



SpiritZ
Visit to a distillery



Bishan Kumar

Where giant pot stills churn fine malt spirit

It takes one good sized industry to transform the economy of the neighbourhood and generate employment for a large number of local residents. Piccadily Agro Industries Ltd., located at Indri tehsil in Karnal, Haryana, is scripting one such story. While driving down from Delhi to this off-road location of Piccadily group's flagship agro and distillation units, one could not well imagine the size of the project set up in a wide expanse, across 168 acres of land. It is really massive in scale and operations. A host of trucks and a large number of labourers were seen busy loading and unloading, which gave us a taste of the scale of operations.

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What is more exciting is the fact that Piccadily can boast of having the largest malt spirit set up in the country. The Indri set up began operations in the year 1996-97 for the manufacturing of white crystal sugar and power generation.

A Significant Endeavour

In 2004, the company decided to set up a distillery in the same unit as the owners were already well entrenched in the liquor business. They soon followed it up with a 10,000 liters malt plant. Their main goal was to create the country's largest malt spirits' manufacturing unit here.

Already one of the largest independent malt distilling facilities in India, Piccadily Distillery, Haryana, added a pair of additional giant pot stills in 2021. The idea was to ensure a marathon churning of malt spirit on a daily basis; taking the production capacity to 4 million liters annually.

The maturation warehouse with 30,000 barrels is bursting at it seems and under construction is an additional 40,000-barrel warehouse. These are indeed big numbers & signals that a lot of hard work has gone in.

It may be mentioned that India, of late, is heading towards a quality obsessive whisky producing & consuming country. In the process, it is slowly evolving & inching towards eventually creating a niche category of whiskies for the world.

Saying cheers alone would not be enough for such a mega project.

Indri Demystified

The vision of the setting up of a world class malt distillery was from the Chairman of the group, Venod Sharma and he in his classic style ordered Praj Industries to set up the largest independent malt plant in India. So came about Indri, with 2 goose neck wash still of 25000 litres each and 2 onion head spirit stills of 16000 litres each, backed by a 6.4 tonne lauter tun and shiny stainless still wash-backs.

The still started producing the spirit of life or elixir as it is called in 2010.

Taking the mantle forward, the next generation of the family, Sharma junior further envisioned to make Piccadily distillery a truly world class malt manufacturing facility. In that endeavour, he started to look for a Japanese or a Scottish Master Distiller, and surprisingly enough along came Graeme Bowie with a spirit of adventure; with a 37-year history of pushing barrels, as a Distillery Manager.

In Graeme's words, he was truly clueless about India, having never worked out of Scotland, and did not even know where Indri was on the world map. He followed his heart to take up this new challenge.

"When I came to India, I was fascinated to see the multiplicity of colours all around and the sheer number of



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people. As for the malt plant, I was pleasantly surprised to see that Piccadilly was working at par with international standards. However, every Scottish distiller brings to the table not just the knowledge of his own but also the knowledge of 300 years of distilling heritage passed down from one generation of the distillers to the other,” Graeme elaborated.

“I feel blessed with the opportunity to infuse all the knowledge that I have into the distillery and make it a shining example of one of the best distilleries in the world”, said a beaming Graeme.

Distillation Process

As for the distillation and maturation process, Graeme said two different kinds of malted barleys were used to prepare the malt spirit – peated and unpeated. 6 row Indian barley grown in the fields of Rajasthan for thousands of years, is being used. This variety is one of the sturdiest malt varieties in the world and it withstands the harsh weather conditions of the arid land in Rajasthan. This barley is first malted and dried before being ground into fine grist, which is then mixed with hot water in the lauter ton and slowly allowed to rest to release its sugars.

Each batch of wort is then transferred to the fermenters where it is left to convert into alcohol for a long period of 72 hours. Fermentation time may vary from the winters to the summer months and owing to the gravity of the fermented water. Once ready, this fermented wort is then pumped into the goose neck wash

stills which is slowly heated to allow the collection of the first distillate through the condensers into the low wine tank. The first distillate is then redistilled in the onion head spirit still from where we get the new make spirit at 70 percent v/v.

