

# THE RISE OF TERROIR-DRIVEN TEQUILA

ONCE THE LIFE OF THE PARTY, AMERICA'S FAVORITE AGAVE SPIRIT IS ENTERING ITS THOUGHTFUL ERA, POWERED BY SMALL-BATCH PRODUCERS, SUSTAINABLE FARMING AND SINGLE FIELDS. GET READY TO TASTE THE LAND, NOT JUST THE LABEL.

WORDS RUVANI DE SILVA

**F** From Jimmy Buffet to The Three Amigos, Elvis to Miranda Lambert, American pop culture loves to knock back Tequila. The “drink of outlaws,” either slammed with salt and lime or served in beachfront cocktails, has long been America’s party liquor, the fuel of Spring Breaks and breakups, dominated by corporate brands.

But a growing interest among both drinkers and bartenders in premium, quality and sustainable drinks has reached what was once the ultimate good-time go-to beverage. Traditionally made, small-batch, terroir-driven Tequilas are growing in popularity and availability in the U.S. Single-estate and single-field bottlings are garnering a passionate, educated and engaged following as Tequila consumption enters its grown-up era.



Loco Tequila



Tequila Ocho



## A TASTE OF TERRUÑO

“We decided from the beginning that we wanted to create a legacy Tequila and a terroir- or *terruño*-driven Tequila that was powerful and complex, defined by true agave flavors that expressed a unique and singular place,” says Alberto Navarro, CEO, creator and maestro tequilero of Loco Tequila.

Loco Tequilas are single-estate selections. The brand owns and farms 240 acres of agave fields within a three-mile radius of the historic Hacienda La Providencia distillery. A part of the Agave Landscape of the Tequila Valley UNESCO World Heritage Site, Loco purchased the legendary location in 2018. For Navarro and his co-owners, this was the only way to make Tequila.

“It was clear to us that true quality and consistency can only come from our team controlling every step of the process, from wholly owned fields and sustainable farming practices

that yield the finest agaves in the world,” says Navarro.

This messaging is shared among other producers, all of whom focus on quality, authenticity, flavor and sustainability.

As American drinkers become more invested in traceability and ethical production, single-estate and single-field producers like Navarro are finding a receptive audience, backed by educated mixologists and beverage directors, dedicated agave bars in the U.S., and Tequila distillery tourism in Mexico.

## SINGLE SITE SUMMARY

While both single-estate and single-field Tequilas are expressions of traditional production, there are key differences between the two. A Tequila can be both single estate and single field, or it can be one or the other—the difference lies in ownership and agave sourcing. By reviving Tequila’s traditional

emphasis on quality and terroir, commercial producers of single-estate and single-field Tequila are capturing the drink’s essential qualities in slightly different ways.

Single-estate Tequila goes through its entire production from field to bottle under the same ownership. The same business or family owns and farms the land where the agave grows and will harvest, ferment, distill and bottle it. The production of single-estate Tequila signifies single-source origin, quality control and small-batch production.

Tequila Ocho, whose primary expressions are also single field, is considered to be the first commercially available single-estate Tequila following its launch in 2008, a date which feels remarkably recent in relation to Tequila’s long history.

“Single estate means every agave that is used to make our Tequila comes from fields either owned or overseen by the Camarena family,” says Chris Dunn, global brand director

COURTESY LOCO TEQUILA. COURTESY TEQUILA OCHO. COURTESY LÁGRIMAS DEL VALLE/BRANDON CUMMINS



Loco Tequila

## KNOWN FOR THEIR PRECISE EXPRESSIONS OF TERROIR, SINGLE-FIELD TEQUILAS SHOWCASE THE RANGE OF QUALITIES AGAVE CAN ACQUIRE DEPENDING ON WHERE IT IS GROWN.

for Tequila Ocho. “So, this is really about quality control of the process from field to bottle.”

And while terroir is a factor in single-estate Tequila, the flavor of the land really comes into its own in single-field production.

