



A Beginner's Guide To: Tequila Ocho

By Samir Osman



Every seasoned drinker has had a run-in or two with the old scorpion honey. Unfortunately for most of them, the spirits they so exuberantly lapped up from the belly buttons of coeds in Cancún were very likely not quality ones, not to mention the mode of imbibing. Though in recent years tequila has become known for more than just the main ingredient in a margarita pitcher. Artisanal spirits have become more available in wider markets, and one of the recent standouts is Tequila Ocho.

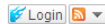
Filipe Camarena, a third generation tequilero, and Tomas Estes, known as the "tequila ambassador to the European union," have joined forces to create small-batch tequilas that are not only rare in quantity, but quality as well. They take their time producing their spirits and control the entire process. They have compared their method to the difference between what chefs call "slow food" and fast food. Slow food utilizes fresh, often organic ingredients that are cared for from seed to plate, not shipped in refrigerated big rigs from coast to coast and peddled to the hurried masses. Taking this careful route ensures that the quality of the spirit will never disappoint (and surely is not destined for the navel of Sally Jo from Iowa City atop the bar at Carlos and Charlie's).

Ocho has full supervision over the growing of the agave plants, and allows them to mature 0-10 years to ensure proper ripeness, which in turn brings complexity. The agave is cooked slowly at low temperatures. The fermenting is done slowly, and naturally in open casks. Slow distillation at low temperatures is also used. Are you seeing a trend here? What all of this means is that Ocho is painstakingly and passionately constructed, from farm to bottle, and while more expensive than most average drinkers are used to paying, it is certainly true that you get what you pay for. If you were to investigate the practices of some "big name" tequilas that we won't mention here, you will see that Ocho's cost is actually a bargain compared to the quality available on the current market.

Camarena and Estes also do something else that is rare to the tequila world. They have an intimate understanding of terroir, something usually only heard of in wine making. They not only have full control over the planting and cultivation of the agave, they also grow it at different altitudes to produce different "vintages" with each area's own character available in limited-release, hand-numbered bottles. Ocho is also known to open up in the glass much like wine. It is also the only tequila that labels each bottle with the year it was produced, as well as the estate, or "Rancho" where the agave was grown. Taking such a passionate wine-like approach to tequila making has put Tequila Ocho on the map as one of the highest-quality tequilas available today.

Posted on Monday, February 28th, 2011
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