

Tequila Is Getting Company: Sotol, Bacanora and Raicilla

By FLORENCE FABRICANT APRIL 24, 2015



The Prietoni, front, made with raicilla; the Matador Norteño, right, made with sotol; and the Amores Perros, made with raicilla, at La Contenta on the Lower East Side. Karsten Moran for The New York Times



Alex Valencia, a partner and the mixologist at La Contenta. Karsten Moran for The New York Times

The cocktail menu at Cosme, Enrique Olvera's acclaimed Mexican restaurant in the Flatiron district, has a curious category: "other agaves." At Tijuana Picnic, a restaurant on the Lower East Side, Jim Kearns, the bar manager, lists a flight of "extended family" spirits made from agave.

Agave is the desert plant used in Mexico to make tequila and mezcal, spirits that have become fixtures in American bars and will soon figure prominently in the celebrations of Cinco de Mayo. And now starting on the same track toward popularity up north are three lesser-known liquors that are made from some of the many types of agave and related plants that grow all over Mexico.

Sotol, bacanora and raicilla are increasingly showing up in New York bars and restaurants, and not just Mexican ones. Importers and distributors are building on the success of tequila and mezcal.

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Another agave spirit, one that's been made for hundreds of years, is bacanora, from Sonora in northwestern Mexico. It is distilled from the fer

It's not hard to detect a whiff of mezcal's smokiness in many raicillas. One brand, La Venenosa, has four styles, each made with different agaves in various parts of the state. Mr. Valencia of **La Contenta** mixes raicilla instead of gin in the Prietoni, a variation of the Negroni. The herbal notes in some raicillas make it a fine stand-in for gin.

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"We're at the point where it no longer has to be in a Mexican restaurant," said Josh Wortman, a spirits specialist for Martin Scott Wines, a distributor in the New York area. All three spirits are now sold on many websites.

Mr. Wortman pointed out that technically, all of these spirits are mezcals. He said that each of Mexico's states "makes some kind of mezcal, but it's not called mezcal everywhere," he said.

Ivy Mix and Julie Reiner, the owner of Clover Club, in Brooklyn, plan soon to open Leyenda on Smith Street nearby. The bar will specialize in south-of-the-border spirits. Ms. Mix said she would use the "alternate agaves" in drinks that incorporate something familiar, like watermelon. "That way, people will be more willing to try them," she said. "You have to give them a helping hand."

Gonzalo Gout, the manager at Cosme, said that "people who enjoy mezcal tend to be very pleasantly surprised by the complexity of these other spirits."

Correction: April 24, 2015

An earlier version of this article misstated the number of states in Mexico. It has 31 states, not 21.