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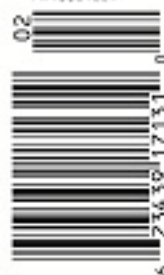
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**MEZCAL'S
SPIRITED
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*"It shocks me
how much hate
there is"*

PG. 42

CANADA'S UNLIKELIEST CRIMEFIGHTER



→ NEAL McLENNAN

Down Mexico Way

Brine, acid, and a whole lotta smoke—meet mezcal, a sipper closer in spirit to scotch than tequila

PHOTO BY MILOS TOSIC

→ WE NEVER REALLY FELT the premium tequila revolution in Vancouver, partly because the spirit had a tough time shaking its frat boy association but mostly because of insane pricing: \$80 for the cheapest bottle of Patrón makes drinking cognac look thrifty. So it's with no small amount of stones that mezcal—tequila's less famous cousin—is hoping to be the

next big thing in sipping spirits. But if there's something mezcal—long the official drink of banditos and bikers—has, it's cojones.

The mezcal we're seeing up here has no relation to the worm-in-the-bottle (it's actually a larva) rotgut seen in Danny Trejo movies. The confusion stems from the nomenclature: all spirits made from the agave

THE BOTTLES

• **JARAL DE BERRIO** (\$55) The most widely available mezcal in the province is overpriced (it costs \$37.40 in Ontario), not really artisanal (it's steamed), and at 36 percent, atypically light. It does have an interesting vegetal taste, like a smoky, diluted version of Hendrick's gin.

• **LOS SIETE MISTERIOS DOBA-YEJ** (\$56) Hawksworth bartender Jon Smolensky brings this amazing line into Canada. The Doba-Yej gives an intense fruit and floral hit that softens the not-insignificant backbone of alcohol. Excellent.

• **FIDENCIO CLÁSICO** (\$80) Importer Eric Lorenz is the country's first mezcalleer, so it's no surprise this bottle is a classic mezcal with earthy and smoky notes and a nice citrus undertone.

plant are technically mezcal. (Tequila, made only from the Weber blue agave, is actually an elevated subset.) But that's like saying a VW Golf and a Bugatti Veyron are both German sports cars. What we're excited about is artisanal mezcal, the stuff that's produced by hand in ridiculously small quantities, mainly around the Mexican state of Oaxaca. Unlike tequila—which uses steam to start its fermentation process—artisanal mezcal uses in-ground makeshift ovens, which impart its signature smoky flavour.

Most artisanal mezcal producers operate largely the same way they would have 200 years ago, so production is both expensive and tiny (about 165 million litres of tequila are exported each year, compared to 800,000 for mezcal). The upside is that few spirits express a sense of place and history better than mezcal: the smoky nose, the clean but strong delivery of flavours, and the infinite variations (from different agave like Espadín, Tobalá, and the excellently named Coyote) that move from classic Joven, or young, mezcals to those with a little age and kick. VM



The Smoking Cardigan
Jon Smolensky, Hawksworth

- 1½ oz Los Siete Misterios Copper Pot Doba-Yej
- 1 oz Punt E Mes Italian vermouth
- ¼ oz Giffard Mangalore (cinnamon/cardamom liqueur)
- 1 dash Scrapy's Chocolate Bitters

→ Stir all ingredients in a mixing glass. Finely strain into chilled coupe. Finish with a flamed orange zest. Express the caramelized oils over the glass then discard the orange.