



# Illinois Beverage Guide

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AT-THE BAR by Robert Plotkin

## Class of '09 -- New Tequilas in the Lime Light

There continues to be an influx of new and exciting brands of 100% agave tequilas on the American market. After all, nothing breeds success like success. Is there a point, however, where there are too many brands of premium tequilas on our shelves?

"Perhaps, but don't start looking for that saturation point to come soon," contends Rich Krumm, food and beverage director for the Brennan Restaurant Group of New Orleans. "At one of our restaurants we carry 45 labels of tequila and they're all extremely active. Tequila drinkers are different than, let's say, vodka drinkers who find a brand they like and typically stick with it. On the contrary, Tequila aficionados are very open to trying new brands."

Brendan Moylan, owner of Noonan's Bar

& Grill in Larkspur, CA, agrees that tequila enthusiasts thrive on the sense of discovery. "Stocking new brands is a significant sales driver. We carry over 300 labels of tequila and invest in new brands when they enter the market. I'm a devoted fan of 100% agave tequilas and I appreciate having an opportunity to sample a new range. It's an enriching experience."

In an evolutionary sense, tequila is a maturing category. As aficionados grow more discerning, distillers are responding by releasing the best and brightest their craft can produce, innovative offerings such as ultra-premium blancos, vintage dated and single estate bottlings, flavor infusions and increasingly rarer and older añejos.

High on the list of sure-fire prospects is

organic 4 Copas Tequila, a super-premium line of handcrafted tequilas made in the lowlands of Jalisco. The 4 Copas Reposado spends 9 months in American white oak, while the añejo is aged 3 years.

According to Mac Gregory, director of food and beverage at the Phoenician Resort in Scottsdale, Arizona, his guests enjoy the tequila and respond well to it being an organic spirit. "We consider 4 Copas to be a one of the marquee "boutique" selections based on the quality of the juice and its non-sense packaging. It's an ideal brand to recommend to connoisseurs looking for a sensational tequila they've not experienced."

Equally engaging is recent arrival Single Estate Tequila Ocho. The range features vintage-dated, estate-delineated, 100% agave tequilas distilled in the highlands of the Los Altos region. Each bottling showcases the agave from an individual estate. For instance, the agaves used to make the 2008 Tequila Ocho Añejo were cultivated in the heat and humidity of El Vergel Estate, which is at a different altitude and miles away from the red soil of the Carrizal Estate, where the agaves for the 2008 Plata were grown. Few brands, if any, better demonstrate the profound affect of terrior on a finished spirit.

Another lottery pick is La Certeza 100% Agave Tequila, a range of small batch spirits from Tierra de Agaves. The state of the art distillery was founded in 2002 by Francisco Beckmann, former co-owner of Jose Cuervo. Ultra-premium La Certeza tequilas are distilled entirely from estate-grown agaves and aged in both American white oak and French Limousin barrels.

Tierra de Agaves has also introduced Lunazul, a line of small-batch 100% agave tequilas competitively priced well below what their enhanced quality would normally dictate. After less than a year on the market, Lunazul was named a "Rising Star" Growth Brands award winner by the Beverage Information Group, awarded to brands "less than five full years of age that have exhibited notable growth."

### Sexy Extra Añejos

After more than six-years of deliberation, the CRT has created the designation of Extra Añejo, which signifies that a 100% agave tequila has been barrel-aged for 3-years or more. For generations these ultra-luxurious spirits were reserved for the private use of maestro tequileros and their families, but now any commoner with a few hundred dollars in their pocket can afford what many consider the epitome of the craft. Here's a look at the recent arrivals. —RP

- **4 Copas** — Made in the lowlands of Jalisco, 4 Copas Extra Añejo is distilled using certified organic agaves and matured for 54 months in American white oak. The añejo retails under \$200, which makes it an affordable slice of heaven.
- **Cabo Uno Añejo Reserva** — Created by ex-Van Halen rocker Sammy Hagar, Cabo Uno is aged 38 months in both French and American oak barrels. Limited in production to only 1,800 cases a year.
- **El Diamante del Cielo** — The handcrafted, limited production tequila is made from estate-grown agaves and triple-distilled in state of the art pot stills. El Diamante Del Cielo Añejo is a blend of tequilas aged up to 4 years in oak.
- **Gran Centenario Leyenda** — Gran Centenario has extended its world-class range with the release of Leyenda, a blend of añejos aged 4 years in French Limousin oak barrels. Older reserve añejos are then added to enhance its depth and complexity.
- **Gran Patrón Burdeos** — Debuted at around \$500, Burdeos is made from a blend of añejos aged in American and French oak. The tequila is then transferred to ex-Bordeaux barrels and racked for a year or more. Over that time the tequila develops a rich amber hue and wine-induced flavors.
- **Milagro Select Barrel Reserve** — The award-winning añejo is triple-distilled in the highlands of Tepatitlán and aged no less than three-years in new French oak barrels.

• **Partida Elegante** — Handmade on the family's estate outside of Amatitán, Elegante is distilled entirely from estate-grown agaves and matured in American oak barrels for 36 to 40 months. The result is a lush and exquisite spirit.

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The True Spirit of Tequila  
[www.partidatequila.com](http://www.partidatequila.com)





## Sizzling New Blancos

Spirits authority Sean Ludford of BevX.com believes the surest way to assess the attributes of a tequila brand is to sample its blanco, or plata version. “Barrel aging has a profound affect on tequila. Blanco tequilas are left unadulterated and typically bottled fresh from the still. When well made they’re vibrant, bursting with flavor, and best represent the compelling qualities of tequila.”

So in case you’ve missed the initial fanfare over their release, here’s our take on new silvers destined for the fast track.

Artisanal Jose Cuervo Platino 100% Agave Tequila is a charming blanco with such tremendous depth of character it’s guaranteed to make Jose Cuervo a household name. The handcrafted tequila is made according to a process called “Esencia de Agave,” in which only that part of the agave richest in fermentable sugars is used in

distillation. Platino immediately grabs your attention with an alluring bouquet and a layered, long-lasting palate.

“Cuervo Platino is a genuine pleasure to work with,” states Adam Seger, general manager, sommelier and bar chef of Nacional 27 restaurant in Chicago. “Not only is it fabulous featured in cocktails, it demonstrates to consumers just how elegant a silver tequila can be and the enhanced flavor of Jose Cuervo’s high-altitude agaves.”

New from the bestselling brand of 100% agave tequilas is Gran Patrón Platinum. In order to produce a lighter bodied, more brilliant spirit, the tequila is sent through a traditional copper pot three times. Another innovative twist is that a portion of each distillation is aged briefly in oak barrels prior to being blended back into the batch.

Bridget Albert describes Gran Patrón Platinum as a tequila to be celebrated. “Agave forward with hints of citrus, it’s one of the few blancos deserving of a snifter.”

Top-shelf Partida Blanco is produced from mature, estate grown blue agaves cultivated in the rich, red volcanic soil of Amatitán, Mexico. The piñas are slowly baked, slowly fermented and double-distilled in traditional pot stills. Bottled fresh from the still, Partida Blanco is a sleek, aromatic tequila with a warm satisfying finish.

The most innovative silver making its American debut is ultra-premium Maestro Dobel Diamond. This franchise player is comprised of barrel-matured tequilas filtered to remove all traces of color and impurities. The result is a crystal clear, highly aromatic tequila with all of the nuances and complexity of an añejo. The ultra-premium carries a suggested retail price of \$74.99.



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