

ered flavor profile. In general, tasters far preferred Patrón's Añejo over its silver, finding greater balance between the aroma and taste.

PATRÓN XO CAFÉ

Type: Not applicable
Aging: Not applicable

How many trends can you bundle into one product? Patrón's newest product seizes on the popularity of premium tequilas, coffee in general, and in this case specifically, coffee liqueurs. Positioned as an alternative to traditional coffee liqueurs, this product has only a 33 percent sugar content versus the higher 49 percent typical sugar content. The result is a liqueur that is dryer in flavor, lighter and less syrupy or overly sweet. XO Café is also slightly less alcoholic than tequila at 70 proof or 35 percent alcohol by volume.

Personally, I prefer to drink my coffee and tequila separately, but if I were going to drink the new Patrón XO Café it would be neat, on the rocks or in an after-dinner cocktail.

PORFIDIO

COMPANY AND HISTORY

Porfidio has attracted quite a bit of attention from the casual as well as the more informed observers of the tequila scene—despite, and maybe even due to, its rather low levels of production.

Unlike the great old tequila companies whose history is in their generations-old Mexican families, Porfidio was founded by a non-Mexican, the thirty-something Austrian entrepreneur Martin Grassl. Since Mr. Grassl founded this premium-only tequila company, Porfidio has quickly elevated itself to the top shelf of the tequila market, where it shares space with the other premium-only producers.

On its way to the top, Mr. Grassl's Porfidio brand has garnered a great deal of attention. Much of the focus is positive, but some is critical with questions about its



authenticity, recognizing Porfidio more as a brand name than a tequila-producing company. On the good side and most importantly, notwithstanding its higher prices, Porfidio consistently receives high praise for the quality of its tequilas. The brand also has received a lot of positive attention as a result of its innovative packaging. Each product in the Porfidio line comes in a different and memorable bottle, ranging from one that is acid-etched blue glass to one that is handblown, beaker glass.

On the more controversial side is Porfidio's lack of a home. On the label of each bottle of Porfidio tequila appear the words, "bottled...by Destileria Porfidio." But this statement may be misleading. Destileria Porfidio is more accurately the name of a company rather than an actual place. As Porfidio tells the story, the company rents space in the factories of other tequila companies with excess capacity, takes over the production facility with its own equipment and personnel, applies its own production techniques, and produces its own unique tequilas distinctly for the Porfidio brand. All of the production has always taken place in distilleries in the Tequila area.

The mobile distillery approach must be working because despite the wonder of how quality can be maintained in such a seemingly temporary production context, the brand's many fans consistently praise the finished product for its quality. During my own travels in Jalisco, I had trouble finding a distillery where the product was actually being made for or by Porfidio.

PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTS

Since I was unable to observe Porfidio production firsthand, I have relied on the company and its representatives for an explanation of Porfidio's path from the agave fields to the bottle.

The company's philosophy begins with its stringent agave source selection with respect to proper maturity. Secondly, the use of juice only from the "first pressing" of the cooked agave is a strict requirement described by the company. Next, they utilize only natural fermentation yeasts, and as with most of the other premium tequila producers, they prefer alambic-style stills, rather than the more modern column stills. Finally, Porfidio distills to 40 percent alcohol by volume—which is its final usable

80 proof product—rather than distilling to a higher proof and then diluting the product with demineralized water, a procedure that is utilized when making lesser quality tequilas.

In a relatively short period of time, Porfidio tequilas have carved out a place alongside the other great connoisseurs' products. In fact, over half of all Porfidio is consumed in Mexico, with additional distribution not only in the United States but as far abroad as the Far East, Europe and even into the Czech Republic.

Where one would expect to typically see three different products from a single producer under the heading of 100 percent agave tequilas, Porfidio has developed a rather extensive line of fine products, each with its own defining characteristics.

PORFIDIO SILVER

Type: 100 percent blue agave

Aging: **Blanco**; no aging

Like all Porfidio tequilas, this one is made only from 100 percent agave juice. Porfidio Silver is an unaged tequila as is typical of the *blanco* category, and it is Porfidio's purest expression of the essence of the blue agave. Tasters found Porfidio Silver to be "citrusy," with one person even being reminded of "Absolut Citron."

PORFIDIO PLATA "TRIPLE DISTILLED"

Type: 100 percent blue agave

Aging: **Blanco**; no aging

The unusual use of the "plata" label alongside a separate and distinct product labeled "silver" may be puzzling, but in fact, to go along with the Porfidio Silver, this is a second unaged tequila from the same "producer." While most tequilas are distilled twice as required by government regulations, according to the company, this particular tequila goes through a third distillation. This extra distillation is intended to make the finished product smoother and even "purer" than a typical *blanco*, removing even more of the harsh "superior"

alcohols. Tasters preferring the “Plata Triple Distilled” to the “Silver” commented on its smoothness. Still others preferred the Silver for its lighter, fresher and fruitier agave flavor.

The bottles used for the “Triple Distilled” may be the most beautiful of any I have seen for tequila. Crafted in Guadalajara, each is dipped in acid to achieve a frosted look. Then color is rubbed in with a cloth, starting with the deep royal blue at the base, fading to an aqua green at the top.

PORFIDIO REPOSADO

Type: 100 percent blue agave

Aging: **Reposado**; aged eight months

This new product filled the only void in the Porfidio line with a *reposado* tequila that is aged eight months in small, 100-liter, heavily toasted American oak barrels. The various barrels of tequila are blended after aging to achieve the desired balance among an authentic agave aroma and a taste with a spicy hint of wood. The amber-colored *reposado* was the most popular Porfidio tequila among tasters, who thought it very “clean” for a *reposado* with excellent clarity and flavors.

In the Porfidio tradition, the *reposado* comes in a most distinctive package. This one is round stoneware with a royal blue, porcelain finish and 18K gold lettering, with a cork to close the bottle. It is definitely the most expensive *reposado* I have seen, and presently only 2,000 cases are being produced each year.

PORFIDIO AÑEJO

Type: 100 percent blue agave

Aging: **Añejo**; aged at least two years

Another very limited production item with only 2,200 cases reaching the United States each year. Porfidio blends this *añejo* from various barrels, which are aged two and three years in previously used American oak bourbon barrels. This smooth, brandy-like tequila is very mellow, but also spicy and complex, with



Porfidio has won several awards for its unique packaging. From left to right: Porfidio Añejo Single Barrel, Porfidio Añejo, Porfidio Plata "Triple Distilled," Porfidio Silver and Porfidio Reposado.

nice flowery characteristics still evident through the wood-imparted flavors.

PORFIDIO AÑEJO "SINGLE BARREL" (CACTUS BOTTLE)

Type: 100 percent blue agave

Aging: **Añejo**; aged a minimum of one year

The "Single Barrel Añejo," known as just "Cactus," is nearly twice as expensive as the regular Porfidio Añejo, and after the introduction of Porfidio "Barrique," is now the second most-expensive tequila. The "single barrel" designation refers to the fact that rather than being blended from different barrels of aged tequilas, each bottle of "Cactus" comes out of a single selected barrel, which has been aged for somewhere between one and three years. Because of the use of tequila from a single barrel for each bottle, the color of the product may actually vary with each bottle. Only new and medium toasted, 200-liter American oak barrels are each used once in the aging process for "Cactus." The presence of new oak