

Robert Plotkin's Review

VARAN IS ECSTASY AND ENERGY, AROMA AND FLAVOR

VARAN IS COFFEE AND IS MEZCAL



AGAVE ESPADÍN & CAFÉ
PRODUCTO ARTESANAL DE OAXACA

VARAN® COFFEE MEZCAL LIQUEUR

It's estimated that more than 700 billion cups of coffee were consumed globally last year, easily making it the planet's most popular beverage. As the largest coffee-consuming nation in the world, the majority of those cups of Joe are consumed right here in America. It therefore doesn't take much stretch of the imagination to predict the triumphant reception VARAN® COFFEE MEZCAL LIQUEUR will receive in the U.S. Guaranteed this Oaxacan import has no equal on the backbar.

VARAN is made with Mezcal from Tlacolula, the pride of Manuel Benet Sr. and Eric Hernández, master distillers in Tlacolula, Oaxaca. The mezcal is handcrafted using 8 to 10 year old Espadín agaves. The agave "piñas" are brought to the distillery where they are wrapped for baking in mesquite wood-fired ovens for 2 days and nights under low, constant heat. After the agaves have been baked, they are shredded using a horse-drawn Tahona wheel. The agaves' sugar-rich juice is collected and transferred to wooden vats where it is allowed to slowly ferment using naturally occurring, airborne yeast.

A partial explanation for VARAN's singular character can be attributed to how it is distilled. The process begins with the fermented wash being distilled in a uniquely designed, steel pot still. Once the distillate emerges from that still it is distilled a second time in a traditional copper pot still.

The final step is to infuse the Mezcal with locally sourced coffee extract and a blend of spices. The artisanal mezcal is bottled at 30.5% alcohol (61 proof).

Why on Earth has something as marvelous as VARAN taken so long to get into our hands? Everything about this product is classy and spot-on, including its confident and understated packaging. The liqueur is skillfully balanced and has the look of freshly brewed double espresso, a silky textured, medium-weight body and a wafting bouquet comprised of vanilla, cacao, coffee, baking spices, and herbaceous aromas with delectable, smoky notes. Its elegant entry raises little in the way of undue heat. The liqueur rapidly bathes the palate with the flavors of vanilla, cinnamon, roasted coffee beans, citrus, white pepper and toasted oak. The fade is slow and thoroughly delicious.

Fortunately there are as many drink applications for VARAN as there are Starbucks. It works served neat, over ice and mixed with coffee, ice cream or creamer, to mention but a few.

¡Salud!

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ROBERT PLOTKIN is a judge at the San Francisco World Spirits Competition and author of 16 books on bartending and beverage management including *Secrets Revealed of America's Greatest Cocktails*. He can be reached at www.AmericanCocktails.com or by e-mail at robert@barmedia.com.