

Cigars Lover MAGAZINE

SPRING 2021



MONTEZEMOLO

- THE TOSCANO CIGAR - BOLÍVAR - NICOTINE - LAURA CHAVIN - NIRKA REYES ESTRELLA - DOUBLE CUÑO - PAIRINGS
- READY TO DRINK - FAIR, ORGANIC AND ETHICAL - AMRUT: THE INTERVIEW - MONONGAHELA RYE - CANCHANCARA
- THE ACIDITY AND TANNICITY OF WINE - AGED BEERS - PIPPALI, THE INDONESIAN PEPPER - BBQ: SMOKY FLAVOUR

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Editor's thoughts

One year after the beginning of the pandemic.

The first issue of 2021 opens about a year after the start of the pandemic that has drastically changed our habits, not only as aficionados, but also as living beings. Although the situation seems to have reached a point where only an improvement seems possible, today we live in a different world, where "digital" has become a reality within everyone's reach, even those who, just a year ago, did not use it or preferred to stay away from it. The big questions of the moment concern how long it will take to restore normality, and in the world of cigars and spirits, how much convivial moments that disappeared a year ago can start once again.

In the current issue, we had the pleasure of having a talk with Luca Cordero di Montezemolo, a world-renowned manager, cigar smoker, and since 2018 President of Manifatture Sigaro Toscano. In his career he has held various roles and represented large companies. One of his last assignments was the presidency of Ferrari, of which he was also CEO. Spring 2021 is full of interviews, including the one with Willi Knopf, owner of the Laura Chavin brand, Nirka Reyes, president of De Los Reyes Cigars, and Mr. Rakshit Jagdale, founder of Amrut Indian Single Malt.

Starting from this issue, a new section is introduced, called "Pairings", where the theme of pairing is addressed as never before. In each issue of CigarsLover Magazine to come, this new section will always remain present, with new proposals and new combinations, aimed to recommend cigars and spirits that best match each other.

2021 will also bring a breath of fresh air to our website, where you will soon be able to appreciate the contents in an even better way and, in the field of spirits, a new website will be launched. #staytuned!

#refineyourtaste

CONTENTS

Spring 2021



24

1 ON THE COVER

22 Manifatture Sigaro Toscano

8 CIGARS

10 Appearance or content?

14 Bolívar

32 Nicotine

36 Laura Chavin

40 Second cut

42 Nirka Reyes Estrella

46 Double cuño

48 "Postponed/cancelled"

52 Sunset of the CUC

56 Pairings: Cigars & Spirits

58 Cigars & Spirits



16



36

62 SPIRITS

64 Ready To Drink

68 Fair

74 Amrut

80 Monongahela Rye

84 Canchancara



42

86 TASTE

88 Acidity and tannicity

96 Smoky flavour

100 Aged beers

104 Pippali

108 SPIRITS TASTING

112 Rum

120 Whisky

127 CIGAR TASTING

138 Panetelas/Lancero

132 Piramides

136 Robusto

140 Toro

144 CREDITS



56



70



90

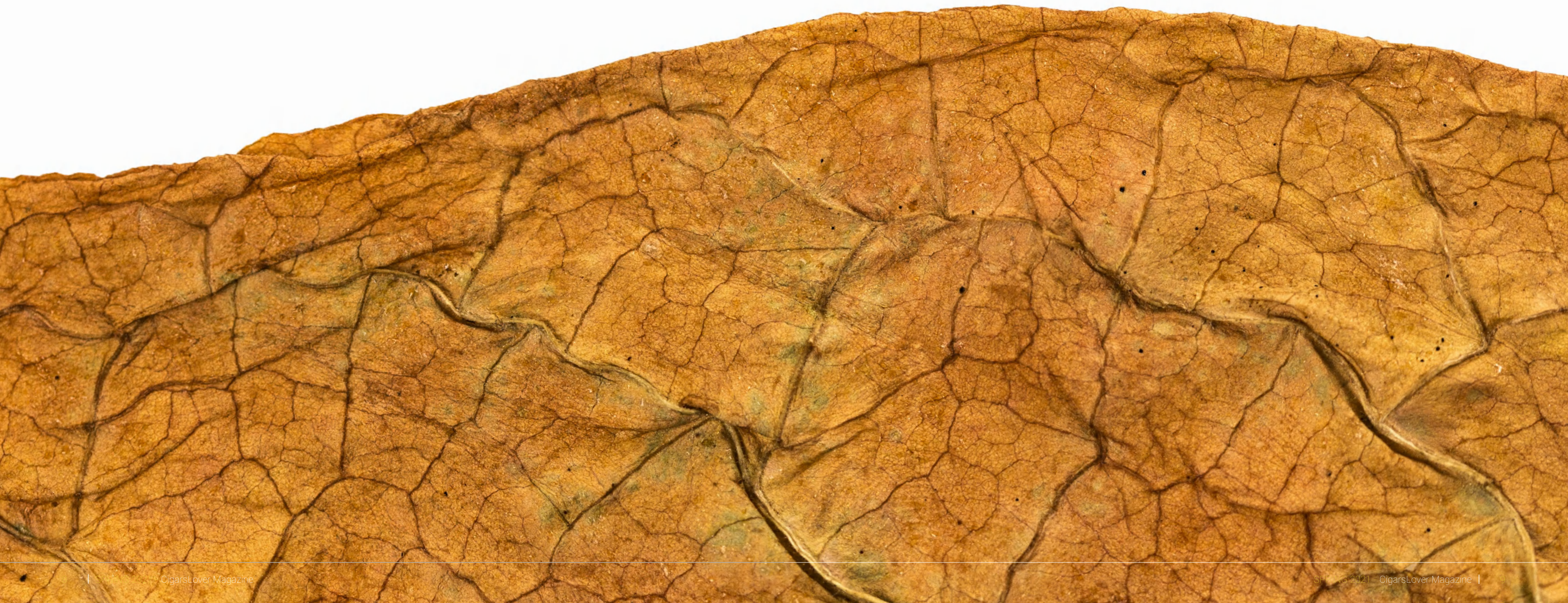


102

CIGARS

“Cigars served me for precisely 50 years as protection and a weapon in the combat of life... I owe to the cigar a great intensification of my capacity to work and a facilitation of my self-control.”

Sigmund Freud



Appearance or content?

Born as imaginative creations, barber poles managed to carve out a decent market by sharing the scene with new and imaginative artifacts

by Giuseppe Mitolo



In the last twenty years cigar-related marketing has developed exponentially, despite the fact that the product itself has been known for over a century. Leaving aside the evolution of vitolas, which has seen a steady increase in ring gauge, we have witnessed a real revolution in the presentation of the cigar to the smoker. Boxes, packaging, anillas, materials, have become the real business card of a new release. A company might have produced the cigar of the millennium, but without a serious advertising strategy, captivating packaging, detailed graphic design analysis, and planning it most likely does not have great chances of success in the worldwide market.

Conceptually related to this field is the very narrow niche of cigars called "barber poles." When people understood that it was no longer enough to produce a good cigar, companies began to experiment with new products, which could offer an intriguing novelty that drew the eyes of the consumer and, at the same time, a satisfying smoke.

The name is borrowed from the traditional barber pole, the typical cylindrical sign with colored coils, present at the entrance of barber shops. The historical origins of this object date back to the first centuries after the Middle Ages, when minor medical practices, such as dental care, were delegated to barbers. The latter, to dry the washed (but still blood stained) rags wrapped the bandages around the poles located outside the workshop. Over time, the red and white pole in Europe began to be associated with those barbers who also carried out "medical" care. With the colonization of the new continent, the barber pole was also exported to the Americas where the color blue was added. The bright colors wrapped on a cylinder inspired the name of the nascent cigars. These extravagant products were launched on the world market in 1996 by Hugo Cassar (now Ventura Cigars), who presented his Diamond Dominican Mystique, the first cigar with two wrappers arranged in order to create the particular helical effect. Since early 2000s all the largest cigar producing countries (with the exception of Cuba) have been home to brands that include a barber pole in their vitolario: Arturo Fuente, Camacho, Asylum, La Flor Dominicana, CAO, Gurkha, Alec Bradley, etc..

Despite this large number of producers, the question that often lies in the smoker's mind is: are they appreciable products or is it just refined aesthetics? For those who have

recently approached the cigar world or for those who have never shown interest in this type of cigar, it must be immediately clarified that a barber pole is made through the overlap of two or three different wrappers of distinctly different shades. The torcedor, after having shaped the two leaves identically, overlaps them, creating an overhang so that one wrapper protrudes more than the other. It is at this stage that the roller must be clear about the aesthetic goal: if both wrappers are to be equally visible the leaves must be spaced with much of the bottom leaf showing, if the intention is to show only a thin line of different color, the space left free from overlapping will be less. Next, with the two leaves arranged appropriately, the torcedor rolls the bonche in the classic way, but taking great care in making sure that both wrappers remain tight and do not shift relative to each other. Therefore, as is easy to understand, they are products that require a high level of skill and concentration of the torcedor. This technique generally requires twice as long as it would take to apply a single wrapper leaf.

Being in the presence of a cigar with a double wrapper, in addition to the aesthetic aspect, the master blender will have to keep in mind at least two factors in the preparation of the recipe: the aromatic components and the level of combustibility of each leaf. Two wrappers that develop aromas that are too contrasting or too similar cannot be combined; at the same time, it poses a great risk to overlap two leaves that burn at different times due to their intrinsic characteristics. To all of this it can be added that the ligador will also have to create a perfect blend of the filler tobaccos, one that does not conflict with the aromas developed by the two wrappers. If all these steps have been carefully weighed, the barber pole may be able to offer a complex, aromatically rich, and satisfying smoke. However, in more recent times, the barber pole technique has evolved towards a concept other than offering a cigar with two or three wrappers. On the market there are, in fact, cigars that have multiple overlapping wrappers, but in non-helical motifs: stripes, chessboards, circles and other imaginative creations. We could call them "patchwork" or "Arlecchino" cigars, without in any way diminishing the skilled work of torcedores that becomes, in this case, a real work of art. In this case, however, the construction process is different, because it provides for pieces of leaf to be shaped and glued to the other, in addition to or in place of the technique used to obtain the helical effect.

These products really represent a small percentage of the production volume of a manufacturer: they are often made at the request of customers (the so-called "custom") or are released in very limited batches to celebrate a specific anniversary of the brand. One of the main reasons is the long time it takes to produce only one specimen. On the latter products, however, finding a credible organoleptic justification becomes difficult. It is difficult to believe that a small cutout of tobacco, which perhaps burns for two or three puffs, could develop peculiar aromas that can be distinguished during smoking. For this reason we are inclined to believe that the "Arlecchino" cigars are, just like the carnival character, a burlesque, yet a very respectable parenthesis in the most serious cigar production.



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Bolívar

A century after its official registration, this brand continues to fascinate for its unmistakable character

by **Giuseppe Mitolo**

Simon Bolívar was a Venezuelan revolutionary general who lived between 1700 and 1800. Who, with his thought and military work, contributed to the independence of Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Venezuela. For his contributions to the liberation of these nations, he was awarded the honorary title of Libertador (The Liberator) and is still considered as one of the most important figures in the political and cultural history of South America. For these and many other reasons (the history of him is particularly broad) his memory is celebrated in Latin American countries: streets, squares, palaces and cultural centers, even the Venezuelan currency are named after this tremendous leader.

Like the character, the Cuban brand of the same name also enjoys a huge popularity among aficionados. Although Bo-

lívar is not recognized by Habanos SA as a global brand, it is classified as a "Value Brand", therefore widely distributed (in particular at Habanos Specialists') and one receiving particular attention for new releases.

The history of the brand does not boast great entrepreneurs, particular stories or legends, yet it has conquered many smokers all over the world and can boast, along with Trinidad, a global notoriety worthy of the great Cuban names.

The origins of the brand, according to the most accredited historians, are to be found in the early 1900s (1901 or 1902), but in 1921 it was officially registered by the company J.F. Rocha y Cia, to José Fernandez Rocha, José Rodriguez Fernandez and Robert Middenas, already owners of the manufacturer and the brand El crepuscolo. There is no historical

evidence for the association of the nascent brand with the figure of Simon Bolívar, but given the fame of Libertador, those who started the production do not seem to have put too much effort into the search of a name that would give prestige to cigars that would soon reach the market. It may have been the fame of the name or the quality of the products, but the first decades of production showed a particular appreciation from British smokers. Later, in 1954 (or 1944 according to some reports) the brand was purchased (together with La Gloria Cubana, acquired by Rocha y Cia in 1905) by Cifuentes company and has remained under the protective umbrella of Partagas ever since.

A historical aside must be dedicated to the Amado Seleccion series of Bolívar. Starting in the 1980s, at the express request of the British importer Joseph Samuel & Son, the Amado Seleccion line was built and, with it, the respective C, E and G products. These three references, in fact, shared, respectively, the same vitolas de galera as the Corona Extra (francisco), the Royal Corona (robusto) and the Coronas Junior (minuto). Production of this line was discontinued in 1993, when Hunters & Frankau acquired importer Joseph Samuel & Son.

One of the major points of production of Bolívar, despite the physiological variation of tobacco and also a lightening of the receta since the mid-nineties of the last century, has always been constancy. All Bolívar cigars, even the least

famous vitolas, have always enjoyed high productive attention, despite not being considered as niche cigars, which can enjoy a less frenetic production because of the lower volume of torcida.

A second reason for success is the balance between aromas and strength. Although a good balance is a key discriminating factor between an appreciable cigar and an offensive one, in Bolívar they manage to coexist an important strength and a rich aromatic bouquet. In fact, with a few exceptions, generally the products belonging to this brand are classified from medium-strong to strong, with a remarkable full body and considered to be some of the strongest in the Cuban portfolio. To properly pair a pronounced strength it is necessary for the intensity of the aromas to be well delineated. This requirement is a real challenge for Cuban master blenders and also for any cigar manufacturer.

Bolívar carries a peculiar aromatic palette, almost always robust and vibrant, played on specific and characteristic notes of wood, earth and spices (from black pepper to nutmeg), up to balsamic components and mineral tones in some specimens with a few years of careful aging. Considering the sum of all of its parts, Bolívar is a brand that enjoys excellent aging capabilities. In fact, on the auction market, cigars of this brand are always present and at prices that, with the appropriate distinctions, we could define as reasonable and affordable.



Bolívar Band
Band used until 2009

Compared to the previous band, the embossing is a different

Standard Bolívar Band
Band used until 2006 for special editions. Used for all Bolívar cigars since 2009



The written "Cuba" is added below "Habana".

Currently, Bolivar's line can count on a total of six vitolas: Coronas junior (minuto, 42x110), Petit Coronas (mareva, 42x129), Royal Coronas (robusto, 50x124), Belicosos Finos (campana, 52x140), Bolivar Tubos No. 2 (mareva, 42x129), and the Libertador (sublime, 54x164) reserved for the Casa del Habano group of resellers.

As for the Edicion Limitada (Limited Editions), the brand has been used on only three occasions: in 2009 with the Petit Belicoso (petit belicoso, 52x125), then in 2014 with the Super Coronas (Hermoso No. 3, 48 x 140) and in 2018 presenting the Soberano (duke, 54x140). The real boom to this brand concerns regional editions, with over thirty versions in various markets around the world, an indisputable sign of how much the brand is appreciated at every latitude.

Focusing on the standard vitolaro, the masterpiece is the Belicoso Fino. It is the most loved and sold in the world,

one of the four campanas produced by Habanos SA as well as one of the very few Cuban cigars to enjoy a packaging in both Habilitada and Slide Lid Box. Such an iconic name for the brand, to the point that the Reserva presented at the Habanos Festival 2020 (the first time ever for Bolivar) has been dedicated to the Belicoso. Even the past confirms this: in 2010 the Book Habanos guarded some Gran Belicoso (rodolfo, 54 x 180) and, even earlier, in 2009, at the first appearance of the brand among the Limited Editions, a Petit Belicoso was presented.

However, the real fortune of the brand has been built and kept strong over the years by real superstars such as the Coronas Gigante, the Inmensas, the Coronas Extra and the outsider Gold Medals. We are not hostages to the classic nostalgia of the Cuban aficionado: those who have smoked these cigars are still looking for products that can recreate their quality, at least partially.

The Corona Gigante was the brand's julietta No. 2: although it coexisted with same sized Churchill (sold exclusively in tubes), it remained in production until 2017. The strength, given the size, was slightly lower than the brand's target, but the aromatic palette confirmed the family DNA.

The Inmensas, on the other hand, was the perfect Bolivar essence: strength and aromaticity at the highest levels but always in perfect balance, in a now obsolete format (dalia, 43x170), capable of great aging potential. Unfairly out of production since 2009.

The Corona Extra was the only exponent of the francisco format (44x143) throughout the Habanos vitolaro. It provided a smoke of extreme character, complexity and fulfilling. Min Ron Nee, expressing its aging capabilities, calls it "tremendous aging potential", as a result of which he often returned balsamic and mineral notes. Cancelled in 2012: a real crime.

Finally, the Gold Medal, a true champion. It was a cervante (also known as lonsdale: 42x165) packaged in a golden sheet that covered the cigar until mid-way, where it was interrupted by the anilla. It remained in production until 1992, only to be re-released, in 2004, as part of a "one off" release for the German market alone. Unfortunately, it remained on the list until 2011, the year of its retirement.

The demands, however, were so pressing that Habanos decided to release it again, for the Casa del Habano circuit alone, in 2017. It smokes as perfectly consistent with the brand, enriched by an unmatched creaminess.

The list could be longer, but we would spend too much time on nostalgia that would blind us to the current production, which still remains of great value and still continues to charm the aficionados scattered around the world, cultivating new proselytes of Bolivar.



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WINTER 2020



- | 2020 EPILOGUE - SAINT LUIS REY - RICKY RODRIGUEZ - THE FUTURE OF LOUNGES - NICHOLAS MELILLO - CIGAR AWARDS
- | BEST RUM & WHISKY OF 2020 - BOTTLED IN BOND - BLENDED WHISKY - BLOOD AND SAND - GLENCAIRN
- | CIGAR & CHAMPAGNE PAIRINGS - TRUFFLE - HIGHEST PROOF BEERS - THE MEDALS OF WINE - HOT CHILI

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FALL 2020

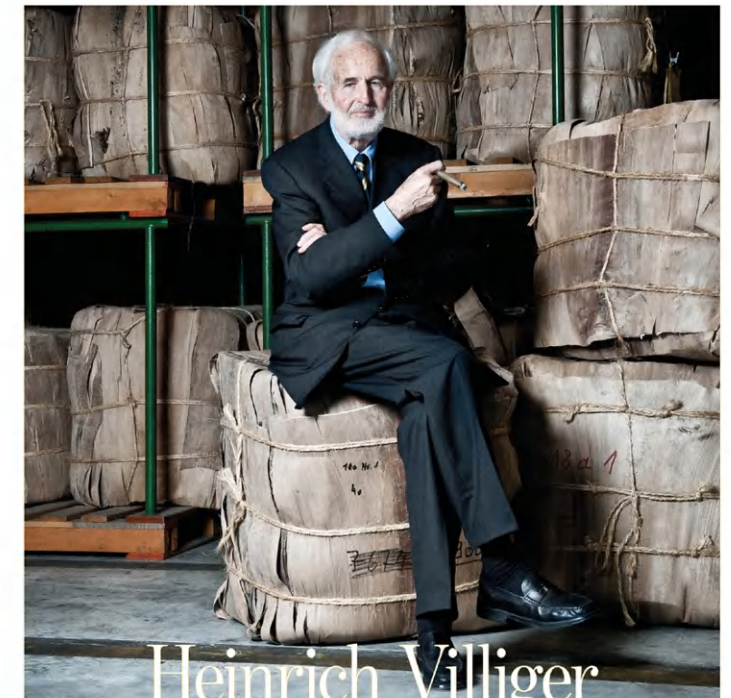


Nestor A. Plasencia

- | LIANA FLUENTE - DOUBLE PUFF - PUNCH - ANDULLO - THE CIGAR RING - MICALLET CIGARS - LOUNGE: LISBONA
- | GLENDALOUGH: THE IRISH DISTILLERY - DINING WITH WHISKY - TRIPPLE DISTILLATION - MORE THAN WINE
- | THE EVOLUTION OF THE BEER - A TEA WITH A CIGAR - T-BONE - INDIGENOUS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

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SUMMER 2020



Heinrich Villiger

- | RU IN SUMMER - THE "SAVING" BLOW - PACHUCHE CIGARS - KAREN BERGER - HULK WRAPPER - THE TREASURE CHEST
- | FLOR DE CAÑA - CUBAN SPIRIT: DRINKS & PAIRINGS - RESERVOIR: THE INTERVIEW - THE RETURN OF THE RYE
- | BEER & BBQ: PAIRING THE BARBECUE - MEAT: HOLY TRINITY - THE MATERIALS OF WINEMAKING - SALT TO TASTE

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SPRING 2020



Alec & Bradley

- | INDIANA ORTEZ - BITTER & SOUR - THE HISTORY OF ROMEO Y JULIETA - CIGARS FESTIVAL - EPERNAVY BY ILLUSION
- | THE PERFECT COCKTAIL - TIKI STYLE - KILCHOMAN & ANTHONY WILLS - RON DIPLOMÁTICO: SV 2005 - MILLET WHISKEY
- | BIOLOGIC, BIODYNAMIC & NATURAL WINE - THE BEER FOAM - HISTORY OF HAMBURGER - PORTUGUESE FRANCESINHA

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SUMMER 2019



Carlito Fuente

- | ADVENTURA CIGARS - SCISSORS - TASTING TECHNIQUES - 5 MUST HAVE CUBANS - SIGARAE - BBQ & CIGARS
- | PROHIBITIONISM: A NEW BEGINNINGS - THE MOST ILLEGAL WHISKY IN HISTORY - TOP 10 DRINKS FOR SUMMER
- | TOBACCO & WHISKY IN SAUCE - COFFEE RECIPES FOR SUMMER - MEXICO: MOLE POBLANO - FRENCH WINES



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A taste of Italy

The interview with Luca Cordero di Montezemolo and the most representative Toscano cigars, paired with three excellent Italian beverages

by **Luca Cominelli** and **Giuseppe Mitolo**

Luca Cordero di Montezemolo is a manager of great worldwide fame, and in his long career has had the opportunity to work in large and prestigious corporations, including companies such as Ferrari, Fiat, Maserati and Alitalia, just to name a few of international fame. Since 2018 he has held the position of President of Manifatture Sigaro Toscano and in this interview, we discover his side as a passionate cigar smoker.

Luca Cordero di Montezemolo, manager of great worldwide fame, cigar smoker and since 2018 President of Manifatture Sigaro Toscano. In your career, you held various roles and represented large companies. How did you discover the cigar?