This part is called the head and is not ideal for drinking, so the master distiller checks the run of the spirit till it reaches the ideal consistency and start drawing the spirit at about 67 percent v/v and lets it run down till about 62 percent v/v , while reject the lower strength alcohol called feints. The middle part, which is considered the product, is considered the heart of the spirit.

Maturing Process

Further explaining the process, Graeme said, “The original warehouse of the distillery can house 30000 barrels in a multi storied rack warehouse. We are now full up to capacity and are using up all the small areas and





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Indri-Trini: A Taste through the five senses

Indri is a single malt whisky, which is aptly named after the area in which it is situated in. It is also synonymous with Indriya or the five Indris responsible for touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound. Indri professes to pleasantly evoke all your five senses and make you enjoy the smooth golden liquid on the palate and the burst of flavours that soon follow. Indri-Trini is the first Indian whisky to be launched using the three-wood expression; a marriage of ex-bourbon, ex-French wine and PX Sherry casks.

Indri single malt is a must have whisky; is extremely sophisticated and holds its own amongst the top Scottish or Japanese single malts of the world. Graeme Bowie, who is recently back home in Scotland, tells us the tale where, on a tasting table, Indri was easily confused with a popular 18-year-old Scottish single malt.

The essential characteristics of the whisky are given below:

Nose: Hints of black tea, caramelised pineapple with a whiff of oak from the barrel comes forward, followed by vanilla and honey from the bourbon oak and traces of spiced tannins from the European oak, finally topped up with vinous raisin and sweet sherry notes. Gentle and mellow on the nose.

Taste: Elegant richness, smooth and warm on the sides of the mouth. Gentle spice and wood characters come through, followed by nutty flavours and hints of burnt pineapple, citrus and raisins.

Finish: A subtle and balanced finish where each flavour compliments one another without dominating. A smooth and long after taste with sweet fruity flavours coming up from the warmth of the throat, lingering long after.

Seeing the huge set up of the single malt distillery, the dedication, enthusiasm and passion of the whole team from the owners to the Master Distiller; from Master Blender down to the warehouse keepers and coopers, I am sure there is something big on the horizon and we will be hearing a lot more noise from the great products coming out of the stable of Piccadily.



nooks & crannies to store the barrels. The construction of the next warehouse to store 40,000 barrels is under full swing and is expected to be ready by the end of the year.”

We source once used bourbon barrels from the US, ex-wine barrels from France and California and PX, Sherry and Oloroso barrels from Jerez de la Frontera in Spain. The warehouse in charge makes sure that each barrel filled is in proper condition and has the right amount of char required to store each batch of spirit.

The enigma behind the rapid maturation in India is simple. The temperature variation of 50 degrees in the summer to zero degrees in the winter in the northern plains makes the evaporation of spirit through wood very rapid. 12-14 percent of spirit is lost every year from the barrel. This loss is popularly known as ‘the angel’s share.’ However, the rapid evaporation causes the spirit to react with the wood much faster, imparting flavours and colour to the whisky much earlier, than it does in Scotland.

It is a known fact that a four-year-old Indian single malt is easily comparable with a Scotch matured for almost 12 years.

For Single Malt Lovers

Indri-Trini is the first single malt expression to be launched from the house of Piccadily, which will be available to select customers in India, the US and Europe by Christmas this year. Trini has been a labour of love created by its Master Blender, Surrinder Kumar, who has a rich experience of more than 40 years in the single malt industry.

I am sure the company would certainly play heavily on creating a strong recall through the exotic name. The label design is quite eye-catching, especially with its very ethnic look and for its subtle choice of colours, and use of special paper.

Memorable Experience

Walking through the large warehouse was a fantastic experience, while watching hundreds of casks of whisky silently maturing with wood; creating the magic by marrying the liquid with its inherent characteristic.

Going by the ambitious plans of the owners, the capacity of the warehouse has been ramped up by 40,000 additional whisky barrels. I am sure, soon they will have to create more space for additional barrels once Indri reaches out to single malt connoisseurs, since its demand is expected to go through the roof. 🍷