

FROM MAMPOER TO UISGE BEATHA



AN INTRODUCTION TO SOUTH AFRICAN WHISKY

JEAN BODART



CONTENT

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

p 4



BOPLAAS

p 9



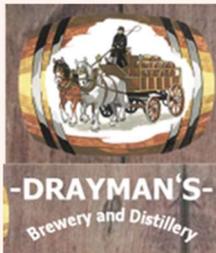
COPPER REPUBLIC

p 16



DONA

p 20



DRAYMAN'S

p 26



HELDEN

p 33



INCENDO

p 39



JAMES SEDGWICK

p 45



PIENAAR & SON

p 59



QUALITO

p 65



STILL-OAKY

p 72

**FUTURE
WHISKY
PRODUCERS**

p 77

FOREWORD

In the sunbaked lands of South Africa, where ancient traditions intertwine with modern innovation, a remarkable journey unfolds - from the fiery mampoer of their forebears to the refined whisky they proudly call their own. This booklet, "*From Mampoer to Uisge Beatha*" charts the fascinating evolution of South African spirits, a tale as rich and complex as the land itself.

Our story begins with mampoer, that potent fruit-based liquor born in the earliest days of settlement. As Voortrekkers ventured into uncharted territories, they distilled this powerful spirit, laying the foundation for a uniquely South African drinking culture. From these humble beginnings, South African distillers have crafted a legacy that now stands tall on the world stage.

The transformation from **mampoer** to **uisge beatha** (*water of life = whisky*) mirrors South Africa's own journey. As the nation evolved, so too did their approach to spirits. The 1990s saw a seismic shift in South African whisky culture, with the drink becoming more aspirational and its audience more diverse. Their distillers rose to this challenge, harnessing the bounty of their land to create whiskies that speak of their origin.

South African whisky makers have embraced their rich biodiversity, turning to indigenous ingredients to craft spirits unlike any other. Maize, a staple of their agriculture, forms the backbone of their distinctive single grain whiskies. Sorghum, an ancient African grain, adds depth and character. But their innovation doesn't stop there. From the iconic Rooibos to the diverse Fynbos kingdom, from the aromatic Buchu to the gnarly Camel Thorn Tree, each plant lends its unique signature to their whiskies.

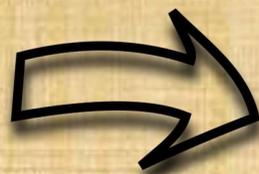
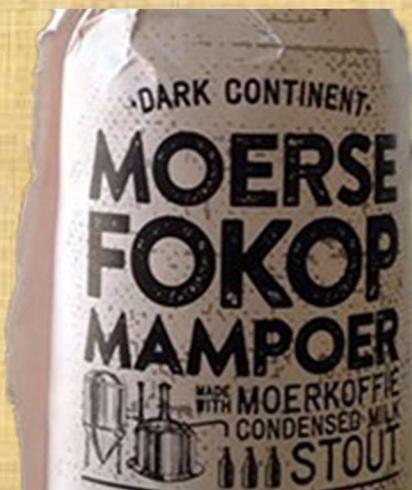
This book celebrates the ingenuity of South African distillers who have married traditional techniques with local ingredients. It tells of how they've adapted to their unique climate, using the warm African sun to accelerate maturation and infuse their whiskies with flavours reminiscent of the bushveld.

As you turn these pages, you'll discover how South African whisky has become more than just a drink - it's a testament to their nation's spirit of innovation, a celebration of their natural heritage, and a symbol of their place in the global whisky community. From the early days of illicit stills to the world-class distilleries of today, this is the story of South African whisky - a spirit as diverse, resilient, and captivating as the land from which it springs.

Welcome to the world of South African whisky, where every sip tells a story of the land, the people, and their passion for crafting truly exceptional spirits.

Les Chevaliers du Malt

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT



FROM THE TIP
OF AFRICA
TO THE TOP
OF THE WORLD.

Bain's Cape Mountain Whisky.
Awarded 2018 World's Best
Grain Whisky.



SINGLE VISION
DOUBLE MATURED
PERFECTLY BALANCED



The history of whisky in South Africa is a tale of pioneering spirit and innovation, spanning over a century. The story begins in the late 19th century and continues to evolve today.

EARLY BEGINNINGS

The first record of distillation in South Africa was in 1672, although this was for the distillation of brandy. **A. H. Nellmapius** built the first distillery on the farm Hetherley, east of Pretoria. This distillery produced gin and whisky. In 1881 he negotiated a concession with the Transvaal Government giving him the sole right to distill alcoholic liquor from corn and other sources. The distillery was named: “**De Eerste Fabrieken**”. The distillery was opened by President Paul Kruger on June 6th 1883. Nellmapius died in 1893, and the concession was taken over by Sammy Marks and his cousin Isaac Lewis.

In 1897, in an attempt to improve the quality of the product, they advertised in European papers for an “experienced distiller”. The advert was seen by a 33-year old man, **René Santhagens**, who was working as a distiller in Cognac. René Santhagens was a great success making whisky from grain. There was no time for maturation, as all the mining community wanted was strong liquor.

