Constructing a Flavor Chart and Taxonomy of Single Malt Whiskies

Dr. David Wishart
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Talk: Tuesday, December 7th
1:00-2:15pm, Science Center 309
(Whisky Tasting to Follow)

David Wishart debunks the conventional classification of single malt Scotch whiskies by region, and instead proposes a typology based on flavor. In his lecture, David recalls the history and romance of Scotch whisky and argues that the place a whisky is made does not describe its flavor. Today, the flavor of malt whisky is more diverse than ever, due to the influence of variable peating, precision distillation, oak cask preparation, extended maturation, blending and special finishing.

With sensory analysis and profiling he uses statistical classification to categorize single malt whiskies on 12 cardinal flavors using cluster analysis, and constructs a flavor chart by principal component analysis. A flavor spectrum is obtained by serialization of the resulting dissimilarity matrix, and nearest neighbors identifies the closest flavor match for each brand. His unique statistical classification of single malt whiskies by flavor is now fully endorsed by the Scotch Whisky industry.

David Wishart has been an Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Social Sciences and the School of Management since 1998. He held previous research and management posts in higher education and the civil service.

After graduating at St Andrews with a PhD on Numerical Taxonomy in 1970 he held a post-doctoral research fellowship at the Department of Statistics, University College London. He has been a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society since 1973, and served as Vice President 1986-89. For his work on the Scotch Whisky Industry, David was admitted to the Keepers of the Quaich in 2006, a society founded by the leading Scotch whisky distillers to honour those who have made a significant contribution to Scotch whisky.