# CigarsLover MAGAZINE

ISSUE 4 - 2025



# Nestor A. Plasencia

- 30 YEARS OF DEDICATION - THE SHIFANG PLAIN TERROIR IN CHINA - MARCELLO CORAZZA - PAIRINGS: CIGARS & SPIRITS
- HARD TRUTH DISTILLING: THE INTERVIEW - CASK ALCHEMY: WINE CASK WHISKY MATURATION - THE SIDECAR COCKTAIL
- REINVENTING THE SEAL: A MODERN LOOK AT WINE CLOSURES BEYOND CORK, WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES

# LIGA PRIVADA
BY DREW ESTATE

9 T52 H99

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# Editor's thoughts

*The Art of Time and Taste: Cigars, Spirits, and Culinary Journeys*

In this issue, we celebrate four remarkable stories behind acclaimed brands. We begin with Néstor Andrés Plasencia, whose family legacy exemplifies what it means to be Rooted in Tradition, Growing with Nature. His perspective reminds us that authenticity and sustainability can harmoniously coexist in modern cigar making. Likewise, Rocky Patel's thirty-year journey stands as a testament to relentless dedication and the pursuit of perfection.

Our exploration of the Shifang Plain Terroir in China opens a new chapter in the global cigar landscape, proof that a passion for the leaf knows no borders. Meanwhile, Marcello Corazza invites us to navigate new waters, blending tradition with innovation as he crafts his own distinctive path. An engaging conversation with Hard Truth Distilling Co., where craftsmanship meets bold experimentation, offers a glimpse into the spirit driving those behind the brand.

We also take a moment to appreciate the tools and pairings that enrich our experience. In Cask Alchemy, we uncover the intricate dialogue between spirit and wood, while the Sidecar Cocktail pays homage to timeless sophistication in a glass. Rounding out the issue, Reinventing the Seal explores the subtle yet vital art of packaging. And to close the issue, our blind tasting celebrates the cigars that impressed us beyond expectation.

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# *Long live the Queen*

## MADURO



# CIGARS

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# Rooted in Tradition, Growing with Nature

*A conversation with Nestor Andrés Plasencia on family legacy, regenerative agriculture, and the soulful journey behind Alma del Cielo.*

*by* **Michel Arlia**

Five years can transform a company, a farm, and even a family legacy. For Plasencia Cigars, this period has been one of profound growth, both in the soil and in spirit. From pioneering regenerative agricultural practices that nurture biodiversity to launching deeply personal creations like Alma del Cielo, the Plasencias continue to intertwine heritage with innovation. In this interview, we revisit the heart of Plasencia's philosophy: cigars that are not only crafted with precision but also infused with history, resilience, and an enduring respect for the land.

**How have you been, and what has happened in the last five years since we spoke?**

First of all, I'd like to greet all your readers and thank you for this wonderful opportunity to reconnect. The past five years have been a period of immense learning and inspiration for us, especially in the field of regenerative agriculture. This focus has allowed us to deepen our connection with the land even further. It's truly impressive how much knowledge is available when one listens carefully to nature. We've also worked intensively on developing new products that reflect our brand's evolution, and these have been well received by consumers. On a personal level, I've been able to spend more time in the fields, which is truly where my heart lies. That's where everything begins: the earth, the seed, and the very soul of the tobacco.

**You launched Alma del Cielo, the latest addition to the Alma series. What's the story behind this cigar?**

Alma del Cielo is a deeply personal project for us. Its name, which translates to 'the soul of heaven,' reflects two key aspects: not only the high-altitude origin of the tobacco used, grown at over 3,500 feet above sea level, but also our profound family roots. The tobacco for Alma del Cielo comes from Finca San Julián in Condega, which was my mother's childhood farm. After it was sold, my father, decades later, recovered it as a special gift for her, a way to help her reconnect with her history and heritage. Today, that farm beautifully represents love, resilience, and the continuity of generations within our family. Thus, Alma del Cielo is more than just a cigar; it's a direct expression of that powerful connection to the land, to family, and to our enduring vision of crafting cigars that are not merely smoked, but truly felt and remembered.

**How much planning and vision does it take to create a**






product like Alma del Cielo?
Creating a cigar like Alma del Cielo truly takes years of vision and a profound respect for the entire process. From studying the living soil to understanding the unique microclimate of this high-altitude estate, every step has been thoughtfully executed with clear intention. The slower maturation under these specific conditions generates leaves with more natural sugars, elegant aromas, and a flavor expression that isn't easily found in other terroirs. But beyond the technical process, there's a compelling story to be told: a story of love, belonging, and a deep connection to the land. Ultimately, that's what makes this cigar truly unique.

Another distinctive line is Cosecha, which highlights Honduran tobacco. How do you showcase this origin while preserving the Plasencia identity?
The Cosecha line is a direct tribute to the Honduran lands we cherish so deeply. By focusing on a single Honduran tobacco harvest for each release, we're able to capture a very specific moment in time, along with its unique climate and distinct soil characteristics. Each Cosecha release represents a living story, a true celebration of the many harvests we've produced since 1865. Furthermore, by being fully integrated, from cultivation to manufacturing, we ensure that while the flavor profile may differ with each vintage, the core Plasencia essence always remains consistent: unparalleled quality, inherent elegance, profound respect for the land, and an unwavering love for tobacco.

You mentioned earlier that your heart is in the fields. Are there any recent agricultural innovations you're particularly excited about?
Yes, we're incredibly excited about the regenerative agricultural practices we're implementing on our farms. This goes beyond traditional organic farming; we're now actively working to regenerate soils, capture carbon, promote biodiversity, and strengthen natural ecosystems. We're collaborating with world-class experts in this field, like Mr. Ray Archuleta, who is helping us understand the entire ecosystem and continuously learn from nature. We're also expanding our compost and vermicompost plants. Through a better use of all the waste produced by our farms – truly embodying a circular economy – and incorporating waste from other industries, we're producing top-quality organic fertilizer. Our goal is to achieve the best carbon/nitrogen ratio and ensure it's teeming with life, meaning a high concentration of beneficial soil microorganisms. This helps us guarantee that our leaves are packed with nutrients, and nutrient-rich leaves, in turn, mean better flavor. It's genuinely a process we've fallen in love with. The most stimulating part is realizing how much we're learning and how much more there is still to discover. Alma del Cielo is a prime example of this philosophy in action. The unique expression of living soil, pure water, and the mountain climate has allowed us to produce a tobacco with truly exceptional character and elegance. Every step we take along this path confirms that growing in harmony with nature is not only the right thing to do, but also the most flavorful approach.

Sustainability is a global priority. How does Plasencia Cigars implement it?
Sustainability is truly at the heart of everything we do at Plasencia Cigars. We were pioneers in organic tobacco cultivation back in 2000, and our commitment has only continued to evolve and deepen ever since. We implement a range of progressive practices on our farms. For instance, when our fields aren't cultivating tobacco, we utilize cover crops (also known as service crops). As their name suggests, these crops serve the soil directly by protecting it from water and wind erosion, and critically, they help us feed and multiply beneficial microorganisms within the soil. We also extensively use fertigation for efficient nutrient delivery, prioritize water conservation practices, and consistently work to reduce our reliance on chemical inputs. Beyond the fields, we're actively developing improvements in our factories and packaging processes to further minimize our environmental footprint. For us, sustainability isn't just a trend or a passing fad; it's a deep-rooted commitment to the land, to our valued workers, and to ensuring a thriving future for generations to come.

How does multigenerational family involvement influence brand identity?
Our story began in 1865, and each generation has contributed something valuable to this legacy. We are a family business in the deepest sense: our decisions are guided by values, not just numbers. The involvement of several generations has taught us to think long-term, to honor our roots, and to innovate without losing our essence. Today, I am proud that my daughter has joined the family business. That gives me hope that this story lives on and continues to ignite souls, one generation at a time.

**With so much respect for tradition and innovation, how do you find the balance between the two?**

We see it as a delicate dance between the past and the future. Innovation, for us, doesn't mean breaking with tradition; rather, it's about evolving it. Our history is replete with examples of innovation, from our origins in Cuba to our expansion into Nicaragua and Honduras, where we've consistently adapted and learned. Today, we expertly use technology to ensure consistency in every single cigar, all without altering the essential craftsmanship of our process. It's precisely this balance, between hands that deeply know the land and eyes that are always looking forward, that truly defines Plasencia.

**What's next for Plasencia Cigars?**

What's next for Plasencia Cigars? We have something very special coming up: in October 2025, we'll celebrate our 160th anniversary. Being one of the oldest family-owned cigar companies in the world is an honor that truly fills us with gratitude. And yes, we are indeed working on a new cigar that we began planning more than five years ago. As a vertically integrated company, we use only our own tobacco, so everything genuinely begins in the soil and culminates in a unique experience for the smoker. Thank you for this opportunity to share our journey with you. We will continue working diligently to light up souls with excellent cigars, inspired by the wisdom of nature.

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# 30 Years of Dedication

*Marking three decades in the cigar industry, Rocky Patel on Legacy, Innovation, and the Pursuit of Perfection.*

*by* **Mark Trumpet**

Few names in the premium cigar world carry the weight and recognition of Rocky Patel. Over the past 30 years, his journey has been defined not only by world-class cigars but also by relentless battles for the industry's survival, hard-earned respect from peers, and an unwavering commitment to excellence.

From navigating the challenges of being an outsider in his early days to experimenting with over 150 blends for the landmark 30th Anniversary cigar, Patel's story is one of resilience, innovation, and passion. In this conversation, he opens up about the defining milestones of his career, the lessons learned from decades in the craft, and his vision for the future of premium cigars.



**Reflecting on three decades in the cigar industry, which moment or milestone stands out as a defining point in the Rocky Patel journey?**
Earning the respect of my peers and fellow cigar makers has been incredibly meaningful. Another defining moment was winning three separate battles against the FDA to protect the premium cigar industry. Those victories weren't just for us—they safeguarded the ability for consumers, retailers, and manufacturers alike to continue enjoying and building this beautiful, artisanal industry.

**During your early days in the business, what were some of the toughest challenges you faced, and what lessons did they teach you?**
In the beginning, one of the toughest challenges was gaining access to truly exceptional wrapper, binder, and filler tobaccos from around the world. As an outsider, I didn't yet have the relationships to source the best leaves. Over time, becoming vertically integrated—owning our farms and controlling every aspect of the manufacturing process—taught us how critical it is to manage quality from the ground up. That control is what enables us to deliver consistently better, more refined cigars today.

