

A shot of history

In 1758, Jose Antonio de Cuervo became the world's first Tequila producer, after acquiring land from the King of Spain. More than 250 years later, David Dennis, Global Brand Ambassador, Jose Cuervo, tells us about the making of this remarkable story.

Interviewed by Sharmistha Choudhury

Images courtesy: Jose Cuervo



Please tell us about your background as a bartender. What prompted you to take up this profession?

Actually, it was never my intention to take up bartending as a profession. When I was 18 years old, I moved out of my parents' house into my Manhattan apartment. Needing to pay my rent and two private college tuitions, I turned to bartending as a way to make quick money at night, which allowed me to study in the day. In the late '90s, New York City was booming, and the bar and club scene was reflective of the city's success. I usually paid my rent in one to two nights of bartending. Since then, it evolved into consulting. I set-up and design bars in restaurants and nightclubs, create speciality cocktails, and train all bartenders according to my standards of exceptional service.

In your opinion, what are the qualities that are essential to become a good bartender?

A good bartender knows how to deal with people. He or she is personable, friendly, professional, is a team player, has strong product knowledge, understands flavour profiles and pairing, and can improvise when needed. He or she should be a master of the classics and take that foundation to create new and exciting drinking experiences for their clients.

How would you rate Indian bartenders in comparison to those around the world?

The skill level of bartending in India is very high and what really stands out is how keen bartenders are to learn more, improve their skills, and find a way to implement what they have learned into their work. The work ethic is strong and professionalism is very high. Kudos to Team India!

Do you believe that bartenders have been given their fair due?

Bartending as a profession has a broad range, from the local pub bartender to the five-star hotel bartender. Overall, I think we have been given our fair due, and now that "mixology" is relevant in our day-to-day responsibilities, we have the opportunity to be seen as chefs, creating masterpieces with liquids instead of food. More acclaim is in our future.

Are there any particular challenges that you have faced in your profession?

Dealing with intoxicated customers is by far the most difficult challenge. Most are happy drunks, but the occasional angry drunk can make us question why we ever got into this profession. On the other hand, friendly and satisfied guests remind us of why we love our profession.

"I LOVE TO SEE THE WAY DIFFERENT PEOPLE APPROACH THE RITUAL OF DRINKING."

What do you enjoy the most about bartending, and what is your source of inspiration?

Travelling. New flavours, fruits, herbs, spices, colours, methods and techniques. I love to see the way different people approach the ritual of drinking. I'm inspired by dynamic cultures that marry all the senses. So far, India tops the list of nations for fusing all my senses, and you guys even manage to bring in the sixth sense. I am truly very inspired by India.

Why did you decide to become associated with Jose Cuervo as its Global Brand Ambassador, and what are your key responsibilities in that capacity?

I've always been a big fan of tequila. Mixing cocktails with tequila is fantastic. The flavour profiles are broad, dynamic and complex. One word to describe how I feel to be the Cuervo Brand Ambassador is, "Proud". The company represents integrity, tradition and a general belief that we are all one people. I love what the company stands for, and it is a real honour to represent them, which is the main





"CUERVO'S STORY IS THE STORY OF A PEOPLE, THE STORY OF A NATION."

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responsibility I have — to personify the brand, to share and exchange experience and knowledge. It's a very cool job!

How has the Indian response been so far?

India has welcomed us with sincere, open arms. Everyone I have met has shared something about India with me. I love India and look forward to coming back as soon as I can. We have some new products that I am very excited about launching here. The bar community is ready for more diverse and mature tequilas. We have shining stars in our portfolio that I'm sure will make everyone as excited as I am.

Where and how did Jose Cuervo's unique story take shape?

The history of Cuervo has its roots in the history of Mexico. Centuries before the Spanish colonised the land, the indigenous people were using agave for healing, spiritual rituals, tools, shelter, clothing, and even wine. Cuervo represents a national and historic pride. Our

agave fields have been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Cuervo's story is the story of a people, the story of a nation.

How integral are tradition and the local environment in the making of Jose Cuervo?

I often compare Jose Cuervo's method of making tequila to that of the best champagne vineyards in the world. In the town of Tequila, where the Jose Cuervo agave fields are, there is a volcano that last

erupted over 200,000 years ago. That eruption blessed the earth with minerals and nutrients. Cuervo grows its agave for a minimum of seven years. The sun, volcanic soil, and dedicated and proud employees of the Cuervo family of Tequila form a part of the environment and tradition — the key to our products.

What makes Jose Cuervo the world's number one tequila?

People trust us, and why shouldn't they? We have been making tequila for hundreds of years and our roots are in tradition and authenticity. When you do things right, people take notice.

How is Cuervo enjoyed best?

Ice-cold is my preference, but I have to tell you, the best way to enjoy Cuervo is however you prefer. As long as you enjoy it, Salud! Cheers to us all! 🍸



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Cuervo Classic Margarita

The beauty of the Cuervo Classic Margarita is that once you know the right way to make it, you can experiment to jazz it up.

Ingredients:

45 ml Cuervo Gold or Cuervo Silver
15 ml Fresh lime juice
30 ml Agave nectar (substitute: light-coloured honey)
Coarse salt (optional)
Garnish with a wedge of fresh lime

Glass: Martini glass

Method: Add all the ingredients with ice, and shake. Strain into a chilled martini glass, on the rocks, or blended. The traditional Margarita uses only the agave nectar as a sweetener. You can substitute a light-coloured honey to keep it natural. Add a little hot water to the honey before mixing. Muddle or blend in some fresh mango, watermelon, or any fresh fruit to add another dimension.



Cuervo Bloody Maria

I love this drink! It's so easy to pour this down the hatch. Warning: some people like it spicy. Make sure you ask your friends if they can handle the heat!

Ingredients:

45 ml Cuervo Gold or Cuervo Silver
120 ml Tomato juice
30 ml Fresh lemon juice
1 tsp Horseradish
2 dashes of Tabasco sauce
2 dashes of Worcestershire sauce
2 tsp Olive juice
1 pinch Celery salt
1 pinch Black pepper
Garnish with a lemon wedge and a crisp celery stick

Glass: Cocktail glass

Method: Add all the ingredients with ice, and shake. Strain into a chilled cocktail glass or on the rocks. Garnish with salt and pepper rim for an extra kick! And get creative with spice and heat. Experiment with fresh chillies for your own special recipe.





La Paloma de Cuervo

This drink is one of the best selling cocktails in Mexico. Locals drink this refreshing drink day and night. It's perfect for a brunch get-together with friends.

Ingredients:

45 ml Cuervo Gold
120 ml Pink or yellow grapefruit juice
15 ml Fresh lime juice
30 ml Tonic water
Coarse salt (optional)
Garnish with a generous lime wedge for flavour and drama

Glass: Cocktail glass

Method: Rim a large glass with salt, then add ice. Combine all the ingredients, leaving the tonic last to top it off. Squeeze and drop in the fresh lime wedge.



Tequila Sunrise de Cuervo

Try this classic at sunset or perhaps sunrise, for if that makes you smile, the drink sure will.

Ingredients:

45 ml Cuervo Gold
120 ml Fresh orange juice
Drizzle with pomegranate juice or grenadine syrup
Garnish with a lime wedge or an orange slice

Glass: Martini glass

Method: Stir or shake straight-up Cuervo Gold and orange juice. Strain into a chilled martini glass or on the rocks. Slowly pour in the pomegranate juice or grenadine, and allow it to settle to the bottom of the glass.