Savoring a Toscano cigar, with the slow movements of the gesture and the silence in which it isolates us in our inner world of tranquility, wrapped in a cloud of aroma, is not just a pleasure, which I was lucky enough to discover soon, but a ritual, from which I would no longer know how to detach myself. Admiring a sunset with an Antico Toscano between your fingers, reading a book, chatting with an old friend while sipping a finger of red wine accompanied by my faithful Toscano cigar are moments in which everything else remains far away. That "slow" and intense ritual prevails over everything. But there is another aspect that in the relationship with the world of manufacturing and tobacco has almost "kidnapped" me and convinced me to commit myself to this company. The Toscano cigar is a product of the highest quality, which expresses in all its power its "Made in Italy" identity: it is a concentrate of Italian culture, history, traditions, and know-how. Our country, with its landscapes, its art, its quality of life, is truly enclosed in this product. And when you savor it, all this hinterland is released in its fullness. The raw material, tobacco, is grown in Italy and the USA. The cigars are made in part by hand by skilled cigar makers who dedicate themselves to it with skill and passion, following a bicentennial tradition that is also capable of evolving in a continuous balance between innovation and tradition. For over two hundred years, Toscano cigars





have been part of Italian history and beyond, as evidenced by the images and photos of men linked to this cigar, protagonists of their time and history: from Churchill, who tried and appreciated it, to Garibaldi, from Puccini to Soldati, from great film directors like Rossellini or Paolo Sorrentino to famous actors like Clint Eastwood and Tony Servillo, entrepreneurs like Joe Bastianich and many others. When I see these photos, I understand how the Toscano cigar is the protagonist of this country's history and how it knows how to cross its borders.

In the career of every manager, there are victories and defeats. Thinking about your best moments, a cigar has always been associated with great celebrations. In your case, did the cigar frame memorable moments? Do you remember any?

The image that immediately comes to mind are the conversations with Jean Todt after a few wins of Ferrari. Wrapped both in the pleasure of a good Toscano cigar, we were thinking about how to improve our cars and Formula One and how to innovate engines and performance. The cigar was the setting for many moments, the happy ones in which the team won or the less happy ones. But many other occasions have marked the sensory experience of the Toscano. For example, I remember smoking a cigar, I did not expect it, in the company of Marcello Lippi, coach of the national football team, in the aftermath of the victory at the World Cup, during which we shared the taste of the smoke and the shared vision. And I also remember delightful moments with old friends or people I happen to meet outside of professional contexts. I have studied and

lived in the United States, and for this, I have many American friends. When they come to visit, I always have a humidor with my favorite Toscano cigars to offer. They appreciate them very much. And even in the Emirates, where we built a Ferrari park when I was president of the Rossa, I often offer Toscano cigars, and my guests are enthusiastic about them. They often confess to me how they are preferable to other types of cigars due to their fuller flavor.

Getting into your routine, what are your smoking habits? How do you prefer to enjoy the cigar at its best? Do you prefer to combine it with something?

There is always a good and pleasant 'opportunity' to relax and smoke a Toscano, reading a book, sometimes accompanying it with a finger of rum, or tasting it with an old friend. Paradoxically, in this period of isolation, where we no longer have the anxiety of running around, there is more time to savor the aroma, the body, the essence of a good Toscano.

In general, I must confess that I love all the cigars produced by MST and the different blends of aromas. Still, if I have to express a clear preference, my favorites are the Antico Toscano, the Soldati, which is lighter, and sometimes I like to dwell on the Original Toscano. However, in the last month, I have appreciated the Toscano Duecento, which is a cigar different from the others. Handmade, 200mm long, born to celebrate the two hundred years of our brand, a unique cigar of its kind that evokes the history of cigars, symbol of excellence and tradition even in its name.

Since 2018, you have held the role of president of Manifatture Sigaro Toscano, a completely new sector compared to the previous ones. With what spirit did you face this new challenge, and what do you think you can bring to this grand company?

In reality, a common thread has accompanied all the business initiatives in which I have committed myself: the passion for excellence, the quality of the "Made in Italy" product, the significant capital of the people I have found along my professional path. Manifatture Sigaro Toscano encompasses all this: it has a product of extraordinary quality, it maintains the history and culture of Italy in its roots, but in a path of continuous innovation, it has a team that works with passion and pride for its product. Around this company, there is everything I have always pursued. There is the dream, the passion, the Italian spirit, the history, the way of life, and the people. I have always believed that men are the winning resource of a company. As in Ferrari and Italo, the first private High-Speed train we created starting from a simple sketch on paper, without spending a single public euro, and which in a few years reached twenty million passengers, even in MST there is technology, sophisticated machinery, state-of-the-art information systems, but then, beware, it is the people who make all these tools work, they are the ones who put their heart and attention to quality into it, the only elements that make you win challenges.

As soon as I joined MST I found an excellent working group, with a characteristic that struck me immediately: that effort,

that lively energy aimed at improvement, which if it reaches one goal immediately thinks of the next. This is the element that has always represented the litmus test of a group: because in the challenge of competition, we can never afford to stop. As soon as I won an F1 race with Ferrari, while everyone was celebrating, my thoughts immediately went to the new Grand Prix. And this is the mentality that I try to convey wherever I go; I offer my contribution by drawing on my previous experiences, trying to be an example and stimulus to work in a compact group of people, convinced of their strength.

What are, in your opinion, the characteristics of a Toscano cigar for which an aficionado chooses to smoke a "fire-cured" cigar?

The strong personality, the strong taste, which an enthusiast manages to "tame", the marked identity, which contains aromas that you need to be able to appreciate. An enthusiast who approaches the Toscano cigar knows what he is looking for, and he wants a product that knows how to combine heritage and modernity.

How does the Toscano cigar represent the concept of "Made in Italy," and how is it perceived abroad?

As I said before, there is no doubt that the Toscano cigar is one of the best symbols of great Italian manufacturing. If you allow me, it looks a little like Ferrari: both extraordinary brands, timeless and, I hope, invariably winners. In the world, there is always a great desire for Italy, because our country evokes



in consumers its extraordinary beauty, the great offer of quality and experiences, art, culture, archeology, history, climate, quality of food, lifestyle, attention to detail, taste: a mix of elements that honestly no other country has put together. Everyone wants to have a piece of Italy. But we must be good at dosing this desire because the challenge, even for Manifatture Sigaro Toscano, is very demanding, tastes change, public preferences evolve quickly.

Behind the equation of Italy equals quality and excellence, there is a great deal of work to be done, there is a lot of strategy and foresight, there are demanding investments, and there is the pressure to keep a product of the highest value on the markets, full of tradition and uniqueness, but at the same time the result of continuous innovation. All this without forgetting our over 200 years of history. And if today we continue to have positive results both in Italy and abroad, despite the moment of crisis due to the pandemic, well, we owe it to the investments made in the past and to that pressure to improve I was telling you about.

The Toscano cigar has recently entered the US market, the most important, in terms of sales, on a world scale. Which market segment are you aiming to conquer?

The United States is not only the largest market but also the one with a high number of aficionados who have a considerable cigar culture. US enthusiasts love to dive into every detail of the product, grasp its specificities and enjoy them by lighting it.

A deep passion that they often share, as if to seek a mutual increase in their knowledge. You see, for this very reason, we waited some time before entering this sector. We wanted to deepen all the aspects of a culture in which the passion for cigars is so deeply rooted. It is necessary to gradually enter the field in this market, but with the aim of dealing with the most important players, firm in the belief that even the Toscano cigar's personality can be understood and appreciated by the most demanding aficionados.

Our cigar is unique to the American consumer for its irregular shape, taste, only wrapper and filler, only Kentucky dark fire-cured, and it can also be cut in half. It is so different from all the others that we aim for large groups of aficionados, cigar experts, but also for newbies who want to enjoy a little "taste" of Italy.

The best Kentucky leaves, mainly used as a wrapper, come from the USA. Is this important link between the USA and Italy to be considered an added value to enter the humidors of American aficionados?

Absolutely yes. Our quality is also and especially due to the use of an American Kentucky that we carefully select and which must be cultivated and cured with fire like in the past to obtain that precious and delicate wrapper. Precisely for this reason, we have a farm called 'Villa Toscano' in the state of Tennessee, an area historically suited for the cultivation of Kentucky destined to be used as wrappers. The American raw material is undoubtedly the finest tobacco, and we proudly make it one of our strengths in the USA.



THE TOSCANO CIGAR

The Toscano cigar is the Italian cigar par excellence. It was born in 1818 due to the processing of leaves accidentally wet by a storm during the air curing phase. That taste immediately broke into the hearts of Italians, also because it offered a simple smoke, far from the austerity of Caribbean cigars. It could be smoked whole but also cut in half, even divided into three parts.

The Toscano is a cigar with a very different physiognomy compared to the Caribbean cigar, which stands out for the tobaccos used, for the care, and for the actual manufacturing. As for the raw material, as easily understood, the Kentucky seed is not typical to Italy. However, having been cultivated for several centuries in various areas of the country, not only has it adapted, but it has been typified according to the terroir: a Kentucky grown in the Tuscany region will be different from that grown in Veneto, Campania, or in Umbria. However, in the realization of some Toscano products, North American tobacco is used both in the filler and, in high-end products, as a wrapper. But such a particular tobacco, with a particularly robust foliar texture, also needs different treatments. In fact, to make the leaves suitable for the "recreational" use of a future cigar, it is necessary to subject them to fire curing. After harvesting and positioning in the barns, fires are lit, fed with oak. The heat (the temperature of which must remain constant throughout the process) and the smoke (which must be of the right amount) will transform Kentucky and give it that particular toasted and smoky touch. However, all this is still not enough to create a Toscano. Another crucial step is the bath of the leaves, by immersion in lukewarm demineralized water, for a variable time depending on the use of the leaves (those intended for filler stay for 45 minutes, those for the wrapper 20 minutes, but are wet only before their use). Subsequently, the leaves are left to ferment, so that they can develop those characteristic scents that only a Toscano can provide. Another important feature, once the cigar has been produced, is the curing: the cigar matures in special curing cells for a period ranging from 4 months up to 10 years. Being a fermented cigar, it needs a long aging phase to refine its taste. The last characterizing aspect of this product is the manufacturing. The product has a bitroncoconical appearance, with two tapers. It is made both by hand and by machine with short or medium filler tobaccos, without the use of binders. The heart of a handcrafted Toscano is the cigar maker. Compared to the torcedor or the torcedora, whoever makes a Toscano is a woman, since always. Her high specialization lies in creating a cigar without a mold and managing the filling.

In the following pages, we paired the three most representative Toscano cigars with three different beverages, in order to create a classic, a bold, and an innovative pairing. Starting February 1st, 2021, Toscano cigars is directly being distributed from the facility of its subsidiary, Parodi Holdings LLC, dba Avanti Cigar Company. For additional information you can visit www.toscanocigars.com.

TOSCANO DUECENTO NONINO RISERVA

PAIRING CHOICE

Toscano and grappa is a classic combination for a "Sigaro Toscano", representatives of the Italian tradition.

The Toscano Duecento, handmade, celebrates the bicentenary of the Toscano's birth starting from the blend of the Original Toscano (selected Italian and North American Kentucky medium filler tobaccos, wrapped in a North American leaf), but in a 200mm bitroncoconical cigar, longer than the original. The Grappa Nonino Riserva Antica Cuvée is the result of a blend of Grappas obtained from the distillation of the pomace of Merlot, Cabernet, and Refosco, aged from five to twenty years in barriques and small barrels. It is available on the market both at Cask Strength (59.9%) and at 43% ABV, the version we preferred in combination with the Duecento.

The unlit cigar shows notes of fragrant wood and spices. Once lit, its docility, balance, and harmonious character are surprising, which also goes for the mix of wood, earth, walnut, and some spicy components. In the central section, it becomes more full, with the predominance of wood, but also with surprising mineral notes. Strength increases, but not to the point of unbalancing the smoke. We suggest approaching the glass when the cigar is halfway smoked.

Nonino Riserva Antica Cuvée intrigues the nose for its softness, with traces of vanilla, spices, herbs, candied fruit, honey, and tobacco. It is fairly sapid and a little almondy on the palate, presenting itself as a product with great personality and extraordinary complexity. After a few moments of rest in the glass, it also reveals its soft and velvety soul, where vanilla now becomes very present but enriched with citrus and woody nuances, which recall the smoky notes of Kentucky from the Duecento.



TOSCANO ORIGINALE CORTE BRÀ SARTORI 2013

PAIRING CHOICE

A bold pairing is that of Toscano and red wine. There is always virtue in audacity.

Since 1985, the Toscano Originale has been produced by the skilled hands of the cigar makers of the historic Toscano factory in Lucca. For its production, Italian and North American medium filler Kentucky fire-cured tobaccos are used for the filler, wrapped in a North American leaf. Sartori's Amarone della Valpolicella is made from Corvina, Rondinella and Molinara grapes, left to dry for 3-4 months. After a first passage in concrete barrels, once vinified, it is aged in medium and large oak barrels for at least three years. A further aging period of 6 months in the bottle follows.

The Toscano Originale is an austere cigar, where you can find all the historical imprint of the brand. Once lit, it reveals notes of seasoned wood and also of pepper. The strength is sustained but never predominant on the flavor profile. Towards the central section, it expresses the typical components of leather, wood, and peat. The finale is long, with the strength that grows without becoming too disruptive.

At the first olfactory approach, the Corte Brà Sartori Riserva 2013 is energetic and incredibly rich: it ranges from red fruit to jam (in particular cherry) to the whole range of flavor from the aging in barrels, such as licorice, tobacco, pepper, and coconut. On the palate, it immediately strikes for its smooth and noble tannin. The retronasal perception then returns vibrant notes of red fruit such as cherry, currant, and blackberry, enriched by a finish that tends to cocoa. The combination of the two products is convincing, and its strength lies entirely in the wine, which can be combined with the smoke from the beginning.



ANTICO TOSCANO FERRARI RISERVA LUNELLI

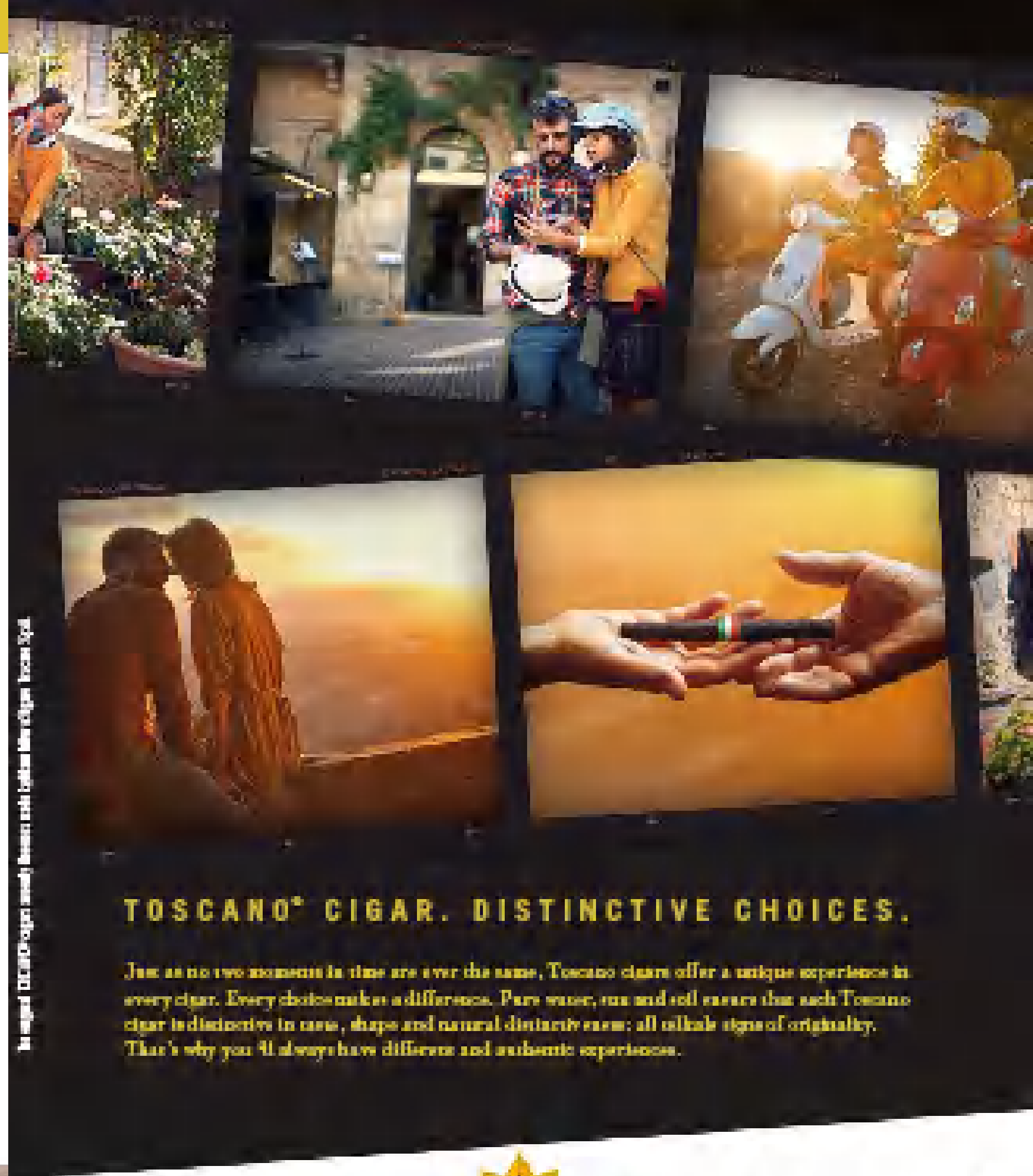
PAIRING CHOICE

Tending towards a more innovative combination, a "Metodo Classico" never disdains tobacco.

Tending towards a more innovative combination, in the mouth, the perlage will offer the tactile components of the smoke a more vibrant physicality. The cigar was born in 1973, and despite being a machine-made product, it has always had a large group of admirers due to its extremely decisive but noble character. It is made with Italian and North American Kentucky fire-cured fillers, dressed in a North American wrapper. Riserva Lunelli is the Ferrari vintage, dedicated to the Lunelli family, owner of the brand. It is made from hand-picked Chardonnay grapes only. It rests on the lees for at least seven years and is also enriched by being aged in large oak barrels.

The Antico Toscano offers a respectable but straightforward smoke, with its own unmistakable physiognomy: sustained strength and well-defined aromas. At the beginning, it develops notes of earth, leather, and nuts, with a medium-high strength that varies slightly throughout the smoke. In the central section, there are hints of pepper and leather. The finale is long and impetuous. On the palate, it expresses a sapidity that winks at the champagne.

The Ferrari Riserva Lunelli has an intense yellow hue. On the nose, it expresses rich and intense aromas: bread crust, exotic fruit, citrus, and a touch of honey, paired with a spicy component. It confirms the fruity and yeast tones on the palate, but also the spices. In general, it shows balance and excellent structure, thanks to the aging in wood which also gives it a long finish. The woody components will blend perfectly with the identity of the Antico Toscano.



The image of the Ferrari Riserva Lunelli Antico Toscano cigar is a trademark of the Ferrari Cigar Company.

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sely a parasympathomimetic toxin, a substance that imitates a neurotransmitter that can haywire the central and peripheral nervous systems. Of course, this circumstance cannot happen while enjoying a good cigar. Yet, the nasty "nicotine kick" (you can find a special focus on CigarsLover Magazine Winter 2018) is nothing but a mild and reversible nicotine intoxication.

Once nicotine enters the body when we inhale smoke, it gets rapidly absorbed and, in few seconds, it reaches its two main target organs via the blood stream: the central and peripheral nervous systems. In these areas, nicotine can stimulate nervous cells due to its similarities with acetylcholine, one of the neurotransmitters that sends messages between the various nerve endings. This will allow specific cerebral areas to activate, causing numerous reactions inside our bodies.

From a biochemical standpoint, nicotine acts by binding with the cholinergic receptors localized in many different cerebral areas (cerebral cortex, thalamus, hypothalamus hippocampus, basal ganglia), but we also know the effects of nicotine on the so-called limbic system. The latter is located in the depths of our brain, it is one of the most ancient and primitive parts because it regulates those primary behaviors that allow us to stay alive. The limbic system is involved in the learning processes (as it is fundamental for keeping us concentrated), in emotional reactions, in instin-

ctive behavioral answers, in short-term memory, in motivational and positive feedback mechanisms, in the sense of gratification and of pleasure. Thus, nicotine stimulates with great intensity this neuronal area, also known as "reward system", that releases dopamine, another neurotransmitter. As widely known, the dopamine release provokes a sensation of satisfaction, relaxation, and pleasure. This explains why the smoker experiences great pleasure while smoking a cigar. By increasing the presence of dopamine in the brain, nicotine also determines an anti-depressive/euphoric and anxiolytic effect, which explains why lighting a cigar facilitates a nice mood for sociality and relationships.

Another organ targeted by nicotine is the so-called "vigilance center" (locus coeruleus), constituted by the nervous cells involved in sleep processes and alarm reactions, responsible for the state of vigilance and of some cognitive processes, of the concentration skills, of attention span and psychomotor performance. This is another reason that explains why many aficionados appreciate smoking a cigar during working activities (a name will suffice: Winston Churchill) or creative ones (here there would be too many names to drop).

Finally, nicotine influences other apparatuses too, particularly the digestive tract due to the activation of the autonomous nervous system. Its action stimulates intestinal motility and increases gastric and salivary secretion: it is not a

Nicotine

The physiological effects of nicotine on the human body are the results of a chemical deception of the nervous system

by **Riccardo Noya**

In discussing nicotine, one always contemplates the risks and diseases it is associated with. Yet, nicotine's interaction with the body is much more complex and fascinating than one can imagine. After all, while we cannot scientifically ignore that nicotine is quite harmful, why would any aficionado experience an unexplainable pleasure in lighting a precious cigar?