The outbreak of the Anglo Boer War in 1899 brought an end to the production of liquor. At the end of the war the British cancelled the concession. The Santhagens returned briefly to Europe. On their return they settled in the Cape and started distilling brandy⁸.

Further South in the Cape Province, **Captain James Sedgwick** established in 1886 what would become the oldest distillery on the African continent. Located in Wellington, about 45 minutes from Cape Town, the James Sedgwick Distillery was initially set up to produce local wines and spirits, as well as import whisky and other fortified drinks.

MODERN ERA

It took until 1952 before the next commercially launched whisky came onto the market under the name Tops. The **Tops Distillery** (named after Mr A W Tops) was situated at Wemmershoek (Paarl) in the Cape and experienced some short lived success. However, excise duties over 200% higher than that on brandy, soon pushed the operation into insolvency.



In the Mid 60's, **Donald Robertson & Noel Buxton** built a small relatively modern distillery on the farm Groote Zalze in the Lynedoch district outside Stellenbosch. This distillery was called the **R & B Distillery**.

In 1972 the Stellenbosch Farmers Winery (SFW) group bought this distillery for experimental purposes. This ensured the continued production of whisky in South Africa and, on November 21, 1977, Three Ships blended whisky was launched by Irish marketing expert Francis Naughton. Initially, the Three Ships was a blend of South African grain spirit and Scotch malt whisky.



In 1981, when the South African grain had matured for three years, the Three Ships blend could then classify as a fully-fledged whisky. The small R & B Distillery could not handle the increased production and the operations were moved to the James Sedgwick Distillery in 1990. The James Sedgwick Distillery underwent a substantial expansion project in 2009/10 to further meet the increasing demand for whisky in South Africa.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The South African whisky industry has gained international recognition in recent years:

- In 2012, Three Ships 5-Year-Old blended whisky won "World's Best Blended Whisky" at the World Whisky Awards.
- In 2013, Bain's Cape Mountain Whisky, the first single grain whisky produced in South Africa, won "Best Grain Whisky" at the World Whisky Award.
- The Three Ships Single Malt 10-year-old received a gold outstanding distinction at the International Wine & Spirit Competition 2015.

In 2001, Stellenbosch Farmers Winery (SFW) merged with Distillers Corporation to form the Distell group. In April 2013 Distell bought the Scotch whisky company Burn Stewart Distillers. In 2023, Heineken acquired the Distell group to become the market-leading alcoholic beverage supplier in South Africa.

Craft Whisky Movement

A craft whisky movement has emerged in South Africa, with distilleries like **Helden Distillery** (founded in 2018) pioneering "African Style Whisky". This style incorporates indigenous African grains, local wood for maturation, and is distilled and matured on African soil.

Challenges and Regulations

The South African whisky industry faces challenges due to stringent regulations:

- The Liquor Products Act mandates a minimum three-year aging period in wooden casks for whisky production.
- These regulations impact the pace at which craft distilleries can introduce their products to the market.

Despite these challenges, South African whisky continues to distinguish itself through its focus on local ingredients, innovative aging processes, and unique production techniques.

To date, about a dozen distilleries are producing whisky in South Africa, and the number is growing every year:

- BOPLAAS DISTILLERY
- COPPER REPUBLIC DISTILLERY
- DONA DISTILLERY
- DRAYMANS DISTILLERY
- INCENDO DISTILLERY
- JAMES SEDWICK DISTILLERY
- PIENAAR & SON DISTILLERY
- QUALITO DISTILLERY
- STILL-OAKY DISTILLERY

Each distillery is covered in detail in the following sections.

The last section lists some potential future whisky producers.

THE NEL FAMILY
SINCE 1880
— CALITZDORP —

BOPLAAS



BOPLAAS DISTILLERY



Boplaas is a family-owned winery and distillery located in Calitzdorp, a small town in the Little Karoo region of South Africa's Western Cape province. Established in 1880, Boplaas has been run by the Nel family for six generations. The distillery's history dates back to 1880 when they first exported potstill brandy to London. Their copper potstill lay dormant for almost 70 years after the repeal of distilling licenses in the 1920s, until it was reactivated in 1989.

Location: Boplaas Family Vineyards & Distilling
Saayman street 2, Calitzdorp, 6660

Contact: +27 44 213 3326 - info@boplaas.co.za

Website: <https://boplaas.co.za>

THE PEOPLE



Carel Nel: Owner and cellar master,
Cape Wine Master

Rozanne Nel: Heads up Marketing

Margaux Nel: Winemaker

Daniel Nel: Distiller and Marketer

THE DISTILLERY

Boplaas Distillery's production process combines traditional and modern techniques to create their distinctive whiskies:

- **Raw Materials:** Uses South African yellow maize for whisky production. Selects Colombar grapes for brandy.
- **Fermentation:** Emphasizes hygienic conditions to ensure quality. Focuses on creating a clean fermented base for distillation.
- **Distillation:** Employs a "low and slow" approach for better control. Uses an old copper pot still, reactivated in 1989. Gradually increases temperature to make accurate cuts. Aims to concentrate flavours while removing impurities
- **Maturation:** Ages whisky in various barrel types: Ex-bourbon American oak barrels (primary aging), French oak casks (for finishing), Brandy maturation barrels (for finishing), Tawny port barrels (for finishing some expressions), Minimum aging of 5 years for their whiskies. Takes advantage of the Klein Karoo region's climate for unique maturation conditions
- **Finishing:** Experiments with different barrel types for interesting finishes. Uses brandy casks to impart distinctive flavours to their single grain whisky.
- **Bottling:** Non-chill filtered to preserve natural flavours and textures, Maintains natural colour, Some expressions are bottled at higher strengths (e.g., 46% or 58% ABV)

Boplaas Distillery's approach emphasizes quality ingredients, patient distillation, and creative maturation techniques to produce their range of unique South African whiskies.

THE WHISKIES

Boplaas produces a range of spirits, including Potstill Brandy, Port-style wines and Whisky.

Unique Characteristics

Boplaas Single Grain Whisky has several unique characteristics that set it apart from other single grain whiskies:

- **Brandy cask finish:** Boplaas ages their single grain whisky in old bourbon casks and then finishes it in old brandy maturation barrels, imparting distinctive flavours.
- **South African yellow maize:** The distillery uses locally sourced South African yellow maize as the base grain, contributing to its unique flavour profile.
- **Port cask influence:** Boplaas, known for its port-style wines, also uses French and American oak barrels previously used for port to age some of their whiskies, adding complexity.
- **Non-chill filtered:** The whisky is non-chill filtered, preserving more of its natural flavours and textures.
- **Natural colour:** Boplaas maintains the whisky's natural colour, avoiding artificial colouring.
- **Terroir influence:** Being produced in the Little Karoo region of South Africa, the whisky benefits from unique climatic conditions during maturation.

These factors combine to create a single grain whisky with a distinctive taste profile, featuring notes of caramel, vanilla, Christmas spices, buttery toast, and dried fruit, offering a smooth and luxurious palate experience.

Boplaas Single Malt Whisky is unique compared to other single malt whiskies due to several distinctive features:

- **Peated Malt:** The whisky is distilled from imported Scottish peated malt, which adds a subtle smokiness to its flavour profile, distinguishing it from many other single malts that may not use peated malt.
- **Port Cask Finish:** After initial aging in third and fourth-fill ex-bourbon barrels for five years, the whisky is finished in Boplaas Cape Vintage Port barrels for an additional 18 months. This finishing process imparts unique sweet and fruity notes, including hints of white peach and citrus, enhancing the complexity of the whisky.
- **Limited Edition:** The Springbok Edition of the Boplaas Single Malt Whisky is a limited release, with only 300 bottles produced. Each

bottle is individually numbered and signed by Daniel Nel, adding exclusivity and collectible value.

- **Non-Chill Filtered:** The whisky is non-chill filtered, preserving its natural flavours and textures, which can be lost during the chill filtration process used by many other distilleries.
- **Distinctive Aroma and Flavour Profile:** The whisky presents an inviting aroma of sweet peat-smoke balanced by fruitiness, with a palate enriched by dried and candied fruits. The finish is smooth and elegant with oak spiciness, offering a complex and satisfying taste experience.

These elements combine to create a single malt whisky that reflects both traditional Scottish influences and unique South African characteristics, making it stand out in the global whisky market.

Whisky Selection

Boplaas produces several distinctive whiskies:

- **Boplaas Single Grain Whisky**
(Brandy Cask Finish)

- Aged in old bourbon casks
- Finished in brandy maturation barrels
- 43% ABV
- Awarded gold at the Michelangelo International Wine & Spirits Awards 2018



- **Boplaas 6 Year Single Grain Whisky**
(Tawny Port Cask finish)

- Aged in old bourbon casks
- Finished in tawny port cask maturation barrels
- 43% ABV
- Also available as a Single Cask version at 58% ABV



- **Boplaas 8 Year Single Grain Whisky**
(Tawny Port Cask finish)
 - Aged in old bourbon casks
 - Finished in tawny port cask maturation barrels
 - 43% ABV
 - Also available as a Single Cask version at 58% ABV



- **Boplaas 8 Year Single Grain Whisky**
(Virgin Oak finish)
 - Aged 6 years in second fill bourbon casks
 - Finished 2 years in new American oak bourbon casks
 - 46% ABV



- **Boplaas Single Malt Whisky - 8 YO Single Cask**
(Tawny Port)
 - Aged for 5 years in ex-bourbon barrels, then finished for 3 years in a Boplaas Cape Tawny Port barrel
 - 46% ABV
 - Non-chill filtered and natural colour
 - Limited to 500 bottles, each numbered and signed by Daniel Nel



VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Boplaas offers tasting rooms in multiple locations:

- **Calitzdorp (Main Location):**
 - Wine and spirit tastings
 - Artisanal cheese and charcuterie platters
 - Wine, whisky, and brandy pairings
 - Deli products