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Sustainable Scotch: What's being done to make your whisky green?

Though the destination is shared, the path to green Scotch isn't the same for all distilleries

By Gavin D. Smith

Sasha Holt with Nc'Nean's Organic Single Malt

Located in the West Highlands, Nc'nean recently became the first distillery in the UK to achieve an independently verified net-zero carbon footprint for its on-site operations. Though no others have yet followed suit, distilleries of all shapes and sizes are adapting to meet the Scotch Whisky Association's (SWA) Sustainability Strategy target of achieving net-zero emissions by 2040.

Sasha Holt, Head of Marketing at Nc'Nean Distillery

Nc'nean is located on the remote Morvern peninsula and was designed from the outset by founder Annabel Thomas to be as environmentally responsible as possible. For the entirety of its production, the company utilises organic malted barley, a biomass boiler, extensive recycling of waste heat and water, and bottles

that are made from 100 per cent recycled glass. Unfortunately, according to Sasha Holt, head of marketing for Nc'nean, this hasn't come without its challenges: "Our biomass boiler is much more difficult to work with – it does not just switch on and off like an oil boiler would, and we also have to plan much further ahead to source the timber, dry it and then chip it ourselves – there's a whole other level of complication when the chipper breaks."

Sasha Holt

Though the boiler itself was hugely expensive, she explains that government incentives make it more affordable to run. According to Holt, cost is not always a limiting factor when it comes to implementing green policies. "There are a few of our sustainability initiatives which are neither more expensive nor more difficult," she continues. "Our cooling pond is probably the best example. We avoid abstracting water or using a chemical and energy-intensive cooling tower by recirculating water through our cooling pond, which is relatively cheap and hassle-free."

Sasha Holt