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ACHANTA

SHOT ON AGAVE

Rock the party with this 'desi tequila'

REMEMBER Y2K? THE SCARE AROUND THE WORLD when the clock ticked over on December 31, 1999 to January 1, 2000, everyone's software would go for a toss? Well, software companies cleaned up big time and Desmond Nazareth was one of those lucky entrepreneurs who made his bucks in the USA. Then this IIT Madras entrepreneur returned to his home state of Goa. His tinkering days weren't done, however, and Des who while in the US was known to fix a mean margarita was laid low by how expensive tequila was in India.

Fast forward to 2016 and in more than 400 bars across Goa, Pondicherry, Karnataka and Maharashtra, you can order DJ Agave Spirit. DJ? DesmondJi! DesmondJi is made from the agave plant, and so is tequila (from another species of the agave).

DJ is truly a unique IMFL (Indian made foreign liquor), as rather than making yet another vodka or whisky, Des decided to follow his passion and craft the finest agave spirit he could. On his travels through the semi-arid Deccan plateau, he found plants of an agave species growing in the wild, and full grown plants with ready to use pinas (the heart of the plant which looks like a giant pineapple) to experiment on.

Agave spirit made outside Mexico cannot be called tequila, but that didn't stop Des from trying to make the best agave spirit in the world, no matter what he could call it. He took some pinas to Goa, where using makeshift equipment, he figured that it was indeed possible to make a quality agave spirit in India.

The emergence of DJ has been remarkable for the farmers earning a hard living in Andhra Pradesh, which is where his micro-distillery has come up. Agave was earlier used primarily in fencing and soil conservation. That continues and as it is used towards the end of the plant's life when the pina is harvested, it is truly a win-win for the farmers, who are now actually growing



more agave to meet DJ's growing needs, which are beginning to outstrip the current supply of the plant. As Des says, his is truly a 'field to bottle' venture.

A successful showcase of the product at Dusseldorf's ProWein in 2015, has led indirectly to growing overseas interest in the product and it may soon be possible to buy Des in the USA and Canada. Unfortunately, convoluted laws make it difficult for the product to be sold in our own duty free shops where it could be an ideal souvenir for a visitor to take back.

It's worth considering that it is enterprises like this, which if encouraged by the government, rather than treated like a pañrah, can truly help in making world class spirits in India from our bountiful agricultural produce.

DJ is available in three variants, a 51 per cent Agave spirit (the minimum agave spirit required in Mexico for a product to be called tequila), 51 per cent Agave Gold (with an oak finish) and a 100 per cent Agave spirit. For my money, I would recommend you first try the DJ 100 per cent agave spirit and make a party night of it with DJ replacing your usual tequila or vodka



DesmondJi cocktail

Ingredients

† DesmondJi 51 per cent agave	45ml
† DesmondJi orange liqueur	15ml
† Fresh strawberries	4-5
† Lime juice (of half a lime)	15ml
† Fresh basil leaves	3
† Ice cubes	5-6

Garnish

- † Half a strawberry and a fresh and crisp basil leaf.

Method

- † Blend all the ingredients until smooth.
- † Pour in a margarita or martini glass (or any with 200ml capacity)
- † Garnish with the halved strawberry and the basil leaf.

Cheers!

brand. Try it as a shot or in a cocktail (see box). I took a bottle of the DJ 100 per cent Agave to my alumni get together in Goa and it went down a treat (and quickly!).

Vikram is the co-founder and CEO of Tulleeho, a drinks training and consultancy firm and www.tulleeho.com, a drinks website