

LifeZette

The Tequila Takeover

How the 'new vodka' is shooting down its competition

By Susan Campos

For years, at dinner, I would simply order a vodka and club soda because the sulfates in wine put my allergies into overdrive.



Occasionally, for fun, I'd order a margarita but never thought to drink tequila on the rocks. But during a recent trip to San Francisco, I tried tequila with fresh lime and couldn't believe how smooth it tasted.

Over the past decade, tequila has gone from slammed in a shot glass to being sipped over ice. It's the drink of the moment due to a number of high-end brands pouring into the market.



Since 2002, tequila sales are rising by more than 5 percent each year, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States. The fastest growth during the past decade has been in premium tequila, where the price for the privilege can range from \$40 to well over \$,1000 a bottle.

Most tequila is made from blue agave plants in Jalisco, Mexico. When the hearts of the agaves reach maturity, they are cooked, crushed, extracted, fermented and, finally, distilled.

“Tequila has become sophisticated where it’s aged in reused whisky and wine barrels,” said Los Angeleno Steve Calabro, a mixologist famous for making killer cocktails with his Bartending Bootcamp.

It’s also touted for its low calorie count. Like vodka, tequila has about 100 calories an ounce. If you throw in a little fresh lime, that’s about 120 total.

Some even claims that like some other spirits, it may have health benefits in moderation. A study from the American Chemical Society says tequila can lower bad cholesterol.

Others dispute that, however.

“There is zero evidence that drinking a moderate amount of tequila is better than any other form of alcohol,” said **Dr. Robert Huizenga**, who consults on the television shows “The Biggest Loser” and “American Gladiator.”

Still, sales are on the rise, and it doesn’t hurt to have star power behind the bottle. Justin Timberlake is partners in the company Sauza 901. Then there’s Cosamigos, a Mexican tequila from George Clooney and Randy Gurber. It’s quickly becoming the go-to brand at trendy restaurants and clubs.



“Tequila is the new vodka, and people wanted something new,” Calabro said. “The quality of tequila has improved, and it’s no longer identified with a bad hangover.”

It now has the opposite reputation of that, with fans claiming if you drink the good stuff made of 100 percent agave, it’s rare to have a headache the next day, as long as you don’t drink too much.

“Binging is bad,” Huizenga said. “Two drinks a night is OK. Just don’t have the entire 14 drinks a week in two nights.”

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