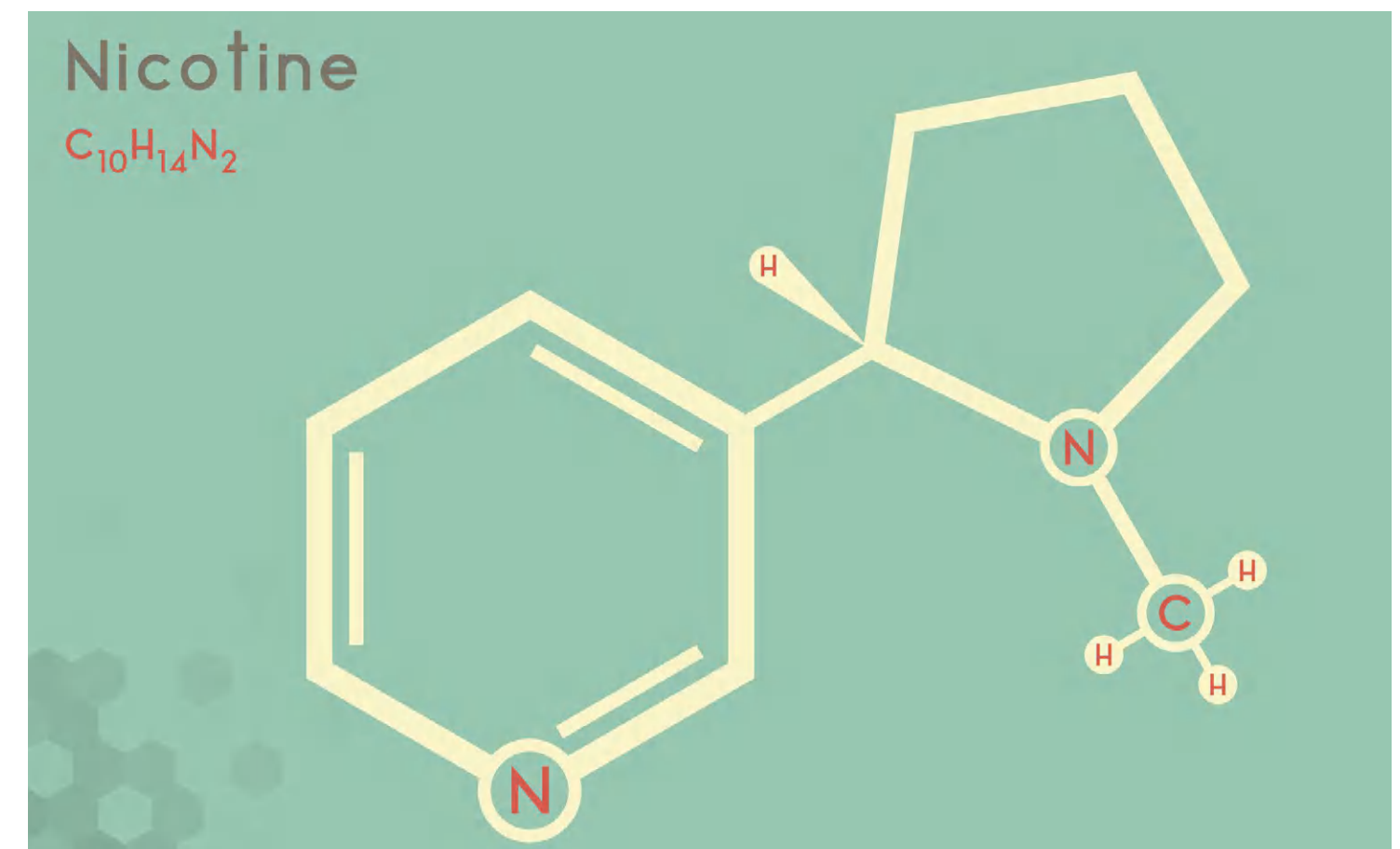
From a chemical perspective, nicotine is a vegetal-based alkaloid which takes the name of the plant species from which we extract it: *Nicotiana Tabacum*. Tobacco plants synthesize nicotine in the roots and then distribute it to the leaves.

Yet, Mother Nature gave this feature to tobacco plants not for the smoker's delight, but as a poison, a means of defense against the bugs that might feast on the leaves. It is

not by chance that we can make an insecticide agent out of tobacco plants (specifically from the *Nicotiana Rustica*). In fact, even other plants in the Solanaceae family like potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers synthesize nicotine in much lower concentrations. In other species, nicotine, even if present, is much less dangerous than other chemical components found in the plants; as in the case of the *Datura Stramonium*, a non-edible and highly poisonous plant.

Nicotine is quite a toxic substance, about 1mg/Kg is a sufficient dosage to kill an average adult subject. Such toxicity depends on its chemical structure, shared by many other natural poisons, that imitates the one of acetylcholine, a non-toxic substance normally present in our organism.

Chemically speaking, nicotine is a neurotoxin. More preci-



case then if the majority of smokers define as "digestive" their post-prandial cigar.

Keeping in mind the most serious damages that can be caused by nicotine addiction, what we described here can be described as "kindly toxic" interactions between nicotine and the human body that for many smokers are among of the most beloved effects of tobacco.

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Laura Chavin

*A brand that, like a Pheonix,
has risen from the ashes*

by **Michel Arlia**

Some of the long time cigar smokers might know a thing or two about Laura Chavin, but the brand has been quiet for quite some time. Everything changed in 2019 as the brand celebrated a comeback. We had a chance to talk to Willi Knopf, the new owner, and mastermind behind Laura Chavin Cigars' relaunch.

Hello Willi, can you share a bit of your background story before becoming the owner of Laura Chavin Cigars?

I was very young when I started smoking cigars. It was in the late 1970s at the age of 19. At that time, there wasn't a single young man in my hometown who smoked cigars, except me. Our generation went to discos and everyone smoked cigarettes. Back then, only grandpas smoked cigars. And me.

I remember a business trip to Switzerland. I was invited to dinner in a beautiful garden restaurant on the Zürich Lake. A fantastic and warm summer evening with perfect food and drinks suddenly seemed to come to an end when they offered me a Davidoff, then still made in Cuba. That was a long-lasting pleasure and one of the key moments for me to fall in love with cigars. After that, cigars accompanied my entire life and even dominated the selection of my vacation trips and other private occasions. I traveled to the Dominican Republic and Cuba several times for this matter. There I met important persons that worked in the world of cigars, first of all, Alejandro Robaina, where I had the great pleasure of spending a whole day with him. Finally, here in Germany, I met Helmut Bührle, the founder and former owner of Laura Chavin Cigars.

In 2017, you bought Laura Chavin Cigars GmbH. What made you decide to become the owner of a cigar brand, and what state was the company in?

I am the owner of a marketing and creative design company for more than 30 years. And for a few years, I was also the publisher of a Lifestyle Magazine. That was why I was invited to the Castle of Laura Chavin Cigar at the very beginning of the company. In the years that followed, I met Helmut

Bührle on various occasions. Never in my life, I thought of doing business with cigars. But it seems to be my destination, and in 2017 I got the chance to buy the Laura Chavin Cigar Company. Then I founded my own Cigar Company Willi Knopf GmbH, and since January 2019, I am also the owner of the international trademark rights of Laura Chavin. The headquarters of Laura Chavin Cigar Company was located in Germany, with offices in Switzerland and Austria. The company exported cigars to more than 15 countries.

Two years later, towards the end of 2019, you relaunched the Laura Chavin brand with a redesigned look and updated blends. What have you learned throughout these two years, and what were your expectations before the relaunch?

Even though I've smoked cigars every day for over 40 years, I was still a greenhorn in the cigar business. Soon, I realized that it was important to redesign the look so that everyone could see that this is a new beginning for Laura Chavin. And by the way, creating designs is my profession. It was a great pleasure to design my own luxury brand.

Production of all Laura Chavin cigars is handled by the Tabacalera Altagracia (the same factory that produced the cigars before Willi's acquisition). Why did you decide to stay with the factory and not look for other options?

The Tabacalera Altagracia has a good team of excellent experts, and first of all, they were able to turn my wishes into cigars. But we are always looking for other options too. If you want to play in the highest premium league, you should never stand still. You always have to optimize the quality and search for possibilities of how and where you can get this.

Part of the brand's reintroduction are three existing lines that older cigar smokers might remember: the Classic, Concours, and Terre de Mythe. What was your goal when you started reblending these lines?

Concerning the blends, I decided to realize my philosophy of smoking cigars. "A cigar should always be an enjoyment.





If not, I put it aside! " You may also say a cigar should never be a chore. That means a perfect draw and nice ashes. No scratchy throat, no bitter taste - always balanced. So we created cigars with medium strength, at most, and a broad flavor profile and variety of flavors - from start to finish. My decision to keep the names of the blends is an homage to the work of my predecessor.

The fourth line is new and goes by the name of Virginy. Can you talk about what inspired you to create the Virginy? What did you want to achieve?

On my first business visit to the Dominican Republic, I heard about a pure, virgin, and genetically untouched tobacco. We immediately started building a puro with this tobacco. But these tobaccos are strong, and it took more than two years to find the perfect blend. We used several tobaccos of different fields and producers to get a huge variety of tastes from the same seed. Only for the wrapper, we decided to use an Ecuadorian Connecticut. The result is an extremely fine and harmonious cigar. In several tastings, the Virginy was rated high with 95 to 97 points. And finally, it was our bestseller in 2020. In 2021 we will bring two new vitolas of the Virginy to the market - a Belicoso and a Lonsdale.

To a smoker new to your brand, which cigars would you suggest to be smoked at certain times of the day or occasions, and why?

Certainly, our Classic Line is the perfect cigar for nearly every occasion and daytime. You can choose between 8 different vitolas. So there should be a size for every preference. The Classic Line is the ideal blend for beginners because they are very easy to smoke. But even to advanced aficionados, this blend is always a perfect companion. After all, there are six different tobaccos in the filler alone.

I prefer to start the day with the Perfecto No.88. After this, I choose between other vitolas of the Classic Line or the Virginy. In the evening hours, it is the time for a Concours or a Terre de Mythe, preferably with a peaty Whisky from the Isle of Islay, cask strength, of course.

As mentioned before, you launched most of the cigars in late 2019, early 2020. Shortly after, the COVID-19 pandemic took over and is still going on. How has it affected you and the company so far, positively or negatively?

Sure these are extraordinary times for everyone and any company. For us, 2020 was the first year, so we cannot compare it to any other year. However, we have managed to win over more than 150 retailers in Germany for us. And even dozens in Austria with our new importer Rainer Gunz.

Leaving the pandemic aside, where do you want to take Laura Chavin? What can we expect from you in the future? Now we are on the way to stabilize the stock of our existing blends. We will go ahead to work with growers to influence the terroirs where the tobacco grows and all subsequent processes. We will continue to promote a sustainable production, paired with a never ending optimization of our qualities and new worlds of taste. And when the time has come, Laura Chavin Cigars will be available in many countries worldwide.

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VIRGINY



NO. 1 TORO

NO. 3 LONSDALE

NO. 2 BELICOSO



Second cut

A tapered head and too wet a fruition can alter the taste and mechanical perception of the smoke

by **John Jeremy**

As is well known, each cigar size has individual needs of smoking attention. In a double figurado it is necessary to continue to puff heavily in the early stages of the cigar despite the fact that only hot air seems to arrive.

In a panatela puffs must be well spaced in order to not raise the temperature of the cigar too much causing a harsh taste. In a piramide size, besides the amount initially cut off (each smoker has his own theory of how much), there is a practice that must be learned for these cigars; the double cut.

As they are designed, the head shape of the piramide funnels the smoke into a more compact area at the mouth. This combined with the moisture of the mouth tends to create a dark and moist end of the cigar.

This effect is amplified for those that like to hold the tip of a piramide further in their mouths whilst smoking. This concentrated area of moist tobacco can cause the smoke to become acrid and bitter. Ultimately the draw can also suffer due to the swelling of the leaves as they absorb moisture. Additionally, some piramides tend to suffer from the development of tar bubbles at the head.

Fortunately there is an easy solution for all of these problems: the double cut. Once you notice the development of a soggy head all you need to do is use your cutter to remove approximately 2-3 mm from the head. This will remove the offending moist tobacco and will reinvigorate your smoke.

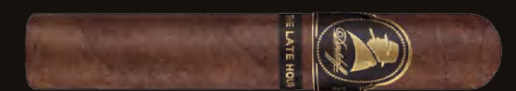
You will be amazed at how much the cigar is reborn to new life with this simple procedure.

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A MAN AND A CIGAR FOR ALL TIMES

Nirka Reyes Estrella

Nirka Reyes Estrella is a true Renaissance Woman. Her journey has brought her to become the driving force behind De Los Reyes Cigars.

by Michel Arlia



Nirka was born into a tobacco family that has been working with our sacred leaf for over 150 years. She has become the president of her father's company, owner of SAGA Cigars, and holds other important positions. We had the chance to talk about her saga in this beautiful industry.

Your family has been in the tobacco industry for generations. What do you remember from your childhood and growing up around tobacco?

I remember running in the fields early in the morning with the sun shining. I remember visiting my dad at the factory and knowing almost everyone (I spent most of the time at the packaging department, it was intriguing for me that it was an area full of women and how everything they did was so fast). I remember the smell of the Galera and how my dad's office smelled almost the same way he did when he came home, and I hugged him at the entrance every night.

You previously had worked in the family business, and after finishing university, you took a little detour before returning to the company. Can you share the journey that brought you to the decision that the cigar industry is where you belong?

When my father asked me to return and help him manage the company, I saw it as a professional challenge; little did I know that I was going to fall in love with it, with the industry. Even though I worked there before, it was like seeing

everything with new eyes, and the more I learned and got involved with the creating process, the more I was captivated. Looking back, I don't exactly remember the moment where I said to myself: -This is where I belong. It just started to feel that way, like I was doing something that connected with my true self.

In 2013 you became the factory manager of your father's, Augusto Reyes, factory, which at the time was called CCE (Corporación Cigar Export). You decided to cut production and rename the company to De Los Reyes Cigars. What was the reason behind those decisions, and what was the most challenging part about it?

The main reason was that I couldn't find the passion that I saw in my father in the huge amount of SKU's we were making, mostly for other people. I wanted to go back to the roots, to the magic of making art. By going back to those roots, so it only made sense that we brought back our original name, which is De Los Reyes Cigars, but with a contemporary logo. The toughest part about it was downsizing. Letting people go was very hard for me.

A year later, you took the next step and launched your cigar brand, SAGA, in 2014. How long did you work on the first blends, and which part of creating a new line is the most fascinating to you?

When we were working on the Don Julio Punta Espada, it was a beautiful process in which I got to know more about



my family's history in tobacco and also to connect workwise with my Uncle Leo and my father. At that time, I learned that my uncle had been working for years on growing the Original Piloto Cubano, and he told me that he would love that we were the ones to use it. That said, the blending process was quite simple because having such an incredible tobacco was already the accomplishment of many, many years of trying. Once the tobacco was ready, we made the blend for the Saga Golden Age within a day without any hesitation. But a typical blend, like the Saga Blend No. 7, usually takes us short of a year. I find everything fascinating; every step has its own magic, and I'm just naturally drawn to them. But Jean Michel says that what we like the most is revisiting the blends a couple of weeks after and seeing if they have evolved towards or away from what we thought they would become. On that, I would have to say that it's always a surprise, it's like unveiling a Christmas present.

A subject close to your heart is women's rights. You have been on the frontlines of witnessing the male-dominated cigar industry change in the last decade. What did you think brought this change, and have we, as an industry, reached an equal level for men and women yet?

I think the world itself is evolving, it's becoming more inclusive, and our industry is no stranger to that. I guess what has brought this change is that there's new blood. People of different ages, sex, and backgrounds have become involved in the tobacco industry. It's probably due to the diversification of the cigar lovers, who in our days come from different walks of life.

Looking back on your career so far, did you ever think that the business would take you to where you are now? And what has been the most significant accomplishment for you so far?

I never even imagined that I was going to be working in tobacco, and once I did, I was always so focused on making everything the right way that I had only visions of the bright future our company could have, not even once I stopped to think where it would take me. My most significant accomplishment has been meeting people who truly believe in what we do and who enjoy our cigars. They have shown their love through words, posts, and tears. Yes, tears. Some people have felt so emotional with the passion and love that we have for the industry that they cry when they hear our story. I even had a US veteran give me his challenge coin after I gave a speech at a Cigars for Warriors event. I treasure all of these moments profoundly because, at the end of the day, we do what we do to transform ordinary days into extraordinary moments through the enjoyment of our cigars.

Next to now being the president of De Los Reyes Cigars, you wear many different hats. You are the Administrative Vice President of Swisher Dominicana, the treasurer of ProCigar, and active in numerous charitable foundations. Where do you think this journey is taking you to next?

The most difficult challenge is yet ahead of me. As you may have heard, I got married last year. And I fully intend to juggle all these responsibilities with the most important one: my family.



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Double cuño

*Accepting reports from retailers and consumers
Habanos SA solves a problem related to anti-smoking labels*

by **Giuseppe Mitolo**

The most attentive aficionados have probably noticed that, for a few months now, the bottom of the Cuban cigar boxes have undergone a curious change. Looking at the bottom of cabinets and habilitadas, it will not escape the viewer that the fire stamp and the boxing cuño (the date and factory stamp) have doubled: two markings at the top and two at the bottom are clearly shown. This is not a factory error but the solution to a problem. The reason for this addition is related to the stickers that importers are obliged to attach in order to comply with anti-smoking laws on each box for sale. The so-called "warning label", glued on the back of the box, often ended up covering the cuño as well, making it impossible for the consumer to know the date of boxing of cigars, quite an important information for true Cuban aficionados. Previously, to solve this problem it was necessary to remove the label with

quite some difficulty (due to a deliberately resistant glue). This practice, if operated by the retailer, in some countries is equated with a tampering of the box and, for this reason, punished by law. It could be argued that it is the importer's responsibility to ensure that the adhesive label does not end up covering the cuño. In this respect, it must be kept in mind that the warnings, according to the different national legislations, must cover a specific percentage of the area on which they are to be applied. Considering that the fire stamp and the cuño do not vary proportionally with respect to the size of the box, having to apply a sticker on a small box, trying not to cover these information-rich stamps, becomes difficult. For this reason, Habanos SA arrived at a solution that allows both to comply with the laws and to assure the public can still easily access some of the most important information about their treasured boxes.



ALEC BRADLEY



**THANK YOU FOR THE FIRST 25 YEARS,
LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT.**

- ALEC, ALAN AND BRADLEY RUBIN

“Cancelled”

*Many events fell victim to the Covid19-Pandemic;
among the more prominent ones were the three major cigar festivals.*

by **Michel Arlia**

Around this time of year, we would normally be traveling to Central America to the major cigar festivals held in the first couple months of the year. This year it is quite different, and you won't be finding any "Festival-Reports" in this issue. All this is due to the ongoing Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Last year, before the proverbial "shit hitting the fan," every festival took place as they had done in the past. The exception being the Puro Sabor in Nicaragua, which was canceled in 2019 due to civil unrest and returned in 2020.

We covered all three of the big Cigar Festivals: the Festival del Habano (from 24. - 28.02.2020), The ProCigar in the Dominican Republic (16. - 21.02.2020), and the Puro Sabor Festival in Nicaragua 21. - 24.01.2020). During the days that

each festival was held, the organizations pulled out all the stops to celebrate their countries cigar industry and heritage. These days, the programs are similar for all three festivals: visits to the factories and fields, various seminars, and the days are capped off by a handful of themed dinners at night.

Only a couple of weeks after the festivals concluded last year, the world was turned upside down. As the year dragged on, every cigar-related event was canceled. Many cigar lovers worldwide were still hoping that the cigar festivals might still take place in 2021, but toward the end of 2020, the news of them being canceled or postponed was communicated. The Puro Sabor was the first festival to break the news, followed by the Festival del Habano and, lastly, the ProCigar.—

By the numbers, Nicaragua has had the lowest number of cases since the pandemic broke out.

Claudio Sgroi, President of the Nicaraguan Tobacco Chamber (organizers of the Puro Sabor), says: "The situation looks under control, but it is difficult to have accurate numbers. The number of tests run daily is not the same as in other countries, so it is hard to get an exact picture of the situation."

Among these three countries, Cuba has had the second-highest number and has probably been hit the hardest early this year, with a significant spike in February.

"The Dominican Republic is currently facing a third wave. But at the same time, medical care capacity has improved,

and mortality has been reduced to 1.25% in those infected, one of the lowest percentages in the world", says Oriana Veloso, from ProCigar. The D.R. has recorded the most cases out of these three countries.

Since then, the pandemic has held its tight grip around our daily lives for over a year now and has forced everybody to adapt and find alternatives. Many of the cigar events were switched to being held virtually. But most of those are smaller in scale, compared to Festivals that usually have thousands of people from many different countries. This brings up the question, are the major Festivals going to be held virtually, if at all?

The Nicaraguan Tobacco Chamber organized a virtual Puro Sabor that started on March 15th. The events, such

as master classes, panel discussions and round tables with experts and manufacturers of the most prestigious Nicaraguan brands will be scattered throughout the next couple months. They have and will discuss many topics, such as the harvest, cigar blending, the value and economic importance of the industry in Nicaragua, technology and innovation in the cigar industry, and many more. The entire virtual event was free of charge.

The ProCigar held their nationwide event, the "ProCigar Night," virtually, and, although the coordination wasn't easy, the event appeared to be a success. "The current conditions make it impossible to carry out an event such as the ProCigar Festival due to the existing health protocols in our country, but we are considering the possibility of holding another virtual event this year but this time with an international scope. We will have more details in the following months", adds Mrs. Veloso.

Habanos S.A. also worked on a virtual event that will be held from May 4 - 6. Parts of the program include events that also belonged to previous Festivals, such as the Trade Fair, Tours, presentations of the releases planned for this year, Conferences, Habanos World Challenge and even the Habanos Awards will be featured.

"We hope that from now to January 2022 we can travel again, and the Covid will be part of the past," says Sgroi and adds, "it is early in the year to talk about the Puro Sabor, but we want to continue the tradition of hosting the festival again in 2022."

"For the ProCigar Festival to have the quality and greatness that it has always had and for us to offer the experience that we want to give to our participants, the event must be completely face-to-face. We are positive that by 2022 the world will be similar to what it was before, and then we can offer an event with the quality that characterizes us", concludes Mrs. Veloso.

A short term solution may have been found with "virtual festivals," but will a virtual aspect still be present in 2022? Depending on the number of attendees keeping, or adding, a virtual part to the festival could increase the numbers and make the festivals more accessible to many people that, for whatever reason, can't be there in person. However, this is only a possibility, and only time can tell what will be by then. All we can hope is that we will have returned to living our lives restriction-free and that events, of any kind, can be attended again in person.



Masterclasses.



Panels & roundtables.





The Sunset of the CUC

Cuba says goodbye to double currency: a promise of equal opportunities, but at a price still unclear

by **Simone Poggi**

In 1994 the economic situation of the Isla Grande was in deep crisis, mainly due to the implosion of the countries under Soviet influence, the main economic and political supporters of the Cuban regime. Cuba sold products to these countries at agreed prices while obtaining from them several specific subsidies. Fidel Castro then decided to focus mainly on tourism, creating an additional currency in addition to the CUP (or common peso): the CUC (or convertible peso). This was intended as an alternative to the dollar, quite extensively used at that time, which was withdrawn in 2004, but never actually declared illegal. The CUC was aligned with the US dollar at a 1-to-1 exchange rate. The Cuban State, the country's leading economic operator, continued to pay governmental employees in CUP, the currency with which it would have been possible to purchase basic goods and amenities, which were produced internal-

ly. However, the State sold imported products internally in CUC, thus stocking foreign strong currency. In addition to the State, other entities, mainly dedicated to tourism and foreign trade, had access to CUC. CUP conversion to CUC was kept at a rate of 25:1, adding to that a government tax.

