

# Indulge./Wine & Spirits/

## Liquor

# Swell Swills

At last, smoky mezcal makes its mark in the U.S. New releases you'll want to track down.

BY JOSEPH GUINTO

**T**HERE'S A SAYING at Del Maguey, an Oaxaca, Mexico-based spirits exporter: "You don't find mezcal. Mezcal finds you." Right now, mezcal, a once-obscure, smoke-filled, agave-based Mexican spirit, is finding more people in the U.S. than at any time in its long history.

Mezcal has been distilled in Mexico for more than 400 years. Typically produced in tiny batches by small-village farmers who just sold it locally, the spirit only rarely popped up in the states. That has changed dramatically in the last decade as the bibulous have discovered the wildly varying flavors that result from the spirit's rustic method of production — the hearts of agave plants are roasted for days in fire pits, mashed, left in the open to ferment with wild yeasts, and then distilled.

"Ten years ago, it was hard to find mezcal anywhere outside of Mexico," says John McEvoy, a former Wall Street professional who authored the 2014 book *Holy Smoke! It's Mezcal!* "But I just saw a bottle at an airport bar in Newark. If mezcal is there, then mezcal has really arrived."

Here, three of the newly arrived artisanal mezcals we like best.



### Del Maguey Mezcal De Puebla San Pablo Ameyaltepec

Del Maguey believes terroir is as important to mezcal as it is to wine. When this mezcal hits stores later this summer, it will give most Americans their first taste of Puebla's terroir. That Mexican state just received official mezcal certification from the Mexican government this year. Del Maguey partner Michael Gardner says the mezcal made in the lush, hillside village of San Pablo Ameyaltepec is "incredibly floral" and has "an elegant mouthfeel."

**Details:** 47 percent ABV; \$100/750 mL

**More info:**  
delmaguey.com

### Mezcal Amarás Cupreata

Translated literally, Mezcal Amarás is "mezcal you will love." Introduced to just a handful of markets in the U.S. by Anchor Distilling Co. last June, with a broader rollout scheduled for late this year, the brand's Cupreata is made in Mazatlan in the state of Guerrero. The hearts of cupreata agave plants are roasted for five days in stone ovens, using sustainable firewood. That long roasting time results in a supremely smoky mezcal.

**Details:** 43 percent ABV; \$60/750 mL

**More info:**  
anchordistilling.com

### Mezcal Viejo Indecente Espadín

Oaxacan-made mezcal is nearly synonymous with "smoky" because most producers there bake agave hearts in wood-fueled fire pits before distillation. But for this mezcal, which arrived in the U.S. late last year, third-generation distiller, Jose Lucas, steams agave hearts in clay ovens. The method dates to colonial times and is meant to capture the full flavor of agave without overlaying smoky flavors. Lucas' Espadín has a nose of mountain flowers and a crisp, citrus acidity.

**Details:** 47 percent ABV; \$60/750 mL

**More info:**  
viejoindecente.com

## Two New U.S. Mezcalerias Where You Can Drink It



### Chicago

#### Mezcaleria Las Flores

The cocktail menu at this Logan Square swillery, just opened in March, is dedicated to agave-based spirits. "Mezcal is a spirit that you can't hide in a mixed drink," says partner/bartender Jay Schroeder, former bar director at Rick Bayless' Frontera Grill in Chicago. "You have to embrace the smoke and its bold qualities and allow them to shine." 3149 W. Logan Road; 773-278-2215; mezcalerialasflores.com

### Washington, D.C.

#### Espita Mezcaleria

Also opened in March, this bar serves more than 80 different mezcals and Southern Mexico-inspired cuisine. "Mezcal has a variety of flavors, ranging from acidic to sweet to savory," says owner Josh Phillips. "Even with its high alcohol-by-volume, mezcal tends to be very smooth and subtle, so it rarely overpowers the food we serve it with." 1250 9th St. NW; 202-621-9695; espitadc.com