Westland. Each day we make about 5 standard barrels at 200 liters each. So it takes 1/5 of an acre to make one barrel of whiskey for us. Depending on whether you dilute it or not, there's roughly 250 bottles in each barrel. Very roughly, it takes just shy of 5 pounds of barley to make one bottle of whiskey.