Over the years, the strong currency has given La Habana lifeblood, although in fact a mere multiplicity of exchange rates has been rapidly created, according to which in the State sector there was substantial parity between CUP, CUC and dollar (1:1:1), while for the general public the exchange rate was actually kept at the declared 25 CUP for each CUC or dollar. This reality has distorted the accounting of State-owned companies for years, where CUP and CUC have been merged as a unique entity in the books, making it difficult, for example, to determine the real state of the Cuban economy.

In addition, the direct outcome was a great economic and social inequality between those who had access to the CUC and those who did not, difficult to accept, even at an ideological level, by a regime that claims to be a guarantor of egalitarianism and communism. In fact, a bartender at a hotel hosting many tourists could earn in a few days more than the amount a doctor could earn in a month, thanks to tips in CUC from generous tourists. On average, salaries paid in CUC were seven times higher than those paid in CUP. The dual currency was a real limit to the growth of the Cuban economy, because it severely limited the operation of Cuban companies that were not oriented towards tourism or exports. With the CUC being the dominant currency this severely hampered those companies not aimed at obtaining CUC.

In 2013, an intention to proceed along the path of monetary unification was announced as part of a reform program desired by Raul Castro's government.

On Thursday, December 10, 2020, President Miguel Díaz-Canel, accompanied by the former president and leader of Cuba's Communist Party, Raúl Castro, announced that the Communist Party had made the decision to implement monetary unification as of January 1, 2021, adding that updating Cuba's economic and social model would require ensuring all Cubans have maximum equality of rights and opportunities. This announcement accounted for the social, and not just the economic, scope of the proposed change. The decree was im-

plemented on 1 January 2021. However, returning to a single currency is not and will not be painless. CUC is exchangeable into CUP for the next six months, but the initial CUP rating (\$0.037) may decline rapidly, as it is no longer in parity with the dollar and in view of the country's economic precariousness. This devaluation of the CUP could lead to high inflation, resulting in higher prices and loss of purchasing power by those who owned CUC compared to the past. The Cuban Government has therefore introduced several measures and actions to mitigate the effects of currency unification, including an increase in pensions and public employees' salaries, price control over products and services, aid for companies doing remarkable business thanks to their opportunity of having access to dollars with favorable exchange rate. The moment is of great economic tension for the country, due to the severe decline in tourism due to the pandemic, the political-economic crisis of its ally Venezuela, and the delays in updating the centralized Soviet-style system. Shortages and uncertainty have skyrocketed prices on the black market, to which the government has declared total war.

How will this change affect the price of Cuban cigars in their respective markets and in Cuba? Cigars and luxury goods not accessible to locals, were already sold in Cuba in CUC; this should ensure some continuity in price. Moreover, in markets around the world, the price of cigars is determined by the important taxes on tobacco and related products, more than by the raw material.



CALDWELL

cigar co.

PAIRINGS

From the moment that CigarsLover Magazine defined its pay-off, "Refine Your Taste", starting to accompany the tastings of cigars to those of spirits such as Whisky, Rum, Armagnac and Cognac, we have set ourselves the problem of addressing the issue of cigar-spirits pairing. It is a thorny field, and often the results achieved are not what we expected and the pairing can give as much emotion as dissatisfaction if something goes wrong.

Cigar size: Robusto/Piramide/Toro. These are nowadays the standard formats of the market, offering a representative smoking experience for the various producers and terroirs. Technically speaking, they do not present particular challenges, yet they still offer a satisfying aromatic experience and allow to appreciate the evolution of the smoke in parallel to the tasting of the spirits.

The Rating Scale: 100 points. We have chosen to keep it in the pairings as well, to simplify the comparison of ratings. In this case, however, this scale only evaluates the pairing,

and not the individual qualities of cigars and spirits. If you have both excellent products, for example, but an unbalanced and inconsistent pairing, the rating will be low. On the contrary, the excellent marriage of two products of decent quality could give rise to a very positive evaluation.

The Tasting: Nose, Palate, Finale. Since our goal is to explore the complexity of a pairing, we thought it was appropriate to decline the experience in the three areas, following what is usual with spirits and that is also made in the cigar tasting, with pre-lit scents, aromas during the smoke and the persistence.

The Comparison: 1 Cigar with 2 Distillates. We decided to start from the selection of a cigar, and ask specific questions such as: perhaps with this cigar is preferable a lower alcohol gradation? Maybe the ex-sherry oloroso barrels marry better than those moscatel with this cigar blend? Perhaps the excessive peat hides the more sophisticated notes of cigar? In order to answer the questions, we selected two spirits to investigate which one is the best cigar partner and why.



PAIRING Cigars & Spirits



ARTURO FUENTE Opus X Robusto

WOOD AND PEPPER

STRENGTH	PRICE
●●●	\$\$\$
SIZE	
47x178mm (7")	
COUNTRY	
DOMINICAN REP.	

It is a very intense, creamy, and satisfying cigar. Its aromatic palette is wide and structured, with wood, mature fruit, and pink pepper. It develops then earthy and black pepper, with also notes of coffee, leather, and toffee. We choose two different whisky: a more intense and fruitier Kavalan Sherry and a more delicate and fragrant Macallan. What will work better between lighter refinement and bold character?



MONTECRISTO Edmundo

PEPPERY AND EARTHY

STRENGTH	PRICE
●●●●	\$ NA € 15.4
SIZE	
52x135mm (5 1/2")	
COUNTRY	
CUBA	

Remarkable character for this Cuban product, opens with cappuccino and hazelnut and then continues with earth, wood and black pepper. Creamy and balanced smoke, of high aromatic intensity. Two different Rye Whiskeys are chosen, one fresher and balsamic, the other mellow and more complex with notes of leather and caramel. ABV is similar, but the small difference may play a role.



PLASENCIA Alma del Fuego Candente

PIQUANT SPICES

STRENGTH	PRICE
●●●●	\$ 13.5 € 15.4
SIZE	
52x127mm (5")	
COUNTRY	
NICAGARUA	

It develops an aromatic palette of great intensity and impressive balance. This robusto shows complexity and evolution offering a satisfactory smoke. We paired it with two Scotch Whisky integrally aged in sherry butts. The Aultmore has a more typical Oloroso sherry profile, while the Arran boasts a higher alcohol proof and a more particular oxidative profile due to the Palo Cortado casks.



KAVALAN

Sherry Oak

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Taiwan	46% - 92	\$\$
TYPE	AGE	CASK
Single Malt	No Age Statement	ex-sherry

New release for the Asian brand with an intense sherry profile of dark fruit (plums), rhubarb, leather, and vanilla. The sip is structured, dense, a triumph of ripe black cherries and sweet strong spices. Extremely long and persistent finish.

The olfactory aromaticity of both products is a perfect match: the cigar earns caramelized tones, while its seducing and humid earthy notes support the explosion of ripening and delicious fruit of the spirit. The remarkable intensity of black cherries and plums, peppered with precious spices, offers a characterful experience to the palate. Great integration of the two palettes. The finish is complex, rich, replete with notes of toffee, chocolate, and almost spicy hints.

Pairing score **93**

MACALLAN

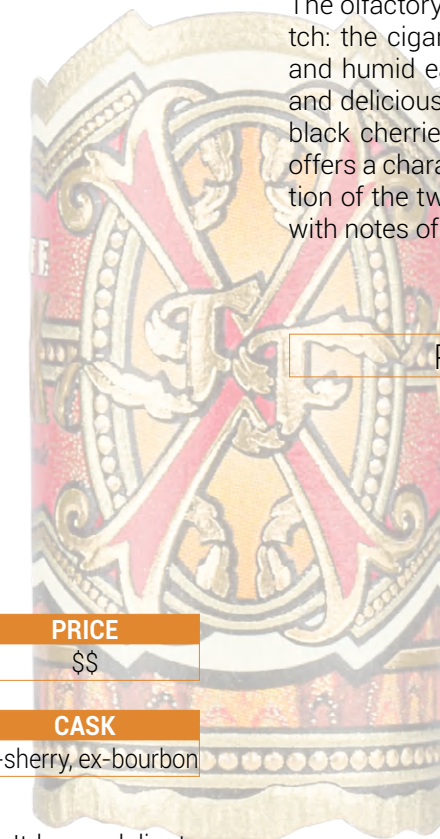
12yo Triple Cask

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Scotland	40% - 80	\$\$
TYPE	AGE	CASK
Single Malt	12 Years Old	ex-sherry, ex-bourbon

It is the entry-level of the Speyside brand. It has a delicate and harmonious profile of honey, malt, wood, light sherried notes along with orange and lemon zest, and a dry finish with a pinch of vanilla.

Paired with the Opus X, the freshness of the whisky creates an olfactory silk sheet for the spiced wood of the cigar. To the palate, the vanilla and toffee sweetness enriches the expressivity of the cigar. The sherried red fruit (difficult to appreciate in the whisky) finds a new dimension in pairing with the pink pepper of the Opus X. It follows a light dryness dominated by the wood and the walnut of the cigar. A classy undertone for this impressive cigar rather than an effective contrast or integration.

Pairing score **88**





WHISTLEPIG 10 Years Old

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
U.S.A.	50% - 100	\$\$
TYPE	AGE	CASK
Rye Whiskey	10 Years Old	Virgin

100% rye for this product, distilled in Canada and bottled in Vermont, which offers structured notes of wood and wood spices, vanilla, leather and more alcoholic balsamic tones.

The palate is made of caramel, toasted wood and leather. The roundness and structure of the rye support the Edmundo excellently, both in the duet of the woods and in the gentle sweetness, giving way to the decisive spiciness of the cigar to rise on the softness toffee of whiskey. The typical balsamic rye note is paired by more complex hints of leather, wood, and caramel that integrate well with Cuban, amplifying toasted notes without becoming bitter. The decisive structure of the 10yo sustains an excellent finish.



Pairing score **92**

BULLEIT Rye

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
U.S.A.	45% - 90	\$
TYPE	AGE	CASK
Rye Whiskey	No Age Statement	Virgin

Mash of 95% rye and 5% malted barley, this spirit has mint and rye when approached, with mild vanilla sweetness and important balsamic notes of pine and wood needles. On the palate it gives lively spicy sensations at the beginning, continuing with vanilla and wood.

The combination focuses on wood, conifers (rye) and cedar (cigar), until it veers on toasted oak. Vanilla notes are sweetening the cigar, but without covering it too much. On the finish comes an herbaceous component that increases the flavor of the cigar and evokes the typical fragrances of other Montecristo modules. The spicy characters are quite different. Finish of freshly sweet balsamic candy, highly persistent. Dynamic and lively pairing, with fitting ABV.



Pairing score **87**



ARRAN Master of Distilling II

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Scotland	51.8% - 103.6	\$\$
TYPE	AGE	CASK
Single Malt	NAS	Palo Cortado Sherry

It offers notes of tropical fruit, petrichor, and nutmeg. The sip is structured, salty, replete with honey, hazelnut, and white pulp fruit. The finish is long, oxidative, bitterish.

In the first tercio, the Arran towers over the more delicate nuances of the cigar. Yet, the oxidative profile offers a delicate counterbalance to the earthy tones of the cigar. The pairing become more stimulating when the increasing strength of the cigar develops mineral whiffs that become absolute protagonists. The Arran balances the Plasencia's crescendo with a pleasing toasted evolution of macadamia nuts and cocoa beans. The spiciness of the tobacco meets with the oxidation of the whisky in a long, mineral, and full finish.



Pairing score **92**

AULTMORE Exceptional Cask Series 11 yo

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Scotland	56% - 112	\$\$\$\$
TYPE	AGE	CASK
Single Malt	11 Years Old	Oloroso Sherry

Classic sherried nose with cloves, dried raisin, and tansy. Fresh and mineral to the palate, it unfolds with variations of plums and mango chutneys. Salty and balsamic finish with plenty of citrus essential oils.

The first tercio moves along mineral and white pepper notes. Aultmore's great drinkability balances the Plasencia's growing strength. With the increase of smoke's intensity and toasted notes, the pairing becomes more pleasing with loads of spices fruit and herbal freshness. In the final tercio, the Plasencia takes over, yet the whisky manages to support the smoke thanks to its citrusy and balsamic components.



Pairing score **89**

SPIRITS

“Never delay kissing a pretty girl or opening a bottle of whiskey.”
Ernest Hemingway

Ready To Drink

Ready to drink Cocktails inspected under the magnifying glass of a blind taste: revered or rejected?

by **Nicola Rugiero**

Following the lockdown periods that followed in the various countries of the world, the demand for "ready to drink" (RTD according to the commercial acronym) cocktails intensified.

As a result of the increased demand, several brands have brought these cocktails to the public, in the trendiest and most imaginative formats, presented in large or small bottles, jars or bags. Among the various offerings, the common denominator is only: fill a glass of ice, pour, drink. NIO, as one of the most prolific producers in this sector summarized in the acronym of its brand: "Needs Ice Only".

What seems like a new marketing gimmick is in fact the pinnacle of the job, which has been under way for some time, by many large companies.

For several years global brands operating in the area have begun to provide home consumers with a product ready to drink, but several attempts ended up with questionable quality solutions. It has always been possible to find a bottled or canned Negroni, a Mojito, or a Pina Colada. The new trend, however, has reduced the quantities to a single

dose and has significantly increased the quality. What has changed in recent years?

In the early 1990s, very large companies such as Bacardi and Campari created the concept of ready-to-drink drinks, with their respective Bacardi Breezer and Campari Mix. Compared to those first experiences, today companies have started to collaborate with professional bartenders who contribute their knowledge and know-how from the world of mixology to that of large-scale distribution. The result has been products of remarkable quality, aimed at satisfying the most refined palates. These products have clearly surpassed their predecessors, whose basic quality was mainly intended to easy drinking without major expectations.

Certainly, over the years, even the bartender has reached higher and more sought-after levels of professionalism. Today, the old "barman" travels, studies and gets updated allowing him to experiment and learn innovative techniques and getting to know products that he never imagined could have reached the shelves of the bar itself. It is not unusual for a bartender to use (in addition to or in place of the basic ingredients)

products such as citric acid, malic acid or sweeteners other than sugar to better balance a cocktail. All of this knowledge has made him able to offer qualified and professional advice to large companies; this has benefited both large companies as well as the world of mixology.

Listening to the voices of producers and consumers, we obtained feedback that surprised us a bit. According to the manufacturers, RTDs are just a temporary trend and sales confirm that the home market is focused on a different way of drinking. For home consumption, sales data tells that we opt more for the purchase of ingredients to be mixed, such as "G&T" (gin bottle, small bottles of tonic water). The consumers we talked to, on the other hand, told us about an initially skeptical approach to Ready To Drink preparations, pushing them however to experiment and rediscover interesting alternatives to what can be drunk at the bar.

We chose, in the end, to sacrifice ourselves and tried, in a blind tasting, several drinks, testing RTDs and freshly made products in mixed order. To everyone's surprise, even the most experienced palates appreciated and confused a boulevardier Ready To Drink with a freshly prepared one, as confirmation of the high quality achieved by these products. On the other hand, juice-based drinks have proven to be less satisfying, since the use of acids, compared to the use of fresh lime or lemon juice, makes the drink more astringent and less remarkable. Almost tending to hide the

aromatic notes of the spirits, as in the case of the Daiquiri. Ultimately, we make no secret of the fact that we were surprised and satisfied with the tasting. It is appropriate to share some considerations as a professional in the sector.

First of all, I can say that I am enthusiastic about the movement that has been created and the quality achieved by these products.

Talking about the taste, most of them have nothing to envy compared to a cocktail prepared at the bar, although they lack a number of elements, such as the right ice, the choreography and the final aromatic touch, which cannot be replicated in a ready-to-drink product.

In the end the final product pleases the public and features the merit of breaking the big barrier between cocktail bar and home.

Everything is so perfect that it even has a counterpart. Ready To Drink preparations have achieved such a quality that they may generate nostalgia for cocktails at the bar and physical presence in the venue, now like never before. Because behind a drink there is the atmosphere, the music, the chats with friends and all the professionalism of an attentive and prepared bartender which many of us have been longing for since the beginning of the pandemic.





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SPIRITS

威士忌標籤

怎麼找出來
你喝的是什麼

Federico Bosco

所有威士忌飲用名經常進行激烈分析，偶爾或熱情，幾乎一處是購買的主要吸引力，但是一個更精確的標籤，必須加深，能夠顯示出多少有價值的細節。

無論是大還是小的，有時用玻璃瓶裝，有時是雙面（正面和背面），有時包裝的紙盒，有時是雙面。標籤應該給我們所有的信息，以了解更多的東西，而不僅僅是內容。它不總是正確的，但一般的一些事情總是有效的。

雙層威士忌將威士忌命名為威士忌這同樣適用於美國世界。相反，在蘇格蘭和丹麥地方，我們談論沒有“e”的威士忌。在蘇格蘭的情況下，名稱擴大了蘇格蘭威士忌。雙層威士忌保留了第一種高爾斯酒。一些蘇格蘭威士忌增加了生產區域，以強調產品的地域性。

*最好之後經常出現的數字與產品的最低年齡有關。最低年齡因為，與標籤不同稱的混合相比，最年輕的數字是最低的。示例：使用二個桶分別釀造8年、12年和29年的威士忌將顯示“0

歲”字樣。無論標桶的老年化情況如何，公司都有責任報告其他桶的年齡，但這不是一個限制性的。有時，您可以找到沒有年齡的威士忌：沒有恐懼，沒有標桶或假單產品，它們是所謂的NAS（無年齡聲明）。其中適用於最低3年威士忌的標桶上則。製片人選擇不要年齡，這仍然是未知的：它將由我們的口味來驗證味道和愉悅。

在標籤上，始終報告酒精含量，必須至少為40%。在這個數字下我們不能說威士忌。如果每瓶空瓶，有許多公司會報告Cask Strength（英國世界）或Full Proof（美國世界）；我們在沒有用水稀釋的產品存在。因此，好像它們只是從桶中取出。然而，這就意味著可以使用用水稀釋的威士忌的較低等級的木桶威士忌。

必，特別是加拿大者俱有一定的年齡。

*Un Chilled（未經冷藏）這個詞讓我們知道威士忌沒有被冷藏，以及“沒有顏色”，或“沒有添加色素”（或其他類似的詞），解釋說沒有添加高麗紅正色。

在特殊情況下，我們還可以找到所用桶的指示，甚至於桶的數量。這種情況經常發生在非常有限的成本中，或在在獨立裝瓶商的情況下使其成為購物的來源。此外，我們可以找到Single Cask或Single Barrel這兩個詞，它們強調了它的獨特性。另一個詞是Shovel Batch，它仍然是一個更廣泛的概念：你可以從兩個桶中取出，但仍比前小一些（在一個桶子，獨立桶的Caskhead的更複雜為自己的小量混合了兩個或三個桶，而與

本小冊沒有宣布使用的桶數量，但他們肯定會把更多的桶放在一起。

在特殊情況下，它總是發很精神強烈的日期，特別是當涉及到單個桶時：生產者想強調精神在桶中花費的時間。

桶的組合符合精確的標準：您可以將來自同一種酒桶，不同桶，甚至來自（大）和小（小）桶的單桶威士忌混合在一起。在第一種情況下，沒有標籤（這是一種常見做法）。在第二種情況下，我們將它命名為威士忌（今年前以稱為Vatted）。第三種情況是混合威士忌（或混合），還有Grain Whiskeys：這些將是來自各種穀物生長的威士忌。在美國世界，我們通常遇到與行標相關的各種詞語，或者使用的唯一一類（黑麥威士忌，玉米威士忌）。

我們試圖解釋各種標籤上最常用的是：沒有絕對的紀錄。每個製酒商都有自己的事情。但是，通過這些與標準，在這個廣闊而獨特的世界中，它將更容易自認。

54 | AUTUMN 2019 | Cigars Lover Magazine

AUTUMN 2019 | Cigars Lover Magazine | 55

FAIR

*The Organic and Fair-Trade
Liquor Revolution*

by **Vincenzo Salvatore**

Since 2009, FAIR produces high-quality liquors using only source materials from ethical and fair-trade cooperatives. More than a simple liquor distillery, FAIR renovated the market by strongly believing in their social mission: demonstrating that is possible to realize high-quality products, making money, and respecting labor and the environment.

Their first product was a unique quinoa vodka, grown in Bolivia and distilled in France, that soon was followed by other staples of mixology like a kumquat triple sec from Southeast Asia, a café liqueur from Mexico, and a juniper gin from Uzbekistan. Their distillery in the Cognac region of France is run with passion by master distiller Philip Laclie. Moreover, they bottle an extraordinary rum in collaboration with a distillery in Belize that respects all the ethical and environmental parameters at the heart of their project. The Fair Rum Belize 8yo, a special limited edition, ranked tenth in the CigarsLover Best Rum Awards 2020.

Over the past decade, you have built a respected and successful business based on activism and sustainable fair-trade practices. Can you tell our readers a bit about the history of FAIR and how much effort it took you to get where you are at today?

First, it is a long process to be able to get the certification on your final product. There are a lot of rules and criteria that must be met. It's a heavy financial commitment and



a whole structure to put in place. Most likely, this explains why most brands give up on the idea in the first place. The other difficulty was to be the first one in the world. Most markets and consumers weren't really talking about sustainability or simply showing any kind of conscious behaviour. The sustainable movement simply didn't exist. We spoke a very different language than our competition and back then the trade wasn't ready for it. It took a tremendous amount of effort. We had to be diligent, never giving up on our principles and ethos.

How have you been developing your liquor and spirit range over the years? Did you plan everything, or did you work by a mix of inspiration and engagement? How did you choose to work with your current partners in Belize, Uzbekistan, Bolivia, and so on?

I would say a mix and match of inspiration and planning. We had the chance to develop our distribution worldwide starting from France, Great Britain, California and New York City. The demand from consumers and the way products are used differs drastically between those markets. To stay relevant, being able to keep on growing the brand and establish some products as leaders in their category we had to show innovation and creativity. We are working with very passionate and super-skilled people in France that allow us to fill those needs.

The reason for going to Bolivia, Belize, Uzbekistan and so on



is based on the fair-trade certification. Belize was the only country producing a rum using fair-trade certified sugar cane. Uzbekistan is the only country producing fair-trade certified Juniper and to finish with one last example Bolivia is where Quinoa was born 5000 years ago and one of the few countries having the certification.

