

SITE INDEX

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[Home Page](#)

[News](#)

[Opinion](#)

[Sport](#)

[Live](#)

[Work](#)

[Home](#)

[Taste](#)

[Pulse](#)

[Look](#)

[Rev](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Back Issues](#)

[Classifieds](#)

Site Search

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**LIVE**

### Whisky proves it's smooth with food

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Vancouver's well-stocked calendar has no shortage of winemakers dinners.

But Scotch dinners, a rarity, are hard to pass up - especially in the cosy confines of Lumiere Tasting Bar.

How well does whisky go with food? A couple of dozen enthusiasts have come to explore some serious collectible and extravagant single malts matched with Rob Feenie's exquisite plates - a "Whisky Wednesday" dinner organized by Edible B.C.

Slow foodie Eric Pateman started Edible B.C. (then Edible Vancouver) last year, as a personalized reservation service for visiting gastronomers. A sign of the times (and of Pateman's hard work), the project has grown by leaps and bounds to take in most of the province. It now covers an expanding circle of topics that appeal to locals and visitors alike. For more info check [www.edible-britishcolumbia.com](http://www.edible-britishcolumbia.com)

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Aside from the hard (some impossible) to find malts and Feenie



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(who drops by to explain the plates), the other star of tonight's show is Andrew Starritt. His consultancy (Caskstrength, 604-562-6026) is increasingly in demand for tutoring and tastings of every kind - including a (not surprisingly) popular continuing ed program offered through the Vancouver School Board.

Starritt discovered an appreciation for good whisky when he met his Scottish wife in Whistler. Love on several levels (and visits to several distilleries) ensued and the enthusiast has turned pro, building an encyclopaedic knowledge he's only too happy to share.

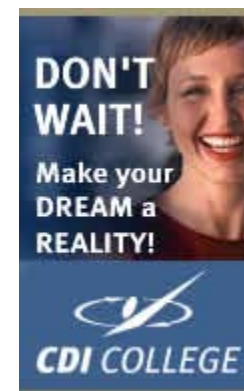
Because of its high and often lingering alcohol (and also lack of acidity), pairing food with Scotch can be a challenge. However there were some seriously good tastes at this dinner - both in and out of the glass.

Chef Feenie house-smoked hamachi tuna to help it marry with the smoky, complexity of Bourbon-barreled Rosebank 1990 (BCLS has the 1989, \$179). The trick is in the back palate, says the chef, who snuck in some jalapano slices, which added another dimension to the after-taste.

Feenie reaches deeper into his bag of tricks for a 32-year-old, 1970 Mortlach (a broad, complex, sherry-cask aged dram; not available in British Columbia), balancing its caramel richness with a superb balsamic marinated terrine; then bumping it even further with a taste of foie gras mousse, coaxing even more from the malt.

A blockbuster Aultmore 1983 (not available in British Columbia) yields the biggest challenge of the night, with persistent, lingering heat from 58.8 percent alcohol. Feenie's play? Sesame crusted swordfish, helped by sweetness from crispy banana plantain and raisin sauce. With sufficient water in the whisky, the food survives. Just.

Don't get me wrong. I love single malts - especially impossible treats such as these. But then comes perfectly seared, pine nut crusted venison loin to go with the remarkable, very rare, 20-year-old smoky, peat powered drop from shuttered Brora. (BCLS has the



even rarer 30-year-old for a mere \$443.25).

Sassenac that I am, I find myself craving something red with tannins: Bordeaux perhaps. Or Shiraz - maybe Grange, just to retain the cachet, of course! I'm also suspicious the chef feels the same way. Why else is there red wine chocolate sauce on my plate? But it's all good, and (no surprise) the whisky soaked cous-cous that Feenie fesses up to works just fine.

The finale, an even rarer, collector's '74 Ardbeg 20-year-old has an immense, almost creosote-like peat nose, followed by a surprisingly delicate, sweet and citrus hints. Remarkable again. (You can find still worthy 10- and 17-year-old Ardmore at BCLS, \$72.99, \$111.77). Lumiere's response: intense, delicious cocoa chocolate brul.e. Does it go? Well, sure . . . but ask someone who cares!

As I leave, replete indeed I am somewhat more convinced about single malt and food - at least enough to pull out that bottle of Talisker more often for haggis and oat cakes.

But short of hiring Feenie to work his magic, we're thinking that malts are still for sippin'.

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