

AGAVE CHRONICLES - Vol. 3

By The Jack Drop & The French Agave
Please note that English version is auto-translated.

Winter has arrived, but the warm breeze of Mexico is still alive in our hearts!

In this new issue devoted to agaves, you'll find articles highlighting our latest discoveries, memorable encounters, and unforgettable tastings.



PHOTO: Stephanie Pollak

Discover the latest trends on the market, tasting notes, a spotlight on Anna Bruce's newest book... And to wrap it up, a deep dive into La Venenosa: the Raicilla that's steadily carving out its own path and shining a light on old-school craftsmanship. Get ready for an adventure!

To start things off, we've put together a complete guide to the various types of mezcals. Back to basics. Next up, follow Clara to London, where Jon Darby is pouring his mezcal Sin Gusano—straight from the tap! Meanwhile, Jack rounds up his top picks for an unforgettable weekend in Rotterdam.



Photo Credit: La Venenosa



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Tequila, Mezcal, Raicilla...

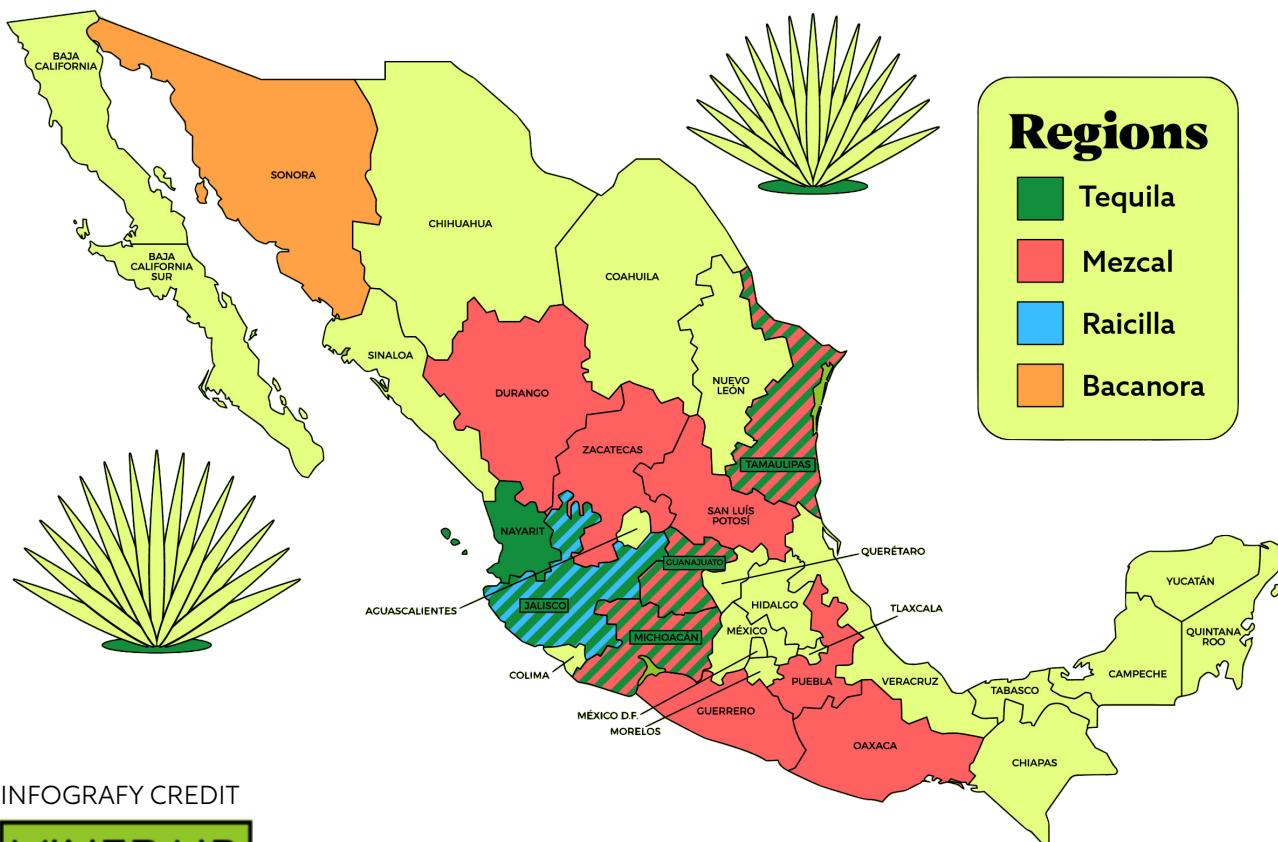
A Quick Guide to the Different Types of Distilled Spirits

Mezcal can legally be produced only in Mexico, under a protected designation known as a Denominación de Origen, the Mexican equivalent of our Protected Geographical Indication.

The word mezcal, derived from the Nahuatl language, literally means “cooked agave.” Today, it is confirmation as a legally defined category, governed by a precise set of regulations: production zones, authorized agave species, and specific methods of processing and distillation. Behind each recognized appellation — mezcal, tequila, raicilla, bacanora — lies a distinct history, unique practices, and a particular relationship between people, the plant, and the land.

