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BY JULIA BAINBRIDGE ON DECEMBER 9, 2009 1:00 PM | NO COMMENTS

Experiments with Mezcal



Yesterday's [Tasting Table](#) story got me in the mood to experiment with the thinking drinker's alternative to tequila: mezcal. In San Francisco, "tequila-loving bartenders have been swapping out bourbon and Scotch for south-of-the-border spirits" in their cocktails—vintage recipes included. [Tasting Table](#) reports that [Beretta's](#) Ryan Fitzgerald, for example, replaces Laphroaig Scotch in the Penicillin cocktail with an equally smoky mezcal in the new Penicillin #2.

Not all mezcal is so heavy-duty. Fidencio, the new kid in the pueblo, is produced not by roasting agave in wood-burning ovens like most mezcal, but in a radiant steam oven. Owner Arik Torren explains: "The radiant oven generates heat by compressing steam under great pressure. The compressor sits outside the roasting room and channels the steam through pipes suspended above the floor. The agave are placed on racks above the pipes and the door is closed. The neutral heat then breaks down the complex sugars to fermentable simple sugars." In other words, you get pure agave flavor without all the charred notes (think about the difference between steamed and grilled asparagus). The stuff is then twice distilled and immediately bottled on site in Santiago Matatlá, Oaxaca—no aging necessary. The result is a smooth,

crisp mezcal, perfectly sippable by its lonesome.

I'm looking for how to mix Fidencio into a cocktail without masking its clean flavor. [@Fidencio_Mezcal](#) recently tweeted, "[Mermaid Oyster Bar](#) (79 Macdougall St) channels Hunter S. Thompson for their new Fidencio Mezcal cocktail 'Dr. Gonzo's Fear and Loathing.'" Perhaps I'll head there tonight and find out how to properly treat this great bottle that's been holding court atop my liquor chest for a couple weeks now. Shall I report back?

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ABOUT MOVEABLE FEAST

Mollie Chen is a senior assistant editor at *Condé Nast Traveler*. She spends her days talking to chefs, keeping up on restaurant openings, and learning cocktail trivia from bartenders. She has a dedicated snack drawer at her desk.



After college in Boston, culinary school in San Francisco, and lots of traveling in between, Julia Bainbridge is back in the city and all over Twitter and the blogosphere as *Condé Nast Traveler's* assistant interactive editor.

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