

Serious Eats

Mercadito, an Addition to Chicago's Killer Cocktail Market

Posted by Michael Nagrant, January 14, 2010

Chicago isn't quite as far along as New York in our imbibing IQ; I'd kill for more spots like [Death + Company](#), [Milk and Honey](#), and the like. [Violet Hour](#) is rocking for sure, and [Bar Deville](#) and [In Fine Spirits](#) are also bringing up the scene, as is [Nacional 27](#)'s Adam Seger. But we need more.

After a recent night—five cocktails and seven sheets to the wind later—I think we have another entrant to the mix. While [Mercadito](#), the New York City-based scenester-style regional Mexican—aka "sex-mex"—spot makes some decent guacamole, it's the killer cocktails at the [Chicago location](#) that are blowing my mind right now.

The [Tippling Brothers](#), cocktail consultants extraordinaire, have unveiled quite the tequila and mezcal-based list, maybe the most comprehensive one I've seen locally.

I'm especially excited by the full line-up of Ron Cooper's [Del Maguey Mezcal](#)s.

Cooper has been walking around Oaxaca drinking both the best hooch and the worst swill for years in his effort to hand select the finest traditional single village-made mezcal for import to the United States. The mezcals he sells are all pretty much made like they were hundreds of years ago by indigenous peoples, with fire roasted agave hearts mashed by horse drawn smashing devices. If Cuervo is a poisonous snakebite from a rare serpent, Del Maguey is the only antidote.

The smokey nose of one of his mezcals tempered by the fruity notes of St. Germain elderflower, spicy finish of Domaine de Canton ginger, and the silky egg white body in the Tres Coops cocktail is the perfect choice for scotch aficionados.

The B.N.G.T.M. (Big Nose Goes to Mexico) made with El Mayor blanco & reposado, dark rum, guava, orgeat, and "fire", a flaming liquid pu-pu platter-like drink is a sultry rich Mexican equivalent of Tiki punch.

My favorite drink, however, is El Pirata, a beer-based boat drink infused with El Jimador blanco, pineapple, spices, and chiles. The bubbles from the fizzy beer lift cinnamon, pineapple, and chili into your nose, conjuring an afternoon on the beach in the Yucatan.

Many of Chicago's best bartenders are working downstairs in Mercadito's Double A lounge including Kyle McHugh of [Drinks Over Dearborn](#) and [Jennifer Contraveos](#), whose cucumber and ginger-infused Modern Mule is one of the best examples of a Moscow Mule I've ever had. With so much talent and such great sippers in the room, I foresee a lot of tacos in my future.

Mercadito

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About the author: [Michael Nagrant](#) writes for Serious Eats from Chicago, where he also publishes [Hungry](#) magazine. Michael never met an organ meat he didn't like. He hopes to meet many more.



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