

Mezcal: Adios Worm! |



Ah Mezcal, poor Mezcal, so misunderstood.
For decades, you sit there, collecting dust,
a bottle, a worm, no one will drink.
Then the rare occasion, someone is dared,
the bottle is opened, passed around,
every drop is gone, even the worm,
it doesn't end well.
Ah, but then I saw it, the bottle behind,
hidden from the Gringos, saved for the Oaxacans,
for the occasion of the day, they say,
"Para todo mal, Mezcal. Para todo bien, también."

("For all things bad Mezcal. For all things good, as well.")

Welcome to the new age of Mezcal. A lot has changed and, yet, everything has stayed the same. It comes from a tradition of family artisanship handed down from father to son.

With few exceptions, this is a spirit that is produced the same way it was 400 years ago; it comes from the earth and the people, from tradition and reverence for the land. And the worm? A marketing gimmick from the 1950's to mask the chemical taste of poorly-produced mezcal.





Mezcal is...

- ...an Agave spirit from Mexico; the D.O. (Denominación de Origen) allows for it to be produced in 7 states, but most often you will find it from Oaxaca.
- ...90% of the time made from *Agave Espadin* (the genetic mother of Blue Agave) but can also be made with up to 28 different varieties of Agave.
- ...roasted in an underground, wood-fired pit for several days (just like they did centuries ago), where it absorbs the earth and the wood's smoke.
- ...made by using a burro- or horse-powered millstone that crushes the roasted agave to extract the juice.
- ...fermented in open, wooden vats with wild airborne yeast.
- ...distilled twice by putting both the juice and the solids in the pot still.

Mezcal is not...homogenized and industrialized.



Del Maguey Tobala

This small, wild, mountain *Maguey* (agave) is smaller and has shorter, broader leaves than the cultivated *Espadin* or *Weber Blue*, taking about eight of its piñas (hearts) to equal one piña from the other varieties. The pueblo elevation is around 8,200 feet, with a mountainous, tropical microclimate. The producer leaves the roasted hearts buried for one month before fermenting and distilling.



Sombra Agave de Oaxaca

Sombra is made from organic *Agave Espadin* grown near the village of San Luis del Rio at an elevation of 8,000 feet in a hot valley with steep slopes. The piñas are roasted in the pit with a mesquite fire for three to five days.



Los Danzantes Reposado

From the town of Santiago Matatlan at an elevation of 6,000 feet. The distiller of Los Danzantes talks about making sure the Maguey “do not suffer” during production. This translates to keeping the process slow and respectful of the plant and the land...even playing classical music during fermentation to make the yeast happy! Aged in French oak barrels for one year.



Ilegal Reposado

From the Tlacolula-Mitla Valley at an elevation of 5,500 feet. They use less mesquite in the pit to showcase the flavors of the Espadin. The reposado is aged three to seven months in charred, new American oak barrels.



Fidencio Mezcal – Sin Humo (no smoke)

This new Mezcal is made by a fourth generation *Mezcalero* in Santiago Matatlan, where he is challenging tradition while still making a hand-crafted, artisanal product. The estate-grown agave are cooked in a neutral-heat oven for three days; only the juice is fermented (no solids) and then distilled twice (these methods are closer to the making of Tequila, rather than traditional Mezcal).



(This is a guest article by Kelley Slagle)

A former chef, Kelley realized her passion for seasonal and market ingredients was best expressed in the liquid form. Now a mixologist/bartender based in NYC, Kelley's passion for all-things-fermented is currently expressing itself in homemade vinegars, the study of Agave and a quest for the unique and hand-crafted.