

軽井沢

KARUIZAWA 1964

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single cask malt whisky
aged for 48 years in sherry cask #3603

BY DAVE BROOM, MASTER OF THE QUAICH



SPECIALY SELECTED FOR

WealthSolutions

KARUIZAWA 1964

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to accompany the Karuizawa 1964 Vintage Single Cask #3603

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KARUIZAWA 1964 #3603

Born in Chiswick to Polish parents I have never lost sight of my cultural roots. In the late 1960s, the corner of London that I called home was densely populated with other displaced people. I remember the visits of my Warsaw-based uncle (actually my mother's cousin) to our apartment so the connection was always strong. So it remains; I was first introduced to Michal Kowalski of Wealth Solutions by Piotr, son of the aforementioned uncle...

Perhaps it is my status as a second generation immigrant that fuels an interest in other cultures. Arguably, my obsessive interest in Scotch whisky could be seen as seeking the roots of the Miller family name – possibly as a part of the Scottish Catholic diaspora.

This led, naturally, to a fascination with whisky from Japan. I first travelled there as Editor of *Whisky Magazine* in 1999 and my senses were immediately overwhelmed by the people, architecture, food and drink.

Since then I have visited every operational Japanese whisky distillery and, on one memorable occasion, invited Dave Broom to accompany me on a trip.

It was Dave's first time and his immediate reactions to Japanese culture were similar to mine but better thought through and more eloquently expressed. Dave is now seen as the world's pre-eminent authority on Japanese whisky, which is why I asked him to write this book.

My passion for Japanese whisky became apparent when I left *Whisky Magazine* in 2004 and decided, with a colleague in Tokyo, to explore the possibility of sharing my obsession with other European enthusiasts by importing small quantities of hitherto unknown single malts.

This culminated in an opportunity to acquire the entire inventory of the sadly defunct Karuizawa distillery which, according to Malt Maniac Serge Valentin has “almost become ‘Scotch’, that is to say a name that’s now seen by most die-hard whisky geeks... as equivalent to big names such as Ardbeg, Lagavulin or Springbank. Or rather Brora or Port Ellen.”

Michal Kowalski approached me to see if it was possible to secure a top-quality cask of Karuizawa and, further, if it could be the oldest one ever released. Not a lot to ask...

Cask #3603 was distilled in 1964, one of only two from my birth year; so it was especially hard to part company with it. However, such is Michal’s commitment to offering the best to his clients, it was only a matter of time before I acquiesced. At the time of bottling, this is the oldest Karuizawa ever released.

The front of the box has been specially crafted from Polish black fossil oak.

The fossil oak is symbolic; the last part of Karuizawa means ‘swamp’ and this oak has been recovered from ancient swamps after hundreds of years. The box is symbolic of the way Karuizawa whisky and Poland have been joined together in this project celebrating Japanese liquid history.

Na zdrowie.

Marcin Miller, Master of the Quaich



軽井沢



“THE JAPANESE LOVE AFFAIR WITH WHISKY
IS A LONG AND INTENSE ONE, WHICH HAS
RESULTED IN THE CREATION OF NOT ONLY
A NEW WHISKY STYLE, BUT SOME OF THE
FINEST EXAMPLES OF THE SPIRIT EVER MADE.”

DAVE BROOM

AN EXOTIC IMPORT

It starts in the 19th century, when the country was emerging from its self-imposed seclusion and becoming an active player in the world. The pace of change from the time when Commander Perry sailed his Black Ships into Yokohama in 1853 (with whisky on board as gifts) was rapid.

Japan's desire to become part of the world was total. Not only were goods entering the country, people were, while Japanese envoys were sent out to discover new technologies which would help the creation of this new nation.

Whisky, therefore, came to Japan's shores in three ways and it was this which helped it gain a status above other drinks. It was not just another exotic imported spirit, it was the product of a country which was sending the new Japan the knowledge of heavy engineering, most clearly manifested in the form of Thomas Blake Glover 'The Scottish Samurai' who not only fought to regain the throne for the Meiji dynasty, but supplied tea, guns, founded a shipbuilding company which

would become Mitsubishi, started the country's first coal mine – and became a brewer, founding a firm called Kirin.

