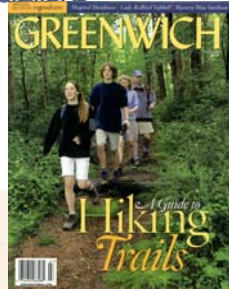


# Greenwich Magazine

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TASTINGS



## THE SPIRIT OF MEXICO

BY ANTHONY DIAS BLUE

Serious tequila connoisseurs owe a debt to crooner Bing Crosby and his buddy, comedian Phil Harris. For many years the only tequilas available in the States were *mixto* tequilas, made by mixing pure agave nectar with lesser-quality sugars during fermentation. But Bing and Phil had spent “quality time” south of the border, where they developed a taste for true 100 percent agave tequilas. Having enjoyed the Herradura brand in Mexico, the two celebrities teamed up in the early 1960s to import it to the States. *Herradura* means “horseshoe,” and this one was an instant ringer. For several decades Herradura was the only premium 100 percent agave tequila that made its way north.

Bing and Phil have gone on to sip margaritas

in that great cantina in the sky, but today the super-premium tequila craze they kindled is on fire. Although Mexico’s strict regulations allow up to 40 percent non-agave sugars in tequila, premium tequilas are made from 100 percent blue agave – the variety known to science as *Agave tequilana Weber var. azul*. Look for the statement “100 percent agave” on the bottle to make sure you’re getting the real thing.

There are three basic styles of premium tequila. Blanco (also called silver) sees little or no time in wood and is transparent in color; blanco is often used for cocktails or for “shooting” with salt and lime. Reposado is rested in wood casks for up to one year, taking on an amber hue; it’s fine for serious mixed drinks or can be enjoyed straight up. The darker añejo is aged at least one year (sometimes up to four) in wood and is considered a sipping tequila, on a par with a fine

Cognac or Scotch. Americans consume the lion’s share of Mexico’s premium tequilas, with around twenty million bottles being imported here each year. New brands swoop down on consumers almost weekly with the urgency of Zorro leaping from a balcony. Since good tequilas take time to make (agave, the plant from which tequila is made, needs eight years in the ground before it’s harvested), most of these newer brands were planned well in advance of their appearance on your retailer’s shelf.

Partida is the result of a collaboration between private equity investor J. Gary Shansby and octogenarian Enrique Partida, one of Mexico’s largest agave growers. Although new to the market, these are classic tequilas. The bright, elegant **Partida Añejo** (\$67) is particularly fine with its spicy agave fruit and toasty oak.

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