



The Williams Grant & Sons USA executive team: Leslie Engel, Ted Roman, Craig Cranmer, Simon Hunt, Ron Wall, Jonathan Yusen, and Rob Skramstad (left to right)

## Family Owned

An Interview with Simon J. Hunt,  
President, William Grant & Sons USA  
and Managing Director of North America,  
William Grant & Sons



**EDITORS' NOTE** In October 2007, Simon Hunt joined William Grant & Sons as President of William Grant & Sons USA and Managing Director of North America. He is a member of the William Grant & Sons, Ltd. Executive Team and sits on the boards of Peter Mielzynski Agency of Canada and Tequila Milagro of Mexico. Hunt came to William Grant & Sons from Malibu-Kahlua International (Pernod Ricard) where as CEO he ran their operations globally. Before this, he held senior local and global marketing positions at Allied Domecq and Diageo. He holds a Bachelor's degree from the London School of Economics and an M.B.A. from London Business School, and earned his Green Beret with the Royal Marine Commandos.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Headquartered in the United Kingdom, William Grant & Sons, Ltd. ([www.grantusa.com](http://www.grantusa.com)) is an independent family-owned distiller founded by William Grant in 1887. Today, the luxury spirits company is run by the fifth generation of his family and distills some of the world's leading brands of Scotch whisky, including the world's most awarded single malt Glenfiddich®, The Balvenie® range of handcrafted single malts, and the world's third largest blended Scotch, Grant's®, as well as Hendrick's® Gin, Sailor Jerry® Rum, Tullamore Dew Irish Whiskey, and Milagro® Tequila.

Founded in 1964, William Grant & Sons USA is a wholly owned subsidiary of William Grant & Sons, Ltd. and features one of the fastest growing spirits portfolios in the USA with brands including Glenfiddich, Sailor Jerry, Stolichnaya Vodka, and Hudson Whiskey. In 2011, William Grant & Sons was once again crowned Distiller of the Year by the International Wine & Spirits Competition, where its Reyka Vodka, Milagro Tequila, and The Balvenie brands each also triumphed winning their respective category trophies. The company has offices in New York City and New Jersey.

**This company has a long tradition and history. How does that impact the way you operate today?**

It's not only the history that comes with having been around that long but also that we are still an independent distiller – we're still family owned. Three families make up the majority of the shareholder group and we're now into the fifth generation of those families.

So they take a long-term view as shareholders in this business. We're in a competitive environment dominated by some very large players and we're a good sized company, but within that, we need to act differently. It doesn't mean we don't move quickly. But when we're building a brand, for something like Hendrick's, which has been a fantastic success, it has taken 10 years to get there.

**Is there a common thread throughout the brands or is it what will lead in a specific space?**

It's a combination of things. For some of the brands, we have to build on a fantastic heritage; for Glenfiddich, it's being the number one and most awarded single malt around the world. With Hendrick's, we tried to identify where in the marketplace we wanted to play.

One of the things we've done recently with Glenfiddich is the concept of Cask of Dreams; it is an idea born of the "One Day You Will" campaign we launched in 2010. And through Cask of Dreams, we've had consumers sharing their personal dreams directly on Glenfiddich casks then rolling those casks through the streets of major cities across the U.S. The casks were then sent back to Scotland where they are finishing what will be a special edition of the world's favorite single malt. That has allowed us to stand out from the more traditional approach for marketing within the single malt market.

**With the proliferation of brands over the past several years, can you truly differentiate in the space today?**

We can. In 2011, we'll be on track for our fourth record year in North America. We continue to outperform across all of our growth brands.

One reason is a very strong marketing program that differentiates our brands within the marketplace. There is nothing quite like Hendrick's Gin or Sailor Jerry Rum, or The Balvenie with its handcrafted approach.

But it's also how we work with our partners and this comes back to the heritage of the company. We're not going to win by doing what the big guys in our industry do. We believe in collaborative approaches and that allows us to separate ourselves from the other players, whether it be with a bartender recommending Hendrick's or a hotel featuring some of our single malts.

**Do you know early on with a new product whether it will succeed or do you have to wait until you launch it?**

There is an intuitive feel early on in terms of how brands are performing in the marketplace. One of the things we focus on is listening to our brand ambassadors about what is performing well.

Hudson Whiskey, for instance, is the first whiskey we made in New York since prohibition. It's a small brand and wasn't on anyone's radar, but we picked up through the mixologists and brand ambassadors that this brand was getting attention.

**What has helped the brands remain so strong during the downturn?**

We offer affordable luxury. We sweep the premium end of the market, and in a tough environment, consumers change their definition of value.

Also, during tough economic conditions, many of our competitors pulled back from supporting bars, restaurants, or hotels, and that is where most people try a brand for the first time. We over-invested during the tough times so we have built a strong base of support not only from trade partners but also with the consumers who tried the brands as a result of that.

**Is the portfolio today the right mix?**

We have a core portfolio of brands that have an opportunity to grow even faster than we are growing today. But as with any business, you always have to look at what is coming next.

At this stage, we have seven new brands being rolled out at different stages across the U.S. covering a range of categories such as Solerno Blood Orange Liqueur; Gibson's Finest, our Canadian Whiskey that we're going to be bringing into the states and making available for the first time; and the roll out of Hudson Whiskey, which is an artisanal handcrafted proposition.

So we have a number of brands in play that help us address some of the gaps in our portfolio.

**How critical is community engagement and how has that been a key part of the values?**

As a privately held family business, we don't get into the details of what we do on a charitable basis but it comes through in the culture, be it in the way we nurture our brands or care about our people, and in terms of working in the communities we do and making sure this is a sustainable relationship.

That comes from this long-term outlook. This business won't be here today and gone tomorrow. In 2012, we will celebrate our 125th Anniversary and we are very excited for the future of William Grant & Sons. ●

*Some of the brands under the William Grant & Sons umbrella*