

# Inspired by Water

An Interview with Lisa Branson, Global Brand Lead, Agave Spirits, Stoli Group



Lisa Branson

**EDITORS' NOTE** Lisa Branson previously consulted for Campari where she globally managed the launch of Rare LTO Scotch and supported all categories in business intelligence. Before that, under her direction as the Vice President of Marketing for Arta Tequila, a start-up artisanal ultra-premium tequila brand, she grew the brand to a top 100

spirits brand as named by Wine Enthusiast in three years representing sales growth six times faster than category average. Earlier, she was with The Integer Group driving national promotions and the Coors Light brand for Coors Brewing Company. She has held various marketing leadership positions in Fortune 500 companies, built a brand division of a full-service marketing agency, and offered consulting services. Branson earned a BA in business and communications from Hamline University and an MS in marketing from the University of Colorado Denver.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Part of Stoli Group, one of the world's leading premium spirits businesses, Cenote Tequila ([tequilacenote.com](http://tequilacenote.com)) is an ultra-premium 100 percent Agave Azul Tequilana Weber Tequila inspired by the beauty of the Yucatán Peninsula and the spectacular underground water systems unique to this geographical region. Cenote Tequila has a complex flavor profile that balances fragrant cooked agave with delicate wood notes and is a result of the diligent craftsmanship of Master Blender Alejandro Garcia.

**Will you highlight the history of Cenote Tequila and how the brand is positioned in the industry?**

Cenote's history is rooted in exploration, curation, and innovation and that is what makes us different in the tequila space. Our creator, Arturo Fuentes, nicknamed the godfather of tequila, grew up in Mexico and started making tequila. He decided to explore the world and went to France and made cognac. There he learned the best distillation methods, but he decided to return to his homeland and created Cenote Tequila. He curated the best methods and ingredients which led to all the innovation within our portfolio. We curated ancient blueprints to recreate an ancestral pit oven for our Ahumado, peels from green



oranges grown in Veracruz, created our own proprietary filters, and aged our Blanco for 21 days all because we want to bring the best to those who deserve the best.

**How do you explain tequila to a person who has never experienced the spirit, and do you feel that there is still a stigma around tequila?**

Has anyone not tried tequila these days? Tequila certainly has a unique taste since it isn't grain based like a lot of other spirits. Agave has an earthy spicy flavor that is strong, but also tastes very clean – especially if you're drinking Cenote. It is also naturally gluten-free and has no carbs.



**“Cenote is 100 percent agave juice, purified water from our artisanal well – no sugar, pure and simple.”**

The stigma may come from how educated new tequila drinkers have become. Younger drinkers know there is a difference between “tequila” and “100 percent agave tequila” and they start with the good stuff. The stigma comes from overconsuming shots of low-quality tequila that is 49 percent sugar water which causes the worst hangovers. Cenote is 100 percent agave juice, purified water from our artisanal well – no sugar, pure and simple.

**What have been the keys to Cenote Tequila’s growth in the industry?**

We are storytellers through tequila innovation – creating unique tasting experiences. We aren’t a mega-brand; we don’t rely on celebrities, and we don’t want to. We want the brand’s innovative approach to inspire tequila explorers to dive deeper into the purity story and share it among their core group of friends.

**How critical is it for Cenote Tequila to continue to innovate and where is innovation taking place for the brand?**

Innovation is part of Cenote’s DNA. Since our name is Cenote, of course we’re inspired by water. We are currently diving deep into this area and even partnering with a water sommelier.

**Will you provide an overview of Cenote Tequila’s product offerings?**

We have our core 3: Blanco, Reposado and Añejo – with all our varieties touching wood, even our Blanco which is unique in the industry. We have Cenote Cristalino Añejo, which is so smooth and even a bit sweet. Two of our most unique offerings are Cenote Ahumado Reposado which is what tequila used to taste like using ancestral techniques, and Green Orange, our full-strength aged Blanco infused with green-orange peels from Veracruz triple-distilled. Our rare jewel is Sac Actun, a 10-year Extra Añejo in a beautiful bespoke bottle and presentation box.

**How do you define the Cenote Tequila difference and what sets the brand apart in the tequila space?**

As our name suggests, we are inspired by water. So, our water which is drawn from our artisanal well on-site is the closest well to the Jalisco volcano. Its minerality makes it very special. Additionally, we focus on purity by filtering it through proprietary coconut fiber filters and ionize it with Mexican silver. We collect the most unique processes and

ingredients so that Cenote consumers can collect the best moments with friends.

**What has allowed you to offer a high-quality, premium product at an accessible price?**

We are lucky. Our parent company owns our NOM, so we can control our process beginning to end.

**What are your priorities for Cenote Tequila as you look to the future?**

Our priorities are getting the Cenote story out and connecting with fellow tequila explorers. We want to provide trendsetters new tasting experiences that bring their friends together. ●