**The cigar industry has undergone significant changes over the past 30 years. How has Rocky Patel adapted while maintaining its core values?**
Adaptation has always been part of our DNA. We've stayed true to our commitment to quality and consistency, while also pushing boundaries with unique blends, innovative packaging, and bold ideas. No matter how creative or unconventional we get, our north star remains the same: to pursue perfection and deliver cigars with character, balance, and an unforgettable smoking experience.

**Can you take us inside the blending process for the 30th**




**Anniversary cigar? What makes this blend special or different from your previous work?**
The 30th Anniversary is one of our most ambitious projects to date. We experimented with over 150 blends, tweaking every aspect until we achieved what we felt was perfection. The final cigar is rich and decadent, with layers of complexity, yet it remains elegantly balanced. It features a six-year-old San Andrés wrapper and a combination of some of our oldest, most refined Nicaraguan and Honduran fillers. The result is a cigar that's both powerful and sophisticated, worthy of marking this milestone in our journey.

**How does the 30th Anniversary cigar compare to earlier milestone blends, such as the Decade, the 20th Anniversary, or the Quarter Century editions?**
Each milestone blend represents a step forward in our knowledge and capability. With the 30th, our inventory of aged tobaccos and our refined aging and curing techniques allowed us to craft something even more complex and balanced. The richness of this cigar can only be achieved with patience and time, years of carefully aging and nurturing every leaf to perfection.

**The 30th Anniversary also features a fresh design and updated branding. Can you share what went into updating the branding, and are there plans to refresh other lines as well?**
For the 30th, we wanted the branding to feel as elevated and distinctive as the cigar itself. The packaging combines dynamic colors, elegant detailing, and refined design elements to create something truly special. It's bold but sophisticated, and it sets a new standard for our portfolio. As we move forward, you'll see that same commitment to thoughtful, elevated design across future releases.

**What do you ultimately hope cigar smokers experience or feel when they light up the 30th Anniversary blend?**
I want smokers to feel like they're enjoying something truly special—a cigar with depth, balance, and a unique flavor profile that stands apart from anything we've done before. It's rich and complex, yet incredibly approachable, making it an experience that both seasoned aficionados and newer smokers can appreciate.

**With your legacy firmly established, how do you envision the future of Rocky Patel in the premium cigar world?**
My vision is to keep innovating while staying true to our roots. We'll continue producing cigars that are not only high in quality but also exciting and relevant. I aim to continue growing the cigar culture, making it more inclusive and enjoyable for people worldwide. Above all, our focus will always be on delivering consistency and craftsmanship, so that every time someone lights up a Rocky Patel cigar, they know they're in for an exceptional experience.





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# The Shifang Plain Terroir in China

*"The Influence of Soil Characteristics on Cigar Tobacco Production."*

*by* **Bai Yuanliang, China Cigar Museum**

The Shifang Plain is an alluvial plain in northern Sichuan Province, China, situated around Shifang City under the administration of Deyang. Lying at the western edge of the Sichuan Basin near the Longmen Mountains, it was formed by deposits from the Mianyuan River and its tributaries. The plain is highly fertile, and historically it was also known for mineral water, and later food and beverage, modern agriculture, e-commerce, aviation and low-altitude economy, and clean energy industries.

To assess the influence of soil characteristics in the Shifang Plain of China on cigar tobacco production, both an extensive review of relevant literature and field investigations were carried out. Findings reveal that the soils in Shifang's tobacco-growing region not only meet the optimal ranges for healthy plant growth across various indicators, but more importantly, these factors converge in one location to create an exceptionally favorable natural environment. As a result, the Shifang Plain stands out as one of the world's premier production areas for raw materials used in Chinese-style cigars, renowned for their distinctive "mellow and sweet aroma."

Cigar tobacco is a short-cycle crop with a growth period of approximately 90 days, during which it undergoes rapid biomass expansion, with leaves as the primary harvested organ. Optimal soil properties, in conjunction with suitable climatic conditions, facilitate balanced root, stem, and leaf development, thereby determining leaf quality. The Shifang Plain, recognized as the core production area of sun-cured tobacco for the "mellow and sweet aroma" category of Chinese-style cigars, has been renowned since the seventeenth century for producing tobacco of superior smoking quality, aromatic diversity, and aroma intensity. The region's distinctive edaphic characteristics, in combination with its climatic and geographic conditions, are fundamental to its status as a premier source of high-quality cigar tobacco. To date, relevant institutions and researchers have systematically examined factors such as the sandy compo-






*Hometown of Chinese cigars*

sition of soils in the Shifang Plain, nutrient distribution across different depths of the tillage layer, soil moisture retention, soil temperature, colloidal structure, and groundwater fluctuations. However, research specifically addressing the ways in which these soil characteristics influence the growth of cigar tobacco plants remains limited. This gap in the literature constitutes the principal innovation of the present study.

An assessment of soils in the core cigar tobacco production area of the Shifang Plain revealed a slightly acidic to neutral pH (6.0–7.0), which aligns with the optimal range for tobacco growth (5.0–8.5) and avoids constraints on root development and nutrient uptake associated with strong acidity or alkalinity. Deep plowing to 40 cm improved the thickness of the tillage layer, enhancing soil water retention, fertilizer-use efficiency, root development, pest resistance, and leaf quality. Nutrient stratification was evident, with organic matter averaging 1.8–2.1% at 5–10 cm, total phosphorus 0.120–0.1231% and available phosphorus 20.85–24.05 mg per 100 g dry soil at 20–25 cm, and total potassium reaching a maximum of 0.743–0.765% at 40–45 cm. These findings demonstrate that the Shifang Plain provides favorable physicochemical conditions and a balanced nutrient profile, supporting sustainable cigar tobacco cultivation and high-quality leaf production. Research on the Shifang Plain tobacco fields, located in the mid-section of the Longmen Mountain Plateau, highlights the unique influence of weathered Devonian sedimentary rock on soil properties, where silt particles (0.05–0.001 mm) account for 61.6–62.1%, a proportion remarkably close to the golden ratio (0.618), creating purple sandy loam that is loose on the surface, compact beneath, and granular in structure, thereby ensuring excellent drainage, aeration, and balanced moisture retention; under early spring drought, a single irrigation with artesian glacial spring water sustains tobacco plants for approximately 20 days, while simultaneously enriching the leaves with trace minerals that enhance aroma, body, and smooth sweetness; moreover, the sun-facing alluvial plain soils, rich in organic matter and characterized by strong heat absorption, provide exceptional insulation, with measurements indicating nighttime root-zone soil temperatures of 22–26°C (minimum 19–23°C) and daytime values of 28–37°C before topping, later stabilizing at 27–35°C during vigorous growth and maturity, conditions that not only optimize fertilizer efficiency but also stimulate microbial populations (bacteria, actinomycetes, nitrifying bacteria) and enzymatic activity (phosphatase, sucrase, urease), thereby ensuring efficient nutrient decomposition and uptake to support healthy plant development.

Studies on groundwater variation and soil colloidal structure in the Shifang Plain tobacco area indicate that during seedling raising, root pruning leads to a distribution concentrated approximately 12 cm below the surface, with absorbing roots clustered within 15–20 cm around the stem base, making it critical that groundwater does not flood the root zone during growth; between late March and late June, groundwater remains below the soil's water-holding layer, thereby avoiding moisture stress, while during the June harvest season, monsoon rains increase but drainage channels effectively divert excess water to rivers, preventing waterlogging and supporting proper leaf yellowing for high-quality harvests; the slightly acidic to neutral purple sandy loam, enriched with hydrated iron and aluminum oxides, vermiculite-like clays, and organic colloids, improves aeration, permeability, moisture retention, and ion exchange capacity, enabling efficient adsorption and uptake of key nutrients such as potassium, ammonium, calcium, and phosphate; additional fertility derives from humus colloids, originating from decomposed plant and animal residues of the alluvial plain and Longmen Mountain region, rich in carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, which enhance soil structure by loosening clay, binding sand, and improving water and nutrient retention, while the synergistic interaction of organic and inorganic colloids forms nutrient-rich complexes that increase fertilizer efficiency; long-term green manure incorporation and seasonal biomass inputs further enrich soil fertility, thereby sustaining stable and high-quality cigar tobacco production.

The research concludes that the Shifang Plain's purple soils, characterized by optimal pH, balanced nutrient composition, a silt proportion near the golden ratio, superior drainage, aeration, moisture retention, insulation, appropriate groundwater levels, and strong colloidal ion-exchange capacity, rank among the most fertile worldwide and form the agronomic basis for the region's globally renowned cigar tobacco; the historical prestige of Shifang tobacco underscores this exceptional soil fertility, with documented milestones including its designation as imperial tribute tobacco since 1718 in the Qing Dynasty, its use in 1793 to host George Macartney's British mission, export by European and American merchants to the UK and USA to start their production of cigars in the 1870s, its preparation into special cigars for Mao Zedong in 1963, and its inclusion in international recognition.

In 2024, CigarsLover Magazine awarded the Great Wall International Series Spectacular No. 3 first place in the "Rest of the World" category with a score of 93; in 2022, the Great Wall GL No. 3 was ranked second with a score of 92, the Great Wall Victory was also ranked second with a score of 91 in 2021, and the Vega Fina Fusion Edition Piramides, produced in collaboration with the Great Wall Cigar Factory, achieved fourth place with a score of 91 in 2020, demonstrating that the unique soils of the Shifang Plain continue to sustain the production of premium tobacco with exceptional quality and enduring global prestige.


