



THE BEST HIGH-ROLLER SCOTCH

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(illustration: Elizabeth Reyes)

You know who knows best which bottles to buy? The people who pour and sell drinks—that's who. We asked dozens of top bartending and spirits industry professionals to tell us which bottles they love and why.

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Heads up: The numerical order below is not organized by importance or quality; it's an alphabetical list, not a ranking. Prices are averages and can vary from state to state.



1: BALVENIE PORTWOOD 21 YEAR (\$200)

"This is one of the peatiest [scotches](#) you will ever experience. However, because of this, the peat becomes a shadow over the beautiful citrus and flower characteristics of the scotch."—Jennifer K. Knott, head bartender at [312 Chicago](#)



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2: BEN NEVIS 21 YEAR (\$105)

"It's located at the highest altitude in the mountains of the British Isles. Although it's very pale in color, don't let that fool as young. It has slight fruity aromas, with nutty and toffee flavors, and a lingering dry finish of tobacco, pepper and smoke. [Ben Nevis Distillery](#) has an interesting background story, with its distillery closing, being sold and reopened. It's now controlled by [Nikka Whisky Distilling Company, Ltd.](#), the other Japanese whisky powerhouse."—Juyoung Kang, lead bartender at Las Vegas' [Dorsey](#)



3: **BOWMORE 25 YEAR** **(\$500)**

“A beautiful package leads to this chocolate-filled dessert scotch, perfect for sipping as I snuggle up on the leather couch fireside.”—Ann-Marie Verdi, co-owner and beverage director at Los Angeles' [Bellwether](#)



4: **BRUICHLADDICH BLACK ART 4 1990** **(\$362)**

“It uses hand-picked first-fill sherry casks from the top 1 percent of barrels currently aging at the distillery. The result is a richer, darker, more chocolatey version of Macallan with a thicker profile and a complex palate of raisins, sultana, orange peel and ginger. The flavor profoundness is exquisite.”—Mcson Salicetti, head bartender at New York City's [Crimson & Rye](#)



5: **BUNNAHABHAIN 25 YEAR** **(\$372)**

“One of the best balanced, heavily sherried whiskies available. I heard a rumor it may be discontinued, but if you find a bottle, buy it! It doesn't disappoint.”—Kang



6: **COMPASS BOX THE CIRCUS** **(\$450)**

“It's a perfect blend—so much dried fruit, like red apple and Bartlett pear. It is quite intense for a blend with all the cinnamon and chai-type spices but rounds out with toasted almonds and hazelnuts on the finish. John Glaser keeps putting out phenomenal whiskies.”—Brian Means, bartender at San Francisco's [Mina Group](#)



7: COMPASS BOX FLAMING HEART (\$130)

“There’s unique and complex aging in the best barrels on earth.”—David Y. Dong, bartender at New York City's [North End Grill](#)



8: COMPASS BOX SPICE TREE EXTRAVAGANZA (\$124)

“John Glaser is a rebellious master distiller. This is a marriage of hybrid casks of elegant wood, with notes of cinnamon, black pepper, leather, red apple and clove.” Gil Izaguirre, beverage director at Chicago's [Honey's](#)



9: THE DALMORE CIGAR MALT RESERVE (\$150)

“With this age statement, it’s significantly smooth with notes of shortbread and stone fruit to appease any palate.”—Izaguirre



10: THE DALMORE 18 YEAR (\$160)

“It’s a delicious scotch to drink and also great to start a collection, as it was discontinued last year.”—Sam Willy, restaurant manager at New York City's [Gabriel Kreuther](#)



11: THE GLENDRONACH ALLARDICE 18 YEAR (\$200)

“Hands down, Glendronach 18 Allardice. The exclusive use of oloroso sherry casks for maturation plays a heavy hand in the flavor profile. Expect notes of dried fruits, exotic spices, leather and polished wood.”—Tommy Tardie, owner and operator at New York City's [Fine & Rare](#) and [The Flatiron Room](#)



