

Malt Maniacs E-pistle #2016-01

By Krishna Nukala

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A Malt by Arabian Sea

Paul John Single Malt Whisky, Goa

Generally, when you visit any distillery you take some idyllic settings for granted - a beautifully manicured garden, a gentle stream flowing down the backyard mountains, lush green fields and some cattle grazing around. At Paul John (est. 1992), you don't find anything such. It is typically a serious working distillery in an industrial estate surrounded by more industries. Situated in Cuncolim Industrial Estate, South Goa, the only beautiful setting you will come across is the sea beach which is about 2 km away. Well, the setting at Amrut is not so idyllic either, but they make some amazing spirit which goes on to prove that beautiful surroundings does not necessarily help make a good whisky.

Paul P John, the founder and the Chairman of the John Distilleries had a vision to deviate into Single Malts right from the beginning from making the mundane molasses based spirits, and the vision driven by passion made him to acquire two copper stills at the Cuncolim Industrial Estate, Goa. And the next best thing he did was to rope in Michael D'souza, the young and energetic wine maker based in Goa. But Michael's passion actually dwelled in making malt whisky and at that time only a few dared to make good whisky in India. It was a perfect match - both the patient and doctor agreeing on same prescription - to make malt whisky!



"Paul John is made from 100% Indian ingredients" says Michael. "We use six row barley that is sourced from Punjab, Rajasthan and other parts of northern India". Scottish whiskies are made from two row barley which has very high carbohydrate content. Due to high fiber and protein content, the six row Indian barley was traditionally used as fodder for cattle and poultry, but nowadays almost all distilleries and breweries use six row barley as source of malt in India. The six row barley offers a distinct tannic character to

the spirit. The alcohol yield is no doubt low and cannot be compared to the yield of Scottish barley varieties.

At Paul John the malting is done outside from various malting units. After usual grinding where the malted barley is turned into coarse powder, water at 70 degrees Celsius is added to make sugary wort. There are 8 washbacks made of stainless steel each holding about 18,000 liters of wort. Unlike the wooden washbacks one finds in Scottish distilleries the washbacks at Paul John are made of stainless steel. "Due to high humidity and proximity to sea, the wood is more likely to rot and added to the factor is high and constant maintenance of wooden washbacks, hence our reason for going in favour of steel tanks", says Michael.

Since Paul John also makes some peated whisky, I asked Michael from where they source the peated barley.

Michael: "Well, we do not import peated barley but import only peat from Scotland".

Krishna: "That is very interesting, but then that does not make your ingredients 100% Indian, right?"

Michael: "Well, the peat is only used as source of heat and to increase the phenolic content of the spirit, but as such it does not become part of final spirit"

Krishna: "Hmm... I see"

Paul John imports two varieties of peat from Scotland. One from Aberdeen which has low phenolic levels but has more marine and grassy character and the other from Islay which has obvious high phenolic and medicinal properties. Spirit is made using both these peats and blended according to the final version of the bottle.



(Amrut, on the other hand imports peated barley directly from Scotland and do not do their peating in India)

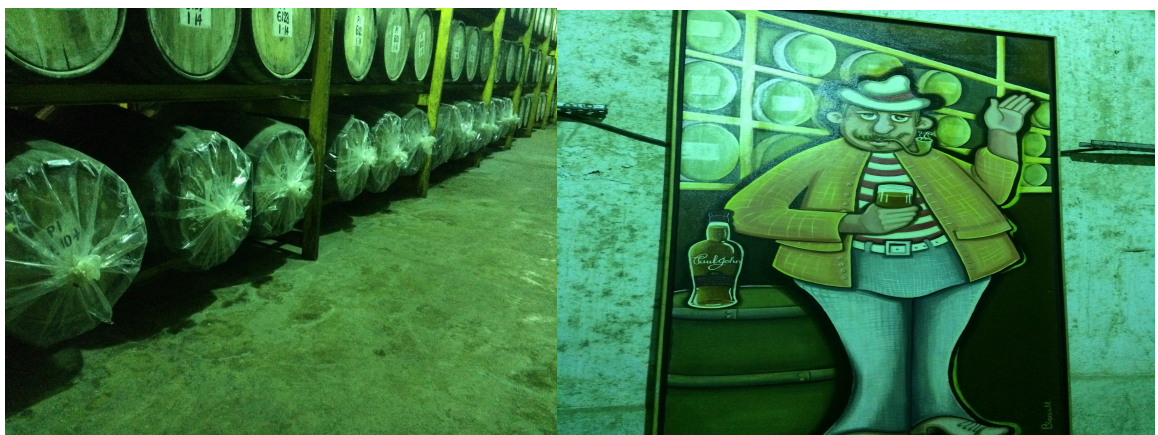
Paul John uses 100% distillers yeast and the fermentation is carried on for 60 hours. The 60 hour period has been found by Michael to be optimum time to extract all good esters, tannins and other congeners that are so essential to characterize the outcome of the final spirit at John Paul.