Single-field Tequila is made from agave plants that have all been harvested from, quite literally, the same field. The agave plants absorb hyperlocal characteristics from the water, soil, air, and nearby flora and fauna, creating individual expressions of flavor and texture that come directly from a single piece of land rather than the production process or the blending of agaves from different locations. Known for their precise expressions of terroir, these bottlings showcase the range of qualities agave can acquire depending on where it is grown.

Single-field Tequilas are not necessarily fermented, distilled and bottled on the same property or by the same owners as those who farm the agave, but they can be. Production methods are usually kept consistent to ensure the terroir of the field is the focus of the drink’s profile.

Lágrimas del Valle is a single-field Tequila brand produced in partnership with Tequila Cascahuín, the brand

of the Rosales family, a Tequila-making dynasty dating back to the early 20th century.

“These types of releases give consumers such a unique perspective on the complexity of flavors that are possible from the world of Tequila,” says Brandon Cummins, director of education at Altamar Brands, which represents Lágrimas del Valle in the U.S. “When you start to consider that each bottling from a unique field is representative of a particular place and a particular time, and can begin to recognize distinct flavor and aromatic differences, you immediately appreciate how much more depth there is from just an agricultural sense.”

Single-estate Tequilas do not rely on consistency. Instead, they embrace their individuality. Even the same field may not experience quite the same conditions from year to year, and drinkers can compare unique vintages.

“Single-field Tequila takes the drinker on a journey through part of Mexico,” says Dunn. “It’s an opportunity to learn about the land, the flora and fauna, and the life lived by each agave used to make the Tequila. Each vintage reveals a nuance of flavor that is representative of the agave.”

### CULTURE AND TRADITION

The practice of making single-estate and single-field Tequila is closely tied to the spirit’s history and identity, deeply rooted in Mexican culture and community.



COURTESY LOCO TEQUILA; COURTESY TEQUILA OCHO

Tequila Ocho



**SINGLE-ESTATE  
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Harvested agave at Tequila Cascahuin

COURTESY LÁGRIMAS DEL VALLE/BRANDON CUMMINS (2)

Prior to commercial production, Tequila was made with agave farmed on family-owned smallholdings using traditional by-hand production methods free from chemicals. Plants were hand-cut and shaved with machetes, fermented in underground pits with hot volcanic rocks and crushed with giant volcanic tahona stones. The juice was then fermented in the open air with wild and home-cultivated yeast before being distilled in traditional copper-pot stills.

These practices, largely eschewed by commercial Tequila production but never abandoned by local small-scale tequileros, have been embraced by producers of single-estate and single-field selections, which employ “slow food” hand production to ensure quality.

At Loco, 100-year-old wooden fermentation *pipones* (tanks) were rehydrated in order to capture and propagate the yeast from the original distillery.

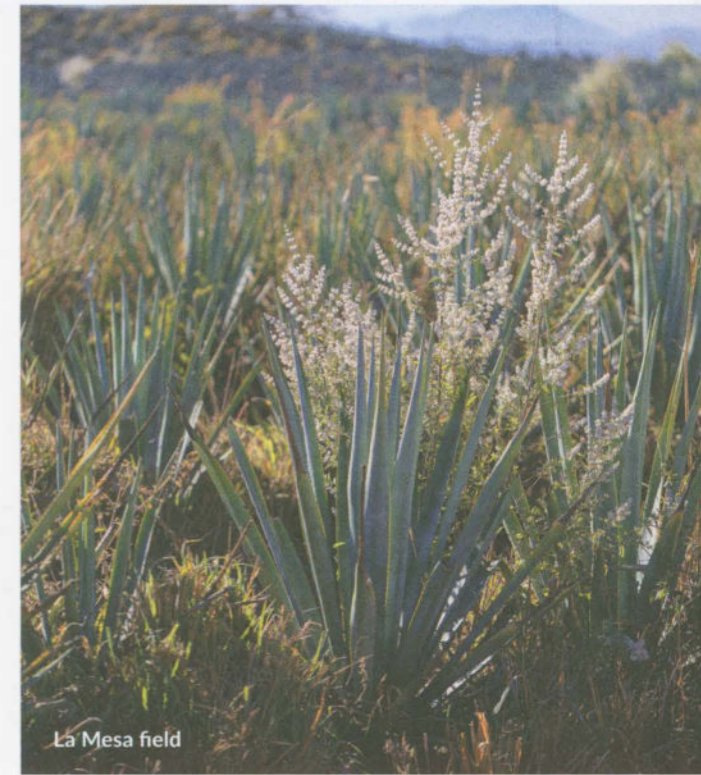
“The result is a historic strain that allows us to travel back in time with every batch, every sip,” says Navarro.

