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[Drinks Preview: Oyamel's Tequila and Mezcal Fest](#)

By Kirk, 3:00 pm March 4th, 2010



Tequila flies under the radar as connoisseur's drink. It's had an unfair representation from co-eds pounding back shots on spring break in Cancun and middle aged women drinking slushy margaritas by some pool. But Tequila, much like anything, can be done right and can be done wrong. Chef Jose Andres and Co. at [Oyamel](#) want to highlight the former, something that they do annually with their two week Tequila and Mezcal Festival.

This celebration of all things agave is becoming a highlight of the DC cocktail scene. Not only do you get to sample some of Mexico's finest in carefully constructed flights, you find some truly creative cocktails crafted by the mixologists at Oyamel, and from a few guests they bring in. The festival kicked off Monday night and I was fortunate enough to be able to sample a few of their highlighted drinks and appetizers.

The belle of Jose Andres's ball is [Fidencio Mezcal](#), an artisanal spirit from Oaxaca, Mexico. For the uninformed (note: I was a bit uninformed before I met Fidencio's owner) mezcal is an agave based spirit not unlike tequila. It is not, however, tequila. Mezcal comes from a few different varieties of agave, is typically roasted and then is single distilled. Tequila, on the other hand, comes from a particular species of agave, is steamed and is double or triple distilled. This translates to mezcal being robust and smoky while Tequila is smoother and more subtle. Then, there is the regional consideration, which is a legal issue. By law, tequila can only come from a few select areas in Mexico, while mezcal can be produced anywhere in the country.



Oyamel provided samplers of Fidencio so that patrons could get a sense for the differences between mezcal and tequila. They also incorporated the spirit into a couple of drinks, which were re-imaginings of cocktail staples. Perhaps the most interesting was a drink called the Oaxacan Fizz, a twist on the Ramos Gin Fizz. The recipe kept the egg white and lime juice of the original, but incorporated horchata in place of cream for a more nutty, spiced flavor. The gin was replaced by mezcal and a

shaving of espresso beans is added to the top. The resulting drink almost bore a holiday air, and the lime and horchata worked surprisingly well together.

My favorite drink of the night was the Mexican Mai-Tai. It combined tequila, a touch of absinthe, lime, mint and Kahlua into a complex and unusual cocktail. It's been my opinion for a while that licorice and citrus is a wonderful and unsung flavor combination, something that this drink realized in through the fennel from the absinthe and the lime juice. Accordingly, I'm not ashamed to say that I had, and very much enjoyed, a Mai-Tai.



I would be remiss if I didn't mention the quality of the hors-d'oeuvres offered to party goers, all of which will be available throughout the festival. Chef Raffa designed a rotation that incorporated tequila into the entire menu. There were ceviches and stews with tequila in the broth, various meats marinated in mezcal and everything was exceptional.

If you want to get in on the action, the Tequila and Mezcal Fest runs until March 14 at Oyamel. Every evening will feature specials on tequila based cocktails and the aforementioned menu of food. Mixologists will hold free demonstrations and tastings next Tuesday – Thursday from 4-6. If you can get off work in time, there's one tonight, as well. High end tequilas are rapidly gaining popularity around the world. It's time you jumped on the train.

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