

First Canadian Distillery to be Craft Malt Certified

By Gary James



Hamill Farms is a grain farm founded in 1929 in the heart of North America's primary barley growing region. John Hamill, the 4th generation owner of Hamill Farms, discusses parallels of farming and distilling. "It's a great feeling getting to see where the grains that I put my heart and soul into end up. It's interesting to see how some of what makes great barley is the same as what allows distillers like Jacques and Daniel to make great whisky: close monitoring throughout the process and responding to the unique needs of each crop / batch. We need to harvest at the right time to maximize germination power and consistent kernel size. Similarly, Jacques & Daniel need to do certain things at the right time to maximize certain flavours and minimize other flavours."

In December 2021, Bridgeland Distillery became the first Canadian distillery to be Craft Malt Certified from the Craft Maltsters Guild. For them, it is an important recognition that is aligned with the distillery's founders' vision; meticulous attention to detail in selecting ingredients. Their primary grain supplier and sole source for malt is Red Shed Malting in Penhold, Alberta, just 100 km north of the distillery.

In whisky, there are very few levers that can be pulled to improve and differentiate a product. In Single Malt Whisky, more so than any other spirit, malt barley reigns supreme. Both the quality and the story are paramount in the mind of the connoisseur. Being a Craft Malt Certified distillery sourcing barley from Hamill Farms that is malted by Red Shed Malting helps provide assurance of both.

Malting is the process of transforming barley, and other grains like wheat, oats and rye, into a usable ingredient for brewers and distillers. Joe Hamill, Maltster for Red Shed Malting explains, "Being the missing link between the farmer and the distiller puts us in the unique position to more intimately link the finished product to the land where it comes from and the farmers who nurtured the grain. The team at Red Shed prides itself on being able to help create that connection back to the farm for distilleries like Bridgeland and their customers."

Red Shed Malting is a member of the Craft Maltsters Guild. Their mission is simple: craft products deserve craft ingredients. The Craft Maltsters Guild is an industry association giving a voice to small batch, independent craft maltsters. By working together they are helping bring

heart, diversity, relocation and excitement to the marketplace.

The Craft Malt Certified Seal helps provide customers the assurance that their values are a good match with the product, the producer, and their suppliers. The best quality ingredients, created by small, independent maltsters delivered with information on the provenance of the grains.

For Jacques Tremblay and Daniel Plenzik, owners of Bridgeland Distillery, using hand crafted quality ingredients is one of the three main factors why they are making award winning Premium Craft Spirits. Jacques explains: "We are Craft distillers because of the passion we bring, how we do things, and what quality raw ingredients we choose to use."

The malted barley they use is a foundational piece of the overall flavour profile and terroir of the resulting whisky. Daniel explains: "With whisky, the main flavour contributors would be the grain, the water, the yeast and the barrels you use. We want to make the best possible choice for each of these components."

Jacques concludes: "It is interesting when we are sampling this whisky-in-progress to connect some of the notes coming from the barley that we detected when we first toured Hamill Farms and Red Shed Malting 4 years ago and tried some of the latest barley varieties."

Bridgeland Distillery single malt whisky will be released this coming July after a 3 years maturation cycle in new American oak casks and ex-bourbon casks. The owners are confident that the hand crafted malted & roasted grain from Red Shed Malting will be front and centre in the overall flavour of the resulting product. ♦

