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AGAVE

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By The Jack Drop & The French Agave

Auto-translated version

New quarter, new faces, new discoveries.

From the agave market in France to the Viva Agave expo, there's plenty happening in this latest issue of Agave Chronicles. We're also bringing you in-depth features on: ENTREMANOS, Cardenxe, Niño Sin Amor and NETA.

Join us on this incredible journey as we explore the world of wild agave.



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INTRODUCTION



The mezcal promise in France

Over the past decade, mezcal has grown from a niche spirit to a must-have category in certain international markets. In the UK and the Netherlands, it's made its mark in cocktail bars and on premium spirits menus, while in the U.S., it's often enjoyed neat, honoring tradition. However, in France, although there's momentum, mezcal is still in the early stages of gaining widespread popularity.



A booming global category

Worldwide, mezcal is experiencing rapid growth. The global market, projected at roughly \$1.24 billion in 2025, could soar past \$3.1 billion by 2034, with annual growth close to 11%.

This momentum is fueled by several factors: rising interest in craft spirits, the search for authenticity, and the appeal of premium products. Mezcal, crafted with traditional methods, a wide range of agaves, and some of the most complex flavor profiles in the world, perfectly meets the demand for unique products. While North America has historically led the way—accounting for most Mexican exports—mezcal is steadily gaining ground in Europe, now one of the fastest-growing regions for the category.

France: A Market Lagging Behind

Even with the global boom, France is still trailing some of its European neighbors. Agave consumption here remains relatively low—especially when compared to the Netherlands, where people consume about four times as much agave.

This gap can be chalked up to several structural reasons. The Netherlands boasts a lively cocktail scene, with a great openness to international spirits and emerging categories. France, while renowned for its food, wine, and spirits, tends to stick to more traditional drinking habits.



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Early Signs of Momentum

One of the clearest indicators of the growing interest in agave spirits is the rise of events dedicated entirely to them. Viva Agave festival, held in Paris, stands out as a prime example. Having already seen several editions, this event brings together producers, importers, and enthusiasts for tastings, workshops, and talks centered around mezcal, tequila, and other agave-based spirits.

The latest edition featured over twenty exhibitors and showcased more than a hundred different labels, with masterclasses and meet-ups designed to highlight the diverse world of agave spirits.

Other encouraging signs: for the past two years, La Maison du Whisky has been developing its “agave patio” at Whisky Live, Rhum Fest Paris is keeping a close eye on this category with plans to feature it in a future edition, and at Wine Paris, the multiple award-winning Mexico stands were simply unmissable.

This kind of event plays a vital part in shaping the French market. As we've seen with other categories before—like agricole rum or Japanese whisky—the creation of an ecosystem of events, specialty bars, and professional training is often the first step toward broader acceptance.

Why Mezcal Has Potential in France

Several consumer trends could propel mezcal's rise in France.

1. The Premiumization of Spirits

French consumers—just like in the rest of Europe—are choosing quality over quantity. High-end spirits, craft-made or with a strong cultural identity, are enjoying significant growth.

2. Interest in Terroir Products

Mezcal is deeply rooted in a sense of place: different agave varieties, cooking techniques, natural fermentation, and artisanal distillation. This approach particularly resonates with the French appreciation for origin and craftsmanship.

3. The Cocktail Culture

The boom of cocktail bars across major French cities creates fertile ground. Mezcal, with its bold and complex flavor profile, fits perfectly into modern cocktail creations.

4. The Appeal of International Cuisine

The growing popularity of Mexican and Latin American cuisine is helping to spread mezcal's cultural influence as well.

A Major Challenge: Education

Despite these opportunities, a significant barrier remains: a lack of understanding about agave spirits. For many French consumers, tequila and mezcal are still linked to party shots or entry-level products. The category's complexity—agave varieties, terroirs, production methods—remains largely unknown.

Yet mezcal is actually one of the world's most intricate spirits. Each bottle can showcase a specific agave variety, a unique region, a particular cooking method (like traditional pit ovens or volcanic stone), natural fermentation in various vessels (from plastic tubs to goatskins), and old-school artisanal distillation (Filipino-style stills, tree trunks, clay pots, and more). Without guidance, these details often go unnoticed, but the category is full of hidden gems.



That’s why the key players in the market—importers, bartenders, trainers, and industry journalists—are so crucial. Their mission goes far beyond just distributing mezcal: they’re the storytellers who bring its history to life. Right now, these aspects are still developing in France.

This means focusing on several things: training bar professionals, hosting educational tastings, organizing specialized events, and highlighting both producers and regions.

In short, mezcal’s growth in France relies just as much on education as it does on distribution.

Steady Growth

France may not be ready for an overnight mezcal boom just yet. But all the right ingredients for gradual growth are there:

- a booming global category
- the rise of specialty events
- a new wave of passionate bartenders

If education keeps pace, mezcal could steadily carve out its place in the French spirits scene, right alongside whisky, rum, and gin. And maybe one day, France will stop looking to the Netherlands as the more advanced market for agave spirits.

Because in the world of mezcal, just like with wine, everything starts with a story—and in France, the best stories have a way of finding their audience.

Note: This article is also available in the SWAF newsletter - [LINK](#).

SHOW - VIVA AGAVE



Dive into the cutting edge of Mexican spirits

On March 8th and 9th, the Kube Hotel Paris became a true embassy for agave spirits, hosting Viva Agave Paris. More than just a typical event, it's now a must for fans, industry pros, and the simply curious, all eager to dive into the vibrant world of Mexican distillates.