Understanding these distinctions allows for a deeper appreciation of the diversity and complexity of the world of agave spirits, far beyond administrative categories. Many other agave distillates are produced in Mexico and elsewhere in the world, which we will explore in future magazines.

As of today, they make up the broader category of *Destilados de Agave*.



INFOGRAFY CREDIT

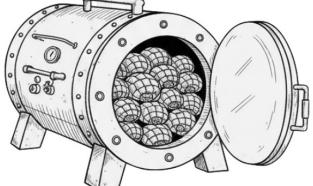


Protected by D.O mezcal map of Mexico.

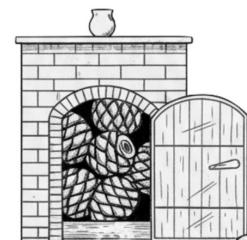
Basic reminders of the common production techniques

A simplified overview of mezcal production, along with a few key terms to help better understand the overall topic. After harvesting the agaves and removing their leaves, several crucial stages follow.

Cooking of the piñas (agave hearts)



Modern autoclave oven

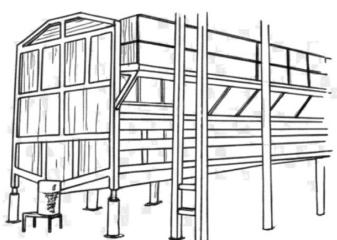


Brick oven

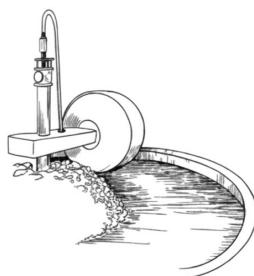


Traditional underground ovens

Crushing & extraction of the pulp, juice, and fibers



Industrial machine: diffuser

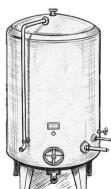


Tahona, stone wheel mill



By hand, using a mallet

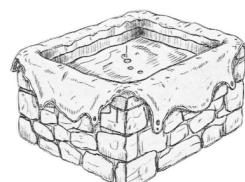
Fermentation (where aromas come to life)



Modern stainless steel

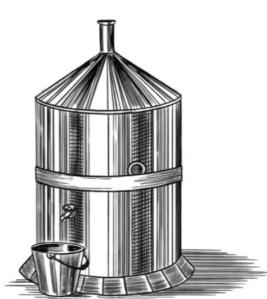


Wooden open vats

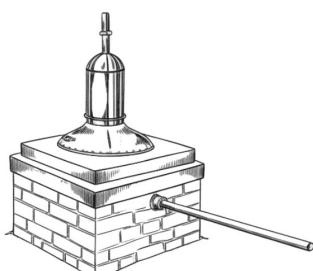


Concrete, wood, clay vessels with or without animal skins

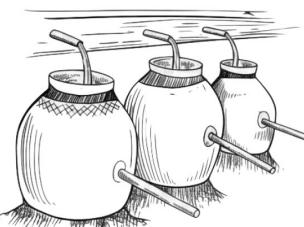
Distillation (most often carried out in two runs)



Column stills or modern stainless-steel stills



Copper pot stills, with or not direct wood-fire heating



Clay or wooden pots, with direct wood-fire heating

This is only an overview of the techniques used, which can be highly diverse.

Mezcal (DO), a spirit steeped in tradition and craftsmanship.

Distilled from 100% agave, with an alcohol content ranging from 36% to 55% ABV, it can be produced in 10 different states: Durango, Zacatecas, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas, Guanajuato, Michoacán, Guerrero, Puebla, Oaxaca, and Sinaloa, using more than 40 different agave species, either wild or cultivated: Espadín, Tobalá, Madrecuixe, Tepezcate, Arroqueño, among others.

Important note: although more than 90% of mezcal is produced in Oaxaca, where a smoky aromatic signature often leaves a strong impression, it would be a mistake to reduce mezcal's diversity to this single profile. Mezcal is widely regarded as the most complex spirit in the world.

Official classifications:

Mezcal : cooking of the piñas is permitted using modern methods such as autoclaves or diffusers, generally to achieve higher volumes and reduce production costs.

Mezcal Artesanal : cooking in brick ovens or underground pits, with distillation carried out in copper stills, which may include certain metal components.

Mezcal Ancestral : cooking only in underground pit ovens, manual crushing or use of a tahona (stone wheel), and mandatory distillation in clay or wooden stills.



Mal Bien - Espadin.

A bold, smoky expression crafted in Oaxaca. Just a few drops are enough to wrap your palate in flavor!



Ultramundo - Lamparillo.

Made in Durango, this is the only Mezcal produced from wild Lamparillo! Expect notes of olives, bell pepper, and jalapeño with just a hint of smoke. Check out the full feature on Ultramundo over on the blog:[LINK](#)



Tesoro de Atlapulco -

Salmania. State of Puebla.

