



WHISKY WISHES

Yes! Whisky from Japan! Can't Believe it?

By JERRY HAMILTON-SMITH



Mars Iwai Japanese Tradition

★★★

A t least in Hong Kong, Japanese products need no introduction, that is, if you are not talking about whisky. So when these two beauties were sent to us, they created quite a stir.

The Hong Kong market is literally awash with Scotch whisky and new entrants to our fancy table better be backed by more than just a pretty bottle. So, here's to luck as we begin with -- Mars Iwai Tradition Japanese Whisky. Soft and rounded, yet full bodied and mellow, the nose gives sweet honey, leading to a complex, peaty full bodied palate which gives sweet peat, orange marmalade, maple, burnt sugar cane, cedar and cigar.

The palate is rather light and peppery. Many of the flavours from the nose are back, such as honey, caramel, and red wine. In addition there are hints of ginger and fudge, followed by oaky spiciness.

The finish is of medium length, spicy and oaky, and pleasantly warming.

This is a very well crafted and superbly balanced blend, not too complex but hugely drinkable.

Akashi White Oak

★★★

Another rather pleasant surprise, this distinct number is quite a surprise. While it is certainly an impressive attempt, it is yet a few years away from other more prominent Japanese whisky labels.

Its nose is smooth with lots of yellow apple, powder sugar and angelica fruits. Honeyed tea, corn flakes and biscuits come floating up. Unfortunately there's also a yeasty, rubbery

side to it which doesn't seem to fit, a strange mixture of plastics and cookie dough. Its mouth is sweet with a rather weak attack. A simple malty core, with plenty of apple flavours again (cider) and grainy notes, ginger maybe, but that's about it. Not exactly raw but pretty immature and synthetic nonetheless. Its finish is very short and rather grainy.

It is best for those novel occasions when you want to impress with uniqueness. Mixed with a dark sweet beverage, it could pass off and perhaps even get some applause. We suspect age would do it some good.

