

# Agave's other liquor contribution

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*"All Tequila is Mezcal, but not all Mezcal is Tequila"*

*"Para todo mal, Mezcal, y para todo bien, también ("For every ill, Mezcal, and for every good as well)."*

Living in San Diego, we all know our fair share of tequilas, and aficionados are aplenty. But how many of you have experimented with mezcal, tequila's brother?

Here are the raw basics: Like tequila, mezcal is produced from agave (also known as maguey). However, only one variety of agave is approved for tequila, while multiple agaves can be used for mezcal.

In both cases the agave plant matures in an astounding 8-15 years, depending on variety. (That's a long time to wait!) The extracted heart, a swollen and pulpy "pina," can weigh anywhere from 25 to a whopping 100 pounds. Tequila pinas are often cooked in steam ovens or autoclaves, whereas mezcal pinas are commonly baked in underground rock-lined pits, which cooks, caramelizes and smokes the juicy hearts, lending it distinct character.

While some territories overlap, tequila and mezcal can be made in different regions of Mexico. For mezcal, the most well known is Oaxaca.

San Diego mixologists have embraced their neighbor's spirit with a welcoming gusto, and bars like Fairweather and The Hake Kitchen & Bar happily serve it neat and in cocktails. Check out some of the city's top mezcal concoctions:

**Hello Betty Fish House, Roostertail Paloma:**  
mezcal, Malahat Ginger Rum

(local San Diego spirit), aperol, lime, grapefruit soda.



**Hello Betty Fish House's  
Roostertail Paloma made with  
mezcal. — *Courtesy photo***

Finally, don't forget to experiment with the magic of mezcal outside of cocktail enjoyment, where one sips it neat as they do in Oaxaca. Renowned mixologist and former California resident Peter Vestinos, the BarMedic, tells me, "As people gain an appreciation for mezcal, I would encourage them to take it back out of the cocktail and to savor all of its amazing layers and nuances of flavors." With bars around the city stocking up on the spirit, don't be afraid to replace that end of the evening whiskey or tequila with a fantastic mezcal. (Fans of peaty Scotch, you are going to love it.)

If you are already a lover of mezcal or want to dive in, hit up the bars listed above, or if you are feeling extra adventurous, plan a trip down to Mexico for the Feria Nacional del Mezcal in Oaxaca, held annually since 1997. On the immediate local scene, look out for the new Kimo Sabe Mezcal, making its national launch in San Diego in May.

Salud!