

This was also written for a bar trade publication

Tequila, the word/name brings to mind varying images from brain-destroying hangovers due to drinking “I’ll never do it again”, rotgut drinks to visions of pensively sipping a rare product that can cost \$1000 a bottle out of a brandy snifter.

Will the “real tequila” please stand up? In fact, both of the above and a full variety in between are all true, real tequilas. This is assuming we are leaving out of the consideration the fake tequilas, those outlaws that are still sometimes found in Europe despite international legislation against them. To be a true tequila the spirit must be made from at least 51% blue agave (the cactus-like plant that takes on average 9 years to mature), the agave can only be grown in certain demarcated regions of central Mexico and it must be distilled at least two times. Some true tequilas can be rough and are not for the “delicate” drinker, but even those are very different to the fakes which used to be around harming the image of tequila.

What are the appeals of tequila to today’s drinkers? Why is this spirit growing in sales internationally while many others are static or even losing sales? To answer that let’s first look at the elements that are unique to tequila. There is the incredibly long growth period of the agave plant, 9 years. No other spirits’ raw material is so long in the growing. It is Mexico’s national beverage. Beer is more widely consumed in Mexico than tequila but it is tequila that Mexicans proudly feel is “their” special contribution to the world of drinking. Tequila’s international image is...(ask yourself)... one of edgy danger, non-conformity, sociability. It has a taste like no other spirit which is a challenge to describe. Many have exclaimed “yuck!”, which is fair enough. Certainly tequila is one of those tastes which pretty much demands being acquired. This may be a key to some of its appeal. Its inebriating effects are seen or remembered as different to other “highs”. Maybe it’s those long years of soaking up the powerful Mexican sun that gives it such a big influence? One way or another this element must add to tequila’s image.

Then there are the myths about tequila, that it’s made from cactus, that there’s a worm in it and that it’s hallucinogenic. None of these are true yet the ideas add color to what people think of it. Finally, of all of the above it will probably be the image composite that sells the most tequila to customers. After all in today’s marketplace it is image, image, image that counts. Think about it and how to use it to its proper advantage.

There are three basic ways tequila is consumed. Shooting is done usually with ordinary or even inferior tequila, hence it is taken past the taste buds[sensors] as quickly as possible. Mixing tequila is most often done with ordinary or upper-market tequilas depending on the view of the bartender. The largest selling cocktail in the world is the margarita. A lot of these are made unfortunately with poor quality tequila. However a margarita, properly mixed with good tequila, is a versatile beverage. It is enjoyed before, during, and after a meal. A good margarita is not difficult to make if, like all things, the basic ingredients are good. One needs to start with freshly squeezed citrus juice, either lemon or lime, and a “real” tequila which has a discernable amount of agave flavor (often

referred to as earthy, peppery, herbaceous) and most any triple sec (curacao) will do. The secret is to make the mixture with not too much triple sec so that the result is "dry" and more-ish. Different tequilas will make different tasting margaritas.

Sipping tequila like a fine cognac or single malt whiskey has been hitting more and more mainstream since the middle 80's. Tequilas in the sipping/savouring category are most often 100% agave. They can be young and reposado (cured for up to one year in oak) and are commonly the anejos (aged more than one year in new or used American or French natural or toasted oak). Generally the more age and the more toasting of the wood (even to deep charring) the more deep, rich flavours and colours will be produced. This can create a more "luxury" spirit, rare and expensive.

Finally just a little bit about each type of tequila and their appeals. Young tequila, when well made, will have the strong, unique agave flavour essence. As such it is great to sip for those who have acquired the taste. It is also ideal to make a pure (strong agave flavoured) margarita.

Reposado tequila retains the agave flavor but is softened and rounded by being aged in oak. Women are attracted to this type. Anejo has the same agave basis but is refined and somewhat covered over by the age and oak (especially in the case of toasted or burnt oak barrels). Which tequila will appeal most to one or another depends on what is desired. Tequila can be sharp and exhilarating when young, mellow and smooth as

an anejo, or in between like a reposado. There is something for everyone.

Mark, the foregoing is intended to be a draft you can edit as you wish. My idea is to combine it w/ statements from some of our key bar staff. My choices would be Charly or Ed from Maiden Lane, Pablo or Francisco from Langley St., and Patrick or Kayum from Fulham. I hope this works out, Tomas p.s. I'm available by my e-mail