

In the Mood for a Whisky

It's not just Scotch, American whisky is the drink of choice for the new generation

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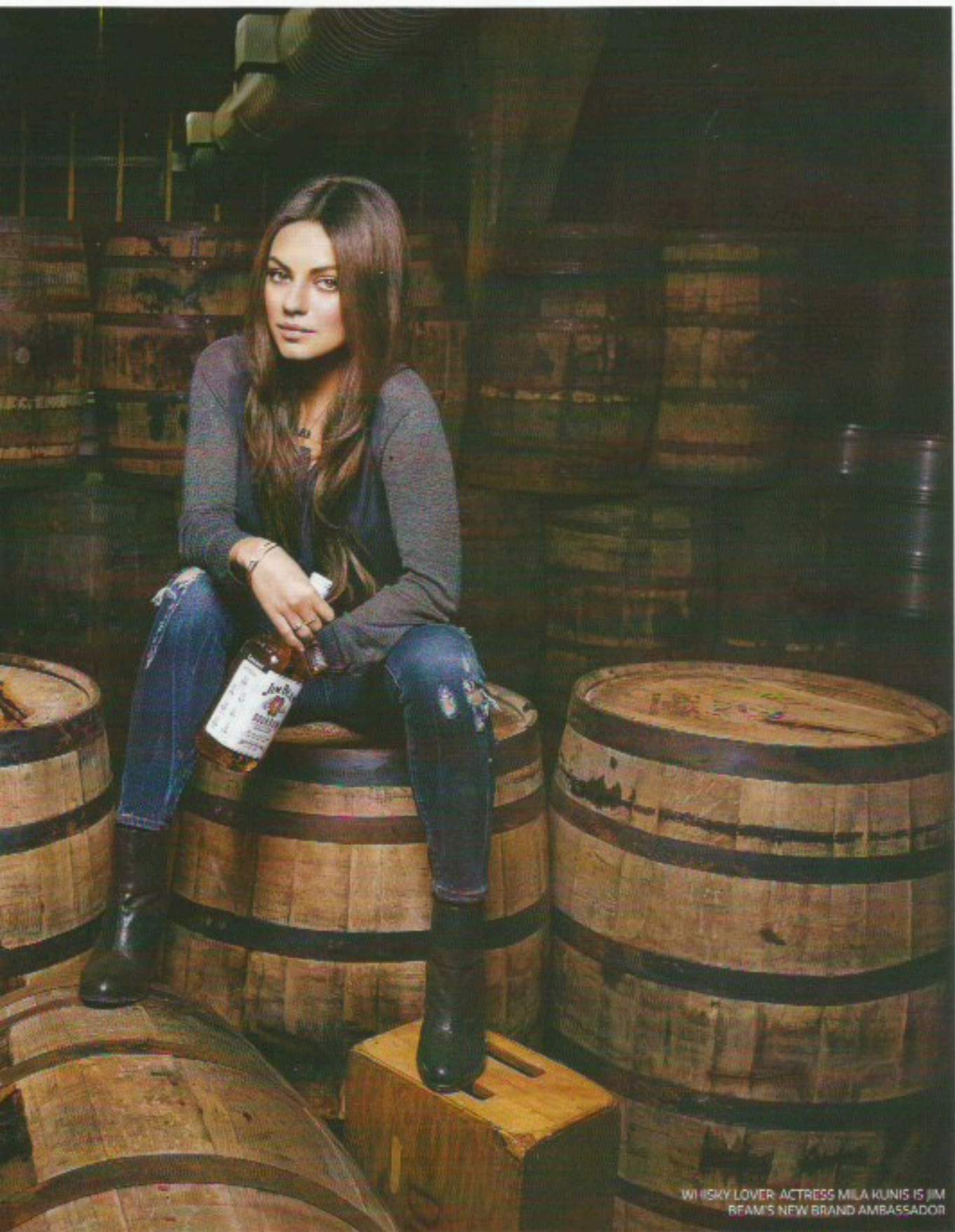
There's a new warmth in India's ties with America, fuelled no doubt by our new-found love for American whisky. Contrary to what you might think, not all whisky is Scotch. There's a fair amount of whisky—bourbon, Tennessee and rye—made by our friends across the Atlantic and shipped over to India, with iconic brands like Jack Daniel's and Jim

Beam leading the charge.

