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PROOF POSITIVE

Tequila Puro

Our selection of the most sensational blancos for sipping and mixing

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While we know them as 100% agave Tequilas, in Mexico they're referred to as *Tequila Puro*. One sip of these extraordinary spirits quickly reveals why they've captured the imagination of the American mainstream. They're so flavorful you're left with the unmistakable impression that this is how Tequila is meant to taste.

Our fascination with 100% agave Tequilas can be traced back to the early '50s when Bing Crosby and Phil Harris first imported **Herradura Silver** into the States. To this day the distinguished brand remains one of the category favorites. One of a handful of distillers that have produced only 100% agave Tequila, Herradura is based in the lowlands of Amatitán.

"Herradura Silver is an example of what mankind is capable of achieving with an alembic still and an estate full of mature blue agaves," says sommelier and cocktail authority Adam Seger, general manager of Chicago's Pan-Latin Nacional 27 restaurant. "It's a magnificent Tequila with a brilliant bouquet and a spicy, peppery finish. It's like the coupe de ville of Amatitán."

Chinaco Blanco is another charter member of the elite. Bottled within 30 days of distillation, its Tequila is fresh, vibrant and brimming with character. The brand well deserves its "must have" status for its voluptuous body and lively bouquet of citrus and ripe red fruit. The palate offers a generous helping of fresh herbs,

PHOTO: DON VAN GORDER

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black pepper and a hint of oak-induced smoke on the finish. It's a blanco best appreciated neat.

The same is true of **Casa Noble Crystal**, a Tequila worthy of *grand cru* status. It's made using mature agaves slow-baked in stone ovens and then spontaneously fermented. The natural yeast lends the Tequila an intriguing flavor. Breaking with tradition, Casa Noble Crystal is triple-distilled in an alembic still. The result is a sleek, light-bodied spirit with spicy notes and a slightly sweet finish. It makes a marvelous apéritif.

If you're more in the mood for a Tequila that will gently seduce your senses, look no further than **El Tesoro Platinum de Don Felipe**. This artisanal Tequila is handcrafted by distiller extraordinaire Carlos Camarena using methods long ago abandoned by others as being too expensive and laborious. The blanco is bottled within 24 hours of distillation exactly as it left the alembic still—unfiltered and unadulterated. Appropriately named, El Tesoro Platinum has a satiny body, an alluring citrus bouquet and a world-class finish. Here's a luxurious spirit begging to be savored neat in a snifter.

Jose Cuervo Reserva de la Familia Platino is made according to a process called *esencia de agave*, in which only that part of the agave highest in fermentable sugars is used in distillation. It grabs your attention at once with a delectable medley of citrusy, fruity and lightly peppery aromas. Crystal-clear Platino has a curvaceous body and voluptuous palate of plums, figs, toasted oak and spice. The lingering finish seals the deal.

Ultrachic **Partida Blanco** owes much of its greatness to pedigree. This Tequila is made from mature, estate-grown agaves cultivated in the red volcanic soil of Amatitán. The plants are patiently baked, fermented and distilled in traditional copper stills yielding an especially elegant

CLASSICS IN THE MAKING

Which of the brands of 100% agave Tequila just making their way onto shelves now have what it takes to play in the bigs? Here's the skinny on three contenders:

DOMAINE CHARBAY: Having already conquered vodka and rum, Domaine Charbay and the indomitable Kararkasevic family ventured to Arandas and created an Olympic-caliber 100% agave Tequila. Their blanco is lush, vital and sensational.

LA CERTEZA: Tequila icon Francisco Beckmann recently launched La Certeza, a top-notch spirit crafted entirely from estate-grown agaves and aged in both American white oak and French Limousin barrels.

TEQUILA OCHO: Another odds-



on favorite. Each vintage of estate-delineated Tequila Ocho Plata will showcase the agaves from an individual highlands distiller. The 2008 Plata derives from the red soil of the Carrizal Estate and it portends great things. But then, great things often result when you enjoy the heat, spice and sultriness of the great blanco Tequilas.

