

DeMar


LOS CABOS ■ MEXICO escapes

the evolution of
elegance

How Five Villas
on the Beach Became
One of the Most Desired
Resort Communities
in the World



DISTINCTIVE COMMUNITIES
BY DEL MAR DEVELOPMENT



TALE OF TEQUILA

ESSENCE IN A BOTTLE

BY ERIC HISS

The story of Mexico and the story of tequila are inseparable. One could argue that the country's signature spirit, derived from the heart of the blue agave plant, is itself a distillation of Mexican culture. Named for the Spanish colonial-era city where it was made, many experts believe tequila has been enjoyed in Mexico since the 1600s.

Today's tequila has lost none of its national identity, and its appeal has expanded far beyond its original boundaries in the state of Jalisco; the spirit has become one of the fastest growing spirits categories in the world, with demand tripling over the last 15 years. Many fans have fallen for tequila via the most popular of cantina cocktails, the Margarita. But increasingly, casual tipplers and aficionados alike are drawn to a growing selection of super-premium tequilas that are usually sipped neat and can command prices of more than \$300 per bottle.

For those who have been "burned" by lesser tequilas (probably from encounters with inferior blends that are not 100 percent agave), rest assured that premium tequila is worth seeking out and enjoying. Fortunately for homeowners and guests of the Del Mar Development communities and One&Only Palmilla, that search needn't go any farther than the resorts' grounds.

Ricardo Espinoza, restaurant manager at Del Mar's private Club Ninety Six beach club, has seen the rise in quality and popularity firsthand. He says that "guests are increasingly interested in tasting the best agave spirits and asking more questions, such as the difference between an *añejo* and *reposado* tequila."

Espinoza's observation reflects consumers' increasing sophistication — their ability to appreciate and discern among tequila's main categories: the unaged *blanco* (white) or *plata* (silver); *joven* (young); *reposado* (rested — that is — aged two months to one

continued on page 72



MUCH ADO ABOUT MEZCAL

Spirits professionals such as mixologists rarely agree on anything. Except when it comes to mezcal, which, like tequila, is also derived from agave. In the toniest cocktail bars from New York to San Francisco, mezcal has become a rock star. It's a shame it only took 500 years. That's because mezcal has had to overcome multiple obstacles to finally arrive at its newfound celebrity. First, there was its isolated and limited production, mostly in the far-flung villages of Oaxaca. Then there was the myth of its hallucinogenic properties. And of course, there was the wiggly issue of the worm floating at the bottom of the bottle, an admirably enduring marketing gimmick imagined a half-century ago by a Mexico City liquor salesman pushing a sub-par brand.

Now, savvy sippers are taking a second look at mezcal, especially in comparison to tequila. The relationship between the two is akin to that of brandy and Cognac, with mezcal representing the general category, and tequila, the scion with a defined region of origin. Like tequila, mezcal is generally associated with one region, Oaxaca, but unlike tequila's sole reliance on blue agave for distillation, mezcal is crafted from a rich array of varieties, including the espadin and prized, wild-harvested tobala. Sample a premium mezcal, such as Pierde Almas or Del Maguey, and the palate is introduced to a new melange of notes, flavors, and finish. Thanks to a reliance on centuries-old methods and different agave varieties, expect to experience layers ranging from earth and woodsmoke to mango and citrus.

"More and more guests are giving it a try, and I love to see this adventurousness," Tez Abbott, general manager of Club Ninety Six says. "At first, many don't even want a taste, but by the next day, they are becoming as discerning as wine connoisseurs and are introducing their friends to mezcal."



year); and añejo (aged one to three years). There is also the coveted extra-añejo category, which is aged three or more years. "The constant is that it has to be 100 percent blue agave," says Tez Abbott, general manager of Club Ninety Six.

At the neighboring One&Only Palmilla, where more than 100 tequilas are poured in the poolside Agua Bar, Wine Director Manuel Arteaga is seeing guests exhibit equal enthusiasm for various agave spirits, especially tequila. "We are always rotating our selection, offering well-known brands like Don Julio, and Patron, but we also like to feature small, family-run tequilas, such as Siete Leguas and Tamuca."

And for those who prefer to enjoy a cocktail instead of sipping their tequila straight, the bar staff here has created a menu of artisanal cocktails. Popular signature drinks include the Tequila Mojito, made with Atalaje reposado, mint, basil, and lime juice, and the Ginger Margarita, a spicy riff on the classic cocktail made with Partida añejo, fresh ginger, and ginger salt rimming the glass.

Since the tequila scene is ever-evolving, Arteaga makes several trips a year to the Jalisco region to do research, where he has noted that traditional methods, such as cooking the spirit in clay ovens, are making a comeback. Talk about your dream job. ■

CHOYERITA

3 oz 100% Blue Agave Tequila

1 oz Controy (can substitute Cointreau if desired)

¾ oz Damiana

1 oz Fresh Lime Juice

Fill Shaker with ice. Add ingredients and shake vigorously. Strain into a glass with a salted rim. Garnish with lime.



DAMIANA'S SEDUCTIVE APPEAL

Though tequila comes from a designated region in Oaxaca (mainland Mexico), Baja can claim its own unique liqueur, Damiana. You may have spied a curious bottle in local liquor stores and at the airport duty-free shop that's shaped like a very curvaceous woman that would make Botero proud.

"Damiana has a light, sweet herbal flavor," Club Ninety Six's Abbott says. "It can be sipped on its own or as an addition to, or substitution for, orange liquors in a number of cocktails. I like it as an addition in margaritas, but you need to be careful because it's very sweet."

One might think that the seductive liqueur is a recent concoction created by some spirits conglomerate, but in fact, damiana has a long and colorful history in the region. Native to a vast region stretching from Mexico all the way to South America, the small damiana plant might look unobtrusive, but its purported powers as an aphrodisiac and medicinal herb — a cure for digestive ailments and depression — loom large.

Today, homemade damiana can be found in many towns along the peninsula, but the easiest way to encounter it is in local shops that carry the Guaycura Damiana brand in the famous bottle. We can't vouch for any of the alcohol's aforementioned mood-enhancing properties — you'll have to explore that on your own — but we can tell you that Club Ninety Six has created the Choyerita, a very tasty cocktail that combines sweet, herbaceous damiana, tequila, controy, and lime juice (*recipe left*). Just don't say we didn't warn you.