This mezcal was picked up at Wine Expo and isn't available for sale in France yet. The Salmania maguey often has vegetable notes and is never smoky!

The **Tequila (DO)** — famous, celebrated, and sometimes controversial.

It's Mexico's most iconic spirit and largest export, with about 500 million liters produced every year (that's 50 times more than mezcal). Despite strict regulations, some producers rely on questionable techniques to boost output. No doubt, many people have had less-than-great experiences with this legendary drink, but we see it as our mission to introduce you to exceptional artisanal Tequilas that might just change your mind.

Proverb: While every Tequila is a mezcal, not every mezcal is a Tequila.

Key features: Tequila must be made exclusively from one species—the Blue Weber Agave (*Agave Tequilana Weber Azul*). It's typically steam-cooked in brick ovens or autoclaves, which keeps it from taking on a smoky flavor.

It's now produced on a larger scale in five specified states, with Jalisco at the heart of production (accounting for 95% of the total).

Categories: There are two main types—100% Agave Tequila and Mixto Tequila (which can include up to 49% sugars from other sources like sugar cane or beets).

A few outstanding sipping Tequilas - CREDIT: The Jack Drop



Tequila Ocho - Plata

If there's one true terroir-driven Tequila, this is it. Ocho owns its own land, grows its agaves, and bottles each batch by rancho—in other words, each expression comes from a single parcel.



Cascahuin - Tahona.

Agaves crushed with volcanic stones create a truly distinctive flavor—a craft perfected by Cascahuin. For more details, check out the blog: [LINK](#).



Tequila G4 - Blanco.

With Felipe Camarena at the helm, this artisanal tequila highlights the purity of agave and natural fermentation. A real gem recently sourced from Germany.

The Raicilla (DO), a spirit with a storied, underground past.

Raicilla—meaning "little root"—might look like Mezcal at first glance, but its roots in Jalisco (the heart of Tequila) and Nayarit, along with its rich history, have led to its own protected designation, honoring a time-honored craft.

Sierra-style Raicilla is distilled up in the mountains. During a pivotal era in Mexico's history, its production was kept under wraps to dodge taxes. Often, producers would use small agave offshoots—those "little roots"—to navigate around certain laws. Meanwhile, Coastal Raicilla uses agave grown by the sea. While this coastal variety often features the Angustifolia agave and shares similarities with Mezcal, Sierra Raicilla stands out with bolder, more intense, and floral profiles.



CREDIT: The Jack Drop

La Venenosa – Raicilla "Sierra Volcanes de Jalisco"

Crafted by Maestro Arturo Campos.

You don't often see Raicilla on drink menus, especially across Europe. But La Venenosa offers some remarkable options, going beyond the boundaries of traditional craft spirits to showcase outstanding artisanal quality. For a deep dive, check out the full feature at the end of the magazine.



Additional photos from the Raicilla production process, with thanks to Casa Endemica & La Venenosa.

The Bacanora (DO), the crown jewel of Sonora.

The name "**bacanora**" comes from the town of Bacanora in Sonora and means "slope covered with reeds" in the language of the native Ópata people.

This small-batch spirit is governed by a Denomination of Origin, only granted in 2000, and is not yet internationally recognized.

Key feature: made exclusively from *Agave angustifolia* Haw (often called pacifica, yaquiana, or bacanora locally).



Aguamiel Bacanora Blanco

Also rarely tasted, this unique spirit stands out for its limited terroir and single-variety production.

Big thanks to Succulent-Spirits for sending me this gem—stay tuned for more about it on social media soon!



The Sotol (DO) is not a mezcal

The Sotol is a traditional distilled spirit from northern Mexico, **made from plants in the Dasylirion genus—which are not agave, which sets them clearly apart from the mezcals** above—commonly known as desert spoon or sotol in Spanish.

It's NOT a mezcal, even though its production process is similar to artisanal mezcals.

Most legally recognized sotol is produced in the states of: Chihuahua (about 80%), Durango, and Coahuila.

Since 2002, a Denomination of Origin (DO) has protected the sotol name in these three states.

Outside this region, similar spirits are distilled but cannot legally be called sotol (for example, "palimilla" in Sonora or "cucharilla" in Oaxaca).

Also available from Succulent Spirits: Señor Sotol.



Sin Gusano: From Oaxaca to London!

Clara gives us the inside scoop on Jon Darby, his brand, and his bar

Jon Darby, founder of the Sin Gusano Project, is a devoted agave explorer and a champion of diversity. His story begins in 2016, when a break from his demanding London job takes him to Mexico—a trip that soon becomes life-changing.

Enchanted by the culture, landscapes, and especially the intricate world of craft mezcal, Jon decides to extend his stay. He visits his first palenques, drawn in by the creativity of the local producers. Back in the UK, he realizes nowhere offers the same depth and variety he'd experienced. That's when inspiration strikes: turn his passion into his purpose.



