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life + leisure

THE CELTIC CHARMS OF SCOTLAND AND NEWFOUNDLAND

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 - + uncover the mystery of **MEZCAL**
 - + the **ACTIVE** patient defined



win
a **YOGA** session
with **BIKRAM**
himself! **PAGE 45**

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inside: CONTINUING DENTAL EDUCATION CALENDAR
where will you meet? **VICTORIA** / NAPA / MAINZ / HOUSTON / CABO SAN LUCAS >>

Janet Gyenes is a magazine writer and editor who likes to dally in spirits, especially when discovering something like corenwyn jenever (a gin-like Dutch spirit)—straight or in cocktails like the “bramble.” Have a boozy idea or question? Send it to feedback@inprintpublications.com



Part 2:
Rediscover
mezcal's
allure
(Part 1:
tequila)

mezcal on the rise

Make room for tequila's older and smokier agave counterpart

If tequila is one of the most misunderstood spirits, then mezcal is a downright mystery.

But bartenders are getting schooled on the smoky spirit says Eric Lorenz, Canada's first *mezcalier*, whose knowledge of all things agave is encyclopedic. (He's also a tequila enthusiast and educator who holds the Distintivo “T” Diploma from the Consejo Regulador del Tequila.)

After completing the first level of mezcalier training from the pros (including the distiller from Scorpion Mezcal), about 20 bartenders working at establishments such as West, Hawksworth and The Shameful Tiki Shack in Vancouver, are a step closer to earn-

ing the “mezcalier” moniker.

Mezcalerias have already been embraced in U.S. cities such as Austin, Seattle and New York (complete with art gallery and burlesque shows), and they've migrated to Europe, with eclectic spots open in Paris (think Mexican wrestling masks married with Marais chairs), London, Berlin and beyond.

Considering that Mexico is Canada's winter playground, mezcal-centric joints have been absent from our cool climes. Until now. Canada's first, La Mezcaleria, finally opened in Vancouver's vibrant Commercial Drive neighbourhood. Mezcal and tequila flights are on offer, giving guests a chance to get an appreciation of agaves' complexity and diversity.

There's truth to the old saying “All tequila is mezcal, but not all mezcal is tequila.” Mezcal has been made in Mexico for roughly 500 years, making it the mother of agave spirits, but politics and propaganda pushed younger upstart tequila to the forefront.

Both boozes are made in Mexico from agave plants and involve roasting, fermenting and distilling.

“The biggest difference is that tequila is a bit industrial and mezcal stayed more primitive,” says Lorenz.

Artisanal mezcal-making is unquestionably rustic, and comparisons are often drawn between moonshiners and mezcaliers. Just a few ingredients are required: agave, water, firewood.

And a mule.

Piñas (the heart of the agave plant) are roasted for three to five days in a pit. Then they're mashed with a mule-drawn stone wheel before open-air fermentation takes place, followed by distillation in wood-fired stills. The method dates back to pre-Columbian times.

There are 30 to 40 agave species that can be made into mezcal, though blue agave, the hallmark of quality tequila, isn't one of them. “In most cases it's a single agave that's used,” says Lorenz. “Most is 100% espadin [agave]. Tobala is second-most known—it's almost always wild harvested—and takes 16 years to grow.” Age is another wrinkle in the mystery that shrouds mezcal, where youth reigns.

“Artisanal mezcal is always presented un-

aged,” says Lorenz. “Flavours will almost always be more herbaceous...smoky, hybrid flavours like roasted pineapple, dried fruits, roasted red pepper, pine needles, cigarette ash, railroad ties...but also anise, especially in wild-harvested agave species from around Oaxaca.”

The smokiness that's characteristic of mezcal comes from the pit roasting—which permeates the agaves with the essence of fire and earth—not from resting in oak, which is where tequila gets its chocolate, soy and caramel nuances. The age of the agave pre-harvest is what's important, Lorenz explains. Some people believe that the longer the plant matures, the more the terroir influences mezcal's flavour. *Arroqueño* agave, for example, can mature for upwards of 24 years. In effect, the aging has taken place before the spirit has been bottled.

Mezcal is produced in very small quantities, compared to tequila, and because of its primitive production methods, each batch is a singular expression. The variables are boundless: the batch, the village, elevation, variety and age of agave, whether the mezcal is made from a single species or *ensamble*, a blend of three species. It all adds to mezcal's mystique.

To confound matters more, quality mezcal *can* be aged in oak. It's not considered artisanal, though, because like tequila, the piñas are steam-roasted. Lorenz describes the flavour of the extra añejo Agave de Cortés as “...raisins, caramel and just delicious, thick sweet spice.”

On the menu at La Mezcaleria? A dozen varieties already, including Fidencio Pechuga, a curious concoction, where distilled mezcal is infused with the essence of, yes, a whole chicken breast.

Artisanal or not, expect to see this smoky spirit explode onto the booze scene soon in Canada. The volume of mezcal imported for sippers to savour has expanded exponentially in the past few years, with artisanal brands such as Fidencio, Pierde Almas, and El Jolgorio entering the market. And like mezcal's more youthful counterpart, tequila, it's best when sipped neat or matched with ingredients that complement—not mask—its assertive essence.” ●

AGAVE
Min. 80% agave; most mezcal is 100% agave. Sipping tequila is 100% blue agave.

ROASTING
Piñas are typically pit roasted.

AGING
Artisanal mezcal is typically not aged. Tequila may be unaged or aged in oak for a min. of two months. Mainly Oaxaca

TRADITIONAL GLASSWARE
Jicara cup, made from the guaje gourd shot glass
ALCOHOL by VOLUME (ABV)
45-55% (diluted to bottle proof with lower-proof alcohol)
40% (diluted to bottle proof with distilled water)

mezcal vs tequila



- PIERDE ALMAS ESPADÍN** > Slightly smoky bouquet with hints of aromatic wood and wild flowers. Prolonged duration on the palate with a velvety texture and smooth, fresh tones of quince and anise in the aftertaste. 100% agave espadin; 51% ABV
- SOMBRA** > Spicy, fruity and high-toned, with notes of citrus and roasted pineapple. 100% agave espadin, 45% ABV
- FIDENCIO CLASICO** > Delicate wood smoke and green pepper scents highlight the bouquet; flavor profile features pipe tobacco, road tar, cigarette ash and pine needle; tangy, piquant. 100% agave espadin; 44.7% ABV
- AGAVE DE CORTÉS SILVER** > Subtle notes of smoke, and a sweetness comparable to cognac with bright, refreshing hints of citrus and herbs on the nose and palate. 100% estate grown agave espadin, 43% ABV

FOOD PHOTO: DR. HOLLY FONG

{learn}
agave education →

Hold the mariachis and caballitos. Bring on the tequila and mezcal, paired with tasty bites from local chefs at the Vancouver International Tequila Expo (VITE). May 24, 2013, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Vancouver; tickets from \$40. vancouvertequilaexpo.com

{sip}
Oaxacan Daisy →

1.5 oz Sombra mezcal + 1 oz Cointreau (or Giffard Triple Sec) + 3/4 oz freshly squeezed Meyer lemon juice

Shake ingredients together with ice. Serve in a coupe glass; garnish with Meyer lemon peel.