

Janet Gyenes is a magazine writer and editor who likes to dally in spirits, especially when discovering something like corenwyn jenever (a gin-like Dutch spirit)—straight or in cocktails like the “bramble.” Have a boozy idea or question? Send it to feedback@inprintpublications.com



tequila renaissance

This agave-based spirit is far more worthy of sipping and savouring than its shot reputation

Eric Lorenz hands me a tiny vial of liquid and asks, “What do you smell?” The herbal aroma is familiar. Oregano? It’s actually thyme. The second aroma is an easy guess: mint. “Which mint?” asks Lorenz, and hands me a third vial. Peppermint. Spearmint. “In which order?” Wrong again. I’ve only nosed a few of the 50 vials of tequila aromas on hand, but the subtlety of tequila has already become obvious.

And we haven’t even had a sip yet.

Lorenz, a tequila enthusiast and educator (who holds the Distintivo “T” Diploma from the Consejo Regulador del Tequila, plus he’s Canada’s first mezcalier), started importing premium agave

spirits to Western Canada at the behest of both his students and Mexico’s master distillers. His goal was to “change people’s hearts and minds” about

the much-maligned spirit, and to transport memorable tequila-tasting experiences from Mexico to Canada by bringing in brands to satisfy aficionados and seduce neophytes into slowing down—and sipping.

Case in point: the first of our three-part vertical tasting—comparing *blanco*, *reposado*, and *añejo* tequilas (see “Primed for Tequila” sidebar) from two brands—Uno Mas (from \$50) and T1 Tequila Uno (from \$97), both 100% agave tequila.

“Two different blanco tequilas, side by side, can taste very different,” says Lorenz. “In the case of 100% agave tequila, there are certainly different quality levels, but some blancos are worth sipping on their own too.” Blanco tequilas let the herbaceous and vegetal fragrances and flavours of the agave plant stand out. When the Uno Mas blanco is first poured, says Lorenz, mint and eucalyptus are at the forefront. As it sits and air mixes in, notes of melon and citrus develop.

Similarly, the T1 Tequila Uno Ultra Fino exhibits some of those cooked agave flavours that develop when the heart of the agave plant is slow-roasted in a brick oven. Overall, the flavour is more floral, less fruity, and markedly peppery. “This is definitely a tequila drinker’s tequila,” says Lorenz.

So who is that tequila drinker? The question is loaded and the answer is laced with folklore, history, and agricultural angst. There’s an old rumour that doctors prescribed tequila, complete with lime and salt, to sufferers of the Spanish flu. You can blame old-school Mexican cinema, with *rancheros* singing laments and drowning their sorrows with tequila, and revolutionary namesakes, says Lorenz. “Chinaco was named after a group of warriors from Tamaulipas,” and “Siete Leguas was named after Pancho Villa’s horse.”

Those machismo concepts were imported to the Canada and the U.S., in part because of cheap “mixto” tequila flooding

the market in the 1930s, which is made from only 51 per cent agave 49 per cent “random industrial sugars,” compared to the 100 per cent blue agave in premium tequilas. Blame that on the fact that the blue agave monoculture invites the risk of blights, and boom and bust cycles, Lorenz explains.

True caramel flavour, along with fruity and buttery elements, come from the fermentation process. The mellow flavours of caramel, vanilla, chocolate and lingering hits of pepper in the straw-coloured Uno Mas reposado come from the aging process—nine months in former Jim Beam and Jack Daniel’s oak barrels. By contrast, with just six months in oak, the T1 Tequila Uno Exceptional reposado is a bit more feisty, retaining more of its herbaceous and grassy flavours, along with hints of quince, peach and sweet spices.

Although a taste for tequila has been reawakened in the U.S. and Canada, the sipping tequila cult following started in the mid-1980s, when Chinaco tequila, created by longtime master distiller German Gonzalez (who makes the premium T1 Tequila Uno we’re sipping), was imported stateside, with El Tesoro tequila following soon after.

Booze experts don’t balk at comparing premium tequilas to single-malt Scotches in smoothness and complexity. Add extra age to those reposados, and they become añejos, with more woody elements, such as the layers of cocoa and cinnamon in Uno Mas and the robust and bittersweet cocoa notes that two years in Scotch barrels (formerly sherry casks) brings to T1’s Uno Estelar añejo.

Premium tequila of all types continues to captivate, whether it’s named for warriors, has a time-honoured pedigree, or comes in a skull-shaped bottle. Substance always trumps style, and it’s what’s inside the bottle that truly counts.

“As with everything,” says Lorenz, “balance is key.”

FOOD PHOTO: DR. HOLLY FONG



Dr. Holly Fong is a practising speech-language pathologist with three young children who’s always trying, adapting and creating dishes.

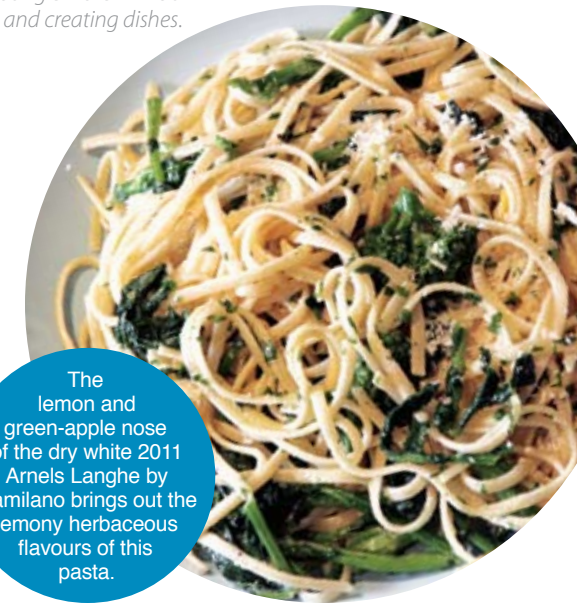
taste trip

Concocting a taste of Tuscany

By the end of February I’m usually tired of winter and longing for warm sunny days. During this time, I find myself making more noodle dishes that are both comforting and remind me of faraway travel.

