

Port Ellen 31 year old

54.6%

Now the one that peat freaks wait patiently for every year, which makes it the bottling that produces the most debate. For me, this is up there with last year's bottling, which itself ushered in a return to high standards after a slight dropping-off in expressiveness. This is different, however. Yes, the color is as pale as ever — has anyone ever tasted an over-oaked Port Ellen? — and yes, the nose initially shows all of the distillery's austere notes: think of a wet fish counter and the sensation of the sea rather than overt 'fishiness,' while there's also a chilled cucumber note. The difference is the sweetness, which is more to the fore, and also, it would seem, a slight dropping-off in massive smokiness. Here the peat is integrated into the whole. The palate has a numb spot right on the front, then wasabi-like heat coupled with olive oil. Soon the sea rolls in and it stands there like some creature from the Black Lagoon covered with balls of tar, draped in wet seaweed, encrusted with barnacles and clams — and clutching a kipper. But don't forget the sweetness that spreads across the tongue and slowly drifts into fresh spice and antiseptic.

Complex...and there's a scant 3,000 bottled for the globe. [not available in the U.S.] £280

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