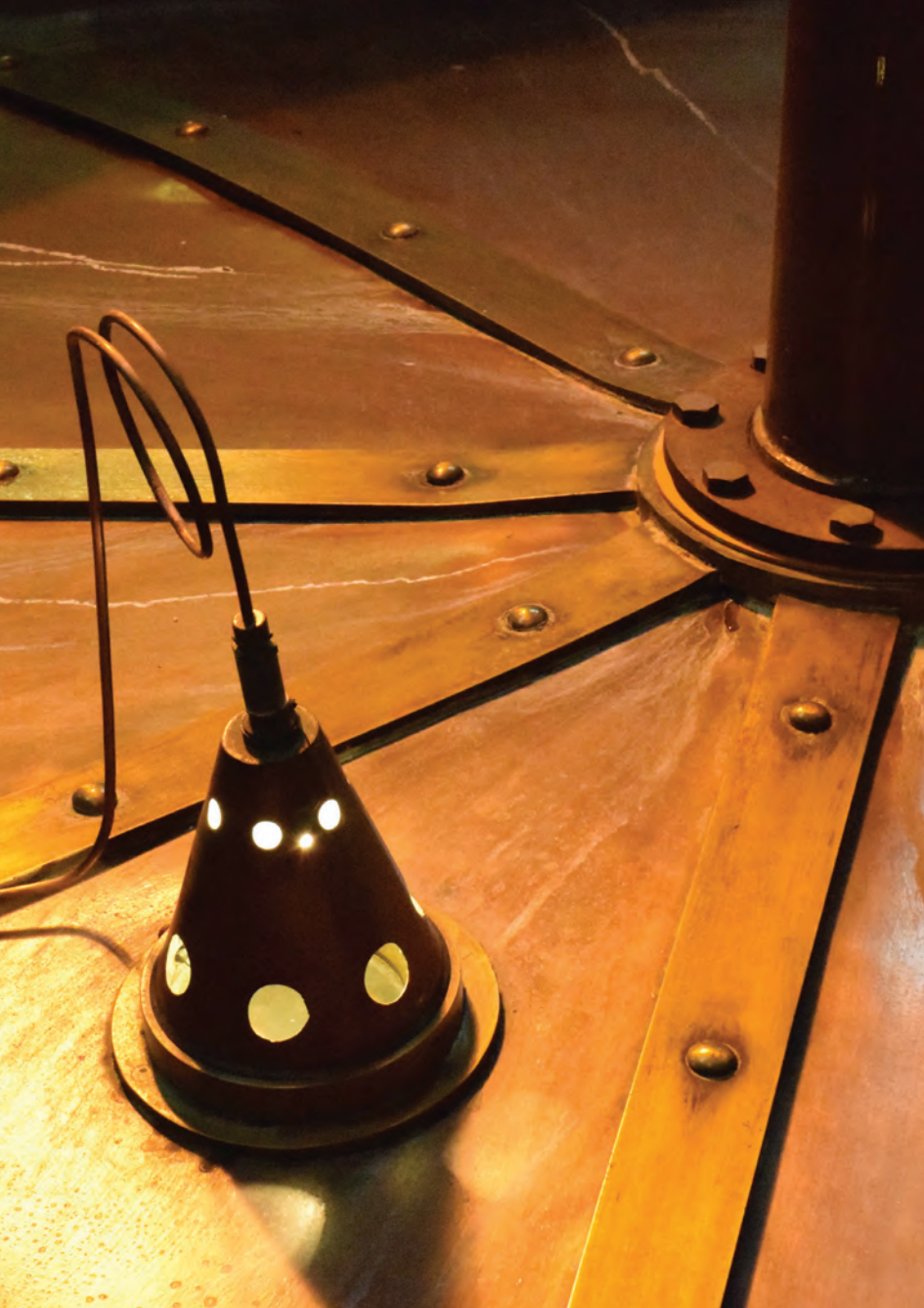
FERNAND DACQUIN

Lannoo



FOREWORD

FORTY WONDERFUL WHISKIES

FORTY

Forgive me, but I have to confess that I don't know if there are exactly forty.

