

FINE WINE & GOOD SPIRITS

Taste

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION • SUMMER 2015

Gin's New Spin

A classic spirit
made modern

Uncorked

Quality wines
on a budget

FREE

BASIL GIN SMASH
See recipe on page 1.

Endless Summer

Throw a casual cookout featuring all-American wines & cocktails

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Pinot grigio is a consistent warm-weather pleaser.



Taste

ON THE COVER

Modernize the minty gin smash with basil and lemon.

BASIL GIN SMASH

5 basil leaves

1 oz. simple syrup

1 oz. lemon juice

2 oz. The Botanist Islay Dry Gin
Seasonal berries, for garnish

Muddle basil, lemon and simple syrup in a mixing glass. Add gin and stir.

Strain into an ice-filled glass. Garnish with berries.

Taste cover photograph by Brett Thomas.
Drink styling by Joshua Neal.
Prop styling and backdrop by Anne Bigler.





Tequila's SUNRISE

Craft and premium bottles are taking tequila to the top of the spirits world **BY ROBERT DIGIACOMO**



TASTE TEST

A flight of tequilas showcases the different flavors in blanco, reposado and añejo styles.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRETT THOMAS

STYLING BY ANNE BIGLER

EQUILA IS FINALLY GETTING its due. Restaurants and bars around the state are offering vast lists of craft-style, barrel-aged tequilas and its cousin, mezcal, that are meant to be sipped and savored.

In Philadelphia, David Suro-Piñera, owner of Tequila's restaurant, has curated a list of 90-plus agave spirits over the past decade, including his own craft tequila brands Siembra Azul and Siembra Valles. In the Lehigh Valley, Fiesta Olé Tequila House rebranded last year in order to emphasize its tequila offerings, available by the pour and in tasting flights. And across the state at Verde, a modern Mexican restaurant in Pittsburgh, the menu of some 200 tequilas and mezcals has outgrown a special

wall display stretching 10 feet wide and six feet high.

"A lot of people think tequilas are interchangeable, but that's not the case," says Nathan Lutchansky, spirits director at Verde. "It's a pleasant surprise to find out how different they all are. If people tell us what flavors they like, we will find a tequila that fits their liking."

Consumers are also finding more options at Fine Wine & Good Spirits stores, where shelves are more crowded than ever with premium and craft options, including Casamigos (co-owned by George Clooney); KAH Tequila Blanco (known for its hand-painted Day of the Dead-inspired bottles) and 123 Organic Tequila (pronounced "Uno Dos Tres").

The diversity of tequilas available today has sparked a fevered interest in and appreciation for *(continued on page 70)*

TEQUILA'S SUNRISE

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the classic spirit. “The more you learn about tequila,” Suro-Piñera says, “the more you want to learn about tequila. It’s an endless category.”

THE REAL TEQUILA

THE FIRST THING TO UNDERSTAND about tequila are the rules governing its production: Mexican law mandates that the spirit be produced from Weber blue agave in the state of Jalisco or certain locations within Guanajuato, Michoacán, Nayarit and Tamaulipas. The agave is picked mainly by hand, and its *piña* (or core) is removed and cooked slowly in an oven. The juice of the *piña* is then extracted and fermented in wooden or stainless steel vessels for several days.

The final step involves distilling the liquid twice.

Although all tequilas share the same basic production process, they offer a wide variety of flavor palates. For starters, tequila that is not labeled 100 percent agave is considered a “mixto,” a style that has at least 51 percent agave and is less expensive to produce. “It was not until the late 1990s when the 100 percent agave tequilas started to cross the U.S. border,” says Suro-Piñera, who helped create the Tequila Interchange Project to advocate for sustainable practices that incorporate traditional methods in modern production.

Where the agave is grown also impacts the final flavor—the Jalisco lowlands produce a spicier, earthier spirit, while the highlands impart a sweeter, floral flavor. “The agave spirits’ terroirs

are the most complex in the world of spirit and food,” Suro-Piñera says. “You have to wait between five and 12 years for the raw material to absorb all the characteristics, and some mezcal plants take up to 35 years to reach maturity.”

At Fiesta Olé Tequila House, patrons can explore flavor variations through horizontal (one type of tequila, three brands) and vertical (one brand, three styles) flights. To illustrate how the highlands influence tequila’s taste, Ramirez likes to pour his customers a sample of 7 Leguas, a venerable brand produced in his native state of Jalisco that offers notes of peppermint, vanilla and almonds. “It’s very balanced,” Ramirez says.

Aging also plays a major role in shaping the flavor of 100 percent agave tequila. Blanco (or white or silver) tequilas are usually unaged or aged for a short time. Reposados are aged between two months and a year and have some oaky qualities. Añejos are aged between one and three years, and extra añejos are aged more than three years, yielding a darker, smoother, richer spirit.