Glover liked whisky as well, though he didn't become a distiller. That role fell to others, for by the end of the 19th century there was a trend to replicate foreign drinks, 'yo-shu' in Japan. Port was one, so were various liqueurs, gin and whisky.

The first was tried with varying degrees of success – and one of the earliest pioneers Kaitakushi Budo Jozozo which started in Hokkaido and then moved to Yamanashi Prefecture will play a central role in our tale. Growing grapes was not as simple as these firms initially believed and wine was continued to be made with imported grapes.

A similar story was taking place with spirits which were created not in distilleries, but in chemists' laboratories, mixing together alcohol, sugar, flavourings and other (maybe thankfully) unknown ingredients to make a replica of the wares now flooding into the newly-established bars of Japan.

Among these chemists were two young men, Shinjiro Torii who worked for his uncle's yo-shu firm in Osaka and a chemist called Masataka Taketsuru who worked in Kyushu for a firm called Settsu. Both acquired the whisky bug. Both believed that there was life beyond the world of yo-shu and that true Japanese whisky could be made.

Torii began blending – his first appeared in 1919 - and soon after bought a site between Osaka and Kyoto with the intention of building the country's first whisky distillery. At the same time, Taketsuru had been sent by his superiors to study chemistry (with a focus on fermentation) in Glasgow, again with the intent to open a whisky distillery on his return.

He soon was apprenticed to a whisky distillery in Campbeltown and returned to Japan (with Scottish wife) armed with the 'secrets' of whisky making. In the interim, however, Settsu had gone bankrupt and their dreams of distilling were shattered. Torii however was still in business – and needed a distiller. In this way, Yamazaki, Japan's first purpose-built whisky distillery, was founded although it would be another 30 years before our story properly starts.



THE EARLY YEARS

Walking through the streets of Karuizawa today, you would not think of it as being a whisky town. Over there is the designer outlet mall, next to it a fashionable hotel. There are top-end bars, swish stores, fine restaurants. It is a weekend getaway for Tokyo's smart set. In the winter they come to ski. In the summer, they retreat here to escape the humidity of the plains. Karuizawa, you see, is high up. The town sits at between 800 and 1,000 metres above sea level, meaning it is blessedly cool in summertime, with clean crisp, fresh air. It is a place where you exhale and relax.

In fact, it has always had this function. During the Edo period it was the 18th of the 69 post stations on the 310 km Nakasendo – the 'Middle Road' which linked Edo (now Tokyo) with the then capital Kyoto. This road carried officials, samurai, traders and their goods. The post towns were spots of refuge, places to rest, eat, bathe, sleep – and probably drink. Karuizawa, high on the plateau, was either the first one after the climb up the steep Usui-toge pass, or the last before the descent on to the plain. A place of relief, or a place for a final rest before the clammy heat.

This role of refuge continued into the 19th century. Although the Nakasendo had become a memory, Karuizawa's properties had been discovered in 1886 by a Canadian-born missionary called Alexander Croft Shaw who began to summer in the town hailing it as "a hospital without a roof."

Such was his enthusiasm for the quality of the climate, air and the hot springs that it soon became the main summer retreat for the missionary community in Honshu. Word soon spread and fashionable Japanese families also began to make the pilgrimage – including the Royal Family. Today's Emperor met his wife on a tennis court in Karuizawa.

Above the town smoke would have risen, as it still does, from Mount Asama one of Japan's most active volcanoes and by the 1920s it would have drifted over a winery established by Kaitakushi Budo Jozozo, which would rename itself Daikoku-budoshu.





THE START OF THE WHISKY YEARS

While Daikoku had been dabbling with whisky at its distillery in Yamanashi – its first brand, 'KM Sweet Home', appeared in 1922 – the main business remained wine. It was not until after the war that the Japanese whisky industry (as we now know it) began to take shape.

