

Tales of distillery hijinks add to charm of nosing

From page B1

Bowmore and its staggering price tag of \$10,987.

While McEwan has hosted many a nosing, they aren't about order forms and cheque books; they are his chance to do what he does best — play educator.

"The first distilleries were created by the Egyptians, but the knowledge of the single malt scotch is still pretty lean. I'm just trying to erase that problem," he explains.

"I was lucky, since I had very good teachers who gave me a good sense of values about good whiskey making. A lot has rubbed off on me — and not just in whiskey, but in life, too."

McEwan stresses there is no reason why more folks can't learn the basics of single malts and the means to identify various characteristics.

At a typical nosing, five excellent labels of scotch — ranging in age from three to 21 years — are offered

to willing hobbyists.

The master explains it starts with the nose and ends with the tongue. "Ladies have a better sense of smell and that's why they buy such expensive perfume," he says. "And the tongue is like a super computer run by 10,000 little cells."

He talks of colour and the body that can be felt by running it against the sides of a glass. Its weight is measured in five-second intervals on the tongue, where recognition of a young scotch is realized by the hot and spicy heat it generates inside the mouth.

Adding several drops of water brings out hidden aromas, before the task is culminated with the finish — the length of time the taste lasts on the palette.

"Nursing whiskey is not like nursing wine. It takes a single malt at least 30 minutes to open up. You have to come in from the side, one inch below your nostrils."

Born in Bowmore on the island of

Islay in 1948, McEwan learned every job at the distillery, beginning as a 15-year-old apprentice to Cooper Davey Bell. After a stretch in Glasgow as a blender, he returned to Bowmore as its manager.

Yet his best talents are saved for regaling a crowd with tales of co-workers' and legendary drinking feats. Such as the tale of the distillery's security system — comprised of Smokey the cat — or the tidbit that a traditional Scottish toast ends with one foot on a chair and the other on top of a table.

Best of all is a story of a teenaged McEwan and his buddies, smuggling whiskey in bottles tucked under their belts past the warehouse guard.

"A weekend without whiskey was considered a fate worse than death and when Angus forgot his bottle, we filled his old rubber boot up to his knee with whiskey," he recalls.

"And all he had to do was walk 500 metres to the front door. Well, Angus already had a bad hip, but he put the

pain on his face and was dragging his leg when the custom officer looked at him funny and asked if a wee dram of scotch might help his plight.

"We were watching him and hoping he'd just keep moving, but Angus stopped and drank it up before walking out. He became a natural hero after that and it became known as the Night of the Wellington Boot."

McEwan often invites visitors to Scotland to stop by for a personal tour of the distillery.

If the ambassador's in town he'll be easy to spot — McEwan's the one wearing a white shirt and tie, turning barley by hand in the middle of the malting floor.



DAVE MCCHESNEY COMPARES LEGS

Varley: War Artist

Varley documents the human drama of the First World War.



Sharon Gaum-Kuchar and Bill Withrow host the Honourable Barney Danson.

The Frederick Horsman Varley Art Gallery of Markham is exhibiting **Varley: War Artist**. The exhibit honours Canada's contribution to the war efforts of the First and Second World Wars. The works are on loan from the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa and the exhibition will continue until January 16, 2000.

This exhibition of rarely-seen landscapes and military portraits by F.H. Varley, one of Canada's most gifted portrait artists and a founding member of the Group of Seven, documents the ravages of military combat during Varley's commission as Honorary Captain in the First World War. These hidden treasures of art, borrowed from the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, pay tribute to our country's contribution to the war effort at the dawn of a new millennium, says Gallery Director/Curator Sharon Gaum-Kuchar. Varley's interpretation of the turbulent human drama he witnessed established him as an icon of Canadian art.

In conjunction with the exhibition the Gallery will host a series of special programs as follows:

- **Thursday Evening Film Screenings:** Until January 13
- **Sunday Poetry Readings:** Until January 16
- **Guided and Self-Guided School Group Tours and Studio Activities** relating to the **Varley: War Artist** exhibition are also available. The **Varley: War Artist** is generously sponsored by De Boer's.

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