

ARTIST'S CENTURY-OLD SCOTCH

Masterpiece in a bottle



PETER GODDARD

Scotch has not always been good for artists — Jackson Pollock spring to mind — but Dave Dymont just might be the exception.

A Drink To Us (When We're Both Dead), the Toronto artist/curator's latest work, is a handsomely packaged promise: a bottle of some of Glenfiddich's finest single malt spirits, being made available only in 100 years.

For \$2,000 — and a whole lot of patience — each buyer will receive one of a limited series of 25 bottles to be filled in 2108 from a keg recently buried in Glenfiddich Distillery's warehouse No. 8 in Dufftown, Scotland. Only 12 bottles are available in Canada through MKG127 gallery at 127 Ossington Ave.

As of earlier this week, one edition of *A Drink To Us* had been sold at a Calgary auction; another was bought at a gallery preview last Sunday, and two others had attracted interest from buyers. Glenfiddich has sold three of the 12 editions it owns. (The artist has the remaining one.) Consider each a bargain. A single bottle of Glenfiddich 50 Year Old goes for more than \$9,000. The 40 Year Old costs about \$1,800 per bottle.

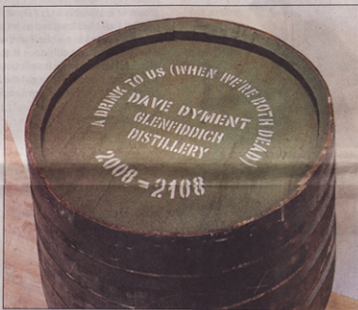
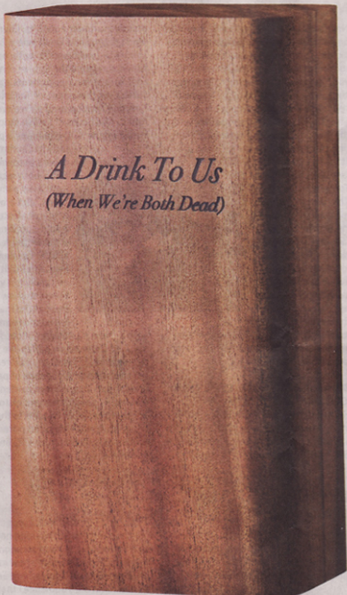
As befits a promise not to be fulfilled for at least two generations, *A Drink To Us* stipulates that any purchaser abide by a lengthy series of terms and conditions, starting with being of legal drinking age at time of purchase and having a lot of trust in the distillery. "There will be no marker at the 'burial site' and its location will be known only through hearsay over the years," states one of the terms. Yikes.

Then there's clause No. 10: "In the event of future prohibition, this contract is null and void." Yikes encore.

Dymont, until recently the director of the Mercer Union contemporary art centre, curated Yoko Ono's installations for last fall's Nuit Blanche. The Toronto writer/artist thinks *A Drink To Us* reflects some of the thinking behind Ono's apple events, such as the one where a fresh apple is allowed to wither over the course of an exhibition in its glass or Plexiglas case.

"In my case, there's nothing for you to take home now except the packaging," Dymont says. "I also see the work in the tradition of 'nothings' that include (American avant-garde composer John) Cage's 4'33", the all-white Rauschenberg paintings that inspired it, Nam Jun Paik's blank leader *Zen for Film*, vacant galleries (Martin Creed, Robert Barry) and the selling of air (Marcel Duchamp, Piero Manzoni, Yves Klein et al.)."

The packing impresses, nonetheless. A stylish wooden box opens to reveal the hollow shape into which the Glenfiddich bottle will nestle a century from now. The box, in turn, is placed in a grey linen box with a hinged lid, along with the signed copy of the contract between artist and purchaser, a vinyl-covered book with production information, newspaper articles about the cask's burial, and pages from Dymont's residency blog. The first five purchasers are being offered free use of a cottage on the distillery grounds



Dave Dymont's *A Drink To Us (When We're Both Dead)* includes a stylish wooden box, top, into which a Glenfiddich bottle will nestle a century from now. The Scotch itself will age in a specially reinforced Sherry butt, above.

for a limited period of time. They'll have to pay for their own transportation.

Dymont was one of eight artists involved in the annual three-month residency Glenfiddich has been hosting since 2001. "Other artists who've gone there have responded to the site to do their paintings or write their poems," says Dymont. "I wasn't going to do that. I was planning to do a sound piece based on *Passacaglia on DSCH* (by British composer Ronald Stevenson), which took a year to write. But when I heard the piece I found that I didn't like it that much."

Then he started looking around. "What grabbed Dave was walking about the warehouse," explains Andy Fairgrieve, who manages the Glenfiddich artists-in-residence program. "Imagine looking at the casks and the dates on the casks and finding one laid down the same year

you were born. You begin to think of all the things you've done. For a whisky distiller, time is a tangible element."

Evaporation over long periods of time — a process known as the "angel's share" — is also a factor in the drinkability of *A Drink To Us* 100 years hence. Some 2 per cent of the original volume of spirits in any cask dissipates annually. As a way of slowing down this inevitable process, Dymont's brew is housed in a specially reinforced Sherry butt imported from Spain. The cask is surrounded in its burial plot by stones from the nearby river Fiddich in order to avoid direct contact with the soil.

"No one has done this before," Fairgrieve says during our transatlantic phone call. "Dave's 100-year-old cask is very much an earnest experiment."

Peter Goddard can be reached at peter_g1@sympatico.ca