

Collector to Creator

An Interview with Julie Macklowe, Founder, The Macklowe



Julie Macklowe

EDITORS' NOTE *The Macklowe is the brainchild of Julie Macklowe, a serial entrepreneur with a life-long love of single malt whiskey. Macklowe came out of the world of hedge funds to start her own line of organic cosmetics called vBeaute, all while married and raising two children. She has been heralded as a renegade and sees drinking whiskey as genderless, owned by neither men nor women. Her vision for The Macklowe (themacklowe.com) is a personal one of true luxury: a Hermès bag, a Louis Vuitton suit, a Gucci belt, a Ferrari – once you own it, you are in a different league.*

What was your vision for creating The Macklowe and how do you define the brand's mission?

I moved from the trading floors to the top strategic levels of finance, got married and had a beautiful little girl. Investing creates wealth, not value, and I wanted to make something of value, a product that people would love to use. I created a line of organic skin care products called vBeaute which sold exclusively on QVC. Instead of looking at inventories, accounts receivables, and logistics from a purely abstract view, I now owned them, and I invested heavily in the people

who managed them for me. We started vBeaute with no guides and we made a lot of mistakes. I eventually closed the business, but found I loved the details of packaging, sourcing, and selling. Ten years later, I was pregnant again and had my second daughter. I realized that you have to really love what you're doing if you are going to be happy with it. Post birth, I found myself golfing in Scotland with my flask and thought: I should be doing this every day.

I took sensory courses to discover more about my own palate. I traveled through Scotland and into Kentucky consulting with some of the great distillers and blenders in both places. I realized I wanted to make a single malt whiskey that was luxurious, but was uniquely American and inclusive of everyone who loved luxury: thus, The Macklowe, the first luxury American single malt whiskey, was born – a single malt of 100 percent barley because of the wide range of flavors that can be produced from that grain: fruity, spicy, smoky or peaty. But I was not going to distill myself: my skill set is the ability to build the right team, having the vision and setting up conditions for success.

Will you provide an overview of the product and how The Macklowe is differentiated in the market?

Initially, I had whiskies distilled especially for me here in the U.S. that I purchased multiple casks of – these are my private collection, my Family Reserve "Casks of Distinction". The Macklowe is the first luxury American single malt. This whiskey is made from 100 percent malted barley distilled in 2014 and matured here in a char #3 new American ISC Kentucky virgin oak barrel.

In our first year we released four editions: Cask N°61, N°60, N°62 and coming in November, Cask N° 58. Each cask of distinction has been chosen specifically by Ian MacMillan, one of the great master blenders in Scotland. Ian, an industry veteran and legend with 50 years of experience, was the master blender for Burn Stewart (makers of Bunnahabhain, Tobermory and Deanston) and most recently brought the Bladnoch Distillery in the Lowlands back to life. Ian is one of the greatest living master blenders of whiskey.

The first release, Cask N°61, was a single cask of distinction which produced only 237 bottles worldwide, and each bottling has been



The Macklowe single malt whiskey (above and opposite page)



in a similar range. The bottles were pre-sold and pre-allocated specifically to people that I've chosen to receive them and to the best restaurants in New York City. These bottles are like Ferraris: luxurious, elegant, with deep nuances that lift them from the ordinary.

We are launching Dallas, Houston, and Aspen this fall/winter which is super exciting for the brand. These are casks that I had specifically distilled and matured for my Private Collection. These are going out to only those that I've contacted, an exclusive curated club. This liquid is irreplaceable and limited. Once it's gone, it's gone. There are only a handful of these rare casks which we will slowly release as each cask is deemed perfection, while we wait for our own liquid to age.

Whiskey is known to be a spirit that is predominantly targeted to the male market. Where did your personal interest in whiskey develop and are you focused on broadening the interest and awareness of whiskey to women?