Then in 1946, Daikoku, released a blended whisky called Ocean, one of the first to (re-)emerge after the disasters of war.

Why the rise of whisky? It could be demand from American troops, a shift in Japanese consciousness, the beginnings of the great Japanese economic renaissance. Perhaps all had their part to play.

What was certain was that by the 1950s demand for whisky was growing and drinks firms wanted a piece of the action. Ocean was becoming an established brand and a new distillery site was needed.

Initially this was tried at Shiojiri, but the quality of the spirit was poor. In 1955, therefore, the decision was taken to shift production to the firm's winery at Karuizawa. Even today, vines trail across the walls of the warehouses, an echo of this former life.

As demand for whisky among Japan's new salarymen class grew, so production was increased. It was small by Scottish standards, but Ocean had helped establish Karuizawa as a whisky town. Further mergers followed bringing Ocean into the ownership of the Showa Brewing Company which itself had swallowed up another winemaking firm, Mercian, which would eventually become the company's name.

Karuizawa was a player: A small player maybe, but a fixture in the Japanese whisky scene.

THE DISTILLERY

The essence of any single malt distillery is individuality. There is no sense in replicating what your competitors are doing. You have to make a style of whisky unique to yourself. It was a lesson which was well learned at Karuizawa. Here was a distillery which looked at the Japanese norm – and did something different.

First, some context: Japanese whisky has always been crafted to suit the specific needs of the Japanese drinker. That may sound obvious, but it has meant that a very different style to Scotch had to be crafted from the outset.

To start with, whisky was not just drunk on its own, it was drunk with food. With Japanese food, which is delicate in character. The whisky had to be able to match this and not dominate proceedings. It had to be drunk in a humid climate which meant that big, heavy flavours were not popular. Lighter ones were preferable.

Physiologically, the Japanese drinker could not consume as much alcohol as his western colleague, therefore the ideal serve was dilute, not neat. This last element

meant that while lightness was desirable, the whiskies still had to have sufficient weight to be able to stand heavily dilution. A tricky test for blenders, for that is the other thing that is often forgotten. Japanese whisky, like Scotch, was built on blends. Karuizawa, for most of its life therefore was a component for a blend. Only at the end of its life was it bottled – in small amounts – as a single malt.

So, how was it made? Small-scale and in an old-style way would be the first answers. Whisky travellers who have visited the other sites in Japan are used to seeing large plants, with big stills and massive warehouse complexes.

Karuizawa on the other and is small, neat and compressed into two buildings and this notion of compression carries through the whole process and into the whisky's character. In later years, it stood out from its competitors by being the only distillery in Japan (and conceivably in the whisky-making world) to exclusively use the strain of barley called Golden Promise.



3603

NO.

Today, barley varieties are chosen less for flavour and more for how many litres of alcohol a distiller can get per tonne. These days that is about 420 litres. Golden Promise will give the distiller 320 litres. It is, to today's distiller, inefficient. But Golden Promise, all agree, has a special quality. It adds an oiliness, a fatness to a distillate. It helps make heavy whisky which benefits from longer term maturation.

This last reason is another reason why distillers moved away from it, a barley strain which needed time isn't overly useful when you want to bottle at three years of age. It does, however, come in handy when – even if unplanned – you have very old stock in the warehouse.

The barley would be malted in Scotland (no Japanese distiller uses Japanese barley) and peat would have been used during the malting process giving a smoky edge until the mid-90s, when a last-ditch attempt was made to craft a whisky – by then aimed at a single malt market – which would appeal more to the Japanese palate, which ironically had just started to find a deep love for smoky whisky!

The barley was ground and mixed with water sourced from the slopes of Mount Asama. Karuizawa wasn't chosen as a distillery site because it was a trendy

retreat, it was chosen because of the climate and its impact on maturation and because there was a plentiful supply of cold, pure, volcanic water whose slightly alkaline, mineral-rich content, it was believed, aided not only fermentation, but was good for hangovers!

