

Cigar Insider

INTERNET ONLY

APRIL 11, 2006 ■ VOL. 11, NO. 7 ■ FROM THE PUBLISHER OF CIGAR AFICIONADO MAGAZINE

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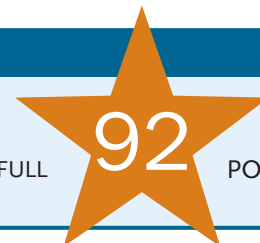
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FEATURED CIGAR

HOYO DE MONTERREY DOUBLE CORONA

CUBA ■ PRICE: £17.50 ■ BODY: MEDIUM TO FULL

For a full tasting, see page two.



92 POINTS

BEST CIGARS THIS ISSUE

Hoyo de Monterrey Double Corona	Cuba	92
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Fuente Fuente OpusX Perfeccion No. 4	Dom. Rep.	90
Oliva Grand Cameroon Robusto	Nicaragua	90
Tatuaje Cojonu 2003	U.S.A.	90



EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW

AMIABLE ACTOR KURT RUSSELL

has been classified as everything from tough guy to cult character, but the June issue of *Cigar Aficionado* gives you *his* take on the business. Also: see the best public golf courses in the world and learn how to buy a custom-made suit from London's Savile Row, read about Nicaragua's hidden tobacco island and a Q&A with the creator of Felipe Gregorio cigars.

NEW AND IMPROVED CIGAR RATINGS

AS A CIGAR INSIDER SUBSCRIBER, YOU GET EXCLUSIVE SNEAK PEEKS AT RATINGS FROM CIGAR AFICIONADO MAGAZINE. BEGINNING WITH THIS ISSUE, WE'RE GIVING YOU MORE PREVIEWS, AS WELL AS MAKING THEM BETTER.

In this issue you will find exclusive previews of cigars from the June issue of *Cigar Aficionado*, which won't be on newsstands until May 5. Starting on page two, you can read some of the best ratings from that upcoming issue, which are presented in our colorful new expanded format that shows you detail of each cigar. Of course, we also have our vertical brand tastings. With *Cigar Insider*, you'll be the first to find the hot new brands, the first to stock up on the 90s and the first to know about the hottest cigars in the world. It begins on page two.



TASTING REPORT: EXCLUSIVE JUNE 2006 CIGAR AFICIONADO PREVIEWS



92

RING GAUGE: 49
LENGTH: 7 5/8"
FILLER: Cuba
BINDER: Cuba
WRAPPER: Cuba

HOYO DE MONTERREY DOUBLE CORONA CUBA

A beautiful brown cigar with a lush draw. It's very rich, with smooth, toasty flavors and hints of coffee beans, almonds and cashews. A medium-bodied cigar with a long finish. **Box Date:** July 2005

Price: £17.50 (U.K.) **Body:** Medium to Full



92

RING GAUGE: 52
LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: Cuba
BINDER: Cuba
WRAPPER: Cuba

MONTECRISTO NO. 2 CUBA

A chunky torpedo with some veins that has a nice draw. It has wonderful flavor: sweet cedar, toasted vanilla, and some mineral notes. It's rich now, and should blossom into a classic with age. **Box Date:** July 2005

Price: £14.50 (U.K.) **Body:** Medium to Full



91

RING GAUGE: 52
LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru
BINDER: Nicaragua
WRAPPER: Nicaragua

SAINT LUIS REY HONDURAS RESERVA ESPECIAL BELICOSO

An oily, well-made torpedo that has a superb draw and burn. It has rich, hearty flavor, from chocolate to leather, cardamom to vanilla. Medium to full bodied.

Price: \$3.45 **Body:** Medium to Full



90

RING GAUGE: 38
LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: Cuba
BINDER: Cuba
WRAPPER: Cuba

COHIBA CORONAS ESPECIALES CUBA

Good oils on this cigar, which has a pigtail cap. It's a slow starter that takes on heavy almond notes, some dry wood and a very toasty character.

