



Whisky Cask Glossary

A complete reference guide to Scotch whisky cask investment terminology

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MEASUREMENTS & STRENGTH

ABV	Alcohol By Volume — the percentage of alcohol in a spirit as a proportion of the total liquid. Casks are typically filled at 63–65% ABV.
AYS	Age of Youngest Spirit — the age of the youngest whisky component in a vatted or blended expression. Determines the legal age statement on the label.
OLA	Original Litres of Alcohol — the total volume of pure alcohol in a cask at point of fill.
RLA	Regauged Litres of Alcohol — the recalculated pure alcohol content after periodic measurement of the cask.
LPA	Litres of Pure Alcohol — a standardised measurement for duty and valuation; effectively OLA/RLA expressed in litres.
HL	Hectolitre — a unit of volume equal to 100 litres. Commonly used in bulk whisky trading.
Regauging	Measuring a cask's contents at a given point to determine current volume and ABV — essential for accurate valuation.
Dilution	The addition of water to reduce ABV, typically from cask strength (~63%) to bottling strength (40–46% ABV).
Cask Strength	Spirit bottled directly from the cask without dilution, typically 55–65% ABV. Premium and highly sought-after.

CASK TYPES & SIZES

Barrel	American oak cask, ~190–200 litres. The most common cask for bourbon maturation and Scotch first-fill bourbon casks.
Hogshead	~225–250 litres. Often re-coopered from bourbon barrels with additional staves. The most common cask size in Scotch whisky.
Butt	Large sherry cask, ~475–500 litres. Traditionally used for fino and oloroso sherry; highly prized for Scotch maturation.
Puncheon	~450–500 litres. Similar to a butt but with different stave dimensions. Used for rum and sherry maturation.
Quarter Cask	~45–50 litres. Increased wood-to-spirit contact accelerates maturation — popular with independent bottlers.
Octave	~45–68 litres; an eighth of a butt. Provides fast wood interaction and rapid flavour development.
Pipe	Port wine cask, ~550–650 litres. Highly sought after for finishing and full maturation.
Blood Tub / Pin	Very small cask, ~40–50 litres. Used for experimental or finishing maturation.
Firkin	~40–56 litres; historically used for ale. Now used in craft whisky finishing.
Drum	Large format cask (up to 700 litres), used occasionally in US bourbon production.

FILL TYPES & PROVENANCE

First Fill	A cask used for Scotch maturation for the first time — previously held bourbon, sherry, port, or wine. Maximum wood and flavour influence.
Second Fill	Used to mature Scotch for the second time. Less flavour transfer; the spirit's own character comes through more freely.
Third Fill / Refill	Used three or more times. Minimal wood influence; little extraction of colour and flavour.
Virgin Oak	Never previously held spirit or wine. Delivers intense wood flavours — vanilla, tannin, spice. Common in American whiskey.
Ex-Bourbon	Previously used to mature bourbon (2+ years in new charred American oak). The most common cask type in Scotch production.
Ex-Sherry	Previously used to mature sherry (fino, oloroso, PX, etc.). Imparts rich dried fruit, nut, and chocolate notes.
Ex-Port	Previously used to mature port wine. Adds sweetness, berry fruit, and a distinctive ruby colour.
Ex-Wine	Previously used for wine maturation — Bordeaux, Sauternes, Burgundy, etc. Increasingly used for finishing.
Ex-Rum	Previously used to mature rum. Adds tropical fruit and sweet sugar cane character.
STR	Shaved, Toasted, Re-charred — applied to ex-wine casks to remove excess tannins and reactivate the wood for Scotch maturation.

