



# TASTY IDEA —Scotland

**Preface**

In a new regular feature we identify a gap in the market and, consulting a few well-chosen experts, set out a plan for filling the niche. Here we send Andrew Mueller to Scotland to find out what it would take to establish a refined food retailer.

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**The hypothesis:** *How to go about founding a quality supermarket chain in Scotland, showcasing great produce and supporting local producers.*

It might seem strange to suggest that Scotland undersells itself. It is a proud and distinctive nation, certainly the most volubly patriotic component of the UK (to the extent that it held a referendum on leaving it in 2014). It possesses an arsenal of national imagery, mythology and music that is instantly and positively recognised the world over.

Not nearly enough, however, is said about Scotland's cuisine and food culture, beyond laboured comic references to haggis (delicious, incidentally) and deep-fried Mars bars (an urban legend with which Scotland has decided, with characteristic bleary humour, to play along). This, as anyone who has spent time in Scotland will be aware, is a scandalous dereliction.

Yet what seems an obvious combination – that of amazing local produce and a resonant national brand – remains unblended in the retail market. There is no real Scottish equivalent of, say, Austria's MPreis or Switzerland's Migros: a smart supermarket chain dedicated to stocking and therefore showcasing the best of the country's food and drink. Not only would such a business be a hit at home

- 01 Staff member Liam at work in the Balgove Larder café
- 02 The shop has a large selection of fruit and vegetables and 70 per cent of the produce is from Scotland or the UK
- 03 Sheep on the farm adjacent to the Balgove Larder shop
- 04 Anyone for cream tea?



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but it would also work well abroad – a robust soft-power tool for the country.

Let's imagine we're going to found just such a supermarket chain. What would it look like and how would it operate? Instead of consulting the oracles we put the question to a selection of business leaders and producers who understand the Scottish market inside out.

Among Scottish producers there is a consensus that such a step should be taken. "If someone came up with an easier way for smaller businesses to sell their produce there'd be a stampede," says Liam Hughes, CEO of the Glasgow Distillery Company, a craft gin and whisky distiller.

The potential for profit seems obvious, both in building a specialist retailer and helping small companies become big ones. The Islay distillery Bruichladdich is an example: founded in its current form in 2000 with a £7m (€9m) investment, it was sold to Rémy Cointreau in 2012 for £58m (€74m). "We once did deals with supermarkets as a survival measure," says Bruichladdich's

Carl Reavey. "But we don't anymore: they're not interested in provenance, only price. If there were a genuine retailer emphasising the quality of products we would be enthusiastic supporters."

It's clear that connecting with a network of independent Scottish producers would be no hardship. What is required then is an outlet with a presence and an identity. Which, for our purposes, might be partway between unmistakably Scottish upmarket fashion chain House of Bruar and Balgove Larder, a shop that sells produce from its St Andrews farm.

Will Docker, Balgove's founder, believes that Scotland is "phenomenally effective" at export but agrees that this leaves a gap in the domestic market. "Tourists especially don't want to come here and eat frozen Brazilian chicken," he says.

While Docker believes that an upscale store would be a natural fit for goods such as his ("There's a bit of mythological romance about Scottish food but there's genuine natural quality"), he has some words of caution about pricing. "The market is incredibly value-oriented. I know everyone knows the joke about copper wire being invented by two Scotsmen fighting over a penny but you really can only charge someone too much once – and they will tell everybody."

Just south of Hadrian's Wall, a plausible model for our prospective business has been quietly flourishing for nearly 170 years. High-end supermarket Booths operates 29 stores, mostly in the north-west of England, and has assiduously cultivated its ties to the region. Localism is a key part of the retailer's business model. "We don't see ourselves as just running a supermarket chain," says Booths CEO Chris Dee, a 21-year veteran of the company. "We see ourselves as very much the heart of an ecosystem and our suppliers are fundamental to that. So we nurture and develop them as well as buy from them. We'd buy something that tastes great even if it's badly branded and packaged – we can put them in touch with someone who'll help."

Dee says it is crucial to have enterprising local buyers: "We expect them



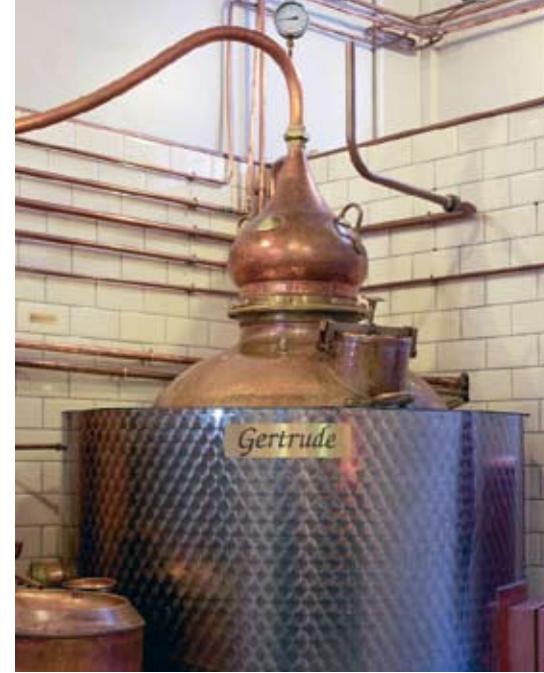
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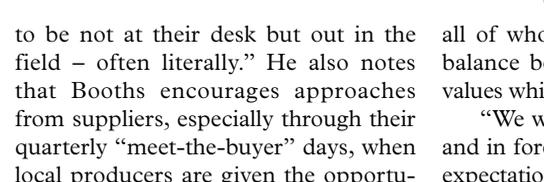
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- 01 Entrance to Balgove Larder
- 02 Delicious vegetables
- 03 Beef short ribs
- 04 Makar Glasgow gin from the Glasgow Distillery Company
- 05 Copper pot still Gertrude
- 06 A red wax seal is saved for export bottles
- 07 Bottling machine
- 08 Pickering's gin trailer
- 09 The wax seal is created by hand



