

A touch of glass

There is no doubt that the glass you use has an effect on the appreciation of the spirit therein. **Marcin Miller** investigates further



ABOVE: OUR OWN DAVE BROOM ASSESSING NOSING GLASSES

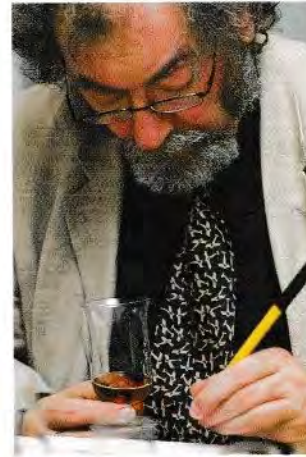
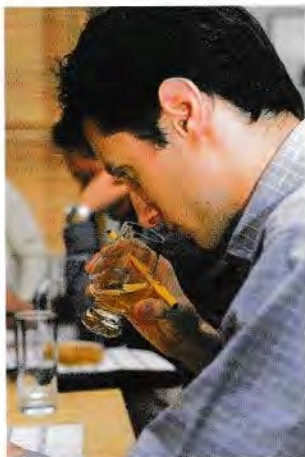
Why do we make life so difficult for ourselves? Why couldn't we just have one whisky and seven different glasses? That is what most people would have done. But no. That would have been too easy. This tasting featured seven different glasses and five different whiskies. This was done because we all know that different whiskies have different properties. Each glass will accentuate a given property. So if you only tasted one style of whisky in several different glasses, the only conclusion you could draw would be that you have found the best glass for that style of whisky. What we attempted was to see if any conclusions could be drawn about different styles of whisky in different glasses. Does that make sense?

Each of these glasses has been designed specifically for the nosing of whisky. The Glencairn Blender's Malt Glass was the only 'ringer' as it is primarily intended for use in pubs and bars and, although developed with the help of many of the Scotch whisky industry's Master Blenders, has not been designed with the professional noser in mind. This exception appears in the line-up as it has been the official glass of *Whisky Live* in London and Tokyo. As the only glass in the world with a *Whisky Magazine* logo on it, it would not have made sense to exclude it. Had the Glencairn glass appeared in a tasting with other glasses normally encountered in pubs and bars – the tumbler and the dreaded Paris goblet – there is little doubt that it would have come top.

With the benefit of hindsight there are several other factors to consider in a tasting of this nature: to what extent is the volume of whisky in the glass a factor and, indeed, the abv of the whisky?

Generally speaking the variations were felt on the nose rather than the palate, even though most tasters were palate-slooshers (by which I mean they ensured that the whisky entered every part of the mouth by passing the spirit up and down and from side to side). However, it was agreed that a key factor is where on the tongue the glass directs the whisky, as different parts of the tongue have different flavour receptors. Many of our tasters – and remember these are people who make a living based on their nosing and tasting experiences – were genuinely surprised by how great the differences and variations were. A Georg Riedel masterclass with Aberlour had, to some extent, prepared me for such distinctions.





FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: IAN WISNIEWSKI WITH THE RIEDEL GLASS. JOSH CUMMING WITH THE GLENCAIRN GLASS. DAVID ROBERTSON, MASTER DISTILLER OF THE MACALLAN, WITH THE SCOTCH MALT WHISKY SOCIETY NOSING GLASS. MICHAEL JACKSON MAKES NOTES ABOUT THE RIEDEL GLASS



Dave Broom suggested that “a good quality nosing glass should expose faults as well as qualities” in whisky. This might be seen as contentious, for surely a whisky glass should ensure a positive nosing and tasting sensation. However, the pitfall of that argument is that if a glass is only to emphasise the positive, it will lead to the lowest common denominator that is sweetness. And if sweetness is brought to the fore, we may well end up sacrificing nuance. It would have been interesting to feature a heavily-peated malt, suggested David Robertson, to see if that tasted sweet. Ian Wisniewski, who uniquely amongst our panel doesn't reduce his whisky with water, found that the glasses all had markedly different effects on the finish and he found some of them 'quite unpleasant'.

Only one mark separated all seven glasses. It's worth reiterating that in matters of taste everything is subjective.

The whiskies

- Representing the wide world of blended Scotch is **Grant's Sherry Cask Finish**.
- David Robertson generously brought a bottle of **The Macallan Gran Reserva** to the tasting.
- The SMWS, equally generously, provided a bottle of **No 82.14**, distilled in 1971 and bottled at 55.2% at 29 years.
- In the green corner, representing Ireland, the peated **Connemara**.
- Finally, from the Good Ol' US of A, at 19 years of age, **WL Weller**.

The tasters

Dave Broom	Contributing Editor
Josh Cumming	Tasting Co-ordinator for the SMWS
Michael Jackson	Consultant Editor
David Robertson	Master Distiller for The Macallan
Ian Wisniewski	Freelance journalist and author

Score 8.00

Price £7.40 / €11.90

www.TheWhiskyStore.com

or www.whisky.de/scoma/



Eisch "Jeunesse" Malt Whisky Glass

New to the market, this glass is not dissimilar in shape to the Glenmorangie but features a slightly taller stem. "This is an optimal glass for appreciating and evaluating malt whisky. The aroma and flavour of the spirit is presented in the most advantageous way. The glass with its serpentine shape and its narrow opening allows the whisky to release aromas without losing them. Naturally the malt whisky glass of the Jeunesse series is completely handmade and only first-rate glass blowers can guarantee the high quality standard."

