

Malt Maniacs E-pistle #2012-08

By Jacob Krodel

This article is brought to you by 'Malt Maniacs'; an international collective of more than two dozen fiercely independent malt whisky aficionados. Since 1997 we have been enjoying and discussing the pleasures of single malt whisky with like-minded whisky lovers from all over the world. In 2010 our community had members from 15 countries; The United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, The U.S.A., Canada, India, Taiwan, Australia and South Africa. You can find more details on: www.maltmaniacs.org.



THE BLUE MOUSE: A BAVARIAN DISTILLERY



THE MAUS' SHOP

Nestled in the quiet outskirts of Forchheim, Germany, hiding on an unlikely corner in the small village of Eggolsheim, is a distillery unlike any other -to my knowledge. With a story as unique as the spirit it produces, the *Blaue Maus* (pronounced "blou-uh mouse" Blue Mouse Eng.) is monument to the dedication and perseverance of a man who wanted to make a single malt German whisky.

It was thanks to my friend, Klaus Pirner, who had the foresight to arrange for a tour of the distillery while our families spent the day at the Schloss Thurn theme park, that I was able to learn about this wonderful little family undertaking in Bavaria.



When we arrived, we were greeted by Mrs. Fleischmann, who showed us around their cozy shop, which had shelves of single cask bottlings and canned goods, like mustards and preserves, flavored with their whisky. She was very friendly, offered us something to drink and told us her husband would be there soon to show us around the distillery.

Not long afterward, Mr. Robert Fleischmann came in the door. He was a burly man with tan skin and bushy hair and eyebrows. He smiled and shook our hands and led us off to the Still Room. It was a middle-sized workshop off to the right behind the shop and connected to a newer-looking building, still under construction. Robert unlocked the door and led us in.

THE MAUS' STILL

Opposite the door, and taking up the entire far wall, was the machine which was the centerpiece of the Fleishman whisky business, their still. Designed for the distillation of various spirits, and probably used originally for the production of the fruit *Schnaps* like *Himbaergeist* etc., the contraption looked more like something one would expect to find in the laboratory of a mad scientist in a 1950s horror film. With its gauges, tubes, wires and dials, I found it impossible to resist walking over and examining it closely.



Robert explained how in 1983, his initial attempts at distilling a spirit from malt had been met with many difficulties. Either the recipe would be wrong and the spirit would not taste right, or the yeast wouldn't activate due to incorrect malt to water ratios, or the wash would get too hot. With all this trouble, he nearly gave up on the idea altogether. Luckily for us, an American Vietnam Veteran friend of his insisted he persist. So, with the assistance of a helpful customs agent, who was familiar with the correct methodology for distilling grain spirits, he began perfecting what is now the *Blaue Maus* single malt German whisky.

It wasn't very long however before Mr. Fleishman ran into a very different set of problems. The Scotch Malt Whisky industry had caught wind of his activities, and was pursuing legal action against the distillery. The *Blaue Maus* was originally named *Glen*

Maus, and Scotch Whisky Industry advocates argued that the word *Glen* was Scottish and that customers would think the *Blaue Maus* was a Scottish Malt Whisky, thus usurping some portion of the Scotch Whisky market. Then it was contended that the logo, with the barrel and a blue mouse sitting on top, could be confused with the bird on the Famous Grouse label and that the ship on the Spinnaker label (another of the distillery's bottlings) could be confused with the Cutty Sark label. By the time all the legalities were sorted out, it had cost the distillery some 20,000DM. The Whisky would be called *Blaue Maus*, and the labels would remain.

Then there were the German distillation laws to contend with. The distillery produces only 300 liters of alcohol per year, because to produce any more would dramatically increase the duty on each liter and require a spirit safe among other stipulations. Apparently there are quite enough regulations, licensing procedures, and paperwork to deal with when distilling only 300 liters per year, thank you very much.



Robert then showed us several boxes of powder with colors ranging from white to dark brown. He explained that this was the malt used in the production of his whisky. It was a far cry from the grist with different sized pieces and bits of husk I have seen in pictures from other malt whisky distilleries. This looked much more like the powder one gets in a bag is mail-order home beer brewing kits. In fact, Robert told us, the different malts used were all sourced from local malting facilities, which served the various Bavarian *Bier* breweries in

the area. It was German malt, and prepared for the production of beer. What's more, he informed us that the only difference between his various bottlings was the species of malt used. Some were produced to make *Pilsner beer* others for *Helles* and so on. The bottlings in the distilleries range all go in to un-charred, virgin, Bavarian oak casks, and are all produced in the same way from the same still. The different malts alone (9 in all, plus one grain) create the variety of flavors which make up the range of whiskies produced at the distillery. Next, Robert produced an unmarked bottle of clear liquid and poured us each a sample. It was new make spirit, right off the still. It smelled of plum, peach and other fresh fruits. The

taste was intense and sweet, with grapefruit, plum and salt water. It had a powerful and tannic finish with notes of licorice, other herbs and ouzo. Overall, it was fruity and extremely fiery. It was only after we had finished tasting it that Robert informed us that the new make sat at a surprising 89.7 percent ABV. He went on to explain that he ran his still slowly, which increased the purity and ABV of the spirit. He then let us open and sniff two covered barrels of fore-shots and feints, whereupon it became quite clear to me why these must be carefully excluded from the middle cut.