WHEN NOT SHOOTING BLANCOS: COCKTAILS

GREEN HARVEST

Specialty of James Meehan, author/mixologist, PDT, New York, NY

- 1½ ounces Jose Cuervo Reserva de la Familia Platino
- ½ ounce Green Chartreuse
- 4-5 muddled concord grapes
- 2 ounces chilled brewed hibiscus tea

Muddle the ingredients together in an empty pint glass and add ice. Stir gently before straining the contents through a fine sieve into a tall iced glass.

GRAPEFRUIT SUPERSTAR

Specialty of Ryan Magerian, Eos Restaurant at the Viceroy, Miami, FL

- 1½ ounces Herradura Silver

- ¾ ounce St-Germain Elderflower Liqueur
- ½ ounce fresh lime juice
- 2 ounces fresh grapefruit juice

Combine the ingredients in an iced pint glass, shake the contents vigorously and strain into cocktail glass. Garnish with a slice of starfruit.

LOOK BETTER NAKED MARGARITA

Specialty of Adam Seger, sommelier/mixologist, Nacional 27, Chicago, IL

- 1½ ounces Partida Estate Blanco Tequila
- ½ ounce Sambazon Pure Organic Acai
- ¾ ounce Partida Organic Agave Nectar
- ½ ounce organic egg white

- 1 ounce fresh lime juice
- 4-inch sprig rosemary, top inch reserved for garnish

Remove the rosemary leaves from the stem and muddle in an empty pint glass until aromatic. Add ice and the remaining ingredients, shake the contents vigorously and strain into a chilled cocktail glass (10-ounces) rimmed with a mixture of organic sea salt and cracked green peppercorns.

LITTLE WITCH

Specialty of Raul Flores, bartender, Pegu Club, New York, NY

- 2 ounces Partida Estate Blanco Tequila
- ½ ounce Liqueure Strega
- ½ ounce simple syrup
- ½ ounce fresh lemon juice

- 1 sprig fresh oregano

Muddle together the oregano, lemon juice and simple syrup in an empty pint glass. Add ice and the remaining ingredients, shake the contents vigorously and strain through a fine sieve into a chilled cocktail glass.

THE 212

Specialty of Angus Winchester, Global Ambassador for House of Tanqueray

- 2 parts Jose Cuervo Reserva de la Familia Platino
- 1 part Aperol
- 2 parts fresh pink grapefruit juice

Combine ingredients into an iced highball glass and garnish with a knowing smile.



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blanco. Bottled fresh from the still, it has a velvety texture, aromas of tanned leather, honey and dried fruit and a warm, luxurious palate.

There's something intriguing about drinking handmade Tequila. Such is the experience awaiting you with **4 Copas Blanco**, a small-batch marvel from the lowlands of Jalisco. Distilled exclusively from certified organic agaves, the blanco is filtered and bottled immediately after distillation. It has a wafting bouquet and a delectable palate of lemon zest and white pepper. The brand offers aficionados everything they're looking for in a great Tequila...and then some.

Those with a few extra dollars in their pocket may want to invest in a bottle of triple-distilled **Gran Patrón Platinum**. A contributing factor to its satiny texture and medium-weight body is that a portion of each batch is aged in American oak barrels and then blended back prior to the final distillation. The Tequila immediately fills the mouth with spicy, peppery and citrusy flavors. While worthy of a snifter, Gran Patrón Platinum is also dandy in cocktails.

Long-time all-star **Gran Centenario Plata** is a stylish gem. After it leaves the still, the *maestro Tequilero* rests the Tequila for 28 days in French Limou[™] sin barrels, during which it gains substantial body and acquires

a boatload of oaky characteristics. Plata has a grassy herbeaceous nose and a dry, almost tart palate with smoky, peppery notes.

Rounding out our roster of recommended blancos is a small yet venerable brand from the highlands of Jalisco, **1921 Tequila**. This blanco is generously endowed with enticing floral and herbal aromas and a savory palate loaded with fruit and spice. There's a touch of smoke on the extended finish. Priced under \$40, 1921 Blanco is an engaging and affordable treat.

Much like the wild Mexican *frontera* from which they come, there are few rules when serving these Tequilas. Serve them on the rocks, with a squeeze of lime, or simply sip them neat. As our roster of star mixologists capably demonstrates (see sidebar, facing page), they also make dynamite cocktails. Regardless of how they're served, one thing is crystal clear: the excitement being generated by blanco Tequilas is testament to their richness and depth. This once-rustic spirit has become posh. **■**

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