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### Vital ingredients

Food and drink represent Scotland's top export, worth more than £5bn (€6.3bn) but the produce needs a base closer to home. These are the products we would turn into our supermarket's standard-bearers.

- 1 **Salmon:** "Scottish salmon" is a phrase that rolls off the tongue for a reason: its usually high quality.
- 2 **Spirits:** We'd work with the Scottish Craft Distillers Association to support smaller makers, such as the folks behind Pickering's Gin (above).
- 3 **Beef:** Hardy Highland cattle are reared for their remarkable meat on the windswept plains in the country's north.
- 4 **Langoustines:** One third of the world's langoustines are sourced in Scotland. The best producers deserve celebration.
- 5 **Seaweed:** The government is pushing the export of seaweed to Asian markets but we would stock a selection



If someone created an easier way for smaller businesses to sell their produce there'd be a stampede



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THE CONSULTANTS  
Scottish produce

explaining how to say it.” And for obvious reasons, one would want to keep well away from any “Mc-” prefixes.

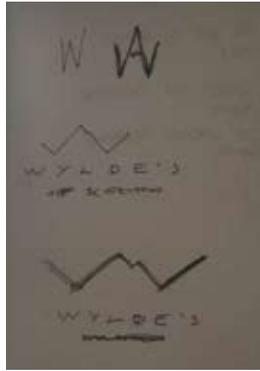
“I think with a retail brand you can be relatively sophisticated,” says Lumsden. “You should head in the opposite direction to keep away from the kitsch.” The solution provided by Good is an elegant best-of-both-worlds.

The name of our business is Wyldes of Scotland. “Wyldes”, Lumsden notes, evokes both a general sense of unadulterated and untamed purity as well as the honest authenticity of a family name. The “of Scotland” suffix manages the tricky balancing act of understated pride. The simple, jagged logo suggests both the mountains of our new brand’s homeland and – hopefully – the eventually upward-trending graph of our sales figures. The rugged packaging, including such deft touches as Harris Tweed handles on our shopping bags, might even lend itself to a tasteful range of souvenirs – aprons like the ones worn by our staff, for example.

Wyldes of Scotland would start with a flagship in Edinburgh, the Scottish city most readily associated with high-end brands. But the possibilities for expanding the business beyond the country seem obvious and immense – and not just in the luxury markets of Asia and America. “I’ll tell you what’s a big opportunity that isn’t being addressed,” says Liam Hughes of Glasgow Distillery. “England, which I would consider an export market. That’s not me declaring independence, incidentally – just saying there are 55 million customers right there on our doorstep.”

But perhaps there’s an argument for Wyldes remaining exclusively Scottish. “We talk about expanding north or south now and again and what it would do to our identity,” says Dee at Booths. “But we’ve got plenty of opportunities on our own patch. If you want to shop here you have to come here.” — (M)

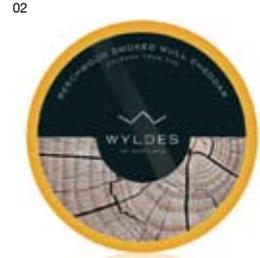
**The conclusion:** *The high-quality produce is there – and the precedents too. With the right branding and a bit of courage, our supermarket chain could be a roaring success.*



01 Glasgow-based creative agency Good conjures up a few ideas for the brand identity of our new quality supermarket, Wyldes of Scotland.



- 01 Ideas for Wyldes of Scotland logo designs by Glasgow-based branding agency Good
- 02 Brown paper and Harris tweed could be the perfect combination
- 03 Own-brand cheese from Wyldes
- 04 Earthy colour palette
- 05 Closer look at the simple logo
- 06 Packaging for juicy steak
- 07 Wyldes advert concept



Brand union

**Who:** Chris Lumsden is a co-founder of creative agency Good and has more than 15 years’ agency experience. He explains the thinking behind our Wyldes brand.

You start by thinking of things you want to avoid: clichés. McThis and McThat, tartan and shortbread tins; they’re not representative of contemporary Scotland. We got to the “Wild at Heart” idea quickly. The name is a play on the word and spelt in a way that evokes a founder or family as well as the country. There’s a sense of heritage that plays well in Scottish culture.

From an interiors point of view there would be a lot of stone and wood to reflect the rugged environment but there are some high-quality products that you could incorporate. You might even get tartan in there – but used sparingly.



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