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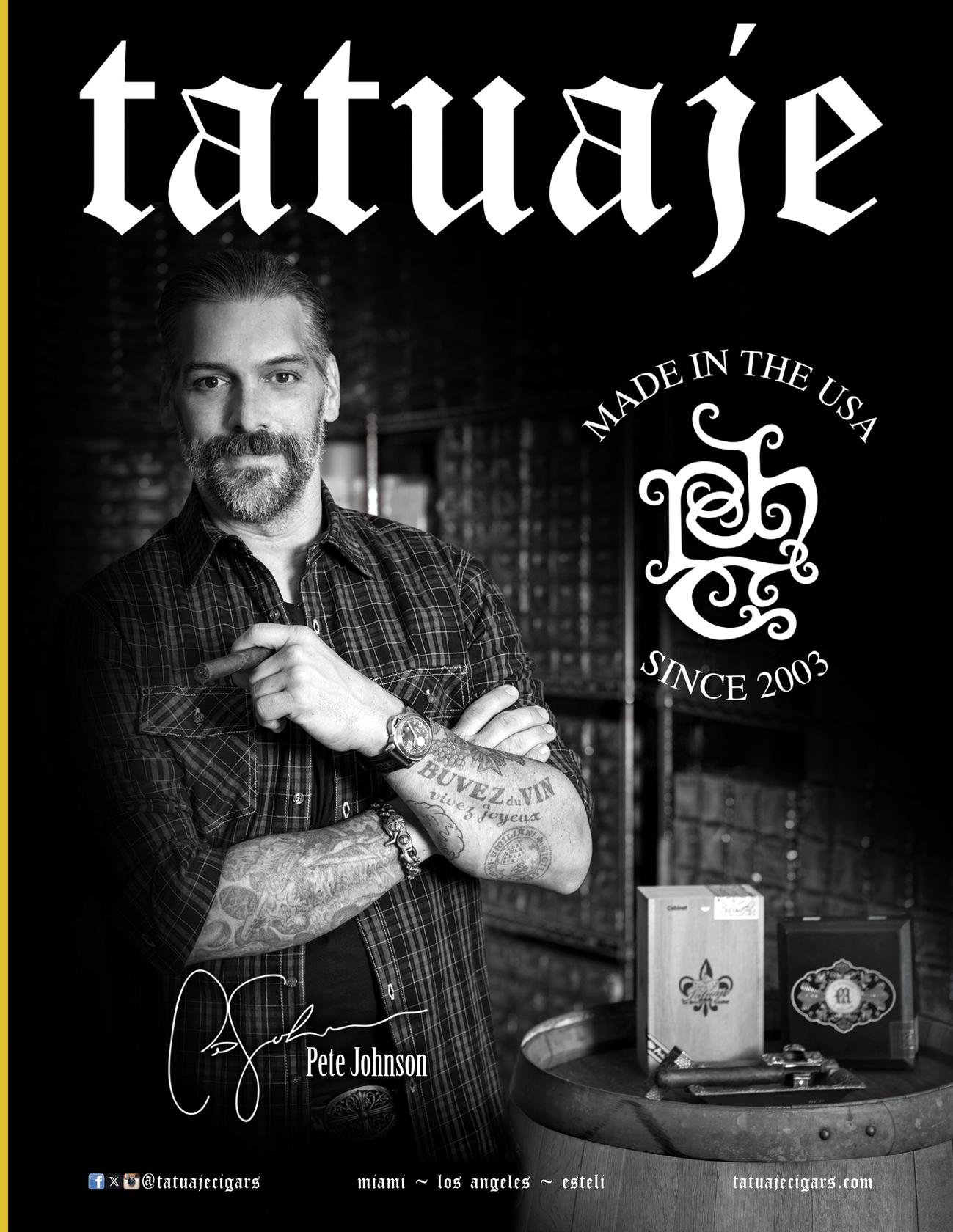
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# Marcello Corazza: Charting New Waters

*An interview with ImpCor's founder on resilience, vision, and the art of building brands.*

*by* **Norman Bliss**



When a non-smoking medical doctor stumbled into the cigar world through family ties, the odds were stacked against him. Yet over the years, he transformed inexperience into an advantage, betting early on boutique brands, navigating the highs and lows of distribution with ImpCor, and ultimately forging his own path with his own cigar brands. In this conversation, he reflects on what drives his decisions and why setbacks often pave the way for new opportunities.

**Let's start from the beginning. How did you first get into the business of distributing cigars?**
Well, as so often in the cigar industry, it was a family situation that brought me to this decision. My cousin, Carlo Corazza, founded Brun del Ré Cigars (our grandmother's last name was Brun del Ré) and was just starting his venture. I just graduated from University and had some time on my hands before starting my first job. So we decided to give it a try. I had no idea of anything. In fact, I was a non-smoking medical doctor trying to sell a cigar that no one knew from a country that was not famous for great tobacco back then. The odds, as you can imagine, were heavily against me. Working under pressure is where I excel. So, in hindsight, not knowing much about the industry helped in finding new ways and brands to distribute.

**When considering the import of a new brand, what key factors do you look for that make you seriously consider importing it?**
We do like small brands with great people in the driver's seat. Basically, there is no more of a key factor than that. People who want to expand their brand in a sustainable manner will always look after their importers/distributors and see them as partners. Also, the product itself must meet the standards and expectations of the market you are trying to conquer. This is the foundation you need to plan your resources and logistics around. It's about long-term growth.

**Beyond the quality of the cigars themselves, how much weight do you place on a brand's story, heritage, or overall identity when making your purchasing decisions?**
To be brutally honest, it is not. Every brand has a story, and none of them are bad. Some might be fake, others might be somehow over the top, but all stories are pleasant to tell or read about. So what's the point? I am not a book publisher. I do care about people though. Integrity, energy, vision, entrepreneurship, and honesty, are some of the characteristics I am looking for. If you bring that to the table, I want to smoke a cigar with you. And if you manage to keep me interested for a whole Robusto, we might have a deal.

**Having worked closely with both retailers and customers, where have you seen the biggest shifts in trends?**
Something I witnessed is the fact that a younger crowd is smoking a broader spectrum of cigars. Special proveniences, small batches, exotic sizes, higher priced, and so on. I am happy not to be the youngest in the room anymore. As for my entrepreneurial approach in this industry, I really cheer for all the producers, retailers, and distributors that embraced the opportunities that our 21st century has to offer. Mainly everything that has to do with supply-chain management, quality control, and data analytics. It makes our work just so much easier.

**Looking back on your journey with ImpCor so far, what has been the proudest moment or achievement you've experienced to date?**
This is a very good question. Since one of my main fields of action is to tackle challenges in the future, I tend to forget that many things already worked out smoothly in the past. One proud moment was when Davidoff snatched Lost&-Found from us some years ago. And then, just recently, again when they took over the distribution of Room101. To be frank, it took me a while to declare this a proud moment, and as a matter of fact, it harmed our business in the short term. But when I think about it. We had the foresight to bet on the right brand before everyone else did, and some bigger dude took what we were building. That's a compliment.



**You quietly acquired the full rights to the La Bucanera and El Loco brands from Marcel Knobel, one of the founders of ADVentura Cigars. Can you walk me through how that deal came about and why?**
This was a direct consequence of the situation described in the last question. Since losing brands harms your business, it's a strategic decision you have to make at some point. Dependencies are fragile and can swing both ways. So I decided to reduce dependencies without harming our cooperation with the brands we already distribute. So when Marcel started his quest with ADVentura we were his distributors from the very beginning. His side quests, El Loco and La Bucanera, were selling very well in Switzerland, but no follow-up lines were planned. So that was a good opportunity to talk to Marcel about the future of those lines. We concurred on terms and conditions within a short period of time. Smooth and discrete.

**La Bucanera was originally produced by the now-defunct Mombacho company. What was the process like in finding a new factory to produce it?**
As Marcel was looking for a Company to produce La Bucanera, I introduced him to Claudio Sgroi from Mombacho. I was there in Granada with Marcel when they agreed to work together on this project. Now that I think about it, that might be a proud moment as well, a brand owner, a master blender, and an importer/distributor, defining tobaccos, blends, sizes, pricing, rings, and so on. One goal, on one table, in one day. This was good! That being said, it was pretty easy to have La Bucanera resurrected. Claudio became a good friend, and he is well-connected and well-respected in the industry. So it was a no-brainer who would reblend our La Bucanera. The rest is history.

**Looking ahead, what are your plans for ImpCor and your new cigar-making venture?**
How does the famous saying go? You plan and the universe laughs, or something along those lines. In a perfect world, we would already be penetrating markets around the globe. The truth is that everything takes time. There is no shortcut; you have to draw your map before you start the cruise. Since I am involved in some major projects outside the industry, time is rare. Nevertheless, our work at ImpCor and with our new brands has reignited our focus, which we will maintain throughout 2026 and beyond. Our team is growing, and our portfolio of our own brands is as well. All on deck, the sails are set, and we are ready to continue our journey!

HIRAM & SOLOMON

CIGARS

# “A Decade of Reflection, Evolution, and Impact.”

*Celebrating our 10th anniversary*



# Lotus Truman Retro

*“Stylish and powerful."*

*by* **Zac Mitchers**




The Lotus Truman Retro Desktop Lighter is a table-top lighter built with a mid-century look in mind. It's made from metal with a weighted base, rounded edges, and comes in a few finishes like pewter-black and copper-gold. This isn't something you'd carry around; it's meant to sit on a desk or table and stay there.

The base has enough weight to keep it steady when you're using it. The metal body and finish are what you'd expect at this price point: clean edges, even coating, nothing flashy. It doesn't take up much room on a desk, but it's hefty enough that it feels substantial. The design borrows from 1950s-60s office accessories, so if you like that vintage style or want something that fits a more classic setup, it works well for that.

The Truman uses a single torch flame with a single motion ignition, one motion, and it lights. You can adjust the flame depending on what you're lighting: turn it down for smaller cigars, or crank it up for bigger ones. It's been consistent in our testing, delivering a sharp flame that lights a cigar evenly without much fuss. There's also a flame lock feature, which keeps the flame going without having to hold down the ignition. This is useful when you need both hands free or want a steady flame for lighting something that takes a bit longer. There's a fold-out punch cutter built into the body, which is handy and one less thing to dig out of a drawer.

One advantage of the desktop design is the larger fuel tank. Because the Truman isn't constrained by pocket-size dimensions, it holds significantly more butane than typical portable lighters. This means fewer refills and less maintenance overall. You can go weeks of regular use before needing to top it off. For someone who uses their lighter daily, this capacity makes a noticeable difference in convenience. Indoors, it performs great in offices, dens, smoking rooms, wherever you'd normally sit down with a cigar. But it's not windproof. Take it outside on a breezy day, and the flame struggles or won't stay lit. If you need something for patios or outdoors in general, look elsewhere. This is really designed for controlled environments.

You can find the Truman Retro priced around $60-70. That puts it above basic torch lighters and other desktop models, but well below high-end brands. For the price, you're getting solid performance plus some actual style.

If you smoke cigars indoors, appreciate retro design, or just want a lighter that doesn't look disposable, the Lotus Truman Retro Desktop Lighter is worth considering. Just know it's an indoor tool first and foremost.

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CigarsLover
MAGAZINE

# Thank you for TEN YEARS

# PAIRINGS

From the moment CigarsLover Magazine defined its pay-off, "Refine Your Taste", starting to accompany the tastings of cigars to those of spirits such as Whisky and Rum, 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 most common formats, 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, Finish. 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, tasting aromas and 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.



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### HENRY CLAY EXPANDS INTERNATIONALLY

Created in the mid-19th century, the Henry Clay brand is named after the legendary U.S. Senator. The "War Hawk" line honors the famous term coined by Henry Clay, a great orator and a very popular character of his time.

