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MIX IT UP

Move over margarita.

These cocktails prove there's
more than one use for tequila.

When it comes to tequila, it's time to think beyond the "m" word—there's so much more to this sometimes overlooked spirit than simply being the main ingredient in the ubiquitous margarita. Tequila offers a versatile platform for cocktails ranging from classics such as the Paloma, a refreshing mix of tequila, grapefruit soda, lime juice and salt, to trendier punches like a tequila-fueled version of the popular mojito. Or like a single-malt Scotch, tequila in its aged form can be sipped and savored. More complex than its popularity as a shot would suggest, tequila boasts a wide flavor palate—from smoky to nearly sweet—depending on variables such as where the agave is grown and the amount of aging during the manufacturing process.

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BY ROBERT DIGIACOMO

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRETT THOMAS

STYLING BY LISA RUSSELL

TEJITO

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SEÑORA
BARRIGA

SURLY
TEMPLE

The margarita may be the most famous tequila cocktail, but it's not the only one. For starters sip a flavorful Tejito, Surly Temple or Señora Barriga, all made from the blue agave spirit

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TEQUILA

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"The one thing that's so intriguing about the drink is that there's a tequila for everyone," says Joanne Weir, author of the new book, *Tequila: A Guide to Types, Flights, Cocktails, and Bites* (Ten Speed Press).

At Xochitl, a restaurant and bar in Philadelphia, the focus of the tequila-centric cocktail list is on matching particular tequilas with fresh, seasonal ingredients. The evocatively named Señora Barriga, for example, uses a base of Corralejo Blanco tequila—one of 75 tequilas available at Xochitl—mixed with muddled pineapple, cilantro and lime.

"We're trying to expand some of the flavors you're going to get from tequila," says Xochitl general manager Sergio Ruiz. "A lot of people think you should just put it in a margarita, but tequilas are different depending on whether they're from the highlands or the lowlands. Some might have black pepper, some might have citrus—and we want to expand on those flavors."

Forget that tequila you tossed in a margarita during your early 20s. It was probably a cheaper mixto—a less pure

form of tequila that is watered down with added sugar. In its 100 percent agave form, tequila ranges from the mild (blanco), unaged or aged less than two months, to middle-of-the-road reposado, aged up to one year, to the often smoky to complex añejo, aged for at least one year.

Another key factor for tequila is location, location, location—of the agave plants. Those grown in the highlands get more exposure to the sun and tend to have a lighter, citrusy end product, while those in the lowlands have an earthier tone. "I think today people know the different types of tequila and are more educated on tequila," Ruiz says. "They're not just asking for the house tequila. They're asking for 100 percent agave."

In Pennsylvania, tequila sales have been up over the past 52 weeks, according to Peg Shirley, a wine and spirits educator with the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board. The PLCB offers more than three dozen types of tequila in stores and online.

Given the diverse character of this spirit, the mixology behind tequila cocktails is largely a matter of taste—and trial and error. As Weir, a James Beard

Foundation award-winning cookbook author and host of the PBS series *Joanne Weir's Cooking Class*, discovered while researching her book, a one-tequila-fits-all strategy doesn't work for every drink. "I wanted to find out, 'Do you only use an inexpensive tequila in a drink because you can't taste it,'" she says. "I found out, if you make a drink with an añejo, you definitely can taste the difference."

For David Montanez, the general manager of Azul Bar y Cantina in the Pittsburgh suburb of Leetsdale, tequila meets its flavor match in citrus- and fruit-based mixers. Azul's bar menu serves up such tequila-based classics as the Sunrise (orange juice and grenadine), as well as its own inventions, including the Tejito (a mojito with tequila instead of rum) and the Toro Rojo, or Red Bull (tequila, rum and gin with Sierra Mist, grenadine and lime). Montanez's verdict: "Tequila is better with the fruity stuff."

Better still for this Cancun native is to drink tequila—Azul stocks 81 types—the traditional Mexican way, by pairing a *caballito* (a small two-ounce glass) with sangrita, a spicy nonalcoholic chaser typically made from tomato, orange and



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lime juices, and hot chili peppers. "It's the custom in most of the cantinas in Mexico," Montanez says. "When you ask for a tequila shot, they give you a shot of sangrita next to it." Azul also offers this potent one-two combo in a mixed version called the Vampiro.

For Weir, her experiments with tequila convinced her of its suitability for a lengthy list of hot and cold beverages. Weir spiked her hot chocolate with it, mulled wine with it and even came up with a tequila-infused Shirley Temple—dubbed the Surly Temple—with each recipe calling for a specific tequila. She adds, "I didn't come across anything where I said, 'Ugh, that doesn't work.'"

RECIPES

SEÑORA BARRIGA

From Xochitl, Philadelphia
Serves 1

- 6 to 8 cubes of pineapple**
- 8 to 10 cilantro leaves, diced**
- 1/2 lime, squeezed**
- 1 oz. simple syrup**
- 2 oz. of Corralejo Blanco tequila**
- Pineapple wedge, for garnish**

Muddle pineapple and cilantro. Add lime

juice, simple syrup and tequila and mix. Serve over ice with a pineapple garnish.

TEJITO

Azul Bar y Cantina, Leetsdale
Serves 1

- 4 to 5 mint leaves**
- 1/2 lime, cut into three wedges**
- 1 3/4 oz. Sauza Gold or Sauza Hornitos Reposado tequila**
- 2 spoonfuls of sugar, to taste**
- Mineral soda water, to taste**
- Lemon-lime soda, to taste**

Place mint leaves and lime wedges in a highball glass. Top with sugar and muddle. Add tequila and stir. Top with mineral soda water and a splash of lemon-lime soda.

SURLY TEMPLE

From Tequila: A Guide to Types, Flights, Cocktails, and Bites, by Joanne Weir*
Serves 1

- 1 3/4 oz. añejo tequila**
- 3/4 oz. freshly squeezed lemon juice**
- 1 1/2 oz. grenadine**
- 4 oz. soda water**
- 2 thin whole slices of lemon**

Place the tequila, lemon juice, grenadine, soda water and ice in a shaker and stir 15 seconds. Fill a tall glass with ice. Press the lemon slices down into the glass. Strain the drink into the glass.

LA PALOMA

From Tequila: A Guide to Types, Flights, Cocktails, and Bites, by Joanne Weir*
Serves 1

Salt for rimming glass
Pinch of salt

- 1 oz. freshly squeezed lime juice**
- 2 oz. blanco tequila**
- 13.5 oz. bottle of grapefruit soda (from Mexico, if available)**
- Lime wedge, for garnish**

Salt the rim of a tall collins glass, and add a pinch to that bottom of glass. Fill with ice. Add lime juice and tequila. Top off with grapefruit soda and garnish with lime.

SEQUI

Azul Bar y Cantina
Serves 1

- 1 1/4 oz. Sauza Gold tequila**
- Pineapple juice, to taste**
- 1/2 oz. Amaretto di Saronno**
- Grenadine, to taste**
- Lime wedge, for garnish**

Combine tequila and pineapple juice in an old-fashioned glass. Top with amaretto and a few drops of grenadine. Squeeze a little lime juice and drop lime in glass.

*Reprinted from Tequila: A Guide to Types, Flights, Cocktails, and Bites by Joanne Weir. Copyright (C)2009. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, Ca. www.tenspeed.com.

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