12: THE GLENDRONACH 15 YEAR (\$200)

“I don’t usually go for this late in aging, but damn, this is good. It goes great with a dessert and cigars. It’s definitely the highlight whisky for entertainment with refinement.”—Kang



13: GLENMORANGIE EXTREMELY RARE 18 YEAR (\$153)

“John Glaser is a rebellious master distiller. This is a marriage of hybrid casks of elegant wood. This scotch has notes of cinnamon, black pepper, leather, red apple and clove.”—Izaguirre



14: GLENMORANGIE SIGNET (\$170)

“This is the 'money is no object' choice. Matured in sherry oak casks for a minimum of 25 years, it's a masterpiece.”—Verdi



15: **GORDON & MACPHAIL MACALLAN SPEYMALT 1973** **(\$2,072)**

“This hard-to-find (but possible) bottle is worth keeping your eyes out for. It’s one of the few single malts that shows older bottlings can display restraint and balance. It’s easily the finest product I’ve tasted from the Macallan distillery.”—Peder Schweigert, general manager at

Minneapolis' [Marvel Bar](#)



16: **HAZELBURN BAROLO CASK MATURED 9 YEAR** **(\$115)**

“This Campbeltown scotch starts with subtle baking spices on the nose, followed by toasted macadamia nuts and almonds coming out from the first-fill [bourbon](#) barrel. The finish pulls out dried fig and rich plum flavors from the Barolo hogsheads it’s finished in. It’s one of my favorites from Campbeltown.”—Alicia Walton, owner and bartender at San Francisco's [Sea Star](#)



17: **HIGHLAND PARK 18 YEAR** **(\$150)**

“It’s the same juice that we all love with a sherry finishing that adds a little extra complexity.”—Neal Bodenheimer, owner and bartender at

New Orleans' [Cane & Table](#) and [Cure](#)



18: **LAGAVULIN 200TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION 12 YEAR** **(\$135)**

“It’s as different as it aims to be—botanical and floral with tropical fruit, vanilla, caramel and dried fruit.”—H. Joseph Ehrmann, owner of

San Francisco's [Elixir](#)



19: **MACALLAN FINE OAK 17 YEAR** **(\$240)**

“It has a unique cask strength and strong sherry flavor. I had the opportunity to try it at the distillery when it was only available there.”—

Willy



20: **MACALLAN 25 YEAR** **(\$1,810)**

“It has dark fruits and gentle smoke. Buy this for someone you love.”—Verdi



21: **MACALLAN RARE CASK** **(\$288)**

“The combination of cask types includes both first- and second-fill American oak, which adds a delicious tropical fruitiness to it, and then the ex-sherry oak, which provides some woody spicy notes.”—Salicetti



22: **SHACKLETON THE DISCOVERY MACKINLAY'S RARE OLD HIGHLAND MALT** **(\$121)**

“This is a recreation of the bottle Sir Ernest Shackleton left in Antarctica sometime between 1907 and 1909. It's a pretty cool effort. Only 50,000 bottles were made, and it comes with awesome history, a map and photos.”—Chris Hannah, head bartender at New Orleans' [French](#)



23: SPRINGBANK LOCAL BARLEY 11 YEAR (\$160)

“A well-balanced single malt from one of the last independently owned distilleries in Scotland, this expression has notes of honey, a bit of peat and a bitter almond finish.”—Paul McGee, owner and bartender at Chicago's [Lost Lake](#)



24: SPRINGBANK 15 YEAR (\$110)

“I love sherry-cask-aged scotch, and this one really delivers. So much tropical fruit—mango and pineapple—but there's a lot of creamy marzipan and some gentle peat on the back end.”—Means



25: SPRINGBANK 18 YEAR (\$161)

“This is everything you want in a Lowland, let alone a scotch. It's vanilla-y, fruity, salty and spicy. The aromatics alone will make your heart smile.”—Camille Cavan, bar manager at Portland, Ore.'s [Quaintrelle](#)

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