Forty chapters, that's right. I'm sure there are. But there may well be one or two bottles more.

But I kept 'forty' on the cover because it is such a nice number for whisky lovers. Thanks to the European Union.

One of the most important contributions of this political institution (besides the fact that we can dump our worn-out politicians there, of course) is that our whiskies must contain at least forty per cent alcohol by volume.

Less than forty: no whisky. More than forty: no problem. Short and sweet.

As Goethe said: 'In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister'.

Therefore: 'FORTY' wonderful whiskies.

WONDERFUL

I thought about that word for a long time. I considered several synonyms but kept 'wonderful' in the end.

It covers many interpretations.

Just click on 'merriam-webster.com', and there you'll find synonyms: amazing, astonishing, awful, fabulous, marvellous, portentous, prodigious, staggering, stunning, astonishing, sublime, surprising, wondrous, rare, singular, uncommon, unique, unusual, unfamiliar, etc.

And this is what you can expect. You will encounter bottles that you will find in very few other whisky books. Simply because they are unknown, perhaps never available in your area, or rarely featured in tasting sessions.

Have no fear: I will not describe these whiskies in detail. Everyone who knows me (or has read my book *The Whisky Book)* knows I am allergic to tasting notes. Nobody has the right to say what you should taste in your whisky. For that matter, no one possesses the unique sense of taste that you have. What YOU taste is exactly what's in your whisky.

So why are the whiskies in this book 'wonderful'? Simply because they put me on a track; they suddenly reminded me of something I read years ago; they suddenly brought back images of what I experienced on my many journeys, etc. And those are the stories attached to the bottles in this book.

Therefore: Forty 'WONDERFUL' whiskies.

WHISKIES

Here I venture onto thin ice.

You know as well as I do when a bottle contains 'whisky' (or 'whiskey') and when it does not. In Europe, this is very precisely regulated. But outside Europe, the rules are not always the same, so you might well be looking at a bottle that says 'whisky', but isn't.

Yes, listen, you can call it a weakness of mine, but I still allowed some non-whiskies in. For the sake of the story.

And then there is this: an attentive reader (as of course you all are) will e-mail me, after reading the book, to tell me that it also contains bottles that have nothing to do with whisky.

And they will be right.

If this were a poem, I could absolve myself by citing 'poetic license', but it is not a poem.

Ok, but even the best horse sometimes stumbles, and those drinks are damn good too.

Therefore: Forty wonderful 'WHISKIES'.

Attentive readers will also notice that this book's whiskies are mainly blended whiskies. I wanted to put them in the spotlight.

Blended whiskies rarely feature in whisky books. On the other hand, they make up almost ninety per cent of all whisky in the world.

And, take it from me, there are a lot of damn fine whiskies among them.

Perhaps it is time to try one of the blends listed – or better yet, try more than one.

In addition, this book, like the previous one in the series, still meets the ideal format for ergonomic reading.

You can take the book in your left hand and have the other hand free for a whisky.

(Left-handers, reverse these instructions).


SPENCERFIELD SPIRIT
PIG'S NOSE
BLENDED SCOTCH WHISKY
MATURED IN EX-BOURBON OAK WOOD BARRELS
HANDMADE • SMALL BATCH
Soft & Smooth as a Pig's Nose
PRODUCT OF SCOTLAND
40% VOL
70CL/700ML

01
A NOSY BUSINESS

Dear reader,

There has been something on my mind for a while now, so I have to get it off my chest.

In my previous whisky book, which also happens to be called *The Whisky Book*, I talked extensively about 'our nose' as an instrument for enjoying whisky. If you have read it, you will surely have noticed that in that particular chapter, 'Ode to the Nose', I suddenly departed from my usual matter-of-fact writing style and suddenly used unbridled melodious language. With a series of adjectives and many vowels, I sang the praises of the olfactory epithelium, with its 30 million receptors that analyse all the odours that pass through and send them on to the brain. That, in turn, enables us to distinguish 10,000 aromas.