A festival on a personal scale

Spread across two rooms, the festival showcased an impressive range: tequila, mezcal, raicilla, rum, and a variety of cocktails crafted by the bartenders from La Mezcaleria. With open tastings, masterclasses, and an especially well-curated food selection, Viva Agave fostered a warm, inviting vibe—perfect for mingling and discovering new flavors.

Kudos to Martha, Laelien, their teams, and all the volunteers, whose friendly welcome helped make the event such a success.

Clara attended on Sunday, while Jack was there on Monday. Here, we share our combined take on the event, from tastings to surprises and memorable encounters.



Confirmation

Some houses reaffirm their status year after year, continuing to stand out:

- **Tequila Ocho** never fails to impress with its single estate philosophy. The Blanco and Reposado 2025 editions are especially delicious! We've already published a full feature on this in issue #2 of Agave Chronicles.
- **Don Fulano** won over Clara with a perfectly balanced Reposado—definitely a go-to brand for great value.
- **Lalocura** is a true magician of agave spirits. Maestro Eduardo “Lalo” Ángeles keeps working his magic and continues to delight us. His presence is felt in every release, and the festival's most passionate fans speak of him in ever more glowing terms.
- **Neta**, and also **Lost Explorer** continue to embody a real sense of authenticity, backed by strong reputations and a distinctive identity.

They're reliable favorites who set the standard, while still making room for an emerging, ambitious new generation.

Standout Discoveries: These New Brands You'll Want to Watch

- ENTREMANOS Could this be the future Tequila that takes France by storm? It isn't on our shelves yet, but their High Proof (batch 2) packs a punch—easily one of the best tequilas at the show. Jack's personal favorite! We got the chance to chat with the team—more on this explosive newcomer later in the magazine!
- Excomulgado, led by Arturo Luis, shows real promise with a Tepextate that truly stands out!



- Beú, a young German upstart, caught our attention with a highly textured, almost fibrous take on quicote distillate—definitely intriguing.
- Ramo de Rosas charms with a refined Madrecuishe, and its friendly founder Nicolas gave us an interview (find it at [this link](#)), with more details coming soon in our next issue (scheduled for July).
- Monte Marea delivers a raicilla that's fresh, fruity, and beautifully marked by essential oils. Another favorite for Jack.



Micro-lots and Curiosities

The event was also highlighted by a selection of micro-batch releases and rare finds: Vecindad offers ultra-limited editions (just 20 to 60 bottles), true gems in the world of agave spirits. However, their classic range is a bit on the plain side.



Excellia, a tequila aged in cognac barrels by Maison Villevert. These casks always bring out the best in a fine tequila.



Special shout-out to **Paranubes** “Cafe de Olla,” a coffee liqueur crafted with rum (so, sugarcane!) that’s especially tasty, offering tangy notes reminiscent of tomato. Looks like a winner for a Bloody Maria twist.

Can independent bottlers spark the next big trend?

You can’t help but highlight the work of Swell de Spirits and their collaborations with the Los Convidados crew. Today, it’s clear: those building bridges between different spirits categories are often independent bottlers—and **Swell de Spirits, founded by Michael Barbaria, has shown strong support for Mexico.** Their “Made in Mexico” lineup features four truly unique offerings:

#1 Made in Mexico: High-Esters White Rum—perfect for thrill seekers!

#2 Made in Mexico: 100% Lineño Agave Spirits from Chacolo distillery. This agave distillate is a testament to Mexican craftsmanship—cooked in underground ovens, hand-crushed with wooden mallets, wild yeast fermentation for 25 days in wooden vats with agave fibers, and double-distilled in a wood-fired Filipino still. An exceptional gateway into mezcal (even if it doesn’t carry the name).

#3 Made in Mexico: Tequila Blanco 100% Blue Agave from Cascahuin distillery. The first independent European bottling from one of the top five tequila distilleries.

We’ve covered Cascahuin at length in Agave Chronicles Issue 3. During tastings at various shows, this tequila wowed fans of white and agricole rums alike.

The fourth product is none other than Mexican Gin, now a brand in its own right: SIRIVS Gin. Swell de Spirits is now a producer alongside its partners Los Convidados and Satvrnal, having acquired a 30% stake in the distillery.

It is also thanks to these enthusiasts of Mexican craftsmanship that agave spirits will find their place in our market, we are convinced. Proof of this lies in the enthusiasm of rum lovers who came to taste the products at various trade shows.

Critical Insight: Navigating Between Marketing and Reality

Every brand brings its own vision, marketing (or lack thereof), and more or less modernized production methods—this diversity is part of what makes agaves so fascinating.

- Teremana, despite its heavily marketed image (fronted by "The Rock," a major American celebrity), is a pleasant surprise: it delivers solid value for money and a production process more serious than many mass-market competitors.
- On the other hand, some iconic names on the French scene offer little in terms of taste and fall short when it comes to value. We've chosen not to name them here, preferring to highlight the standouts instead.

A Community That's Growing Stronger

Viva Agave is more than just bottles—it's about the people you meet. Reconnecting with Aldo, now running our favorite new Mexican spot in Lille (Le Fer, which you'll find more about later in the magazine), catching up with agave enthusiasts, bartenders shaking up the cocktail scene, and a community that keeps expanding!



