

Keepers of the



Scotch whisky's most prestigious society launched its American chapter with a bang

BY SUSANNAH SKIVER BARTON
PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIM RYAN SMITH

Quaich

NEW YORK CITY — On September 25th, the biggest leaders in Scotch whisky came together to toast the start of an exciting new chapter. The Keepers of the Quaich, an industry group that celebrates individuals who promote and support scotch worldwide, opened its new USA chapter with a banquet ceremony at Gotham Hall attended by 175 people.

The biggest producers of Scotch whisky were all represented, with companies like Diageo (Johnnie Walker), Pernod Ricard (Aberlour), William Grant & Sons (Glenfiddich), Beam Suntory (Laphroaig), Bacardi (Dewar's), and many others pouring some of their finest whiskies during a cocktail hour. A series of toasts punctuated the formal dinner, which included remarks from British consul general and HM trade commissioner for North

Bagpipers (top) opened the gala; Jonathan Yusen of William Grant & Sons (above) addressed the crowd. Many toasts (opposite) were made.





Tracie Franklin of Glenfiddich cut the haggis.

Stomach This

Haggis is the national dish of Scotland, famously immortalized by Scottish poet Robert Burns in his 1787 poem *Address to a Haggis*. The dish includes sheep offal, which is thickened with oatmeal and flavored with onion, fat, and peppery spices. The mixture was traditionally cooked inside sheep stomach, although the casing is often artificial today.

Haggis is always the focal point of a Burns Night Supper (celebrated on his birthday, January 25). It's generally accompanied with "neeps and tatties" (rutabaga and potatoes) and, of course, whisky, both sipped alongside and often poured directly over the haggis. An avid admirer of the dish, in his *Address*, Burns memorably declares haggis the "Great Chieftain o' the Puddin'-race!"

FIND IT Scottish haggis is not exported to the U.S.; however, you can find domestic versions at scottishhaggis.com and scottishgourmetusa.com.



The Duke of Argyll (center), a patron of the Keepers, hosted the head table at the event.



From left: Dan Houghton, Steve Gibb, and Caitlin Warbelow played traditional Scottish music.

America Antony Phillipson and Torquhil Campbell, the Duke of Argyll, a spirited recitation of Robert Burns's *Address to a Haggis*, and plenty of bagpipes and traditional Scottish music.

Marvin R. Shanken, editor and publisher of *Whisky Advocate*, was inducted into the Keepers of the Quaich in its inaugural ceremony in 1988 and served as a member of the event's steering committee. "The entry of Keepers of the Quaich into the U.S. is a major step for the scotch industry and great news for whisky lovers everywhere," he said. "As one of the first members inducted and the publisher of the world's leading whisky magazine, I am proud to represent this prestigious organization."

The Oscars of Scotch

"Being a Keeper is a bit like being awarded an Oscar," says Peter Prentice, the society's chairman and global VIP relationships director at Chivas Brothers. "The Keepers give us the

opportunity to showcase the very best of Scotland and Scotch whisky in a way that reflects the leadership position that Scotch whisky has in the world." The society's stated mission is "to recognize the outstanding commitment of those who produce or promote the world's finest spirit."

Pointing to the collegiality across competing companies promoted by the society, Prentice compares it to creating a blended scotch. "When the whisky industry really took off in the mid-1800s, [it] rapidly learned that by blending whiskies together, you could make them a lot more palatable and pleasant—that whole expression of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts, and the art of blending and so forth," he says. "We rely on each other in a symbiotic relationship in many ways."

The Keepers of the Quaich was founded in 1988 by United Distillers, Allied Distillers, Justerini & Brooks Ltd., The Highland Distilleries Co., and Robertson & Baxter. (Mergers and



Glenmorangie brand ambassador David Blackmore led a rousing toast with Glenmorangie Signet.



More than 175 guests attended the inaugural gala for Keepers of the Quaich's USA chapter.



What Is a Quaich?

While most whisky drinkers today imbibe from a glass, hundreds of years ago, the Scots used a shallow, two-handled vessel called a quaich (in Scots Gaelic, "cuach" or cup). Some believe the unusual form is derived from the early practice of sipping a dram from a scallop shell. Early quaichs were carved from a single piece of wood, and today, most are cast in metal, usually pewter or silver.

The quaich's two-handled design is often touted as a symbol of fellowship and trust. A person can only drink from it using both hands, meaning that, in the old days, the drinker couldn't keep a hand on their sword or dagger—they had to trust that no one around them intended any harm. Fortunately, the Keepers of the Quaich's membership has no such worries, but continues the tradition in the name of camaraderie and goodwill.

Say it like a Scot

Roughly pronounced *kwayk*, try making the final consonant sound deeper in the throat, more like "loch."



MIX THIS DRINK

Teacher's Pet

Ceremony welcome cocktail

1/2 oz. Teacher's Highland Cream
blended scotch
3/4 oz. Funkin passion fruit purée
1/4 oz. simple syrup
3/4 oz. fresh lime juice
soda water
1 lemon wheel or mint sprig

Combine scotch, fruit purée, simple syrup, and lime juice over ice and shake. Strain into a rocks glass filled with fresh ice. Top with soda water and garnish with lemon wheel or mint sprig.



Marvin Shanken (center) of M. Shanken Communications with Stephen Rust and Ewan Morgan of Diageo.



Aberlour brand director Andy Weir recited Robert Burns's *Address to a Haggis* with enthusiasm.

industry changes over the years mean that, today, the founding partners are listed as Chivas Brothers, Diageo, Edrington, George Ballantine & Son, and Justerini & Brooks.) The society inducts 90 new members—and promotes ten existing members to the status Master of the Quaich—biannually in ceremonies held in spring and fall at Blair Castle in Scotland. The stately residence is the seat of the Duke of Atholl, the chief of Clan Murray and a patron of the Keepers who commands Britain's only private regiment, the Atholl Highlanders. These kilted infantrymen serve as the honor guard, greeting guests with bagpipes.

While details of the ceremony are kept secret, it does involve the use of a ceremonial quaich measuring 24 inches across and engraved with barley designs, and inductees are required to swear an oath. Scottish symbolism and heritage play a large role; the society has its own tartan, as well as a special coat of arms, shield, and crest. Its motto is "Uisgebeatha Gu Brath," Scots Gaelic for "Water of Life Forever." Yet despite its obvious Scottish identity, the Keepers has ten international chapters spanning Australia, Brazil, Germany, India, the Netherlands, the Nordics (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland), South Africa, Turkey, the United Arab

Emirates, and now the United States.

"America is, without a doubt, the most important market for Scotch whisky in the world, with the most Keepers and Masters of any other country," Prentice says. "I'm very excited about the America chapter because you've got so much to play with over there. You know how to do things well; you know how to do things big. The USA is the land of the free and the melting pot for so many people from around the world. In many ways, the spirit of the United States of America is so closely aligned to the spirit of the Keepers of the Quaich in terms of putting people together. I think there's a lovely affinity." ■