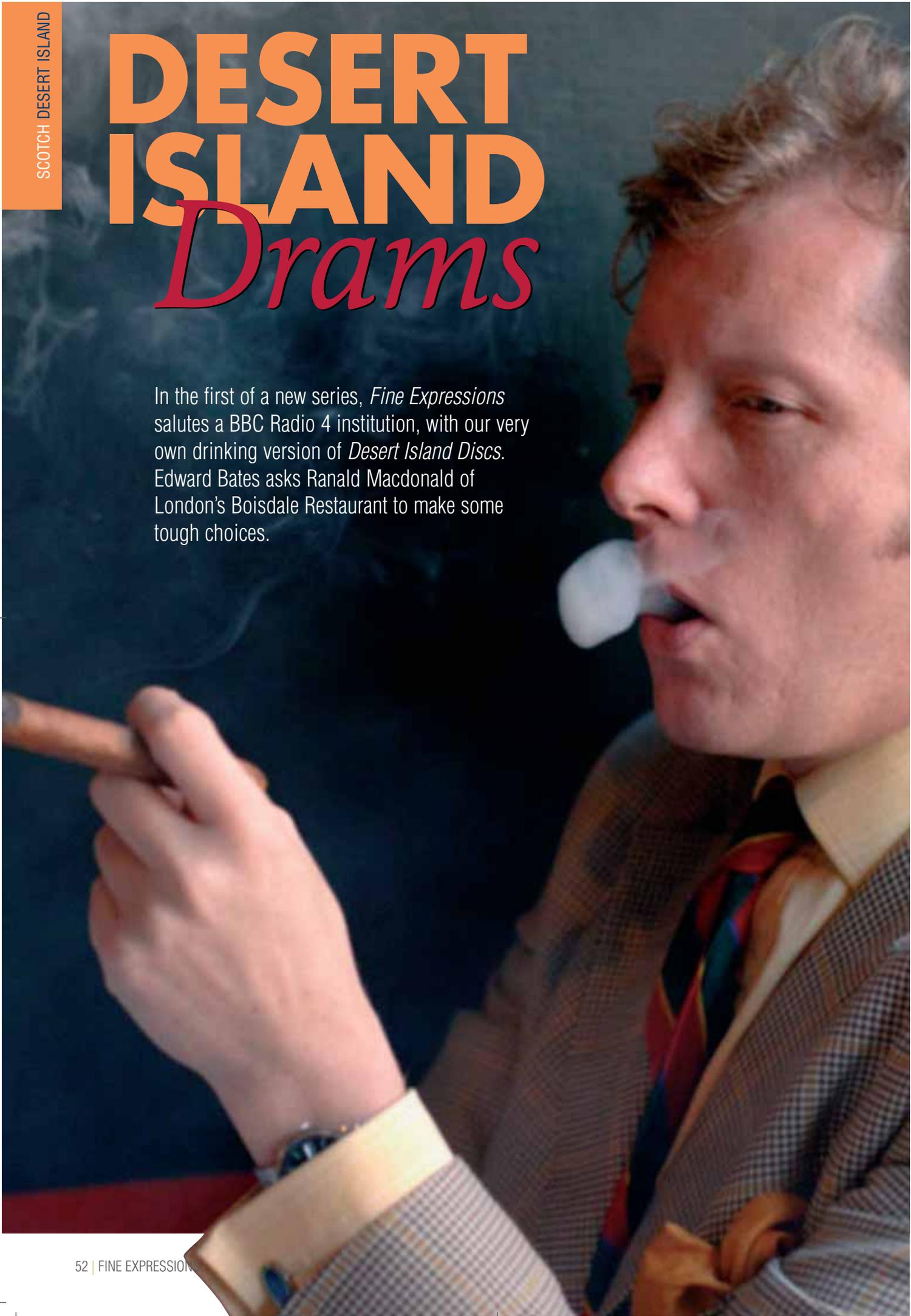
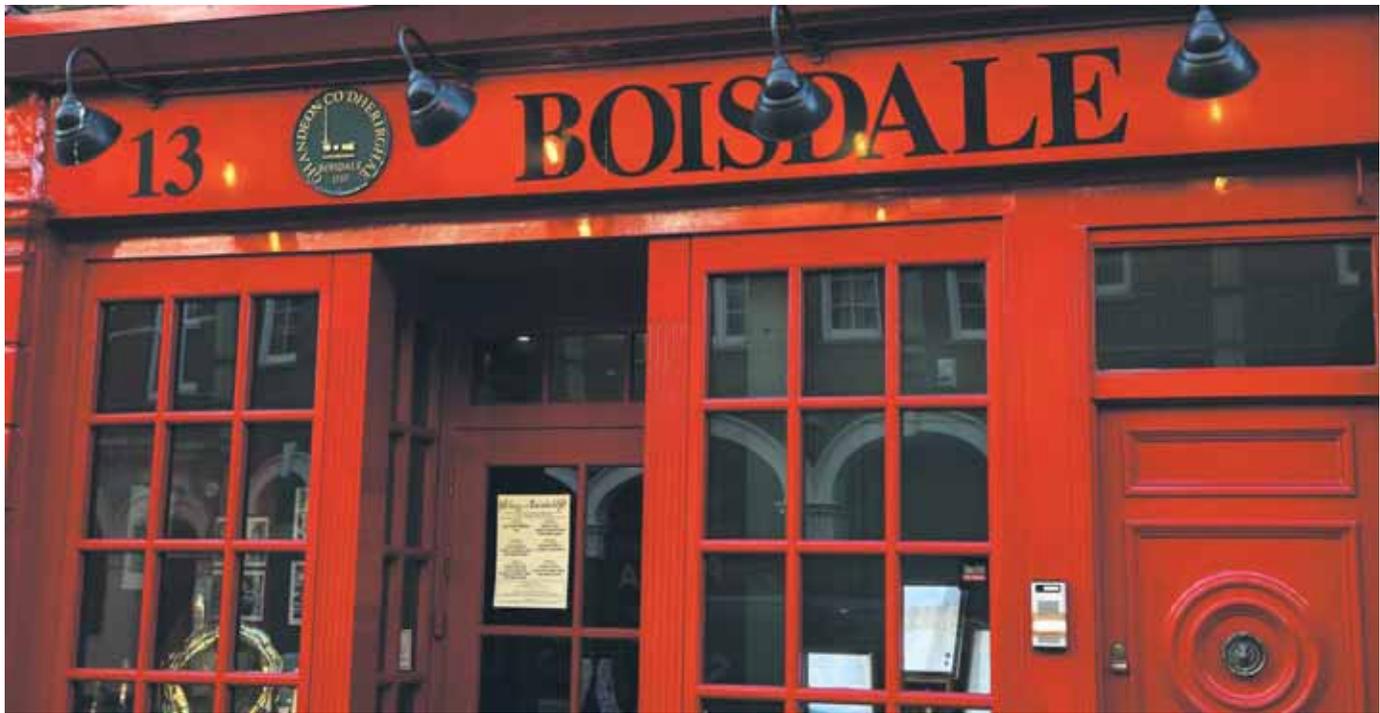


