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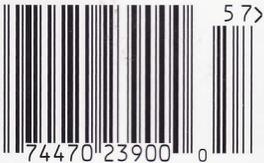
CURATORS *of the* CUBE
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TALKING TALL
about TEQUILA

MAI TAI TIME

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The **FAMOUS FANS** *of*
PURA VIDA TEQUILA

THE TEQUILA OF SONG

By Mike Gerrard. Photos courtesy of Pura Vida Tequila.

“IT MAKES THE AGAVE
JUICE SWAY TO THE
MUSIC. WHY DO YOU
THINK OUR TEQUILA
MAKES YOU DANCE
MORE THAN
ANY OTHER!”





Stewart Skloss is a Texan, and describes himself as looking like a cross between James Gandolfini and Shrek. He also claims to make “the best damn tequila you’ve ever tasted,” which you could take for Texan talk as tall as his 6’4” frame, except that his tequila is Pura Vida.

Pura Vida has grabbed industry attention by winning numerous awards in the last couple of years, including one each for its Silver (Best in Class), Reposado (Gold), Añejo (Silver), and Extra Añejo (Gold) in the 2012 Spirits of Mexico competition. What’s also grabbed attention is the selling price. The Silver retails nationally at an average of \$32 a bottle, the Reposado for \$34 and only \$38 for the Añejo.

“We’re only grossing around 35% profit,” says Skloss, “or about half of the industry average. I’d rather produce better tequila for less profit than make more money on an inferior product.”

An award-winning tequila doesn’t come out of thin air, though. Or rather, they all do. They come from the thin air of the highland regions of Jalisco in western Mexico, where the best blue agave plants grow. So that’s where Skloss went when he was seeking an agave supplier for his tequila.

This wasn’t Skloss’s first attempt at making his favorite drink, as he’d already started a tequila brand when he was in his 20s. “Back then I had the attention span of a Mexican jumping bean,” he admits, “so needless to say it didn’t last very long. I’ve owned several businesses since then and had a lot of success, but my heart has always been with tequila.”

It was in 2008 that he decided to put his money and his energies where his heart was, and throw himself into making the best tequila he possibly could. He traveled through Jalisco tasting tequilas and meeting agave growers until he met the Vivanco family, who were 4th generation growers and destined to be his Pura Vida partners.

The Vivanco family had been growing agave since the 1920s, both making their own tequila and selling their agave to other distillers. They were reputedly getting higher than average prices from the prestigious Orendain tequila company because of the higher sugar content and richer flavor in their agave plants.

This being Mexico and this being the spirits business, there has to be a colorful historic story, of course. One of the founding brothers, Emilio Vivanco, decided one day for reasons known only to himself that instead of tending the agave he would go raid the local police station and free the police horses. The police didn’t think much of his idea and Emilio was gunned down and died in a hail of machine gun fire, becoming a local martyr.

His brother Feliciano, however, dedicated himself to the family’s agave plantation, gained that reputation for producing some of the best plants in Jalisco, and became a local hero. As well as the extra flavor and sugar content his agaves held, Feliciano had another ingredient: music. He played classical music through a phonograph during the distillation process. This isn’t as out-there as it might sound, as other distillers such as Tuthilltown in New York believe in the power of music played to spirits while they’re distilling, the vibrations having their effect on the ultimate taste.



GODSMACK
FRONTMAN
SULLY ERNA

It's a practice still carried out by the Vivanco family today, but using a state-of-the-art concert-hall system rather than a scratchy old phonograph. The 4th-generation agavero, Feliciano Vivanco IV, says, "It makes the agave juice sway to the music. Why do you think our tequila makes you dance more than any other!"

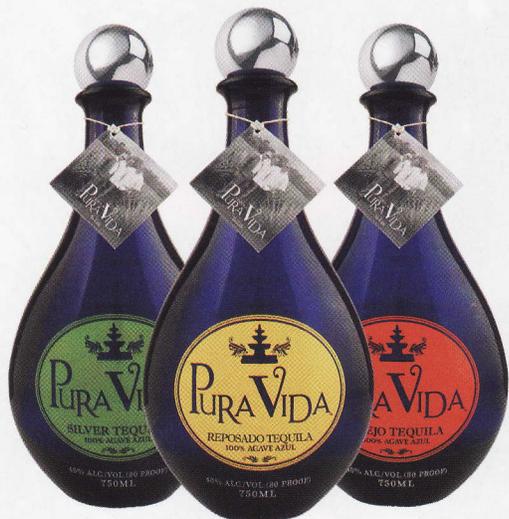
"It might seem a little crazy to some," says his Texan partner Stewart Skloss, "but it's a tradition with our agaveros and I don't argue with results."

And if the tequila dances, the bottle bounces, or so Skloss hopes. The Pura Vida container got almost as much attention as the spirit inside it.

"I wanted to create a bottle that represented Mexico and tequila," says Skloss. "A true piece of art. The colors represent Mexico to me as I remember it when I was a child. I always loved the cobalt blue glass and shiny silver balls in so many stores. The lower shape represents the part of the agave that the tequila comes from, the part that's underground, similar to a pineapple."

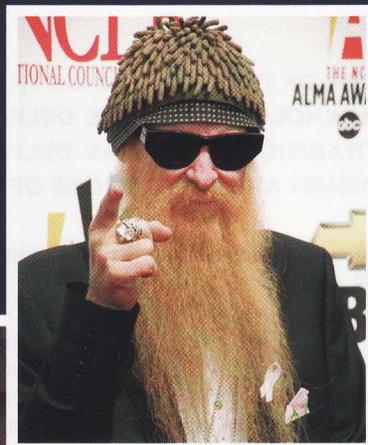
"The neck was designed specifically with bartenders and mixologists in mind. It's a bottle that can make a perfect pour no matter how small your hands are and still look fantastic on your shelf. It's shaped so it doesn't slip out of your hands, especially when bartenders are rammin' and jammin'. I also had the glass made twice as thick as your typical bottle. You can feel the quality when you hold it. If you happen to accidentally drop one, no big deal."

Despite all the modern focus on packaging and pricing and design, Feliciano Vivanco IV still goes out five days a week to focus on where it all begins. He tends the agave plants, just as his namesake began to do in the 1920s. "Great tequila comes from letting the plants know that I care about them," he says, smiling.

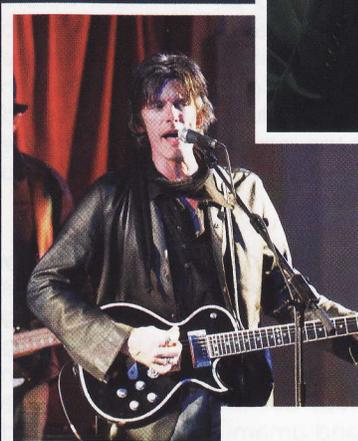


SIDE BAR

As the first liquor brand to own and operate its own radio station, **RadioPuraVida.mx**, this tequila is rooted in music for sure. Fellow investor Rock-N-Roll Hall of Famer, and Chilled cover guy, Billy Gibbons of ZZ Top is the brand's celebrity front man, with a long and impressive line of celeb endorsers backing them up. Check out some of Pura Vida Tequila's star sippers.



Billy Gibbons, ZZ Top



Charlie Sexton, The Arc Angels



Sully Erna, lead singer Godsmack

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