

# Inked

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## HOLD THE LIMIE

### DON JULIO BLANCO

We had a hard time choosing between this and El Tesoro, but the Don Julio proved to be so clean and pure that we couldn't resist. This spirit also makes a formidable margarita, but obscuring the vivid flavors of green peppers, pineapples, herbs, and vanilla might be an even worse idea than a 3 a.m. round of body shots.

### PARTIDA REPOSADO

Using only estate-grown agave, and aged for more than 6 months in French Canadian barrels, this tequila has a brilliant pale-honey color. Notes of vanilla, hazelnut, and almond complement the agave flavors without overpowering them, and the finish has a touch of sweetness.

### GRAN PETRON

Easily the best unaged tequila in our tasting; this was so soft, so smooth, and so delicious the speed with which we sipped it was scary. Equally as frightening: the \$200 price tag.

### MILAGRO AÑEJO SELECT BARREL RESERVE

The packing: a glass representation of an agave plant inside a dramatic bottle. The spirit: vibrant agave flavors shine brightly even though they are enrobed in notes of vanilla, toast, and sweet baking spice courtesy of three years inside French oak barrels.

 Drink mellow reposados straight; save woody añejos for after dinner. If you must have a margarita, choose one featuring the bright, clean flavors of a silver tequila—and make sure it's of the non-frozen variety.

You're at a bar and it's a few drinks past midnight when your friend yells, "Tequila shots!" Flashbacks of college come and you're reminded of that astringent, putrid-tasting, hangover-inducing liquid that could only (barely) be saved by licking salt off skin and sucking on lime. All that work, so little pleasure.

By now you should know better. Tequila (like canned beer and grappa) can be added to the list of libations you thought sucked as an undergrad, but now realize can be not only palatable, but actually enjoyable. These days there's a greater range of high-quality tequila than ever before. This means entering the world of 100 percent blue agave, the raw material from which tequila is distilled. Industrial versions can use up to 49 percent of "other fermentable sugars," but the finest versions are all blue, so look for it on the label.

The three most common versions of tequila are silver (or unaged); reposado (literally "rested," or aged from two to 11 months), and añejo (aged at least one year). Since tequila is a delicate spirit and can easily be overwhelmed by wood, many enthusiasts stick to the younger versions.

Laurence Kretchmer, author of *The Mesa Grill Guide to Tequila*, suggests buying tequila from producers that have been making their product for some time. "You don't want some fly-by-night producer," he says. His other tip? "Don't fall for gimmicky packaging." Here, four of our favorite sipping tequilas—hold the salt and lime please. —Joseph Campanale

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