The ground barley and the heated Asama water were mixed together in a small, one tonne, mash tun. The sweet liquid (wort) which was extracted from the bottom was very clear. Crystal clear. This slow careful filtration is a Japanese distilling technique which allows its whiskies to have a clarity of flavour and aroma and none of the dry, cereal character which is picked up in Scotch single malt.

The clear wort would then have been pumped to one of five wooden washbacks where the distiller's own proprietary yeast would have been added. Here is another element within Karuizawa's character. In Scotland, all distillers use the same yeast, therefore any differences in flavour between the single malts is not driven by this component. In Japan, however, a wide range of yeasts – each with their own flavour – are used.

The fermentation was long, encouraging the production of fruity aromas and also only gave a beer (or wash) which reached 7% abv. In Scotland these days wash is generally 9% or even 10%. This lower strength is another factor in producing a richer and oilier spirit.

The wash was then transferred to the second room where the two pairs of wash and spirit stills sat. They were small, narrow in the waist, with necks which reached up into the rafters of the wooden roof. Whether this peculiar configuration had any effect of flavour no-one knows. Underneath the stills coal fires would have originally been lit – the 1964 came from this era – which would have added further richness and an almost burnt edge to the spirit.

Small stills have less copper in them and since copper is highly efficient at removing heavy elements from alcohol vapour, the resulting spirit would be rich in character. Even although distillation was slow – seven hours for the middle cut alone – this richness was carried through. This then meant that when the new make spirit was transferred to cask for maturation it could cope with the powerful flavours and tannins coming from European oak ex-sherry casks. Mercian was the long-term agent in Japan for sheries from Gonzalez-Byass so sourcing casks was never an issue.

These butts were of slightly smaller size – 400 litres rather than the standard 500. This wasn't to do with a deliberate attempt to craft specific flavours, but so the casks could fit on the racks originally made for wine casks! The effect, however, of this smaller size resulted in a higher ratio of wood to spirit and helped once more with the build-up of deep flavours of dried fruit, resin, incense and tannin. These casks would have been reused – as is standard practice – allowing slightly different flavours to be created. Refill casks have less oak impact and allow the distillery character to show through.

So the whisky would slumber in the vine-trailed warehouses for as long as the blender dictated, picking up flavour and being subjected to a very special climatic conditions: icily cold winters, warm summers and temperate springs and autumn. This profile would also have impacted in the way in which the whisky interacted with the oak.

Karuizawa is a Japanese whisky unlike any other. It is big, it is bold, it has solidity and weight, it is richly fruited, it revels in its oiliness, it has smoke, but has retained that very Japanese qualities of heightened aroma and precision of flavour. It is the antithesis of lightness.

Why? Because this was the bass line for a blend, the anchor in the Ocean.



THE DECLINE

Although never a major brand, Ocean remained profitable up until the 1990s when the economic crash had a major impact on whisky consumption – and production. In reality, it was more than just financial worries which started Japanese whisky's lost years.

The crash happened to coincide with a demographic shift in attitudes, similar to what was happening in western Europe and the US. A new generation of drinkers didn't want to sip on the same brands as their fathers had (whisky in those days was an almost exclusively male drink).

In the west, this saw a turning away from whisky and gin and an embracing of vodka. In Japan it resulted in an abandoning of whisky and a reaching out for beer and for Japan's own native spirit, shochu.

Distillers didn't know what to do. Since the 1950s Japanese whisky had enjoyed a boom. None of the distillers had ever had to manage a dip in sales, never mind a mass rejection of their spirit and brands. Result? Distilleries were mothballed. Production either ceased completely or tiny amounts were dribbled through the spirits safes. Karuizawa stopped production in 2000 and never re-opened.

There was some hope that there might be whisky made there in 2007 when Mercian was bought by Kirin. Maybe the shade of Thomas Blake Glover would encourage the brewer to start production once more.

