



Rolando Reyes Sr.

*Owner
Puros Indios Cigars*

Rolando Reyes Sr. has been called the world's most talented cigarmaker—and the most eccentric. He left Cuba as a young man, first employing his gifted hands as a knitter before opening cigar factories in Union City, New Jersey, Miami, the Dominican Republic and finally Honduras, where he makes Cuba Aliados and Puros Indios cigars. For 14 years he made his cigars in a creaky old 12-room motel in the center of Danlí, sleeping during the day before rising to check the work of his rollers. Reyes, 79, still has a lector read to the workers in the gallery, just as it was done in old Cuba. One of his cigar shapes, the crazed Diadema perfecto, is among the hardest in the world to roll. Unlike many cigar company owners, he can roll the shapes himself, often teaching men a third his age the art that was passed down to him from a Cuban master. This year, Reyes—who has never used the local Honduran tobacco in his cigars—opened a modern factory in Danlí, but his old-fashioned work habits remain the same.

—DS

Alejandro Robaina

*Tobacco Farmer
El Pinar Plantation*

It's sometimes said that the international image of Cuba is symbolized by three individuals: the leader, Fidel Castro; the musician, Compay Segundo; and the tobacco grower, Alejandro Robaina. The fact that the last is the greatest tobacco grower on the island only underlines the importance of cigars to the Cuban economy and the prestige of the country.

Robaina, 84, has grown tobacco his entire life, and growing the best means everything to the octogenarian. His family has been growing tobacco since 1845 on his Vuelta Abajo plantation, El Pinar. Robaina has some of the highest yields per hectare for high-quality tobacco in Cuba. "Anyone in Cuba can do as well as we can," says Robaina, who this year relinquished control of his plantation to his young grandson, Hiroshi. "It's all a question of dedication. You must be dedicated to quality, no matter the personal gain." To honor the man, Cuba launched the Vegas Robaina cigar brand in 1997.

—JS

Janelle Rosenfeld

*Director of Marketing and Advertising
Altadis U.S.A. Inc.*

Janelle Rosenfeld, 40, entered the cigar business about seven years ago, after she decided it was an industry she wanted to know more about. After a trip in 1996 to visit Altadis U.S.A., then Consolidated Cigar, she was offered a marketing position. Today, she runs the largest advertising budget in the cigar industry. She says her basic philosophy is to promote the company's brands by focusing on each brand's history, and then on the company's commitment to quality. She has helped develop specific advertising and marketing campaigns that differentiate the brands, so that each "stands on its own." Altadis is also striving to build a strong connection to its consumers. "We know that this is bigger than just a cigar. It's about a lifestyle and a passion that people have for cigars," says Rosenfeld.

—GM