SCOTCH DESERT ISLAND

DESERT ISLAND *Drams*

In the first of a new series, *Fine Expressions* salutes a BBC Radio 4 institution, with our very own drinking version of *Desert Island Discs*. Edward Bates asks Ranald Macdonald of London's Boisdale Restaurant to make some tough choices.





How's your Latin? Mine never was that good either; however 'Dhandon Co Heri Agha' is the family motto of a man who in little more than a decade has created a restaurant genre that simply didn't exist before. 'Gains He Who Dares' could no be more appropriate, and who better with whom to share a really good glass of White Burgundy? In the mid and late '80s, there was no such thing as a whisky 'themed' restaurant. Today Google finds Boisdale around 150,000 times on the net. Most diners who have a passion for whisky, cigars or live jazz have at least heard of, if not dined at, one of the Boisdales in London – or the new venture, The Lamb at Hindon in Wiltshire.

So I joined Ranald in a glass or two of excellent Montagny 1er cru, and we discussed just how the Boisdale phenomenon happened, what the future holds, and which eight bottles would be washed up on his dream desert island.

FE So tell me about the start of things here at Boisdale, and where the passion for whisky came from.

RM Well the whisky thing is easy, that was my father. At home (Uist in the Outer Hebrides) whisky was always there. My father would have a bottle of Macallan on the go all the time.

FE So Macallan would have been your first dram?

RM Yes indeed.

FE Not a bad place to start! You were saying?

RM Well to cut a very long story short, around the mid '80s instead of taking my finals at St Andrews, I was actually running a wine business in London. I'll never



Auld Restaurant

forget it: I went to France intending to travel around buying wine here and there. Instead I got as far as Paris. In Paris we went to a restaurant, the owner of which, it turned out, owned a vineyard. So instead of traipsing from vineyard to vineyard, we bought 1,500 cases on the spot. The day loomed for the lorry to arrive from France and I'd lined up 20 or so of my friends to help unload. The only snag was that by the time the lorry actually turned up, all my friends had disappeared. Two of us had to unload the lot. Off the lorry, along the street, down the narrow stairs, and into our premises. 1,500 cases! It took us eight to ten hours and I don't think my back has ever been the same since. We then put up a sign on the back of a pallet saying 'Wine Clearance' with a big arrow, and we were in business.

FE So you were selling wine rather than taking exams, what next?

RM Well I'd noticed that no one else in this area was advertising at all in Yellow Pages, so I took an ad, a really big ad, and things started to snowball from there. We started doing everything that everyone else wasn't. Own label wines, for example were really successful, including the most amazing deal with the Post Office, where they gave retiring employees a special Royal Mail labelled bottle of Champagne, supplied by me! Things just kept growing. By 1987 we had a shop in Ebury Street, with a very healthy turnover. However then the recession hit, and customers stopped paying their bills. So cash flow became a real issue. It was around then that I was approached, aged 23, by the great Peter Evans, who said "I've got this restaurant site, do you want to be my partner?"

