

that otherwise dominate the industry, is the John Fergus & Co-owned InchDairnie Distillery in Fife. Built in 2014 on the edge of a Glenrothes industrial estate at a cost of £15 million, it may lack the nostalgia of some of its contemporaries but it is seeking to make up for this with a state-of-the-art plant and by forging a new brand in an underserved corner of the market.

“Our long-term success rests on carving out a niche in an otherwise crowded space,” explains Ian Palmer, managing director at InchDairnie Distillery.

With roughly 100 well-known brands in the home market and many more exported, building a following without a notable point of differentiation would take pockets far deeper than those available to Mr Palmer. Instead, he has identified a sector of the market which is established yet experiencing significant growth of its own and for which there are only a few established brands: rye whisky.

“Heritage is great if you have it and it certainly makes the marketing task a lot easier, but what we’re really interested in is flavour. Rye gives us an entirely different flavour profile and the market for it is growing,” he says.

Although rye whisky owes its origin to north-west Europe the market for it is North America. Between 2009 and 2018, sales of rye whisky in the US increased ten-fold.

“In certain markets, principally the US and Canada, rye is already recognised as a unique product. This means the market is established and the consumer understands the point of difference with whisky from other grains. Whisky made using a large proportion of rye from Scotland is a niche opportunity we are seeking to exploit,” says Mr Palmer.

What InchDairnie lacks in heritage it makes up for in provenance. Its whisky, RyeLaw, the brand it successfully trademarked in 2017, takes its name from a near-by farm of the same name and the grain is also grown in Fife.

“The name may be a fortuitous fit, but it underlines our ambition. We are seeking to build a sustainable supply chain based around a whisky which owes its identity to a grain grown, matured and distilled in Fife.”

While the backstory may be strong, regulations mean that only whisky distilled from barley malt can be marketed as ‘malt whisky’. Everything else is described as ‘grain whisky’.



Ian Palmer, managing director at John Fergus & Co's InchDairnie Distillery in Fife, Scotland

Fortunately, meeting the definition of a grain whisky in Scotland and a rye whisky in the US is reasonably straight-forward.

“As long as it is more than 51% rye, distilled at no more than 80% alcohol, and matured in new oak charred casks at no more than 62.5% alcohol, it will fulfil the terms of the US regulations.

This is not too different from Scottish regulations, so we can comply with both,” explains Mr Palmer.

Eyes on the prize

The prospect of great rewards may have been the stimulus that captured the attention of John Fergus & Co but creating the product that would one