Handmade in Honduras, it offers a complex blend of unique toasted and woody flavours.



# PAIRING Cigars & Spirits



## GREAT WALL 132 MIRACLE

*COMPLEX AND RICH*

| STRENGTH | PRICE |
|---|---|
| ●●● | $ - \| € 6.8 |

| DIMENSIONS |
|---|
| 50x124mm (4 ⅞") |

| COUNTRY |
|---|
| China |

This surprising Chinese craft features an opening that delivers a blast of spices, with black pepper, chili, nutmeg, and some citrus aromas. Then roasted wood, nutty notes, and some minor vegetal hints. We look at possible best pairing with 46% ABV spirits with great price/quality ratio, a Highlander with some funky notes on top of a classy sherry profile, and a tropical Indian with intense aromas.




## H. UPMANN CONNOSSIEUR NO.2

*CREAMY AND BALANCED*

| STRENGTH | PRICE |
|---|---|
| ●●● | $ - \| € 20.2 |

| DIMENSIONS |
|---|
| 51x134 mm (5 ¼") |

| COUNTRY |
|---|
| Cuba |

Exceptionally creamy and buttery, starts with intense notes of wood and hazelnut, enriched with shades of leather and roasted coffee. During the smoke, a subtle and persistent cinnamon spiciness appears, on a medium-light body. The chosen spirits are a Japanese blended release, with a slight saltiness to it, and a new-age Scotch, a NAS with a complex array of aging woods.




## PLASENCIA ALMA FUERTE C. CL. ROBUSTUS II

*STRUCTURED AND PERSISTENT*

| STRENGTH | PRICE |
|---|---|
| ●●●● | $ 23 \| € 25 |

| DIMENSIONS |
|---|
| 55x130mm (5 ⅛") |

| COUNTRY |
|---|
| Nicaragua |

This full-bodied powerhouse exhibits notes of earth, leather, and black pepper. The background is a little tangy. In the last part, the smoke is enriched with balsamic herbs.
Two relatively affordable American whiskeys are paired, with very different ABVs, and different spices dimensions. Both the spirits are interesting ways of quenching the intensity of the Nicaraguan tobacco.






## BEN NEVIS

*10 Years Old*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Scotland | 46% - 92 | $ |

| TYPE | AGE | CASK |
|---|---|---|
| Single Malt | 10 years Old | Ex-bourbon, ex-sherry |

Very good product, from a very trendy distillery. The sherried sensations are present, yet complex and varied, with fruity notes sided by good chocolate and nuttiness. Spices are never overwhelming; balanced and intriguing. The cigar is rather delicate at the very beginning, with the rich set of spices playing well with the elevated sherry tones of the spirit for a complex, classy mix. Balanced, yet classy. Nice enveloping of the palate, sherry quality, some chocolate, mix of sweet spices: perfect integration. The cigar becomes more and more woody, and this specific aroma is well suited by the winey character of the spirit. Nutty quality in the end, for a long finish.

| Pairing score | 89 |
|---|---|




## AMRUT

*Single Malt*

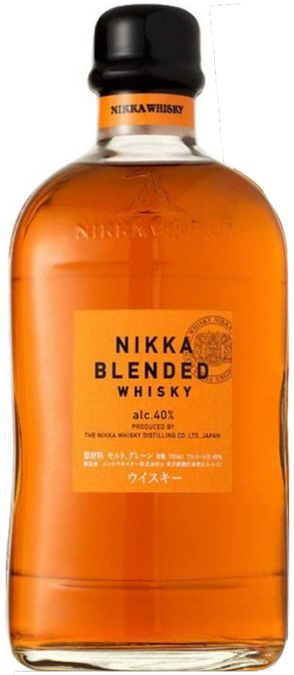
| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| India | 46% - 92 | $ |

| TYPE | AGE | CASK |
|---|---|---|
| Single Malt | NAS | Ex-bourbon |

A truly tropical experience, a great introduction to Indian Single Malts. The tastes are intense and particular, refined and creamy, mixing a valuable barley character with demerara sugar, toffee and hints of tropical fruit. Wood with several different layers of spices and buttered cream; reminds of some British Indian dishes which are somehow sweeter and creamier than their original Indian counterparts. When the body of the cigar increases, the spirit delivers even more intense fruity notes to pair with, mango, ripe banana, passion fruit, perfectly matching the wood. The vegetal hints come through well too.

| Pairing score | 91 |
|---|---|






# NIKKA
## *Blended Whiskey*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Japan | 40% - 80 | $ |

| TYPE | AGE | CASK |
|---|---|---|
| Blended | NAS | NA |

Silky Japanese blend, with low ABV yet rich in the yellow fruit and flowery components, mixed with a gentle touch of iodine, which are also part of the distillery DNA. A simple, yet classy and smooth drink, with good pairing potentialities. Excellent fusion of the noses, with the image of a tropical island where bourbon vanilla flowers are mincing up with scented woods burning near to a basket of ripe peaches. Persuasive and simple, yet fragrant. The palates feature an extra kick, with the mix of the minor salty note and the tangy cinnamon, and a final note of crushed fresh pepper, between green and black, yet not too wild. The finish is short, clean, little dry, with the nuts of the cigar taking over. Nice and balanced, nuances and respectful of both natures.

| Pairing score | 90 |
|---|---|




# MEIKLE TOIR
## *The Turbo*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Scotland | 50% - 100 | $ |

| TYPE | AGE | CASK |
|---|---|---|
| Single Malt | 5 Years Old | Virgin Oak, Oloroso |

Small batch peated release from the Glenallachie property managed by Billy Walker, this release features the highest phenol content, for a profile rich in dark chocolate, cherries, smoked blood oranges and a rhubarb end note, with a medium and ashy finale. Noses are immediately darker and closer than expected: the nuts and the wood of the cigar are shut down by a dark chocolate with cherries of the peated whiskey, not unpleasant, but rather flat. The rhubarb of the spirit takes over the palate pairing, with the spiciness of the tobacco becoming black pepper with some complex hints of middle-east origin. Wet sultanasdominate the second palate, with the 50% ABV proving to be too much for the Cuban tobacco.

| Pairing score | 84 |
|---|---|







# MICHTER'S
## *Unblended American Whiskey*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| U.S.A. | 1.7% - 83.4 | $ |

| TYPE | AGE | CASK |
|---|---|---|
| American Whiskey | NAS | White oak barrels |

Well balanced, it is a velvety release, with a rich butterscotch dimension, good quality vanilla and baking sweet spices. The palate has some rye freshness, before a solid fruity core of peaches and candied apricots. The Nicaraguan tobacco is a true bomb of flavors. The whiskey has the right aromatic profile, yet maybe a higher ABV or longer aging would have worked better. The leathery, oaky and black pepper profile is deepened by the butterscotch and the peaches aromas, becoming slightly sweeter, a nice combo which however last for few seconds. On the palate the fruity sweetness helps the body of the tobacco, for a mellow earthy finish. On the contrary, the spices are even enhanced and made wilder by the rye component, for a complex fresh and somehow tart mix. Rather complex and with good mix of flavors.

| Pairing score | 90 |
|---|---|




# WILD TURKEY
## *101*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| U.S.A. | 50.5% - 101 | $ |

| TYPE | AGE | CASK |
|---|---|---|
| Bourbon | NAS | New |

A bourbon mixing up nuts and honey with vanilla and caramel on the nose with a truly bold spices contents, with warm pepper and cinnamon on the striking palate. A deep, rich, honeyed peanut bar splashes over the dark chocolate notes of the cigar, making it sticky and dark, yet sweet and persistent. The sweetness perfectly balances the roasted, dark notes. Great nose, both living up to the intensity of the other. Spices are dancing together without being aggressive to the nostrils. The palates are impressive together; though the intensities are similar, and the aromas of caramel candies and earthy tobacco are nicely integrated, the final result is slightly fatiguing, especially for the peppery spices which are heating and piling up. The final touch of chocolate mellows everything together, but one needs to wait a little too much...

| Pairing score | 88 |
|---|---|



# SPIRITS

"The light music of whiskey falling into a glass – an agreeable interlude."
*W.C. Fields*

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Signature



# Hard Truth Distilling Co.

*"We are real people in a real place, making honest whiskey."*

*by* **Norman Bliss**

In the heart of Indiana's Brown County, Hard Truth Distilling Co. has carved out a place in the American whiskey landscape by embracing authenticity as both a brand philosophy and a production ethos.

The distillery has built a reputation for bold, unflinching spirits that stand apart in a crowded market. Hard Truth's whiskey program reflects a careful balance of tradition and experimentation, blending time-honored techniques with a willingness to push boundaries. As the brand continues to grow, it is positioning itself not only as a regional standout but as a name to watch on the national stage.

In this interview with Bryan Smith, master distiller, we explore the story behind Hard Truth Whisky and the values that drive its makers.

**Could you share the history and origins of Hard Truth?**
Hard Truth's distillery campus is set on 325 wooded acres in Brown County, Indiana, steps from the historic village of Nashville. Founded in 2015 and named the No. 1 Destination Distillery in the U.S. (Distillery Trail, 2022), our home is more than a place; it's one of the country's most exciting and unconventional whiskey destinations, a pilgrimage for those who believe whiskey should be rooted in experience. In just over a decade, Hard Truth has grown from a micro-distillery housed in a few hundred square feet to a state-of-the-art campus spanning hundreds of acres. The scenic property features three rickhouses, a full-service restaurant, a tour center, a beachside bar, a lake cruise, ATV tours, and an outdoor amphitheater. There's even an on-site cabin for overnight stays. Visitors can explore guided distillery tours, mixology classes, live music, and seasonal warm-weather events like the Moonshiner's Experience, a hands-on tribute to Brown County's storied distilling heritage. We are still a relative newcomer, but have quickly made our mark. Our first grain-to-glass release debuted in 2021, earning a spot in Fred Minnick's Top 50 American Whiskeys. And, our Bourbon was recently named as "one of the 50 Greatest Bourbons of the 21st Century (so far)" by Jonah Flicker and Robb Report. I continue to build an award-winning portfolio of ryes and bourbons, all crafted using the sweet mash process. This rare, labor-intensive method sets Hard Truth apart from many American whiskey makers. Hard Truth embodies the same grit and perseverance that defined the early artisans and settlers of Brown County. Just as they carved out a life in the unforgiving hills, the distillery embraces hard work, patience, and self-reliance to create spirits worth celebrating. The hard truth is simple: nothing great comes easy. Every barrel is a testament to the pioneering spirit that inspired us to create our brand.