Well, I would like to apologise for that.

First of all, that epithelium is the size of a postage stamp. A STAMP. With '30 million receptors'? Not 30,249,718? No, '30 million' — a round figure, a three followed by seven zeros. I should have known such a nice round number is not possible. And 10,000 aromas? What use is that? Can you even name 40 aromas?! Try and do it that right now... Don't worry; I can't, either. Our noses make me laugh.

By the way, even the Creator must not have believed in our noses. He gave us two eyes, two ears, two hands... you name it. Two of everything. But noses? Just one. And the nose is something that is often in the way. If it's not sneezing, it's blocked. Rubbish.

Belgium, a tiny country, has 30 clinics specialising in rhinoplasty. Not surprising. The ancient Sanskrit book *Sushruta Samhita* already described rhinoplasty in 600 B.C., which says it all. And then there's this: if our nose is so important for enjoying whisky, why don't I know of any whisky that glorifies the human nose in its name?

ONLY MAYBE... PIG'S NOSE

Pig's Nose is a Scottish blend, five years old, 60% grain alcohol from Invergordon and 40% malt from Speyside, Islay and the Lowlands, well blended and matured in first-fill ex-bourbon casks.

The blend has been around since 1977 and (along with the blended malt Sheep Dip) changed hands a few times until it finally fell to Ian Macleod.

The bottle still features a pig triumphantly sticking its nose up. 'As smooth and soft as a pig's nose' is written in large letters. You see, that makes me angry again. As if the pig's nose is only smooth and soft. Their nose is, damn it, better than ours.

In their book *The Ubiquitous Pig*, Marilyn Nissenson and Susan Jonas stand up for the cute little rascals (what a lot of reading one has to do to write a scientifically based whisky book!): 'After the dog, the pig is the most kept pet in the world. It is intelligent, loyal,

obedient, clean and sweet. Like man, they chew their food only once, but unlike man, the pig never overeats. They are gourmets, thanks to their highly developed sense of smell. In a study in the U.K., scientists served 200 different vegetables and plants to some hungry pigs. Just by smelling, the pigs refused 117 of them.'

Now that's quite something, isn't it?

Does this detract in any way from enjoying a 'wee dram' of Pig's Nose? Not at all. I like Pig's Nose.

But one thing is crystal clear: stop sniffing your whisky glass. It's not only ridiculous; it's also wholly useless... what our nose extracts is nothing special.

But don't worry: as always, I have a solution that promises to amaze you.

THE AUSTRALIAN NOS.E

At the University of Technology in Sydney (UTS) in Australia, a surprising electronic device was developed in 2019 and first described in the scientific journal *IEEE Sensors Letters*: the NOS.E.

It was first demonstrated in 2020 at CeBIT Australia, a fair to promote current and future technologies. The device contains eight gas sensors that mimic the human olfactory system but greatly surpass its sensitivity. You throw a wee dram in the NOS.E, and a series of algorithms and artificial intelligence spring into action in no time. Endless tables are consulted, and then the NOS.E instantly tells you everything there is to know about the whisky.

What's more, you know immediately with almost 100% certainty where that whisky comes from, with 96.15% certainty how old it is, with 92.31% certainty what type of whisky it is (blended, single, etc.). It also tells you in detail what you smell and taste.

A test with Johnnie Walker Red and Black Label, Macallan and Ardbeg yielded similar results. NOS.E even found a bottle where the contents did not match the label on the bottle. Moreover, compared to other research methods, NOS.E is faster and cheaper.

When reading all this, you might laugh pityingly. Still, I can assure you that *Smithsonian* magazine devoted an article to NOS.E. And this magazine is published by the Smithsonian Institution, a research centre of the American government, which runs, among other things, 19 museums. These guys don't mess around.

Admit it — this is liberating news. You sacrifice a few drops of your expensively paid dram, and you no longer have to sniff and swirl it. All the whisky's secrets are revealed. Maybe it will even spell the end of those wretched tasting notes in whisky books. Or maybe this is wishful thinking on my part...

SORRY, HOLD ON...