As our readers know, your Belize Rum 8yo Cask Strength really impressed us. How difficult is it to make a sustainable rum? How did you handle the most resource demanding aspects of rum making like cask aging and transportation? Can you give us more details about the way you develop limited editions like the 8yo CS?

Our founder Alexandre Koirasny has developed a very strong relationship with the distillery in Belize. The 8yo cask strength is one project out of a dozen developed in the last 7 years. We have developed those projects based first on liquid availability in Belize and opportunities created with our

different European partners such as LMDW in France. Specifically, regarding FAIR Belize Rum 8yo cask strength we knew that French consumers love higher abv rum and having a limited edition would be even more appealing. Novelty and uniqueness are key to sustain and grow your brand awareness. Also, a really fun project to get involved with.

Let's talk about one of your newest spirits, the Juniper Gin. Every year there are dozens of new releases, so it seems that the love for quality gin will not fade away soon. How long did it take you to develop your gin and what were the biggest difficulties? What makes your gin different from the others?

This project is a new version, the original product was launched in 2014. So, my answer would be that it took 6 years of development. The category has exploded and went a little everywhere with loads of new styles and flavours but often forgetting about what consumers really want. We have

spent a lot of time researching and trying to understand what would be the most successful approach, and keeping in mind that we always want to differentiate ourselves with the liquids that we offer.

The biggest difficulty is to find the perfect match. You can't just have a liquid that pleases the trade or one that only seduces consumers. So far, the feedback is fantastic. I think we found the right balance and with this new gorgeous bottle, it's a win. The differences come from the fact that we use our quinoa vodka as an alcoholic base and we source our botanicals in Uzbekistan. As a plus now the product is not only fair-trade certified but also Organic certified.

What's your relationship with the mixology world? Do you think that cocktail bars could be a convenient place for the public to learn about your products and the idea behind them?

100%! That's where the brand started and where it has been getting a lot of love. The cocktail scene in London, Paris, NYC, Sydney, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Singapore is absolutely amazing and it shows where the brand is now widely available. I personally had the chance to visit all those cities, hosting masterclasses and events, sharing our stories, and building an amazing relationship with like-minded people.

It was pretty awesome to discover their working styles and skills. We are brand builders but bartenders are the ones dealing directly with the final consumers, they are an open window to the world. It's very competitive and you have to show a relentless effort in order to succeed but, hey, it could be worse than spending your time in some of the best bars in the world, right?

Many people in the business still say that sustainability and fair-trade are nice marketing trends, but they do not

pay the bill. After ten and more years, have you simply been very good at marketing your brand or has something actually been changing in the way the public consume alcoholic drinks?

Our marketing has improved and is getting better every year. I think the main reason lies in the fact that people now understand what we do. Consumers are seeking that kind of product, which means that our words and ethos resonate a lot more today. Most consumers didn't know or didn't think it could be done in spirits, even though it started 20 years ago with fair-trade wines. It took some time, but first social media, and now media overall, are generating a huge amount of content every day, making people more aware of the issues that we face today. This is creating awareness and consciousness.

Also, now that other brands, and especially some of the leaders, are using the same language we use, the impact is multiplied and dynamises our capability to reach out to consumers. Being a trendsetter is very important and one of the keys to success. But being the only one, being seen as an alien limits your growth. Having competition means that there is a category, if there is a category it means there is demand and therefore potential growth.

What are your visions about the future of the spirit market? Do you see a growing niche for engaged brands like yours, or do you think that the 2020 global crisis will crunch the mid-price range of the spirit market? How has it been this past year for you?

Well, it's a tough one. The Covid-19 crisis created a lot of disruption and is shaking everything up. Niche and independent brands are clearly struggling being mostly used in bars that have barely been open in 2020. Sadly, I think many brands will disappear, and this will create a switch. People are still proactive, and brains are working very hard to go through these difficult times, so we will see many brands go and many will come in. The market remains competitive, the lower end is definitely benefiting from the situation, but brands like FAIR that are engaged in a more meaningful project clearly have an advantage.

Covid-19 has accelerated and exacerbated the need for consumers to understand where ingredients come from, how products are made. We are all asking for more transparency and traceability. Rum is by far the category where it is the most needed and it's finally happening. Last year was tough, but it could have been a lot worse. We took the right decision at the right time and managed to find some good solutions. I hope that all that new business built-in 2020 will end up being just a great plus when the business goes back to normal.

What's in the future of FAIR? Are you working on a new addition to the core range? Can we expect new limited releases like the Belize Rum 8yo Cask Strength?

This is still a secret so I can't tell you much yet. That said, keep a close eye as we have some exciting stuff in the pipeline. 2021 has just started and we are ready for it.




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Amrut

*The Indian whiskey more and more appreciated,
with a very interesting portfolio*

by **Luca Cominelli**

Amrut is a brand that has gained a lot of visibility in recent years, thanks to many bottlings that have been hugely appreciated by enthusiasts all over the world.

The company was founded in 1948 as "Amrut Laboratory" and over the years has branched out into distillation. In the 1970s and 1980s they started Grape Brandy and Malt Distillation respectively. In the 2000s, their current CEO was pursuing an MBA in the UK and as part of his dissertation, he studied the potential of Indian single malt whiskeys in the world market. In 2004 the brand launched the first Indian whiskey "Amrut Single Malt".

We had the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Rakshit Jagdale, the founder of Amrut Indian Single Malt, to learn more about

Amrut products, and to better understand the secret of their success and to learn more about their whiskeys.

What makes Amrut products different from all other whiskeys available on the market?

The most important thing that makes our whiskeys different is its Indianness. The many cultures and colours that India represents is what our whiskeys contribute in flavour and profile, from bold and rich spices to elegant sweetness. We are also extremely proud to innovate with our bottlings with the likes of Spectrum – whisky aged in custom built multiple wood assembled casks, Kadhambam – rum, brandy and sherry finished whisky, Naarangi – whisky aged in citrus infused in sherry casks etc.

How does the climate influence your aging process?

The climate conditions in Bangalore plays a pivotal role in making our whiskeys unique. We are at 3000 ft above the sea level with summers and winters going as high as 40 and 30 degree Celsius respectively. Interestingly, we are in a low humidity region, so our casks gain alcohol over the course of maturation, giving our whiskeys a robust profile with a wide range of flavours. Since we are located in a tropical zone, the rate of evaporation very often touches 12% per year and so we lose a lot of whisky annually. However, that also means that our whiskeys reach full maturity relatively sooner compared to the distilleries in colder areas.

Usually, hot weather distilleries do not age their whiskeys that long, but you released editions with important aging, such as the Greedy Angels. You also have a 12-year-old bottling. How do you deal with the evaporation?

The Greedy Angels series are luxury age statement whiskeys. We have released an 8yo, 10yo and 12yo. At the end of 12 years, we are only left with 30-35% of whisky in the casks. We periodically move the casks in a warehouse that is at a lower level to combat higher evaporation losses.

In your portfolio you have many products bottled at cask strength and many other have an ABV of 50% or even more. Do you sense a higher demand for high proof whiskeys nowadays?

We understand and believe that whisky tastes best when it is closer to its natural strength and we want our consumers

to enjoy the uniquely robust profile our whiskeys deliver. We have seen that as the global consumers of whisky are increasing, they are also simultaneously growing in their understanding of the multiple aspects of whisky making and tasting, this has probably led to a tremendous increase in demand for higher strength whiskeys and rightly so.

What were and still are the major difficulties in selling your product and your brand as Indian Whisky? What is the best-selling Amrut whisky and what do you think of certain sales trend?

The liquor market in India was very different from the rest of the world. India was never known to make whisky of international standard and by extension, single malt whisky. In the subsequent years after our launch in 2004, people were surprised to know that there is a Single Malt from India and a lot of them were also extremely suspicious of our production and quality standards. In the hardworking years that followed and as the consumers became more aware, so we have been generously gathering praises for our products. Amrut Fusion is our most sought-after whisky but we have also been fortunate to have all our products be extremely well received.

How difficult was for Mr. Shri Neelakanta Rao take over in the business? And what did it take to make Amrut that company that is today?

Shri Neelakanta Rao faced multiple challenges when he



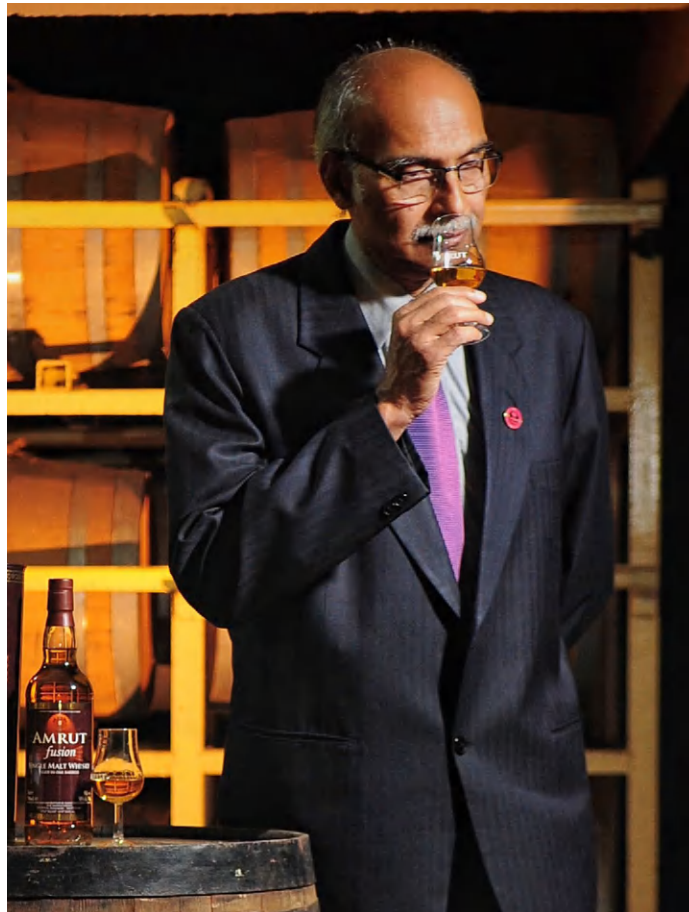
took over in 1976: first, he was relatively young, barely into his mid-20's; second, the Jagdale group, as it existed then, spanned much more diverse industries besides liquor - bulk drugs, pharmaceuticals, food processing, machine tools, to mention a few.

Shri Neelakanta Rao managed to turn these challenges into the foundation for success - with the energy of youth, willingness to learn from juniors and seniors alike, daring to explore uncharted territory, capacity for unlimited hard work and, above all, an iron will to succeed - these were the inherent qualities that helped him to lift Amrut to the heights that it has achieved today.

How has the company changed and how has the whisky market changed over the past decades?

In terms of its core philosophy, the company has remained unchanged - passion for quality and highest standards of business ethics and integrity. The business profile of the company has however undergone a sea change. At the turn of the century, Amrut was known more for its Deluxe range of liquor than for premium products. Early in his stint, Shri Rao began focusing more on premium products.

Grape distillation began in 1975 followed soon by malt spirit distillation with technical assistance from Scottish experts. These were to form the foundation for production of superior liquor in later years.



While these efforts have met with uniform success, the case of Amrut Single Malt is the most shining example that has fundamentally changed not just the profile of Amrut but even the perception abroad about Indian liquor makers. Today the company sells no less than 8 brands of premium liquor including 30 variants of Amrut Indian Single Malt, MaQintosh Silver Edition (a blended malt whisky), Amrut Two Indies Rum (India's 1st Natural rum) along with several other blended whiskies and grape brandies, mostly in the premium segment.

In terms of customer profile too, the company has changed beyond recognition. When Shri Rao took over, Defence Ministry (CSD) was the most dominant customer. This has changed and the civilian market now constitutes over 70% of the company's revenues. The civilian market in turn is spread over no less than 15 states, representing the length and breadth of the country. Moreover, the company also exports its products to 45 countries. All this is a result of the Shri Neelakanta Rao's drive to achieve geographic widening of Amrut's market. To service the burgeoning market for its products, the company has also established three more bottling units of its own - one in Kerala and two more in Karnataka - apart from entering strategic bottling tie-up in several other states. Thus, the company has changed in many ways, in terms of customer profile, product profile, geographic spread of its worldwide market and even of its production facilities.



Amrut management is fairly young. What have the new generations brought to the company?

The new generation, although relatively young, has had the benefit of some two decades of hands-on experience in the industry. Besides, as is to be expected, they also bring to the table a very much more tech savvy approach and are keen on technology-driven solutions to various decision-making issues. Their focus would be on luxury segment, development of ultra-premium, niche products and raising the global footprint of the company - from the current 45 countries where Amrut products are sold to at least 75 in the next 4 to 5 years.

While naturally applying modern ideas and methods, the younger generation is conscious of its pedigree and would retain company's core values: passion for quality, highest standards of business ethics and integrity.

Can you tell us something about your rum? How important is rum for Amrut?

Amrut Two Indies Rum was the idea of the late Jagdale Neelakanta Rao. We wanted to create a one-of-a-kind rum. At Amrut, we have distilled and matured a rum made from jaggery (used all over India in food and cultural traditions) and blended with a portion of Caribbean rum made from molasses. The profile of the rum then is extremely elegant with notes of sugarcane sweetness, muted spices, and dark chocolate.

Recently, Amrut opened its portfolio to a gin product, named Nilgiris. What brought Amrut to create its first gin?

We had been working on a distilled Gin for a few years. Over the many months, we had taken the time to perfect the recipe and source the finest ingredients from India and overseas and now seemed like the perfect moment to commemorate the many years of work that went into it. As a Gin Distiller, it was imperative for me to let every element in the Gin shine through and create a symphony of flavors.

Gin is becoming more and more trendy nowadays. What makes Nilgiris different from the other gins on the market? How is it made and what kind of botanicals are used in the blend?

Amrut Nilgiris Indian Dry Gin is unique in a lot of ways, the pot still is locally made in Bangalore and we have used Nilgiris Tea (a mountain range in the western ghats of India, after which the brand is named) and betel leaves (commonly known as Paan in India).

Betel leave is used to make a very popular digestif and also finds its use in many cultural/festive occasions. We have used 10 botanicals: Juniper berries, Coriander seeds, Lemongrass, Angelica root, Orris root, Mace, Nutmeg, Cinnamon, Nilgiris Tea and Betel leaves.

What is next for Amrut?

We have a lot of ideas for our Single Malts and some new products are in development. We are extremely excited and looking forward to their eventual release.



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Monongahela Rye

*The Rise, Fall, and Second Coming
of the Historical Pennsylvania Rye Whiskey*

by **Fabio Sgarro**

Since the mid-2000's, there has been a growing popularity of cocktail culture within the United States, Western Europe and East Asia. Bars are increasingly making more mixed drinks and cocktails, each an attempt to be more interesting than the next. Along with the rise in popularity of cocktails there is an increased popularity in American rye whiskey. To most, this spicy and daring type of whiskey seems relatively new, rapidly exploding from a few relatively unnoticed brands to an increasingly popular ingredient at trendy drinking establishments. But any aficionado or connoisseur would tell you that rye whiskey has always been there, even predating America's oh-so-popular bourbon. It is simply making a well needed craft comeback.

Rye whiskey dates back to the American colonial period,

when German, Dutch and Swiss settlers started moving into the colony of Pennsylvania in the early to mid-18th century. Many were Mennonite farmers. Speaking to Herman Mihalich of Dad's Hat Whiskey, he noted that rye was a familiar grain to these settlers, and it took well to the terroir of the central and western parts of the colony. Mihalich also pointed out that rye was wonderful in terms of agriculture; it was useful in the practices of crop rotation and using certain crops for nitrogen fixation. In an interview with historian Samuel Komlenic, he put it this way: "whiskey was a necessary part of the frontier. Settlers used it instead of currency, and it was considered a staple of everyday life". The grain would quickly go bad if left untouched, so it would be made into whiskey. It took time to bring to market in the eastern area of the region, and was transported in wood barrels, giving it a better taste than what the farmers and distillers had

in the western area of the region. There was even a rebellion in western Pennsylvania over a tax implemented on whiskey, which disproportionately impacted producers in the area due to their heavy reliance on whiskey. Unrest began in 1792 and culminated in October 1794 when President George Washington moved towards Pittsburgh with multiple state militias in order to stop the rebellion.

What exactly was Pennsylvania Rye whiskey, or what had been known as Monongahela whiskey? In my interview with him, Komlenic outlined the main features to make rye whiskey: first, the whiskey was mainly made using two grains in the mash bill – rye and barley- at the proportions of roughly 80 percent rye and 20 percent barley. This was often labeled as "pure rye". According to Mihalich, malted barley was included to smooth the flavor and because it adds enzymes useful for fermentation that are not contained in rye. The other possible mash bill was called "all rye", which is exactly what it sounds like: a mash bill of 100 percent rye grain, composed mostly of unmalted rye. The second feature was to use only sweet mash instead of sour mash. In the sour mash process, a small portion of the fermenting mash, or mixture of grains, yeast, and water prior to distillation, is taken from the last batch, then added to the next fermenting batch. The use of sour mash is a common feature of making bourbon, while Monongahela whiskey traditionally only uses sweet mash. This creates a slight variability between batches. The third defining feature was the usage of a unique still called the three chamber still. Komlenic explained that these were in relatively common use between the end of the American Civil War and just prior to Prohibition. In essence, a three chamber still consists of three pot stills stacked on top of each other. The design is an interesting fusion between the pot still and the more efficient column still. There are very few three chamber stills in existence today. The fourth and final feature was the aging process. Most American whiskey distilleries tend to use unheated wooden warehouses to store their barrels, which allows for both the building and the barrels to expand the contact with the changes in weather. This causes variations in the exchange between the barrel and the whiskey inside, depending on temperature, humidity, and season. Komlenic describes a very different aging process when dealing with Monongahela whiskey: Instead of unheated wooden buildings, he said that steam-heated buildings built with brick or other masonry were preferred. Distilleries often kept the buildings above 70 degrees Fahrenheit, or just over 21 degree Celsius, year-round. Combined with stone or brick buildings, consistent warmth allowed a greater interaction between whiskeys and barrels. The end result was a much deeper, richer, fuller bodied whiskey than what most modern rye whiskeys taste like.

This style of whiskey seems to have vanished without a trace. Why? The most obvious reason is because of the damage done to America's alcohol industry during the Prohibition era. A select few distilling companies were selected by the government to continue production for medicinal purposes, and consumers could get a prescription from a doctor to receive whiskey. Other distillers had to close their facilities,

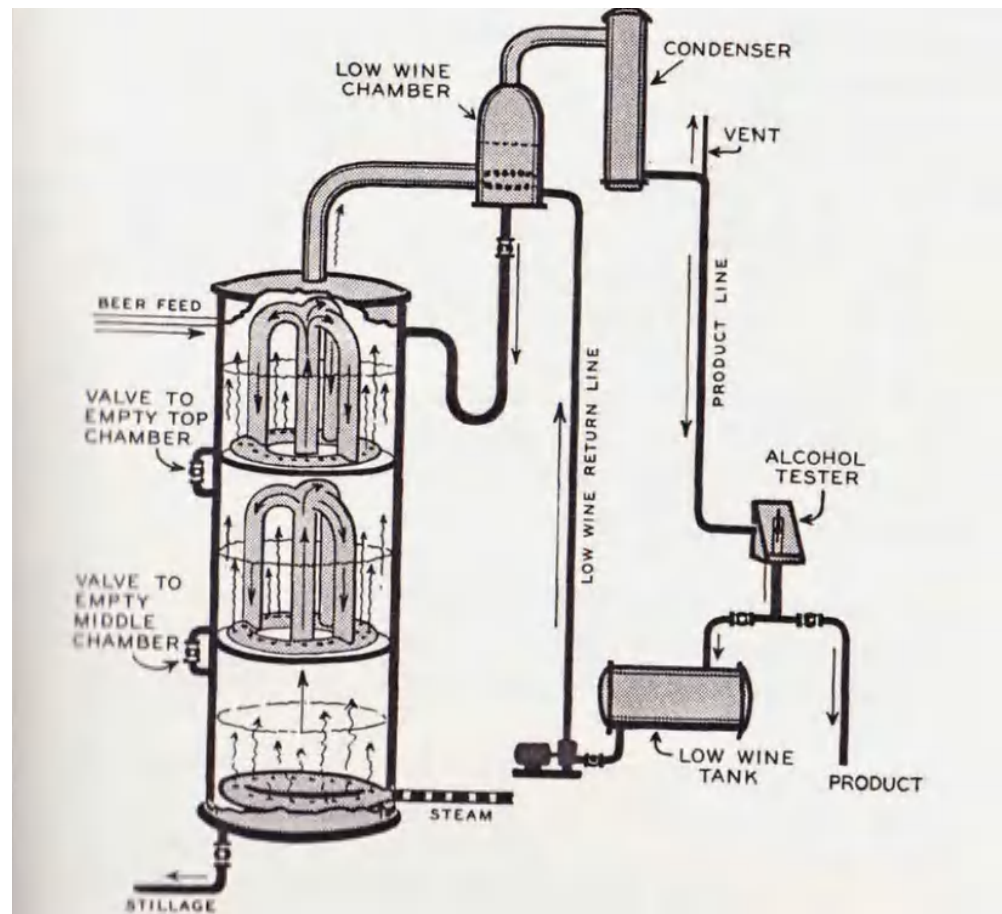


leading to financial ruin. Even after Prohibition, the entire industry had to restart, almost entirely without full barrels in store and in aging warehouses. It would take years to have product ready for market. Herman Mihalich points out that another factor hit rye whiskey much harder than bourbon. During Prohibition, there was big money to be made in running whiskey in from Canada, which was often illicitly labeled at speakeasies as "rye" when, in fact, it was simply blended whiskey. This blended Canadian whiskey was more affordable to make and more approachable for newer drinkers than the genuine Pennsylvania rye. This essentially stole the market away from the producers who were making Monongahela style rye, and those producers were never able to recover. However, according to Komlenic, "Prohibition was the nail in the coffin, but not the cause of the demise of rye". Instead, he argues that 55 years prior to Prohibition the American Civil War was the root of its downfall. During the Civil War, troops from both the Union and Confederate States would have been likely exchanging goods, whiskeys included. The sweeter, more dessert-like corn heavy bourbon that was much more popular in the American South found its way in the hands of Union men and became much more popular during and after the War. Soon, bourbon was outcompeting its spicy, savory neighbor. All these factors led to a very niche market with minimal production by the time Prohibition ended in 1933.

