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THE 7 BEST NEW MEZCALS YOU CAN BUY RIGHT NOW

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While it could be argued that mezcal is tequila (with some detours in agave selection and distilling techniques), tequilas are definitely not mezcals. The difference is in the fire-roasting of agaves in stone pits or clay ovens for mezcal, which gives the spirit its characteristically sweet—and often tart—smokiness. Yet even this has come a long way from the early days of mezcal production, with today's increased focus on terroir and aging techniques. Like its cousin tequila, the number of high-quality mezcals on the market continues to grow.

This has created in an ever-widening spectrum of flavors. The result is a multifaceted spirit that has become a bartender's "go-to" secret ingredient for tweaking classic cocktails such as Margaritas, Palomas and even Negronis. As a result, mezcal sales are predicted to increase nearly 18 percent by the end of 2022, according to a study by Future Market Insights.

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However, for the purest, mezcal is best appreciated sipped straight, at room temperature, in a traditional vaso veladoras (a votive candle holder) or shot glass. But whether savored mixed or neat, here are seven of the best new breeds of mezcal.

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Bozal Tepeztate

This mezcal's gracefully elongated ceramic bottle tells you this is a spirit for special occasions and special friends. Bozal Tepeztate is an easy-sipping, single varietal mezcal—a subspecies of the Marmorata family of agaves that grow wild on the sides of the steep, rocky cliffs of Oaxaca. The mezcal it yields is sweet and spicy, with a soft earthiness and a gentle pinch of spice in the finish.

BOZAL / TEPEZTATE MEZCAL