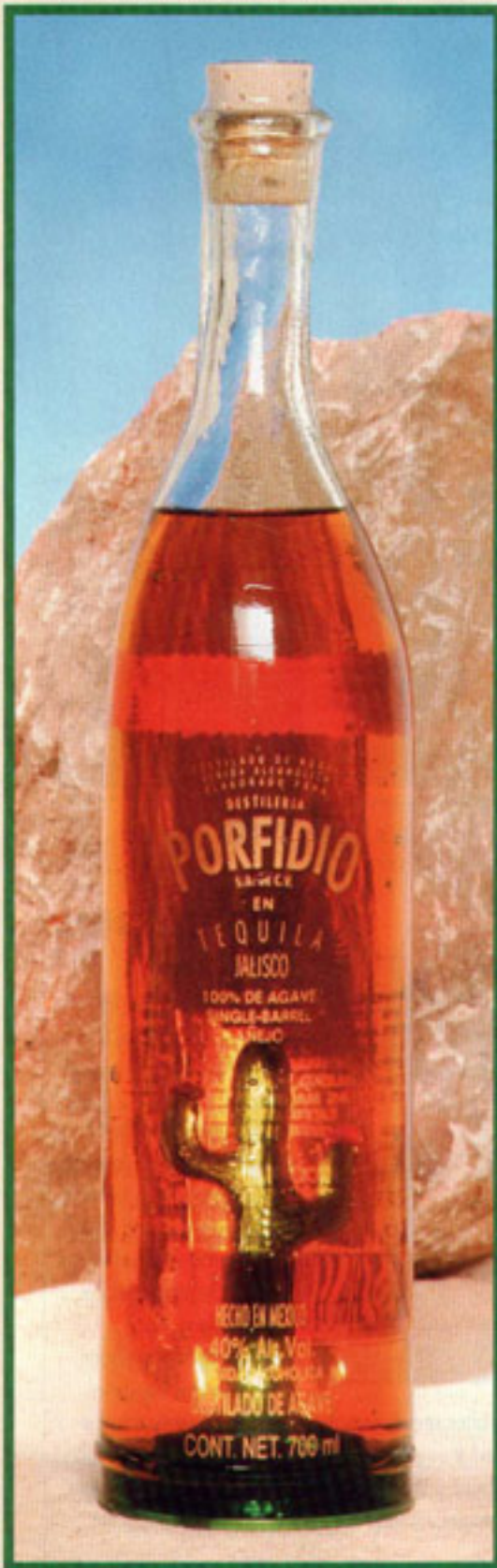


Our drink expert Dr Reg Porterhouse goes over the border to El Mexico for some **TEQUILA** tasting...



SLAMMIN'

Tequila, it makes me happy...

Well it certainly did that. A great party drink, Tequila originates from the state of Jalisco in Mexico. Produced from the sugary sap of Agave plants, which are not, in fact, cacti. They are actually a member of the lily family and quite closely related to the Yucca.

The spiky leaves are cut down and sliced. The hearts of these are removed and cooked for a few days before being crushed to release the sugary sap that forms the basis of Tequila. This sap is fermented in white oak vats for up to three days producing a low strength liquid called Mosto. The Mosto is then double distilled in copper pots producing a clear liquid of high strength, approximately 75% abv..

The various types of Tequila are then produced from this. Adding water to this distillate before immediate bottling produces Blanco Tequilas, also known as Silver, White or Plata. Gold Tequilas are produced in the same way as Blanco Tequilas except flavouring and colourings are added.

The best Tequilas are aged for some time in oak allowing the flavours to soften and mellow producing more rounded flavours. Reposado (meaning rested) Tequilas must be aged for between sixty days and a year in oak casks. However, the very best Tequilas are called Añejo. These are aged for between one and ten years in government sealed oak containers. The flavours of the oak casks will be slowly released into the Tequila really accentuating the fine flavours of Tequila and the Agave.

I began with the only Añejo Tequila on test. Porfidio Single Barrel Añejo Tequila is unlike any 'normal' Tequila I had tasted. More used to slamming with a grimace or mixing margaritas it came as a bit of a shock to slowly sip Tequila and enjoy it. Porfidio is aged in French Limousin oak barrels and the agave flavour is subdued by hints of brandy.

BOOZE



I was really taken aback by this and would recommend this highly to anyone, even those who do not normally like Tequila. It has a really rich and smooth flavour with hints of smoke. It comes in a hand-blown glass bottle with a glass cactus inside. (Even though Tequila is not produced from a cactus!)

Next on the list was the brand that probably everyone knows – Jose Cuervo (Joe Crow in English) which is the oldest Tequila company, established in 1795. I tried the Jose Cuervo Especial Reposado, which has a rich Tequila flavour but is again smooth and mellow. This is probably one of the best value Tequilas on the market and holds up well being drunk in any way you want.

Sauza Hornitos (Reposado) was next. Hornitos means 'little ovens' and this Tequila was somewhat sweeter than the last two. There are caramel flavours over

the rich agave but with citrus tones as well. It is aged in huge vats for between four to six months. The size of the vats means that less of the woody flavours are imparted into the Tequila.

Olmeca Tequila Gold is named after the Olmecs, an early Indian civilization from Mexico over 3000 years ago. It has a peppery flavour but is still fresh with fruity notes. Although this is a 'Gold' Tequila I preferred it to the Reposado Sauza.

The next two Tequilas are of the same brand. Sierra Tequila Gold and Sierra Tequila Silver. The Gold I found to be a bit lighter in flavour than some of the others but nevertheless had good flavours and was easy to drink. The Silver had stronger Tequila flavours but without a fuller taste. The only other Blanco Tequila I tried was Bambarrisa Tequila Blanco. This had a very light flavour and I did not feel that it was as well rounded as the Sierra Silver.



The last three Tequilas were all flavoured. Coming in funky square-sided bottles with a UV sensitive Scorpion logo, they will be easy to spot in bars and clubs. These were much better than some flavoured spirits, which are often weaker and overly sweet. These three are all the same strength as most Tequilas (38% abv). The first was black in colour with cinnamon flavours. This is interesting and I would definitely drink it neat on a night out. The next, which was my favourite of the three, was blue in colour, flavoured with citrus. This has the initial Tequila flavour followed by a citrus aftertaste. Everyone knows the delight of a bite of lime after Tequila and this just means you don't have to worry about the lime. The last was my least favourite, perhaps because it was sweeter than the rest. Red in colour it is flavoured with strawberry.

Overall my favourite Tequila was the Porfidio, which was a class apart. However, it tastes so different from the other Tequilas that the winner goes to Jose Cuervo Especial, closely followed by Olmeca Tequila Gold. Of the Blanco Tequilas my favourite was the Sierra Tequila Silver.

Just a short note here to give you my recipe for making the best margaritas around. Take two parts Tequila, one part Triple Sec (such as Cointreau) and one part freshly squeezed lime juice. Shake all these ingredients together with a scoop of ice and strain into a salt-rimmed martini glass. Pure pleasure.

Here's to next month.

Cheers!



Stockists:

Porfidio - www.porfidio.tequila.com, **Jose Cuervo Especial** - available in all good off licenses, **Sauza Reposado Hornitos** - www.sauzahornitos.co.uk, **Olmeca Tequila Gold** - Oddbins and selected independent retailers, **Sierra Tequila Gold and Blanco** - most major supermarkets, **Bambarria Tequila Blanco** - www.wineandspirit.com, **Scorpion Tequilas** - www.bibacity.co.uk