© Viva Agave

Conclusion: An Unmissable Event

Viva Agave Paris cements its place as a can't-miss gathering—intimate, high-caliber, and deeply rooted in agave spirits culture. With trusted classics, new discoveries, and small-batch gems, it captures the spirit of a rapidly evolving industry.

The only question now isn't if we'll be back, but who we'll bring along to share the experience next year. Spoiler: Count us in.



Latest happenings, bars & restaurants, recipes...

This section could definitely use a more solid structure, but for now, we're sharing some of the latest news highlights, must-see events, and great new finds we've recently come across.

Artesario: A curated agave selection



When we're on the hunt for something new, we browse the web and rarely stumble upon sites that are truly trustworthy or worth recommending. **Artesario** breaks the mold and helped us discover some real gems—many more are on the way and will be featured in an upcoming magazine article.



The tequila **Cazcanes**, a real favorite among American spirits critics, is now available. The reposado truly stood out to us—think leather, gum, gingerbread, vanilla, candied lemon, and citrus, all blending into a one-of-a-kind, balanced profile.

El Gran Legado de Vida, crafted by NOM 1123 (Cascahuin Distillery—yes, them again), highlights honeyed agave, floral tones, and exotic fruits, while finishing with a spicy kick reminiscent of jalapeño. Exceptional!

The mezcal **Salvadores**, here a Cirial (agave Karwinskii), takes you straight to the arid lands of Tlacolula de Matamoros, delivering an earthy, dry, and spicy experience.

We had the chance to meet Vlad, Artesario's co-founder, to get a better sense of his selection process—and it's safe to say, he has our full trust. Stay tuned for more details soon about the different brands in his portfolio.

More info at: <https://artesario.fr>

FOOD



Le Fer: Lille's newest Mexican restaurant

Since we're both from Lille, it just wouldn't feel right not to share the news about the latest spot from our favorite local, Aldo Ponce. He's the founder of [Mexcaligne](#) (a specialty site offering a great selection of mezcal, liqueurs, and mezcal-infused beers). Aldo recently took over the iconic Venezuelan location at 42 Rue Saint-Sébastien (59800 Lille), turning it into a haven for Mexican cuisine.

And that's how Le Fer was born!



At Le Fer, we honor the vibrant flavors of Mexican cuisine with traditional recipes crafted from the freshest, handpicked ingredients. Indulgent tacos, hearty burritos, melty quesadillas, house-made guacamole, and spicy specialties—every dish is a ticket to a culinary journey.

Our team is dedicated to giving you a warm, lively, and colorful dining experience, true to the heart of Mexico.

Shoutout to the guacamole, El Sartencito, the cod ceviche with mango, and the chicken tostada—generous, well-balanced plates bursting with freshness.

And don't miss the tempting drink menu, featuring a wide variety of cocktails—some served frozen. Finally, it just wouldn't be right to leave without trying a mezcal. Enjoy it as an appetizer, alongside your meal, or as a digestif!

Wishing Aldo and his team every success!

COCKTAILS

The Iconic Paloma

The Paloma is now one of the world's most beloved agave-based cocktails, but its true origins are a bit of a mystery—and that's part of its allure.

Many credit its invention to Don Javier Delgado Corona, the famed bartender at La Capilla, an iconic spot in the town of Tequila. While this story hasn't been officially confirmed, it's the most widely accepted theory.

What's certain is that the Paloma has won hearts thanks to its simplicity and approachability. Unlike the more technical Margarita, the Paloma is made by directly mixing tequila and grapefruit soda—often Jarritos, a favorite in Mexico.

The name “Paloma” (Spanish for dove) brings to mind something light, refreshing, and easy to sip—just like the cocktail itself.



Traditionally made with grapefruit soda, the Paloma can also be crafted with fresh grapefruit juice for a more natural and less sweet twist!

Ingredients:

- 5 cl blanco tequila
- 10 cl grapefruit soda
(like Fever Tree, Three Cents)
- 1 cl fresh lime juice
- A pinch of salt
- Ice cubes

Result: *a cool, slightly bitter, salty, and ultra-refreshing cocktail—perfect for any occasion! Always enjoy responsibly.*

ENTREMANOS



Tradition, science, and creative freedom

After an unforgettable tasting of ENTREMANOS tequila at Viva Agave alongside Bruno Sarabia (Los Convidados), we were invited to an exclusive masterclass with Yan Monroy (founder) and Jaime "Jimmy" Villalobos Sauza. With outstanding expertise, an iconic bottle, a meaningful vision, and passionate conversation, we invite you to discover this tequila—which we hope will be available in France very soon.

In the ever-evolving world of tequila, **ENTREMANOS stands out with a style that's at once handcrafted, innovative, and deeply rooted in human connection.** If we had to sum it up in just three words: **Innovation, Heritage, Vision.**



At the heart of the project are two complementary figures: Yan Monroy and Alan Taylor.

They were soon joined by one of the industry's standouts: Jaime Villalobos Sauza. A true asset for ENTREMANOS, "Jimmy" is a renowned tequila master whose expertise goes back five generations—his great-great-great-grandfather founded one of the world's earliest tequila distilleries in 1873. Jimmy was given total creative freedom to craft the brand's unique signature.

A sommelier and wine professor, he's passionate about spirits from around the globe—especially French agricultural rums (he has an impressive collection of bottles from Guadeloupe and Martinique) and Chinese baijiu, said to be one of the largest private collections.