After all, by this time interest in Japanese single malt was growing not only domestically but in export markets. Karuizawa – because of its scarcity – had become a cult. Kirin also owned another distillery, Gotemba which made a light, gentle fruity style. It was a perfect pairing, but it was not to be. The stills remained cold.

THE SAVING OF KARUIZAWA

By 2007 it was clear that Kirin had no plans to re-open the distillery and though attempts were made to buy it, they were rebuffed. It then became apparent that the firm would however sell the stock, which is when Number One Drinks entered the picture.

After protracted negotiations, in 2011 they became owners of all of the remaining casks of Karuizawa, all 364 of them which now sit at Japan's newest distillery, Chichibu, where they are watched over by Ichibori-san, former distiller at Karuizawa.

A circle has been completed and, while it is heartbreaking to see the distillery close, at least there are some remarkable liquid memories of its brief existence and of an old way of making whisky in a new land.







TASTING NOTES: DAVE BROOM

Colour: Deep amber with a slight green rim indicative of ex-sherry cask maturation. Not incredibly dark, suggesting a refill cask.

Nose: Initially quite hot with an intense resinous lift. Then a deep, concentrated fruitiness (apricot jam and yellow plums soaked in brandy) emerges – all with a background of rooty earthiness and a little smoke. With water, it becomes more alive and more obviously Japanese with plenty of scented wood and snuffed perfumed candles. The earthiness gives it the character of a Japanese Glenfarclas.

Palate: Quite tight with a nutty oaken grip which loosens into a powdery feel. The key is a bittersweet character with the fruits on the nose combined with liquorice. A drop of water helps, not just cutting the heat of the alcohol but allowing a fresh acidity – another Japanese trait – to come through. There are hints of chocolate towards the back palate and coffee-flavoured biscuits.

Finish: Dry, lightly smoky.

Conclusion: Typically bold – that's the Karuizawa style – while age has allowed a crisp quality to develop on the palate which plays off the depth of the nose.



TASTING NOTES: DOMINIC ROSKROW

Nose: Very attractive, soft and seductive. This is a Spring woodland walk to a village church: drying leaves, fir trees, pine, meadow flowers and then polished church pews, stale incense and traces of Camp Coffee essence.

Palate: Wow, this is a sweet massive malt... initially there's the big hickory and red liquorice delights of very old whisky, intense treacle toffee and then it's like letting crystallised coffee flavoured icing sugar melt in your mouth. There are oak and spice notes here but they are controlled and gentle... it's the whisky equivalent of being picked up in the palm of a giant and being placed gently by him on a feather bed; lots of controlled strength and power. Sublime.

Finish: Old, venerable and stately, with liquorice, oak, spice and liquid honey.

Conclusion: Absolutely top drawer whisky and a treat from start to finish...

Score: 94/100



TASTING NOTES: JOEL HARRISON & NEIL RIDLEY

Nose: Toasted pine nuts and pine resin, candied orange peel, crème brûlée topping, homemade toffee, hints on the back of the nose of freshly baked oak cakes, vanilla and spearmint.

Palate: An initial hit of apricot jam, with wood spices and burnt orange peel filling the mouth. Some cloves and bitter back cherry are bolstered by a subtle sweetness of royal jelly, quince jam and honeycomb. With water, caramelised pecan nuts appear and the fruits are enhanced.

Finish: Lively lemon zest, a wisp of smoke and a huge hit of blood orange.

Conclusion: Like a really good, well made Manhattan.



TASTING NOTES: MARCIN MILLER

Colour: Amber with a green-tinged rim.

Nose: Some classic autumnal forest floor notes; earth, moss and tobacco. Then all the herbal, medicinal qualities that suggest ancient Karuizawa is good for the soul: Tiger balm, acacia honey, apricot conserve and menthol. A few drops of water reduce the poke and reveal more oak and smoke. There are hints of sandalwood and incense, too.

Palate: Wow! Hot as you'd expect then old wardrobes, furniture polish and chestnuts. Spiced fruit compote and figs in syrup. Water makes the complexity more evident; it is mouth-watering with coal smoke and rich black pudding, then black coffee and bitter dark chocolate with sour cherries.

