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# THE **tastina** panel

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## **TOKAJI ASZÚ**

Hungary's Elixir is  
**SWOON-WORTHY**  
by the Spoon



Daniel Mahdavian serves Aszú and Essencia by the crystal spoon as Director of Food and Beverage at the Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C.



As General Manager at Tallula's in Santa Monica, CA, Mary Thompson culls housemade syrups, farmers market produce, and other fresh ingredients to use in her impressive list of Margaritas and Palomas.

# A Somm's Eye View for Southwest Food and Drink

SANTA MONICA MEXICAN EATERY **TALLULA'S** IS RUN BY A GROUP WITH A TRACK RECORD OF TALENT AND EXPERIENCE

by Meredith May / photos by Rick Poon



Tallula's Chef/Partner Jeremy Fox uses sustainably-farmed meats and seafood and the freshest local and seasonal produce for his signature "homecooked-style" dishes.

A vibrant cantina offering seaside views just off the Pacific Coast Highway, the hacienda "estate" that is Tallula's offers Mexican comfort food and ingredient-driven cocktails to its sun-kissed patrons in Santa Monica, California.

Those cocktails come courtesy of General Manager Mary Thompson, who worked alongside some of the most cutting-edge chefs in Southern California before joining up with the RC Group, a family-owned restaurant company that includes Rustic Canyon, Milo & Olive, Cassia, Esters Wine Shop & Bar, and Huckleberry Café.

At Tallula's, Thompson has curated a bar program that's both innovative and craft-motivated by taking a somm's eye view, choosing vintage-dated or small-production, agave-based spirits for her menu. "I enjoy the hunt," she tells *The Tasting Panel*. "These small brands take a cue from the wine industry, and I'm selecting products that speak to place and the people that make them."

As expected for a Mexican eatery, Tallula's, which opened in May 2017, places a reliable spotlight on the Margarita—but Thompson ensures her bar team finds ways to expand the parameters of the classic cocktail. "I like to push for recipes that are memorable," she explains. "I imagine myself taking our customers on a tour of what's out there with agave spirits."

Wine Director Kathryn Coker oversees a global selection of wines from Spain, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Italy, France, and the U.S., finding labels that pair well with the creative dishes rich in flavor and texture. Coker also co-owns Esters with the same trio behind Tallula's—Josh Loeb, Zoe Nathan, and Chef Jeremy Fox—and it's the addition of these ultra-professionals that makes the Santa Monica cantina a standout in a crowded field of Mexican cuisine. From spending just one meal inside Tallula's southwest-inspired interior, with the inimitable California sunshine pouring through the windows and the ocean just steps away, it's clear it's a special place to work. ■■