

# Keep on Walking

## Johnnie Walker Black Label Celebrates 100 Years of Innovation and Sets the Stage for 100 More

By Alia Akkam



One of the world's most iconic liquor brands, and the number one blended Scotch whisky, Johnnie Walker Black Label, traces its roots back to an inventive grocer in Kilamarnock, Scotland, nearly 200 years ago. Today, the famous whisky is sold in over 120 countries, alongside its family of blends from the House of Walker. And what has sustained the brand's popularity through the years? Quality.

"The art of blending is the hallmark of the Johnnie Walker brand. The signature blending style used today is the same as it was in the 1900s when Walker was a family-run business," notes Dan Kleinman, marketing director of Scotch whisky for Diageo. "The slanted label and the iconic 'Striding Man' logo have been emblazoned on the Black Label bottles since its inception."

### Ambitious Beginnings

In 1820, John Walker, a 15-year-old farm boy, took over a grocery store in Kilamarnock, where he experimented with whisky, applying the same skills he learned blending teas. In 1857, his son Alexander took over the store and devoted his energies to creating a new blend. 'Old Highland' was the precursor to Johnnie Walker Black Label, flaunting the slanted label and square bottle synonymous with today's version.

In 1909 Johnnie Walker, the global brand, was born. Two of John's grandsons, George and Alexander, took the business to a new level by purchasing Cardhu Distillery – still the home and visitors center of Johnnie Walker today.

It is the quality blend Alexander Walker perfected that Kleinman believes underscores the excellence and widespread popularity of Johnnie Walker Black Label. "Each individual bottle of Johnnie Walker Black Label is the result of decades of planning. Every sip is the product of the rich heritage and skill of the Johnnie Walker Master Blenders, as they select from up to 40 whiskies from over 700 casks. Johnnie Walker Black Label has stood the test of time and remains the cornerstone of the Walker portfolio," he explains.

### The Iconic Bottle

George Walker traveled the globe establishing international distribution networks that helped propel the collection of Walker whiskies into a pioneering brand across the world. In addition to the distinctive slanted label and square bottle shape, the next step in making the Johnnie Walker brand easily recognizable was a collaboration with cartoonist Tom Browne, which resulted in the creation of one of

the world's first advertising icons: the famous 'Striding Man'. Over the century, the look of the bottle, despite a few tweaks, has essentially stayed the same, maintaining its powerful brand identity among consumers.

### Ongoing Buzz

In tandem with the release of the limited edition bottle, Diageo has unrolled a new campaign entitled *100 Years of Progress*, which will include a high-impact visual theatre program, POS materials and a robust national public relations campaign.

"The compelling story of 100 years of Johnnie Walker Black Label will be activated on every platform and consumer touchpoint, including advertising, public relations, [www.johnniewalker.com](http://www.johnniewalker.com) and in-store displays," Kleinman explains. "In addition to the Limited Edition Collector's Pack, high-impact video displays and a variety of other visual elements have been created for various store formats. Consumers are being invited to join in the anniversary celebration at home with a mail-in offering of beautiful etched anniversary 'Striding Man' glassware. Even our extensive nationwide mentorship program of on- and off-premise events will receive a special Black Label 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary twist."

As they begin to dive into another century, Johnnie Walker Black Label is confident about the future and maintaining the level of quality they have been recognized for over the past century. As Kleinman says, "The *100 Years of Progress* campaign will set the stage for 100 more." ■

To honor the occasion, Diageo will be releasing a new Johnnie Walker Black Label Centenary Limited Edition Collector's Pack. The sleek black bottle is embellished with gold and a timeline of the brand's key milestone dates on the back.