PHOTO: Stephanie Pollak



CREDIT: SIN GUSANO

He heads back to Mexico, journeys through Oaxaca, connects with producing families, and brings back mezcals in his suitcase—enough to launch the very first Sin Gusano pop-up in 2017. His mission is straightforward: showcase the rich spectrum of agave spirits through tasting flights, encouraging curiosity, comparison, and understanding. That initial success paves the way for limited new releases, the birth of the loyal Mezcal Appreciation Society, and a clear commitment: honor small-batch craftsmanship, resist standardization, and protect these endangered skills from mass commercialization. “It’s more than a drink,” he often says. It’s a lifestyle—a way to give back.

His selection process hasn’t changed: meet each producer in person, understand their community and environment, try everything they make, and only select truly extraordinary lots. For every mezcal bottled, ten are left behind. That’s how this journey unfolds—through adventure, meaningful connections, and lasting loyalty.

Taking transparency to the next level, every bottle now comes with a QR code: scan it and you'll unlock the full story behind its batch—how and where it was made (with photos), all the details, and the context. It's more than just a drink; it's a true taste of the land.



CUCHARILLO WITH ESPADÍN - AMATLÁN - BATCH: CGG-03

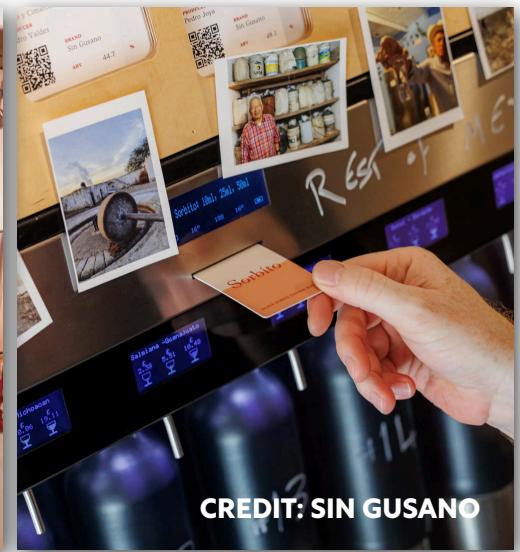
Back in Lille, I brought this bottle to Jack's place and together we got to savor this little gem—just 40 liters made!

Fruity, saline, mineral... this blend of Cucharillo (Sotol) and Espadin maguey (Mezcal) showcases a truly distinctive craft.

Crafted by CAMILO GARCIA GUTIERREZ.



Today marks a new chapter: Sorbito, their cozy tasting room in London. A welcoming, modern spot that's become the hub for the project. Sample at your own pace with self-serve, join masterclasses, take home bottles you've discovered, and soon enjoy an innovative bottle return program



Sorbito embodies the heart of Sin Gusano: openness, curiosity, diversity, and respect for the craft. It's a space for learning, tasting, sharing, and falling in love with agave, just like he did in 2016

Ready to check out this one-of-a-kind spot? Head to London!

Get more info here: sorbito.com.

Rotterdam: Where to Eat & Drink

Jack tours the Netherlands on a Mezcal adventure

When it comes to agave spirits education and appreciation in Europe, the Netherlands is definitely leading the pack. Our Dutch friends reportedly import four times more of these Mexican treasures than we do in France.

During a weekend getaway to Rotterdam—just a three-hour drive from Lille—I discovered a city that's refreshingly different, more modern, and honestly, doesn't have much to envy about Amsterdam. I checked out several spots recommended by my buddies at Succulent Spirits, importers and distributors I've been lucky enough to work with for over a year now.

So, I'm sharing my favorite addresses in case you're tempted to check them out for yourself.



Mariniersweg 55, 3011 NE Rotterdam
-- Just steps from the famous Market Hall.



I rolled in around midnight, already well-fed, and stumbled upon this epic wall of mezcals—it completely blew me away!

The cocktails here are top-notch and pretty affordable for the area, plus... they've got Paloma on tap! Unreal.

As for the spirits list, there are over 50 selections, priced between 8 and 20€ for 3cl. I took the chance to sample some real gems, like the Tequila Ocho Añejo 2023, the wild Venenosa "Puntas" 100% maximiliana, and plenty more—including a little Vago that'll be featured in an upcoming video.

The vibe is fantastic, the service is spot-on, and the whole experience was made even better by the radiant [Zara](#)!



The agave wall is absolutely wild!



Duke of Tokyo

KARAOKE, COCKTAIL BAR, DANCE BAR.

Hofplein 19, 3032 AC Rotterdam, Netherlands.

Glowing neon lights, karaoke rooms and underground dining spaces, with a wild cocktail menu upstairs. Easily the most creative drinks list I've come across. Don't miss the special shoutout for the "I'M A REVIVER": Tanqueray Gin, Yamanoka Shochu, Umeshiso Liqueur, Kumquat, Lemon, Absinthe, Shiso Oil.



Masa – Mezcaleria & Antojitos



Restaurant offering 5, 7, or 9-course tasting menus.

