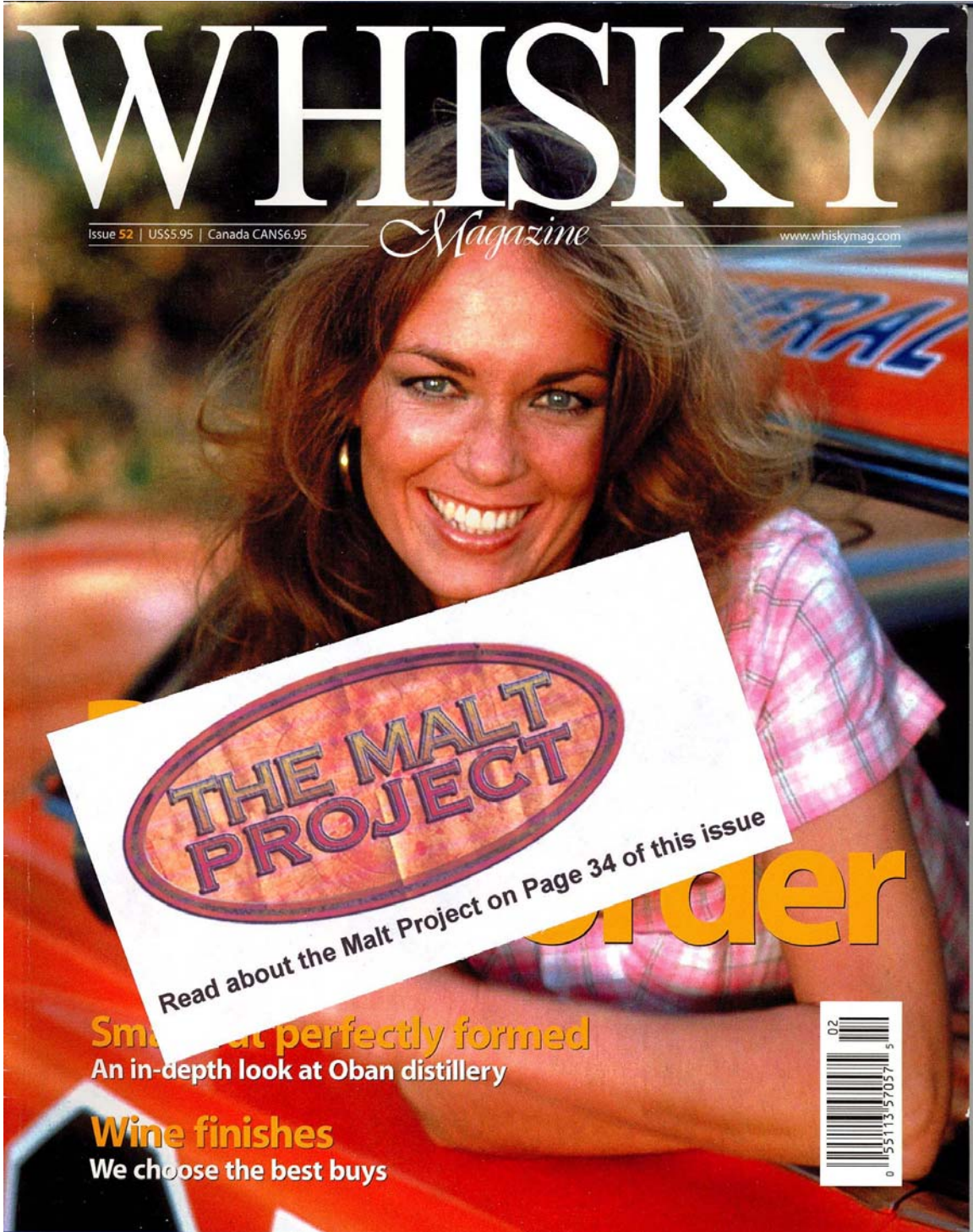


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THE MALT PROJECT

Read about the Malt Project on Page 34 of this issue

Small but perfectly formed

An in-depth look at Oban distillery

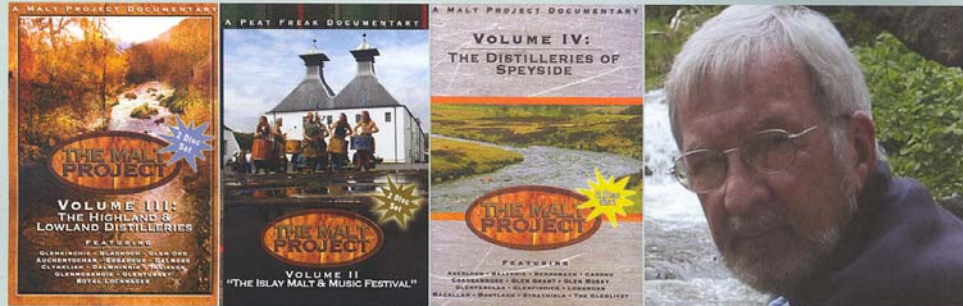
Wine finishes

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Whisky spotlight



Jack meets, shoots, and leaves

Jack and Jean Oswald have turned their passion in to a hobby and business.
Dominic Roskrow reports

They say film-makers and photographers make their own luck. It's not so much a case of being in the right place at the right time, but knowing to be in the right place at the right time.

So for American whisky lover Jack Oswald, capturing Mickey Mouse as he arrived at Bunnahabhain during the Islay festival is up there in the 'priceless' category.

"We had stopped at Edradour on the way to the festival to visit Iain Henderson," Jack recalls. "We had tried to persuade him to come over with us but he refused.

"Then a week later Jim McEwan and John MacLellan were hosting the manager's night at the festival and in comes Iain dressed as Mickey Mouse. It brought the house down and I captured it on tape.

"No-one knew that he was coming and it was the first time I'd seen Jim completely off his guard."

This memory is just one of thousands that Jack and his wife have stored up while visiting the distilleries of Scotland, which they have filmed and put out on four DVDs in recent years.

If ever there were a great example of someone taking a passion and building a business around it, it is Jack Oswald. Having lived in, and fallen in love with, Scotland some years ago, he had nurtured the idea of working with whisky at some point.

But his full-time role as a documentary

filmmaker at the head of a production company in Southern California meant that it was only in 2002 when he retired that he was able to pursue his interest in malt.

