



THE FUTURE OF *WHISKY* IS NOW

SARAH ENGSTRAND *heads to Scotland for the unveiling
of the world's premier distillery at The Macallan*

The present meets the past at The Macallan Estate in Scotland

IN A WHISKY-saturated world, what does it take to be the best? Edrington seems to know. The group produces some of the world's best spirits, including the legendary The Macallan whisky. One of the original distilleries in Speyside, The Macallan has been (legally) producing since 1824. Over the course of its almost 200-year history, it has become one of the most prized single malts on the market. Just this year, two rare bottles were auctioned off at a record-breaking sum of HK\$16.6 million.

But The Macallan isn't content to rest on its laurels. It wants to change the way the world sees whisky. Too often, the beverage is taken too seriously. Kept hidden away in bars and cabinets, it has developed a reputation as an intimidating, even austere, old man's drink. But that couldn't be further from the truth – and The Macallan might have just proved it with its new state-of-the-art £140 million distillery and visitors' centre. Built on the site of the brand's ancestral home, Easter Elchies, the visionary building took six years to complete. For the reveal, invited guests were whisked to Speyside

PHOTOS _ THE MACALLAN

in a fleet of branded Mercedes-Benz vans, driven up from London especially for the event. We started with a round of speciality cocktails and inventive canapés on the lawn, enjoying spectacular views over the property and whispering about the night to come. We wouldn't see the new distillery, we learned, until just past midnight. With the sun setting over the hills and the temperature starting to drop, we were escorted through a mysterious hobbit-like circular door and straight into a fairy tale. The marquee for the evening's ceremonies had been transformed into an enchanted

forest. Inside, the renowned Roca Brothers, the three chefs behind the globally acclaimed El Celler de Can Roca (formerly the world's best restaurant) in Girona, Spain, presented The Macallan Circle, a once-in-a-lifetime menu that celebrated the distillery and the brand. The meal was a culmination of a year's work, time in which the brothers foraged their way through Scotland, meeting farmers, producers and fishermen, and learning about the country's culture and history. Only served for the opening week's ceremonies, the dinner took us through the journey of a cask of The Macallan. It began in the oakwood forests of Galicia, Spain, where the prized wood is born. After being felled, it is then taken to the Andalusian city of Jerez, where it is shaped and aged with the finest Oloroso sherry. The meal finished in Scotland, the cask's final resting place, where it is filled and laid down to mature for more than a decade. The evening was one of monumental significance. After almost 200 years, The Macallan was getting a new spiritual home, one that would carry it forward through the next century and beyond. Speeches were made and tears were shed as members of The Macallan family spoke about their whisky's new home. They explained what it meant to be uncompromising in excellence and bolstered by centuries of history. Edrington even surprised us with Scotland's own Nicola Benedetti, the world-renowned classical violinist, who captured the evening's emotions with her dazzling renditions of Massenet's *Méditation* and Bach's *Chaconne for Solo Violin*. Chosen as an ode to the mastery of The Macallan, the pieces represented the similarities between

classical music and whisky – the passion, dedication and artfulness found in each. The evening passed quickly and it was soon time for the big reveal. We were ushered out of the forest just before midnight. The sky was dark and a cold mist was hanging in the air. We huddled breathlessly, waiting for... well, we didn't know what. Suddenly, Easter Elchies came alive before us. The beautiful stone building became a backdrop for the brand's history as a light show transported us from The Macallan's humble beginnings to the present day, culminating in a powerful poem by Liz Lochhead, the former National Poet of Scotland. It was dazzling. Then, without warning, streams of light shot into the sky, revealing the new distillery and visitors' centre at last. If there were awards for dramatic entrances, this would win. A video of the light show went viral by the next morning. Even at night, the space is magnificent. Designed by Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, the stunning new build was created to blend seamlessly into the surrounding 370-acre Speyside estate. A large undulating roof mimics the flow of the landscape and sets the distillery apart from all others as a modern architectural marvel. Inside, immersive displays introduce visitors to every step of the distillation process. You can even walk through the fully functional, high-tech distillery. Run by just a handful of technicians, almost all of the work is done automatically in a control room. It's a cutting-edge facility that can grow with demand and is capable of increasing production by more than a third if necessary. Devotees to The Macallan will be pleased to note that the 36 stills are identical to the originals. For those familiar with The Macallan, it seems incongruous: an ultra-modern facility for a deeply traditional brand. And yet, it fits somehow. The Macallan is uncompromising in its quality, as is the new centre. Even those without a taste for the aqua vitae will succumb to the majesty of the towering whisky archive: rows upon rows of the most significant The Macallan bottles. There's a gift shop, of course, and bars with more than 900 expressions to sample at the end of your visit. The space is undoubtedly a beacon for whisky lovers, the first of its kind and a vanguard in the industry. The new home of The Macallan is one that will enchant visitors for generations to come – and is set to drive the whisky world forward in the 21st century. #