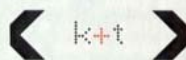


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[HAVING A MOMENT]

Tequila Cocktails

Conventional wisdom says that tequila works with sugar, salt, and lime juice—and that's about it. This unyielding approach probably stems from the liquor's taste spectrum: One brand can be floral while another is earthier than dirt. That means that breaking out of the margarita box requires a level of skill the average bottle jockey doesn't possess. Fortunately, the bartenders at some of the country's top watering holes are up to the challenge. *Rob Willey*



THE ONES TO TRY

APEROL SUNSET

At Pegu Club, a SoHo spot, bartenders mix silver tequila with lemon juice, two syrups—cane sugar and grapefruit—and the aperitif Aperol. 77 W. Houston Street, 2nd floor, New York, 212-473-7348, peguclub.com

NOCTURNE

Silver tequila is blended with fresh apple and lemon juices, house-made cassis, and cardamom at Teardrop Cocktail Lounge, a slick Pearl District bar. 1015 NW Everett Street, Portland, Oregon, 503-445-8109, teardroplounge.com

BELLE

This brazen combination of aged tequila, dry vermouth, absinthe, Galliano (an herbal liqueur), and orange bitters is part of a rotating drink list at the nautical saloon Bar Pilar. 1833 14th Street NW, Washington, D.C., 202-265-1751, barpilar.com

YELLOW ROSE OF TEXAS

A provocative mix of silver tequila, yellow Chartreuse, and rose water, the Yellow Rose is the drink to settle in with at the Violet Hour, a lounge in Wicker Park. 1520 N. Damen Avenue, Chicago, 773-252-1500, theviolethour.com



[THE RECIPE]

La Rosita

La Rosita, a tequila-based riff on the Negroni, is potent but smooth—in other words, everything a cocktail should be.

1½ oz silver tequila, such as Patrón (smooth) or Herradura (pungent)
½ oz Campari

½ oz sweet vermouth
½ oz dry vermouth
1 dash Angostura bitters
1 lemon twist

Fill a pint glass with ice, add the liquids, and stir briskly. Strain into a chilled glass and garnish with the twist.

[THE POUR]

Mezcal

Mezcal, tequila's smoky Oaxacan cousin, is a sipping spirit. Drink Del Maguey or the soon-to-be-released Sombra—both worthy substitutes for añejo tequila or single-malt Scotch—neat. And if you're feeling experimental, add a splash to an old-fashioned made with tequila.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS MOTTALINI. SHOT AT BARRIO CHINO (CENTER) AND PEGU CLUB (TOP), NEW YORK.