What does the future hold for Pennsylvania/Monongahe-

la Rye? Both Mihalich and Komlenic notes that there is not any distillery that is currently producing whiskey that meets the four parameters above mentioned. Dad's Hat seems to be very close in terms of mash bills. Mihalich says "Dad's Hat tries to be very historically accurate. The mash bills are chosen for both taste and for history." The Leopold Brothers Distillery, based in Denver, Colorado, seems to be one of the few distilleries using a three chamber still today. Yet, this company is producing a related style of whiskey, Maryland rye, which in the modern era tends to include some corn in the mash bill to create a more gentle and sweet whiskey. True Monongahela style rye whiskey had a much more pronounced, deeper, richer and full-bodied flavor profile. No whiskey producer within the United States seems to be using heated brick or stone buildings to store their barrels of whiskey. Komlenic said it like this: "Nobody who is making rye whiskey is making Monongahela rye because they don't meet the first three parameters. No one to my knowledge is really trying to recreate it". However, rye whiskey as a whole category seems to be making a major comeback as craft distilleries begin producing more, and consumers become more educated and curious. "More people want to learn about whiskey, especially rye and bourbon," Mihalich says

The recent boom in popularity could also be due in part to an increased popularity of cocktails and eased legislation in regard to opening new distilleries in several states, Pennsylvania and Maryland included.





Canchanchara

All the temper of the Cuban people is concentrated in a drink born during the wars of independence

by **Davide Pertino**

From the sixteenth century, a famous phrase attributed to King Philip II of Spain has been handed down: "Whoever owns the island of Cuba holds the key to the New World."

The historical sense, strongly correlated to Isla Grande's alternating dominations, emphasized its strategic position in trade with the Americas. Over the centuries, the Spaniards, the French, the British, and the United States have alternated in the domination or aims of control over Cuba for various geopolitical and commercial reasons.

Over the centuries, however, the Cuban people began to harbor intolerance towards foreign rulers, especially the Spanish. However, having to set a fixed point for our history (because the succession of dominations over Cuba would

risk getting us too far from our intentions), we find it in the figure of José Martí, a Cuban jurist and philosopher. Born to Spanish parents, in 1869, at the age of sixteen, the young José was accused by the Spanish government of treason and sentenced to six years of brutal and painful imprisonment in Cuban prisons. Despite several attempts at a pardon, given the prisoner's young age, the atonement of the sentence was carried out. Following this, the government decided to repatriate him to Spain, where he subsequently devoted himself to studies and work. Moving to New York in 1880, he began to implement a plan for the Cuban revolution, aimed at obtaining independence from Spain and the annexation of the island to the United States. His intentions culminated in the publication, on March 25, 1895, of the Montecristi Manifesto, which marked a point of no return for the Spanish-American war, which began on April 11 of the

same year and ended three years later. However, after a few weeks, José Martí found his death in battle on May 19, 1895.

In June 1898, at the end of the war, with the landing of the last troops of the American general Shafter, a supporter of the Cubans for independence from Spanish rule, the troops discovered an entirely Cuban way of drinking rum. Canchanchara seems to be the oldest drink in Cuba, used by Cuban warriors (mambis) to prepare for battles and protect themselves from diseases. It is made by mixing rum with aguamiel and citrus fruits. Aguamiel was, in turn, an ancient Cuban drink made simply by adding water to the sugar cane extract. Canchanchara was drunk in the morning before each battle to remedy hunger, fatigue, and, if we want, fear as well, given the high alcohol content.

There is no certainty about the etymology of the word. According to some sources, it comes from the leather-covered flask worn on the saddles of warriors. According to a more dreamlike vision, it would be the onomatopoeia of the sound of the surf of the sea with the beach.

Only recently has Canchanchara been recognized as a drink because it was born more as a way of drinking rum, and not even in all of Cuba, but in one city in particular: Trinidad. Therefore, it is a way of enjoying rum with a strong identity, linked to the warriors, peasants, and people. The history of slavery and the struggle for the region's independence lives in it. It was the after-work drink of the slaves in the sugar cane plantations, who, after 18 hours in the fields, resorted to this restorative tonic, strictly drunk in squat containers, made from the dried fruit of the pumpkin trees (jicaras). But why is it a revitalizing tonic? Perhaps because of its ingredients, in addition to the Aguardiente, we find Aguamiel and lime. Despite the sound the word may suggest, the term aguamiel is thought to refer to the sugar cane juice called "miel de cana" and not to honey itself. Subsequently, over time, this sugar cane juice was gradually replaced with honey, mainly neutral or a thousand flowers (although today bartenders delight in concocting and experimenting with new types of this sweet nectar). However, the Aguardiente is a sugar cane distillate that does not undergo aging: we could consider it the smaller brother of rum.

Thus, drinking Canchanchara becomes a way to get to know Cuban culture in-depth, going beyond the more famous Mojitos and Daiquiris. It is an easy drink to prepare, it was not made famous by Hemingway or another historical figure, and it was not created in a famous cocktail bar in Havana. Canchanchara is rooted in Cuban history as it dates back to the conflicts of independence. In Trinidad, a UNESCO heritage city and native homeland of the drink, where time seems to have stopped and more horse-drawn carriages than cars circulate, the most popular place to quench your thirst from the humid heat of the city is "La Taberna Canchanchara", one of the oldest buildings in the city. In light of all this, forcing Hemingway's famous phrase but giving it even more Cuban spirit, we can argue that "the Mojito at La Bodeguita, the Daiquiri at La Floridita and the Canchanchara at Canchanchara."

INGREDIENTS

- 60 ml of aguardiente
- 3 teaspoons of honey
- 30 ml of lime juice

GLASS

Low tumbler or, as in the origins, terracotta glass

PREPARATION

- Pour the honey into the glass and the lime juice
- Dissolve the honey in the lime with the help of a teaspoon
- Add the aguardiente
- Fill with ice and mix for one minute
- Garnish with a lime slice

ADVICE

To keep the recipe as faithful as possible to the original and fully respect the characteristics of the drink's historical taste, we recommend using the Aguardiente. Alternatively, you can go for a Cuban rum but with a low aging (like Havana Club 3). The original recipe involves putting all the ingredients in the glass at the same time and then mixing them. Today, bartenders tend to shake it, a practice that you can do if you have a shaker at home. To make the drink at its best, we recommend, before pouring the ingredients into the glass, preparing a honey mix of 60% honey and 40% water in order to have the honey already diluted and not run the risk of having it stuck on the bottom of the glass.

TASTE

In wine there is wisdom, in beer there is Freedom,
in water there is bacteria.”
Benjamin Franklin



Acidity and Tannicity

An Introduction to the Tasting of Wine Hardness

by **Vincenzo Salvatore**

Among the most important, and initially most counterintuitive, aspects of wine tasting we certainly find the understanding of the so-called “wine hardness”, that is acidity and tannicity. On the one hand, the latter feature fundamentally discriminates between white wines and red wines, as it is mainly linked to the amount of natural tannins dissolved during grape pressing. Indeed, tannins are quite limited in white wines (unless they undergo long cask aging or skin maceration to obtain orange wines). On the other hand, acidity is more important to determine the tasting profile of white wines, though we cannot underestimate its role in building balance and harmony in red wines as well. Here we offer you a general overview of the role played by this “hardness” that defines the profile of a wine, and a short guide to understand these rough features to better navigate the differences among grapes, styles, winemaking processes, and aging techniques.

We can define tannicity as the sensation of astringency caused by wine when it stimulates the frontal part of the tongue and the palate, reducing salivation, making your mouth pucker, and suggesting the perception of a material and tactile sip, sometimes also bitterish and rustic. In fact, this sensation is not perceived by taste buds, but rather by the receptors of the oral mucosa and by some tongue buds where the tannins bind with mucin, a fluidifying glycoprotein, inhibiting the fluidification of saliva, thus provoking the sensation of astringency. Among the so-called wine tannins there is quite a wide array of polyphenols (tannins, but also flavonoids like anthocyanins, catechins, flavanols, etc.) that compose the extraordinary nutritive richness of wine



grapes. The most representative polyphenols are certainly the so-called proper tannins along with the anthocyanins of grape skin and seeds. Generally speaking, these polyphenols contribute to the typical sensations of rusticity in young red wines and of full-bodied structure in aged red wines. In fact, even white grapes contain polyphenols, particularly catechins, which can produce an astringent and bitter taste in certain types of white wines. Indeed, bitterness is connected to tannicity because in dry wines (meaning without any meaningful sugar residue) polyphenols interact with alcohol and other wine components to produce what our taste perceives as a bitterish profile. In general, this moderate bitterness should be a pleasing and stimulating tasting sensation in the posterior part of the palate, which allows tannic red wines to perfectly pair with oily and fatty preparations. Yet, mainly due to an unfortunate grape harvest or to a wrong vinification process, sometimes polyphenolic components could deteriorate producing quinones, which are oxidized tannins unsuited for human consumption. Finally, we must consider that the presence of tannic-bitter components can widely vary according to grape varieties and their pedoclimatic areas of cultivation – for instance, Cabernet Sauvignon, Nebbiolo, and Sangiovese are quite tannic, while Pinot Noir, Syrah, and Zinfandel are way softer. This capital role played by terroir gives plenty of choice to producers about how to work their grapes to get the best intended result.

As a matter of fact, from this perspective one must consider that tannins are a lively natural component in constant relationship with the other wine components in fermentation and, above all, while aging. The slow smoothing of tannins by the osmotic relationship through the wood is the reason behind the ancestral bond between red wines and casks. In fact, casks do not simply work on the polymerization of the hard flavanol tannins of wine, but they also dissolve their own way softer and more pleasing gallic tannins that soften the taste by adding notes of vanilla and spices and by improving the integration of alcohol and aromas into the



wine structure. By the same token, certain important white wines can undergo cask aging as well, especially when producers have great vintages with high acidic and glycerin concentrations. In any case, the choice of cask aging any wine is always connected to the intended product one wants to obtain. For example, using barriques to maximize the wine-wood exchange in the quickest possible way will not automatically produce better wines than using only steel tanks, cement, fiber, or amphoras. The choice must always depend on the grapes, the wine typology, the work in the vineyard, and the goal one desires to achieve. In these days dominated by the fixation with the perfect wine-food pairing, we must never forget that there is an immense array of possible combinations to find the perfect match, so it is pointless to think only in terms of brands or high-end products. What really matters is the features of a wine and of the dishes we want to pair. Thus, tannicity can be more or less pronounced, but in general we strictly define "tannic" as a young red wine of a naturally predisposed grape or of a style that includes the vinification of the stalks, as greener and more rustic tannins support a pleasingly thick, dry, sometimes rough and tactile, aromatic profile. These wines, then, are particularly apt for cleaning the fat off the palate after dishes like charcuterie, roasted meat, or lasagna. On the other hand, a full-bodied red wine with a meaningful cask aging can be defined as "tannic" when its peculiar texture of mature tannins can be more or less silky, more or less austere, depending on the complexity of the evolved tertiary aromas it has developed. These wines, thus, are better suited to be paired with more substantial gastronomic preparations like slow cooked meat cuts and bold spicy sauces.

When we talk about acidity, we are talking about another quite complex aspect of winemaking and winetasting. Within certain limits, acidity has never a negative meaning in the analysis of a wine. Indeed, among the hardness, acidity plays for white wines the same role that tannicity plays for red wines, as it is the feature that makes them alive and vibrant, stimulating salivation (contrary to tannins), enhan-

tatuaje



Pete Johnson
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cing minerality and freshness (not by chance, a term that is used as a synonym to acidity in technical tastings), and balancing the alcoholic perception and the wine structure with respect to the inferior extract given by the lack of tannins. First and foremost, acidity depends on the amount of tartaric acid and malic acid dissolved in must after pressing. The presence of these organic acids derives fundamentally from the typology of the grape, of the climate, and of the qualitative maturation at the time of harvest. More in details, tartaric acid builds the “acidic backbone”, the skeleton that holds together the taste-olfactory profile of a wine – a feature that we have already described as fundamental for white and red wines alike. On the other hand, malic acid is responsible for the more pronounced bitterish taste. Therefore, many producers prefer to let the must undergo a malolactic fermentation to transform the sharper malic acid into smoother lactic acid. Moreover, during alcoholic fermentation can appear succinic acid, which is responsible for a certain salty taste in young wines, and there is the risk to produce acetic acid, a pleasure for natural producers and a true pain for conventional ones. In general, an excessive presence of acetic acid, especially if volatile and thus perceptible to the taste-olfactory analysis, is considered as an unacceptable productive fault. Yet, many natural and biodynamic producers tend to consider acetic acid as an important natural component of winemaking processes that should never be removed through the way of technological solutions or altered by adding external substances, as it should rather be integrated in the overall taste-olfactory structure of a wine. The most interesting outcome of this debate was the discovery, on both sides of the aisle, of new solutions to valorize grapes and styles that had developed a bad reputation as wines that were too rustic, too difficult to make, or too cheap for mass distribution. Prolonged efforts and experimentations to update traditional techniques and winemaking styles led to the rebirth of high-quality wines that had been almost forgotten, among which we can mention bottle refermentation, cement vinification, and amphora aging.

As we said, a right amount of acidity is fundamental in white wines because it highlights the varietal aromatic components of the grapes, it enhances the mineral subtones, and, above all, it supports the intense aromatic persistence. Yet, red wines too need acidity to balance the higher alcoholic concentration, support the fuller body, and allow their eventual aging first in cask and then in bottle, especially for those extremely concentrate productions that requires to wait for many years after bottling. Conversely, given their lack of extract, the aging of important white wines requires high acidity to sustain the integration of gallic tannins in the different aromatic profile. Furthermore, if it is true that modern enology can practically produce any kind of wine in any circumstance, consumers should understand once and for all that not all red wines improve with age and that not all white wines should be consumed within the year of production. In fact, there are white wines that, even when not intended for cask aging, would reach their best condition only after a few years of bottle aging, for the very reason that their high acidity needs some time to perfectly integrate with the taste-olfactory structure (for instance, Italian Fiano d'Avellino, Portuguese Arinto, Spanish Viura of Roja). There are also great white wines like Rieslings from Mosel, Chardonnays from Burgundy and California, Sauvignon Blanc from Loire, and Timorasso from Piedmont that should rest for at least a decade after bottling.

As suggested, acidity and tannicity are two complex aspects of winetasting that can often rise many questions and doubts, but that, if adequately understood, will allow the consumer to better read the intimate structure of a wine and its origins. In turn, this will lead aficionados to have a clearer understanding of their own personal taste and preferences in terms of aromas and drinking styles and it will facilitate the very demanding task of food-wine pairing.



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Smoky flavour

Each type of wood can give an extra boost to a BBQ dish provided the delicate technique of smoking is mastered

by **Vito Renna**

Thinking of an American barbecue and considering any dish cooked in this style will immediately evoke the unmistakable and unavoidable smoky note. This particular quality is caused by different smoking techniques, which vary depending on the type of aromatic wood used.

Although the process may seem simple, a pitmaster knows exactly how difficult of a technique it is to master. With the right skill and patience, smoking represents a magnificent added value to a meal with increased aromatics, taste and even aesthetics to the the dish. Too often, one makes the mistake of using too much smoke, overdosing the amount of woody aroma, resulting in an unpleasant experience. The result will be a bitter, very acrid, with an aromatic profile that will remind of a wet ashtray, truly not a pleasant note. Smoking occurs when, by means of partial combustion, wood releases its aromatic essences that bind, in the first phase of cooking, to the dish. Wood must be specially bought for this purpose; it is not possible to substitute cheap alternatives. One of the main reasons is that seasoned wood, which is available on the market in different forms, is required in order to obtain the desired enrichment of cooking. Organizing smoking wood by size, the smallest type is referred to as wood dust and needs special equipment to be used, mainly for cold smoking. Next, we find the pellets, completely similar to the one used for heaters, which is placed, inside a special perforated aluminum container, directly on

the embers. These pellets are made by compressing wood dust or shavings through special dies which compress the material into pellet form. Larger pellet sizes are called chips; these are real wooden petals to be put directly on the embers. They are the most used and also the easiest to manage. They appear similar to common wood mulch. One of their strengths is that they are perfectly suitable for creating a blend of multiple essences. Chunks, larger than chips, are real wooden pieces: they last longer and avoid the complete burning of the wood. Logs are the largest size, since they are mere longitudinal sections of hardwood. They are also the type to be used in a pit or in large offset smokers, which can be as large as a trailer for a truck. Planks should also be considered, which would be positioned between chunks and logs, they resemble boards hewn from the logs in short section similar to cedar shingles for roofs. However these are actually used following a different technique, called planking. In this case the wooden plank is placed at a specific distance from the heat source and the food is cooked directly in contact with it.

There are many varieties of woods used in American barbecue, each with its own characteristics and able to give to the dish a specific and unique aroma. However, to simplify the choice for the pitmaster taking his first steps in the BBQ world, all types of timber are classified according to three large families, each of which can provide a certain aromatic spectrum, since they share the same biological

characteristics. The family of fruity woods consists of timber obtained from common fruit trees (apple, pear, peach, mulberry, cherry, orange, cedar, vine, plum trees). They do not provide the taste of the fruit they carry the name of, as one might mistakenly suppose, but instead they can deliver their own and characteristic and intriguing scents. They are the most subtle of the woods, with a soft character, which why they are suitable for many combinations when cooking and using smoking techniques. Their aromatic note is welcome to many grillers, while the intensity can be considered as mild. For this reason it is very difficult to incur in the mistake of over-smoking. They are particularly suitable for grillers who are just beginning to experiment with the smoking technique.

In the family of tannic woods are very generically all the hard woods (as soft woods are not suitable for smoking) not belonging to the fruity woods previously discussed (beech, oak, maple, alder, birch, almond, pecan, hickory, mesquite trees). The predominant element is a dry, severe, intense and masculine imprint, particularly suitable for those who love robust, strong, full-bodied flavors and experiences. With these woods, over-smoking is a real risk, especially for beginners.

The last family, the one of flavored woods, is actually the result of the new trend of using raw materials which have been enriched, compared to the physiological characteristics, with aromas of different origins. Most notably, woods that have been previously used as whiskey aging barrels are included in this family of woods. The idea has been ex-

tended to barrels that previously contained different spirits, such as wine, cognac or beer. The combination of wood and smoking technique is of the utmost importance. There are two basic types of smoking methods; hot and cold. The latter consists in exposing food to smoke at a temperature which is lower than that of cooking, through different tools. The goal is not to cook the dish but to give it the right aromatic note and flavors. The time it requires will be longer and the amount of smoke involved will be greater than hot smoking. The former, on the other hand, provides for the cooking of the food. It is therefore of fundamental importance that this should be done in the first part of cooking, as it has been shown that the raw material absorbs smoke better when it is cold, since it stops absorbing when it reaches 55°C.

Ultimately, as it is easy to guess, the more woods used for cooking a dish, the greater the number of possible aromatic combinations, becoming almost infinite. An endless world of aromas and flavors, contrasts and encounters, often also shrouded in the mystery of the pitmaster's secret recipe await the connoisseur of smoked meats and other foods of American Barbeque. In order to offer some direction to the reader, we offer you a brief summary of the types of wood, the aromatic notes they provide during smoking and the food to which they can be combined. However, given the wide variety of woods available, the possibility of blending them and the inevitable imaginative curiosity of the griller himself, smoking is a very large territory and sometimes even a realm still to be explored.

CLASSIC TYPES OF WOOD

- **Apple:** mild, sweet and delicate
- **Pear:** sweet and delicate with spicy note
- **Peach:** sweet and aromatic
- **Mulberry:** sweet and elegant
- **Cherry:** sweet and intense, of great personality, versatile
- **Orange:** slightly bitter and intense
- **Cedar:** distinctly citrusy and full
- **Vine:** medium intensity slightly acidic
- **Plum:** the most intense of the fruity, very characterizing
- **Beech:** mild and versatile
- **Oak:** soft and neutral, perfect with all blends
- **Alder:** light but definitely aromatic
- **Maple:** medium intensity
- **Birch:** refined, clean and elegant
- **Mandorlo:** extremely aromatic and refined
- **Pecan:** persistent with aroma of hazelnut
- **Hickory:** intense, full-bodied, widely used in Texas
- **Mesquite:** powerful, risky due to intensity

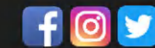
WOOD FROM BARRELS

- **Whiskey barrels:** very intense and full-bodied
- **Cognac barrels:** sweet, full and aromatic
- **Wine barrels:** intense and refined
- **Beer barrels:** soft and versatile



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Aged beers

*Discovering the best beer styles
for bottle aging*

by **Vincenzo Salvatore**

As odd as it might seem, the idea of aging bottled beers is not just a new hipster homebrewing trend. It is true that, just like wine, beer is mostly mass produced for immediate consumption (as mandated by the general indication of an expiration date).

It is also true that for long time certain styles have been intended for bottle aging before reaching their best condition. These bottles are often marked by the usage of high-quality cork caps to allow oxygenation, they are made in thick dark glass to shield beer from light, and they have to be stored at constant temperatures of 11/13 °C (52/55 °F) to prevent dangerous thermic shocks that might unleash degenerative phenomena. Above all, they usually indicate the vintage year on the label to show off their millésime like a wine.

Even if some of the most complex aspects of beer aging are still unknown to us, at least we know that there are two main features making beer suitable for bottle aging, high alcohol by volume (minimum 8%) and the presence of wild yeast. These two features determine the possibility to develop the

two key processes of bottle aging, oxidation and refermentation. We discussed some high-ABV styles in Cigars Lover Magazine Winter 2020: among the most suited styles for bottle aging, we can certainly mention Barley Wines and Imperial Stouts/Porters, as testified by the legendary Thomas Hardy's Ale, the never-failing Brooklyn Black Chocolate, and the innovative Baltic dark beers by Pöhhjala.

In all these cases, the high-ABV pairs up with a full body and a great concentration of malts, hops, and other ingredients, in making these beers particularly well structured. In freshly bottled beers, these factors might in fact produce a still closed and incoherent tasting profile, whereas they make them particularly suited for age improvement in terms of oxidation.

Just like important wines, a slow and steady oxygenation of these bottled beers allows the transformations of the most complex aromatic compounds in simpler and more expressive ones like esters and aldehydes. For example, toasted malt might evolve in scents of chocolate and coffee, hops in





notes of tropical fruit, bread crust in tones of dry fruit. High ABV preserves the resistance of beers to a too rapid oxidation and it also permits a better integration of the alcoholic strength in the overall structure.

Many of these beers have often a certain sugar residue with respect to their bottling ABV, which can certainly help the processes of transforming oxidation and refermentation, but this is not a rule. For instance, Belgian Dark Strong Ales, also known as Trappist Quadruple, are relatively poor in sugar residue, yet they can marvelously age as demonstrate the increasingly rare Westvleteren 12 or the more common, but never banal, La Trappe Quadrupel.