He teamed up with two former students from the time he taught documentary production, Dylan Weiss and Mike Smith – both fans of malt whisky – and began capturing Scotland's distilleries on tape.

His son Jeff has helped out with the filming while on location, and the team is ably supported by Jack's wife Jean, who has

"It was the first time I'd seen Jim completely off his guard"

a passion for filmmaking and travel and has been known to sink the odd dram of whisky or two.

The resulting DVDs are a labour of love, and great care has been taken so that the films reflect the nature of the industry the production team so clearly loves.

"I guess we see it as our way of being ambassadors for the industry," says Jack. "So many people love single malts but they can't get to Scotland, and so we bring it to them.

"All our photography has been done on top of the line digital video, so we have not only captured the beauty of the whisky industry, but have done so on the best digital medium possible.

"And that's important because we want to capture the atmosphere as much as possible for people a long way away. The fact that we have been helped to do this by having access to so many leading figures in the industry has been fantastic."

The team started out with Islay, dedicating their first two DVDs to the island, but have since covered the Lowlands and Highlands in volume three, and the distilleries of Speyside in volume four. They've even filmed at Whisky Live London.

Now they're working on a fifth volume, filmed at the Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival, but it's a time-consuming process. The aim is to have it out in time for the Spring festival. And the team shows no sign of slowing down – they're all having far too much fun for that.

"You know thinking back there are really no bad memories at all," says Jack. "No matter how many times we go we always want to go back. That's probably why we'll be back in Speyside in 2006. We've just got too many friends in distilleries – we've become part of that big extended family."

The same family that includes Mickey Mouse no doubt. ■