Yan Monroy (pictured left) truly embodies the entrepreneurial drive behind this project.

A lifelong friend of our dear Bruno, Yan is a former student of the French school in Guadalajara and also spent several years living in Paris.

About seven years ago, he dove into the tequila industry, and after working with a major distillery—including making a mark at various European festivals—he joined forces with his friend Alan Taylor (COO), a now-essential educator and content creator in the Mexican scene, to launch ENTREMANOS.



Yan & Jimmy



Creative Freedom

One of ENTREMANOS' core values is the complete creative freedom given to Jimmy.

The first bold move: making you fall in love with autoclave cooking.

Sure, at high pressure and poorly managed, an autoclave can spell disaster—but in skilled hands, with a little science on your side, everything changes. Here, mature agaves are selected and cooked for 10 hours, then left to rest for 48 hours in the autoclave. This not only allows for a gentle cool-down and continued cooking, but also develops especially aromatic compounds.

Free from traditional constraints, **he experiments and customizes recipes to match the seasons and the climate.** Fermentation naturally evolves:

- In winter (January), the cold and dry air slows things down.
- Spring (April–May) brings warmth that speeds fermentation up.
- August's rainy season shifts the balance yet again.

This living approach creates one-of-a-kind tequilas, where every batch can reveal new nuances—even if the 40% Blanco is, of course, more consistent. Finally, distillation is done in two rounds using a copper-pot still (copper-pot still, for those in the know).

Social Awareness, & Human Project

The bottle design, created in collaboration with an artist friend based in Spain, took over a year and a half to perfect. Today, these recycled glass bottles are a signature feature, and the iconic little cord is tied by hand thanks to the association founded by our friends at "Cultivando Lazos", which gives women facing hardship the chance to work flexible hours—allowing them to balance family life with dignity.



Technical Deep Dive – For Our Geekiest Readers

Controlled cooking is key to forming specific aromatic compounds (also called congeners).

Jimmy gave us a seriously in-depth explanation—too detailed to recap here (we have to save something for future masterclasses!)—but one essential concept is managing furfural levels. In short, when plant materials packed with sugars (like agave) are heated, some sugars break down and create furfurals. The legal maximum is 4 mg per 100 mL of alcohol. For certain ENTREMANOS editions, levels reach up to 2.8 mg, which naturally adds subtle notes of coffee, chocolate, and sometimes a hint of smoke.

The team also focuses on the development of esters, distinguishing between those coming from natural fermentation and others produced by chemical reactions—especially when aging in glass, *a technique inspired by mezcal*.



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Bold and Expressive Range

ENTREMANOS features a lineup of distinct expressions, each with its own unique personality:

- Blanco (40%): Recently bumped up from 38% to 40%, this is the foundation of the collection.
- Primavera (44%): A springtime release inspired by Sonora's bacanora, fermented in small open tanks. It boasts an intense, untamed profile that seasoned enthusiasts love, and is blended with 30% blanco for extra balance.
- Castaño (42%): Lightly aged for 10 to 15 days in chestnut barrels, it preserves the essence of a blanco while adding layers of complexity.
- High Proof (50%): An unfiltered, robust expression with minimal water added, allowing the distiller's precision to shine—Jack's top pick at Viva Agave.

All of these tequilas undergo 100% spontaneous fermentation, shaped by their environment—including wild yeasts carried by the local wildlife around the tanks.



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Philosophy

Nestled in the heart of the Amatitán Valley, ENTREMANOS flourishes, guided by a simple philosophy: savor slowly and truly enjoy every moment.

Three core values deeply shape this human adventure:

- Honesty : transparency, both in how we craft our tequila and how we communicate.
- A trago lento (slow sipping): an invitation to slow down and simply enjoy life.
- Social conscience: life in Mexico isn't always easy, so we believe in lending a hand to our neighbors—just as our team does through the Cultivando Lazos association.

Conclusion

In just four short years, ENTREMANOS has firmly established itself in both Mexico and the US. This new wave of tequila, brought to life by a team deeply aware of their heritage and their responsibility, highlights the artistry of their maestro tequilero—much to our delight.

Once you try ENTREMANOS, you'll never look back. We're excited to see the brand make its way to France, and we'll be sure to keep you posted through all our channels—and in a future issue of Agave Chronibles. Until then, we're sending our best wishes for continued success to our new friends. Special thanks to Bruno, who recently joined the project to support its European launch, helped connect us with the team, and gave this article a thoughtful review—along with his always invaluable advice, our agave teacher is always ready to answer even our wildest questions. Gracias!



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EXPLORING NIÑO SIN AMOR

Nino Sin Amor is the brainchild of Luis Alonso, a mezcal enthusiast deeply connected to the work of Oaxaca's maestros mezcaleros. We were lucky enough to meet him during his visit to Europe—especially in Lille—where he shared his vision and let us taste his special creations.

This project is still in its early days: the palenque only began construction in 2022, driven by the desire to create something truly rooted in tradition. Its official debut will take place at the Roma Bar Show in May 2024, which marks the brand's launch. There's a fantastic energy here, genuine respect for the land, and an authentic approach to mezcal.

It was a memorable time filled with great conversations and discoveries, right alongside the founder himself, featuring an impressive lineup that included the famous Espadín, Tepeztate, Mexicano, and many other unique expressions.