If bottle aging can be just a possibility for high-ABV styles, for styles retaining wild yeasts in bottle is de facto a need: only time will allow wild yeasts to fulfill their job of taste-olfactory transformation. Belgian Lambic/Gueze are certainly some of the most famous styles of this kind. These acid beers are fermented in partially filled casks to favor the work of the wild yeast in the cellar. After the cask conditioning, these beers are bottled without filtration to preserve their rich fermentative substances. Once bottled and stored at the right conditions of temperature and conservation, these wild yeasts can get reactivated to produced refermentative processes similar to those of cheese ripening, stimulating bacterial flora to create peculiar lactic aromas that will combine with the elevate acidity.

Among the most renowned producers of aged Lambic there are Cantillon, Girardin, Boon, and Drie Fonteinen. A relatively new and noteworthy proposal is surely the Oude Gouze type, which is productively quite close to the Champenoise method of Champagne and requires at least a year of spontaneous fermentation in cask and six months of secondary fermentation with wild yeast in bottle. Thus, this version is a middle way between the extreme elaborations of the most complex Lambic, which can sit even ten years in bottles before being commercialized, and the simplest ones for immediate taproom service, to which Old Gouze adds the charm of a great perlage.

As we mentioned in the opening, the rediscovery of bottle-aged beers is a relatively new trend, surely connected to the diffusion of homebrewing experiments that then suggested aficionados to set aside some bottles in cellars. Amidst few high and many lows, given the evident difficulties of homebrewing, the spreading interest for aged beers at least produced the convenient outcome of leading many producers to propose more and more beers suited for bottle aging. So far, the main problem was the constant lack of stocks and places where to purchase already aged beers, something that in the wine world is a longtime assured custom.

Luckily, over the past years we have been witnessing a spectacular multiplication of excellent taprooms and specialized dealers with beer lists rich in adequately aged options. The future of the market seems clearly oriented toward a growing presence of these beer styles in the beer-ficionados' drinking habits.

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Pippali

A very aromatic Indonesian pepper that is versatile for any serving and does not irritate the palate

by **Vincenzo Lopez**

Pepper is a spice that cannot be lacking in our pantries. It tempers the palate, makes our dishes savorier, and it improves our “temple” when adequately used. There are numerous varieties on the market, but often their use is strongly connected to local customs. Simplifying, all peppers are different. Yet, distinguishing among them is quite difficult and demanding due to the vastity of the different types and to the clumsiness of written descriptions: indeed, any sensorial experience should be personally witnessed. Yet, let me try to do away with these limitations to discover the pippali, a still largely unknown pepper in Western cuisine that should always be present in our spice shelf next to the more common piper nigrum.

The pippali comes from the temperate areas of Indonesia (though it is also common in India, South Africa, etc.), but it

boasts a long and historical tradition, as it was already renowned in the Roman empire for its silky aromaticity, its peculiar anti-inflammatory properties, and, last but not the least, its acknowledged aphrodisiac capacities. Today pippali is still considered a fundamental ingredient in ayurvedic and homeopathic medicine.

Warm and way savorer than the common piper nigrum, the pippali has an oblong wedge-shaped pod and quite cheerful colors between pastel green and yellow when freshly picked. Its aroma moves creatively and comfortably both for the native use as kitchari in ayurvedic food and as enduring spice for the daylong smoking of Texan brisket (a brisket BBQ botanical). This wondrous spice warms up the mouth without irritating the palate and without compromising overall taste appreciation, even when you grind an extra bit.

My memory is replete with the infinite aromatic nuances of pippali, but I would like to impress your mind by recounting only a handful of the best ones. To understand how game-changer this spice can be for a preparation, I ask you to imagine substituting a cotton sheet with a satin one. An almond and basil pesto as well as a hummus of red beets cooked under ashes would be dramatically enhanced by adding this pepper. It would be great even over simple slices of Mauritian-style orange with salt and pepper. It will be bold if infused with ginger and lemon zest in a classic Tanqueray tonic (though in this case I suggest not to grind it). My fondest memory, though, leads me to toasted rye bread, hand-made smoked butter, and a load of grounded pippali that I had just bought at the local market of Pasari Sari in Bali. The was also a glass of Port Charlotte 10yo for soothing the pepper in the palate, then some tarts with balik eggs and

truffle... but this is another story. Islay's peat would fly high, butter would balance with the necessary fatty note and it would enhance the smoked peat, rye would clean and viscous the tongue. Between a sip and a puff, rigorously iced water would promptly remind you to slow down and enjoy the magical encounter between art and nature.

As is known, one can often intuitively and consciously perceive peppery nuances when tasting a cigar, and the pleasing notes of this pepper are perfect to be paired with the smoking habits of an aficionado. Yet, like I said in the beginning, no two peppers are alike, which means that only a greater knowledge of pepper's typologies might help us in perfectly identifying the aromatic nuances when smoking. Who knows, maybe you will find yourself to perceive a note of pippali while enjoying a great cigar.



CIGARSLOVER MAGAZINE DISCOVER ALL ISSUES



INTERACTIVE

PAGE

Blind Tasting

114 SPIRITS

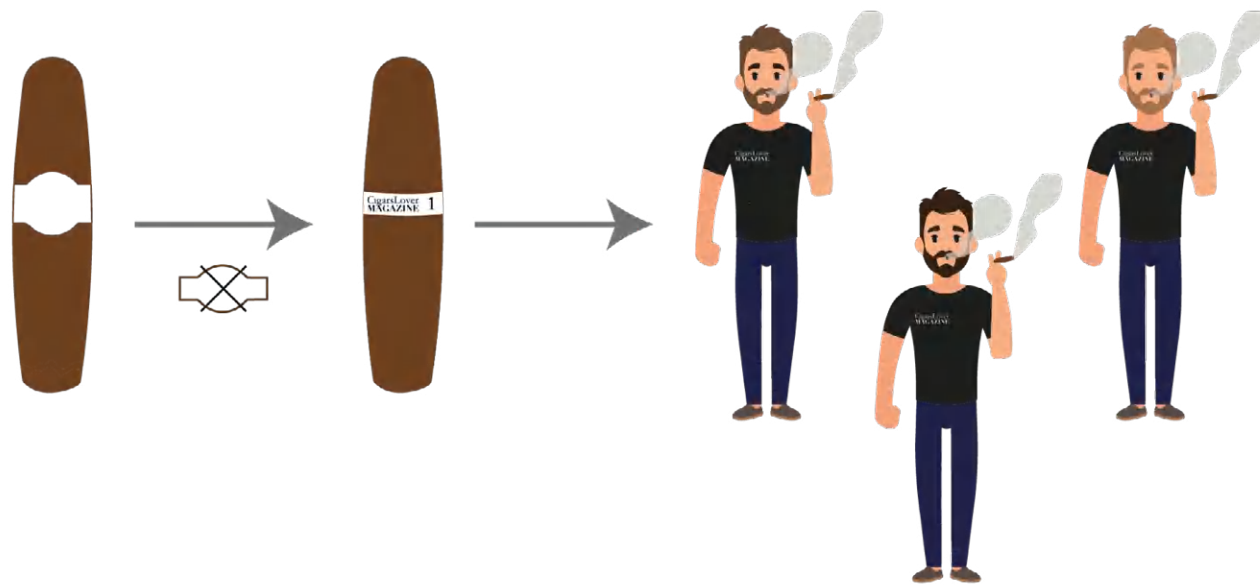
- 116 Rum
- 122 Whisky

129 CIGARS

- 130 Panetela/Lancero
- 134 Piramide
- 138 Robusto
- 142 Toro

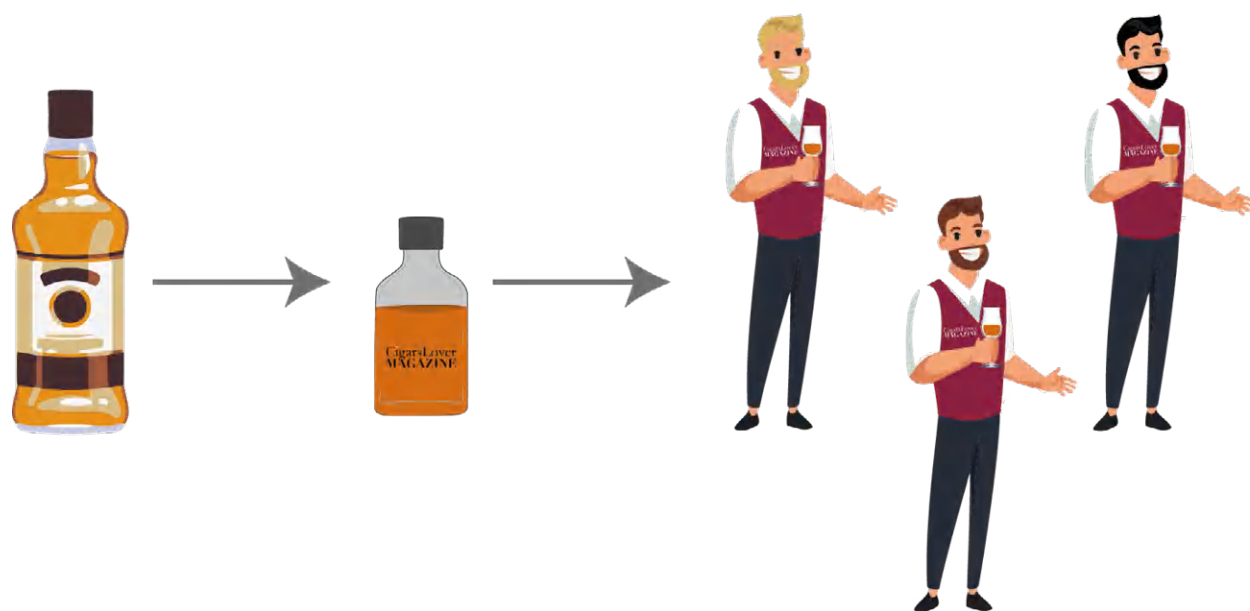


HOW ARE THE BLIND TASTINGS MADE?



The cigar rings are removed and cigars are once again "dressed" with a new band, which simply bears a number. The same happens for the spirits, which are poured into little sample bottles, only showcasing a number and a possible indication, regarding the alcohol content, if the ABV is higher than 50%.

The products are then tested in a completely impartial way, in a blind tasting in which the tasters do not know which products they are trying.



The evaluations are then collected and CigarsLover Magazine team gets to work, calculating the averages and creating the final evaluations.

The tastings are compared to create the definitive review and the rating, expressed in a 100 scale.

Cigars & Spirits Results



Legend

All the information in the blind tasting

To place the spirit inside of an ample rating scale, we adopt a scoring system made of 100 points. The rating of each spirit is made by the average given score by the reviewers. Blind tasting means every spirit is tested without knowing what it is. No information about the brand or origins are given. The reviewers only knows if the spirit is above 50% ABV.

- 1 Spirit image.
- 2 Name of the spirit reviewed.
 “yo” means “Years Old” and indicates how many years the product has been matured. If there is no indication of that, it is because the producer didn't declare it.
- 3
 - COUNTRY: where the spirit is made.
 - ABV-PROOF: percentage of alcohol contained in the spirit.
 - PRICE:
 \$ less than \$50
 \$\$ between \$50 and \$100
 \$\$\$ between \$100 and \$250
 \$\$\$\$ above \$250
- 4 The tasting is divided in three parts: what is perceived to the nose, to the palate and in the finish. The final rows describe the overall experience that brought to the rating.
- 5 Rating scale: **95-100** memorable and excellent in every detail. **90-94** great quality and highly satisfying. **86-89** high quality and very pleasant. **81-85** decent, delivering a good dram. **Less than 80** not recommended.

KAVALAN *Solist Fino Sherry*

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Taiwan	57.8% 115.6	\$\$\$\$

— NOSE —
 Ripe fruit, with rich plum notes, together with honey and a mix of exotic fruit, including coconut. Then cocoa.

— PALATE —
 Exotic fruit, caramel and honey, along with rich white pepper notes and orange zest.

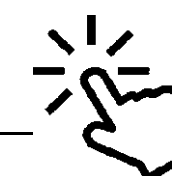
— FINISH —
 Long persistence. White pepper, cocoa and walnut. A touch of orange peel.

Complex and incredibly rich, it is a very satisfying whisky.

94

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Rum



The chosen 12

A mix of rums, both in terms of types, ABV and price range. There are both new products and classics that have been on the market for several years.

Results

Jamaica, Martinique and Barbados stand out in the top positions of this blind tasting, where four rums out of twelve rank above 90 points.



RUM NATION Jamaica 7 yo Cask Strength

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Jamaica	61.2% 122.4	\$\$

— NOSE —

Rich aromas of cloves, plantains and caramel. After a few moments, graphite and pepper are added.

— PALATE —

Strong and impactful, with spicy and herbal notes, as well as balsamic peaks. Hints of green olives.

— FINISH —

Long and sapid. It is smoky, with notes of brine and leather.

Intense and great intensity. The finish seems to never end.

93



DEPAZ XO

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Martinique	45% 90	\$\$

— NOSE —

It releases ripe tropical fruit, where dates stand out, flanked by dark chocolate and sherry.

— PALATE —

Dark chocolate, spices and oak. Shades of cloves and then a profusion of acacia honey.

— FINISH —

Long persistence. Oak, spices and vanilla. Cotton candy and walnut.

Explosive on the palate and with a structured and complex finish.

92



FOURSQUARE Plenipotenziario 12 yo 2007

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Barbados	60% 120	\$\$\$

— NOSE —

Intense notes of cocoa, enriched with hazelnut, fine wood, dates and coffee beans. Balsamic nuances.

— PALATE —

Intense notes of pecan and hazelnut. Then caramel and cocoa, followed by a touch of ripe fruit.

— FINISH —

Long finish. Intense and a little bitter. Resin and spices.

Structured and complex. It demands attention to be fully appreciated.

92



UNHIQ
XO

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Dominican R.	42% 84	\$\$

— NOSE —

Orange peel, cocoa, and a touch of rancio, enriched with spices and a touch of vanilla. Then cocoa.

— PALATE —

Dark chocolate, spices and hints of rancio. Slightly dry. Red fruit, caramel and honey.

— FINISH —

The finis is medium - long, with notes of dark chocolate and rancio.

Very soft and round, it is a particularly balanced rum.

90



HAMPDEN
Estate Rum

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Jamaica	46% 92	\$\$

— NOSE —

Vegetal scents and an important note of tropical fruit. Mint and pine needles follow. Then raisins.

— PALATE —

Tropical fruit, enriched with toasted notes and hazelnut. Then orange peel with hints of mineral.

— FINISH —

Medium long finish. Orange peel and tropical fruit are confirmed.

Well structured, and with a good flavor complexity.

88



ROBLE
Viejo Ultra Anejo

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Venezuela	40% 80	\$

— NOSE —

Delicate. It develops aromas of brown sugar, cinnamon, raisins and a touch of red fruit.

— PALATE —

Aromas of toffee, cacao and candied orange are perceived, enriched with notes of vanilla. Hints of red fruit.

— FINISH —

Medium-long finish, with pecans and maple syrup. Liquorish.

Persuasive and drinkable rum, which is particularly balanced.

87



PLANTATION
Rum 2005 Fiji

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Fiji	50.2% 100.4	\$\$

— NOSE —

It releases aromas of cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, Williams pears and plums, together with caramel.

— PALATE —

Soft entry, which quickly becomes peppery and rich in ripe fruit, plum, pear and mango.

— FINISH —

Medium persistence. Slightly smoky. Toasted wood, macadamia nuts.

The sweet and spicy combination is interesting. Drinkable and satisfying.

87



NAGA
Pearl Of Jakarta

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Indonesia	42.7% 85.4	\$

— NOSE —

Smoky hints, followed by medicinal herbs and citrus fruits, where lemon peel stands out.

— PALATE —

Quit sweet. There are spices, dried fruit, and maple syrup, followed by black cherry and plum.

— FINISH —

Medium persistence. Spices, wood and smoky nuances.

Particular flavor profile. Equipped with a good balance.

86



ZAFRA
21 yo Master Reserve

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Panama	40% 80	\$\$

— NOSE —

It takes a few moments in the glass to open up. Hints of coffee, creme brûlée and toasted wood.

— PALATE —

Aromas of licorice, white pepper and walnuts are perceptible, with a touch of honey.

— FINISH —

Short finish. Salted caramel, and toasted wood. Slightly smoky.

Delicate rum, very drinkable, but not very persistent.

86



A.H: RIISE
Npu Black

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
U.S. Virgin Isl.	42% 84	\$\$\$

—NOSE—

Caramel, cotton candy and pine needles, followed by chestnut honey and licorice. Then, hints of coffee.

—PALATE—

Sugar candy, honey and notes of wood spices. Very sweet.

—FINISH—

Medium persistence. Sugar candies are confirmed.

Well performing on the nose, it is very sweet and soft.

84



ARCANE
Flamboyance

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Mauritius	40% 80	\$

—NOSE—

Chocolate cherries, peaches, white flowers, rose water, wild herbs and marjoram.

—PALATE—

Cherry and peach, apricot, milk chocolate. A bitter note stands out on the sweet base. Peppered spices.

—FINISH—

Medium finish. Sweet fruit, vanilla, cinnamon and a mineral note.

Particular. Very fruity and with fresh and delicate notes.

84



BIELLE
Odysee Goelette Rhuum Premium

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Guadalupe	55% 110	\$\$

—NOSE—

Vegetal and herbal, with brine, vanilla and shades of rose water. Caramel and walnut.

—PALATE—

The vegetal component also stands out on the palate and the herbal notes are also confirmed.

—FINISH—

Medium-long finish. Vegetal, with spices. Slightly dry.

Limited structure. The alcoholic content results a little overpowering.

84

CigarMate

*Handmade CigarMate
for handmade cigars*



The CigarMate is a cigarholder created to let your cigar lay on a smooth surface of wood, providing the best natural support.

The design is completely studied in Italy and the production is entrusted to the most experienced woodworkers of the Philippines. Each CigarMate is completely made by hand, starting from a block of mahogany wood and slowly giving it size and shape. At the end of the process the cigarholder is lacquered manually with a brush. Each one has small differences from the others, which make it unique.

The CigarMate is composed of several collectible pieces.

Whisky



The chosen 12

Coming from five different producing countries, the whiskies of this blind have very different characteristics. Some products are recent releases.

Results

Two products reach the threshold of 90 points, and in the case of the winner, we are faced with a particularly successful limited edition, not to be missed.



AULTMORE Exceptional Cask Serie 11 yo

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Scotland	56% 112	\$\$

—NOSE—

Elegantly sherried, with marzipan, sultanas and candied exotic fruits. Then cloves.

—PALATE—

Dark chocolate, followed by spices, cardamom and mineral notes. Then a blast of fruits.

—FINISH—

Medium-long finish. Essential oil of orange and balsamic nuances.

Explosive and endowed with a pronounced intensity and balance.

92



SANMI Ittai Cask 9585

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Japan	57.6% 115.2	\$\$\$

—NOSE—

Ripe fruit, raisins, maple syrup and fine wood. Then suave spikes of white pepper and hints of malt.

—PALATE—

On the palate it is incredibly balanced, despite the high alcohol content. Ripe apple and raisins.

—FINISH—

Medium long finish, with fine wood and white pepper. Honey.

Sweet, delicate and fresh. Round and very balanced.

90



WILSON AND MORGAN Caol Ila 2020

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Scotland	46% 92	\$

—NOSE—

Peaty scents, mineral tips and a touch of medicinal herbs. Then nuances of citrus, with cedar peel.

—PALATE—

Peat and licorice, with wood spices and cedar peel. Smoky, mineral and with a touch of vanilla.

—FINISH—

Medium long persistence. Marine notes and mineral hints. Smoky.

Intense and harmonious, it is satisfying and well balanced.

89



SANTIS
Appzeller

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Switzerland	48% 96	\$\$

— NOSE —

Yellow fruit, spices, a hint of cinnamon, hops and malt. Nuances of roasted wood and coffee beans.

— PALATE —

Malt, wood and spices. Cinnamon is still present, enriched by a muted mineral note.

— FINISH —

The finish is medium, with notes of wood and spices. Hints of coffee.

Very round and balanced, it is easy to appreciate and drinkable.

88



**ARDNAMUR-
CHAN**
AD 09.20:01

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Scotland	46.8% 93.4	\$

— NOSE —

Floral aromas, wildflower honey, vanilla, light mineral note and flint. Then herbal hints of algae.

— PALATE —

Peat notes, are followed by marine and smoky aromas, alternating on a base of cereal biscuits. Sweet.

— FINISH —

Medium-long finish. Flint and roasted marshmallow.

Direct and intense. A satisfying and easy to appreciate product.

88



KILKERRAN
*Heavily Peated 6 Batch
No.2*

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Scotland	60.9% 121.8	\$

— NOSE —

Intense peated notes, followed by black pepper and smoky notes. Followed by cigar ash and shades of red fruit.

— PALATE —

Peat and spices, with intense notes of black pepper. These are followed by smoky and charcoal aromas.

— FINISH —

Medium-long persistence, with smoky peat and charcoal notes.

Intense, with a particularly strong peaty and spicy profile.

88



TEELING
*Brabazon 14 yo Pedro
Ximenez Edition No.3*

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Ireland	49.5% 99	\$\$

— NOSE —

Spices, intense aromas of licorice, ripe red fruit, dark chocolate and dried figs.

— PALATE —

Powerful, with dark chocolate, cherry in alcohol, spices and vanilla, together with vegetal nuances.

— FINISH —

Medium-long persistence. Spices, ripe red fruit and melted chocolate.

Explosive and boasting a strong flavor intensity.

88



PAUL JOHN
Peated Select Cask

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
India	55.5% 111	\$\$

— NOSE —

Dark chocolate, red fruit and a mix of spices and cardamom. Then dates. Chestnut honey.

— PALATE —

Dark chocolate, red fruit and dates are confirmed. Spices. Nuances of orange peel.

— FINISH —

The finish is medium-long. Spices, pepper and red fruit.

Intense and well balanced, it is warm and enveloping.

87



**AMERICAN
EAGLE**
12 yo

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
U.S.A.	43% 86	\$

— NOSE —

Wood, vanilla and caramel, then malt and cereal biscuits. Lastly, notes of ripe yellow fruit.

— PALATE —

Wood, wood varnish and caramel. Spices and aromas of balsamic herbs follow. Then caramel.

— FINISH —

Medium-long finish, with wood varnish, and peppery spices.

Intense and drinkable, even if not particularly complex.

86



JEFFERSON'S OCEAN
Aged at the Sea

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
U.S.A.	45% 90	\$\$

— NOSE —

Sweet, fruit and honey. A hint of iodine and then medicinal herbs, malt and sea breeze. Smoky nuances.