MATURATION & WOOD SCIENCE

Angel's Share	Spirit lost to evaporation during maturation — approximately 2% per year in Scotland, higher in warmer climates.
Devil's Cut	Spirit absorbed into the wood staves of the cask — distinct from the Angel's Share (evaporation).
Extraction	The process by which whisky draws colour and flavour compounds from the wood — vanilla, caramel, spice, tannin, fruit.
Oxidation	Interaction between spirit and oxygen through the porous wood stave; softens harsh notes and develops complexity.
Congeners	Organic compounds from fermentation retained through distillation — esters, aldehydes, fusel oils — that shape flavour.
Tannins	Polyphenolic compounds extracted from oak. Contribute dryness, structure, and complexity.
Lignin	A wood component that breaks down during maturation to produce vanilla and sweet aromatic compounds.
Charring	Burning the inner cask surface to create a charcoal filter layer and caramelize wood sugars — standard in bourbon production.
Toasting	Gentle heat application (without flame) to the cask interior — standard in sherry cask production; develops spice and vanilla.
Finishing	A secondary maturation period (typically 3–12 months) in a different cask type after primary maturation is complete.
Warehouse Style	Dunnage (traditional, earth floors, cool, slow), palletised (modern, consistent), racked (American-style, temperature variation).

INDUSTRY & REGULATORY TERMS

SWA	Scotch Whisky Association — regulates and protects Scotch whisky under the Scotch Whisky Regulations 2009.
SWR	Scotch Whisky Regulations 2009 — the legal framework governing production, labelling, and marketing of Scotch whisky.
HMRC	His Majesty's Revenue & Customs — responsible for excise duty. Scotch whisky held in bond is under HMRC supervision.
Bonded Warehouse	HMRC-approved facility where excisable goods are stored without payment of duty until released for sale or export.
Duty Suspension	Status of whisky casks held in a bonded warehouse — no excise duty payable until released for consumption.
NAS	No Age Statement — a bottling with no declared age. Often indicates blending of multiple ages for consistent flavour.
Single Malt	Wholly from malted barley, at a single distillery, in pot stills, matured in Scotland for a minimum of 3 years.
Single Cask	Bottled exclusively from one individual cask, typically at cask strength. Valued for uniqueness and traceability.
Blended Malt	A blend of single malts from two or more distilleries — no grain whisky. Formerly called 'vatted malt'.
Blended Scotch	A blend of single malt and grain whiskies from multiple distilleries. The most widely produced and consumed Scotch category.

INVESTMENT & COMMERCIAL TERMS

OWC	Original Wooden Case — the case in which a bottling was originally packed. Significant for secondary market bottle trading.
BBR	Berry Bros. & Rudd — one of the UK's oldest and most prestigious wine and spirit merchants.
IB	Independent Bottler — purchases individual casks and bottles under their own label (e.g. Gordon & MacPhail, Cadenhead's).
OB	Official Bottling — released by the distillery under its own brand.
Regauging Certificate	Official document certifying the current volume and ABV of a cask — essential for insurance, transfer, and valuation.
Cask Deed / Title	Legal document confirming cask ownership — includes cask number, distillery, fill date, and warehouse location.
Warehousing Fees	Annual storage charges levied by the warehouse operator for holding a cask in a bonded facility.
Provenance	Documented history and chain of ownership of a cask or bottle — critical to authenticity and value.
Cask Valuation	Assessment of current market value, based on distillery reputation, age, fill type, volume, and market conditions.
MLA	Minimum Lot Age — the age of the youngest spirit component in a blend; determines the legal age statement.

SCOTCH WHISKY REGIONS

Speyside	Scotland's most prolific region (70+ distilleries), centred on the River Spey. Elegant, fruit-forward, lighter and sweeter styles. Home to Macallan, Glenfiddich, and Glenlivet.
Highlands	Scotland's largest geographic region. Styles range from coastal and peaty to fruity and heathery. Includes Glenmorangie, Dalmore, and Oban.
Islay	Island off Scotland's west coast. Famed for heavily peated, smoky, maritime whiskies — Ardbeg, Laphroaig, Bruichladdich, Bowmore.
Lowlands	Southern Scotland. Light, approachable, unpeated — historically triple-distilled. Includes Auchentoshan and Glenkinchie.
Campbeltown	Small peninsula on Scotland's west coast. Distinctive briny, slightly peated style — home to Springbank and Glengyle.
Islands	Informal category: Orkney (Highland Park, Scapa), Skye (Talisker), Jura, Mull (Tobermory), and Arran.