's-Gravendijkwal 140D, 3015 CC Rotterdam.

Every dish comes with a hint of Mexican flair, and the cozy, dimly lit vibe feels perfect for a romantic dinner. Still, with over 100 mezcals to choose from and a lively bar at the entrance, this place can totally switch things up! Honestly, for the quality on the plate, the prices are more than fair.

Ted's

BRUNCH & ROOFTOP.

Schiekade 189, 3013 BR Rotterdam, Netherlands.

Definitely not Mexican this time, but right in the heart of graffiti-lined alleys, skateparks, and the iconic buildings around the Oude Kleine Loopbrug, these rooftop brunches are absolutely a must!



Here are a few spots and ideas I really liked:

- The arcade, pizza, and beer garden (entrance through SQUARE's: Detroit-Style Pizza)
- COMEDOR 701: a small Mexican eatery with plastic chairs
- The Rumah: hands down the best rum bar in town
- Walk beneath the river via the Maastunnel Noord Fiets.
- Stroll the old harbor in the Oude Haven Area

And there are so many more awesome things to discover in this city, blending authenticity with modern skyscrapers.

This Month's Highlights & a Few Cocktails

Our Top Picks Right Now

Tequila of the Month: SWELL DE SPIRITS Made in Mexico #3 Cascahuin Tequila Blanco 47°

Crafted at Cascahuin—which has never before offered an independent bottling in Europe—the **Swell de Spirits x Los Convidados Tequila has**



Of course, Mika's crew went all in—this tequila is bottled at a bold 47%, undiluted and pure. The agave is harvested at peak ripeness, crushed with a traditional Tahona, and slow-cooked in the iconic brick ovens of the distillery. Fermentation happens in wooden vats, with the agave fibers left in for maximum aromatic punch.

Flavor notes: mineral, citrus, pepper.

Photo is for illustration only (but you'll spot it taking pride of place at Jack's).

PVC (France) : 65€ for 50cl.

Cocktail of the Month: The Mezcalita by Clara

Mezcal is fantastic on its own, but it's also an amazing ingredient for cocktails. Its complexity and smoky, herbal character bring real depth, whether you're putting a twist on classic recipes or crafting something new.

Here are two mezcal cocktails—simple, balanced, and proof that you can honor the spirit while having some fun.

The Mezcalita is a modern classic! Grab your favorite artisanal mezcal (smoky is best), fresh lime juice, and triple sec. Shake with ice and pour into a glass rimmed with a touch of chili salt.

It's a bright, refreshing cocktail where mezcal's smokiness lifts up the zing and coolness of the lime.

You can also try a passion fruit twist—my personal favorite! Here's how: artisanal mezcal (smoky is best), fresh lime juice, half a passion fruit, and agave syrup. Shake, strain, and serve ice cold. Passion fruit brings the tropical vibe, lime adds brightness, and mezcal keeps its bold edge.

If you make these at home, I'd love to hear about it on Insta!



Tastings of the Month

Arroqueño Showdown with Jack

Cinco Sentidos - Arroqueño - 46.3%

“Tio” Pedro Pascual Hernández & Eduardo “Lalo” Barriga

Nose: smoky, barbecue, rustic, hints of animal leather.

Palate: leather, mineral notes, lots of black pepper, a touch of salt, light BBQ... the whole thing is reminiscent of a thick slice of peppered pancetta. Rich and fatty, with a fantastic texture.

Finish: a mix of smoked meat, pepper, and a subtle sweetness that brings to mind strawberry notes. Easily my current favorite!



Rezpiral - Arroqueño - Reina Sanchez 2022 - 47.8%

Nose: mineral notes, a hint of citrus, no smokiness or wild character—overall, very approachable. After some time in the glass, exotic fruit aromas emerge, especially pineapple and banana.

Palate: mineral and fruity, with apple taking the lead, accented by subtle kitchen spices. Faint hints of green banana linger in the background.

Finish: smooth granny smith apple, a touch of smoke, and mild spice.

Exceptionally easy-drinking and fruity—you’ll want to come back for more.

Siete Misterios - 49.2% Arroqueño - 2014

Met up with the ROA crew in Liège, and just like that, my buddy Alain surprises me with a fantastic bottle of Mezcal! That's exactly the kind of unexpected treat we love—cheers, Alain.

Nose: fermented apples, tangy notes, green and earthy hints.

Palate: gently smoky, vibrant yellow fruits, tart notes, and a touch of baked apple.

Finish: a lively mix of fruit and bold spices, giving it an energetic kick!

This one carries a subtle Jamaican vibe (in moderation), a real gem!



Reading

Tequila, Mezcal & More by Anna Bruce



With *Tequila, Mezcal and More*, Anna Bruce delivers an accessible and thorough guide to agave spirits. The book provides a clear and well-organized exploration of what defines these spirits, their origins, how they're made, and the range of agave varieties used.

The author skillfully highlights the key differences between tequila and mezcal, while also shedding light on lesser-known varieties like sotol and raicilla.

