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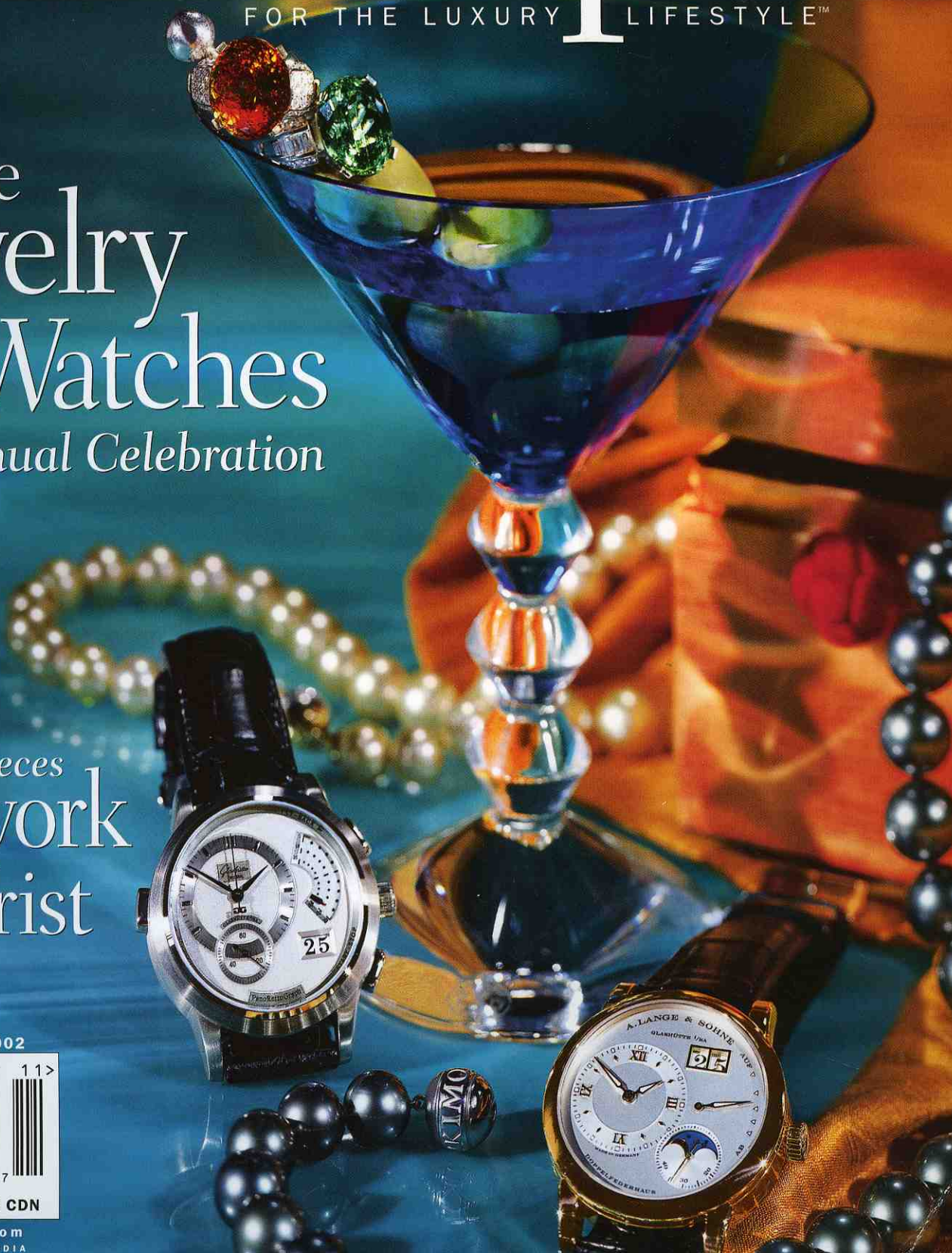
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Liquid Gold

A cache of rare single-malt whisky is a connoisseur's treasure.

THE LEGEND OF THE SS *Politician* certainly had all the makings of a movie: In wartime England, a British ship laden with a cargo of hard cash and Scotch whisky braves the Atlantic and U-boats to conduct the Empire's business in colonial Jamaica. She never arrives at her destination, running aground on the remote Scottish Island of Eriskay. Opportunistic islanders make the best of the mishap, "liberating" one-quarter million bottles of Scotland's finest. Most of the cash is recovered, but nary a bottle of Scotch is ever found. (Aye, there is no fooling a Scotsman as to the true priorities in life.)

As fate would have it, the colorful incident did come to the silver screen in the late '40s in the pulpy, popular *Whisky Galore!* But of greater significance to single-malt aficionados is the fact that the celebrated sinking and subsequent film now lend their legacy to a newly available cache that can only be described as whisky's holy grail. No moonlit treasure hunt of the Hebrides' jagged coast could provide greater romance for Scotch aficionados than the discovery of this age-old oak-laden single malt. Rarer than plutonium—and much tastier—30-year-old-plus Scotch is the benchmark by which all other whiskies must be measured.

Through his thick brogue, Steve Lipp, who with his longtime friend and partner, Euan Shand, helms the boutique importing firm of Duncan Taylor & Co. Ltd., explains how their company came to acquire 2,000 casks of the liquid gold. "We had the opportunity, through a gentleman's estate, to invest in probably the rarest and most significant lot of Scotch whisky available on the market today," he says. The cache, which the firm dubbed "Whisky Galore" in memory of the lost trove, is now also a boon to connoisseurs, who can slake their thirst for rarefied marques by acquiring premium casks directly through Duncan Taylor.

Originally assembled by a wealthy American importer in the late 1960s, the list of the cache's contents is as dizzying as it is dazzling: In all, 21 different brands are represented. Duncan Taylor is now busy tending to clients from Europe to Japan, each eager to own a cask of 1969 The Macallan with its velvety finish, or a staunch, peaty Bowmore that has spent 35 years weathering alongside the North Atlantic. Expectant buyers, however, should

not anticipate the arrival of a massive cask on their doorstep. Duncan Taylor bottles a customer's lot on site in its warehouse in Huntly, in the heart of Scotland's malt-whisky country. Each whisky is bottled at cask strength (no diluting permitted) and then numbered, much like a limited edition, with additional information on the label that includes the distillation year bottling date. Depending on the size of the cask they purchase, buyers can expect anywhere from 150 to 500 bottles, which will be shipped to them at pre-arranged intervals.

Adding to the offering's cachet, clients can opt to have personalized or corporate logos emblazoned on the bottle.

With prices ranging from \$6,000 to \$40,000, the investment in a full cask of 30-year-old-plus single-malt Scotch is not for everyone. But then, initiates will know a deal when they see one. In fact, Lipp points out, a single 30-year-old bottle of Macallan will run around \$350, whereas one of his customers will pay about \$150 at cask prices.

Of course, at whatever price, some of this rare booty will inevitably be lost to the "angel's share"—the name given by the Scots to that wee amount of alcohol that evaporates as the whisky ages. But who can blame the celestial beings? It is single malt, after all. —ERIC HISS



Duncan Taylor & Co. Ltd., 323.960.9065, www.scotchcasks.com