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SHAKEN AND STIRRED

The Avocado's Avocation

By JONATHAN MILES

THE motif at Macondo, a restaurant and bar that opened last week on Houston Street on the Lower East Side, is "estilo libre latino," which translates to "freestyle Latino." This may explain why I found myself drinking an avocado at the bar there last Thursday. An avocado cóctel? That's freestyle, baby.

Macondo is an offshoot of Rayuela, a restaurant on nearby Allen Street where chef Máximo Tejada introduced his freestyling tropical cuisine last year. Macondo is pitched as the taco-truck cousin of Rayuela, with a focus on Latin American street food — bocadillos, arepas and empanadas — and a takeout window. But don't be fooled: This is to street food what Julia Roberts, in "Pretty Woman," was to street-walkers. "Truffle trumpet aioli" isn't exactly a street-cart staple.

Neither is a frozen avocado drink, spiked with mescal, Cointreau and a coca leaf liqueur, but who's complaining? The street is hot and the drink is arctic cold. Not to mention deliriously odd. In designing the cocktail list, Macondo's owners aimed to evoke a Brazilian juice bar, with most of the 14 drinks built around a fruit. Acai is paired with rum; banana meets cachaca; tamarind is shaken with tequila.

"But you can get all the drinks with or without alcohol," said Hector Sanz, an owner. "The fruit comes first."

And avocado, being a fruit, isn't left out. While rare, it's not unknown for bartenders to reach for one. (There's little, save perhaps Spam and Velveeta, that bartenders haven't reached for in this decade of experimentation.) Several years ago, Lucy Brennan, the owner of Mint and 820 Lounge in Portland, Ore., noticed



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LOOK AT IT LIKE THIS They drink tomatoes, don't they?

the similarities between avocados and bananas while mixing a banana daiquiri, and created an avocado daiquiri that remains on the menu. Avocado margaritas dot Texas cocktail lists. And Dale DeGroff, the author and former Rainbow Room bartender, devised a frozen tequila-based avocado drink five years ago.

"It's such a Latin American ingredient," said Mr. Sanz, explaining his own reach for an avocado to liquefy. Junior Merino, a native of Mexico who created Macondo's drinks, said the greatest challenge with using avocados was their thickness. The way around that was to create a thick drink. (In politics, this is called attacking an opponent's strengths.)

Hence the Aguacate + Mescal, a pistachio-colored smoothie that gets its edge from the aforementioned liquors, its winsomeness from agave nectar and honey, and its lush texture from an avocado quarter. It can provoke cognitive dissonance, teetering between savory and sweet, familiar and bizarre, refreshing and oversatiating. Ordering more than one is a mistake; not ordering one is a bigger mistake.

Macondo derives its name from the town Gabriel García Márquez invented for his novel "One Hundred Years of Solitude," and, despite the fate Macondo suffered, it's not a bad name for a bar. In Márquez's Macondo, if I'm recalling right, ice was magical, no one was over 30 and residents went years without sleep. They wouldn't have blinked at drinking an avocado.

AGUACATE + MESCAL

Adapted from Macondo

Kosher salt
Lime slice
1/4 avocado
1/2 ounce Cointreau
3/4 ounce Agave coca leaf liqueur (or Midori melon liqueur)
1 1/2 ounces mescal
1 1/2 ounces freshly squeezed lime juice
1 ounce agave nectar
1 teaspoon honey.

Spread some kosher salt on a small plate. Rub the rim of a glass with lime and dip in the salt. Combine all other ingredients with a large scoop of ice in a blender; mix until smooth. Pour into the prepared glass and serve.

Yield: 1 serving