Finish: Drying, long, warming and balmy.

Conclusion: A serious, grown-up whisky for contemplation. Or even meditation. One of the very finest old Karuizawa whiskies, it soothes and excites in equal measure.



TASTING NOTES: SERGE VALENTIN

Colour: Rich amber.

Nose: Rather than smoky and chocolaty like many old Karuizawas, this one is all overripe fruits and the jams made thereof, with background spice and sap. Quite extraordinary. Strawberries with menthol? Figs and marzipan? Dates and liquorice? Quince with putty? There's even something coastal there; overall like a glorious very old but terrifyingly vibrant sherried Speysider from a magnificent cask. Maybe a little beef stock, too... **With water:** Karuizawa loves water; the whisky became even more fabulous and incredibly complex. Some fruitcake especially made for a very wealthy and completely mad dictator?

Palate: What the hell is this? I've never found this in any malt whisky... Some kind of overripe tropical fruits, maybe longans? There's also a curious cheesy side, absolutely wonderful. There's plenty of oak, which is normal, but it's all perfectly integrated. Add to that some tangerine liqueur; black pepper; cumin, cloves, grape pips... It's almost a monster of a whisky. **With water:** these wonderfully strange notes grew even bigger. Swiss cheese with mango jam.

Finish: Endless, with the spices singing many songs. Bitter chocolate in the aftertaste.

Conclusion: First it's brilliant whisky, and second, it's 'different' whisky. Respect.

Score: 95/100



TASTING NOTES: STEFAN VAN EYCKEN

Nose: A prelude of almond tofu and maraschino cherries is followed by a triple fugue of forest, tree fruit and waxed wood notes. Initially suggestive of a damp forest in spring; incredibly fresh, with hints of pine trees, sandalwood and feint eucalyptus. Soon after, fruit notes appear: over-ripe apricots, Yubari melon (a Hokkaido cantaloupe), Japanese pears and dates. Then something reminiscent of a recently polished chapel starts to develop. Water tends to foreground the fruit notes, pushing green apples and under-ripe peach notes to the fore; also wet grass drying in the sun.

Palate: Neat, the initial impressions are acerola, brambles, gooseberries and orange liqueur. The pleasantly sour flavours soon give way to equally pleasant and seductive bitterness: goya, walnut skins and a little liquorice. Water brings out a prominent note of sudachi (a Japanese citrus fruit) – something I never thought I'd find in a whisky! How can a whisky this old be this refreshing?

Finish: Medium-long with hints of both kiwi and lingonberry jams, sweet-and-sour sauce, goya again, and an incredibly delicate sweetness at the centre of it all.

Conclusion: It's fairly common to compliment mature whiskies on how young and vibrant they are despite their old age. This 1964 Karuizawa is far beyond such platitudes. Only time and a large dose of luck, could have conspired to make this; a rare whisky that creates a world of its own and holds it together so beautifully, like an image of nature at its best.



WEALTH SOLUTIONS

Wealth Solutions was established in 2007 with a mission to provide unique products for Polish collectors and investors. It was created by real enthusiasts for luxury goods such as fine Bordeaux wines, top quality whisky and art.

These assets are perceived not only as sound alternative investments but also as an important element of prestigious private collections and the luxury life style.

Wealth Solutions is regarded as one of the top wine banking advisors in Europe. The company has also introduced a unique group investment in real estate allowing individuals to profit from the increases in value of land in Poland.

Today, with assets worth more than £55 million, we are a leading alternative investment company in Poland. Over the past six years, more than 6,500 clients have trusted Wealth Solutions by purchasing top quality collectibles and using the company's expertise.

In 2012, after launching Glenfarclas 1953 on the Polish market, Wealth Solutions has a great honour to introduce to its clients an exceptional 48-year-old Japanese whisky from the legendary Karuizawa distillery. We are delighted to offer this extraordinary whisky from one of the oldest Karuizawa casks to Polish collectors and investors.



WealthSolutions

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