**Hard Truth offers an extensive range of experiences — including tours, live music, and events —that go well beyond the traditional distillery visit. Are these offerings an intentional and integral part of your vision for the brand?**




While I was busy creating the vision for the liquid, my partners were working hard bringing the experience to life. Their entrepreneurial spirit and background in hospitality provided a unique approach to how we fleshed out our tours and guest experiences. We always wanted a home place.

**The Moonshiner Experience, both private and public, is a distinctive offering. What inspired its creation, and how has the public responded, considering the strong cultural associations moonshine holds for whiskey enthusiasts?**
While we aren't a moonshine brand, the history of whiskey making in Brown County has always been interesting to us. There are well-documented archival photos featuring local sheriffs with raided stills taken from local moonshiners right near our property from the 1800s. Being able to bring some of those stories to life through bookable tour experiences was something that really intrigued my partners. It's truly something that should not be missed.

**Your commitment to using sweet mash rather than sour mash is a notable differentiator. Could you elaborate on the reasons behind this choice, the challenges you faced in implementing it, and the key differences you have observed in the final product?**
When it comes to creating flavors through whiskey or food, I always let my palate guide me. I'm inspired by flavor profiles that are complex while still being overall balanced. Learning about the sweet mash process from our friends at Wilderness Trail really set us on a path to creating sweet mash whiskey. Whiskey made from a sweet mash process is more complex, bright and balanced, celebrating the fruit flavors of the grain in the best way. Mitigating the risk of producing sweet mash whiskey is all about getting the equipment and process flow as sanitary from start to finish. Our crew on the distillery floor prides themselves on an incredibly hygienic environment which is plain to see on tours.

**Hard Truth's core line includes a diverse range of products with varying ABVs and mash bills. How do you ba-**




**lance offering variety to appeal to different palates while maintaining a cohesive brand identity?**
This is a great question. The whiskey world has changed so much over the last 10 years and continues to evolve. Our philosophy from the beginning was to create variety through mashbills and custom barrel char/toast combinations, however, we never wanted to be too niche. When you see our lineup, you will see easy-sipper bourbon and rye whiskeys at reasonable prices as well as more exotic cask strength and barrel finished offerings for those looking for something a bit more unique. We always like to have a lot in our toolbox so that we can meet every whiskey drinker right where they are. Our quality, value proposition and dedication to sweet mash is what ties everything together.

**What is the inspiration behind producing two distinct rye expressions — High Road Rye and Sweet Mash Rye?**
I really love rye whiskey and wanted to highlight two different approaches in order to really show the diversity of the style. The secret is out: Rye whiskey is easily as delicious as bourbon.

**The Mizunara Finished Sweet Mash Rye is a particularly distinctive release. How do you approach the concept of barrel finishing, and what makes this expression unique?**
It all starts with the quality of the base whiskey. Our sweet mash rye is such a great whiskey to utilize in barrel finishing. It's sweet yet intensely spicy and complex. This provides an amazing backdrop for many different barrel finishing techniques. When I learned about Mizunara Oak, along with my understanding of attention to quality, process and ingredients in Japanese culture, I knew that this would be a winner. The result is incredibly delicious in my opinion.

**Could you provide insight into the Harvest Rye project and the vision behind its four releases to date?**
Our limited edition for whiskey collection project in collaboration with Mellencamp Whiskey Company originated from our desire to highlight our farmer partners. We felt that it was important to shine a light on how farming and the farming families responsible affect all of us. We wanted to tell the story of the people behind those farms. Quality grains make quality whiskeys, and we have the best farmers who are as passionate about growing their grains as we are about making whiskey.

**Looking ahead, what do you envision for the future of Hard Truth?**
We are real people in a real place, making honest whiskey. The future of Hard Truth is to continue to provide incredible experiences at the distillery while growing into new markets throughout the United States, ultimately establishing Hard Truth as the next heritage American whiskey brand.





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# Cask Alchemy

*The Rise and Risk of Wine Cask Whisky Maturation*

*by* **Vincenzo Salvatore**

Not so long ago, the whisky cask was a largely utilitarian vessel – usually ex-bourbon, always oak, and seldom discussed beyond whether it was first-fill or refill. But in the last two decades, the humble cask has stepped into the spotlight, not just as a vessel, but as a creative instrument. Among the most intriguing developments in this new era of maturation is the use of wine casks: barrels once filled with Bordeaux, Barolo, Sauternes, or Port, now pressed into service by whisky makers seeking layers of aroma, structure, and narrative complexity. What began as a niche experiment – some might say a gimmick – is now a serious discipline, combining the chemistry of oak, the residue of fermented grape must, and the distilled heart of malt or grain. Yet despite its popularity, wine cask maturation remains a technical and sensory balancing act… not every experiment ends well. When it works, though, the results can be transformative. At the heart of this transformation lies a question that's both practical and philosophical: how does a wine cask change whisky? The answer is layered, much like the casks themselves.

In traditional whisky maturation, American oak barrels that once held bourbon are prized for their structural regularity and the predictable vanilla-caramel notes they lend to spirit. But a wine cask, whether it comes from Margaux or Moscatel, carries more than wood; it carries history. And expectations. Tannins from the wine, residual sugars, acids, and volatile esters seep into the stave fibers during their previous life, only to be coaxed out again by the high-proof spirit now inside. The result is a second act in the barrel's life – a chemical encore. Producers often face a key decision: whether to use wine casks for full-term maturation, or to "finish" a whisky that has already spent time in more neutral oak. The finishing method, popularized by Glenmorangie and Balvenie in the 1990s, involves a shorter second maturation – typically six months to two years – in wine-soaked wood. This approach allows a degree of control; the base whisky's profile remains intact, while the wine cask lends a top-dressing of color, fruit, or spice. Finishing is less risky, but also more superficial. By contrast, full-term maturationresults in deeper integration – but if the cask is too active, or if the wine influence dominates, the original distillate can be smothered beneath a layer of grape-derived noise. This is why some distillers tread carefully. The wine cask, beautiful and unpredictable, is not always easy to tame. Wine is acidic, more so than fortified spirits like sherry or port. This acidity can destabilize a young spirit, or accelerate extraction of lignins and tannins, producing bitter or flabby results. In less controlled settings, the high sugar and microbial residue from sweet wines like Sauternes or Tokaji can even create unwanted fermentations within the barrel itself.

Yet for all these challenges, the demand for wine-cask-aged whiskies has only grown – driven in part by consumer curiosity, and in part by the sensory theater such finishes provide. Take Glenmorangie's Nectar d'Or, one of the earliest and most enduring examples of Sauternes cask finishing. After a decade in ex-bourbon barrels, the whisky spends two additional years in sweet Bordeaux dessert wine casks, developing layers of honey-drizzled brioche, lemon tart, and hints of saffron. The Sauternes lends a




viscous texture and exotic spice note, while Glenmorangie's elegant distillate retains its citrus and floral core. The integration here is near seamless – decadent but balanced. Compare this to the Benromach Château Cissac, a limited Speyside release matured in red wine barriques from the Haut-Médoc. The influence of the Cabernet-dominant claret is apparent: red berries, bitter chocolate, and fine dusty tannins wrap around the distillery's robust, lightly smoky spirit. It's a whisky with grip and chew, almost vinous on the finish, where the French oak and the malt seem to push against one another with purpose.

Further afield, the Taiwanese distillery Kavalan has become a leader in full-term wine cask maturation. Their Solist Vinho Barrique, a single malt matured entirely in re-toasted red and white wine casks, is renowned for its tropical fruit explosion – mango, guava, grilled pineapple – layered over thick vanilla, coconut, and spice. The accelerated aging from Taiwan's hot, humid climate pushes extraction faster, but the result is both bold and elegant. It's a case where the wine influence is less about a specific grape and more about the overall richness and sweetness of the wood treatment. On the lighter side, Glen Moray's Chardonnay Cask Finish shows how a dry white wine cask can lift and brighten a younger malt. Notes of green apple, pear skin, and shortbread are rounded by a subtle creamy texture, with gentle acidity on the finish. The Chardonnay casks don't overpower but add a delicate top note – an approach more about freshness than depth. Then there's Springbank's 12yo Burgundy Cask, a cult favorite among collectors. Full-term maturation in Pinot Noir barriques lends this Campbeltown malt a dried cranberry and rosehip quality, with earthy tannins and maritime salinity dancing through the palate. It's complex, savoury, and slightly feral – an example of how wine casks can enhance rather than obscure a whisky's terroir. Other examples include the Deanston 2008 Bordeaux Red Wine Cask Finish, rich with dark forest fruit and toasty oak spice; and Amrut's Indian Single Malt Portonova, matured in both new American oak and ex-Port pipes, yielding a dramatic profile of plum, fig, and dark cocoa with a hint of eucalyptus.

What's evident from these whiskies is that wine casks are not monolithic in their impact. Much depends on the base spirit, the duration and type of maturation, and the prior use of the barrel. Sweet wine casks like Sauternes or Port tend to add richness, roundness, and a dessert-like profile. Dry red wines bring structure, berry fruit, and subtle tannins. White wines offer freshness, acidity, and lift – though they demand more delicacy in handling. Ultimately, the diversity of these expressions reflects the diversity of wine itself. Just as a Chardonnay from Chablis will differ from one grown in Napa, a whisky finished in their respective casks will carry different signatures. For whisky lovers, this means not just variation, but a new dimension of terroir – one that bridges two worlds, one grain-based, the other grape.

But what about the costs? Wine casks are not cheap. A used Sauternes barrique from Château d'Yquem, even after it has already seen wine, can cost several times as much as a standard ex-bourbon barrel. And unlike sherry casks, which are now often made to specification for the whisky industry, wine casks are harder to source consistently. Each one has a backstory: how long was the wine in contact with the wood? Was the barrel toasted, charred, or left raw? What's its microbial history? What was the sulphur regimen? These variables complicate cask management and increase batch variation. Transportation also adds cost. Most premium wine casks are coopered in France or northern Italy and must be shipped to distilleries in Scotland, Ireland, or further afield in Japan, Taiwan, or the United States. Timing is critical – many distillers demand "wet" barrels, freshly emptied and sealed, to preserve the wine's influence and minimize oxidation. All of this raises the final price tag of the whisky, which is why wine cask finishes often appear as limited editions or premium expressions.

Ultimately, wine casks represent more than just a stylistic flourish. They are a frontier – a place where whisky meets wine, where oak becomes a bridge between traditions, and where flavor is shaped by both nature and intention. Not every experiment succeeds, but the best of them remind us why whisky remains a living, evolving spirit. It absorbs not only the air around it, but the stories of the vessels it sleeps in. And as any good blender will tell you, sometimes it's the influence you don't fully control that leads to the most interesting results.



