



# WHAT *tradition?*

**T**HINK of the tradition of whisky drinking as it has grown up over the centuries in Scotland and you might well conjure up images of a Highland pub with a glowing peat fire or a sumptuous drawing room in Georgian Edinburgh, with kilted men nursing a dram or two – sometimes more, it has to be said.

In Nigeria, things are a bit different. “The Nigerian consumer is not necessarily driven by the traditional codes of whisky,” says Osato Evbuomwan, a Marketing Manager at Diageo in Lagos. “Most people don’t understand the significance of a whisky’s origin or why it has been aged for 12 years or more.”

And unlike India, say, where there has been a long tradition of drinking brown spirits, she adds: “Nigeria is a beer market. Whisky is something that we’ve borrowed from the West. It is what the sophisticated socialite drinks, so it’s more associated with high-

NIGERIA IS FAST BECOMING  
AN IMPORTANT MARKET  
FOR SCOTCH, AS **ADAM**  
**CAMPBELL** DISCOVERS

tempo, high-energy spaces.”

The cultural challenges are exacerbated by economic ones. Charlie Winter, a senior analyst with drinks market experts IWSR, explains: “The naira has fallen from 700 to the dollar last April to nearly 1,500 today. The

acute cost of living crisis is exacerbated by the sudden removal of fuel subsidies, rising raw materials costs, transport, rents, electricity and food prices due to the depreciating naira.

“Widespread downtrading can be seen across all drinks categories. Even beer has become too expensive for many.”

Despite this, the signs for Scotch are promising. The latest figures show that in 2023, Nigeria – Scotch Whisky’s second largest market in sub-Saharan Africa – was worth £20 million to the industry, equivalent to nearly five million bottles and up a third on 2019 pre-pandemic levels. (There was a downturn of around





➤ 10 per cent on 2022, but that was an unrepresentative “bumper year”, according to the Scotch Whisky Association, as global markets reopened and restocked following the pandemic.)

And judging from the number of Scotch Whisky producers who have set up in Nigeria in recent years, it’s clear that the challenge of bringing their premium product to a greater number of drinkers in this country of over 200 million people is something many of them are relishing.

Socially, much of the promotion starts from the top, at high-end nightspots in the big cities such as Abuja, Lagos and Port Harcourt – and in 2021 William Grant debuted its Balvenie Single Malt in the country with two celebratory nights, one in Abuja at the Transcorp Hilton and one on Lagos’s Victoria Island, the city’s main financial district and a favourite of the affluent ‘going out’ set.

Invited guests were offered a whisky-tasting experience along with excellent food, cocktails – whisky, of course – cigar pairings and performances by the well-known musicians Johnny Drille and The Blues Project.

### **Nightlife**

Glenmorangie, which was first introduced to Nigeria in 2018, has also been making its mark on the social

calendar, recently unveiling a marquee Glenmorangie bar at Vaniti in Lagos, one of the city’s most vibrant nightlife destinations.

Commercial Director Derek Ruediger says: “We are focused on connecting with Nigerian consumers through elevated experiences that bring their celebratory moments to the next level, and we continue to build our presence in Nigeria’s thriving nightlife scene.

“Since Glenmorangie was first introduced to Nigeria in 2018, the brand has seen incredible growth.

Nigeria is the second-largest market in the world for our Glenmorangie 18 Years Old.”

At its very premium end, Johnnie Walker hosts slightly quieter affairs, exclusive Blue Label whisky dinners catered by top-rated chefs with paired whiskies for the lucky few invited movers and shakers.

They also host whisky tasting events for a maximum of 50 guests and support high-net-worth customers with direct delivery opportunities and gifting services. They will even locate an engraving station on site at an event so that guests can personalise bottles for their own use.

“This allows us to get Blue Label into the right hands, but also creates the sense of exclusivity that only a few people would typically have access to,” says Osato.

Edrington’s The Macallan also confirmed its



**Derek Ruediger**





**Clockwise from left:** Customising T-shirts at a Chivas Regal event; guests at a Glenmorangie event in Lagos; The Reach, The Macallan's oldest whisky; The Macallan lounge recently opened in Lagos; the Glenmorangie bar at Vaniti, Lagos; one of The Macallan's Brand Ambassadors, Daniel Atteh; musician BNXX is the latest of Chivas's New Regals.

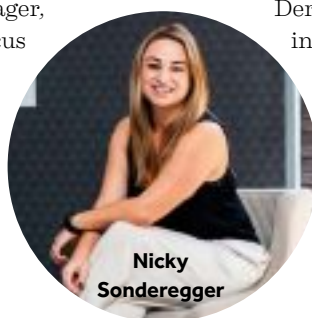
commitment to the Nigerian market last year when it opened a private lounge in Lagos, located in a fashionable restaurant and bar on the city's Victoria Island.

The Macallan's whisky bar offers clients a range of the finest single malts, limited-edition whiskies, new releases and rare offerings from the company. Guests can also enjoy a guided sensory journey with expert brand ambassadors and curated food pairings that complement each whisky's unique flavours and aromas.

