

Riding the wave

Ed Bates and Dominic Roskrow look at the latest English distillers

After waiting for more than 100 years for an English Whisky producer St. George's distillery in Norfolk has got some company Adnams, the family run 138 year-old Suffolk brewer, has opened a distillery at its Sole Bay Brewery in Southwold, a sleepy seaside town on the Suffolk coast. The new distillery is producing vodka, gin and liqueurs, as well as spirit that will be released as whisky, already in cask.

Following the re-fit of the main brewery in 2008, Adnams found themselves with a spare building, so following a £750,000 investment the new distillery was built in the refurbished old Copper House. The distillery has been installed with a pair of handmade copper column stills made by Carl of Germany, a family company whose experience in manufacturing distillery equipment stretches back 135 years. The choice of column rather than pot stills was taken so Adnams could make their own high quality gin and vodka, the commercial case for which was the initial impetus behind the project. However if you make your own vodka, then with a little tweaking whisky is but one more small step. A step that head distiller John McCarthy was very happy to make.

On visiting Adnams Copper House distillery it is immediately noticeable just how different the operation is from most distilleries in the country. Being English they have embraced the lack of restriction that Scottish distillers work under. After all there is no English Whisky Association, yet. The stills are an obvious difference, but the differences go much deeper. Rather than sticking to malted barley to make Whisky, they are also using a three grain (barley, wheat & rye) wash; rather than ex-bourbon and sherry casks, most of the wood is brand new and French. This all leads to some very exciting flavours already bursting out of the glass.

What the final whiskies will taste like is still far from clear. It is obvious is that they will be very different and interesting.

- Meanwhile across the country a unique partnership of two Cornish drinks producers is set to release the oldest whisky ever released in 'England.'

Hicks & Healey Cornish Single Malt 7-Year-Old Whiskey, which adopts the Irish/American spelling of the word 'whiskey', will be the first new whiskey to be bottled in Cornwall for 300 years and is seven years old – three years older than the whisky from St George's in Norfolk. It is the result of a partnership between St Austell Brewery and Healey's Cyder Farm, and will be available in limited quantities from August.

Cornwall, which has its own language and culture, and which to a great extent has closer ties to the Celts of Brittany and Wales than to England, maintains a degree of independence and the new whiskey is being promoted distinctly as a Cornish rather than English whisky.

But because it is highly unlikely that whiskey from Cornwall or England would have been matured for any length of time 300 years ago when it was last made, Hicks & Healey can

claim to be the oldest single
malt whisky ever produced by either country.

The new malt is the brainchild of highly respected St Austell Brewery head brewer Roger Ryman, who knew that the humid peninsula air and mild Cornish climate would provide optimum maturing conditions. The partnership brings expertise in brewing and distillation together for the first time in Cornwall.