

Wee dram warms art lovers at The Corn Exchange

Stephen Woodcock took the decision to mothball Tobermory Distillery for two years however Mull's only distillery has come roaring back with two whisky brands now selling well on a number of continents.

And it has also produced Tobormory gin which has quickly made a real impact in an already tough marketplace.

Tobermory's continuing push for market share brings them to Edinburgh this weekend for the prestige art fair in The Corn Exchange.

It is recognised as the UK's leading fair of its type outside London and the artwork on the drinks company's stand was appreciated by the opening night clients.

However, the two whisky brands, a ten-year-old Ledaig and Tobermory, a 12-year-old whisky, proved a heady attraction.

Let's not forget the soft and wonderfully refreshing gin which was savoured by many amidst the first night hubbub poured onto a generous bed of ice and presented with a sprig of thyme, blood orange and hibiscus.

The enterprising, art-linked promotional campaign is also backing the UK's first fine art pub crawls this weekend and tickets are still available for Saturday's trip. Sunday is sold-out.

Stephen, the distillery manager, was undoubtedly a man in

demand and guests listened intently to the re-energising of Tobormory which has a patchy history beset by closures and name changes.

It was founded in 1798 by local kelp merchant John Sinclair and was one of the first to take out a distilling licence in 1823.

Tobormory is now owned by the South African wine and spirit group, Distell, but remains distinctly Scottish and the 12-year-old is matured in ex-bourbon casks. It enjoys a slightly salty edge.

Stephen said: "The minute you mention Tobormory you know that it is an unpeated whisky. It spends 12 years in an American oak and what that gives us are some lovely vanilla notes. It is a light and refreshing and something for the summer there "

Ten-year-old, Ledaig has a rich peaty smoke taste and is so different from the other brand.

In this case, the company ship the malt in by ferry from Islay. That helps give what Stephen describes as "a peaty expression".

Holding the lemony gold drink in his hand he said: "You can't beat Ledaig with its peatyness beside the fire in the middle of winter."

Looking back on the closure he declared: "Tobormory is one of the oldest operating distilleries in Scotland and it has been on and off since 1798.

"We shut it purposely as it was tired. We needed to spend some money on the processing equipment and we also needed to spend some money on the structure of the building, put on new roofs, do some work with the stonework.

"We also had to build the gin distillery and, when we closed down, we underpinned our commitment to the community and kept

our staff with us.

“They were allowed to go and work for other people and we gave them the option to come back. Some did, some didn’t so the ultimate challenge was to go out and recruit people who come in and adapt to the world of distilling.

“Mull, unlike other regions, was not tripping over with distillers so we brought people in from a range of professions. We are really pleased with the team we have got now.

“We have hit the quality product we know is going to be beautiful when it comes out in ten or 12 years.”

Picture: Tobormory Harbour near the distillery by Nigel Duncan