

OCEAN DRIVE



FROM BRAZIL WITH LOVE

Cachaça fever on South Beach and beyond

It's more than a little fitting that liquors are called spirits—there's often a timeworn history of people and places tied to the flavor. Consider the spice of expertly aged Caribbean rum or the peat of single-malt Scotch from Islay. This is especially the case with cachaça, the bewitching, vibrant spirit of Brazil. Distilled from pure, freshly pressed sugarcane juice, cachaça is actually the oldest spirit in the Americas and the third-most-consumed in the world. You've likely tasted it in a caipirinha, the upstart challenger to the mojito's status as the most seductive cocktail in the tropics. But not all cachaças are created equal. To better understand why this mysterious spirit is so increasingly popular among Beach visitors and Miami locals alike, we spoke with Freddy Diaz, spirits consultant for The Raleigh in South Beach and president of AlambiQ mixology training and consulting firm.—*Jason Jeffers*

How does cachaça differ from rum?

Rum is usually made from thick, strong molasses, while cachaça is made from fresh sugarcane juice pressed within 24 hours of harvesting. Cachaça has a lighter, less spicy taste than rum.

Are clients ordering cocktails made with cachaça more frequently these days?

Absolutely. The caipirinha is light, refreshing, delicious and a little exotic, and is on its way to becoming one of the world's great cocktails. With that, cachaça will receive the attention it deserves.

As someone who's always tinkering with flavors, what's the key to a quality cachaça?

Most are distilled using heavy-duty, industrial-scale processes, but a quality cachaça needs refinement. Leblon is a great example. It's crafted in copper alembic pot stills that result in a superior spirit.

Other than the sugar and lime of the classic caipirinha, what ingredients do you like to use with cachaça?

I enjoy blending it with fresh peppers. Nearly all fruits and herbs go well with it: passion fruit, pomegranates, Thai chili, Cuban oregano, as well as agave and pine syrups. Cachaça makes for a very refreshing cocktail with great complexity.



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