

Great Scots

Ardbeg's whiskies deserve diplomatic status

DON TSE

Whiskies from Islay in Scotland hold a special place in the hearts and minds of Scotch drinkers. They are loved. Or they are hated.

In particular, whiskies from the Ardberg distillery are revered or reviled. Being some of the most heavily peated and smokiest whiskies available, Ardberg exemplifies what people like (or loathe) about Scotch.

Because of this, Ardberg has an almost cult-like following (by those on the love side of the equation), which has made obtaining rare or exclusive expressions of their Scotch an obsession. But things should be a lot easier now for Calgary-based members of the sect thanks to the opening of a local "Embassy."

BOOZE

Ardberg Embassies are outposts officially sanctioned by the Ardberg distillery to help spread the gospel of peat and smoke. Kensington Wine Market is officially Canada's Ardberg Embassy but, at least for now, it's also the only one in all of North America.

In its official role, Kensington Wine Market will have dibs on limited release Ardberg bottlings and is the exclusive distributor of special bottlings made

for the Ardberg Committee (worldwide membership of over 50,000) and for Ardberg Day (an annual day of worship for Ardberg fans — the next one is June 1, 2013, so you have plenty of time to plan your festivities).

If you're not sure if you love or hate Ardberg, there are three regular bottlings currently available at the Market (and other fine spirits merchants) for you to try.

• **Ardberg Blasda** — This is the most lightly peated of the Ardberg expres-

sions and is bottled at a mere 40 per cent. Even so, it is representative of the Ardberg style and a taste of it will tell you whether or not you'll become an Ardberg follower (\$94).

• **Ardbeg 10** — This 10-year-old is officially the entry-level Ardberg but, at 46 per cent and non-chill filtered, 10 is full-flavoured and packs a punch.

For those who have never tried Ardberg, tasting this one can shock the senses (\$69).

• **Ardbeg Uigeadail** — Pronounced

OOG-a-Dal, this is made in part with whisky aged in ex-sherry casks. While this normally softens a whisky, Uigeadail is bottled "cask-strength" at 54.2 per cent, so it isn't for the faint of heart (\$102).

A limited number of bottles of Ardberg Galileo were recently available as the first Embassy special release, but sold out quickly. If you don't want to miss out on future rare bottlings, visit the Embassy and add your name to the list of Committee members.