

In Search of the Forces that Shape Japan

Continuous efforts and the Blessings of Nature in the Home of Japanese Whisky

~ A Visit to the Suntory Yamazaki Distillery ~

Malt whisky, created from pure water, malt and yeast and matured in a variety of casks, becomes rich tasting whisky through superb blending. A day spent in the Yamazaki Distillery gave us an appreciation for the complexity of this process.

Photography/ Satoru Naito Text/ JQR Editorial Staff



A pot that was used when the distillery was first established is now found in front of the Whisky Museum.

With an abundant supply of pure water and a moist, verdant environment, Yamazaki has all the necessary conditions to make it the ideal place for crafting whisky.

One day, at the beginning of the rainy season, we made our way through the grounds of the Suntory Distillery toward the fermentation room, listening to chief blender Seiichi Koshimizu as we walked. Above us bamboo thickets and overhanging trees dripping with rain seemed to enfold the buildings. Yamazaki is at the base of Mount Tenno, on the southwest edge of the mountain range surrounding the Kyoto Basin, where the three rivers of Katsura, Uji and Kizu merge. Since antiquity this region has been famed for the superb quality of the water that

wells up from the ground. It was here, in 1923, that Japanese whisky began.

The Whisky Making Process

During the whisky making process the raw ingredient, barley, is germinated and dried, and the resulting malt is finely ground then mixed with warm water to convert starch into sugar in a tank called a mash tun. This mixture is filtered to produce a clear liquid known as wort. The quality of the wort is affected by the water used, so a plentiful supply of good quality water is essential. Next, the wort is transferred into vats called washbacks, and yeast is added. The choice of yeast is a major influence on a whisky's taste and smell, and so it is

carefully selected to match the desired outcome.

The fermented liquid, wash, is transferred to pot stills, and twice distilled to become a clear transparent liquid called new make. In the distillery we saw sparkling golden pot stills lining both sides of the passageway, each shaped slightly differently to produce various types of new make. The new make created through this process is transferred to casks and allowed to slowly slumber and mature in a cool, gloomy warehouse.

The Reason for Maturing in Casks

A whisky's flavor becomes rich over an extended period of time, so naturally Mr. Koshimizu is extremely particular

Rows of giant pot stills in the distillery. Direct-fire distillation and indirect steam distillation are applied.



Clear, transparent new make is transformed into amber-colored malt whisky inside the casks.

