



Instead of toasting with wine this Valentine's Day, turn up the romance with these high-end tequila suggestions from La Hacienda of the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, neighbor to the Waste Management Phoenix Open.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DEAN STEVENSON

The Tequila Goddess of Valentine's Day

Story by David M. Brown

A BEER BESHARIEH IS THE TEQUILA GODDESS at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess. As such, she oversees her domain at the Princess with great care and knowledge and, for this Valentine's Day, is bestowing her wisdom and sharing her joy for the drink with all worshippers. Besharieh has selected five premium tequilas to enjoy with your Cupid-struck special someone.

Also at the Fairmont, Forest Hamrick, the Chef de Cuisine at La Hacienda, the resort's exceptional Mexican restaurant, has paired these five premium sips with a variety of dishes, starters to dessert.

In the restaurant industry since she was 17, Besharieh graduated from Arizona State University with a degree in

early childhood education, but today, she says with a laugh, she teaches adults how to sip and savor tequila. "I am fortunate enough that Fairmont sent me to Mexico a few times to visit distillers and learn about their method of process," she says, noting that she is certified through the country's Tequila Regulatory Council, which approves and certifies all tequilas before they are exported.

As the resort's tequila sommelier, Besharieh begins at a low-price-per-glass and moves up to the "sip-very-slowly" stratosphere:

Riazul Anejo "Christmas in a Bottle" (\$28/snifter) paired by Chef Hamrick with his Barbacoa de Borrego, a Guajillo chile-braised lamb shank, accompanied by black bean and



Abeer Besharieh



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SIP AND SAVOR: "I love tequila because it's more than just another spirit; it has its own culture, art and traditions," says Abeer Besharieh, tequila goddess.

goat cheese gordita, mole Amarillo and Poblano yogurt and roasted winter vegetables. "A medium-bodied tequila that does not overpower the flavors in the lamb. The lamb has bright flavors that balance and bring out the spices of this excellent tequila," she says.

Reserva de la Familia by Jose Cuervo (\$30/snifter) paired with Capirotada, Braeburn apple bread pudding with tequila, piloncillo caramel and cinnamon ice cream served in almond tuille. "A full-bodied tequila, which I recommend as an after-dinner dessert drink. The flavors from the Capirotada enhance the aromas and flavors in the Reserva de la Familia because you get toasted almond, vanilla on the nose and flavors of rich spices and caramelized agave."

Chinaco "Negro" (\$60/snifter) paired with Filet a la Parilla, piloncillo- and coriander-rubbed filet mignon with Oaxacan cheese enchiladas, tortilla crema, rajas and Oaxacan chile demi. "The filet brings out the aged oak, while the demi-glaze enhances the citrus flavors in the 'Negro.' The richness of the filet allows the tequila to cut through and lift the herbal notes."

Herradura Selección Suprema (\$80/snifter) paired by Chef with pan-seared sea scallops and sherry-glazed pork belly, Achote truffle butter sauce and pineapple plantain salsa. "The Herradura goes perfectly with the pan-seared scallops and the pork belly

because they both have earthy flavors. The vanilla flavors allow the soft flavors of the scallops to develop."

Clase Azul Ultra (\$180/snifter) accompanied for dessert by the Choco Flan, with chocolate devil's food cake, cajeta and fresh berries. "The aromas of this ultra anejo complement those of the rich dessert because of the cherry notes with hints of caramel and vanilla."

These specialty tequilas are appreciated in the same way a fine glass of scotch or cognac is: "I suggest sipping at room temperature and neat, as it's been consumed for the past 200 years in Mexico," Besharieh says. By serving in a snifter, guests can enjoy the complexities of aromas, textures and flavors and their individual terroirs. These are aged in different barrels at different lengths from different regions, and these characteristics come through with each as well, she adds.

"The more I sip, the more I learn about tequila, and the more I visit the motherland of tequila, the more I fall in love with this elegant spirit," she says. "I love tequila because it's more than just another spirit; it has its own culture, art and traditions." ■

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