

Old spirits, news ways ?

“Why should there be a ‘proper’ way to drink whisky?” (doc.1). This question, asked by Annabel Thomas, founder of the Nc’nean distillery, captures the tensions explored in the dossier. Long rooted in tradition, Scottish whisky now faces economic, environmental, and cultural challenges that require adaptation. The documents, three press articles, a statistical chart and two ads, examine how the industry responds to these pressures while maintaining its identity.

The Scottish whisky industry is adapting its production methods in response to growing environmental concerns. In document 1, Nc’nean distillery adopts a sustainable approach by eliminating peat, using organic barley, biomass energy, and closed-loop cooling systems, while obtaining B Corp certification, reflecting a structured commitment to reducing environmental impact. Document 2 illustrates a similar effort through Stirling Distillery’s experiment with aluminium bottles, aimed at lowering carbon emissions linked to glass packaging, despite technical and aesthetic challenges associated with tradition. Document 5 reinforces this focus through two advertisements that highlight eco-friendly whisky practices. These ads not only inform but also visually emphasise a “green” image, using sustainability as a branding strategy to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers. In a context of market growth and evolving consumer trends identified in document 4, adaptation is therefore not limited to production methods alone.

The cultural image of whisky and the ways it is consumed are also evolving. Document 1 challenges rigid codes surrounding whisky drinking by rejecting the idea of a single “proper” way to enjoy the spirit and encouraging more flexible practices, such as cocktails or mixed drinks. This evolution is echoed in document 5, whose second advertisement highlights the diversification of spirits through products such as spiced rum, illustrating how producers respond to changing consumer tastes by expanding flavour profiles. This reflects a broader shift towards experimentation and variety. In addition, document 3 shows that consumption is no longer limited to drinking itself, as whisky is increasingly experienced through tourism, luxury stays, tastings, and immersive brand environments. These cultural changes also serve economic objectives.

Indeed, while adapting to modern pressures, the whisky industry continues to rely heavily on its heritage as an economic asset. Document 3 presents whisky as “the jewel in the crown of Scottish drinks,” with luxury tourism and premium experiences driving revenue. Scotch Whisky Visitor Centres recorded 2.7 million visits in 2024, over 60% of which came from abroad, highlighting the international appeal of Scottish whisky traditions. Document 4’s market analysis shows strong projected growth, identifying experiential tourism and emerging markets as key opportunities, while underlining the continued influence of tradition and regulation. Even in document 2, the use of aluminium bottles is described as potential “heresy” for whisky drinkers, illustrating how consumption remains tied to expectations of tradition and aesthetics. These examples show that heritage remains central, even as innovation is pursued.

In conclusion, the dossier shows that rather than abandoning its heritage, the Scottish whisky industry reinterprets it, allowing innovation and tradition to coexist in shaping its future.

(494 words)