A favourite “sunny” meal is an Italian-inspired lemony linguini. The inspiration is a delicious lemon pasta with garlic and parsley I had in the south of Italy. Since then, I’ve made many variations, adding broccolini or greens for a slight bitterness or peppery kick (and a subversive but tasty way of getting my children to eat more leafy green vegetables). And, whenever available, I use Meyer lemons as they have a floral fragrance and slightly sweeter taste. I serve this dish on its own or as an accompaniment to fish.

Have all the ingredients prepped and the sauce prepared while the pasta is cooking to ensure that the dish is served hot. Even better, have pre-warmed bowls. Then, at the



The lemon and green-apple nose of the dry white 2011 Arneis Langhe by Damilano brings out the lemony herbaceous flavours of this pasta.

table with a glass of wine, and a crisp romaine salad, it’s like being transported to a scented lemon grove in sunny Italy.

For the wine, the 2011 Arneis Langhe by Damilano is a medium-bodied dry white. This wine made with the Arneis grape in the Piedmont region is fresh with a nose of lemon and green apple. There’s bright acidity with a long finish of a hint of almond and grapefruit that brings out the lemony herbaceous flavours of the pasta. *Buon appetito.*

LINGUINE WITH LEMON & RAPINI (MAKES 4 MAIN COURSES OR 6 SIDE DISHES)

- 1 bunch of rapini
- 1 clove of garlic
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 box linguine (375g)
- 1 egg yolk
- 1/3 cup heavy cream
- 1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan, plus more for garnish
- 1 lemon (Meyer lemon if available), zested, and juice of 1/2, plus more juice, as needed
- 2 tablespoons (1/4 stick) unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons chopped Italian or flat leaved parsley leaves
- fresh ground black pepper
- salt

In a bowl, add yolk, cream, Parmesan, lemon zest, half the juice and a good grind of pepper. Combine with a fork and taste. If you want it more lemony, add more juice. Set aside.

Trim the ends of rapini by cutting about 1cm on a diagonal. Thoroughly rinse, taking care to remove the leaves from the main stalk. If leaves are big, cut in half. Cut stalks into 2–3 cm pieces by cutting on a diagonal. If the ends of stalks are woody, use a paring knife to peel the outer layer. Set stalks and leaves aside separately.

Fill a big pot with water and bring to a boil. Add enough salt to make it taste like seawater. When the water is bubbling fiercely, add the pasta. Bring water back to boil, and give it a good stir to avoid the linguine sticking to one another. Cook until al dente (about a minute less than package instructions).

Meanwhile, heat olive oil in a large pot over high heat. Smash the garlic

clove with the side of a knife and add to pot when oil is shimmering. Fry until slightly yellow. Add rapini stems and stir fry for a minute. If they start to brown, reduce heat to medium-high. Sprinkle some salt. Add leaves and stir fry another minute and a half until wilted. Remove pan from heat. Find the garlic clove and transfer to still-cooking pasta pot.

When the linguini is al dente, remove a cup of the cooking liquid. Drain pasta and toss it back in the pot off the heat. Discard garlic clove. Add butter. Stir and swirl until butter is melted and pasta is coated with each strand slightly gleaming. Add the cooked rapini and toss to combine.

Stir in the egg mixture, adding some of the cooking liquid if it’s too dry (only a bit at a time). Add extra salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle parsley and serve immediately with Parmesan cheese.

Part 1: A taste for tequila (Part 2: mezcal)

PRIMED FOR Tequila



1 BLANCO/SILVER > This tequila is clear, colourless and un-aged; the true flavours of the agave plant shine through. *Uno Mas blanco*



2 REPOSADO > Spanish for “rested,” reposado tequilas are pale yellow/straw in colour, and must be aged from two to 12 months. *Chinaco reposado*



3 AÑEJO > Añejo is Spanish for “aged.” This smooth, complex spirit must be aged for one to three years to earn its name. *T1 Tequila Uno, Estelar añejo*

agave appreciation

Fresh herbs and pepper? Maple and caramel, with a hit of cinnamon? Sugary white peaches and bittersweet chocolate? Yes, please! Indulge in the true taste of tequila with a selection of more than 30 brands at the second annual Vancouver International Tequila Expo (VITE). Local restaurants will serve up tequila-inspired food at this year’s celebration of agave spirits. *May 24, 2013, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Vancouver; tickets from \$40. vancouvertequilaexpo.com*

{terroir} → Tequila must be distilled + made in one of 5 tequila-designated states in Mexico—Jalisco, Michoacan, Nayarit, Guanajuato and Tamaulipas.

{mixto + gold} →

Skip the mixto, shun the gold. Neither represents Mexico’s diverse spirit. Unlike 100% agave tequila, mixto’s made from just 51% agave sugars. “Gold” gets its colour from caramel additives, not from age.