The book breaks down production processes, cooking, fermentation, distillation, and aging in a concise and easy-to-follow way, ensuring readers never feel lost.



The book is full of well-chosen photographs that make the technical points easy to understand. At the end, the author adds a fun twist by sharing creative cocktail ideas featuring mezcal, tequila, and sotol—perfect for livening up a night with friends.

I highly recommend keeping this book close by—it's like a pocket bible for anyone interested in spirits. Use it to refresh your memory on how these drinks are made, how they age, what sotol and raicilla are, deepen your knowledge, and, of course, impress your guests when you show off your collection.



Can you introduce yourself and share how you ended up writing a book about agave-based spirits?

Hello! I'm a British photojournalist living in Oaxaca and the author of *Tequila, Mezcal and More*. After traveling to Mexico as a young adult, I was always looking for ways to go back.

In 2013, the Mexican Embassy in London put out a call for projects to showcase Mexico. I pitched mezcal as an exciting subject, just as it was beginning to pop up in some of the trendiest bars at the time.

This project led to more photography opportunities for exhibitions in both the UK and Mexico, and the exposure opened doors for me to collaborate with brands and other media outlets. I also started contributing regularly to mezcalistas.com, mostly writing in-depth profiles of producers. That experience really boosted my confidence as a writer and caught the eye of Octopus Books (part of the Hachette group), who then commissioned me to write *Tequila, Mezcal and More*.



What was the last tasting experience that really amazed you?

My partner, Brooks Bailey, oversees the tastings for our *Rambling Spirits* project.

Sometimes that means heading out to palenques and working side by side with the mezcalero to put together a tasting that truly highlights the producer's craft.

He often collaborates with Mezcal Salvadores, whose lineup is fantastic—mostly clean, herbal expressions that really showcase the diversity of agave varieties.



On other occasions, Brooks organizes tastings out in the fields or at special venues for weddings or private events. These usually feature a selection of mezcals that showcase just how diverse this spirit can be. It's always fascinating to watch him put together a tasting based on whatever's inspiring him at the moment—whether that's new releases or his connections with producers.



And to wrap things up, if you could only pick one agave-based cocktail, which one would it be?

My top choice is Brooks' red bell pepper and árbol chili margarita (you'll find the recipe in the book).

He made it for me the very first time I visited him at the bar he managed (before he joined me in Oaxaca).

It's incredibly refreshing and balanced, with a pleasantly spicy kick from the chili.



Feature: La Venenosa

Exceptional Craftsmanship: Raicilla and Other Fine Spirits

During several trips to the Netherlands, I had the chance to discover La Venenosa—one of the rare Raicilla brands to reach Europe. After a bit of research, I bought my first bottle, and wow—what an experience! That sparked my curiosity to dive deeper and seek out more information.

To really understand the product, I reached out directly to Casa Endémica in Mexico, and they generously offered me a 90-minute video call for a private masterclass. I'll do my best to share with you the most important insights from this presentation, highlighting the exceptional and nearly forgotten skills of small producers.

Many thanks to Samuel RUIZ and his entire team for their time, for answering all my questions so openly, and for providing the valuable materials that bring this article



mezcal
DERRUMBES®



SOTOL
LA HIGUERA®

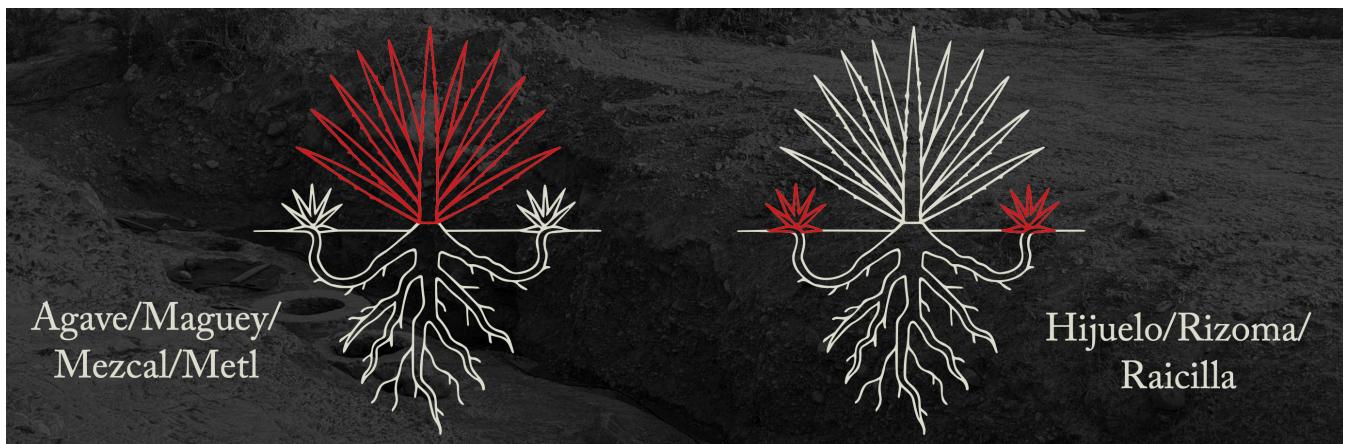


Casa Endémica is a company based in Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico, dedicated to discovering, valuing, promoting, and distributing traditional Mexican agave spirits like raicilla, mezcal, sotol, and more.

