

Sector: Food and drink

Robertson businesses: Robertson Northern, Robertson Civil Engineering

Client: Chivas Brothers

Value: £7.3m

Contract dates: May 2013—April 2015

Location: Aberlour, Speyside



Dalmunach Distillery, Aberlour, Speyside

A hidden jewel

The new Dalmunach distillery was built on the site of the disused Imperial Distillery at Carron, becoming the 15th Scotch whisky distillery operated by Chivas Brothers. It is named after a nearby pool in the River Spey on whose banks it sits. It is one of more than 20 other distilleries in a five-mile radius, situated in the famous Spey valley.

The layout was designed by Archial Norr and inspired by the shape of a sheaf of barley, Scotch whisky's core ingredient.

The client, Chivas Brothers was not looking for an 'industrial shed', and rather wanted a building that would demonstrate the manufacturing process in a transparent and easy to follow way. The distillery was designed to show the equipment, including malt mills, malt bins, mash tuns, washbacks, stills and the spirit safe, in a bright and spacious environment.

Civil works with a minimal impact

Intricate civil engineering works formed a significant part of the project. Chivas Brothers were introducing a cooling process that required significantly more water than before, so Robertson Civil Engineering constructed a new intake structure in the river Spey with a sump to draw up to 400,000 litres of water per hour.

Robertson worked with the designers to ensure that the inlet and discharge pipework met functional requirements, while minimising the environmental risks to the River Spey and surrounding areas.

'In-river' works could only take place during a short window in October, between the end of the fishing season and the start of the salmon spawning season. This led us to consider pre-cast and pre-fabrication solutions for the key elements. We also held meetings with SEPA and representatives of the fishing industry to ensure our works had minimal environmental impact on the river, local wildlife and surrounding communities.

Space and light

The production plant's glass-fronted still room houses eight copper pot stills, with tulip shapes used for the wash stills and onion shapes used for the spirit stills, replicating those used at the Imperial Distillery. In a departure from distillery tradition, the stills are arranged in a circular pattern, which gives a feeling of spaciousness.

The former distillery buildings on the site were recycled to create a distinctive landform that visibly and acoustically screens the yard area.

The new distillery has won and been shortlisted for several of the UK's leading architectural awards, which is unusual for an industrial plant such as this. In addition to awards from RIBA and RIAS it was shortlisted for the Stirling Prize 2015.

Dalmunach's annual output of ten million litres of alcohol per year makes it the second highest capacity distillery that Chivas owns, just behind The Glenlivet. This provides an increase of ten per cent in the company's malt whisky distilling capacity.



"All the cooling water, 400,000 litres per hour, comes from the River Spey. The thermal vapour recompression technology [on the spirit condensers] makes this one of the most efficient distilleries in the world."

Trevor Buckley
Operations Manager
Chivas Brothers

"The construction of the new Dalmunach distillery is a clear demonstration of our confidence and also of our commitment to invest to meet the significant growth potential."

Laurent Lacassagne
Chairman and Chief Executive,
Chivas Brothers


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FURTHER INFORMATION: www.robertson.co.uk/project/dalmunach-distillery