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INTERACTIVE





# Sidecar Cocktail

*From post-war Parisian salons to modern mixology*

*by* **Mark Trumpet**

The Sidecar cocktail is a classic that dates back to the early twentieth century. Like many famous drinks, its origin is unclear, and several competing stories assert their claim to its invention. One popular account attributes its creation to the bar at the Ritz Hotel in Paris shortly after World War I, while another suggests it was first made in London, possibly at Buck's Club, a favored gathering spot for fashionable gentlemen. The true origin may never be definitively known, but this mystery adds to the allure of the Sidecar's legacy.

The name "Sidecar," reminiscent of the motorcycle accessory that was popular in the early 20th century, evokes a sense of the unconventional, which perfectly reflects the drink itself. The Sidecar follows the traditional sour cocktail model, composed of a spirit, citrus, and sweetener. In this case, the base is cognac, known for its subtle notes of fruit, oak, and spice, which provide a richness that no other base spirit can replicate. This is complemented by an orange liqueur, most commonly Cointreau, although Grand Marnier or another quality curaçao can also be used. The liqueur adds brightness and balanced sweetness, along with a slight bitterness that harmonizes beautifully with the cognac. Finally, freshly squeezed lemon juice provides sharp acidity that cuts through the drink's richness, bringing everything into balance. The debate over the perfect balance continues today and varies with individual taste—some prefer a drier style while others seek a smoother, rounder experience.

When shaken with ice and strained into a chilled glass, these three ingredients create a cocktail that is crisp, warming, and refined. Much of the Sidecar's intrigue lies in its proportions. Early recipes typically called for equal parts of all three ingredients, resulting in a brisk and austere drink. Over time, bartenders have experimented with the ratios; some use a heavier pour of cognac to accentuate its character, while others prefer a stronger citrus presence for a sharper flavor profile. Today, the question of balance remains subjective: should the Sidecar be dry and invigorating or smoother and more indulgent? The answer depends on the drinker.

Another point of discussion is the sugared rim. Some argue that coating the edge of the glass adds visual appeal and provides contrast to the acidity of the lemon, while others see it as an unnecessary embellishment that detracts from the drink's purity. Both traditions continue to exist, and in either case, the Sidecar maintains its essential elegance.

Beyond its recipe, the cocktail embodies the glamour of the era in which it emerged. The 1920s were a time of significant cultural transformation, with artists, expatriates, and socialites gathering in the bars of Paris and London to celebrate new freedoms and identities. The Sidecar, with its French spirit, cosmopolitan character, and polished simplicity, seemed perfectly suited to this vibrant world of jazz, art deco, and evolving social norms. Even as tastes shifted in the following decades, the drink never faded away. It continued to appear in bar guides, menus, and the repertoires of skilled bartenders, always being appreciated for its clarity of flavor and effortless sophistication.

## PREPARATION

Chill a glass and, if desired, rim it with sugar; then fill a shaker with ice, add the cognac, Cointreau, and freshly squeezed lemon juice, shake vigorously until well chilled, strain into the prepared glass, and finish with a garnish of lemon twist or orange peel.

## ADVICE

If you prefer a smoother drink, use a touch less lemon juice or a richer cognac; for a brighter, sharper version, keep the lemon as is.

## INGREDIENTS

- 2 oz (60 ml) cognac
- 1 oz (30 ml) Cointreau (or triple sec)
- 3/4 oz (22 ml) freshly squeezed lemon juice
- Ice
- Optional: sugar for rimming the glass
- Gar nish: lemon twist or orange peel

## GLASS

Coupe glass or Martini glass.

# TASTE

"I drink Champagne when I'm happy and when I'm sad. Sometimes I drink it when I'm alone. When I have company I consider it obligatory. I trifle with it if I'm not hungry and drink it when I am. Otherwise, I never touch it unless I'm thirsty."
*Lily Bollinger*





















# CIGARSLOVERS MAGAZINE
# DISCOVER ALL ISSUES



















PAGE

# Reinventing the Seal

*A Modern Look at Wine Closures Beyond Cork.*

*by* **Vincenzo Salvatore**



For centuries, the ritual of uncorking a bottle of wine has been inseparable from the culture of wine itself – an audible prelude to everything from intimate dinners to grand tastings.

Corkscrews, that satisfying "pop," and the earthy smell of cork have become sensory markers of tradition. But in the world of 21st-century winemaking, that moment is no longer a given. As the industry seeks greater consistency, sustainability, and control over bottle aging, an increasing number of producers are rethinking what lies between the wine and the glass.

While natural cork remains the standard-bearer – valued for its renewable nature and age-worthy oxygen perme-

ability – its shortcomings are increasingly difficult to ignore. The variability of oxygen transmission, occasional structural flaws, and the persistent threat of cork taint from 2,4,6-trichloroanisole (TCA) have led to widespread experimentation with alternatives. Beyond synthetic corks, a new generation of closures – screw caps, glass stoppers, crown caps, and technical polymer systems – have matured from novelties into serious tools of enological expression and have redefined how wine can evolve in the bottle. These closures don't just seal; they shape a wine's evolution, for better or worse.

It was in Australia and New Zealand where the screw cap – often referred to generically as Stelvin – began its quiet revolution led by science. Originally met with skepticism, it quickly gained favor in regions focused on preserving the crisp, aromatic profiles of Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, and Semillon. In regions producing such expressive, aromatic whites, the need for a closure that could guarantee freshness and eliminate cork taint was urgent. The aluminum cap, paired with polyethylene or PVDC liners, delivers just that. Today, nearly all New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is bottled under screw cap, and the model has spread to European producers with progressive leanings. The science backs the shift. A decade-long study conducted by the Australian Wine Research Institute (AWRI) monitored the evolution of white wines bottled under natural cork, synthetic cork, and screw cap. The results consistently favored screw caps for aroma retention and oxidative stability, with wines remaining brighter and more fruit-forward over time. However, winemakers were cautioned about the potential for reduction – sulfur-like aromas stemming from the cap's extremely low oxygen ingress. The key, as always, is balance.

Where screw caps deliver functional modernism, glass closures offer elegance and neutrality. Systems like Vino-Lok and ViniSeal have gained traction in Austria, Germany, and beyond, particularly for Rieslings and rosés. The precision-molded glass is paired with a food-safe elastomer O-ring, creating a resealable, airtight seal that avoids any interaction between wine and closure. Geisenheim University's trials on wines under glass confirmed their performance: minimal variability, low but consistent oxygen transmission, and excellent preservation of aromatics. Though more expensive and requiring bespoke bottling equipment, their aesthetic appeal and consumer-friendly resealability are hard to ignore, particularly in the premium white and rosé segments.

In an unexpected twist, the crown cap is making quiet comeback into wine production, particularly in the natural and pét-nat scenes. France's Loire Valley, Italy's Emilia-Romagna, and the new-wave wineries of California and South Africa have all flirted with the crown cap for its sealing reliability and mechanical simplicity. Although still burdened by consumer perception – some see it as undignified – it offers a robust closure with negligible risk of cork taint or oxygen ingress variability. For wines intended for early consumption or stylistic experimentation, the crown cap is proving both efficient and refreshingly honest.
Not all innovations aim to challenge cork on technical grounds alone. Some, like the Zork closure – a resealable three-part synthetic system – aim to replicate the ceremonial appeal of cork while offering improved consistency and user-friendliness. Though still relatively niche, Zork has found limited traction in New World regions like South Africa and Australia, where wine education and openness to closure innovation are strong. If cork's greatest flaw is its unpredictability, technical polymer closures aim to correct that with industrial precision.

Closures such as ArdeaSeal and Nomacorc's latest PlantCorc lines are manufactured to deliver specific, consistent oxygen transmission rates, tailored to a wine's profile. Whether aiming for reductive freshness or controlled oxidation in barrel-aged reds, winemakers can select closures with the desired permeability. In side-by-side studies involving Bordeaux-style reds in both California and France, wines sealed under these engineered closures showed less bottle variation and more controlled phenolic evolution than those under lower-grade corks. ArdeaSeal, in particular, has found favour in cellars where micro-oxygenation is part of the maturation philosophy, but cork contamination is unacceptable. Nomacorc's move into bio-based closures derived from sugarcane polymers adds a further layer of sustainability, pushing back against the common criticism that synthetics are environmentally inferior.

The debate over closures is not just theoretical – it's playing out in cellars and tasting rooms across the world. A notable experiment by New Zealand's Villa Maria tracked identical wines under cork, screw cap, and technical polymer for over a decade. Tasting panels repeatedly found that screw-capped wines preserved varietal integrity longest, while cork-aged bottles evolved more unpredictably. Some aged beautifully. Others did not. In Italy, Feudi di San Gregorio has bottled select Greco di Tufo vintages under both cork and screw cap, comparing oxidative evolution in blind tastings among sommeliers. Invariably, the screw-capped wines aged with greater uniformity, but tasters were divided: some preferred the oxidative depth



*Screw cap*



*Vino-Lok*



*Crown cap*




*Zork Closure*

of cork-aged samples, flaws and all. Meanwhile, Austrian icon Weingut Bründlmayer has embraced glass closures for certain Rieslings and Grüner Veltliners, noting that the combination of visual clarity and inert material aligns with their philosophy of purity and terroir expression.

In the end, no closure is universally superior. Instead, each offers a different set of trade-offs. Screw caps provide consistency and freshness, but risk reductive faults if used without careful winemaking. Glass closures deliver purity and elegance but require financial and logistical investment. Crown caps are functionally robust but still suffer from an image problem. Engineered polymers bring oxygen management to the forefront but can feel impersonal to traditionalists. Today, closure selection is increasingly customized.

A winemaker may choose screw caps for aromatic whites meant for quick release, glass stoppers for rosés and premium varietals with a lifestyle branding edge, and high-grade corks for reds destined for cellaring and ceremonial enjoyment. This pluralistic approach recognizes that no single closure is universally best—only the best match for a particular wine's structure, purpose, and journey from cellar to table.

Ultimately, closure choice is not merely a packaging decision – it is an enological strategy. It determines how a wine will evolve over time, whether it will express its freshness or develop into tertiary complexity, and whether it will reach the consumer as the winemaker intended. While natural cork continues to dominate in the fine wine segment, often driven by perception and tradition, many producers now admit that cork is a gamble – one that may or may not pay off in long-term bottle aging.

