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Whisky paradise at Edinburgh's Whiski Rooms

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Awards and plaudits have been heaped on [Whiski Bar](#) on Edinburgh's Royal Mile, including the title of whisky bar of the year at the 2011 Dram Awards, so we were keen to see what owners Gary and Anne Still would come up with for their second venue. The result is Whiski Rooms – a great new concept that combines a bar with a bistro and a whisky shop – just off the Royal Mile on The Mound, overlooking Edinburgh's New Town.

The new venture blossomed out of a plan to set up a website where Whiski Bar customers could buy bottles of the Scotch they were enjoying. “The logistics of holding stock were difficult so we began looking for premises

and eventually bought two side by side on The Mound – one would be a shop and the other a small tasting bar and bistro,” Anne explains. But it then emerged that the ground floor of a former bank next door was also coming available so they knocked through to create three adjoining units. Each part has its own entrance but the shop leads through to the bar which leads to the bistro, while there is a separate whisky tasting room. “Our idea was always that our customers can ‘try before they buy’,” Anne adds.



The shop at the Whiski Rooms

They worked on the design with [Edinburgh-based KBAD](#) which has worked on many hospitality projects in Edinburgh, from Orocco Pier hotel to Hyde Out. The interiors of the Whiski Rooms are cool and contemporary but retain a traditional feel, with a copper-edged horseshoe bar and copper ventilation inspired by a whisky-maker’s copper still.

There is a good selection of wines, beers and spirits but the focus is whiskies, with over 300 different ones available from the bar. The choice of whiskies is regularly updated and changed, and there is always plenty to delight any connoisseur. Gary leads on the selection of whiskies, which is a “work in progress”, Anne says. “He loves whisky and decides on all of them and is constantly changing and adding to it.” They encourage people to explore the category through whisky flights served with tasting notes.



The bistro at Whiski Rooms

Bar manager Rory Dalgety has also developed a more extensive list of whisky-based cocktails than at Whiski Bar, from classics such as Rob Roy and a Whisky Sour to whisky twists on other classics such as a Monkey Mojito made with Monkey Shoulder whisky, a Whiski Rita using The Snow Grouse instead of tequila, and a Burnt Manhattan made with Smokehead whisky. When I visited anonymously with friends in August, the bartenders were friendly, efficient and knowledgeable, talking enthusiastically about the whiskies and cocktails they were serving. The shop staff were similarly helpful and informative, and it was only the people waiting tables who sadly let the side down, perhaps weary of the hordes of Sassenachs who head north from England for the Edinburgh festivals.



The tasting room

There is an emphasis on Scottish produce across the food and drinks menus. The freshly cooked dishes from the kitchen range from a Haggis Tower –

haggis, neeps, mashed potatoes with Whiski's own sauce – to a steak and ale pie served with a Mull cheddar crust and parsley mash potato. Smaller bites include a haggis spring roll in sweet plum sauce and peat-smoked venison with quail eggs and horseradish crème fraiche.

There is also a Scottish flavour to the rest of the drinks list. Alongside a comprehensive selection of bottled and draught beers from around the world, there are ales from Scottish brewers Caledonian and Innis & Gunn and ciders from [Thistly Cross in East Lothian](#). Both the bar and the shop stock other Scottish spirits including gins Caorunn and Hendrick's and [Botanist](#), a new gin produced by the Bruichladdich distillery on Islay. There is also [single malt vodka Valt](#), distilled in Kingussie in the Scottish Highlands, and Renegade Rum, distilled in the Caribbean but bottled at Bruichladdich.



The opening of Whiski Rooms was the culmination of a year and a half of tackling planning, licensing and other challenges so Gary and Anne have no immediate plans for another site, although one day they would like to open a Whiski outlet in London. It is nearly five years since they gave up their successful careers in IT and investment to buy Clever Dick's and turn it into the first Whiski Bar. "Our aim was to provide a mecca for whisky in the Royal Mile that was accessible to all, friendly, with good service," Anne recalls. "It was a learning curve and

a complete change of direction, but we are both naturally sociable and have always enjoyed eating and going out in general. Our philosophy has been to implement what we enjoy and would want as we think others will want it too. It works and Whiski has been a great success.”

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