



A Still Life in London

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If you're anything like me; and if you're reading this article then we must have something in common; then you don't have a key to the distillery door. Nor do you have a Highland estate the size of several European principalities. Not even a blood line that you can trace back a croft with its own still. We have no ancestral obligation to like whisky. We just like drinking the stuff. Quite a lot.

Every now and then a new whisky is launched (When I say 'new' it will hopefully be several decades old) As we are much more likely to live in or around our nation's great capital than in than within haggis hurling distance of the distillery; we are normally advised, in the new releases section of Fine Expressions, to visit a specialist whisky retailer.

This of course raises more questions. Are there any such places in London? Who and where are these fine merchants? What do they sell? Do they have anything open? And could I possibly try a little dram?

So, I invested in a one day travelcard to find out.

Berry Bros. & Rudd

Berrys' is different. The second thing you notice, after the shop front that looks 300 years old is the none too flat floor and the lack of bottles. At my hopeful question of "Whisky...?" a be-uniformed (dark grey pin stripe suit) assistant pointed me towards a door beyond the ancient coffee scales labelled 'Fine Spirits.' Whilst I cradled some excellent 1974 Bunnabhain, I took in the little den. Less of a shop, it's more like standing inside an oversized booze cabinet. A few hundred malts, a few dozen of Berrys' own bottlings, a wall of Cognac, Armagnac, Bourbon, Gin Vodka, Irish Whiskey and Rum! Talk about kid in a candy store!. Completely unlike any other drinks shop, and yet it's all here.

Whisky Exchange

The area of London around London Bridge is proverbial maze. This means that actually finding Vinopolis is the hard part. Vinopolis is the closest thing that the drinks industry has to a theme park. Here a number of railway arches have been imaginatively turned

into London's leading wine based visitor attraction. Located within its cavernous arches, you find the Whisky Exchange. At first glance it appears to be less of a shop, and more a rather over sized corridor. This rather different layout gives Andy and his team space that others can only dream of. Space to show off their impressive range. When I say impressive, that's 500 or so on display as well as the 3 available on draught (Along with a bourbon and a rum) with lots of real rarities , including a 50 year old Dalmore, a snip at £4,500.

Gerry's

OK, so a whisky specialist, they are not. However this is about the must visit drinks shops of London. If you've been scouting around the internet trying to find that elusive bottle of Scorpion Vodka (that's right, vodka with a real scorpion in it!) then Gerry's have it in stock. Crammed full with bottles from every continent, and a refreshing lack merchandising. Even though Gerry's has been around for 20 years they still don't seem in any rush to join in doing things like any other shop. No computers, no credit cards, just bottles, and staff who really know their stock. In a city like London, if Gerry's didn't exist, then someone would no doubt invent it.

The Vintage House

Since 1945 the same family have been running this quiet little wine shop in the heart of Soho. However, appearances can be deceptive. From the outside The Vintage House looks a bit like an original branch of Oddbins. Wooden shelves, crammed full of bottles. Inside however it's an Aladdin's cave. With a range of whiskies topping 2000, a comprehensive range of fine wine, Cuban cigars, Liqueurs and Armagnacs dating back to 1879

Milroy's of Soho

Jack and Wallace may no longer be at the helm, and Mark Reynier has gone on to do great things on Islay, but for many Milroy's is still *the* destination whisky shop in London. It was the first, and for many years without doubt the best. Whilst it now has some competition, Milroy's is still a very good place to buy whisky. Milroy's now stocks a range of over 700 malts and a large selection of whiskies from around the world. There is also a constantly evolving inventory of rare and old, collectable whiskies

Cadenhead's Covent Garden Whisky Shop

The say that small is beautiful. If that's the case, then Cadenhead's in Covent Garden has to be the most beautiful whisky shop of the lot. Just how Sean manages to cram it all in is truly amazing. Not only are there several hundred bottles to choose from. There's the range of glasses, and accessories too. Pride of place within the shop however goes to the six casks of whisky. This enables you to have your whisky bottled for you there and then.

Royal Mile Whiskies

No, not Edinburgh, the London outpost; and no, not a mile, I made it 1408 yards. Nestling beside the grandeur of the British Museum in Bloomsbury, Royal Mile have been part of the London whisky scene for the last four years. In that time they have generated a reputation for studied excellence. Graceful, subdued and refined, the London shop is all of these. That is until Duncan starts to talk. From then on the enthusiasm, depth of knowledge and above all passion for whisky dominates.

N.B. The information below has not been updated since publication in 2006

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| The Whisky Exchange | Vinopolis 1, Bank End London SE1 9BU |
| Tel:- Fax:- | 020 7403 8688 020 7403 8788 |
| Opening Times | Monday - Thursday 11.00am - 6.30pm Friday 11.00am - 7.30pm Saturday 10.30am - 7.30pm Sunday 12.00am - 6.00pm |
| Website Internet sales? | www.thewhiskyexchange.com Yes |
| Nearest Tube | London Bridge |
| Most interesting bottle | 40y.o. Balblair £85.00 |

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|----------------------------|---|
| Royal Mile Whiskies | 3 Bloomsbury Street London WC1B 3QE |
| Tel:- Fax:- | 020 7436 4763 020 7436 4764 |
| Opening Times | Monday - Friday 11.00am - 7.00pm Sunday 12.00am - 6.00pm |
| Website Internet sales? | www.royalmilewhiskies.com Yes |
| Nearest Tube | Tottenham Court Road |

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|----------------------------|---|
| The Vintage House | 42 Old Compton Street London W1D 4LR |
| Tel:- Fax:- | 020 7437 5112 020 7734 1174 |
| Opening Times | Monday - Friday 9.00am - 11.00pm Saturday 9.30am - 11.00pm Sunday 12.00am - 10.00pm |
| Website Internet sales? | www.sohowhisky.com Yes |
| Nearest Tube | Piccadilly Circus / Leicester Square |
| Most Interesting bottle | 1926 Macallan £20,000 |

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|----------------------------|---|
| Milroys of Soho | 3 Greek Street London W1D 4NX |
| Tel:- Fax:- | 020 7437 2385 020 7437 1345 |
| Opening Times | Monday - Friday 10.00am - 8.00pm Saturday 10.00am - 7.00pm |
| Website Internet sales? | www.milroys.co.uk Yes |
| Nearest Tube | Tottenham Court Road |
| In store samples | Yes |
| Most Interesting bottle | Balblair 26y.o. £63.00 |

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| Cadenhead's Covent Garden Whisky Shop | 3, Russell St, London, London WC2B 5JD |
| Tel:- Fax:- | 020 7379 4640 020 7379 4600 |
| Opening Times | Monday & Saturday 11.00am - 6.30pm Tuesday to Friday 11.00am - 7pm Sunday 12.30pm - 4.30pm |
| Website | www.coventgardenwhiskyshop.co.uk/ |
| Nearest Tube | London Bridge |
| Most interesting bottle | Campeltown Loch 21y.o. £29.90 |