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DINING



Edible BC's Eric Pateman (l) and Andrew Starritt of Caskstrength teamed with Rob Feenie to present the latest Whisky Wednesday dinner. Photo-Tim Pawsey

Whisky a go go with Feenie's food

By Tim Pawsey

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

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

How well does whisky go with food? A couple 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 BC.

Slow Food adherent Eric Pateman started Edible BC (then Edible Vancouver) last year as a personalized reservation service for visiting gastronomes. A sign of the times (and of Pateman's hard work), the project has grown to take in most of the province. It now covers an expanding circle of topics that appeals to locals and visitors alike. Visit [www.edible-britishcolumbia.com](http://www.edible-britishcolumbia.com) for more information.

Aside from the hard- (if not impossible) to-find malts and celebrated chef Feenie, 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 popular continuing-ed program offered through the Vancouver School Board.

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

Because of its high and often lingering alcohol and a lack of acidity, Scotch can be a challenge to pair with food. 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 jalapeno slices, which added another dimension to the aftertaste.

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 B.C.), 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 B.C.) yields the biggest challenge of the night, with persistent, lingering heat from 58.8 per cent 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).

Sassenach 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 couscous 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 surprisingly delicate, sweet 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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