"As the next generation of consumers enters the whisky category, the new entrants will look for newer expressions of whisky which reflect their taste and lifestyle and is differentiated from what they have seen the generation before them drinking, which is primarily Scotch," says Ankur Bhatia, marketing controller

with Beam Suntory India. Beam would certainly hope so, as it has recently begun shipping Jim Beam over in bulk to India, to be bottled locally.

Also, unlike Scotch and its holy trinity of ice, water and soda, things are a little more free and easy with American whisky. As the Jim Beam tag line goes: "Any damn way you please," with cola, ginger ale and tonic all



WHISKY LOVER: ACTRESS MILA KUNIS IS JIM BEAM'S NEW BRAND AMBASSADOR



AMERICAN COCKTAIL: BOURBONS, SUCH AS JIM BEAM AND JACK DANIELS, MAKE A GREAT BASE FOR MIXES

combining wonderfully with American whisky. And if you're in the mood for a cocktail, you're in luck, as bourbon/rye whisky has traditionally been at the base of great classic whisky cocktails, like the Manhattan, the Old Fashioned and the Mint Julep.

Fifteen years ago, I asked my brother, who was visiting from the USA, for a bottle of Jack Daniel's. Instead of the regular Old No. 7 bottle however, he got me a premium variant called Jack Daniel's Silver Select. "A robust but opulent whisky, bursting with aromas of caramel, vanilla and toast," proving that it wasn't just a fine single malt or cognac which could be sipped.

Vineet Agrawal from Jack Daniel's also sees a lot of women, who traditionally have shied away from whisky, now finding a suitable alternative in American whisky. Shatbhi Basu, the official ambassador for American whisky in India, corroborates this, saying, "American whisky has an edge and mellowness with a great aromatic nose that should find wide appeal."

American whisky, of course, has its share of celebrity fans, among them being the legendary Frank Sinatra. To commemorate his love for Jack Daniel's, the company released a special edition called Sinatra Select (USD 175) in 2014. As the ad line went, "They

were inseparable. And as it turns out, they still are." Tongue in cheek perhaps, as a bottle of Jack Daniel's was placed in Frank Sinatra's grave with him.

"A lot of our drinking culture has been influenced by the British," says Vaibhav Singh, drinks expert, which partly accounts for the sway held by whisky, rum and brandy in India. George Washington (yes, the George Washington) also had British influence in the form of a canny Scotsman who was his plantation manager and who persuaded Washington to start making whisky. It's this same distillery which has been recently brought back to life and now makes rye whisky.

A few years ago, Dave Pickerell, the ex-master distiller of Makers Mark, who was also associated with the resurrection of the George Washington distillery, came visiting and ran a very engaging session for us on American whisky, including a taste of a 100 per cent rye whisky, unfortunately not however the George Washington rye whisky which is back on the American market. The first two bottles sold for \$ 100,000 each!

There are four critical components of American whisky: quality grain, most often either corn or rye; water (low in iron); American white oak (thin, but still watertight) for the barrel; and the diurnal weather--the heat of the day and the cool of the night.

Some things, however, are pure serendipity. In the 18th century, Reverend Elijah Craig, a whisky distiller in Kentucky, USA, had whisky pouring out of his stills, but nowhere to store it. Off he went to the barrel maker who had no barrel, except for one which smelt strongly of fish. The good Reverend, in a stroke of inspiration, burnt the barrel from the inside to get rid of the fish smell. The resulting charred barrel gave the whisky a remarkable colour and flavour! And to this date, bourbon whisky has to be matured for at least two years in new charred oak barrels. Amen to more such mistakes! 