But what's becoming clear, from sensory panels to long-term lab studies, is that closure choice is no longer a matter of habit. It's a decision that must be aligned with winemaking style, wine chemistry, consumer expectation, and environmental priorities. In the end, wine is a living product, and the closure is its gatekeeper. In moving beyond cork and its synthetic twins, the wine world is not abandoning tradition, but rather refining it with the tools of modern science and engineering. The pop of a cork may remain romantic, but in many cases, it's the quiet twist of a cap or the gentle pull of a glass stopper that preserves the magic inside the bottle. In the modern cellar, the question is no longer "Cork or screw cap?" but rather: What closure will best express this wine, five, ten, or twenty years from now?




*Ardseal*




*Nomacork*



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2023, 4 号刊



# Blind Tasting


**96** SPIRITS
**98** Rum
**104** Whisky

**110** CIGARS
**111** Corona
**114** Lonsdale
**119** Robusto
**124** Toro

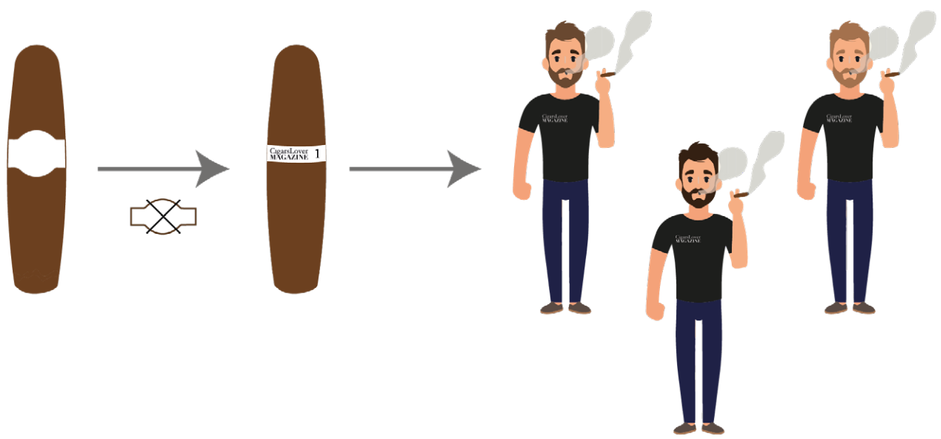






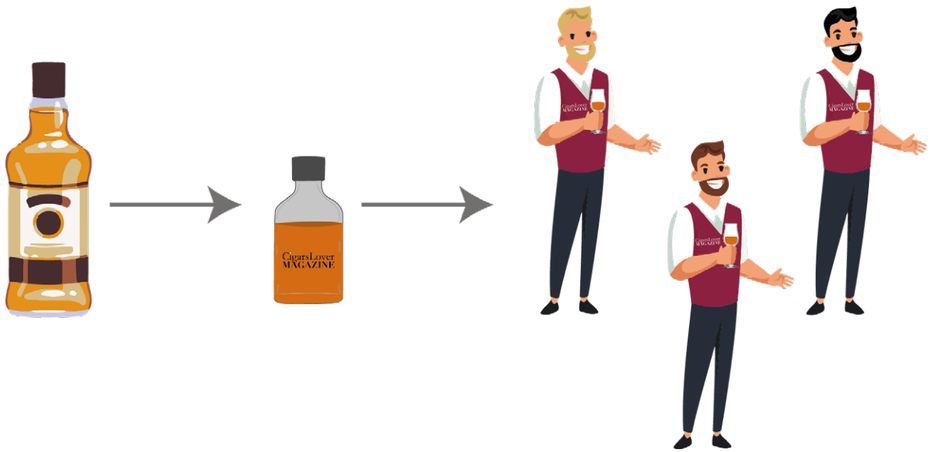



# HOW ARE THE BLIND TASTINGS MADE?



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**




1

# 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.

## KAVALAN
*Solist Fino Sherry* 2

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

3

*INTENSE AND COMPLEX* 4

On the nose, ripe fruit, with rich plum notes, together with honey and a mix of exotic fruit, including coconut. Then cocoa. On the palate, exotic fruit, caramel and honey, along with rich white pepper notes and orange zes. The persistence is long. There are white pepper, cocoa and walnut notes, with a touch of orange peel.

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

**94** 5

**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.



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# Rum







## LONGUETEAU
*Signature Familiae*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Guadeloupe | 57.4% \| 14.8 | $$ |

*PRECISE AND VIBRANT*

Fresh sugarcane and lime zest intertwine with white flowers and grassy notes, framed by a subtle touch of oak. The palate reveals citrus peel, green herbs, and a hint of vanilla sweetness, carried on a smooth and lively texture. Long finish, fresh and elegantly structured.

Lively agricole character with bright depth and purity. Crisp. Balanced and naturally expressive.

**91**




## PLANTERAY
*Aged 25 Years*
*Trinidad 2000*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Trinidad | 56.4% \| 112.8 | $$$$ |

*MATURE AND COMPLEX*

Dried tropical fruit, orange peel, and polished oak intertwine with cocoa, molasses, and subtle tobacco, wrapped in deep caramel sweetness. The palate reveals toffee, spice, and roasted nut, carried on a silky, full-bodied texture. Long finish, warm and elegantly spiced.

Aged depth and island refinement. Sophisticated. Perfectly balanced with lingering richness and grace.

**91**




## DEPAZ
*Les Millésime 2015*

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

*RICH AND STRUCTURED*

Dried fruit and cocoa mingle with oak, vanilla, and sweet tobacco, framed by hints of spice and caramel. The palate reveals prune, molasses, and roasted nuts, carried on a round, full texture. Long finish, warm and refined.

Mature depth and elegant strength. Classic. Balanced and persistently rich.

**90**




# GOSLING'S
## *Papa Seal*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Bermuda | 41.5% \| 93 | $$$ |

*ELEGANT AND COMPLEX*

Dried figs and honeyed oak open with nutmeg, citrus zest, and vanilla cream, softened by polished wood. The palate reveals toffee, caramel, and gentle spice, carried on a silky, refined texture. Long finish, mature and harmonious.

Deeply aged and gracefully balanced. Smooth. Sophisticated, layered, and enduring.

**90**




# WORTHY PARK
## *Single Estate Reserve*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Jamaica | 45% \| 90 | $$ |

*BOLD AND BALANCED*

Molasses, banana, and brown sugar blend with oak, cocoa, and baking spice, framed by warm Jamaican funk. The palate reveals tropical fruit, caramel, and pepper, carried on a bold, textured body. Long finish, complex and rounded.

Rich depth and with a balanced structure. Harmonious. Full-bodied and characterful.

**89**




# CHALONG BAY
## *Wild Fermentation*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Thailand | 49% \| 58 | $$ |

*FRESH AND LIVELY*

Lemongrass and citrus peel meet green apple and herbs, lifted by wild yeast and cane purity. The palate reveals white pepper, saline brightness, and delicate fruit, carried on a crisp, vibrant texture. Long finish, light and refreshing.

Bright and natural with wild depth. Energetic. Pure, authentic, and perfectly fresh.

**89**




# BARBANCOURT
## *15 Years Old*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Haiti | 43% \| 86 | $$ |

*REFINED AND ELEGANT*

Dried apricot, candied orange, and polished oak blend with caramel, cocoa, and a touch of tobacco, wrapped in warm sugarcane richness. The palate reveals molasses, spice, and citrus peel, carried on a silky, full-bodied texture. Long finish, smooth and delicately spiced.

Mature depth with graceful sweetness. Balanced. Complex yet refined, with lasting warmth and poise.

**89**




# DILLON
## *Brut de Colonne*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Martinique | 71.3% \| 142.6 | $ |

*BOLD AND EXPLOSIVE*

Sugarcane syrup and pineapple rise with varnish, spice, and oak char, giving way to bold tropical esters. The palate reveals caramelized citrus, pepper, and molasses heat, carried on a dense, fiery texture. Long finish, powerful and vibrant.

Fierce overproof intensity with raw depth. Dynamic. Potent and full of life.

**89**




# MOTHER MESCCIA

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Monaco | 47% \| 84 | $$ |

*RAW AND EXPRESSIVE*

Molasses and ripe banana mingle with roasted coffee and charred oak, layered with hints of cocoa and spice. The palate reveals burnt sugar, earthy depth, and tropical fruit, carried on a dense, oily texture. Long finish, smoky, warm, and powerful.

Unrestrained intensity and raw depth. Wild. Structured with commanding character and presence.

**88**




## PÈRE LABAT
*Dame Jeanne*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Guadeloupe | 51.9% \| 103.8 | $$ |

*EXOTIC AND SILKY*

Sugarcane juice and lime leaf rise with floral tones, sea spray, and a trace of white pepper. The palate reveals grassy minerality, citrus peel, and herbal spice, carried on a crisp, dry texture. Long finish, bright and invigorating.

Pure agricole clarity with vibrant precision. Fresh. Clean and distinctively refined.

**88**




## HAMPDEN
*Great House 2025*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Martinique | 57% \| 114 | $$$ |

*INTENSE AND POWERFUL*

Ripe pineapple and molasses burst with varnish, spice, and oak smoke, revealing deep tropical esters. The palate shows citrus, sugarcane, and wood, carried on a dense, oily texture. Long finish, aromatic and lasting.

Funky and refined in perfect balance. Complex. Dynamic, bold, and unforgettable.

**87**




## PHRAYA
*Aged 8 Years*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Thailand | 40% \| 80 | $ |

*SMOOTH AND BALANCED*

Vanilla, honey, and toasted coconut rise with warm spice and polished oak, layered with caramel sweetness. The palate reveals dried fruit, gentle pepper, and molasses, carried on a silky, rounded texture. Medium length finish, mellow and soft.

It delivers an elegant warmth with tropical depth. Graceful, poised, and with a nice persistence.

**85**

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# Whisky







## MICHTER'S
### *US*1 Toasted Barrel Finish*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| U.S.A. | 54.4% \| 108.8 | $$$ |

*ELEGANT AND WARM*

Toasted oak, vanilla bean, and caramelized sugar open with hints of cocoa and charred spice, enveloped in a soft, smoky sweetness. The palate reveals maple syrup, nutmeg, and toffee, carried on a silky, full-bodied texture. Long finish, smooth and gently smoky on the tongue.

Refined warmth with layered sweetness. Harmonious. Perfectly balanced with depth and subtle spice.

**91**




## GLEN SCOTIA
### *21 Years Old*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Scotland | 46% \| 92 | $$$$ |

*MATURE AND COASTAL*

ISea breeze, caramel, and polished oak intertwine with dried fruit and nutmeg in gentle harmony. The palate reveals salted caramel, spice, and toffee warmth, carried on a velvety, maritime texture. Long finish, mineral and elegant.

Deep coastal maturity and supple richness. Complex. Refined balance with quiet power.