The aesthetic input came from whisky lover and designer Juergen Deibel, who used a practical approach to solve a personal dilemma: "A long time ago I was searching for an optimum glass for appreciating my favourite dram. Knowing that different whiskies will taste and smell differently out of different glasses, I started to design this glass to find a good combination of aroma and taste presentation to the connoisseur."

Of the five flights, this glass won two of them outright (The Macallan Gran Reserva and the SMWS bottling) and tied in first place with the SMWS noser when tasting Grant's Sherry Cask Reserve. In the Grant's flight, Ian felt this glass emphasised oak at the expense of other nuances. Dave felt it gave good palate direction and that it "exposes the whisky best on nose". Michael Jackson felt that this glass with this whisky gave the longest finish. It was the favourite of Michael, David, Dave and Josh. This glass did tend to flatter whiskies by emphasising sweetness. Ian felt that the glass had "the ability to segment flavours."

On the aesthetic side, David felt it was a little 'girlie', Josh said "I can't ever see myself drinking out of one of these". Having said that, it is a nosing glass rather than a drinking glass. Doubtless Josh would be more comfortable with the glass in the sterile atmosphere of the tasting room than in the convivial atmosphere of the pub.

Score 7.75

Price £7.90 / €12.70

www.lfw.com

www.andrewsparke.co.uk (trade enquiries)

Nosing Glass from Andrews Parke

Based on the traditional tasting glass as designed for wine, this glass is closest to that normally used for nosing whisky. Although this glass did not win any flights outright, it displayed remarkable consistency throughout the tasting. Tasters were asked to use this glass pretty much as a 'control', that is to say the glass against which the performance of the others was judged. David Robertson felt that with this glass "The Macallan nosed poorly unreduced but better than the others when reduced." According to Josh Cumming, this was similar with the SMWS bottling.



Scotch Malt Whisky Society Tasting Glass

As the SMWS were our hosts for the tasting, it would have been churlish to exclude their glass. It took joint first place in the Grant's Sherry Cask flight. Again, as with the traditional nosing glass, this was found to be a relatively consistent performer. Having said that, Michael Jackson found it 'a little flat' and thought that it gave 'unhappy aromas'. Overall, tasters felt that the glass had too short a stem for good colour assessment. Dave Broom felt that this glass had a tendency to make the whiskies taste drier. General consensus was that this glass made whiskies taste quite harsh – but clearly some like it hot.



Score 7.50

Price £6.50 / €10.40

The Scotch Malt Whisky Society

www.smws.com

Whisky nosing



Glenmorangie tasting glass

Supplied by Andrews Parke, this tulip has a slight flare and comes with a round lid to keep all the aromas in the glass and to arrest evaporation. It was David Robertson's second favourite and won the Connemara flight.

Score 7.50

Price £2.95 / €4.70

www.ardbeg.com or

www.glenmorangie.com



Riedel Single Malt Whisky Glass

Designed by famed Austrian stemware manufacturer, Georg Riedel, this glass is made specifically for single malt whisky. This classic glass performed best, perhaps surprisingly, with the WL Weller 19 year old. Dave found it uncomfortable to drink from and it was David's least favourite. Ian felt that it accentuated vanilla whereas Josh stated "it handled the more intense whiskies better." Michael thought that it worked well with The Macallan.

Score 7.25

Price £10.95 / €17.60

www.riedelcrystal.com

Glencairn Blender's Nosing Glass

The official glass of *Whisky Live* was designed for use primarily in pubs and bars. It was felt that other drinks had their own glass, so why not whisky? Dave felt that the whiskies lost some complexity with this glass. On the positive side, the panel found this glass aesthetically pleasing; nosing and drinking was pleasurable with this glass in hand.



Score 7.25

Price £5.00 / €8.00

www.whisky-world.com

www.glencairn.co.uk (trade enquiries)

The Pure Glass

In 1996 La Maison du Whisky collaborated with a design agency to create The Pure Glass specifically for whisky tasting. Our panel tested the smaller (17cl) version of the glass. Based on a Burgundian wine-tasting vessel, this glass works by swirling the whisky thereby releasing the aromas. Ian Wisniewski found it 'visually unattractive' whereas Dave felt it worked best with blended whisky. Overall the impression was that The Pure Glass was a little gimmicky and too diffused as whiskies seemed spirtier and less focussed than in the other glasses.



Score 7.00

Price Boxed pair (small 17cl) £18.70 / €30

Boxed pair (large 33cl) £23.70 / €38

www.maisonduwhisky.com

Based on the results of this tasting, *Whisky Magazine* recommends

Best nosing glass for blended whisky

Eisch "Jeunesse" Malt Whisky Glass
Scotch Malt Whisky Society Nosing Glass

Best nosing glass for single malts

Eisch "Jeunesse" Malt Whisky Glass

Best nosing glass for cask strength malts

Eisch "Jeunesse" Malt Whisky Glass

Best nosing glass for Irish whiskey

Glenmorangie Nosing Glass

Best nosing glass for bourbon

Single Malt Whisky Glass by Riedel