My wife Yvette has just brought me, as she always does at this hour, a coffee and a Highland Park. At the same time, she reads the last lines on my screen (I write in 24 font size, which means she can read from afar). She casts a glance at the many notes carelessly strewn across my desk and on the floor.

On leaving, she says: 'Honey, did you notice when that article appeared in *Smithsonian*? Does that date mean nothing to you?'

Only women can pick out the most essential information at a glance from a sea of scattered notes.

Let's see... '1 April 2020' it says. And that date should mean something to me. Have I forgotten our wedding day? No, that's somewhere in the autumn; I remember it well. Her birthday... not it either, that's 11 October. Mother's Day, perhaps? But that's in May. 1 April... oh, no... an April fool's joke?

A joke in the *Smithsonian* magazine? There are no laughs at the Smithsonian. To work there, someone once told me, you first must go to a desert in Nevada or Arizona for six months for a de-laughing cure. Anyway... sorry for the interruption.

Where were we? NOS.E... no, that was finished.

Pig's Nose, yes... that was it... Pig's Nose.

RICHARD PATERSON'S PIG'S NOSE

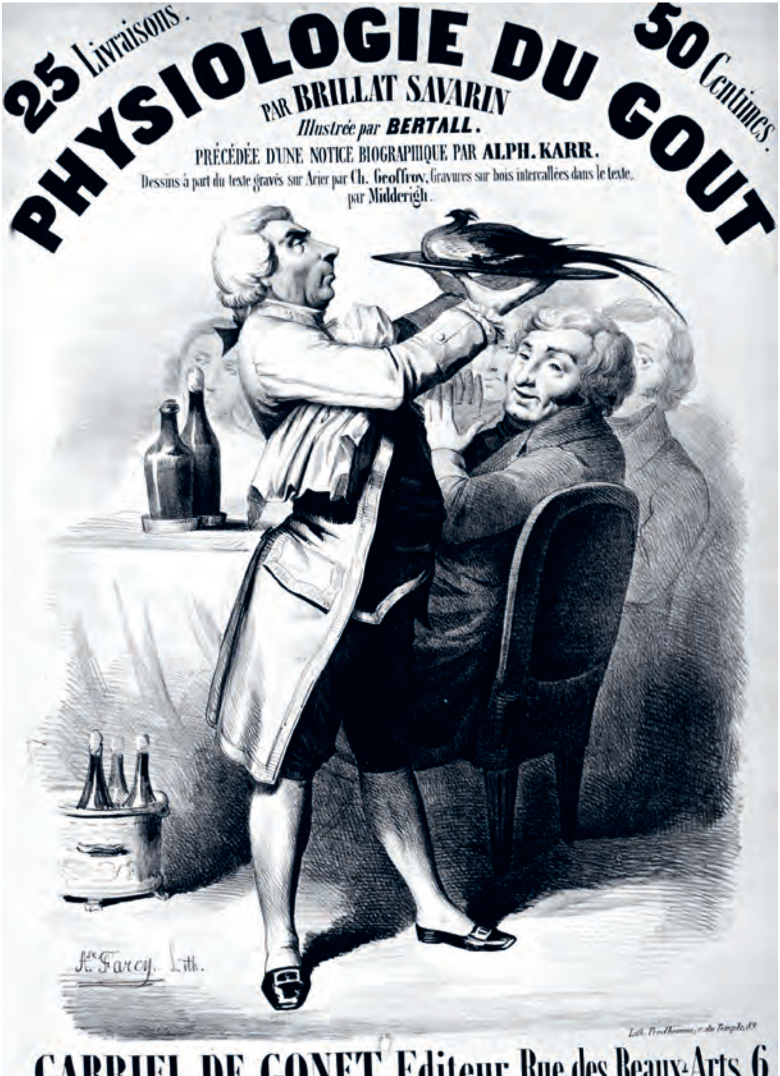
Pig's Nose was initially bottled in 1977 as a four-year-old blend in a pub in Oldbury-on-Severn, a small town near Bath in the U.K. There's only one pub in the town now, The Anchor Inn, so it could well be that Pig's Nose originated there. Years later, Pig's Nose was sold to Invergordon Distillers, which became part of Whyte & Mackay in 1993. The master blender at Whyte & Mackay is still Richard Paterson, nicknamed 'The Nose'. So, the real Pig's Nose is an exceptional blend put together by 'The Nose'. I should have written 'Richard Paterson O.B.E.' because he recently became an 'Officer of the Order of the British Empire'. And that was purely because of his exceptional sense of smell. Richard inherited that nose from his father (who was also a master blender) and from his grandfather before him, who set up his own blending company in 1933. He is also the man behind Fettercairn and Dalmore, among others. A few years ago, he took out a £2.5 million insurance policy with Lloyd's of London to secure his precious nose. Richard dissects each whisky down to its bare essentials just by sniffing. A trained human nose is a wonderful instrument.