Box Date: December 2004
Price: £15.00 (U.K.) **Body:** Medium

100 POINT SCALE

95-100: Classic ■ 90-94: Outstanding ■ 80-89: Very good to excellent ■ 70-79: Average to good commercial quality
 BELOW 70: Don't waste your money ■ N/A: Not Available *Note: Prices are manufacturers' suggested retail, before taxes.*

TASTING REPORT: EXCLUSIVE JUNE 2006 CIGAR AFICIONADO PREVIEWS



90

RING GAUGE: 52
LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: Dom. Rep., Nicaragua
BINDER: Ecuador
WRAPPER: Nicaragua

**CUBA ALIADOS COROJO MADURO
 PIRAMIDE NO. 3 CUT HEAD**

HONDURAS

Oddly shaped, with a stubby, open head, but it has excellent flavor. The cigar has sweet wood, chocolate and mocha flavors, with an earthy, leathery core.
Price: \$4.70 **Body:** Medium to Full



90

RING GAUGE: 43
LENGTH: 5 3/16"
FILLER: Dom. Rep.
BINDER: Dom. Rep.
WRAPPER: Dom. Rep.

FUENTE FUENTE OPUSX PERFECCION NO. 4 DOM. REP.

Good oils on this streaky cigar, which has a fine draw. It's full in body, delivering wood and spice, with an undertone of leather. Lots of raw power here.
Price: \$8.25 **Body:** Full



90

RING GAUGE: 50
LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: Nicaragua
BINDER: Nicaragua
WRAPPER: Cameroon

OLIVA GRAND CAMEROON ROBUSTO

NICARAGUA

A pressed cigar with a rich cocoa color. It's meaty, with a strong cedar note and a toasty cocoa flavor. Medium to full bodied.
Price: \$3.00 **Body:** Medium to Full



90

RING GAUGE: 52
LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: Nicaragua
BINDER: Nicaragua
WRAPPER: Nicaragua

TATUAJE COJONU 2003

U.S.A.

A dark and oily smoke, with a reddish-brown hue. It has a fine draw and even burn. The smoke is woody, spicy and leathery, with a full body.
Price: \$13.00 **Body:** Full

100 POINT SCALE

95-100: Classic 90-94: Outstanding 80-89: Very good to excellent 70-79: Average to good commercial quality
 BELOW 70: Don't waste your money N/A: Not Available Note: Prices are manufacturers' suggested retail, before taxes.



TASTING REPORT: VERTICAL BRAND TASTING

EL LEGEND-ARIO BY CAMACHO

NEW RELEASE—VERTICAL BRAND TASTING

Country: Honduras

Maker: Tabacos Rancho Jamastran

Distributor: Camacho Cigars Inc.

Filler: Honduras

Binder: Honduras

Wrapper: Honduras

Release Date: September 2005

BERTHA

87 POINTS ■ 6" x 60 ■ \$5.00

A thick cigar with a rough cap. It has a toasty character with cocoa, cedar and earthy flavors. Some inconsistency on the draw was noted.

Body: Medium

FIGURADO

86 POINTS ■ 6 1/8" x 54 ■ \$5.00

This cigar is enclosed in a toothy wrapper. Woody notes are complemented by coffee bean and cocoa flavors before an overly sweet maple finish.

Body: Medium to Full

TORO

85 POINTS ■ 6" x 50 ■ \$5.00

Coarse and rough, this cigar burns hot. It starts off harsh and then shows some wood and strong espresso flavors. The finish is tinny.

Body: Medium to Full

BRAND SUMMARY: Christian Eiroa considers his El Legend-ario brand to be among his strongest smokes. He unveiled it at last year's Retail Tobacco Dealers of America show and began distributing the cigars last fall. These Honduran *puros* are part of his effort to reestablish Camacho as a premier name in strong cigars. They are exceptionally dark, although, surprisingly, not covered by maduro wrappers. The marketing of El Legend-ario is unique as well. Offered in only three sizes, the cigars sell for a suggested retail price of \$5 each, and are available in wood cabinets of no less than 100.

