



## FOOD & WINE

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### BOTTLE SERVICE, TEN GREAT MEZCAL TO SEEK OUT

By: Ray Isle

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#### BOZAL ENSAMBLE

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#### BOZAL / ENSAMBLE MEZCAL

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# BOTTLE SERVICE

COCKTAIL HOUR

**A Mexican Original** With its roots in culture and craftsmanship, mezcal is one of the most complex and varied spirits in the world.

By Ray Isle

At Atla in New York City, beverage director Yana Volfova makes this super-refreshing Watermelon-Cucumber Cooler using Yola Mezcal (recipe p. 59).





## TEN GREAT MEZCALS TO SEEK OUT

### MARCA NEGRA ESPADÍN (\$60)

"Marca Negra works with several maestro mezcaleros, but this espadín has been in their portfolio from the beginning," Yana Volfson says. "It showcases the way espadín expresses terroir and can stand up to the stronger flavors in a Mezcal Negroni (recipe p. 59)."

### REY CAMPERO ESPADÍN (\$48)

"Rey Campero is a sustainable project run by a single family," Yana Volfson says. "Their espadín is a solid expression of traditionally made mezcal. It's at a price point where you can make a cocktail with it, but it's also great as an introduction to what espadín mezcal is like."

### SOMBRA (\$35)

"I like Sombra's sustainability efforts, like using bagasse (cooked and pulped agave fibers) to build houses for people who lost them in the 2017 earthquake," says Miguel F. Lancha of D.C.'s Think Food Group. "Sombra's smoky and intense but great for the adventurous."

### DEL MAGUEY MINERO (\$99)

Bobby Heugel of Houston's The Pastry War says, "This comes from a palenque in [Santa Catarina Minas] Oaxaca, where the agaves are crushed by hand with wooden bats. That approach is increasingly rare, but it makes for a greater range of complex flavors."

### KOCH EL ESPADÍN DE SOLA DE VEGA, OLLA DE BARRO (\$97)

An olla de barro is a clay cooking pot; for mezcal, it means the spirit was distilled in clay rather than copper. "I like the en barro process, which gives a more mineral, earthy, chocolaty tone to mezcal," Yana Volfson says.

### BOZAL ENSAMBLE (\$50)

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### MEZCAL VAGO ELOTE (\$57)

Mike Barrow of San Francisco's Mosto says, "The agave used for this mezcal is grown together with corn, then dried corn kernels are toasted and put in the still to infuse it with flavor. Since corn is a bedrock of Mexican cuisine, that's just a lot of cool culinary synergy."

### YOLA MEZCAL (\$60)

Oaxaca native Yola Jimenez seeks to empower women in Oaxaca's rural community with her brand. "We employ 98% women. I wanted them to be able to make a product they could be proud of," Jimenez says. Espadín plus a little wild madreague gives Yola a soft subtlety.

### REAL MINERO BARRIL (\$145)

"Barril is vegetal and crisp but also dark and musky, like fresh-cut grass on a damp forest floor," Ivy Mix, of NYC's Leyenda, says. "You get classic cooked agave flavors of papaya, banana, and vanilla and a lot of minerality. It's a fantastic sipper."

### EL JOLGORIO CUISHE (\$160)

Miguel F. Lancha recommends all of El Jolgorio's mezcal. Of this one, he says: "It's unusual because cuishe is a wild agave—you have to head up into the foothills to harvest it. Like tobalá, it makes a mezcal that's fruity and incredibly complex."

## THE DEEP DIVE

The best artisanal mezcal is made in tiny amounts. But seek them out. Yana Volfson loves **Lalocura**, "the epitome of maestro-driven mezcal that respects tradition and nature," and also recommends **Neta**, a brand that works with a community of maestro mezcaleros in Miahuatlán. Gonzalo

Goût says: "Look outside Oaxaca, too—**Origen Raíz**, for instance, up north in Durango. And also, look for anything from **Cuish**—they just have amazing quality across all of their mezcal. Unfortunately, these two names aren't easy to find in the U.S., but there's quality behind every bottle they make."