“When you get into the añejo and extra-añejo categories, it’s about the qualities of what the wood can do to enhance and smooth out the spirit,” says Jane Merritt, e-commerce manager for FineWineAndGoodSpirits.com. A premium añejo like Don Julio Cazadores can taste like a mellow cognac, for example, while one like El Tesoro has more bite. Merritt adds that not everyone is a fan of aging. “You have traditionalists who want to taste more of the agave and don’t like the aged versions as much.”

Merritt likens tequila’s rise to that of craft bourbon and gin, noting “bartenders are driving this interest by using these craft spirits in experimental ways to create their signature drinks.” This includes featuring tequila in cocktails that go beyond the classic margarita, such as Verde’s Aztec Old-Fashioned, made with reposado tequila, blue agave syrup, orange and chocolate bitters.

MEET MEZCAL

AS CONSUMERS HAVE GROWN MORE accustomed to the aged versions of tequila, they are also sampling its agave-based relative, mezcal. The latter has much wider production parameters than does tequila, because the Mexican government does not limit the type of agave that can be used to

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Today’s tequilas have inspired bartenders to experiment with cocktails beyond the margarita.

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make mezcal and allows for the spirit to be made in multiple parts of the country. “The production of mezcal is still very artisanal, very organic and very pure,” Suro-Piñera adds.

Pennsylvania will soon be the site of the launch of Suro-Piñera's Siembra Metl, a mezcal from Michoacán. “This is a region that is new to the mezcal palate and offers incredible complexity of flavors,” Suro-Piñera says.

Like single-malt scotch, mezcal evokes strong reactions to its typically smoky notes. According to Merritt, “you either love it or hate it.” This extreme reputation can work in mezcal's favor, as in Verde's “Scotchy Scotch” flight, which pairs three styles from three brands—Sombra Joven, Illegal Reposado and Scorpion Mezcal Añejo. “When you tell people it's smoky like Scotch but has the mineral characteristics of tequila,” Lutchansky says, “people are interested in giving it a try.”

TASTING NOTES

BLANCO

SIEMBRA AZUL BLANCO TEQUILA

Fresh with vivid fruit, citrus and herbaceous aromas.

Price: \$36.99 | **Size:** 750 mL | **Code:** 5578

AGAVE UNDERGROUND SILVER TEQUILA

Smooth and light with agave flavors.

Price: \$39.99 | **Size:** 750 mL | **Code:** 7865

JOSE CUERVO TRADICIONAL SILVER

Well-balanced spice and sweet flavors with fruit overtones.

Price: \$24.99 | **Size:** 750 mL | **Code:** 3420

DE LEON PLATINUM

Subtle sweet agave flavors, citrus, warm spice and smooth vanilla on the finish.

Price: \$59.99 | **Size:** 750 mL | **Code:** 8914

AVION SILVER TEQUILA

Gently sweet and crisp with hints of grapefruit, pineapple and black pepper.

Price: \$47.99 | **Size:** 750 mL | **Code:** 3513

REPOSADO

CASAMIGOS REPOSADO TEQUILA

Slightly oaky with hints of caramel and cocoa.

Price: \$51.99 | **Size:** 750 mL | **Code:** 8565

SAUZA HORNETOS REPOSADO

Fruit and wood aromas lead to complex yet perky sweet pear and spice flavors.

Price: \$25.99 | **Size:** 750 mL | **Code:** 6224

KAH REPOSADO TEQUILA

Ultra-smooth and high-proof with a full body and intense agave flavor.

Price: \$55.99 | **Size:** 750 mL | **Code:** 3644

AÑEJO

DON JULIO AÑEJO

Complex and full-bodied with cooked agave and wild honey flavors and notes of cherries, strawberries, vanilla and oaky butterscotch.

Price: \$55.99 | **Size:** 750 mL | **Code:** 623

EL JIMADOR AÑEJO

Vanilla and oak flavors balanced by subtle hints of cinnamon and caramel.

Price: \$29.99 | **Size:** 750 mL | **Code:** 5453

RECIPES

SHORT RIB

From Tequilas,
Philadelphia

2 oz. Siembra Valles Blanco

1 oz. lime juice

1 oz. simple syrup

1 barspoon pomegranate molasses

½ jalapeño pepper, for garnish

Mix everything in a shaker and shake vigorously. Serve up.

MOJITO VERDE

From Tequilas

1½ oz. Siembra Valles Blanco

½ oz. St-Germain elderflower liqueur

½ oz. agave nectar

¾ oz. lime juice

¾ oz. cucumber juice

2 basil leaves

Shake everything together and serve in a tall glass with ice.

VAMPIRO

From Fiesta Olé Tequila House,
Whitehall

Salt, for rim

1½ oz. reposado tequila

1½ oz. Viuda de Sánchez Sangrita

2½ oz. orange juice

½ oz. lime juice

2 oz. grape soda

Orange slice, for garnish

Rim a highball glass with salt. Mix ingredients together in a shaker. Strain into prepared glass filled with ice. Garnish with orange.