With trailblazers Ocho leading the way, an increasing number of single-estate and single-field brands have entered the U.S. market, including Fortaleza, Santanera, Siete Leguas, Casa Azul and AgaveLuz, as well as Lágrimas del Valle and Ocho. Each brand, naturally, has their own distinct production process, emphasizing the importance of the skill of a maestro tequilero and the role of historic methods in cultivating authentic flavors.

At Lágrimas del Valle, second-generation Maestro Tequilero Salvador Rosales Torres oversees the quality of the agave while his son, Salvador Rosales Trejo, takes the lead on developing Lágrimas’ flavor profile and production process. Currently, Lágrimas utilizes 70% roller mill-crushed agave that’s open-air fermented in stainless steel without fibers and 30% tahona-crushed agave that’s open-air fermented in wood with fibers. The Tequila is then double distilled in a combination of different sized stills, minimally filtered and then proofed to 46% alcohol-by-volume (abv). Each element of the process was rigorously tested, as was their choice of water source, for which a nearby deep well was chosen.

“Lágrimas del Valle Tequilas rely so much on the hand of the maker, that’s why the Rosales family was so important in its process,” says Cummins. “Their knowledge about traditional and artisanal production systems that yield big and complex flavor while preserving the unique character of each field is what has helped make Lagrimas stand out.”

Planting as well as production is approached in a bespoke and holistic manner. At Loco, third-generation Maestro Agavero José Antonio (“Toni”) Sánchez López and his team hand-monitor plant health and ripeness daily across their bespoke-designed agave fields. The layout features a mix of concentric circle planting over hill



La Mesa field

tops, triangle planting on slopes and straight-row planting to best suit each particular site. Double-wide spacing is also used to prevent soil exhaustion.

Caring for fields, conscientious replanting and non-invasive chemical-free farming are all key characteristics of single-estate and single-field Tequilas, where the flavor the agave develops from the earth is its critical feature. The age at which the agave is harvested, the number of times it is shaved and the number of distillations are other techniques that can be varied to produce the exact parameters a maestro tequilero requires, all of which aim to allow the flavor and texture of the agave to shine. Rather than keeping these processes under wraps, brands are keen to show off the care and dedication they have put into them, leaning into their focus on transparency and authenticity.

### RAISING AWARENESS AND APPRECIATION

The priorities of these brands and their production techniques have strong appeal to modern drinkers who increasingly want to know about what they are consuming and seek out flavor and sustainability with transparency and authenticity. Sebastian Cajas, a beverage director and agave spirits specialist, has noted an increase in interest in single-site Tequilas among his customers.



"Single-estate Tequila is helping shift Tequila away from its old image as a party shot and into a category that deserves to be sipped, discussed and respected," he says. "In my experience, once guests understand that Tequila can express terroir, just like wine or mezcal, the way they drink it changes immediately. They slow down. They ask questions. They become open to flights and guided tastings."

With the help of experts like Cajas, it's not just maestro tequileros who can taste the expressions of terroir.

"One of the most unique Tequilas we've produced is from a field called Los Mangos," says Dunn. "If you can find a bottle and have a chance to try it, you'll notice a distinct fruity quality. That's because near the field where the agaves were grown also stand mango trees, thus the name of the field and the naturally occurring fruity note in the Tequila."

These are the differences consumers and bartenders are getting excited about and seeking out. And to Cajas, this change in consumption is part of a wider evolution in drinking culture.

"I believe the growth is being driven by education and by a broader shift toward conscious and intentional drinking,"

he says. "Guests today want to know where products come from, who makes them, and how they are made. That curiosity already exists in wine, coffee and mezcal, and now it's finally reaching Tequila in a meaningful way."

