

# Jay Weston's Restaurant Newsletter

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## Partida Tequila

### The Blue Agave of my Dreams

For many years during its development, *Partida* was the best-kept secret in the world of tequila. There were hints about the new brand among tequila aficionados, but it was three years ago that the mythical spirit was unveiled by Gary Shansby, the man who had a dream of making the world's best tequila and turned it into an exquisite reality. "I always knew we could create an incredible tequila by keeping what was best of the traditional production process while innovating where needed. The truth is, though, that **a great tequila is only as good as the blue agave plant from which it is made.** That is why we are so fortunate to meet Don Enrique Partida who owns one of the leading agave estates in Amatitan, very close to Tequila in the state of Jalisco. It takes seven to ten years for a premium plant to mature properly. We went against prevailing thought to plant the blue agave further apart, spacing them to give them more sunlight and air. The result: a higher sugar content and incomparable flavor, making our tequila richer and more flavorful than others...a delicate note of sweetness and unique smoothness on the palate."

Gary went on to rhapsodize about the new, just introduced (at the Aspen Food and Wine Festival) *Partida Elegante*, which has a clean dry taste with just a touch of wild honey...aged for three years, this exquisite offering should be sipped like cognac, over ice or in a snifter. It sells for \$350/bottle and there are only a limited number of bottles, less than 1,500, in the first release. For the Partida Margarita with our own Partida 100% organic agave nectar, I use the *Partida Blanco* a somewhat lighter taste, citrusy with a touch of black pepper, or *Partida Reposado*, aged six months in oak barrels. (All tequilas are 80 proof, 40 % alcohol by volume.)

Somewhere in heaven, Bing Crosby is looking down at me and smiling. Let me



Tequila Cocktail with lime.

explain: many years ago, crooner Crosby first introduced me to the pleasure of the wondrous elixir called **tequila**. It was at the bar at the illustrious *Racquet Club* in Palm Springs. Crosby was making a film called *High Society*, with Frank Sinatra and Grace Kelly, supposedly set at the Newport Jazz Festival, and since I had been one of the founders and the publicist for the festival, I was unofficially 'vetting some musical details.' The singer and his genial sidekick, Phil Harris, were extolling the wonders of this relatively unknown drink from Mexico, a brand of which they had grandly acquired for U.S. distribution...although I suspect most of it was consumed at that bar. Like all good cowboys in the Western movies I adored as a kid, I thought I knew the procedure to drink it, what was called 'the Mexican itch'...pour some salt in the web of the left hand, then swallow a shot of tequila, lick the salt, and squeeze the juice of a lime into your mouth. I was made to realize quickly that it was not to be done with this incredible spirit...it was to be drunk straight or over a little ice. Since that long-ago evening, I have never lost my taste for tequila. There was a period some years ago when it was almost impossible to get a great tequila here, but then the golden potable at the end of the rainbow became more available. Now I'm in heaven, for I've discovered the tequila of my dreams. (Or it discovered me, thanks to long-time sub-

scriber Chuck Fries who introduced me to it.) One taste of this golden *anejo* and I knew that my quest was over. There's an Aztec legend that the gods sent a bolt of lightning which struck the agave plant and split it in two, cooking the heart of the plant, which then began oozing *pulque*, a sweet warm sap known as 'nectar from the gods.' Today the fermentation of *pulque* is still part of the preparation of fine tequila. The *Partida* estate is a magical region of arid mountains, rich clay-like soil, pure water and splendid sunshine which gives life to a smooth blend. Its also home to the Partida family, who personally oversee the planting and harvesting of the blue agave plants, which features majestic fondos and a huge root which grows in the ground until it is ripe, from 7-10 years to mature. Unearthed, the bulb weighs in at up to 200 pounds. The Mexican call them 'pinas,' Spanish for pineapple, because of its shape ...the tuber is steamed 'til soft, then crushed; the juice is the agave 'honey' from which tequila is distilled. The *pulque* is slowly cooked in stainless steel ovens, the heavy dark liquid is fermented and pumped into stills. The liquid is aged in one-pass Jack Daniels barrels, *Reposado* for 6 months, *Anejo* for 18 months, producing just for *Partida* lightly touched with the whiskey before aging, on the way to producing the finest super-premium tequila. "You can smell the agave flavor the moment you open a *Partida* bottle," Gary said. Incidentally, I never discard the hand-blown glass decanters in which *Partida* comes. Each of these 750 ml. bottles is a hand-crafted creation, with a textured surface and the soft glow of good Mexican glass, perfect for a vase or water decanter.

The *margarita* is the single most popular mixed drink in the country today, and *Partida* has created the most unique and delicious version I have ever, ever experienced. The secret is, firstly, the pure, 100%