COCO LOCO

From Verde Mexican Kitchen & Cantina,
Pittsburgh

Lime wedge, for rim

Toasted sweetened coconut flakes, for rim

2 oz. 1800 Coconut Tequila

½ oz. Cointreau

¾ oz. pineapple juice

¾ oz. fresh-squeezed lime juice

Lime wheel, for garnish

Rub lime on the edge of a double rocks glass, then roll the rim in coconut flakes. Fill glass with ice. Combine ingredients in a shaker with ice. Shake and strain into prepared glass. Garnish with lime wheel.

AZTEC OLD-FASHIONED

From Verde Mexican Kitchen & Cantina

2 oz. Corralejo Reposado Tequila

1 tsp. Wholesome Sweeteners Fair Trade Organic Blue Agave Syrup

1 dash Fee Brothers West Indian Orange Bitters

1 dash Fee Brothers Aztec Chocolate Bitters
Wide orange peel, for garnish

Pour ingredients into a mixing glass, and fill with ice. Stir until cold and strain into a double rocks glass filled with ice. Garnish with orange peel tucked into the side of the glass.



Blanco, reposado and añejo tequilas all make excellent bases for cocktails.

TROPICAL STORM

From Peligroso Tequila

1 oz. Peligroso Silver Tequila
1 oz. grapefruit juice
½ oz. lime juice
½ oz. Peligroso cinnamon
½ oz. agave nectar
Lime slice, for garnish

Combine ingredients in a shaker with ice. Shake vigorously and strain into an ice-filled glass. Garnish with lime.

MERCADITO

From Milagro Tequila

1 part fresh lime juice
1 pinch cilantro
2 parts Milagro Reposado
¾ oz. parts agave nectar
4 cucumber slices
1 thin jalapeño slice
Cucumber slice and cilantro sprig, for garnish

Muddle lime and cilantro in a Boston shaker. Add remaining ingredients and ice, and shake vigorously. Strain into a rocks glass with fresh ice. Garnish with cucumber slice and cilantro sprig.

NOBELITA

From Casa Noble Tequila

2 parts Casa Noble Crystal
1 part orange juice
3 parts Pom pomegranate juice

Combine ingredients in a glass with ice. Stir.

BLANCO - REPOSADO TEQUILA

CODE		PF.	SIZE	PRICE
3163	Cazadores Blanco Tequila	80	750ML	19.99
8914	N De Leon Platinum Tequila		750ML	59.99
644	Don Julio Silver Tequila	80	750ML	49.99
3336	El Jimador Silver Tequila	80	750ML	19.99
4878	El Mayor Blanco Tequila	80	750ML	29.99
3440	Espolon Blanco Tequila	80	750ML	24.99
6619	L Gran Patron Burdeos Platinum Tequila	80	750ML	199.99
8752	Herradura Blanco Tequila	80	750ML	39.99
6464	Hornitos Lime Shot Tequila	70	750ML	23.99
8496	Hornitos Plata Tequila	80	750ML	23.99
3420	N Jose Cuervo Tradicional Silver Tequila	80	750ML	24.99
3642	Kah Blanco Tequila ...	80	750ML	49.99
7533	Lunazul Blanco Tequila	80	750ML	18.99
9784	Milagro Silver Tequila	80	750ML	28.99
30982	L Milagro Silver Tequila Select Barrel Reserve.....	80	750ML	54.99
7928	Olmecca Altos Plata Tequila	80	750ML	19.99
8604	Patron Roca Silver Tequila		750ML	69.99
4859	Patron Silver Tequila	80	50ML	5.99
3448	Patron Silver Tequila	80	200ML	16.99
5214	Patron Silver Tequila	80	375ML	25.99
9709	Patron Silver Tequila	80	750ML	49.99
5208	Patron Silver Tequila	80	1.75L	104.99
8923	N Peligroso Silver ...		750ML	29.99
4942	Sauza Blue Silver Tequila	80	750ML	19.99
8959	N Sauza Cucumber Chili		750ML	17.99
5578	Siembra Azul Blanco Tequila	80	750ML	36.99
34353	N Siembra Valles		750ML	41.99
7471	L Tanteo Jalepeno Tequila	80	750ML	34.99
6611	Tres Agaves Blanco Tequila	80	750ML	24.99

TEQUILA - REPOSADO

5576	1800 Reposado Tequila	80	750ML	27.99
3158	1800 Reposado Tequila	80	1.75L	42.99
7935	L Agave Underground Reposado Tequila	80	750ML	44.99
8026	Cabo Wabo Reposado Tequila	80	750ML	39.99
3579	Camarena Reposado Tequila	80	750ML	19.99
8565	Casamigos Tequila Reposado		750ML	51.99
5801	Cazadores Reposado Tequila	80	750ML	24.99
5718	Corralejo Reposado Tequila	80	750ML	29.99
3402	Don Julio Reposado Tequila	80	750ML	51.99
8078	El Jimador Reposado Tequila	80	750ML	21.99
3441	Espolon Reposado Tequila	80	750ML	26.99
8751	Herradura Reposado Tequila	80	750ML	42.99
6224	Hornitos Reposado Tequila	80	750ML	25.99

N = New Product

L = Limited Distribution



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