

PLAYING WITH FIRE

Toca Madera's popular Ghost Rider margarita lights up the spooky season

The legend of the ghost rider tells of spectral spirits with flaming skulls who ride through the sky on fiery steeds or infernal motorcycles and hunt down evil souls. Over the years, the phantom figure has inspired numerous stories and works of art, including paintings, comic book characters and this month's featured cocktail.

Modern Mexican steakhouse Toca Madera offers its own take on the mythical antihero. The Ghost Rider margarita is one of the restaurant's most popular cocktails — and it's the perfect libation to put guests in a spooky state of mind. According to Toca Madera beverage manager, Jan Santana, the drink "evokes the image of the devil's bounty hunter himself."

Served in a double old fashioned or rocks glass, the Ghost Rider (\$20) starts with a classic mix of reposado tequila, lime and agave. Muddled mint adds a refreshing twist. "When the margarita section of the menu was being put together, there was this idea for a light, refreshing, herbal take," Santana says.

But it's what's on top of the drink that makes it such a spooky showstopper. Garnished with a generous, fluffy bouquet of mint and a carefully balanced lime wheel, the Ghost Rider is adorned with a house-made sugar skull, crafted of superfine cane sugar by bartender Mariana Falossi, that's doused in overproof rum and set aflame.

Fire is a prominent element within Toca Madera's brand and plays a central role in the dining experience. It's showcased in the restaurant's 40-ounce Flaming Tomahawk steak (served tableside; \$325) and in the fire dancer performances. And with the Ghost Rider, fire adds a touch of theater.

"The Ghost Rider hits all the familiar notes of a margarita while being a uniquely Toca Madera cocktail," Santana says. "It's refreshing, tart and herbaceous."

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BY REBECCA L. RHOADES / PHOTO BY DEBBY WOLVOS

