



Vikram Achanta



## To a Haggis

*"May all your pleasures become habit and all your habits become legal"*

**IF YOU SEE COWS DOING A SHIMMY** on your Scottish holiday, you're not hallucinating, they've probably OD'd on draff balls of barley skins, full of protein, and a by-product of the whisky making process. We are in Aberdeen in what could be called the whisky bowl of Scotland.

Our measurements are taken for a kilt, which we are to wear for the haggis ceremony. "Fair and full is your honest face, great

chieftain of the sausage race," starts Robert Burns' *Address to a Haggis*, which is read out every year on Burns night, the 25th of January, his birthday. If you knew what haggis is, I doubt very much you'd lay knife and fork to it, but after three days of hospitality in the Scottish Highlands, the least we owe our hosts is to do justice to the sausage chieftain. They ply us with Scotch whisky. "Give an Indian, whisky," they are told,

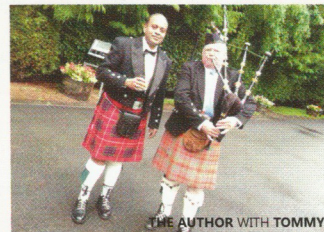
"and he'll eat your haggis."

We reach Leith House in Keith, owned by the Chivas Brothers, and neighbour to Strathisla (Valley of the River Isla) distillery, which produces the Single Malt, described as the heart of Chivas Regal. Whisky flows free. The five we taste, from the Strathisla 12-year-old to the Chivas 25-year-old, are a teaser for our main course. Ian Logan, our host and brand ambassador for Chivas Brothers, takes us to the Royal Salute warehouse, which stores casks of some seriously old amber. What Ian draws out reverentially from the cask is a 38-year-old Royal Salute, known as the Stone of Destiny. Its colour is deep and taste rich. It retails at USD 650 a bottle. "Where do you buy this from?" I ask Ian. "You think I buy my own whisky!" is incredulous.

A blended scotch like the Chivas Regal combines 25 or more different Single Malts (A Single Malt is whisky distilled in a single distillery, using barley), and grain whisky (made from grains like wheat or rice). The recipe for

Chivas Regal is handed down to each generation of master blender who is tasked with ensuring that year on year, it remains consistent. Given that each Blended Scotch whisky contains multiple malts, no single company can produce everything it needs. They are supplied through competition and malt supplies go back and forth across distilleries. As I heard it described, "we just exchange trucks!"

We're prepared for our Burns night by our morning visit to The Glenlivet distiller. Ian reveals that his "desert island drink" is The Glenlivet 18, but my favourite is the Glenlivet Nadurra (Gaelic for natural), as near a replica to what George Smith, the founder of Glenlivet might have produced. We find our kilts laid out in our



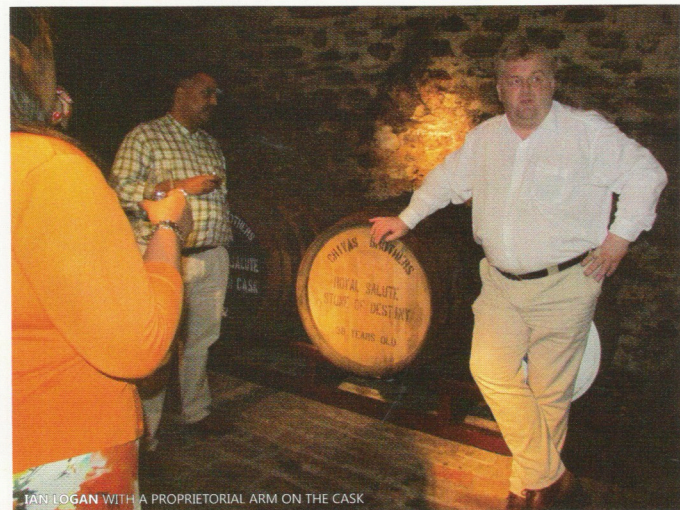
THE AUTHOR WITH TOMMY

rooms with accompanying leather belts and sporrans (a small pouch). With some help I'm soon kilted, and feel like a Lord of the Manor. Tommy, the bagpiper, has a few tunes going as we come down.

The haggis is ceremonially escorted in on a tray, with Tommy preceding it playing his pipes. It reaches Ian at the head of the table, who recites Robert Burns poem, *To a Haggis*, in Gaelic before serving us. I bravely taste the first mouthful. Interesting, is my reaction. I could eat this and have seconds, too.

On our last night at Leith House, I raise a toast and bid adieu to Keith, Aberdeen, Scotland and the haggis, "May all your pleasures become habit and all your habits become legal."

**Tulleeho!**



IAN LOGAN WITH A PROPRIETORIAL ARM ON THE CASK