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THE STEW

A TASTE OF CHICAGO'S FOOD, WINE, AND DINING SCENE
BY CHICAGO TRIBUNE'S GOOD EATING AND DINING STAFFS

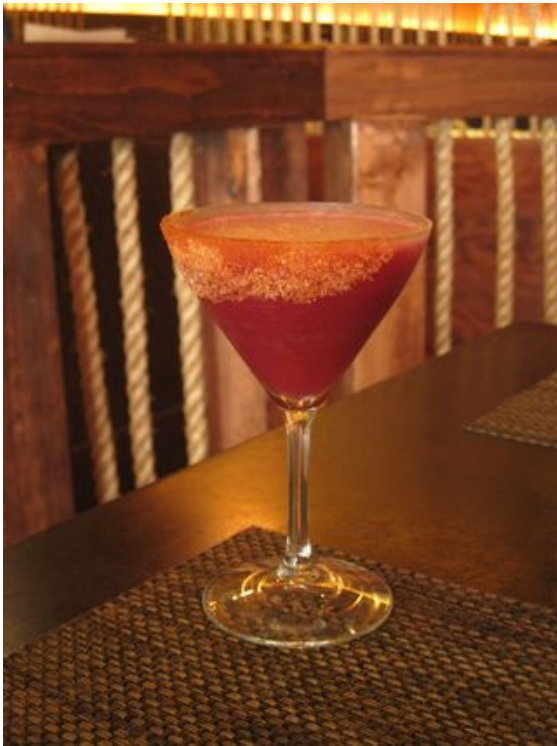
October 29, 2010

Friday @ 5: A cocktail to kick off the weekend

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Posted by *Alexia Elejalde-Ruiz*



Not that you ever need an excuse to drink tequila, but there's no better time to raise a glass than El Dia de los Muertos.

Celebrated November 2, The Day of the Dead is a festive Mexican holiday during which people honor their departed loved ones by building private altars decorated with sugar skulls, marigolds (their scent is believed to attract the souls) and the favorite foods and beverages of the deceased. The point is to invite the spirits to visit and hear the prayers of the living.

Common beverages offered to the dead (and drunk by the living) are tequila and mezcal. And Mexican restaurants throughout Chicago are happy to help toast the dead with creative twists on tradition.

At Mercadito, that spirit of the spirits takes center stage at its special Day of the Dead dinner, which features a cocktail called "La Muerte" ("Death"), which isn't as depressing as it sounds.

Conceived by Tad Carducci, co-founder of beverage consultancy Tippling Bros. and a partner in Mercadito, the cocktail is made with prickly pear, a cactus fruit indigenous to southern Mexico, and served with a rim of ancho chili salt.

Both the pear and chili have an understated, earthy flavor that lets the agave be the star, a nod to Mexican flavors and the spirit of the holiday.

"The holiday is very much about returning something to the souls who have passed and are in the ground," Carducci said.

Carducci describes La Muerte as a food-friendly cocktail because it's got all the trappings of a good margarita, though the acidity is balanced by the earthy flavors. The color, a deep blood red, embraces the morbidity of the day. But don't forget, it's a celebration.

"It's not necessarily a macabre death color, it's a pretty death color," Carducci said.

La Muerte

2 ounces of blanco tequila, preferably 100 percent blue agave (Mercadito is currently using Sauza Hornitos, but Carducci prefers Siete Leguas)

1 ounce prickly pear puree (look for frozen prickly pear puree at gourmet stores, which carry brands like The Perfect Puree)

1/2 ounce of agave nectar

1/2 ounce lime juice

A couple dashes or rosewater (find it at Whole Foods and gourmet stores)

Throw everything together in a cocktail shaker with ice, shake hard for seven to eight seconds, then strain it into a chilled martini glass rimmed with ancho chili salt (mix two parts ancho chili powder, one part kosher salt and half part granulated sugar). Garnish with a lime wheel if you like.

Photo courtesy of Tad Carducci

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