Their main goal is to showcase the incredible diversity of regional agave expressions—honoring artisanal techniques, local terroir, and traditional craftsmanship—and to share them with people both in Mexico and around the world.

On their website, Casa Endémica offers a curated selection of brands and expressions from various master distillers, including La Venenosa, Mezcal Derrumbes, Bacanora Yowee, Sotol de La Higuera, and many others.

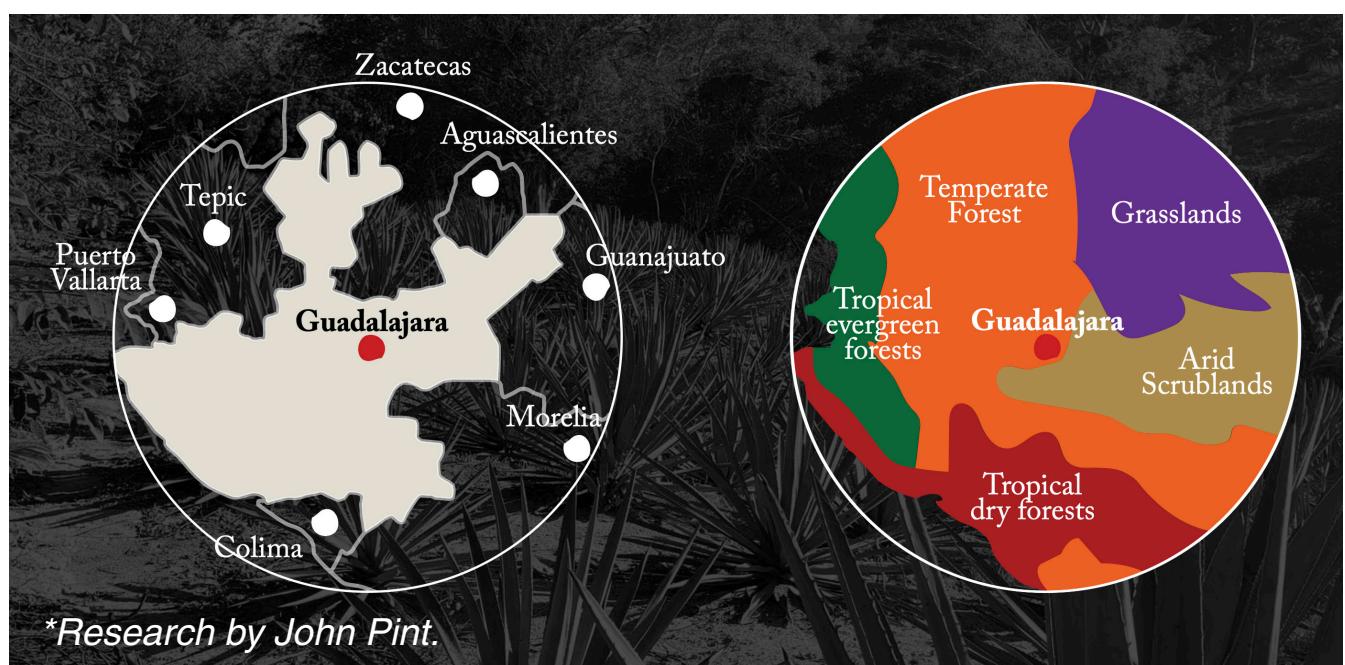
Founded by Esteban Morales in 2011, La Venenosa was the very first Raicilla brand to reach international markets. Today, it stands as more than just a label—it's a celebration of the craftsmanship of Maestros Taberneros across seven unique regions. Each bottle in the collection pays tribute to age-old artisanal methods, explores the rich biodiversity of Jalisco (featuring both wild and cultivated agaves), and offers an authentic new batch with every release.



Raicilla : The word comes from the coast of Jalisco and translates to “little root.”

It refers to the abundance of rhizomes (or offshoots) that agave plants—especially those from this region—naturally produce. Vintage bottles often carry the label “puro mezcal raicillero,” showing that these spirits are crafted from these very special agaves.

Beyond the methods, it's the land itself that takes center stage here—each corner of Jalisco boasts its own unique soil. Our “little roots” seem right at home wherever they grow, adapting to every environment they encounter.



Terroir & Agaves

While it's important to remember that Jalisco is the birthplace of Tequila—and home to the Blue Weber Agave—the wilder lands nearby are full of hidden gems. That's why La Venenosa features six types of agaves from 11 different varieties.