If you're curious about the name Niño Sin Amor—literally “child without love”—it's actually a playful nod to Luis's childhood. It's not that he lacked love (far from it!), but rather, it was a nickname the neighborhood gave him and a friend because they were free spirits, always playing outside and coming home late.



With Niño Sin Amor, the concept is straightforward: shine a spotlight on handcrafted creations that honor the land and traditional expertise. Luis partners directly with local producers to handpick agaves and batches that truly capture the character of each region and every maestro mezcalero.

©luisalonso



These mezcals are crafted in small batches, without additives, allowing the full depth of the agave—whether wild or cultivated—to shine through in the heart of Oaxaca. The approach is honest, authentic, and deeply rooted in the land, highlighting people, tradition, and the time it takes to create an exceptional mezcal.



©luisalonso

P19



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Mezcal is crafted using traditional methods that honor every key step: starting with the jima, or harvesting the agave, followed by cooking, crushing, fermentation, and then a double distillation in copper stills. For select batches, an extra distillation in clay pots brings even greater depth and character to the spirit.



©luisalonso

This work is embodied by Destilando Ando, a company crafting 100% Mexican mezcal in San Luis del Río, located in the Tlacolula district of Oaxaca. Here, mezcal is much more than just a spirit—it's a true commitment and a source of pride for those who make it. The project is built on shared values between the Cruz and Alonso families, who, with genuine passion and sincerity, strive to share Niño Sin Amor mezcal with the world.

NIÑO SIN AMOR
MEZCAL ARTESANAL



©luisalonso

San Luis del Río sits at about 970 meters above sea level, experiencing temperatures that range from 8 to 32 degrees and a relatively short rainy season, with only 30 to 60 wet days each year. In 2020, the village had 526 residents, 98% of whom are Indigenous, and around 60% speak Zapotec. This unique cultural and geographical setting is central to the character of the local mezcals, deepening the connection between the spirit, the land, and the people who craft it.

PRODUCT FOCUS: Sierrudo

Here's our chance to spotlight this unique release after exploring the world and craft of Nino Sin Amor... introducing Sierrudo.

This mezcal is crafted from Americana agave, a patient variety that matures over 16–20 years, often at high elevations, drawing in the full richness of the land. Such slow growth brings deeper structure, boldness, and a truly layered aromatic complexity.

Handmade in San Luis del Río, Oaxaca, by maestro mezcalero Baltazar Cruz Gómez, the process is entirely traditional: cooking in underground pits, crushing with a tahona, wild fermentation in oak vats, followed by double distillation.



Bottled at 45%, this release stays true to the house philosophy—authentic, expressive, and shaped equally by its agave and its terroir. Who better to describe it than Luis Alonso, founder of Nino Sin Amor:

“Sierrudo mezcal is a rare gem, distilled from Americana agave—a broad family that also includes varieties like Arroqueño and Sierra Negra. This agave takes its time, maturing for around 15 years, and is especially notable for its massive piñas that can reach up to 300 kg.

In the glass, you'll find an intense, complex mezcal with a beautiful mineral backbone, fresh green notes, and a hint of vanilla—all wrapped in a gentle smoothness that makes it remarkably approachable and easy to enjoy.”

Expresamos nuestras más sinceras condolencias por
el sensible fallecimiento de

Baltazar Cruz

We also want to pay tribute to Baltazar Cruz, maestro mezcalero, who left us on March 1, 2026. Through his expertise, generosity, and dedication, he made a lasting impression on everyone fortunate enough to cross his path. His legacy lives on in every mezcal he helped craft and in the memories of those who keep this tradition alive.

CARDENXE, Song of the Desert

And the revival of sotol.



We made a great call recently by ordering a bottle of Cardenxe sotol. Not long after, the brand—newly available in France thanks to La Maison du Whisky—reached out to us. We got to join a virtual masterclass led by Luigi, the brand’s co-founder. He’s a charismatic, vibrant personality and a pleasure to talk with.