Average Rating: 86 points



CIGAR NEWS

CUBAN CROP LATE, BUT LARGE

BY JAMES SUCKLING

A visit to the tobacco fields of Pinar del Río, Cuba, revealed many farms with knee-high plants in their fields, despite the late date. This harvest is almost a month late, yet Cuba looks to have a generous and rich crop of tobacco this year, if the weather holds out.

The late harvest was due to extremely wet weather caused by hurricanes in October and November. Most of the tobacco seedbeds in the key growing regions of the Vuelta Abajo were swept away in floods, making tobacco growers pick much later. The weather in March has been dry, sunny and hot—perfect for ripening tobacco leaves. The growers expect to harvest lots of strong tobacco this year, which will help to buttress blends.

Growers on the plantations I visited expected an exceptional harvest, including Alejandro Robaina, who had already picked almost his entire crop when I arrived. "It looks to be excellent," said the 87-year-old legend. "My family and I are very excited."

Robaina is considered the best wrapper grower in the Vuelta Abajo region. His 45-acre tobacco estate near the town of San Luis delivers some of the finest wrappers in the world.

Robaina's plantings this year are primarily newer hybrid seeds: Corojo 99 and Criollo 98. "They are much less susceptible to blue mold than Habana 2000," he said, describing another hybrid. "And I like the flavor and quality that these tobaccos deliver."

Last year, about half the Cuban crop was grown from Habana 2000 seed, and growers had a terrible time, said one employee from a tobacco institute in the Pinar del Río region. This year, Habana 2000 is not being used.

The only concern among Cuban tobacco specialists is that Corojo 99 and Criollo 98 are sensitive to a fungus called black shank, a disease that affects the roots of tobacco plants and inhibits their growth. It is a widespread problem, not only in Cuba but also in other tobacco-growing regions in the world.

Robaina said he prefers the new tobaccos, claiming they have better texture and flavor than Habanos 2000.

However, he said that his favorite remains Corojo Antigua, the age-old wrapper tobacco that was dropped in the mid-1990s because of low yields and blue mold problems. “High yields are not everything,” added the grower. “Flavor and quality were more important.”

And it seems that something new is in the works. The tobacco institute technician let it slip out that Cuba has just developed a new variety of leaf that it is very excited about. It’s called Criollo 2006. “It’s a vigorous tobacco that is both resistant to blue mold and black shank,” he said, adding that the plant grows very tall, producing 24 leaves per plant, instead of the normal 16 or so with more popular varieties.

When Robaina heard this, he looked rather skeptical. “It doesn’t sound right to me,” he said. “We will see.” ■

STIFFER PENALTIES FOR CIGAR COUNTERFEITERS

BY MICHAEL MORETTI

Cigar counterfeiters now face stiff penalties rivaling that of major felons. Five Miami men accused of counterfeiting cigars face federal charges that carry sentences of up to 10 years in prison and \$2 million in fines.

The five defendants have essentially been arrested twice on the same charge with drastically altered penalties. The defendants were first arrested in December 2005 as the result of a sting operation involving the Fort Lauderdale, Florida-based cigar giant Altadis U.S.A. Inc., Miami-Dade police, the U.S. Secret Service and the U.S. postal inspectors office. Officials raided the homes and businesses of Juan Penton, Miguel Guerra, Filiberto Marimon, Hugo Endemano-Portal and Lauro Perez, reportedly seizing more than \$100,000 worth of counterfeit Cuban and non-Cuban cigars. The authorities also seized enough bands and boxes, according to Altadis U.S.A., that could have been used in the sale of hundreds of millions of dollars of fake cigars annually.

The defendants were allegedly involved in the trafficking of counterfeit **Cohiba**, **Hoyo de Monterrey**, **Montecristo**, **Partagas**, **Romeo y Julieta**, **Trinidad**, **Saint Luis Rey**, **Bolivar**, **San Cristobal** and **H. Upmann** cigar brands. Altadis U.S.A. owns the U.S. rights to many of those brands. General Cigar Co. owns the U.S. rights to Cohiba, Partagas and Bolivar.

