



IT GOES WITH NACHOS

If margaritas aren't your thing and you're bored with beer, try branching out of your chardonnay rut with a truly global match—Southern Hemisphere wine meets south-of-the-border food. This Brancott Reserve sauvignon blanc from New Zealand has mouthwatering passion-fruit flavor and tangy acidity that are refreshing with fiery foods and seamless with Mexican flavors like lime, chiles, and cilantro. —A.I.

CÓMO SE DICE "MAKE MINE A DOUBLE"?

IN HONOR OF CINCO DE MAYO, ESQUIRE'S WINE-AND-SPIRITS COLUMNIST PROVIDES A PRIMER ON AMERICA'S FAVORITE COCKTAIL

I suppose there is a woman to blame, as the Jimmy Buffett song goes, but in my book, Margarita deserves heaps of worshipful praise, not blame. And I am not alone. Her glorious, eponymous tequila-and-lime-juice concoction is America's number-one cocktail by far.

Margarita's identity and how her bracing nectar came to be are steeped in all the lore befitting a world-class cocktail. Did a bartender create it as a tribute to the object of his affection? Many stories give credit to a Mexico City socialite named Margarita who charged her bartender with creating a cocktail that would please the guests at her elaborate fiestas. Whatever story you choose to believe, you can bet the original wasn't some slushy, blended mess. With all due respect to Mr. Buffett, margaritas are best served on the rocks or—my preference, when the ingredients are top-shelf—straight up.

On my drinking calendar, Cinco de Mayo kicks off the official margarita season. Because I spent my college years in Texas honing certain crucial skills, the margaritas I make are smokin'. Consequently, I thought it timely to dispense a little womanly advice on the subject.

The only ingredients permitted to come out of a bottle are the tequila and the orange liqueur (Cointreau or triple sec). Buy a two-dollar hand reamer and juice your own limes. Whip up some homemade simple syrup (equal parts hot water and white sugar dissolved together and then chilled).

Buy a shaker, and use it. You want the Boston shaker, which is a pint beer glass that nests inside a tall metal tumbler. Put the ingredients into the glass part, tamp the metal cup over it like a lid, and then flip the whole unit so the metal part's on the bottom. Use a two-handed grasp, one on each side, and shake like hell for a slow ten count. Beware of bartenders who are wimpy shakers, which brings me to my next piece of advice.

The best place to drink margaritas is at home. On the porch. Around sunset.

Stupid margarita tricks to avoid: Adding blue curaçao to make the drink blue. (I hope I don't need to explain this.)

Using bottled margarita mix, sweet-and-sour mix, or bottled lime juice of any stripe. Using garbage tequila on the theory that all the other stuff will cover up the nasty taste.

On the subject of tequila, your choices have never been better. Tequila makers are now putting out small-production luxury bottlings that are pure and silky-smooth, bearing no resemblance to the slammers of your college days—thankfully. The aged styles, labeled *reposado* (rested) or *añejo* (aged), want to be sipped neat from a snifter like a fine whisky or cognac. The unaged *plata* (silver) bottlings are great on the rocks and in the margarita. They're usually distilled from 100 percent blue agave, the giant plant on which tequila is based. If the label doesn't say 100 percent blue agave, the tequila's been extended with neutral spirits, so steer clear. (This goes for the popular mass-market tequila bottlings, whose "gold" versions get their color from caramel, not aging.) The tequila below—the four on the right are oak-aged sipping tequilas—make the best margaritas.

ANDREA'S MARGARITA PERFECTA

2 oz. Sauza Centenario or 100-percent blue-agave tequila of your choice

3/4 oz. Cointreau orange liqueur

3/4 oz. fresh-squeezed lime juice

1/2 oz. simple syrup

Shake all ingredients hard, with cubed ice, in a Boston shaker. Strain into a chilled martini glass, or over ice in a rocks glass, rimmed with salt if you prefer. For rocks, add a squeeze of lime and drop the wedge in; for up, add a thin lime wheel. I like mine tart; if this is too tart for you, add another splash of simple syrup.

ANDREA IMMER



Chinaco Blanco
100 percent blue agave; bracing agave flavor.

Gran Centenario Plata
100 percent blue agave; very clean; makes a great margarita.

Sauza Centenario
I make an exception to my 100-percent-blue-agave rule with this bottling, which produces an excellent margarita.

Herradura Gold Reposado
The *reposado* designation requires sixty days' aging in wood, but this one spends more than a year.

Jose Cuervo Reserva de la Familia
Top of the line from the dominant tequila producer, this is ultra-aged, spending three years in wood, rich and almost cognac-like.

Sauza Tres Generaciones
Another ultra-aged product with at least two years in wood; soft and smooth.

Porfido Añejo
Two to three years in wood; very mellow, slightly spicy aromatics.