

# Capitol File



CHEERS



The Canela margarita at Bidwell features cinnamon-infused tequila.

## Not Your Mother's Margarita

DISTRICT COCKTAIL PROGRAMS ARE SHAKING UP WARM-WEATHER CLASSICS USING TEQUILA AND MEZCAL. BY KAYLEIGH KULP

Tequila and mezcal aren't just reserved for Cinco de Mayo celebrations and the beach. "Tequila is something we need to respect and really understand. It is very complex," says Juan Coronado, beverage director for José Andrés's ThinkFoodGroup. That's why Coronado and fellow area bar chefs are using these Mexican spirits in unexpected ways, like as substitutes for gin and whiskey in barrel-aged cocktails or as the surprising stars in fresh takes on bitter, boozy classics like the Negroni. Bartenders have also taken to infusing tequila and mezcal with herbs, spices, and fruits that tame their tang while still allowing natural flavors to shine, turning timid drinkers into agave appreciators.

El Centro D.F. (1819 14th St. NW, 202-328-3131; richardsandcoal.com/dcentrodf) sells infused tequila flights that could include cherry, green tea, and cucumber, or guava and papaya, and "show the range of the products without being overpowering," says beverage director Rob Day. Want something more rich? At press time, Day was experimenting with a four-week barrel-aged cocktail of sherry, chocolate bitters, and reposado tequila. "When you stick tequila in a barrel, it tends to mellow. It produces oak and hazelnut flavors," he says.

Coronado's latest creations at Oyamel Cocina Mexicana (401 7th St. NW, 202-628-1005; oyamel.com) include mezcal-based bitters macerated with epazote and hoja santa herbs, cocoa, hibiscus, coriander seeds, red clover, and chamomile flowers that make for a complex addition to any classic tippie.

At Union Market's Bidwell (1309 5th St. NE, 202-547-0172; unionmarketdc.com/market/artisans/bidwell), the Canela margarita includes cinnamon-infused blanco tequila, lime, triple sec, grapefruit, and agave for a spiced, refreshing cocktail suitable for all seasons. And the jalapeño-infused margarita is "so popular that when it leaves the list we still do it," says co-owner Mick O'Sullivan. Conversely, for the heat-averse, the Doppelganger is a pleasantly bitter concoction of reposado tequila, sweet vermouth, and Cynar artichoke liqueur.

All of this exciting exploration and innovation may have you wondering whether tequila and mezcal are the new bourbon and rye. We say, "Si." **CF**

### • MELLOW GOLD

• As an alternative to the typical margarita, opt for Bidwell's pleasingly bitter Doppelganger.

- 1 oz. sweet vermouth
- 1 oz. Cynar artichoke liqueur
- 1 oz. reposado tequila
- Grated orange zest

• Stir all ingredients together with ice in a cocktail shaker. Strain over fresh ice into a rocks glass, top with orange zest, and serve.



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