At the time, the punishment would have come under Florida state law, which would have been considerably less severe. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the defendants were originally arrested under state law because the state issued the search and arrest warrants.

“The fine would have been inconsequential,” said Charles Grimes, of Grimes & Battersby LLP., lead counsel for Altadis U.S.A. “The worst penalty would be the loss of the merchandise.

“There has always been in the past a perception among those in the counterfeiting community that there are no risks...prosecution under state law was viewed as merely the cost of doing business.”

Following the arrests, the defendants were let free on bail and their case at the state level is still running through the normal proceedings. After the arrests, authorities aiming for federal charges collected evidence, analyzed it and submitted it to the U.S. attorney in Miami.

On March 17, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced that a Miami federal grand jury had indicted the five accused counterfeiters on charges of trafficking and conspiracy to traffic counterfeit products.

“A lot of people thought that this [the December arrest] was not a big deal and would amount to a slap on the wrist,” said Janelle Rosenfeld, vice president of advertising for Altadis U.S.A. “But now that it’s federal, it carries a significantly stiffer sentence.”

In a statement, Altadis said it would take action against any importer, distributor, retailer or other entity that deals in counterfeits. In a separate case in January, the company helped to bring about the arrest of two retailers accused of selling counterfeit cigars, one of which was also a legitimate customer of the company.

“Once again, this operation is part of an ongoing, determined effort by Altadis to protect its interests and those of its distributors and consumers, as well as the entire industry,” wrote Theo Folz, president and CEO of Altadis U.S.A. “No one who is now dealing in counterfeits can claim that they are doing so innocently. We are moving forward with an aggressive enforcement program that will go after anyone not respecting our rights.”

Grimes said that the federal prosecution was made possible because of the investigations spearheaded by Altadis U.S.A. over several years, which netted important information in building a case for federal charges.

Added to this, the Stop Counterfeiting in Manufactured Goods Act, an amendment to the federal anticounterfeiting law signed by President Bush on March 16, will make it easier for prosecutors to invoke federal charges in future counterfeiting cases. Under the former federal law, those convicted of dealing in fraudulent merchandise of any kind, whether it be DVDs, handbags, pharmaceuticals or cigars, were looking at a maximum of five years in prison and fines of up to \$2 million for conspiracy to traffic in counterfeit goods, and 10 years and a \$2 million fine for actually trafficking counterfeit goods. Under the new law, the penalties are the same, but the trafficking in the packaging and labels of counterfeit products also becomes a crime.

“The bill strengthens our laws against trading counterfeit labels and packaging,” said Bush at the signing. “In the past, the law prohibited the manufacturing, shipping and/or selling of counterfeit goods, but it did not make it a crime to ship falsified labels or packaging, which counterfeiters could then attach to fake products.”

“Counterfeiters,” said Grimes, “would send the labels separate from the cigars—what happens now is we can go more aggressively after counterfeiters.” ■

CIGAR AFICIONADO DINNER RAISES MORE THAN \$1.4 MILLION

BY DAVID SAVONA

Cigar Aficionado's 14th annual Night to Remember, held in late March in New York City, raised more than \$1.4 million for prostate cancer research.

The event was a black-tie gala with stellar wines, fine food and some of the world's greatest premium cigars, including a presentation of *Cigar Aficionado's* top three cigars of 2005.

It was a star-studded affair, with members of “The Sopranos” in attendance, including James Gandolfini, Steve Van Zandt, Dominic Chianese and Tony Sirico; actor Peter Weller and the co-creators of the hit show “24;” star chef Emeril Lagasse; radio's Rush Limbaugh; Michael Milken; John Salley; and former mayor New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

Marvin R. Shanken, editor and publisher of *Cigar Aficionado* magazine, was the host of the evening, as well as auctioneer.

