

# SEATTLE WEEKLY

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FOOD IN GOOD SPIRITS

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## That Latin Swing

By [Liza B. Zimmerman](#)

First it was the comeback of the tango, then the sensuality of fresh-muddled mint in a mojito. Now it seems to be the turn of almost anything Latin- and South American–inspired. Despite Seattle's less than tropical climate— or maybe because of it—pan-Latin spirits are helping heat up the atmosphere in some of our more fashionable cocktail haunts.

The focus of this new wave of drinks is on Peruvian, Chilean, and Brazilian "white distillates"—clear spirits made from various vegetable products. Cachaça provides the kick in Brazil's most famous cocktail, the caipirinha (the "nh" is pronounced just like the Spanish "ñ"). The traditional cocktail is basically muddled lime sweetened with sugar and laced with distilled sugarcane juice from São Paulo state (caipira's the country dialect thereabouts), but while we're discovering the original, trendy Brazilians are making caipirinhas with everything from vodka to sake.

Pisco is a South American grape brandy (Chileans and Peruvians fight endlessly as to which country is its true home) best known for the cool, refreshing, and almost energizing quaff called a pisco sour—clear pisco brandy beaten with a dash of syrup, fresh lime juice, and egg white, with a dribble of angostura bitters atop the foam.

You can sample the classic pisco sour as interpreted by cocktail guru Ryan Magarian at Suite 410, but variations abound. "People want something that is not going to be a huge jump out of their flavor profile," says Devlin McGill, an owner of the Great Nabob in Queen Anne. So he serves a Seagram's vodka–based version of the caipirinha called the Caipirosca (\$6) to introduce those unfamiliar with cachaça to the style and flavor of the drink. He also pours a classic caipirinha (\$6) made with Pitu-brand cachaça. The caipirinha is also a boon to the bartender. "It's less labor intensive [than mojitos] because you don't need to deal with the mint."

Over at Washington state's allegedly only Peruvian restaurant, El Chalàn in White Center, owner Raul Villalobos says he's been waiting over two years for a liquor license, and when he gets it he's going to celebrate by offering five true-blue-Peruvian variations on the pisco sour. Don't worry about trying them all: One of pisco's benefits, Villalobos notes, is that "it's 100 percent natural. You don't have any headaches."

At Galerías restaurant in Capitol Hill, where the consulates of Mexico and Peru recently sponsored a pisco and tequila tasting, owner Ramiro Rubio says customers drink pisco with Coke (\$6) as well as in sours (\$6). But since his is a Mexican restaurant, Rubio's biggest seller is naturally the margarita (\$5.25). His bar features 180 different tequilas, with one, the Porfidio Barrique, going for \$90 a shot. Though tequila is distilled from agave and pisco from grapes, he

also explains a natural synergy between the two drinks. Well, something—"Tequila, Mexico, and Pisco, Peru, are sister cities."

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