

15, May 2011, regular meeting

Tasting Notes: by Rhys Jones

As always, we enjoy & appreciate the hospitality of the Union Club for our regular & special meetings.

I awaited this tasting with great anticipation, even inviting my first-ever guest, as the tittle on offer was both rarely-tasted, and holding much promise. 32 members joined for this meeting.

First up was...

Royal Lochnagar Special Reserve, 43% abv, no age given... \$345

Owned by Diageo, Royal Lochnagar is a small, low-volume distillery which doubles as a training facility for Diageo. Situated next door to Balmoral Castle, I've read the royal family are frequent visitors, come to check their stocks as they age in clean and graceful splendour.

Each bottling of Special Reserve is comprised of casks hand-selected by the distillery manager and his trainees. It has no age statement as the casks are chosen to create a consistent, premium flavour profile.

Appearance did not disappoint. The deep amber/golden-red held the promise of richness and a multi-layered flavour profile we each expected to unfold. Nicely-viscous in the glass, it was indeed an attractive serving.

Nose, undiluted, offered up malt & sherry first and foremost, melting into gobs of brown sugar/honey with a molasses note. The initial alcohol prickle and no small acetone note hinted at an early cut to the spirit safe. Cool, this tittle very tightly held onto its' secrets and pleasures.

Well-warmed, it became decidedly more friendly, as the sherry notes opened into the dried-fruit, Christmas cake cherry, raisin notes one would reasonably-expect. The age of one or more casks became more evident as the hint of furniture-polish drifted by, with some fine old leather puffing by in the top end breeze. There was the Speyside grassiness overlaid by a grapiness, which...

Nose-Diluted... morphed into light apple & pear notes, with blood-orange and apricot noted. Still of note was the high alcohol, which did loosen with some time in the glass, changing to a more licorice note. The malt notes remained, with a verging on cereal tones with some strawberry hints on top.

Palette was knocked about a bit as, undiluted and cool, it was hot and peppery which overwhelmed the fruit, making it taste more sherry-ish.

Warmed & some added water opened it up with a buttery oiliness. Wood notes tended to cedar around the tongue, brown sugar came to the fore with doughy malt and a ground almond

nuttiness sliding into bitter chocolate/cocoa. Increased water brought about a shift to spicy notes consisting of ginger, cinnamon and clove, still with the licorice, and honey-candied orange rind. Some butterscotch, melon notes were discussed.

Finish was for many, disappointing as it left quite quickly and was a bit thin. However, for others, it was longer with the tree-fruitiness lingering amid a balanced cedar-woodiness. For such a sherried mouthful, it finished on the dry, dusty side, again the peppery notes perhaps hinting it wasn't the whole peppercorn, but the husk. Regardless, with more time, again the secrets slipped in to play a soft song of light fruity notes, showing the maturity of the wood and spirit in a classy way before fading into the night

Development was actually very good, as it held together with consistency. Pretty much all the noted nose and flavours remained intact with the addition of some light floral hints. In fact, I noted it as a rich development where the brown sugar shifted to a more mature demerara, the pear/grassiness was fresh without being young

Scoring: 85 This was, with the usual single low and single high taken-out, remarkably consistent ranging 79-89. Of course, there was a 91, and a 71.

Comments were: Very prickly for aged 43% malt; Not for me at \$345...; Classy-lady; Sophisticated; Balanced; Initiates would enjoy.

Next-up, and highly anticipated...

Glenfarclas, 40, 46% abv... \$480

One of two longtime family-owned distilleries, both unrelated Grant families, Glenfarclas answer only to themselves which allows them to hold stocks as long as they wish, and produce what they want in the way they want. Glenfarclas is my favourite sherried malt, with my only peeve being the 700 ml bottles, and I miss the old \$19.95 pricing. I enjoy all Glenfarclas expressions from 10yo-40yo, with the 12, 15, & 21 as my first-up preferences. However, I went for a 25 once and ... well, I surely liked it.

Appearance was as expected for a 40yo sherried malt. Dark tea/ walnut, red-gold shimmering through. The heavy viscosity and rich colours simply screamed exotic, heavy as gold, magnificently-fruity malt whisky of the highest order. On point, we quivered just looking at it.

Nose, undiluted, first hit cold with a vague sourness, mustiness and big hit of petrol. After some warming, the musty became earthy, the fruitiness became evident with the usual aged- sherry suspects, demerara, unlit aromatic pipe tobacco, plum, raisin, pie-crust, vanilla, chocolate, fruitcake, with mint, paper, sweeter dried & candied citrus aromas. But still, rumblings of discontent over solvent, rubber, ash kept most from waxing poetic with ecstatic surprise.

Nose, diluted,.. “dare I?..”... but we did... First hit, petrol, ash, consistent with undiluted, but softened & mellowed a bit... lemon, tea, orange, bitter chocolate, juice-box sweetness, toffee. Still hard to pull-out the individual flavours.

Palette again showed petrol & light rubber, ash, musty-dusty, a bit hot, then diverged to reflect the nose as the flavours while rich were so uniformly blended-in it took a while to pick them out. First up were citrussey notes, led by lemon, orange, tea, aspartame sweetness, sour cherry candy,

fruitcake but the fruits weren't definable... "Past its' Prime by quite a bit"... recurrent ash, becoming evident as sulfur.

Finish was evident as being "all about the cask". It was a mid-long battle between the ashy "benevolent?" sulphur and the lingering, more spicy notes of cinnamon, chocolate-butter and aromatic pipe tobacco.

Development was somewhat uneven, but thankfully it finally sweetened with brown sugar notes and tidied-up as the flaws seemed to fade.

Scoring: 81 Regardless the obvious flaws, I expected high scores out of deference to Glenfarclas...

Comments: Malt whisky was not what this bottling was about. It was all about age, sherry & \$480. It was quite blandly-homogenized and long past its' prime. The sulphur, while not the terribly-damaging burnt-match type, did not curry favour. What the heck were the Grant's thinking on this bottling? Somebody was asleep at the switch, hung-over, or ate too much garlic, fried-kippers & truffles for breakfast as they bottled this one... Or, they just found the offending casks, and at 40 years-old, no blender wanted to pay that price for this whisky.

Debatably, the one low of 68 was deserved. The two highs of 90?.. Well,.. a bland 40yo Glenfarclas at a stunning \$480 *Canadian!* has to be justified somehow. A big disappointment from an extraordinary distillery.