For much more on the Night to Remember, go to www.cigaraficionado.com. For a complete story and many more photos, see the June issue of the magazine. ■

FIRST TASTE: ASHTON ESTATE SUN GROWN

There's quite a lot of buzz around this cigar, which hasn't reached cigar shops yet. The owner of the Ashton brand, Robert Levin, has been waiting for them to have enough age. Early versions, he said, were just too strong.

Levin sent me an ESG recently to try out. The wrapper on the cigar is dark and alluring, a shade lighter than the Ecuadoran found on the Ashton VSG. It's remarkably good-looking for a sun-grown wrapper. The cigar is strong, but subtly so. Whereas an Ashton VSG has quite prominent leather and red pepper power that makes itself readily known on the palate, this ESG has a sneaky strength that you don't necessarily notice until you've smoked a good amount of the cigar.

It's a rich smoke, with notes of espresso coffee and just a touch of leather, with hearty dark, charred wood flavors. It's strong, yet well balanced. There's some nose spice, and the finish has a light touch of caramel. Rich and rewarding.

Score: 91-93 points

—DAVID SAVONA

EXEMPTION TO A SMOKING BAN

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

Despite a smoking ban, you can smoke cigars in a few places in Madison, Wisconsin, thanks to Ald. Mike Verveer. His proposal to exempt cigar bars and other places where tobacco products are sold from Madison's smoking ban was finally approved on March 21 by a 12-8 city council vote after four unsuccessful attempts by Verveer since last summer.

According to the amendment, any establishment applying for the exemption must prove that at least 10 percent of its revenue is generated from the sale of tobacco products such as cigars, pipes, and chewing tobacco. Cigarettes are not included in the exemption, and the sale of cigarettes can't be counted toward the ten percent.

The citywide restriction went into effect July 1 with no

exemptions whatsoever, despite significant outcries of lost revenue from local businesses. Now that the exemption is in place, some have complained that it is unfair to cigarette smokers.

Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz, who opposed the amendment, said the tobacco sales of each establishment granted an exemption will be checked regularly. Both the mayor and Gary Poulson, chairman of the Tobacco Free Dane County Coalition, are concerned that this loosened restriction could create a slippery slope, resulting in further exemption proposals. Verveer, however, says that he has no intention of trying to topple the ban, and claims it is unlikely other bar owners would try to exploit the exemption, as most taverns generate a negligible amount of revenue from the sale of cigarettes.

Brian Haltiner, owner of Maduro cigar bar, Madison's first approved exemption, was quoted by the *Badger Herald* as saying, "We're just looking forward to getting our cigar business back and saving some of our clientele."

Maduro is presently the only establishment to be exempted in Madison. Other bars have until April 14 to apply. ■

COLORADO SMOKE BAN

BY MICHAEL MORETTI

Gov. Bill Owens signed off on a statewide smoking ban in late March, making Colorado the 13th state in the country to enact such legislation.

Battles in the legislature over this year's Colorado Clean Indoor Air Act go back to January. The outcome is an indoor smoking ban in most public places and places of employment, including restaurants, bowling alleys and pubs. Smoking within 15 feet of a public entryway will also be illegal.

The ban allows for exemptions on indoor smoking for cigar bars, tobacco retailers and casinos. The casino exemption has been a bone of contention in New Jersey, which also recently passed a ban excusing casino floors from compliance and prompting a lawsuit from a coalition of restaurant, bar and bowling alley operators.

To retain smoking rights, Colorado cigar bars must generate at least 5 percent of their total annual gross revenues or \$50,000 in annual sales from the on-site sale of tobacco products. The stipulation includes income derived from

humidor rentals, but not vending machines. There is no specification favoring one kind of tobacco product over another, only that the 5 percent or \$50,000 figure be met. The law forbids any cigar bar from expanding or changing location.

Establishments violating the ban would get slapped with an initial fine of \$100, with a \$300 fine for a second offense and \$500 for subsequent offenses within a calendar year.