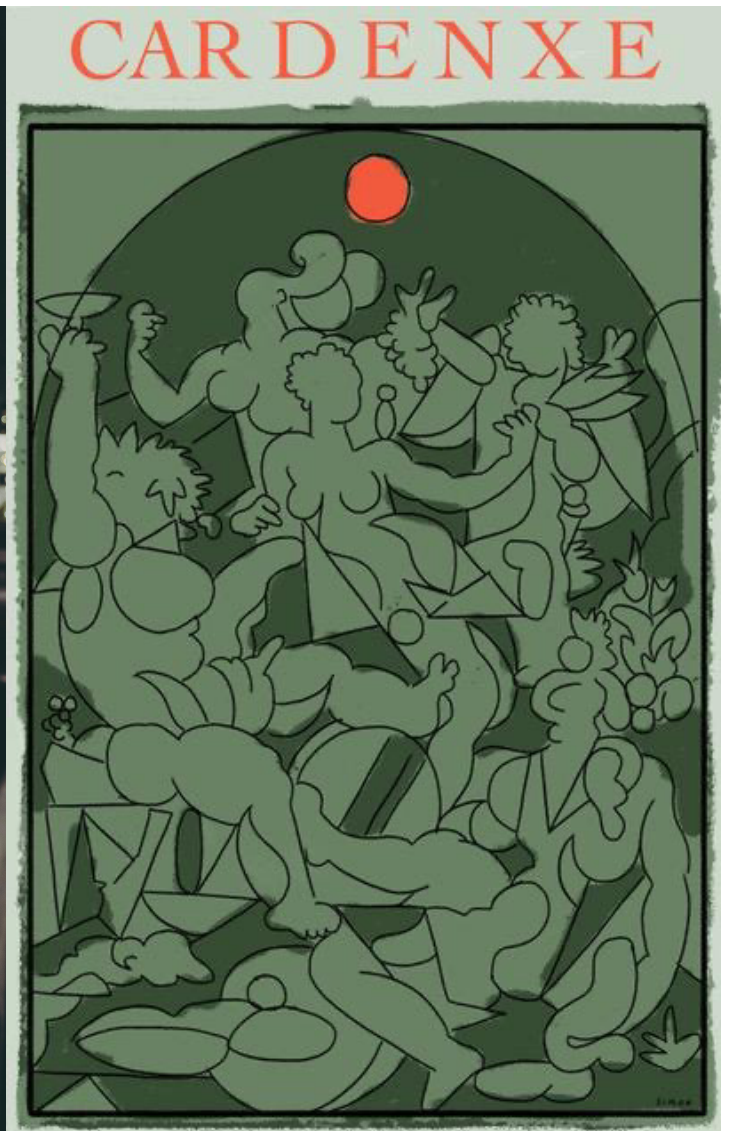
A spirit born from an ancient song

In northern Mexico, in the state of Durango, echoes a nearly forgotten melody: canto cardenche. This raw, unaccompanied vocal tradition is often described as cathartic—a heartfelt cry carried by the vast, arid desert.

It was this very song that drew Luigi (co-founder of Cardenxe) to Mexico. Originally from Italy, he wasn’t searching for a spirit at first, but for a culture. As he immersed himself in this ancestral music, he uncovered another language of the land: sotol.



© Cardenxe & dedicated photographer



From Song to Spirit: A Revelation

Sotol isn't an agave, but a wild *Dasyliirion* plant that thrives in the arid expanses of northern Mexico. Unlike tequila or even certain mezcals, there are almost no cultivated varieties here—everything is wild and deeply rooted in the land.

For Luigi, this discovery is eye-opening. Where tequila often reflects the uniformity of blue weber agave and mezcal showcases roasting techniques and immense craftsmanship, sotol speaks first and foremost of the earth itself.

“With our sotol, you can taste the desert, the grasslands, the mountains.”

This connection to the land forms the heart of Cardenxe—a brand created to share a side of Mexico that's still largely unknown.

Sotol: A History Once Kept in the Shadows

Sotol remains a well-kept secret even today, and history has a lot to do with it.

In the state of Chihuahua, its production was banned for decades—a prohibition that lasted far beyond the 1920s and into the early 2000s in some border regions. For generations, producers distilled in secrecy on their estates, passing down almost invisible expertise.

Cardenxe is part of this ongoing story—not by romanticizing it, but by bringing it to light.



Showcasing the Northern Terroir

Having lived in the United States for over 12 years, Luigi brings a unique vision to Cardenxe: the brand owns no distillery. Instead, Cardenxe collaborates with three local distilleries, each rooted deeply in its own region, resulting in three distinct expressions.

Desierto - The Desert.

Crafted in Chihuahua (Ciudad Aldama), this spirit comes from a harsh, extreme climate. It's the only one made from a blend of several dasylyrion varieties.

Pradera - The Prairie.

Distilled in Durango (Nombre de Dios) inside a converted 15th-century monastery, surrounded by open fields and farmland.

Sierra - Hikes & Forest.

An authentic taste of the Chihuahua mountains (Ciudad Madera), where pine trees shape the landscape and the scent of moss fills the air.

Each expression is a true reflection of its own unique terroir.



© Cardenxe

An Artisanal Process

The production follows time-honored traditions:

- Wild Harvest: piñas are harvested without uprooting the plant, allowing it to keep growing
- Cooking: underground pit roasting for 24 to 48 hours using volcanic stones
- Fermentation: open-air fermentation in pine wood vats (5 to 8 days)
- Distillation: double distillation in copper stills
- Reduction: with distilled natural spring water.

The bottle design is intentionally artistic, reflecting Luigi's personality. Its distinctive bell-shaped curve is inspired by the underground ovens used to cook the piñas.

Northern Mexico: The New Frontier

Through Cardenxe, Luigi champions a bold yet straightforward vision: Northern Mexico is one of the world's great, overlooked spirit regions.

Still largely unexplored and far less structured than Jalisco or Oaxaca, it boasts:

- untouched biodiversity,
- traditional farming methods,
- genuine authenticity.

Cardenxe's arrival in France, through distributor TAG, signals a new chapter—one of global recognition.



A Taste for Learning

But Cardenxe is about more than just the product. Luigi and his Mexican partner, Nitzan Podoswa—who both have a passion for herbalism—are on a clear mission: to educate.

Their sotol, bottled between 40% and 45% ABV, aims to overturn a persistent myth: that it's a harsh spirit.

Instead, Cardenxe offers: approachable flavor profiles, a fresh aromatic experience, a nearly botanical approach to spirits.

Cardenxe is more than just a sotol label—it's a bridge connecting ancient songs, rugged landscapes, and a modern vision for spirits.

By following in the footsteps of canto cardenche, Luigi didn't just learn a music—he discovered a voice, and now he makes it resonate beautifully.

NETA

Land, Legacy, and Community



This brand had always piqued my curiosity, so I jumped at the chance to attend a masterclass in Paris hosted by the Mezcal Brothers to dive deep into the heart of the NETA project. Here's what stood out to me.



