

## Knappogue Castle Single Malt

# The New York Times

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NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, MAY 19, 1999

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### Irish Whisky With a Vintage and a Pedigree



Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

**GOLDEN LIQUOR** The 1991 Knappogue Castle Single Malt Irish Whisky, left, is around \$30 a bottle; the 1951, right, is \$600.

By FLORENCE FABRICANT

SCOTLAND produces more than 100 single malt whiskies, but Ireland very few, the best known of which is probably Bushmill's malt, made in Northern Ireland. Now, there is another, and a most unusual whisky it is. For starters, it is bottled and sold by an American.

Back in the 1960's, Mark Edwin Andrews, a Texas oilman, started spending part of his time in Ireland, and eventually he bought Knappogue Castle, in County Clare, on the western coast. Mr. Andrews, a fan of Irish whisky, also bought all the remaining casks of unblended whisky that had been made by B. Daly, a distiller in Tullamore that had gone out of business in 1954. Mr. Andrews started bottling and selling the whisky under the Knappogue (pronounced nah-POG) Castle label in 1987.

Mr. Andrews died in 1992, but the whisky business has been taken over by his son, Mark, who is also in the oil and gas business in Houston. Though the family no longer owns the castle, it retains the right to use the Knappogue name on its whiskies. Mr. Andrews is now selling some 3,000 bottles of Irish malt that were made in 1951, and with the help of Jim Murray, an English spirits expert, he is selecting casks of more recent distillations to bottle and sell. These newer

whiskies all come from Cooley's, the only independent distiller left in the Irish Republic, which years ago consolidated most of its whisky distilling at one huge plant near Cork.

Mr. Andrews uses vintage dating, unusual in the whisky business. "We thought having dates would set it apart," he said. "Most single malts can't do it, because they are blends of several years for consistency, but we think having slight variations makes it interesting."

Knappogue Castle whiskies are among the most delicate on the market, excellent before dinner or after. None have the smoky richness associated with Scotch, because in Ireland the malted barley is not dried over peat fires. And they have the golden color of aged chardonnay, not the amber color of whisky. Notes of vanilla in the aroma give way to a floral, light and smooth taste, with a hint of bittersweet pepperiness in the finish. The 1990, no longer available, was somewhat more complex than the 1991. The 1951 is a bit darker and heavier, with a fruitiness and a touch of exotic spices.