The Colorado ban will go into effect on July 1. ■

SAN CRISTÓBAL ADDS NEW SIZES

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

Three new sizes mark the first extension of the San Cristóbal De La Habana line since the Cuban brand's launch in 1999. The expansion consists of the Muralla, a 7 1/8 inch by 54 ring gauge torpedo; the Mercaderes, 6 1/2 inches by 48 ring; and the 5 1/4 by 43 Oficios. Each size is named after a historical street in Old Havana. Aficionados briefly saw these same cigars in 2004 as part of the limited-edition V Anniversary humidor that disappeared as quickly as it was released. The *vitolas* were resurrected at this year's Habanos Festival for official induction into the brand, which previously had only four sizes. Unlike the existing line, which is packaged in semi-plain boxes, the new cigars come in darkly varnished, 25-count cedar boxes affixed with brass hinges and a brooch-style clasp. All sport a secondary band depicting a golden leaf in honor of the Casa Del Habanos shops. San Cristóbal De La Habana is one of the newest Cuban brands and is named after the original sixteenth-century name of Havana. The new brand is completely unrelated to the discontinued pre-revolution brand of the same name. See the full tasting in an upcoming issue of *Cigar Insider*. ■

ZINO PLATINUM CROWN SERIES COMES IN TUBES

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

Two sizes of Davidoff's Zino Platinum Crown Series now come individually tubed—the Barrel, a 6 inch by 60 ring toro, and the Chubby Especial perfecto, which measures 5 7/8 by 61. When the series was launched four

years ago, the cigars were sold in three-packs only. The Chubby Especial and Barrel quickly became the best-selling sizes of the series, which prompted Davidoff to market them individually. Each platinum-colored metal tube is fashioned with a signature Zino Platinum logo embossment and a gold-plated band.

The cigars comprise Dominican and Peruvian ligero filler, a Connecticut-grown Connecticut-seed binder and a Connecticut-seed wrapper from Ecuador. The Chubby Especial and Barrel Tubos have suggested retail prices of \$34 and \$26 each, respectively. ■

INDIAN TABAC CHANGES COMPANY NAME

Indian Tabac Cigar Co., maker of the Rocky Patel Vintage, Rocky Patel Sungrown and Indian Tabac Super Fuerte brands, has officially been renamed Rocky Patel Premium Cigars as of March, 20. According to Rocky Patel, president and CEO of the company, the name change was due primarily to the majority of cigar brands that already feature his name. “The positive response from cigar smokers to all of my Rocky Patel cigars since the very first vintages were released in 2003 was enough to call for the change,” said Patel. ■

JERSEY TOBACCONISTS UNITE FOR SMOKERS’ RIGHTS

A group of New Jersey retail tobacconists joined forces on March 20, creating the Associated Retail Tobacco Stores of New Jersey. The members include Andrew Kerstein of Smokers Haven, Ruth Weiss of Greentree Tobacco, Gary Kolesaire of The Tobacco Shop, and Frank Toscano of Cigars Plus. Toscano is the president of the association.

“The purpose of this organization is to influence the legislatures and Division of Taxation the plight of New Jersey tobacconists in dealing with critical issues that jeopardize their existence. This includes new antismoking laws and tax collection,” said Toscano.

New Jersey’s smoking ban begins on April 15. ■

2006 CIGAR AFICIONADO “BIG SMOKE” LINEUP

April 18
CHICAGO • HYATT REGENCY O’HARE

November 3
LAS VEGAS • THE VENETIAN

November 4
LAS VEGAS • THE VENETIAN

November 3-5—Big Smoke Weekend
LAS VEGAS • THE VENETIAN

November 21
NEW YORK • MARRIOTT MARQUIS

FOR TICKETS, GO TO: www.cigaraficionado.com,
OR CALL (212) 684-4224.

IN THE NEXT CIGAR INSIDER

California tobacconists face higher taxes that could force many of them out of business, a cigar bar opens in a major league baseball stadium, Litto Gomez creates new cigars, and much, much more.

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