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2010



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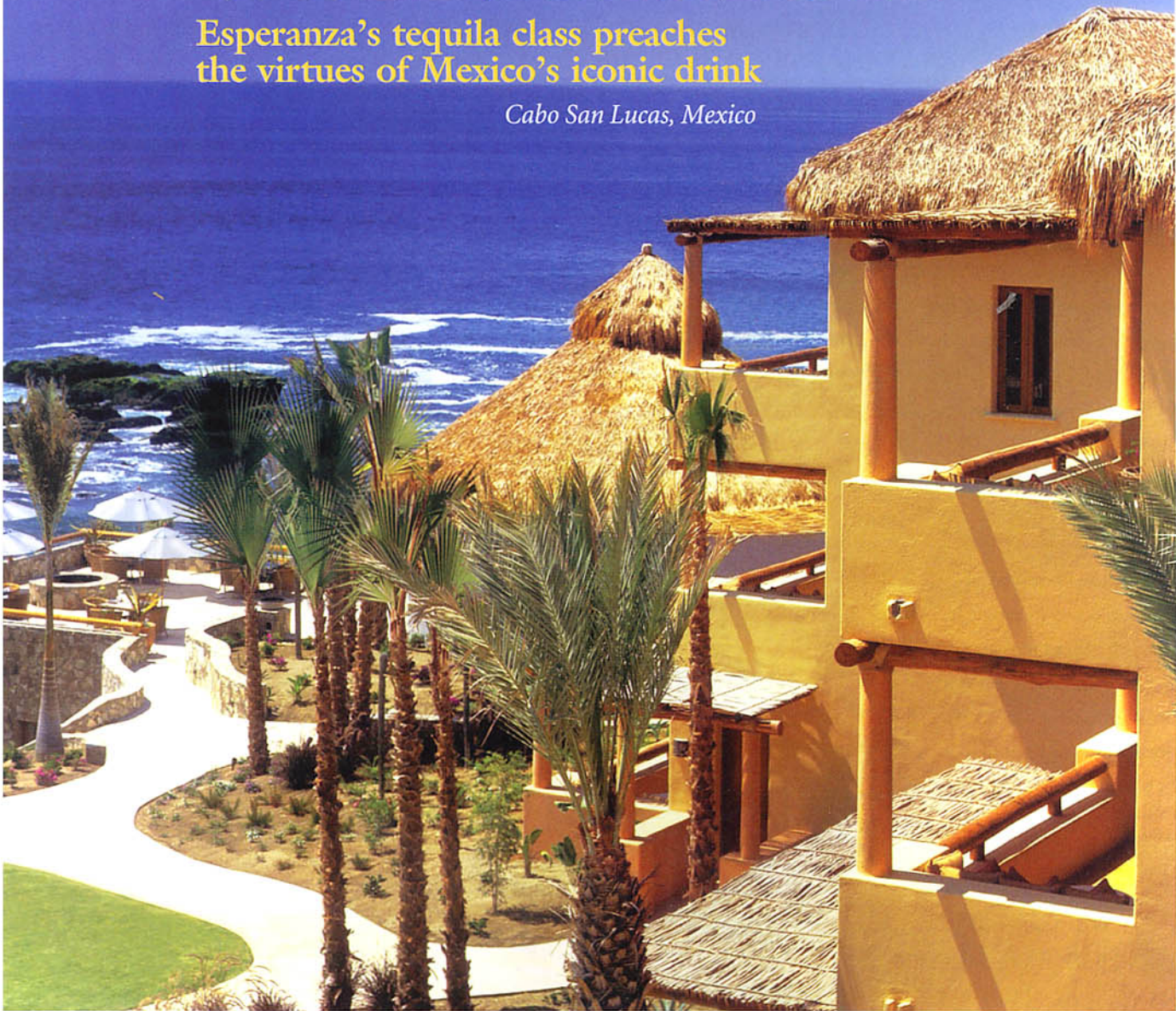
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Spiritual. conversion

Esperanza's tequila class preaches
the virtues of Mexico's iconic drink

Cabo San Lucas, Mexico



STORY BY **MARTIN KAUFMANN** MANAGING EDITOR/THE GOLF LIFE OF **GOLFWEEK**
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF **ESPERANZA RESORT**

Christian Moya had a sober, almost professorial air, so it was easy to overlook the fact that he was about to get me a bit tipsy. Moya was my teacher, I was his student, and the subject was tequila.

Moya's classroom is El Restaurante at Esperanza Resort, where he serves as master tequilero. In his weekly tequila classes, he takes it upon himself to help guests embrace Mexico's iconic drink.

It's hard to imagine a better setting for Moya's class than Esperanza, which has been open just seven years but already has developed the sort of mystique that most resorts spend decades trying to foster. The boutique resort, situated on the Sea of Cortez, is the sort of place where the entire staff seems to know your name even before you arrive at reception. Overseeing it all is General Manager Severino Gomez, a native Colombian who, with his courtly manner and ability to speak five languages, seemingly was plucked from central casting to play the role of the gracious host.

True to the philosophy of parent company Auberge Resorts, Esperanza eschews the cookie-cutter approach in favor of architecture and amenities that celebrate the best of Mexico and, specifically, southern Baja. It's designed to recall a Mexican village, though one with all of the amenities guests would expect from a five-diamond property. Esperanza showcases the work of Mexican artists, incorporates indigenous minerals into its spa treatments and uses many local ingredients at El Restaurante. The seaside, open-air restaurant

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features more than 100 types of tequila, making it a natural place for Moya to celebrate the spirit.

A confession: I've always been intimidated by tequila. For the longest time, I associated it with things – harsh taste, headaches – that were best avoided.

Then a friend sent me a bottle of Partida Añejo a few years ago, and I began to soften my anti-tequila stance. It was smooth, like a scotch that's meant to be sipped rather than shot, with a peppery finish. Partida Añejo, as it turns out, was one of the tequilas Moya had poured for my tasting.

Moya began with the basics. Like champagne, he told me, tequila is not just a drink, but an appellation; it is made primarily in and near the city of Tequila. Spaniards who had settled in Mexico began distilling the spirit from agave plants in the 1500s.

As Moya walked me through a tasting of more than a half dozen tequilas, he discussed the spirit's various classifications. Those included: Silver tequilas, which are unaged; Abocado, which Moya called “junk” tequilas because they typically are colored with caramel; Reposado, which are aged two months to a year in oak barrels; Añejo, which are aged

one to three years; and Extra Premium tequilas, which are aged two to 10 years.

Moya's selections got better and better, building to a crescendo. The José Cuervo Reserva de la Familia, my sixth sample, reminded me of drinks I was more used to savoring on cold winter nights.

“I've had a lot of people take this class who say they can't tell the difference between this and a fine cognac,” said Moya, who described it as “one of the values of the extra premium market.”

But it was the last sample that made the biggest impression. The words “That's wonderful” slipped from my mouth upon first tasting Herradura Selección Suprema Añejo, which is aged five years in French oak barrels. Its flavors were further enhanced after Moya suggested I taste a piece of dark chocolate before my next sip.

For Moya, who views his class more as a mission than just an amenity, that final sip was the clincher. He had won over another tequila convert.

“The main reason I do this,” Moya said, “is to change people from thinking about shots of tequila to sipping it or having it with chocolate or a good cigar.” ■

