



Frontiers In LA

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FRONTIERS IN LA



Indulge by Brian Padgett

The 120 Days of Tequila

It may seem impertinent to comment on a restaurant's ability to pair alcohols with its cuisine. Sommeliers regularly facilitate flavorful marriages of food with wine, and gastropubs have been pairing their takes on traditional fare with selections from impressive beer lists for quite some time. Just when you thought the libation matchmaker had mixed and paired to the max, enter Redondo Beach's Ortega 120. Named

for both executive chef and co-owner Thomas Ortega and the selection of 120 tequilas available, the era of tequila paring has arrived.

Although there existed a long history of fermenting the sap of the agave plant in what is now Mexico, it was not until after the introduction of European-style distillation that the antecedent to modern tequila was developed. Its iconic association with Mexican culture, however, was not cemented until the Mexican Revolution in the early 1900s. It is precisely this culture that co-owner Demi Stevens and Chef Ortega—who cut his teeth at such established L.A. eateries as Patina and Water Grill—hope to share with diners through light and fanciful food and drink pairings.



The True Spirit of Tequila
www.partidatequila.com





“To me, this is Mexican food. This is how I grew up eating. I didn’t grow up eating...everything covered with cheese,” he asserts.

If the notion of pairing tequilas with food sounds bizarre, the confusion is likely rooted in past experiences with poorly crafted concoctions. This is a misfortune entrepreneur **Gary Shansby** has been working fastidiously to help you avoid, thanks to his premium tequila line **Partida**. **Partida** was rated higher than any other leading tequila brand based on aggregate scores in a recent taste test conducted by the Academy of Tequila, and is among Ortega’s 120. By maintaining the highest production standards, **Partida** tequilas tend to resemble a cognac or single malt whiskey rather than those of the shot-slammng variety.

“I’d rather have you sip and savor,” Shansby instructs, “it’s much more fun.”

Partida produces four premium tequilas that I was fortunate enough to experience with Chef Ortega’s dishes. After the Taco de Atun Crudo amuse—Ahi Poke style yellowfin tuna, roasted corn, fresh mango, cilantro, roasted red peppers, chili oil in a crisp taco shell topped with chili crèma fresca and fresh guacamole—did we have our first pairing. Of the four tequilas, **Partida’s Blanco**, so named for its lucid appearance, has not been aged in American oak barrels like its counterparts. Chef Ortega’s pan-seared snapper, served with onion, tomato, cilantro and white wine alongside lime-scented rice, captures the citric notes of the Blanco, creating a prolonged flavorful episode. **Partida’s Reposado** is the exact same product as the Blanco but has been aged six months, imbuing it with an amber appearance and a richer, sweeter flavor. The sweetness of Chef Ortega’s slow-braised chili short-rib coordinates well with the tequila, likely because of the **Partida** agave nectar glaze, while the savory pozole risotto balances the dish nicely. **Partida’s Añejo** has been aged 18 months, intensifying the fruit and almond accents, which pairs with Chef Ortega’s house-made churros, Mexican-style chocolate and vanilla bean ice cream. The meal concluded with **Partida’s Elegante** tequila acting as a digestif; with only 1,500 bottles produced annually, this premium beverage begs to be savored because, to quote Shansby, it is “much more fun.”

If you want to learn more about tequila’s versatility, Stevens hosts “Tequila University” the second Tuesday of every month from 7-9 p.m, and with such a wide selection to learn from, there is no better place than Ortega 120.

the details

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ortega120.com

partidatequila.com



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