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THE AMBASSADORS

Quintessential (and tasty) examples of the eight types of good tequila

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A FEW WEEKS AGO, we took an hour and a half out of a busy Wednesday to sit at a table covered with little stemmed glasses of tequila. Our entirely altruistic purpose: to identify perfect examples of each of the eight types of quality—that is, 100 percent agave—tequila. It comes in four official aging categories, which you'll find on the label: blanco, reposado, añejo, and the relatively new extra añejo. And two unofficial styles: highland and lowland (which you won't find on the label). The first, made from agaves grown in the volcanic uplands in the part of Mexico the stuff hails from, tends to be brighter, more acidic, with notes of olive brine and green pepper. The second, from the plateau around Guadalajara, is generally fruitier, with a whiff of tropical funk. Here, then, are eight benchmark tequilas. What? There are ten? Okay, so we had a hard time narrowing them down.

	HIGHLAND	LOWLAND	
Blanco ○ <i>This can rest in any sort of container up to 60 days before bottling.</i>	 EL TESORO PLATINUM Sharp and lively and intense; \$38.	 ARETTE BLANCO SUAVE Fruity and floral; \$50.	
Reposado ○ <i>Aged 60 days to a year. (This is our favorite category: The oak-aging mellows them without killing the agave, as often happens with añejos.)</i>	 SIETE LEGUAS Chalky and bright—nice; \$42.	 PARTIDA Smooth and utterly elegant; \$58.	 CUERVO TRADICIONAL Figs and chocolate—great value; \$25.
Añejo ○ <i>Aged one to three years in oak barrels (usually old bourbon ones).</i>	 CHINACO Knife-edged balance between lovely oaky richness and wild agave funk; \$60.	 HERRADURA Mellow but not without a little bite; \$50.	
Extra Añejo ○ <i>Aged more than three years in oak barrels (sometimes with very old tequila blended in).</i>	 GRAN CENTENARIO LEYENDA Like incense—really good incense; \$250.	 CABO UNO Layers of vanilla and upfront spice easing into a mellow finish; \$250.	



The True Spirit of Tequila
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