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AT THE BAR

Crystalline Perfection



Top 10 Most Sensational Blanco Tequilas

BY ROBERT PLOTKIN



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 in 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. It's made on the Herradura estate in the lowlands of Amatitán and they are among only a handful of distillers that have produced nothing but 100% agave tequila.

"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 Coup de Ville of Amatitán."

Chinaco Blanco is a charter member of the sensational elite. Bottled within 30 days of distillation,

the tequila is fresh, vibrant and brimming with character. The brand well deserves its "must have" status. It has a voluptuous body and a lively bouquet of citrus and ripe red fruit aromas. The palate offers a generous helping of fresh herbs, black pepper and a hint of oak-induced smoke on the finish. It's a blanco best appreciated served neat.

The same is true about Casa Noble Crystal, a sultry 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 aperitif.

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. The artisanal tequila is handcrafted by distiller extraordinaire Carlos Camarena using methods long ago abandoned by others as too expensive and laborious. The blanco is bottled within 24 hours of distillation exactly as it left the alembic still—unfiltered and unadulterated. Here's a luxurious spirit begging to be savored neat in a snifter. Appropriately named El Tesoro Platinum has a satiny body, an alluring bouquet of citrus and a world-class finish.

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 ferment-

able sugars is used in distillation. The tequila grabs your attention at once with a delectable medley of citrus, fruity and lightly peppered aromas. Crystal-clear Platino has a curvaceous body and dazzling palate of plums, figs, toasted oak and spice. The lingering finish seals the deal. Guaranteed Platino will make Jose Cuervo a household name.

Ultra-chic Partida Blanco owes much of its greatness to pedigree. The 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. The blanco is especially elegant. Bottled fresh from the still, it has a velvety texture, aromas of tanned leather, honey and dried fruit and a warm luxurious palate. Sensational is a fitting overall description.

CRYSTALLINE NOBILITY

There's something intriguing about drinking handmade tequila. Such is the experience awaiting you with Four 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 Platino.





A contributing factor to its satiny texture and a medium-weight body is 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 sifter, Gran Ferde Platinum is also dandy in cocktails.

Longtime all-star **Gran Centenario Plata** is a stylish gem. After it leaves the still, the maguezo tequilero rests the tequila for 25 days in French Limousin during which it gains substantial body and acquires a bonafide of oaky characteristics. The Plata has a gross herbaceous nose and a dry, almost nut palate with smoky, peppery notes.

Extending out over water of sensational Blanco is a small yet venerable brand from the highlands of Jalisco, 1921 **Tequila**. Their blanco is generously endowed with enticing floral and herbal aromas and a savory palate loaded with fruit and spice and a touch of smoke on the extended finish. Priced under \$45, 1921 Blanco is an engaging and affordable treat.

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 big? Here's the skinny on three contenders.

- **DOMAINE CHABAY** – Having already conquered vodka and rum, Domaine Chabay and the indomitable Katochastic family returned to Agave and created an Olympic caliber 100% agave tequila. Their Manco is lush, vital and sensational.

- **LA CERTIGA** – Tequila icon Francisco Beckmann recently launched La Certiga, a top-notch spirit crafted entirely from sun-ripened agave and aged in both American white oak and French Limousin barrels.

- **TEQUILA OCHO** – Another riddle on its way. Each vintage of esteemed Tequila Ocho Plata will showcase the agave from an individual highlands distiller. The 2008 Plata derives from the red soil of the Central Estate and it portends great things. ■

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GREEN HARVEST

Recipe by David Eshelman, author/illustrator, F&W New York, NY

- 1-1/2 ounces Jose Cuervo Platinum de la Familia Blanco
- 1/2 ounce Green Chartreuse
- 2-3 crushed cucumber pieces
- 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 shot glass.

LOOK BETTER NAKED MARGARITA

Recipe by Adam Degan, author/illustrator, Alacran 21, Chicago, IL

- 1-1/2 ounces Partida Estate Blanco Tequila
- 1/2 ounce Sambazon Pure Organic Acai
- 3/4 ounce Partida Organic Agave Nectar
- 1/2 ounce organic egg white
- 1 ounce fresh lime juice
- 4 fresh spicy serranos (two fresh reserved for garnish)

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

GRAPEFRUIT SUPERSTAR

Recipe by Paul Chapman, Executive Producer at the House of M, FL

- 1-1/2 ounces Hemelius Silver
- 2/3 ounce BT-Garnish Elderflower Liqueur
- 1/2 ounce fresh lime juice
- 2 ounces fresh grapefruit juice

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

THE 212

Recipe by Julia Rothman, Great American Tequila of Sonoma

- 2 parts Jose Cuervo Platinum de la Familia Blanco
- 1 part Agave
- 2 parts fresh pink grapefruit juice

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

LITTLE WITCH

Recipe by Paul Pepp, bartender, Pappi Club, New York, NY

- 2 ounces Partida Estate Blanco Tequila
- 1/2 ounce Lilouise Shiga
- 1/2 ounce simple syrup
- 1/2 ounce fresh lemon juice
- 7 spicy fresh peppers

Muddle together the organic, 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.