Rhodacantha



Maguey Mai



Maguey Cimarron



Maguey Cenizo Gigante



Maguey Amarillo

Angustifolia



Maguey Sierrilla



Maguey Lineño



Maguey Chico Aguiar

Guadalajarana



Maguey Masparillo

Aplanata



Maguey de Castilla

Maximiliana



Maguey Lechuguilla

Inaequidens



Maguey Bruto

r!

Cooking & Fermentation

The cooking stage has its own unique traits, shaping spirits with flavors that range from gently smoky to bold. ***Don't let stereotypes fool you—mezcal isn't always smoky!***



Adobe



Conical underground



Brick aboveground

Fermentation is the stage where the spirit's flavor complexity really develops. For handcrafted Raicilla, this process relies almost entirely on **wild, native yeasts that thrive in the distillery's surroundings** (the space known locally as the taberna). Methods and vessels can differ widely from one producer to the next:

- Wooden or stone vats: Traditionally used for slow fermentations—sometimes lasting up to 15 days.
- Alternative containers: Some La Venenosa expressions use pits carved in volcanic rock (tepetate) or plastic tanks for more precise temperature control.
- With or without fibers: Unlike tequila, which only ferments the juice, many Raicillas ferment the juice together with the agave bagasse (fibers), giving the final spirit a richer, earthier character.



Stone vats



Tepetate pit



Stainless steel vats



Plastic vats

It's worth noting that the Raicilla D.O. doesn't regulate these methods, and that's actually a good thing! However, it does set boundaries for the production area, and Samuel pointed out that some of their products will no longer be labeled Raicilla because they fall just outside the authorized zone. While that's a calculated risk, for him **it's mostly proof of a strong commitment to supporting local small-scale producers.**

Distillation

Raicilla distillation is truly one of the world's most captivating, thanks to its frequent use of rare, pre-industrial stills.



Hollowed Parota trunk still, Filipino-style, with copper condenser.



Stainless steel and copper coil alembic



Ancient Huichol-style still



Filipino-style clay pot stills with a copper condenser



Filipino-style clay pot stills with a copper condenser



Stainless steel still with a copper coil



Tree trunk Tepehuano-style still



Filipino-style stainless steel

The Filipino-style still: A hallmark of many Raicillas, but also seen in the Mezcal world. Brought by Filipino immigrants in the 16th century, this still is often made from a hollowed-out tree trunk (typically Parota or Higuera wood) perched over a cooking vat. Vapor condenses inside on a metal plate cooled by water, and the distillate is collected through a bamboo or copper tube.

Clay still (Olla de Barro): Used for the Sierra del Tigre expression by La Venenosa, this set-up features two stacked clay pots. The clay imparts a creamy texture and distinctive earthy flavors to the spirit.

Huichol still: An extremely rare and ancient method, reserved for special editions like Tutsi, and a priceless piece of cultural heritage.

Copper or stainless steel still: These more traditional stills are used for cleaner styles or for the second distillation to fine-tune the alcohol content.

Conclusion

Raicilla, an agave spirit, is at the heart of La Venenosa's remarkable project, supported by Casa Endémica. Far more than just a raw ingredient, agave serves as a true cultural symbol. Whether it's hand-crushed with a mallet or distilled in hollowed tree trunks, every drop tells the story of a resilient Mexico, proud of its heritage.



SIERRA VOLCANES

Maestro Raicillero: Arturo Campos

AGAVE:

Classic blend of mature farmed agaves Rhodacantha and Angustifolia, locally named as Cenizo Gigante and Sierrilla

OVEN:

3 days in an underground conical shape with volcanic rocks and fired with oak and mezquite wood.

MILLING:

Hand-chopped with machete and mechanical shredder.

FERMENTATION:

Wild yeast, 5 to 9 days in stone and plastic vats.

DISTILLATION:

Double distillation in Filipino-style clay pot stills with a copper condenser.

I haven't (yet) had the chance to explore the whole range, and with each batch offering something different, but the Sierra Volcanes I described above was a real delight. It's a one-of-a-kind blend of aromas that truly captures the spirit of Mexican terroir—earthy, rustic, with a subtle smokiness, and above all, vibrant fruity and estery notes that at times remind me of Jamaican rums. Exotic fruits, strawberry, maybe even a touch of blue cheese—depending on your own tasting markers—add intrigue and elevate every sip.

AGAVE

CHRONICLES - VOL.3

Special thanks to our friends and partners who are always there cheering on this passion project.

There's still so much for us to learn about Mexico, agaves, and everything they inspire!

Our goal is to publish three or four issues each year—even though balancing professional commitments, events, and tastings makes it a real challenge. Still, we're committed to building strong connections so we can keep bringing you authentic insights.

So far, we haven't taken on any sponsors or commercial deals with the brands we mention. But if you're a brand, please feel free to reach out, share your products, and tell us your story—we'd love to be convinced to spread the word through our magazine.

With heartfelt appreciation to all mezcal lovers and fellow spirits enthusiasts joining us on this journey. *mezcal*s and other spirits who share this adventure with us.

Jack & Clara

