

The Design Playbook Keeping Glenfiddich on Top of the Single-Malt Scotch Market

When William Grant & Sons introduced Glenfiddich to the American market in 1963, the Scottish distiller was taking a big risk.

Americans liked blended scotch—brands like J&B, for example, which funneled 42 different whiskeys into one bottle to deliver a soft, sweet flavor easy to mix with soda. Glenfiddich, by contrast, was a single malt scotch—complex and oaky, rich with flavors like walnuts and apples. It cost more, too.

Despite these odds, Glenfiddich found its audience and became the bestselling single-malt scotch in America—a title it still holds more than six decades later.

But a brand that leads a category faces the dual mandate of holding onto the legacy that defines it, while also staying contemporary enough to draw younger consumers.

That tricky balancing act is why Glenfiddich has updated its packaging every eight years or so. Next month, it will roll out its latest. ADWEEK asked the brand's global head of innovation and design Jonathan Cornthwaite to point out some of the updates and explain the thinking behind each.

THE CANNISER – Glenfiddich’s 14-year-old variety comes in a clear bottle, but Cornthwaite’s team wanted to evoke the green of the original that hit liquor-store shelves in 1963. The paper sleeve’s hue has been refined to what he calls a “modern heritage green”—a key differentiator, because it’s “the first thing people see in a retail environment.”

THE WORD MARK – The upper- and lower-case serif typeface has ceded its place to a sans-serif in block caps with generous spacing. The treatment is a nod to the typeface that first appeared stateside, but the principal aim was legibility. “Most of the world doesn’t fare well with Gaelic names,” Cornthwaite said. “Making [the name] clear is an advantage to the average person looking at products on the shelf.”

THE WHITE SPACE – Verbiage on the packaging has gotten a

crewcut: the canister and bottle have 66% and 72% fewer words, respectively, than they did before. Why? “We take recruiting people to single-malt scotch seriously,” Cornthwaite said. “Our job is to meet consumers where they want to be, and that pared-back aesthetic is less overwhelming, less confusing.”

THE STAG – Glenfiddich has used the stag (the consummate symbol of Scotland) for decades, but the buck is more prominent now. He’s also flanked by the brand’s founding year of 1887. (Grant & Sons distilled scotch for other brands for 76 years before creating Glenfiddich.) The logo conveys refinement while contextualizing the \$60 price. “Everybody needs to feel like they’re buying into a luxury product,” Cornthwaite said.

THE CREST– In an era when so many top-shelf spirits belong to liquor leviathans like Diageo, Constellation Brands, and Pernod Ricard, Glenfiddich is an outlier: it’s still in the hands of founder William Grant’s family. Few visual cues reflect old-world pedigree better than a family crest. “If you can lay claim to a legacy that rich,” Cornthwaite said, “why would you not want to point it out?”

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