

# Drink, dine like the Scots on Robbie Burns Day



Calgary Herald - Jan 25, 2010

By Nick Lees, Edmonton Journal

**Matthew Waddle plays the drum for the Edmonton Boy's Pipe Band during the annual celebration of the famed Scottish poet, Robbie Burns at Rutherford House on the University of Alberta campus**

**Photograph by: Greg Southam, Edmonton Journal**

Doug and Irene Townshend have been dining out several times a week for 25 years.

"Invariably, we found wines by the glass were not the best," he says.

"It's always been at the back of my mind to open a wine bar with good food and offer premium wines.

"You could say The Bothy Wine and Whisky Bar came about because of our pet peeve over wines by the glass."

Offering good whisky, as well as premium wines, was a natural for the Townshends, who officially opened their bar last weekend at 5482 Calgary Trail.

Born in Stromness, the second-largest town on Scotland's northern Orkney Islands, Townshend moved to Dundee with his family at the age of three.

"As a young man, I often worked in my uncle's century-old pub, Ye Old Tav," he says. "I always enjoyed chatting with customers. As everyone knows, they regard their barman as everything from their father confessor to psychologist."

Townshend moved to Canada in 1975, and with a partner, launched a small machine shop. He met his Glaswegian wife here and when he sold his business, where he'd often worked 14-hour days, she suggested he relax and visit some of the places he'd always wanted to.

"I climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and Machu Picchu and thought of opening a bar in Jasper when I returned," he says.

"But that fell through and I had found a location in Edmonton and was building the bar when I met Andrew Walls at a local tasting. He knows all there is to know about whisky and it made sense for me to bring him on board."

Walls, who grew up in Inverness and wears a kilt to work, began taking in whisky lore as soon as he could walk. His mother worked in the Glen Ord distillery west of Inverness.

"Initially I thought we might carry between 50 and 75 single malts," Townshend says. "But we now have significantly more than 100."

With the 251st birthday of Scotland's national poet Robert Burns being celebrated throughout Edmonton before, on and after Jan. 25, it's easy at present to spot someone sporting a kilt in The Bothy. (A bothy is a basic shelter that provides shelter for hikers and skiers caught by bad weather.)

Customers can sample everything from a wee dram of the Lowland Auchentoshan Classic (\$6), to Islay's Bruichladdich Blacker Still (\$28) to the Speyside's 1979-bottled Glenfarclas (\$69).

"The single malt I drink all the time is the Speyside's 12 Year Old Balvenie Double Wood (\$7.50)," Townshend says. "If it's a wee bit of a celebration, I might have the 25 Year Old Highland Park (\$29). It's from the Orkneys."

It would have to be an exceptional night before Townshend enjoys a dram of the very rare, and 97-point rated, 1964 Bowmore Black from Islay. It sells for \$280 a shot.

*He has invested a small fortune in a large, state-of-the-art Enomatic wine system that replaces oxygen in opened bottles with argon gas.*

*"We sell 16 red wines and four white," he says. "But we are prepared to open a bottle at any price if a customer will purchase two glasses. We have a 700-bottle cellar."*

*"We've found if people like the wine, they will probably buy the entire bottle. If they don't, the wine is good for up to about a month and it will almost certainly arouse the curiosity of another wine aficionado."*

Wines by the glass include the highly rated Ballentine Chenin Blanc from Napa Valley (\$12); Russian River Valley Rodney Strong Pinot Noir, \$18); Sbragia Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon from Dry Creek Valley, Healdsburg (\$27), and Chateau Beaucastel, a leading winery in Chateauneuf du Pape (\$30).

There are another five reds by the glass that are not in the Enomatic system.

The biggest barrier for consumers opening bottles of sparkling wine in their homes is the loss of "fizz."

Through a system called Perlage, air in the bottle is replaced with carbon dioxide, exactly what comes out when the cork is removed, Townshend explains.

"Essentially, the wine doesn't 'know' it has been opened and will keep indefinitely," says Townshend.

"Dom Perignon producers were so impressed, they bought 2,000 of the chambers to give to their main suppliers."

Domaine Chandon Blanc de Noir is \$11.50 a glass, while France's iconic Veuve Clicquot Champagne is \$22.

"Once we are more established I'd like to pour the very good Champagnes, perhaps selling for about \$350 a bottle, and sell glasses for \$55 to \$65 to people who might want to taste them, but not want to purchase a full bottle," Townshend says.

The Bothy kitchen offers top-end cheese and charcuterie to accompany tastings.

Also popular are the soups, pies and sandwiches. And, of course, haggis.

"We are doing very well," Townshend says. "My wife and I can have a hard time finding a table at night."

nlees@thejournal. canwest.com

© Copyright (c) Canwest News Service

---