Statistics back up Cajas' observations. According to PwC's 2024 Voice of the Consumer Survey, consumers are willing to pay a 9.7% sustainability premium, with 46% saying they are buying more sustainable products to reduce their impact on the environment. A reflection of this shift can be seen in Tequila sales: A 2023 report from the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States notes that since 2003, Tequila has seen 1,270% growth in higher-end, premium brands and 1,500% growth in super-premium brands.

While not all premium brands are environmentally focused, for single-estate and single-field Tequilas, it goes with the territory. Many are certified organic or work with nonprofit community and sustainability-driven organizations such as the Tequila Regulatory Council, the Tequila Interchange Project and SACRED to demonstrate their commitment to holistic and ecological goals.



SACRED is a 1% For The Planet organization that helps communities in Mexico who make heritage agave spirits maintain their cultural identity. Founder and Executive Director Lou Bank sees single-site Tequilas as the tip of the conscious-consumption iceberg.

"I think the single-field approach is sort of like an amuse-bouche," says Bank. "It slows you down and makes you think about what you are consuming. That thoughtfulness is the foundation to more mindful consumption."

## SUSTAINING TODAY FOR SUCCESS TOMORROW

With attraction to and investment in mindful consumption showing no signs of slowing down, single-site Tequilas look set to grow further in popularity. But growth brings its own challenges, particularly the pressure to meet increased demand while maintaining high standards of quality and sustainability as well as a fully traceable supply chain. And as these brands are not prepared to sacrifice their product or principles to accommodate a current rush of interest, they instead look for creative ways to stay authentic and support local communities while keeping up with demand.

In 2025, Ocho launched a new Terroir Select range of single-region, multi-field Tequilas made from agaves grown in one of eight designated zones of Mexico's Highlands.

"Terroir Select is a natural extension of our exploration of terroir in spirits, a sustainable way to meet growing consumer demand and our way of providing an economic boost to small farmers at a time when the agave market downturn has led family farmers to abandon their crop, taking a significant economic hit," says Dunn. "These are our neighbors, our colleagues and our friends, hence the name of the first Terroir Select vintage,



Salvador Rosales  
Trejo of Lágrimas  
del Valle



Comunidad, which translates in English to community.”

Lágrimas del Valle is taking a similar approach, collaborating with small farmers to create new, different single-field expressions without over-harvesting their own sites.

“The Rosales family has amazing relationships and pedigree, they have been able to find truly exceptional agave from multiple states in the Denomination of Origin, which is also key to the identity of Lágrimas,” says Cummins. “We’ve so far harvested from three of the five states—Jalisco, Michoacán and Guanajuato—but even within those states, there are still so many unique terroirs left to explore.”

To Bank, this is a key development.

“I especially like that a number of those [single-site] fields are located outside of Jalisco, in the other four states where Tequila can be made,” says Bank. “If we don’t spread out our consumption of Tequila among those four states, there’s going to continue to be outsized environmental pressure on families in Jalisco.”

This diversification is a win-win, helping support local producers and giving drinkers an even wider range of new experiences to enjoy.

Single-estate and single-field Tequilas are changing the way Americans understand the drink, both as part of a movement towards more mindful and sustainable drinking and as a long-overdue appreciation for a spirit that has for too long been taken for granted.

“I don’t see this as a short-term trend—I see it as part of a longer transition in how people engage with agave spirits,” says Cajas. “As more consumers travel to Mexico, visit distilleries and experience regional styles, it becomes harder to go back to thinking of Tequila as a one-dimensional category.”

With so many diverse flavor-forward offerings on the market and brands that ethical consumers can form relationships with, it’s an exciting time to be a Tequila drinker.

“Loco Tequila is rooted in a philosophy of radical authenticity and transcendent creativity that honors the original identity of Tequila, with a level of refinement and elegance that is timeless, not trendy,” says Navarro. “It makes perfect sense that consumers would want to know where their Tequila comes from, who is farming the land and what they stand for.”

And there’s never been a better time to do just that. **EP**

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