THE CASKS

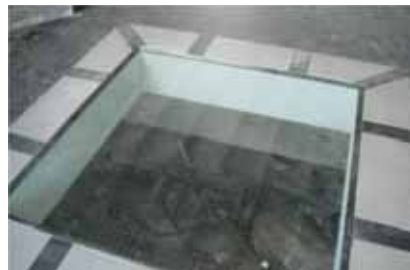
Opposite the still, on the same wall as the entrance, was a stack of un-charred, virgin, German oak, casks. Each was filled with spirit, reduced to 50% ABV, and had the Blue Mouse logo branded into its head; a good time for a photo.



The distillery bottles only single distilled, single cask offerings at 40% ABV, from 3 to 25 years old. The 25 year old expression boasts a respectable 95.5 points from Jim Murray, but good luck finding a bottle; they don't even have any at the distillery shop. I was however told that there is a shop in Nurnberg where one could find a bottle.

NEW CONSTRUCTION

We were then led out of the room where all the magic happens, and shown the new still room, still under construction, which will double as a visitor center and tasting room when it is finished. It had some very



interesting stone work on the walls where new pot-style stills are to be set up and a glass floor for viewing of the future dunnage cellar. Though still in its early stages, one can tell that this is going to be a great place to visit, learn about the Fleishman distillery, and enjoy a wee dram.

THE PUB

Finally, Robert showed us his maritime pub (normally open only on weekends in the summer). It was full of interesting maritime and whisky memorabilia and had enough history for its own e-pistle. We sat down to a drink and listened to Robert tell stories about his time in the German navy, his family business, and his whisky, and the



tour wound slowly to an end.

We concluded our tour back in the front shop, where Robert bid us goodbye and left us in the capable hands of his wife, who was kind enough to pour us a few samples of their single cask, German malt whisky.



THE WHISKY

Blaue Maus SC 40% 1st fill 14y

Somewhat salty, with leather, soap, grapefruit, tobacco and *Obstler* notes on the nose. The palate is sweet, oily and metallic with herbs and salt. Tastes different than it smells. The finish is of medium length and comes with wood tannins and fruit notes. Overall quite complex and beefy.

It has a nose that is so unlike any Scottish malt that it truly deserves the name German malt whisky. At first I thought that the *Obstler* note was probably due to the fact that the same still is used to distill fruit spirits, but when I tasted a sample of a special run they did with Scottish malt, which had no such notes, I began to think otherwise. Was it simply the effect of the German malt combined with the fact that it comes in the form of a fine powder instead of more coarse grist?

Elbe 1 SC 40% 15y

The nose has roses, sawdust, honey, perfume and more *Obstler*. The palate is dry and spicy with malt, butter and floral notes. The finish is a bitter, tannic apricot. Overall it is floral and complex.

Gruener Hund (Green Dog) SC 40% 12y

Nose: *Obstler*, spring flowers, peanuts and fruit. Palate: Fresh and light, fruity and salty. Finish: short and spicy. Interesting but lacking in the finish.

Schwartzter Pirat (Black Pirate) SC 40% NAS

On the nose, melon, brine, sweet, *Obstler* again, lutefisk with ammonia, perfume. On the palate, malt, spice, sour apples and Glenmorangie. The finish is longer, with wood and pepper. This one has a better palate than its nose.

I wonder if the ammonia note could be the result of fore-shots or feints getting let in to the middle cut, or an effect of the slow distillation method. Either way this is very different from the Scotch malt whiskys that I am used to. Maybe, like Scotch whisky, German whisky just takes time to wrap one's head around and get on the same wavelength. What is sure is that these are complex and interesting offerings from a unique distillery with a colorful history.

Huge thanks to the Fleischmanns for the fun-filled and informative tour, and to my friend Klaus for having the idea and arranging the trip. It was one I won't soon forget.



Jacob Krodel is the event coordinator for the Humphreys Whisky Club. He lives in Korea with his wife and daughter where he serves as a MEDEVAC helicopter pilot with the US Army. Jacob enjoys skiing, grilling out and making a spectacle of himself obsessing over Scotch Malt Whisky.