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THE 16 BEST SIPPING TEQUILAS TO ENJOY RIGHT NOW

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After falling from its pandemic high, spirit sales remained flat in the United States last year with a mere .2% increase from 2022, according to last week's Distilled Spirits Council of the United State's economic briefing.

Amidst the not-so-impressive news, however, there was one particular bright spot—the continued rise of agave-based spirits. In 2023, tequila (and mezcal) sales skyrocketed 7.9%, up \$476 million, to a total revenue of \$6.5 billion. The increasingly popular category is running hot on the heels of vodka, America's longstanding favorite spirit.

Tequila drinkers are spoiled for choice these days. There are thousands of options on the market, from popular bottles to mix into a margarita or Mexican martini to celebrity-owned brands and aged reposados at a wide array of price points. It seems there's an ever-constant

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influx of tequilas debuting on U.S. liquor store shelves, including a surge of “premium” bottles intended for savoring slowly.

Some of these higher-end selections are aged or filtered to maximize smoothness, while others are rare or otherwise special in varying ways. According to the drinks market analysis firm International Wine and Spirits Record (IWSR), consumers have been gravitating toward this so-called “sipping tequila” for a while now.

“Over the years, tequila has evolved from being a low-price shot to a more premium option used in cocktails and high-end sipping,” says Brandy Rand, chief strategy officer at IWSR. “Tequila has an association as an affordable luxury, and many brands are aligned with celebrities, leading to lifestyle-oriented marketing.”

More imbibers have been placing value on tequila’s connection to Mexican heritage, creating a sense of place, she adds, which has prompted their desire to learn more and experiment with different expressions. All of this has led to even more growth in the category.

While this expansion is great news for lovers of all things agave, it does make it difficult to figure out which bottles are worth stocking in the liquor cabinet. But there’s no need to stress: We’ve tapped our expert reviewers to narrow down the best tequila for sipping right now. Take a look below.

Pasote Blanco

The mild scent hints at agave and basil. Meanwhile, the palate shows vanilla sweetness up front, warming to a traditional agave and jalapeño midpalate, and finishing with black pepper sparks and echoes of vanilla and cinnamon. Seems like it would lend itself to barrel-aged expressions. **90 Points—K. N.**

PASOTE / BLANCO