As Nicky Sonderegger, Senior Area Manager, Nigeria, for The Macallan, explains: "We focus our marketing around engaging with our consumers in small, private experiences hosted by our Brand Ambassadors, Daniel Atteh in Lagos and Adeyinka Adepotun in Abuja. We have done some strategic out-of-home placements across Lagos and Abuja, highlighting The Macallan Double Cask and Sherry Oak ranges.

"We have launched new releases in the market over the last year such as The Macallan Harmony Collection, The Macallan Sherry Oak 25 and 30 Years Old and The Macallan M Collection."

A really special launch took place at a formal event in Lagos in February this year, where Edrington unveiled a decanter of its 81-year-old Reach, the Macallan's oldest whisky ever, for the first time in Africa, an exceptional experience for invited whisky connoisseurs.



**Nicky Sonderegger**

And last Christmas, Glenfiddich took part in a gifting event alongside the high-end Seinde de Signature Salon De Parfum in Lagos's standout skyscraping Centre Point building. The city's great and good were invited to take away gift boxes of some of the brand's premium aged whiskies and luxury perfumes.

The 'sport of kings' has always had an exclusive following, and Glenmorangie has also been getting its product into the right hands at the Lagos Polo Club.

Derek Ruediger explains: "Over two weekends in February, we partnered with the 2024 NPA Lagos International Polo Tournament to present an exclusive viewing experience. From the comfort of the Glenmorangie VIP terrace, more than 1,000 guests had the opportunity to experience the match while enjoying our delicious whiskies and canapé pairings."

Celebrations continued into the night with an after-party hosted by one of Nigeria's premier DJs, Jimmie Akinsola.

## Culture

While it is undoubtedly the case that premium Scotch Whiskies are luxury spends for the average Nigerian purse, promotion of whisky isn't just about the very top end, Osato is keen to explain. And here there is a strong opportunity to make imported brands "proudly Naija" –



» something that regular Nigerians can make their own.

“From a Diageo point of view, culture is a big pillar of what we do,” says Osato. “It’s music, it’s food, it’s art, its fashion, as you find in other places, but very deeply rooted in what is originally ours.”

In the case of Johnnie Walker Red and Black Label, the brands have developed considerable goodwill with their audiences through these cultural facets – alongside the Nigerians’ love of partying.

For Red Label, the Walker’s District initiative is a series of festival-type events, held throughout the country, that showcase up-and-coming musicians, artists, fashion designers and other creatives – a chance to ‘paint the town Red’.

Free to enter and open to allcomers, music is central, with DJs and acts playing throughout the night. Food and drink are available to buy, photo booths provide the memories – and the social media posts – and a series of flavour profiling questions at the many bars on site offer an opportunity to work out what kind of Red Label cocktail is perfect for you.

Walker’s Mix is another creative initiative, this time associated with Black Label. These invite-only events usually focus on a single creative partner. Last June, for example, a collaboration with award-winning music producer Sarz led to an event in Lagos with creatives, media personalities, influencers and the like who were treated to a night of personalised Black Label cocktails, Afrobeats, food and fun.

Another Walker’s Mix event in October 2023 saw a partnership with celebrated photographer Anny Robert, who created an exhibition, The Confluence, celebrating Nigeria’s history and diversity.

“Guests get to network with each other and meet some of their favourite influencers – and to have a nice chat over a Johnnie Walker cocktail,” says Osato. “We typically aim to have a Walker’s Mix once every quarter. That’s one way of keeping the engagement going.”



Mixing cocktails  
with Johnnie  
Walker Black Label.  
Below: a guest at  
one of the Walker’s  
Mix events.

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Osato Evbuomwan

In a similar vein, Chivas Regal has been spreading its message of sophistication and quality through its New Regals music platform, which celebrates inspiring individuals who talk about their paths to success. Its current New Regal is BNXXN, one of the biggest names in the Nigerian music scene, and previous Regals included Flaz, Zoro and DJ TGarbs. With BNXXN, Chivas is working on a content campaign aiming to highlight the innovative and determined spirit of Nigeria’s creative community, with a focus on BNXXN and others who have helped him along the way. It aims to showcase the collaborative effort among creatives who have redefined success within the Nigerian creative landscape.

Last November, BNXXN performed at Chivas Palace, a huge party night in Lagos. He was among numerous performers who took to the stage during an adrenaline-fuelled evening that brought together elements from the worlds of fashion, art and music – with brand experience spaces, Chivas cocktails, photo ops, T-shirt customisation and the unveiling of a brand-new bottle design for Chivas XV.

The push to introduce the wonders of Scotch to the Nigerian palate is certainly on, and the audiences are clearly there. At one Johnnie Walker-supported event, the Island Block Party in 2022, more than 20,000 people turned up to watch Ghanaian rapper Black Sherif.

And these big events go hand in hand with the more exclusive offerings, which helps to drive home the distinctions that exist across the wide range of expressions of Scotch – all part of the education process.

It’s still early days but – with a little help from Scotch Whisky producers – Nigerians appear to be on the way to creating their own whisky-drinking traditions.