



June 1, 2023

## BOZAL ENSAMBLE MEZCAL REVIEW

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VPM: 810,570

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This light and approachable mezcal is a great introduction to the category.

Bozal translates to “wild” or “untamed” in Spanish, and is named for the native agave species harvested for the distillery’s mezcals, as well as the traditional practices used during production. The Ensamble expression is made using three different types of agave: espadín—a cultivated species that compose 90% of Mexico’s mezcal production—as well as barril and mexicano, both of which are harvested from the wild.

Our tasting panel concluded that this spirit is a solid representation of the complexities found in a mezcal made from multiple varieties of agave. With the lighter nose and palate, our reviewers

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agreed that this is an excellent introduction to the category, especially for those who have been intimated by the common descriptor "smoky," which is often erroneously used to describe mezcal as a whole.

### Pros

- A great example of a blend of agaves varieties
- Attractive bottle and packaging
- An excellent introduction to the mezcal category

### Cons

- May be too light on nose and palate for those seeking a stronger mezcal
- Not ideal for those who seek prominent notes of smoke

### Tasting Notes

**Color:** Clear

**Nose:** Wet clay, fresh cut grass, white flowers, gardenia and sweet violet, rubber, citrus peel, raspberry, papaya, banana, olive tapenade, earth, hints of roasted agave, mesquite, well-modulated smoke

**Palate:** candied citrus peels, over-ripe pears, oregano, thyme, marjoram, earth, wet clay, flinty minerality, saline, pickled jalapeños, cooked corn, black pepper, veggie stock with celery notes, mesquite, brown sugar, orange oil, hint of serrano pepper, touch of smoke

**Finish:** Medium-long with lingering notes of earth, saline, grass, and sweet herbs

**Suggested uses:** Sipped neat or with ice/small amount of water, Smoky Margarita, Oaxaca Old Fashioned, Tommy's Margarita, Mezcal Negroni

### Our Review

As a lighter, easy-drinking mezcal, Bozal Ensemble earned generally high ratings from our reviewers across all scoring categories.

Each member of our tasting panel observed light notes of smoke and a broad approachability to Bozal. They unanimously agreed that this bottle would be a great introduction to someone not yet familiar with the mezcal category.

"The flavor of the roast is there but the star of the show is really the floral notes that come through on both the nose and the palate," says Misty Kalkofen.

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Enrique Sanchez says this mezcal is "for someone who is looking for [a] decent Margarita with mezcal that doesn't have a complex or strong character," and for "beginners that are moving from [the] tequila world to the mezcal world."

"This is a great choice for an agave enthusiast who's looking to sip something complex but not too far out there," says Joaquín Simó. "This has the minerality and savoriness you want out of a mezcal, but there are still plenty of approachable flavors that make it easy to share or recommend."

Our reviewers picked up a variety of floral notes on the nose and palate such as gardenia and violet. Earthy notes like wet clay and flint were also recognized on the nose and palate alongside fragrant herbs, citrus peel, and fresh-cut grass. A hint of mesquite and just a touch of smoke lasted from palate to a lengthy earthy finish.

On the palate, Simó notes that Bozal Ensamble Mezcal offers a "great balance between savory and sweet, with plenty of movement along the way." Adding that this bottling has a "very good structure, with the cultivated espadín providing the backbone, and the wild varieties [of] barril & mexicano adding depth and complexity." On the finish, "salty and grassy notes linger," says Simó, "a lovely reminder of the wild mexicano's influence in the blend."

Because the Bozal Ensamble "blends well with sweet and citrus," Sanchez recommends using it a Tommy's Margarita. Simó agrees, suggesting mixing it into a Smoky Margarita. Kalkofen prefers this spirit neat and thinks it is "definitely a sipper."

In terms of cost to value, our panelists were conflicted. Simó believes this bottle is priced accordingly and notes that "the beauty of this particular bottling is the two wild varieties mixed in, which makes this an excellent value proposition," while Sanchez thinks it is, "really pricey for what it is." Kalkofen, meanwhile, believes that "Bozal shines in quality alongside [similar] options...[it] would be a good introductory purchase [for] folks finding their footing among the multiple varietals used in the production of Mezcal."

Kalkofen does express concern, however, about the lower price point for a mezcal using barril and mexicano agave. "Those are two species that are slowly disappearing in Oaxaca, and at that

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price, I'm guessing demand is quite high," she says. However, representatives from Bozal do state that the producer replants two agave for each one harvested.

### Production

Bozal Ensamble Mezcal is produced using a blend of three different agaves: espadín—the agave most commonly used in mezcal, which is generally planted and cultivated—supported by the addition of wild agave species, barril and mexicano. Made in the artisanal method, the agave is hand-harvested, the piñas are roasted in earthen pit ovens underground, and then crushed by a horse-turned stone tahona wheel to release the juice for fermentation. Fermented in open-air wood tanks, the spirit is then double distilled in copper pot stills.

Three different mezcaleros, or distillers—Fermin Garcia, Lucio Bautista, and Don Adrian Bautista from the Oaxacan towns, San Dionisio Ocotepec and Ejutla de Crespo—participate in producing this mezcal.

### History

In 2016, Sonoma-based négociant 3 Badge Beverage Corporation launched Bozal Mezcal, named for the wild, difficult-to-reach agave species that grow on the steep hillsides of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Durango. Led by fourth-generation vintner August Sebastiani, 3 Badge works with small villages and communities where wild agave grows, and where mezcal is handmade in limited amounts.

Bozal Mezcal's signature ceramic bottles were custom-made by San Francisco agency Swig and are a different earth-tone color for each expression. The simple, rustic design is a nod to traditional mezcal drinking vessels—terra cotta copitas.

The brand offers four regular expressions, in addition to limited edition bottlings that can feature upwards of 15 wild agave varieties native to Oaxaca, Guerrero and Durango.

### Interesting Fact

To address sustainability and biodiversity within the mezcal industry, Bozal Mezcal says they replant twice as many agave plants that they use to produce their mezcal. For every one that is harvested, two are added to a nursery for one to two years and then relocated back into the wild.]

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