

# AROUND TOWN

Photographs by **BRUCE STOTESBURY** Times Colonist



Whisky festival patron Annie Bellis, left, Matt Jones from Beam Suntory and artist Carollyne Yardley.



Roberto Roberti, left, Thomas Chen and Jordan Cran from the Fountana Beverage Corp.



Mike Moorhouse from Corby, left, J.P. Wiser's master blender Don Livermore and Dave Mitton of Wiser's.

## All for the love of whiskies



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If the Scots in the Hotel Grand Pacific ballroom felt threatened having their legendary whiskies upstaged on the world stage last year by a Canadian competitor, they weren't showing it.

Ian Logan, international brand ambassador at Chivas Brothers, couldn't contain his playful irreverence.

"When the Scots came over in the 18th and 19th century, we were actually doing missionary work," he quipped.

"I'll quite happily tease Don Livermore [master blender for J.P. Wiser's] and tell him it was the Scots expats who showed Canadians how to make whisky."

Logan said "it's good for whisky in general" that a Canadian malt whisky, Crown Royal Northern Harvest Rye, was named 2016 world whisky of the year.

It was awarded 97.5 points out of 100 in Jim Murray's Whisky Bible, heading the whisky guru's top live list that contained not a single Scottish whisky.

Logan's reaction came before Thursday night's Canadian Whisky Awards dinner that kicked off the 11th annual Victoria Whisky Festival.

Lot No. 40, a Corby Distilleries whisky from Windsor, Ont., was named best Canadian whisky of 2015.

"It's a rye whisky sensation," declared jury chairman Davin de Kergommeaux.

Dave Broom, the Glasgow-born whisky writer, said it didn't surprise him it took so long for the world to embrace Canadian whiskies.

"Domestic markets are often the toughest because you never quite have faith in your product," he said, noting Canadian whisky has long filled an important American market need for high-volume, low-margin whisky.

"No one has really taken it seriously. The whiskies have always been there, and the distillers and quality, but they weren't being promoted and marketing departments are now realizing they're sitting on a goldmine."

Roberto Roberti, service manager with Vancouver-based Fountana Group, recalled his own amusing experience when he was category manager for duty-free sales at Vancouver airport.

"Canadian whisky is a souvenir product, like maple syrup. It's Canadiana," said Roberti, who beseeched his boss to capitalize on that by putting a maple leaf on packaging to boost sales.

When told it was too costly, the passionate pitchman said he'd buy 500 maple-leaf stickers himself.

"I said you can fire me if they don't sell," he said.



Miss Whisky Alwynne Gwilt, left, and Sarah Parniak, a beverage writer who also writes for Toronto-based NOW magazine.

"They lasted just three days."

Alwynne Gwilt, the London-based founder and editor of *Miss Whisky* who grew up in Prince George, was back at the festival for her third year.

"I always try to spend a few days there and come back down to Victoria. It's a good chance to catch up," said Gwilt, whose past whisky-and-chocolate tasting events have been festival hits.

"I wanted to mix it up a bit this year, and I was thinking how there's been a lot of controversy saying things have changed too much in the whisky industry."

It inspired the book *Whisky Wander*, the glamorous connoisseur's journey through whisky history since the late 1800s.

"I chose some key aspects to show people where it's come from and hopefully where it's going," said Gwilt, who covered the art of blending, Prohibition tales and the rise of single malts.

Miss Whisky gamely revealed one of her favourite whisky-related movies.

It's *The Angels' Share*, British director Ken Loach's bittersweet comedy about the adventures of a Glaswegian small-time hood's life-changing outing to a whisky distillery in the Scottish Highlands.

"I know [Edinburgh-based whisky expert] Charlie MacLean really well, so it was amazing to see him being his normal self, and I've been to Balblair Distillery, where it was filmed," she said.

"It brought home to me what an incredible industry this is and how lucky I am to work in it."



Graeme Macaloney of the Victorian Caledonian Distillery with whisky-loving publicist Heather Leary.



Whisky experts Davin de Kergommeaux, left, and Dave Broom at the Canadian Whisky Awards on Thursday.



Ian Logan from Scotland, left, representing Chivas Brothers, with festival organizer Iain Hooper.



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