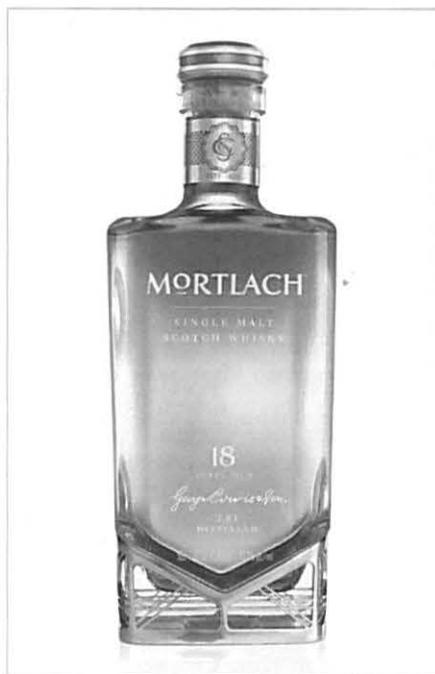


cask strength, quarter cask, and fairly dusted entries.

Spirit Journal September 2014:
★★★★/Highly Recommended

**Mortlach 18 Years Old
Single Malt Scotch Whisky**
(Scotland; Diageo, Norwalk, CT)
43.4% abv, \$299.

Brilliant amber/burnished orange color; flawless clarity. This Mortlach aroma is dusty dry, waxy, grain husk-



like, tofu-like, fibrous, brown rice-like; later whiffs encounter minerals, nickel, breakfast cereal. The entry features a Mighty Malts flavor that is lovely, dry, balanced, chewy in texture, nutty; midpalate impressions mirror those of the entry, adding raisin bread toast, lemon marmalade, honey. It concludes like dried apricot, tobacco smoke, roasted malt, malted milk balls. Supple, succulent, luscious. Mortlach in its prime.

Spirit Journal September 2014:
★★★★/Highest Recommendation

**Mortlach 25 Years Old
Single Malt Scotch Whisky**
(Scotland; Diageo, Norwalk, CT)
43.4% abv, \$650.

Similar amber/bronze color to the 18; impeccable, sediment free purity. I smell grass, hay field, textile fiber, unsalted snack cracker, new leather. Entry is malty, breakfast cereal-like,

nearing semisweet status, biscuity; midpalate is all of the above and more, including saltwater taffy, tobacco leaf, dates, figs, dried berries. Finishes long, satiny, minerally, focused, seductive. Though I preferred the 18-year-old expression, this 25 packs a wallop.

Spirit Journal September 2014:
★★★★/Highly Recommended

SIA Blended Scotch Whisky

(Scotland; Spirits Imports, Colchester, CT)
43% abv, \$50.

Marigold yellow color; dazzling clarity. Initial nosings detect brisk breakfast cereal aromas, as well as toffee, lemon meringue fragrances; additional air contact stimulates dried apricot, new leather, marshmallow aromas. Entry is intensely grainy, lead pencil-like, earthy, semisweet, slightly metallic; midpalate highlights dry, tobacco-like flavors that leave behind a snack cracker taste that's a trace salty. Ends on a deeply grainy, wheat-like note. Good blended Scotch is always welcome, even though I think this one is too pricey.

Spirit Journal September 2014:
★★★/Recommended

WHISKEY - USA

Editor's note: I documented my relationship and travel experiences with the late Booker Noe, grandson of Jim Beam, in my 2003 book *American Still Life* (Wiley), so I won't belabor those facts here. Not enough space. Read the book if you care to discover more about the friendship. Booker's Small Batch KSB was a milestone for the James B. Beam Distilling Co. because it marked the beginning of a new era for the legendary bourbon distillery.

In the wake of Elmer T. Lee's Blanton's Single Barrel Bourbon (in 1984), Booker felt he needed to join the conversation about big-ticket American whiskey in a way that focused on the quality stocks that he lorded over in Clermont, KY. Booker's Bourbon was his brainchild as he personally chose specific barrels that, in his opinion, had reached their apex; barrels

that normally ranged in age from 6 to 8 years old.

Over a breakfast of ham biscuits (Booker's daily favorite) at his Bardstow house one morning back in 2001, as Sue and I were conducting research in Kentucky for the book, I said to Booker, "How do you know when a whiskey's at its peak? How does it become Booker's Bourbon?" Booker looked first at the ham biscuit in his massive hand, glanced at Annis, his wife who was about to serve up another platter of ham biscuits prepared by their family friend Toogie, then eventually said, "Paul, I sniff it, chew it around in my mouth, sniff it again, chew it around once again...and I just know." Case closed for Booker after over 50 years of making and aging whiskey. If only life was always that certain in its brilliance...and memorable.

Directly following are two bottlings of Booker's, one their latest edition and the other a commemorative bottling of Booker's Bourbon 25th Anniversary. As is my custom, I tasted these hearty whiskeys neat first, wrote my notes, then added spring water at a rough ratio of one part water to three parts whiskey, and then rated them.

**Booker's Small Batch
Aged 7 Years, 2 Months
Batch #C07-B-7
Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey**
(USA; James B. Beam Distillery, Clermont, KY)
65.4% abv, \$50.

Pretty deep bronze color; flawless clarity. Whoa, Nellie, the abv comes right at you like a UFC heavyweight but does not overshadow the cornmeal/cornbread aromas that are woody, slightly baked, but purposefully supple, round, spicy (green peppercorn); secondary nosings are vivid, piquant, prickly, warming, and for veterans only as the corniness accelerates, becoming more corn fritter-like, honed, fried, complex. Entry is caramel sweet, maple syrup-like, focused on corn, oaky but not resinous, loaded with vanilla extract; midpalate echoes the entry but with water added shows a luscious, bakery shop flavor profile that's semisweet, nougat-like, succulent. Aftertaste is fruity, oaky, semi-