

Two unique takes on the whisky bar

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PHOTOGRAPHY
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Taste the Romance

Michael and Carol Buchanan know whisky. Their restaurant and lounge Buchanan's Chophouse & Whisky Bar has been named one of Canada's best whisky venues by *Whisky Magazine* and one of the world's top six whisky bars by internationally renowned distiller Jim McEwan.

In Buchanan's intimate back bar, the couple is conducting a weekly Wednesday tasting of

some of the establishment's more than 280 single-malt Scotch whiskies, the largest selection in North America. Michael raises each glass in turn, bidding both the seasoned and novice drinkers in attendance to immerse themselves in the romance and magic of the drink. The evening's samples include Springbank 10, Aberlour 12 and Dalmor.

The Buchanans have seen interest in whisky surge, with single-malt varieties all the rage. The product of a sole distillery, single-malt whiskies are not blended with other varieties. The Buchanans' own interest was instilled while living abroad in London, England, where a nightly dram with neighbours became ritual. Returning to Calgary 25 years ago, they established their New York-style steak and seafood chophouse, where they were eager to showcase whisky.

Scotch whiskies, Michael explains, are imbued with poetry at their origin where, as in fairytales, villages seem to sprout from the heather in mystical solitude, their timber and stone kissed by soft rain. The peat-smoked barley used to make whisky embodies the very soil of Scotland. The drink's subtle hues range from palest light-yellow to green to

wedding-band gold and the burnt sienna of Highland sunsets.

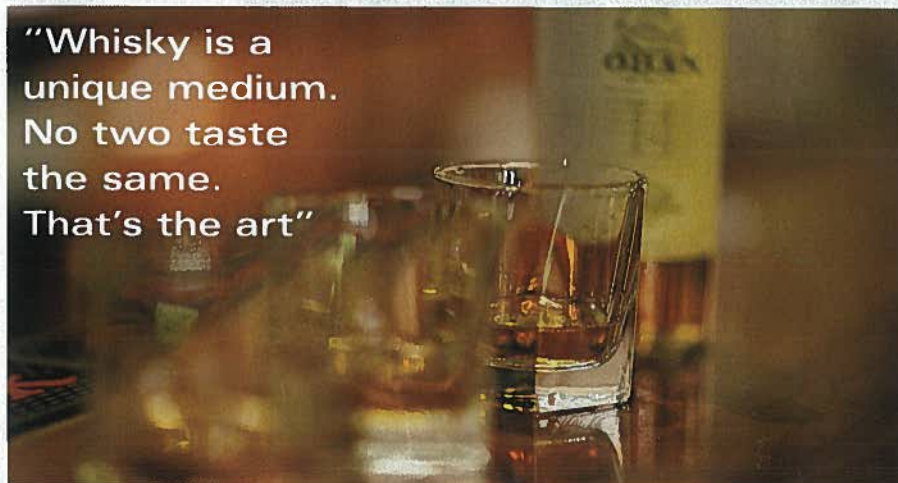
"We want you to discover the art and science of whisky in a way that's similar

**WHISKY
WEDNESDAYS
AT BUCHANAN'S
FEATURE FLIGHTS
OF THREE
WHISKIES FOR
\$15 TO \$25**

to discovering wine," he says. Inhaling their aroma, he suggests "pinning down an area." Is the whisky smoky, grassy or oily? Is it biscuity, floral or herbal? Is there a hint of orange peel, or has it been kissed by seaside air?

"Whisky is a unique medium," says Michael. "Every distillery uses the same ingredients and old casks that have previously

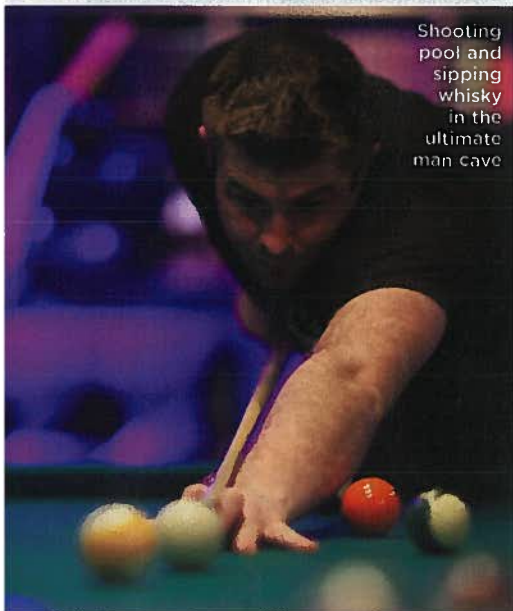
"Whisky is a
unique medium.
No two taste
the same.
That's the art"



hands and met amazing people.
It's about these experiences"



A Sociable Retreat



Shooting pool and sipping whisky in the ultimate man cave

Over a glass of Writers Tears, an Irish whiskey known for its smooth finish, Thomas McDonald admits he may not have the Buchanans' vast whisky expertise, but he loves the drink and shares their egalitarian take on its connoisseurship. "We cater to the educated, introverted and bookish," he says with a sly grin.

McDonald owns the swank new Hyde Whiskey Room below Vinyl Dance Lounge, and his ironic joke befits Hyde's hip, young patrons and his own gregarious nature. An engineer turned pub entrepreneur, he says he's built his ideal basement, a TV-free man cave he'd love to—and does—hang out in with friends.

Whisky is a drink that befits such sociability, he says. "I've shaken at least 10,000 hands and met amazing people," he says of the four months since he opened the place. "It's about these experiences."

The room has a golden aura, the warmth

and suits the rarified appeal of its namesake drink. A stretch of barstools and dark wood countertop face a back bar lined with bottles. Their shapes are echoed in the hardcover books that fill two entire walls of shelving. Schoolhouse lighting, exposed brick, dark leather sofas and a pool table complete the picture. The room's charm is conducive to romance and existential reflection, having hosted both speed-dating nights and literary readings.

Depending on the time of day, Hyde serves as a retreat both from the city's office towers and from the thrum of the Beltline's nightclubs, including the one just upstairs. However, come 10 pm Thursday to Saturday, it's time for reverie as resident DJs spin a '60 through '90s musical mashup.

McDonald's patrons, too, are feeling the single malt craze, and he stocks over 140 of them as well as 10 to 20 blends. A full selection of beer, wine and cocktails can

**WEDNESDAY TO FRIDAY FROM
4 PM TO 8 PM HAPPY HOUR**