© Mauricio Novelo Jarque

Introduction

Since 2012, NETA has been working closely with more than twenty small, family-run producers from the valleys and hills of southern Miahuatlán, Oaxaca. Many of them are part of the Grupo Productor Logoche cooperative. Located at the southern edge of the Central Valleys and at the foothills of the Sierra Madre del Sur, the region is known for the strong character of its people, the incredible diversity of its landscapes, and the deep-rooted traditions in farming and cuisine passed down through generations. Because of this, the area has held onto its reputation for crafting some of Mexico's finest spirits.

<https://netaspirits.com/about-us>

Traditional Agave Spirits

NETA chose not to certify these mezcals mainly for cost reasons. Each micro-batch is crafted with exceptional care by the community, following time-honored artisanal methods—there’s no question about it.

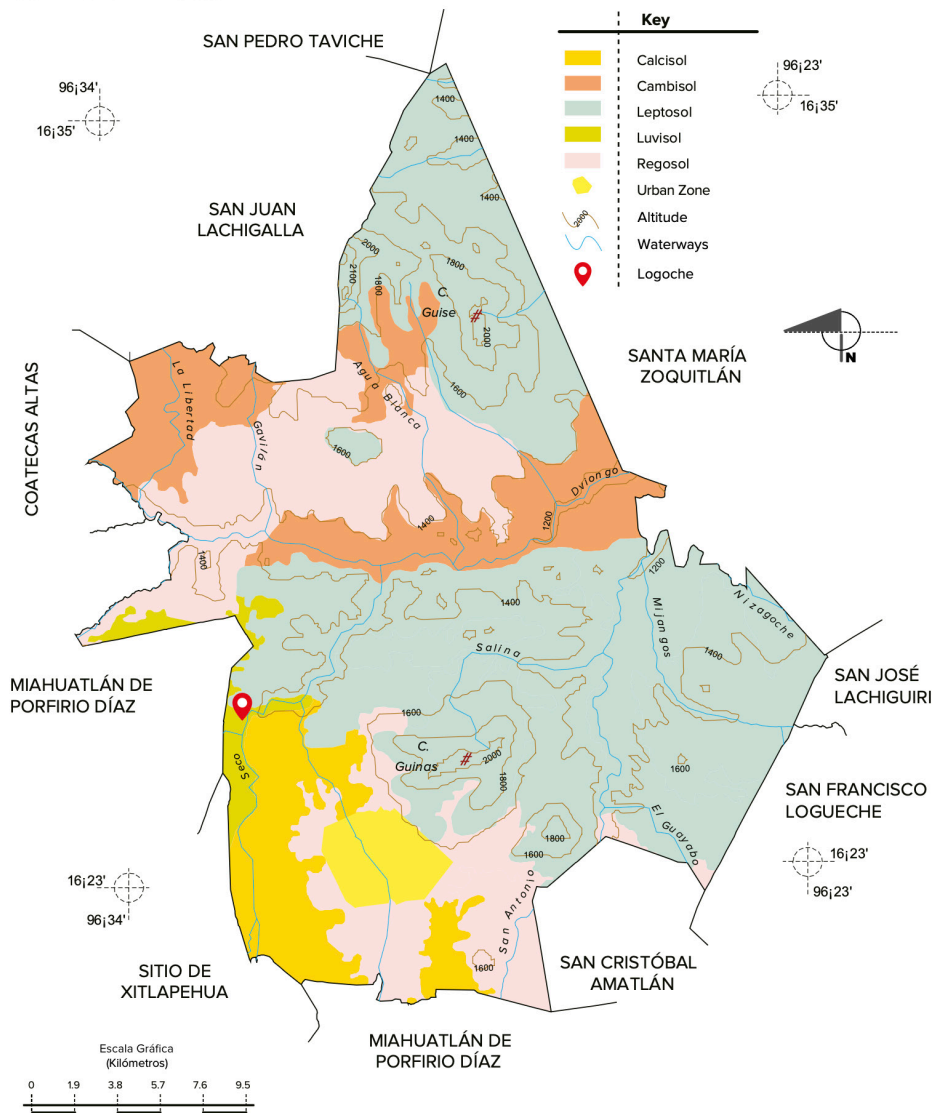
Every batch starts with harvesting fully ripe agaves, grown using guía or capón methods (where they’re castrated and then left to rest for a few months), often from a mix of species or varieties, usually around the full moon.

The agaves are then slow-roasted together in an earthen, conical pit. The roasted agave hearts, or piñas, are either separated for smaller batches or macerated and fermented together for a single batch.

Distillates from different runs are never blended, homogenized, or adjusted to a specific alcohol level. Each production is one-of-a-kind and bottled at its natural proof by the cooperative members and their families.

San Luis Amatlán & Its Terroir

Map of San Luis Amatlán



Soil studies help us understand how wild agaves first took root in this region, and reveal the unique character that shines through in every batch. The agave variety and type of soil combine to create something truly one-of-a-kind.

Fuente: INEGI. Marco Geostatístico 2010, Versión 4.3.
 INEGI. Información Topográfica Digital Escala 1:250 000 serie III.
 INEGI. Continuo Nacional del Conjunto de Datos Geográficos de la Carta Fisiográfica 1:1 000 000, serie I.
 INEGI-CONAGUA. 2007. Mapa de la Red Hidrográfica Digital de México escala 1:250 000. México.



