

MEZCAL PRODUCTION PROCESS

Until recently, mezcal was considered a drink for the poor or working class. Before the arrival of the Spanish, the indigenous people of Oaxaca fermented a beer-like drink from the agave called pulque, and it was made for many generations prior to the Spanish introduction of spirit distillation. With this fusion of cultures and knowledge, the process of making mezcal evolved and has remained almost unchanged for more than 400 years.

The word mezcal is derived from the Nahuatl word for agave, mexalmetl. We honor and use these same traditional methods when we make Chulele Mezcal. Every batch is hand-crafted by those who practice the artisanal ways handed down from their forefathers.

CUTTING

Los cortadores, or the cutters, use the same tools and methods as the generations before them to harvest the mature maguey.

The agave harvest is the first stage in making a great mezcal. The workers arrive at the field early in the morning, before the sun gets too high and the day's heat sets in. They assess the agave plants and only select which ones are mature to harvest. First, cutting the spines away to reveal the pineapple or la piña, then using a sledgehammer and cutting tool to release the heart or el corazon from its roots, which have firmly anchored the agave to its earthen home for those many years.

COOKING

Los hornadores or the oven builders, chop the maguey and prepare the underground oven for many days of cooking.

The oven's structure is made of river rock. The preparation of the underground oven starts early in the morning, before sunrise. The oven builders climb into the underground oven to begin building the hardwood fire that will be the heat source.

As the fire begins to take hold, the workers bury it in volcanic stone. This stone will hold the heat to cook the agave hearts, converting the carbohydrates and starches into fermentable sugars. While the oven heats, the oven builders use axes to chop the maguey hearts into quarters. Covering the hot volcanic stone with moist agave fibers from a previous batch, they pile the chopped agave into the oven. Once the oven is full, a covering of earth is added to seal in the heat. The maguey will cook for 3 to 5 days.

CRUSHING & MILLING

The "Tahona" or stone milling wheel, crushes the cooked maguey. A horse or mule turns the wheel, and the maguey is slowly crushed into a thick, sweet paste.

The cooked maguey rests for one day after cooking is complete. It is then moved to the Tahona, which crushes it into a mash. This process releases the juices and exposes the sinewy fibres of

the agave plant. As the maguey is crushed, you can smell the sweetness of the agave as it rises into the air.

FERMENTATION

The fermentation process uses only the natural yeast from the environment, with nothing artificial used to convert the agave sugar to alcohol.

The agave paste is moved into the pine wood vats, and the fermentation process begins organically, initiated by yeast naturally occurring on the agave itself and by any present in the Palenque. Completely organic, with no artificial yeasts used. The process takes 3 to 6 days, depending on the weather.

DISTILLING

The fermentation process uses only the natural yeast from the environment, with nothing artificial used to convert the agave sugar to alcohol.

1st DISTILLATION - The first distillation is known as 'ordinario' and comes out at around 37.5% alcohol by volume. During this step, all the fiber and juice from the fermentation are loaded into the still.

2nd DISTILLATION - After the first distillation, the fibres are removed, and the liquid will be distilled on its own the second time. What comes out of the still this time is a beautiful, pure distillate now considered mezcal. The alcohol content of the mezcal also increases during this step.

TESTING

Every batch of Chulele is tested in the traditional way and then in the lab.

Our maestro mezcalero uses traditional methods to test the mezcal after it has completed the 2nd distillation. First by observing "las perlas" that form on top of the mezcal after it has been agitated. Then using an alcohol float meter. This is a small float, with a scale in it. The more alcohol that is present, the lighter the density of the liquid and so the alcoholmeter sinks a bit lower displaying the percentage of alcohol. The third and absolutely accurate method is the laboratory where the alcohol is tested along with the presence of methanol or any other toxins. Ensuring the quality and safety of each batch. Once the batch has been tested, it is sealed by AMMA until the bottling takes place.

BOTTLING

Chulele mezcal is bottled and labelled by hand in Santiago Matatlán.

Our bottling team takes the time to apply each label, seal and the special batch specific hang tags in the true artisanal way, using their hands. With their experience and careful attention to detail, they finish by numbering each individual bottle, making it truly one of a kind. Finally each bottle is purposefully placed in a case of six and ready for shipping.