Paul John has a single set of pot stills. The wash spirit still has 12,000 liters capacity and the spirit still handles 6,000 liters and both are steam heated. The stills have been custom made in India at Gujarat. Gujarat is the state where Mahatma Gandhi was born and as mark of respect to the father of the nation, the state still practices 100% prohibition (but it is OK to make equipment for making alcohol in the state!).

The spirit safe at Paul John is never locked. In no Scottish distillery have I seen an open Spirit Box and Customs are very strict about this aspect although it is more a symbolic feature nowadays. When I asked Michael about this, he said, the custom officers are more

concerned with their duties at the final bottling rather than at the distillation point. But more importantly at Paul John, it helps the technician to have a real feel of the cut he is going to make. Therefore the entire middle cut is done by actual organoleptic senses and by constant monitoring. In Scottish distilleries the middle cut is done entirely by timing and monitored by spirit meter. Paul John extracts the middle cut at 63.5%.

So far Paul John has produced only malt whiskies matured in American Oak. About 95% of their casks are of American oak. There are two warehouses. The underground warehouse has a capacity of 4,000 casks with comfortable temperature and is less humid. The upper warehouse which is at ground level houses about 6000 casks and is much warmer. One describes the climate of Goa as hot, hotter and hottest. Average summer temperature is around 32 deg C and winter temperature is around 24 deg C although on some days in winter it may go a little below 20 deg C. Due to high humidity, the heat factor is compounded and one is sweating most of the times. The humidity is never below 67% and goes as high as 90% in summer and monsoon. Due to this high temperature and humidity factor the loss of spirit is very high between 8% to 12% depending on the time of the year. This is the single most reason the spirit at Paul John is not allowed presently to age more than 9 years. Most of the spirit is aged between 3 to 7 years. Some experimentation is going on by wrapping the casks in polyethylene sheets to prevent excess angels share and the results are yet to be seen.



Bottling is done at the same premises and none of the Paul John whiskies are chill filtered.

Tasting Paul John whiskies

- 1. Paul John, Brilliance 46%, NAS** - On the nose you get those immediate sharp notes of an underaged whisky. Basically sweet characteristics of barley sugar and some honey. After the spirit takes some air in the glass, you get those organic notes. More specifically fresh cumin with some mint. On palate the rough edges reappear with sweet and some bitter taste. With a dash of water it is more agreeable. The finish is short, almost a vanishing act. *73 points*

2. **Paul John, Edited, 46%, NAS** – On the nose it is much gentler. You get those barley sugars again, but with hints of orange marmalade and peat. The peat is not blatant, but gentle, suggesting that the malting was done with Aberdeen peat. After some time you get green capsicum, wet chalk and vanilla. On palate, it is much rounder and peat reappearing with sweet and honey flavors. Much better whisky with medium finish. *78 points*.
3. **Paul John, Classic, c.s 55.2%, NAS** – On the nose you get those complexities immediately. Lots of sugars and tannins mistaking it to be a sherried whisky. Some lactones with a feel like asafetida followed by mix of citrus notes. On the palate it is dry and you get some tannins with a wholesome feeling of a full bodied whisky. Very sweet. Finishes long with a mix of spices. *85 points*
4. **Paul John, Bold, 46%, NAS** – On the nose you get some smoke with definite peat notes. Vanilla and lemon, spices with green peppers. On the palate it is very sweet. Finishes with long peaty notes.- *81 points*
5. **Paul John, Peated, c.s 55.5%, NAS** – Bonfire smoke and peat. Sweet and honeyed and mild medicinal notes like any Islay whisky. Lots of complexities, green grass juices, vanilla and citrus notes. On the palate you get those dry tannins but the mouthfeel is very full and wholesome. Sweet and syrupy. Finishes very long with a satisfying feeling. *88 points*
6. **Paul John, Freshly made spirit 63.5%** - Very fruity and malty. Almost like fresh bread. The general character of the spirit can be placed as tropical fruits.



The weather is hot and humid in Goa, the alcohol yield is low and there is no peat in India to malt your barley. The casks are imported and the loss of whisky to angels is insanely high. Despite against all odds, the people at Paul John passionately make whisky that too at such affordable prices and every bottle of John Paul is a bang for your buck. Salute the guys at Paul John and enjoy the Arabian Sea captured so well in the bottle!

Slainte!
Krishna Nukala
Certified Malt Maniac
August 08, 2016.

(The author thanks immensely Vikram Achanta, CEO of www.tulleeho.com who arranged the visit to the distillery)



"Krishna Nukala (b 1955) lives in Hyderabad, India. After tasting a Lagavulin in Surrey, UK in 1998, he cancelled his return ticket to India to go in search of the distillery. He met Mike Nicholson at the distillery and his life has not been the same since then. After working 35 years in banking and a Multinational Company, Krishna is now retired and spends time in pursuit of QAVP (Questio Aqua Vitae Perfectum). Besides whisky being his passion, his chief mission also is to spread the message of malt in India and he frequently contributes articles in Indian Magazines and conducts master classes. Krishna is one of the earliest Malt Maniacs having been invited by Johannes, the founder member in 2000"