© Mauricio Novelo Jarque

The Importance of Community

We know that the Logoche community has been making mezcal since 1890, when four palenques (small distilleries) were set up. The first generations kept this tradition alive and, in the 1970s, were granted permission to expand their production.

With the help of the 5th and 6th generations of palenqueros, mezcal production now supports over 110 people today! It's an intergenerational journey, full of stories, close family ties, and a spirit of sharing. In these small communities, it's common not to pay for a service or a product, but instead to trade a helping hand. Mutual support is essential at every key moment—when the village grows, during weddings, or when a new batch of mezcal is created. Everyone gathers around the maestros to lend their support.



© Mauricio Novelo Jarque

Growing Agave and the Vital Role of Bats

At NETA, agave isn't simply seen as a raw material—it's treated as a living being, deeply rooted in the landscape, climate, soil, and the know-how passed down through generations of producer families. Cultivating agave is crucial, shaping not only the quality of the spirit but also the survival of a rich agricultural and cultural ecosystem in Miahuatlán, Oaxaca.

The journey starts long before harvest, in the nursery. These nurseries make it possible to select, nurture, and protect young agave plants, encouraging resilient farming that's less dependent on monoculture. This work is especially important in regions where some varieties are rare, slow-growing, or found only in small areas.

Among these, Bicuixe is often semi-cultivated, marking boundaries and helping prevent soil erosion. Madrecuixe holds a special place as a local variety acting as a “mother plant,” sparking new regional agave types. Cuixe Verde, for example, is the result of open pollination, grown from Madrecuixe seeds.

NETA also celebrates Tobaziche, Coyote, Tepextate, Tobalá, Jabalín, Pulquero, Espadín, and *Agave americana*, showing that mezcal's richness comes from its botanical diversity first and foremost.

This diversity is invaluable—each species and variety brings out unique expressions of terroir, ripeness, water availability, and connections with local pollinators.



© Eirini Pajak

This is where nectar-feeding bats come in—they're essential for the sexual reproduction of agaves. Carrying pollen from flower to flower, bats ensure genetic diversity among agave populations and play a key role across Mexico. Without their help, fields replanted only by cuttings or clones become genetically uniform, making them more vulnerable to disease, climate change, and a loss of flavor complexity.

That's why it's so important to maintain corridors of mature, flowering agaves: these stretches provide bats with a steady food source as they travel on their nightly and migratory routes. In fact, these migration paths go far beyond Mexico's borders.

Tasting Notes

These spirits were showcased during this masterclass, and here are a few thoughts on the lineup. In my opinion, each one stands out as truly fascinating. Available in France at [Mezcal Brothers](#).

NETA Espadín Capón - Margarita Sánchez Díaz (2026) - [LINK](#)

46.8%.

Capón (the cut flower stalk) allows the sugars to concentrate in the agave.

- Nose: olive, herbs, green notes
- Palate: rich, salty, mineral
- Finish: long, dry, structured

NETA Madrecuishe Capón - Tomas García Cruz - [LINK](#)

50.4%.

- Nose: pepper, ripe fruit, spices
- Palate: generous, fruity, floral
- Finish: extra long, spicy

Impressive power with remarkable complexity.



NETA Bicuixe – Familia García Cruz - [LINK](#)

50%.

- Nose: white fruits, dried herbs, floral notes
- Palate: clean, taut, mineral
- Finish: salty, precise

Keep in mind that tasting is a personal journey, and impressions (as well as preferences) can differ from person to person.

CONCLUSION

NETA isn't about taking shortcuts or chasing instant appeal. The project stands for an agricultural, cultural, and deeply human perspective on agave distillates.

By offering unique batches, NETA empowers producers to raise the value of their craft, keep working according to their local traditions, and avoid the pressures of market trends—especially those favoring low-proof, standardized distillates often used in cocktails.

Every bottle tells a story:

- a distinct region,
- unique environmental conditions,
- specific yeasts and soils,
- and the unmistakable touch of the men and women who crafted it.



© Jake Lindeman

NETA, which means "the truth," stood out to us for its genuine approach to traditional agave spirits. Niki Nakazawa, its founder—passionate and deeply knowledgeable—pours her heart into honoring the land and the people of southern Miahuatlán. Here's to NETA's continued success!

Special thanks to Niki for sharing visuals, photos, and her feedback with us.

AGAVE

CHRONICLES - N°4



Thus concludes this new issue of Agave Chronicles. A rich edition that, we hope, has taken you on a journey and awakened your senses.

Exploring agave culture, discovering new landscapes and new spirits — this is the quest that drives us. A journey we strive to share with you through a sincere perspective, shaped by our experiences and encounters.

Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who helps bring this project to life, near and far: for your ideas, your invitations to intimate masterclasses, and your thoughtful reviews of the articles we hold so dear.

With each issue, our understanding deepens. We become more aware of the impact of these age-old traditions, which invite us to question, to revisit history, and to admire the richness and beauty of this culture. We are also continually struck by the vastness and diversity of Mexico — not to mention other agave-spirit-producing countries that we look forward to introducing in our next issue.

We move forward with a clear editorial line: independence, curiosity, and sincerity. To date, we have no commercial partnerships — only genuine favorites and discoveries that we freely choose to highlight.

If you are a brand whose approach resonates with ours, we would be delighted to discover your work.

Once again, thank you to everyone who follows this journey and shares in our passion.

Jack & Clara