Attending a master class by Richard is, therefore, an unforgettable experience. He always throws away his first whisky; that was one for his glass. The second he always politely addresses with 'Hello, who are you?' And that's the beginning of his masterly demonstration of 'smelling'.

He probably got that 'Hello, who are you?' from another master of the nose: Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin. In his *The Essence of Taste*, the French gastronome writes: 'Our nose is the sentinel of taste, constantly calling out "Who is there?" Without the participation of our sense of smell, no real experience of taste is possible; I am even tempted to think that taste and smell form a single sense, the mouth being the laboratory and the nose the chimney.'

I could not have put it better. A little further on, he writes: 'Among the many writers I have consulted, I do not find one who gives the olfactory organ the honour it deserves.'

The good man died in 1826; he would have been pleased with my plea for the nose.


25 Livraisons.
PHYSIOLOGIE DU GOUT
50 Centimes.
PAR BRILLAT SAVARIN
Illustrée par BERTALL.
PRÉCÉDÉE D'UNE NOTICE BIOGRAPHIQUE PAR ALPH. KARR.
Dessins à part du texte gravés sur Acier par Ch. Geoffroy, Gravures sur bois intercallées dans le texte,
par Midderigh.
A. Farcy. Lith.
GABRIEL DE GONET, Editeur, Rue des Beaux-Arts, 6

London, seventeenth century

02 WHISKY OR AMBROSIA

On the eve of 14 July, 1618, John Taylor, better known as the 'Water Poet', closed the door of the Bell Inn pub near Aldersgate on the north side of London, mounted his horse, and set off 'with the wind from the south' for a three-month tour of England and Scotland.

No mean feat in 1618! The roads were somewhat unpredictable once away from London. And in Scotland, they were virtually non-existent. He was accompanied by a few patrons and knew a few people along the way. And that was just as well, for he left without a single penny in his pocket: 'neither Begging, Borrowing, or Asking Meate, drinke or Lodging'. He recorded his experiences in his diary, 'The Penniless Pilgrimage'.

It was not his first exploit. He earned his living by running a ferry service on the Thames, hence his pseudonym: 'The Kings Majesties Water Poet'. He got the idea of sailing down the

Thames from London to Sheppey in Kent (about 65 kilometres) in a paper boat. He recorded the result in a moving poem:

...The water still rose higher by degrees,
In three miles going, almost to our knees.
Our rotten bottom all to tatters fell,
And left our boat as bottomless as hell.

His pilgrimage, fortunately, ended better, even though his horse was 'neither stallion nor mare, but a castrated sluggard'. But what interests us most is what he took with him on his road. He lists it in verse, but it comes down to this: lots of rusks, cheeses with fruit, salted bacon, beef tongue, oil and vinegar. He did not have a high opinion of Scottish cuisine because he also carried a lot of mithridate, a mythical medicine containing 65 ingredients

that provided proper protection against poisoning. And to complete his 'indispensable' luggage: plenty of aqua vitae, whisky, which he describes in one fell swoop as 'that sweet Ambrosial Nectar, the potion of the gods'.