FE The restaurant started in 1989. Did you stop the wine business straight away?

RM No it wasn't until 1991 that I started to properly focus on the restaurant business wholly. I knew then that I had a good selection of whiskies, and a good selection of cigars, but I didn't think that I was doing anything particularly special. That was until, over a glass of Champagne one morning, Derek Wiggle of Hunters & Frankau told me that I had the second best range of cigars in London. So I immediately trebled my order, so we could then say that we are London's best cigar bar. From then on it seemed obvious, that if we had the best range of cigars, we should have the best range of whiskies, too.

FE Now the restaurant has taken off, and you have the recognition, what next? >>



«It seemed obvious, that if we had the best range of cigars, we should have the best range of whiskies, too»

RANALD MACDONALD



Cigar boxes



Jacobite Room

« **RM** Well as the business here grew we started looking around for new sites, which is where Bishopsgate comes in. We knew we wanted to be in the city, but it wasn't until 2001 that we found the right site, and that really has been an outstanding success. The newest venture is The Lamb at Hindon, which has just opened. It is just my idea of a perfect village pub, but with some rooms and a really good restaurant too!

FE So tell me a little about what else you have room for in your life.

RM Well I adore music; everything that I adore is within the walls of Boisdale. I always had a dream of having live jazz in the restaurant, and it was music that kept me going. It has always been important to have the food I like, the drink I like, the music I like and the ambiance I like.

FE A storm blows up and seven of the bottles are washed away, which one is left?

RM I think it'd have to be the Port. Nothing is more amazing than great Port.

FE A book? We'll give you the Bible, and the complete works of Shakespeare.

RM It'd have to be a beautifully written biography, that brings to mind a life and a world that has gone. So I think it would be Roy Jenkins' biography of Winston Churchill, or maybe the complete works of Evelyn Waugh, whom I adore.

FE And a luxury?

RM That's easy. Can I have a DVD player with an endless supply of movies.

FE How about the future, what ambitions are left?

RM Well I'd like to open a Boisdale in Havana, and I would like to try America, or maybe Asia, where I think the Boisdale look would work really well.

FE Ranald Macdonald, thank you for being *Fine Expressions'* very first castaway.

RM My pleasure. ■



Macdonald Bar



The Desert Island Drams

Dram 1

RM I know it's not strictly speaking a spirit, but there is one bottle that you're going to have to allow me to take.

FE Which is?

RM My Nebuchadnezzar of 1896 Dow's

FE Your Nebuchadnezzar, not just any old Nebuchadnezzar that's hanging around?

RM Well as far as I know it is the only one in existence. It was the first truly great vintage for Port, and I've been trying to find a suitable occasion to drink it.

FE You need an awfully good excuse to crack that!

RM I've got no idea what it's worth, but I do believe that it's the most important bottle of Port in existence.

Dram 2

RM In keeping with the island theme, there must be a Rum. There really are some amazing Rums about. A bottle of Matusalem Rum, is just like a caramel sweet, so soft, you hardly feel it in your mouth. Absolutely delicious.

Dram 3

RM Obviously there would have to be whisky. I really can't conceive of a world without whisky. The flavours that whisky offers makes it much more diverse than any other spirit. The thing is which? It really is very tough to choose, but there would have to be an Islay, wouldn't there?

FE Yes, but which one?

RM Arrrgh, so tough. You see whisky really is the most sophisticated spirit made today. But I've got to choose, so there'd be a Caol Ila, I suppose, or maybe a Port Ellen; yes, that's it, a Port Ellen. Something really special and expensive!

Dram 4

RM Of course there would have to be a Macallan too, to remind me of my youth in Scotland. Something classic, like the 25 year-old.

Dram 5

RM And then there's that bottle of Dalmore.

FE Which bottle of Dalmore?

RM It was a bottle of 1948 that I tried with Richard Paterson, Whyte & Mackay's Master Blender, at an auction in Havana, which really was the most sublime and complex thing that I have ever tried. The flavour just went on and on and on. Fantastic stuff.

Dram 6

RM Have you ever tried some really old Cognac, from the 19th century? They really are quite wonderful, so I would have to have one of those too. Something like an 1880s Folle Blanche.

Dram 7

RM Wine is, and always has been, a very important part of my life, so there's going to have to be some wine too. I simply must have some red Burgundy, and some Claret.

FE Okay, but which ones?

RM Well for Burgundy it's got to be one of the great Grand Crus, I think it'd be La Tâche, or Romanée-Conti, yes that's it, Romanée-Conti from a truly great vintage, something like '85 or '90.

Dram 8

RM Then as for the Claret, something quite spectacular, like an '82 Pétrus.