— PALATE —

Vanilla, honey, smoky and spicy notes, with all spice and caramel. Then iodine and sea breeze.

— FINISH —

The finish is medium-long, with spices, vanilla and honey.

Good flavor intensity and an interesting finish. Average complexity.

86



THE GLENALLACHIE
11 yo Port Wood Finish

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
Scotland	48% 96	\$\$

— NOSE —

Wood, brine and particularly ripe fruit. Then hints of burnt sugar.

— PALATE —

Buttery and round, it releases notes of spice, caramel and even ripe fruit.

— FINISH —

Medium finish. There are spices, wood and vanilla.

Round and velvety on the palate, it is particularly balanced.

86



BAKER'S
7 yo Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey

COUNTRY	ABV - PROOF	PRICE
U.S.A.	53.5% 107	\$\$

— NOSE —

Intense notes of wood and vanilla, followed by citrus fruits (cedar peel), honey and light pepper notes.

— PALATE —

Sweet. It delivers notes of oak and vanilla, supported by spices and vegetal nuances.

— FINISH —

Medium persistence. There are spices and vanilla.

Classic bourbon, particularly powerful, due to the high ABV.

85



CHOOSE WHO TO BELIEVE.

A MIRACULOUS LIE

Inspired to the miraculous and fraudulent remedies sold by charlatans in the 1700s.

A BITTER TRUTH

A craft amaro bitter, made by infusion and distillation of herbs, spices and barks.



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PAGE


1000+ CIGARS TESTED EVERY YEAR

 **FIND CIGARS** 

Legend

All the information inside the blind tastings

To place cigars inside of an ample rating scale, we adopt a scoring system made of 100 points. The rating of each cigar is made by the average given score by the reviewers. Blind tasting means every cigar is smoked without knowing what the cigar is. No information about the brand, blend or size are given. This is the only way to evaluate cigars objectively.



1


ADVENTURA
Royal Return King's Gold Robusto

COMPLEX AND RICH

It releases cocoa and citrus, enriched with earth and a touch of incense. The base is honeyed. Then, it continues with spicy notes of white pepper, which gradually become more intense, culminating in hot spices.

2

3

95 

4

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	52x127mm (5")	\$ 13.5 € 13.5
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
U.S.A.	MEXICO	DOMINICAN REP., NICARAGUA, U.S.A.

5

- 1** Cigar picture.
- 2** Cigar tasting notes: the flavor profile delivered through the smoke.
- 3** Rating scale: **95-100** memorable and excellent in every detail. **90-94** great quality and highly satisfying. **86-89** high quality and very pleasant. **81-85** decent, delivering a good smoke . **Under 80** not recommended.
- 4** Flag identifying the country where the cigar is made.


Cuba


Dominican Rep.


Nicaragua


Honduras


Brazil


Mexico


U.S.A.


Costa Rica


Italy


Philippines


Canary Islands


Panama
- 5**
 - STRENGTH: described on a scale from "●" (lightest) to "●●●●●" (strongest).
 - SIZE: ring gauge (1/64 of inch) and length, written in both millimeters and inches.
 - PRICE: cigar price in US Dollar and Euro.
 - WRAPPER: the external leaf.
 - BINDER: the leaf under the wrapper.
 - FILLER: the leaves inside the cigar.

Panetela/Lancero



The chosen 12

A mix of panetelas coming from five different countries. In the tasting, there are very well know brands as well as cigars that are not sold worldwide.

Results

Six cigars, which means half of those tested, registered a score of at least 90 points, a sign that this format always gives great emotions.



BOCK Y CA. PANETELA

INTENSE WITH A GREAT FINISH

Spicy notes on a slightly acidic base open the smoke, soon followed by intense aromas of wood, cappuccino and cinnamon. The profile is then enriched with note of seasoned oak wood.

92

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	35x146mm (5 3/4")	\$ - € 5
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
ECUADOR	INDONESIA	DOM. REP., NICARAGUA



CAVALIER CIGARS WHITE SERIES LANCERO

BALANCED AND EVOLUTIONARY. GREAT BALANCE

Fine wood, citrus and earth open the smoke. The base is sweet and recalls honey. Then coffee beans and a riot of spices, with white pepper, nutmeg and hot spices. A touch of hazelnut.

92

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	38x178mm (7")	\$ 9 € 9
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
HONDURAS	HONDURAS	DOM. REP., NICARAGUA, PARAGUAY



TRINIDAD FUNDADORES

CREAMY AND ENVELOPING

The smoke is creamy and revolves around cedar wood and nuts, where the hazelnut stands out. In the background, a veiled vegetal note is also perceptible, enriched with white pepper.

91

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	38x191mm (7 1/2")	\$ - € 25
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
CUBA	CUBA	CUBA



PLASENCIA ALMA DEL FUEGO FLAMA

INTENSE AND FULFILLING

It releases rich earthy and leathery notes, supported by an important spicy vein of black pepper, which culminates in chilli spice, which give rise to a prolonged finish.

90

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	38x165mm (6 1/2")	\$ 17 € 17
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA



TATUAJE RESERVA BROADLEAF ESPECIALES

BALANCED AND STRUCTURED

The beginning of the smoke releases toasted aromas and earth, enriched by coffee beans and vegetal notes. Approaching the finish, balsamic herbs are also added, which gradually become more intense.

90

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	38x191mm (7½")	\$ 11 € -
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
U.S.A.	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA



MONTECRISTO ESPECIALES NO. 2

INTENSE AND FULFILLING

The smoke opens with notes of cocoa, nuts and balsamic nuances. Then aromas of wood and white pepper are added. In the finish, the profile is completed with metallic hints.

89

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	38x152mm (6")	\$ - € 14
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
CUBA	CUBA	CUBA



A.J. FERNANDEZ BELLAS ARTES M. LANCERO

INTENSE AND EVOLUTIONARY

It alternates notes of incense, white pepper and earth, together with a touch of leather. In the central section, the spices become more pronounced, culminating in hot spices. Then undergrowth, vegetal and balsamic notes.

90

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	40x178mm (7")	\$ 10 € 11.5
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
BRAZIL	MEXICO	NICARAGUA



LO TEJANOS BY OSOK X ROJAS LANCERO

BALANCED AND GOOD COMPLEXITY

It releases notes of wood and spices, where white pepper stands out, followed by vegetal and leather aromas. Earth is added in the central section, while coffee appears in the finale.

89

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	38x178mm (7")	\$ 12 € -
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
MEXICO	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA



DAVIDOFF SIGNATURE NO. 2

ELEGANT AND BALANCED

It reveals a sweet smoke, with notes of wood bark, white pepper and a touch of nuts, where hazelnut stands out. There are also mineral nuances present.

89

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	38x152mm (6")	\$ 20 € 21.5
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
ECUADOR	ECUADOR	DOMINICAN REP.



EL VIEJO CONTINENTE MADURO LANCERO

INTENSE BUT LITTLE EVOLUTION

Earth, incense and toasted notes make up the flavor profile of this Lancero. The aromas alternate throughout the smoking, without any major changes.

86

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	38x191mm (7½")	\$ 7 € 6.5
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
MEXICO	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA



JOYA DE NICARAGUA 1970 ANTAÑO LANCERO

INTENSE AND FULFILLING

It releases notes of earth and walnut, followed by toasted coffee. Earth and vegetal aromas are then perceptible. In the second half, a spicy component of black pepper is released.

89

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	38x191mm (7½")	\$ 8 € 8
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA



PADILLA 1932 LANCERO

INTENSE BUT UNBALANCED

It develops notes of seasoned wood and earth, with a suave spiciness of black pepper and cardamom in the background. Advancing, walnut is added, joined by balsamic herbs.

85

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	42x175mm (6¾")	\$ 12 € -
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA

Piramide



The chosen 12

Among the torpedos and pyramids chosen, there are classic versions of these vitola, together with box-pressed ones and cigars with a rather rounded head finish.

Results

Dominican cigars win in this tasting, with three out of four products present in the first four positions. All the top rated come from well-known brands this time.



E.P. CARRILLO ELITE SELECTION OSCURO BELICOSO

INTENSE AND SATISFYING

The smoke revolves around notes of earth, seasoned wood and coffee beans, all enriched by a mix of spices that remains present in the aftertaste and gives rise to a considerable finish.

92 

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	52x152mm (6")	\$ 9.5 € -
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
MEXICO	ECUADOR	NICARAGUA



ALEC BRADLEY PRENSADO TORPEDO

PERSISTENT AND INTENSE

Notes of black pepper, earth and a toasted nuance are developed. In the central section, the smoke is enriched with leather and moist earth. In the final part, the profile is completed with cinnamon.

91 

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	52x156mm (6 1/8")	\$ 12.5 € 11
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
HONDURAS	NICARAGUA	HONDURAS, NICARAGUA



BALMORAL AÑEJO XO OSCURO TORPEDO MK52

INTENSE AND FULFILLING

It releases a mix of spicy notes, where white pepper and chilli stand out, all enriched with walnut and vegetable aromas. In the final part, earth and leather are also added.

90 

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	52x159mm (6 1/4")	\$ 11 € 9.5
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
MEXICO	DOMINICAN REP.	BRAZIL, DOM. REP., NICARAGUA



ARTURO FUENTE AÑEJO NO. 77 SHARK

SMOOTH AND BALANCED

It delivers coffee beans and earthy nuances, enriched with aromas of leather and nuts. In the final part, hazelnut, balsamic herbs and white pepper are added.

89 

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	50x150mm (5 7/8")	\$ 18.5 € 24
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
U.S.A.	DOMINICAN REP.	DOMINICAN REP.



DREW ESTATE UNDERCROWN SHADE BELICOSO

BALANCED AND ROUND

It develops notes of incense, white pepper and chilli spice. Aromas of camphor in the background. A touch of cellulose is also perceptible. In the final part it turns to earth and black pepper.

89

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	52x152mm (6")	\$ 9 € 9.5
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
ECUADOR	ECUADOR	DOM. REP., NICARAGUA



VILLIGER LA MERIDIANA TORPEDO

FULFILLING

The smoke revolves around an intense mix of roasted notes of coffee beans and spicy aromas, where black pepper stands out. In some puffs, earth and hints of wood are also outlined.

87

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	52x159mm (6¼")	\$ 11 € -
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
MEXICO	INDONESIA	DOM. REP., NICARAGUA, U.S.A.



SIN COMPROMISO SELECCIÓN NO. 2

INTENSE AND STRUCTURED

It develops notes of cocoa, earth, wood and spices, enriched by a mineral nuance of graphite. In the second half, coffee beans, black pepper and a hint of citrus are also outlined.

88

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	52x152mm (6")	\$ 18 € 18
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
MEXICO	ECUADOR	NICARAGUA



PARTAGAS MADURO NO. 2

RATHER STATIC

The flavor profile revolves around vegetal notes, leather and wood, accompanied by spicy aromas of white pepper. The second part of the smoke is less performing.

87

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	55x121mm (4¾")	\$ - € 14
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
CUBA	CUBA	CUBA



AGING ROOM QUATTRO NICARAGUA MAESTRO

INTENSE BUT CONTAINED

It releases vegetal, nutty and earthy aromas, supported by a suave peppery vein. Advancing in the smoke, balsamic notes are added, which become more and more pronounced towards the finale.

87

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	52x152mm (6")	\$ 11 € 11
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA



EL GALAN DOÑA NIEVES SENTIMIENTO TERNURA

INTENSE BUT LITTLE EVOLUTION

It develops notes of earth, black pepper and roasted coffee aromas. Then a leather note reaches the palate as well. Approaching the finale, the spices become more pronounced.

87

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	54x152mm (6")	\$ 7 € 7
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA



MOMBACHO CASA FAVILLI TORPEDO

STRUCTURED AND BALANCED

Wood, earth and coffee beans are enriched by notes of leather, soon followed by vegetal nuances, which become more pronounced the further you get into the smoke.

87

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	52x140mm (5½")	\$ 15 € 12
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA



LA AROMA DE CUBA EDICION ESPECIAL NO. 5

GOOD INTENSITY

Notes of wood and nuts are perceptible, where walnut stands out. In the central section, leather and black pepper are added. The base becomes slightly bitter in the last third.

86

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	52x140mm (5½")	\$ 9 € 9
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
ECUADOR	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA

Robusto



The chosen 12

The Robustos chosen for this blind are very different from each other. Some belong to boutique brands, others to large and well know manufacturers.

Results

A brand new Cuban release reaches the top place, relaunching a brand that is sometimes in the shade, followed by a timeless Dominican classic.



H. UPMANN CONNOISSIEUR NO. 2

CREAMY AND BALANCED

It releases notes of wood and hazelnut, enriched with leather and roasted coffee aromas. There is also a suave spiciness present, which recalls cinnamon. Intense black pepper in the final part.

91 

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	51x134mm (5¼")	\$ - € 13.5
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
CUBA	CUBA	CUBA



ARTURO FUENTE DON CARLOS ROBUSTO

SATISFYING AND RICH

The smoke opens with hazelnut and wood, accompanied by leather and coffee, with a hint of spice. In the second half, the cigar alternates notes of black pepper and coffee beans.

90 

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	50 x 127mm (5")	\$ 10.5 € 15
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
CAMEROON	DOMINICAN REP.	DOMINICAN REP.



LA GALERA ANEMOI EUROS

PERSISTENT AND EVOLUTIONARY

It releases spicy notes, where black pepper, leather, wood and licorice stand out. In the second half, the cigar turns to vegetal notes and balsamic herbs, supported by an intense note of white pepper.

90 

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	48x140mm (5½")	\$ 9 € 9
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
U.S.A.	DOMINICAN REP.	DOMINICAN REP.



MI QUERIDA TRIQUI TRACA NO. 552

INTENSE AND FULFILLING

It releases notes of wood, cocoa and earth, enriched with a spicy component of black pepper. It all makes its way onto a sapid base. Mineral nuances also reach the palate towards the end.

89 

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	52x127mm (5")	\$ - € 11
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
U.S.A.	NICARAGUA	DOM. REP., NICARAGUA



**GILBERT DE MONTSELVAT
ANNIV. GRAN ROBUSTO**

LONG FINISH

It releases notes of white pepper with hints of herbs, flanked by mineral notes, clayey earth and hazelnut. In the final part, notes of balsamic herbs are outlined, where mint stands out.

88

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	54x140mm (5½")	\$ - € 10.5
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
ECUADOR	DOMINICAN REP.	NICARAGUA



**MACANUDO
INSPIRADO GREEN ROBUSTO**

BALANCED

It releases aromas of seasoned wood and toasted notes, followed by nuances of citrus, which refresh the smoke. Hints of green pepper are also perceptible.

86

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	52x127mm (5")	\$ 7 € 6
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
BRAZIL	INDONESIA	COLOMBIA, DOM. REP.



**MONTECRISTO
EDMUNDO**

INTENSE AND BALANCED

It releases leather, fresh wood and a suave spiciness. There are also vegetal nuances present, which come through in some puffs. Earthy nuances appear in the last third.

88

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	52x135mm (5¾")	\$ - € 14
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
CUBA	CUBA	CUBA



**GURKHA
TREINTA ROBUSTO**

ROUND. A CIGAR WITH TWO SIDES

The first half releases wood and coffee. It takes until the second part of the smoke for the intensity to increase. Then it develops notes of black pepper and hot spices, along with leather and walnut.

86

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	52x127mm (5")	\$ 13 € 13
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
ECUADOR	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA



**CROWNED H. FOUR KICKS
CAPA ESPECIAL ROBUSTO**

ROUND AND SMOOTH

The profile opens with a mix of speices, mainly black pepper. Notes of wood, earth and leather. A nutty mix of almond and hazelnut appear in the second half.

88

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	50x127mm (5")	\$ 9.5 € -
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
ECUADOR	NICARAGUA	DOMINICAN REP., NICARAGUA



**VEGAFINA
FORTALEZA 2 ANDULLO**

RATHER STATIC

The entire smoke revolves around notes of seasoned wood and toasted aromas, which find their way onto a distinctly sweet base that is present from the first to the last puff.

84

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●	54x133mm (5¾")	\$ 7 € 8
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
ECUADOR	DOMINICAN REP.	DOMINICAN REP.



**CAO BONES
CHICKEN FOOT**

SMOOTH

The flavor profile revolves around vegetal notes, leather and toasted aromas, which alternate throughout the smoke. Nuts is added in the second half, which recalls the walnut.

87

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	54x127mm (5")	\$ 7.5 € -
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
U.S.A.	U.S.A.	HONDURAS, DOM. REP., NICARAGUA



**VEGAS DE SANTIAGO
LA FAMILIA BLACK ED. 2019**

LITTLE BALANCE

The smoke opens with notes of walnut and coffee. The base is slightly bitter. In the central section, wood and peppery notes are perceived. The last third sees the bitter notes become more pronounced.

82

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	55x127mm (5")	\$ - € 10
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
N/A	N/A	N/A

Toro



The chosen 12

Recent releases and products that can be considered "classics" are part of this blind of Toros. Four producing countries are present in this blind tasting.

Results

The Dominican Republic also stands out in this blind, placing three out of three cigars in the top positions: two are not new releases, one is a recently introduced cigar.



ARTURO FUENTE OPUS X PERFECTION X

INTENSE, ROUND AND BALANCED

It releases spicy notes, where chilli peppers stand out, flanked by white pepper. There is also earth and seasoned wood present, along with citrus aromas. Then walnut and balsamic nuances.

92 

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	48x159mm (5¾")	\$ 26 € 32
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
DOMINICAN REP.	DOMINICAN REP.	DOMINICAN REP.



WINSTON CHURCHILL THE COMMANDER TORO

GREAT STRUCTURE

Cedar wood, nuances of cocoa and spices, where white pepper stands out. Then nutty aromas, which recalls the almond, and hints of mineral. Seasoned wood appears in the final third.

91 

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	54x152mm (6")	\$ 20 € 24
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
ECUADOR	MEXICO	DOMINICAN REP., NICARAGUA



ADVENTURA ROYAL RETURN QUEEN'S PEARL TORO

STRUCTURED AND EVOLUTIVE

It releases notes of cellulose and spices, enriched by fine wood. In the second half, it turns to earth, white pepper and chilli, which alternate with wood. Vegetal nuances are also perceptible.

89 

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	54x152mm (6")	\$ 11 € 12
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
ECUADOR	ECUADOR	ECUADOR, DOM. REP., NICARAGUA



MOMBACHO LIGA MAESTRO NOVILLO

CREAMY AND FULFILLING

The smoke revolves around spicy notes of black pepper, earth and wood. In the second part, the base becomes sweet and aromas of ripe fruit appear as well.

89 

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	52x152mm (6")	\$ 13 € 11
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA



**S. CRISTOBAL DE LA HABANA
LA FUERZA**

WELL STRUCTURED

It releases notes of leather and spices, where black pepper stands out. There are also hints of tea present. Intense roasted coffee notes are added in the second half of the smoke.

89

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●	50x140mm (5½")	\$ - € 14
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
CUBA	CUBA	CUBA



**E.P. CARRILLO
PLEDGE SOJOURN**

BALANCED AND INTENSE

The smoke revolves around notes of coffee beans, earth and undergrowth, the latter perceptible mainly in the first half. There are also toasted nuances present in the background.

88

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	52x152mm (6")	\$ 12 € -
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
U.S.A.	ECUADOR	NICARAGUA



**PERDOMO RESERVE
10TH ANN. MADURO EPICURE**

CREAMY AND STRUCTURED

It releases notes of ripe fruit and wood, enriched with cinnamon and vegetal nuances. The base is sweet. Walnut and coffee are added in the central section. It turns to balsamic notes in the end.

89

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●●	54x152mm (6")	\$ 9 € 11
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA



**CASDAGLI
BASILICA LINE A**

BALANCED AND ROUND

Earth and cedar wood start the smoke, surrounded by suave spicy notes. In the second half, vegetal notes are added, which gradually become more pronounced towards the end.

87

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	52x152mm (6")	\$ 16 € 14
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
DOMINICAN REP	DOMINICAN REP	DOM. REP., PERU, NICARAGUA, U.S.A.



**CALDWELL LLTK
PETIT DOUBLE WIDES. CHURC.**

GREAT HARMONY. SMOOTH

It releases notes of wood and nuts, where hazelnut stands out. Leather and toasted coffee notes are also perceptible. Vegetal nuances come through as well in some puffs.

88

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	52x152mm (6")	\$ 12 € 12
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
DOMINICAN REP.	DOMINICAN REP.	DOMINICAN REP., NICARAGUA, PERU



**H. UPMANN
MAGNUM 50**

SIMPLE TO APPRECIATE

Notes of leather and wood are perceptible, which alternate throughout the smoke. Nuances of hazelnut and a vegetal hints are also perceivable in some puffs.

87

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	50x159mm (6¼")	\$ - € 15
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
CUBA	CUBA	CUBA



**CASA TURRENT
1880 OSCURO**

INTENSE AND BALANCED

Earth, leather and spices start the smoke, flanked by black pepper. Hazelnut is added in the second half, together with vegetal nuances. Balsamic aromas towards the end.

88

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	55x165mm (6½")	\$ 20 € 14
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
MEXICO	MEXICO	MEXICO



**VIVA LA VIDA
TORO**

INTENSE BUT CONTAINED EVOLUTION

Earth and vegetal notes start the smoke. Notes of undergrowth and hints of incense are then added. The spices become more pronounced in the second half of the smoke, culminating into chilli.

87

STRENGTH	SIZE	PRICE
●●●	54x152mm (6")	\$ 12 € 14
WRAPPER	BINDER	FILLER
NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA	NICARAGUA

Credits

A taste of Italy

picture by: Mario Amelio, Foto Bellocchio

Appearance or content?

picture by: CLE Cigars, Pinterest.com

Bolívar

foto di: Mario Amelio - Cubancigarwebsite.com

Nicotine

picture by: Mario Amelio, GettyImages

Laura Chavin

picture by: Laura Chavin

Second cut

picture by: Mario Amelio

Nirka Reyes Estrella

picture by: Reyes Cigars

Double cuño

picture by: Giuseppe Mitolo

"Postponed/cancelled"

picture by: Purosabor

Sunset of the CUC

picture by: jovencuba.com

Pairings: Cigars & Spirits

picture by: Mario Amelio, Renz A. Mauleon

Ready To Drink

picture by: line.17qq.com, NIO Cocktails

Fair

picture by: Fair Drinks

Amrut

picture by: Amrut Distilleries

Monongahela Rye

picture by: Cumberland County Historical Society, skinnerinc.com

Canchancara

picture by: pickytop.com- Renz A. Mauleon - istockphoto.com

Acidity and tannicity

picture by: Mario Amelio

Smoky flavour

picture by: burntumberarts.com

Aged beers

picture by: Mario Amelio

Pippali

picture by: Mario Amelio