What a compliment! 'Ambrosia' with a capital A. Penelope took Ambrosia before she appeared before her admirers for the last time. Homer wrote: 'All traces of age had disappeared, and her admirers were inflamed with passion at the sight of her beauty'. They all blushed because Penelope is still praised for her virtue and loyalty to her husband Odysseus (the creator of the Trojan horse). If anyone got nasty, she would bite their hands and, if we are to believe Homer, several Greeks lost their fingers.

'Whisky as Ambrosia.' It's excellent to hear that from an Englishman. But then the question also arises: why would an Englishman take 'enough whisky' to Scotland?

ENGLAND AND WHISKY DON'T MIX

There was much drinking in England and Scotland in the seventeenth century. In Scotland, it was often limited to beer, sack (the Spanish fortified wine, the forerunner of sherry), white wine and claret, a red wine from Bordeaux. Whisky was usually only consumed on festive occasions, especially funerals. And particularly in the Scottish Lowlands and the islands, where they dragged all the spare grain — barley, oats, wheat — to their (illegal) distilleries. Even our 'Penniless Traveller' John Taylor reports that he could quietly enjoy 'plenty' of whisky at a funeral.

Taking aqua vitae with him was an excellent idea. Even the English who travelled with him were happy with this supply. At home, they stuck mainly to ale, beer and wine. According to some sober historians, the Norman William the Conqueror defeated the English at Hastings in 1066 mainly because a large number of the English fighters were drunk. Six hundred years later, things had not improved.

However, a new 'poison' slowly crept into England in the sixteenth century: gin. The English drank it pure or mixed with beer. Morality preachers spoke with disgust of a 'new kind of drunkenness' that would destroy society. To their great dismay, they also saw how the English Parliament (which urgently needed money to wage war against the French) reduced the taxes and restrictions on gin production in the city of London. The demand for gin in London increased enormously. And so too did the population. Drinking migrants continued to pour in. By 1700, London had 600,000 inhabitants, meaning it had tripled in just under a century. One in six English people lived in the capital. Due to alcohol abuse and poor hygiene, the mortality rate was correspondingly high: one in five babies did not reach their second birthday.

THE DEVIL FROM THE LOW COUNTRIES

Gin was a gift from the devil. And the English knew only too well who that 'devil' was: the inhabitants of the Low Countries, Flemish and Dutch, whom the English referred to as just the 'Dutch'. Thomas Nashe, an Elizabethan poet and satirist, was one of the first to put his dislike on paper. In his 1592 pamphlet 'Pierce Penilesse his Supplication to the Devil', he wrote, after pointing out our 'gluttony of the flesh': 'Let us now descend to their superfluity in drink, a sin which, since we have mingled with the Low Countries, is now deemed honourable here also. Still, before we knew it, their lingering war was waged with the highest degree of hatred there could be.'

And he was not the only one. People from all corners of the kingdom were pointing to the Dutch. How did they know? In the sixteenth century, many British came to the Low Countries to work as mercenaries, and in time, whole troops of soldiers came over and settled. In the middle of the seventeenth century, things went wrong between the English and the 'Dutch', resulting in a real two-year war, which was a battle fought mainly at sea. The English learned 'Dutch Courage' in all these encounters: heroism through booze.

THE PENNYLES PILGRIMAGE,

OR

The Money-leffe perambulation,

of IOHN TAYLOR, *Alias*
the Kings Majesties
Water-Poet.

HOW HE TRAVAILED ON FOOT from *London* to *Edenborough* in *Scotland*, not carrying any Money to or fro, neither Begging, Borrowing, or Asking Meate, drinke or Lodging.

With his Description of his Entertainment in all places of his Iourney, and a true Report of the vnmatchable Hunting in the *Brea* of *Marre* and *Badenoch* in *Scotland.*

With other Obſeruations, ſome ſerious and worthy of Memory, and ſome merry and not hurtfull to be Remembred.

Lastly that (which is Rare in a Trauailer) all is true.

LONDON
Printed by *Edw: Allde*, at the charges of the Author. 1618

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Fernand Dacquin
Ghent, October 2022

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If you have observations or questions, please contact our editorial office: redactielifestyle@lannoo.com

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