

COCKTAIL OF THE WEEK

TASTING THE MARGARITA RAINBOW AT LA COMIDA



La Comida's colorful margarita lineup comes with a side of excellent company.

Photo: Leila Navidi

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"It's National Tequila Day every day here at La Comida," a boisterous voice booms from behind the 25-foot zinc-top bar. "So come on down and take a seat, lil' lady."

The voice is John O'Donnell (aka JOD), and the lil' lady is me. At 5-foot-8, I don't know that I'm really all that little, but compared to the Irishman towering above my wooden bar stool, perhaps I am. I've hardly been in Michael and Jenna Morton's Downtown Mexican joint two minutes and I've already learned La Comida Bar Lesson No. 1: Life is always a matter of perspective.

“Are you ready for the tequila world tour?” O’Donnell asks. I smile, nod and politely say, “Bring it.”

O’Donnell immediately grabs a bottle, a pint glass and a shaker. He was born on Cinco de Mayo, so making margaritas is practically instinctual. Considering La Comida has more bottles of tequila behind its bar than seats in its restaurant, O’Donnell fits the place perfectly. A Mason jar slides across the bar. It’s a burst of magenta. Another Mason jar, this time bright orange, isn’t far behind.

O’Donnell introduces me to a dashing gentleman a few seats down, who happens to be Nevada Secretary of State Ross Miller. “The quality of the cocktails isn’t really why I come here,” Miller says, as O’Donnell slides a fresh passion fruit margarita in front of him. “For example, I didn’t even order this. I follow Johnny. He’s always been the life of the party.” The barman informs Miller that he’s also on the world tour, and Miller shrugs. As if he had a choice.

Miller is right. The magic at La Comida is not really about the cocktails, though they are delicious. House margaritas generally follow an approachable formula that includes Casamigos blanco tequila, a 100 percent Blue Weber agave from the Jalisco highlands, some kind of fresh fruit purée, sour mix, a Mason jar and a \$9 price tag. O’Donnell is the first to admit he’s not a mixologist and isn’t too keen on a jigger. “They call me the resident funologist around here. Good drinks, food and fun. It’s like a fiesta every night.”

La Comida Bar Lesson No. 2: It’s about the company you keep while sipping cocktails, especially the company of the bartender.

The rainbow of Mason jars keeps building: yellow, pink, yellow, red. As for the company, I’ve spotted P Moss, Tony Hsieh and Rehan Choudhry in the past hour. O’Donnell adds that Ashton Kutcher, Oscar and Carolyn Goodman and Fox White House Correspondent Ed Henry have all visited his bar.

We're ready for the final destination on the tequila world tour. Dubbed the Siempre Caliente, it's fruity, sassy and made with hot sauce. O'Donnell says he was inspired by his love of Cholula on scrambled eggs. After we sample it, O'Donnell smiles and offers a non sequitur that turns out to be La Comida Bar Lesson No. 3: "If you find a doctor that smokes and drinks as much as you, you'll be fine the rest of your life."

If life really is a matter of perspective, La Comida will help you see it half full. And if you ask politely, O'Donnell might even take you on the world tour of margaritas sometime, which could involve billionaires, politicians, advice on doctors or maybe an adventure all your own.

Siempre Caliente Recipe:

2 oz. Chamucos tequila

3¾ oz. fresh sour mix

1 oz. freshly puréed passion fruit

5 splashes of hot sauce

1 basil leaf (garnish)

Add all ingredients to a shaker with ice. Shake and strain over ice in a Mason jar rimmed with salt. Garnish with basil.