I'm Julie Macklowe and this is the story of a whiskey I produced, the first luxury American single malt whiskey, called The Macklowe. It is the story of a journey I've been on since I discovered single malt Scotch whiskey at the tender age of 21 at the beginning of my career.

Have you ever been thrown into deep water to either swim with the sharks or get eaten alive? And once you get wet you find you're just as hungry, maybe even hungrier, than the sharks? That was me. I got hungry for success at an early age. My first job was in "hard" finance: stocks and hedge funds of

all things. This was a high-testosterone, "win or die" world, where the guys smoked cigars, played poker and drank Scotch single malts, neat. Every aspect of it was competitive. Now it had me...the renegade. So I showed up in my tailored Chanel skirts and stepped right into the middle of the arena and learned the game. I've since given up cigars and poker, but I learned how to drink, and love, Scotch single malt. I grew into business with the feeling that men and women are equal.

That's where the whiskey obsession began and as I travelled the world for work, I started collecting whiskey: the Far East, Europe, ending up in Speyside or Kentucky or Paris – everywhere I went I searched out the bottle shops and duty-free shops and stuffed my suitcases for the trip home. One bottle leads to another bottle, and now I've got a crazy, big whiskey collection, primarily Scotch single malt. The bottles in my kitchen are the ones I drink every day and then there's the "collection" – old, rare, and some of them priceless. But I drink what I buy, I'm driven by my palate, not the price, and I love the entire range of flavors available from malted barley, from fruity and spicy all the way to smoky and peaty.

My goal is to create a brand in line with the life I lead, one that is inclusive of both men and women equally. In that goal, nothing is unique to me – I am just doing what I've always done.

Is it challenging to get the message out about The Macklowe in such a crowded space with so many whiskey brands?

I believe whiskey has become too technical and people have lost the joy of drinking it. To

me, whiskey is personal, it's a reflection of who I am and what I love in life. The other thing is that drinking whiskey still has the stigma of old men and loose women. Ridiculous. Look, I've been called a renegade and a trailblazer because I've pushed back on gender stereotypes, but I'm just being me. Whiskey is personal and an expression of freedom.

What The Macklowe represents is luxury – the Louis Vuitton bag, a Ferrari, a Patek Philippe watch that everyone can aspire to own. That's why I assembled a "dream team" of experts to create what I feel can be a collectible American single malt – something every whiskey drinker should have on their shelves, if they can find one. It is a new category, yet to be officially established, although we expect that American single malt will be defined at its own category any minute – so we are part of the pioneers in what I view as nascent and white space in the marketplace.

Do you feel that your background in finance has been helpful in your entrepreneurial endeavors?

For certain, there is no better skill than knowing how to run a financial model. Add the life given crash course in marketing, and you cannot recommend a better tool kit to anyone.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

I believe team building and listening are key skills. Also, I often make mistakes, like anyone, and I think it is important to recognize when you have, and the resolution is equally as important as the problem itself. I have a team where we believe hard work and persistence pays off. We recognize that the customer is always right. Being a leader is making sure that you surround yourself with the best people possible who are also brand ambassadors and share the same culture and spirit of seeing the brand succeed. We live The Macklowe life every day and night and love all the amazing restaurants, partners, and customers we encounter – they are what make our brand succeed.

In a short period of time, The Macklowe has already made an impact on the whiskey industry. Do you take moments to reflect and appreciate what you have accomplished?

I feel extremely fortunate to have such amazing partners. We are in 120 of the highest rated restaurants in New York City, with an 85 percent depletion rate. I think this is a reflection of how fantastic the quality of these rare Private Collection casks are, and people know great quality when they see it. We are equally as excited to launch the main release of the Kentucky Edition a year hence. Ian and I have tried the three year, and we are confident it will be one of the most exciting four-year releases when it comes out next year. I guess, ultimately, we are in the first inning. I feel like we have just started, and there is a very long road ahead of us, which excites me every day. I toast our amazing team, partners, and customers for all their support every day. ●