

# The battle of the blends

Tee off at "the blended back 9" with these aged scotches

**T**alk in the clubhouse may be about the single-malt craze, but there's no denying that blends – with 90 percent of scotch sales internationally – are still champion. The rules of blends are simple: They must be made in Scotland and contain malt and grain whiskies. The execution, however, is what separates the pros from the duffers. With a dizzying number of distilleries to choose from, the skilled blender combines dozens of spirits to achieve a unique – but consistent – dram. That's as easy as a par 3 at St. Andrews.

We brought our best blends to the 18th green at Battleground Country Club, Manalapan, to see how they stack up. All are 750mL bottles, and each is rated on a 10-point scale. Although blends are the go-to liquor when a cocktail calls for whisky, these aces fare better on the rocks with a splash of spring water.

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**Buchanan's 18**

The bottle may be small, but the 40 whiskies packed inside provide a big taste. Loaded with richness but with enough follow-through to lull the palate with its gentle finesse. The distinctive dark bottle and light label earned the original blend the nickname "black and white whisky," and we'd rate this offering as "black and gold."

Price: \$75  
Rating: 9.1

**Kings Crest 25**

With competitors blending dozens of whiskies in their recipes, this two-distillery scotch is a rarity. Only the (defunct) single grain of North of Scotland '74 and the single malt of Glenlivet '77 gain admittance to this exclusive blend. A sweet approach and a clove follow-through give this Speysider a taste profile similar to that of an American whiskey.

Price: \$200  
Rating: 9.7

**Duncan Taylor 38**

Matured in the '60s, blended in the '80s and two decades in sherry casks yield a nose of eucalyptus with waves of mint on the palate.

Featured players in this lineup are Bunnahabhain, Highland Park and Springbank.

Price: \$175  
Rating: 9.5

**Johnnie Walker Blue King George V**

In 1934, King George V designated Johnnie Walker the "official purveyor of scotch to Britain's royal household." Seven decades later the most recognizable brand in the world honors him with a special bottling using only whiskies from distilleries operating during his reign.

The crystal decanter (with its iconic tilted label) is a fitting home for immortals such as Islay's legendary Port Ellen. The smokiness is par for JW, but the complexity of this dram is unmatched in its family.

Price: \$550  
Rating: 9.3

**Ballantine's 30**

This best all-around game. This veteran is smooth and complex with heavy apple notes and a finish worthy of Tiger Woods.

Price: \$400  
Rating: 9.8

**Dewar's Signature**

The Aberfeldy 27-year-old single malt provides the backbone for the star of the Dewar's product line. Credit sherry oak casks for the harmony. Smoky and musty with a touch of pepper at its short game.

Price: \$200  
Rating: 9.4

**Black Bottle 10**

All seven Islay distilleries contribute to this relative newcomer, and the results are what you'd expect from this Scottish region – lots of peat and loads of spice.

Price: \$35  
Rating: 8.8

**Chivas Regal 25**

This new expression harks back to the original 25-year-old Chivas that came to America 100 years ago. An elegant addition to their 12- and 18-year-olds that are staples in most clubhouses.

Price: \$300  
Rating: 9.6



**Compass Box Asyla**

Leave it to an American to redefine the game. Whisky maker John Glaser (best known for his battles with the Scotch Whisky Association over his innovative techniques) creates an easy-drinking style that plays effortlessly on the course. The aging in first-fill American oak casks ("the wood" in the game of scotch) provides the palest of our brown spirits with a citrus and vanilla sweet spot. If you're looking for something refreshing at the 19th hole, then this is your dram.

Rating: 9.2 Price: \$40