**91**




## THE BALVENIE
### *A Collection of Curious Casks 14 Years Old*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Scotland | 47.8% \| 95.6 | $$$ |

*NUANCED AND REFINED*

Honey, vanilla, and orchard fruit unfold with gentle oak and creamy malt, framed by spice and sweet grain. The palate reveals toasted almond, citrus peel, and soft caramel, carried on a rounded, delicate texture. Long finish, smooth and harmonious.

Layered sweetness and balanced depth. Elegant. Gentle richness with polished character.

**91**




# FIRST WEST
## *Extra Aged Bourbon*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| U.S.A. | 50% \| 100 | $$ |

*RICH AND BOLD*

Maple, brown sugar, and leather rise with toasted oak, clove, and vanilla bean, layered with depth and warmth. The palate reveals caramel, dried fruit, and baking spice, carried on a dense, creamy texture. Long finish, smooth and lingering.

Robust sweetness and elegant structure. Luxurious. Deeply expressive and harmonious.

**90**




# YAMAZAKI
## *Islay Peated (2024 Edition)*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Japan | 48% \| 96 | $$$$ |

*ELEGANT AND SMOKED*

Soft smoke and ripe stone fruit mingle with honeyed malt and subtle sea breeze. The palate reveals peat, citrus, and oak spice with touches of vanilla and incense, carried on a silky, layered texture. Long finish, smoky and refined.

Japanese finesse with Islay spirit. Balanced. Complex and delicately peated perfection.

**89**




# MARS
## *Cosmo Manzanilla*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Japan | 42% \| 84 | $$ |

*SOFT AND SWEET*

Dried fruit, toasted nuts, and sea salt blend with malt sweetness and Manzanilla influence. The palate reveals caramel, citrus zest, and spice, carried on a smooth, wine-kissed texture. Long finish, dry and elegant.

Sherry warmth meets maritime freshness. Intriguing. Balanced and layered with depth.

**89**




# SASAYAKI
## *Malt Whisky*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Japan | 41% \| 82 | $$ |

*GENTLE AND HARMONIOUS*

Soft malt, vanilla cream, and apple blossom open with honey and toasted grain in delicate layers. The palate reveals pear, caramel, and faint spice, carried on a smooth, silky texture. Long finish, light and graceful.

Subtle sweetness and refined charm. Poised. Elegant Japanese whisky with serene depth.

**88**




# GLENMORANGIE
## *A Tale of Spices*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Scotland | 46% \| 92 | $$ |

*VIBRANT AND EXOTIC*

Orange peel, cinnamon, and nutmeg open with honeyed malt and floral lift, full of warmth and color. The palate reveals clove, ginger, and caramel sweetness, carried on a creamy, layered texture. Long finish, bright and aromatic.

Exotic spice meets Highland elegance. Expressive. Complex and beautifully composed.

**88**




# KYRÖ
## *Peat Smoke*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Finland | 47.2% \| 94.4 | $$ |

*AROMATIC AND BOLD*

Smoked malt, caramel, and forest herbs rise with peat, oak, and rye-like spice in aromatic intensity. The palate reveals toffee, charred wood, and citrus peel, carried on a rich, textured body. Long finish, smoky and warming.

Nordic character with modern balance. Distinct. Peated richness and crisp precision.

**87**




## MEIKLE TÒIR
*5 The Sherry One*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Scotland | 50% \| 100 | $$ |

*SHERRIED AND ROBUST*

Dried fruit, chocolate, and polished oak mingle with orange peel and baking spice, enveloped in sherry richness. The palate reveals toffee, nutmeg, and plum, carried on a full-bodied, silky texture. Long finish, sweet and spiced.

Sherry-driven depth with Highland heart. Generous. Balanced and intensely flavorful.

**85**




## PRAKAAN
*Double Cask*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Thailand | 43% \| 86 | $$ |

*WARM AND BALANCED*

Oak, vanilla, and tropical fruit blend with caramel, malt, and subtle spice, touched by gentle smoke. The palate reveals honey, dried fruit, and nutmeg, carried on a smooth, rounded texture. Long finish, soft and polished.

Mellow balance and tropical depth. Harmonious. Refined character with quiet complexity.

**85**




## THE POGUES
*Irish Whiskey*

| COUNTRY | ABV - PROOF | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| Ireland | 40% \| 80 | $ |

*SMOOTH AND LIVELY*

Honey, apple, and malt sweetness combine with vanilla and a hint of citrus zest. The palate reveals toffee, spice, and cereal warmth, carried on a light, rounded texture. Long finish, soft and easy.

Playful yet balanced Irish charm. Mellow. Approachable spirit with lasting warmth.

**84**



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# 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 throught 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.




**5**

- STRENGTH: described on a scale from "●" (lightest) to "●●●●●" (strongest).
- SIZE: ring gauge (1/64 of inch) and legnth, written in both millimiters 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.

# Corona





## *UNDERCROWN 10 CORONA VIVA*

*DENSE AND RICH*

Cocoa, espresso, and black pepper open up the smoke, joined by woody nuances. Leather aromas are added in the second half. Spicy towards the end.

**91**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●●● | 43x127mm (5") | $ 12 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| MEXICO | U.S.A. | HONDURAS, NICARAGUA |



## *ALEC BRADLEY GATEKEEPER CORONA*

*FLAVORFUL AND EVOLVING*

Wood, black pepper, and spices kick off the smoke. Nutty aromas are outlined later on. The final part turns to intense earthy notes and balsamic herbs.

**90**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 43x130 mm (5 ⅛") | $ 10 \| € 11 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | NICARAGUA | DOMINICAN REP., NICARAGUA |



## *THE WISE MAN MADURO CORONA*

*BOLD AND FLAVORFUL*

The cigar opens with roasted coffee, earth, and hints of vegetal aromas. In the second half of the smoke, aromas of leather and black pepper are added.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 48x127mm (5") | $ 10.8 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| MEXICO | NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA |



## *DAVIDOFF GRAND CRU NO. 2*

*BALANCED AND STRUCTURED*

Vegetal notes, cream, and light nutty nuances open the smoke. A hint of citrus and mild spices are introduced to the profile in the second half of the smoke.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●● | 43x143mm (5 ⅝") | $ 22.6 \| € 21.4 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | DOMINICAN REP. | DOMINICAN REP. |



## *CONFIDENCIAAL CORONA*

*HARMONIOUS AND SMOOTH*

Roasted nuts, wood, and pepper give way to the smoke. A cappuccino note follows later on, along with a herbal nuance towards the end of the smoke.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 42x130mm (5 ⅛") | $ - \| € 64 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| N/A | N/A | N/A |




## *CAPITOL SWING*

*BALANCED AND ROUND*

A salty mineral note, nuts, and wood give way to the smoke, which is later followed by cream and espresso aromas. A white pepper spice appears towards the end.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 44x130mm (5 ⅛") | $ - \| € 8.8 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA |




## *MONTECRISTO NO. 3*

*BALANCED AND STRUCTURED*

Earth, nut, and woody nuances are the main flavors in the first half. The flavor profile is enhanced by leather and pepper in the second half.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 42x142mm (5 ¾") | $ - \| € 16.1 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| CUBA | CUBA | CUBA |



## *ROMEO Y JULIETA CEDROS DE LUXE NO. 2*

*LINEAR AND STRAIGHTFORWARD*

A combination of wood and earth is revealed in the first half, supported by white pepper. A walnut aroma appears in the second half, with hints of cocoa.

**87**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 42x143mm (5 ¾") | $ - \| € 10.8 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| CUBA | CUBA | CUBA |

# Lonsdale




CigarMate

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*for handmade cigars*



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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.



## *SOBREMESA SOLITA RED*

*NUANCED AND STRUCTURED*

The cigar starts out with leather, black pepper, and vegetal aromas. A walnut note is added later on, with a subtle creaminess in the background. Balsamic and spicy towards the end.

**92**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 46x159mm (6 ¼") | $ 18.6 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | MEXICO | NICARAGUA, U.S.A. |




## *PARTAGÁS 8-9-8*

*AROMATIC AND BOLD*

It opens with earth, wood, and black pepper, with vegetal nuances in the background. It turns to hot spices and balsamic notes in the second half.

**90**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●●● | 43x170mm (6 ¾") | $ - \| € 14.3 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| CUBA | CUBA | CUBA |



## *GRAN HABANO COROJO NO. 5 MADURO CORONITA*

*BALANCED AND BOLD*

Rich notes of black pepper, wood, and earth give way to the smoke. Roasted coffee, hot spices, and vegetal notes join in the second half of the smoke.

**90**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 44x152mm (6") | $ 9.5 \| € 9.5 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA, COSTA RICA |



## *ADVENTURA ROYAL RETURN KING'S GOLD CORONA*

*RICH AND BALANCED*

White pepper, earth, and wood, with a touch of cocoa, are revealed in the first half. Vegetal notes are added in the second half, together with hot spices.

**90**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 44x152mm (6") | $ 14.8 \| € 12.8 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| U.S.A. | MEXICO | DOMINICAN REP., NICARAGUA, U.S.A. |








## *HENRY CLAY WAR HAWK LONSDALE*

*INTENSE AND ROUND*

The smoke opens with well-defined aromas of cappuccino, joined by notes of leather and nuts. The smoke is creamy, with some white pepper notes and herbs also coming through.

**89**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 42x171mm (6 ¾") | $ 8 \| € 8.9 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | U.S.A. | HONDURAS |



## *ROMA CRAFT INTEMPERANCE EC XVIII AWS IV*

*BOLD AND INTENSE*

The cigar opens with earth and a blast of spices. Later on, vegetal and walnut notes follow. A balsamic aroma is added toward the end of the smoke.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●●● | 44x165mm (6 1/2") | $ 9.7 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | INDONESIA | NICARAGUA |




## *VEGAFINA 1998 VF 42L*

*BOLD AND LAYERED*

Cappuccino, bitter almonds, and faint pepper aromas give way to the smoke. The cappuccino note morphs into an espresso aroma along with a bitter herbal note.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 42x187mm (7 ⅜") | $ - \| € 8.3 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | INDONESIA | COSTA RICA, DOMINICAN REP, NICARAGUA |




## *ILLUSIONE ONEOFF ALLEGRIA LONSDALE*

*LINEAR*

Peppery and nutty aromas give way to the smoke, followed by leather and an evident sapidity. An earthy note is added later on, while the profile stays unchanged.

**85**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 44x159mm (6 ¼") | $ 11.75 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA |

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# Robusto






## *VALACARI LUMINEER ROBUSTO*

*FLAVORFUL AND NUANCED*

The cigar starts out with intense nutty aromas, cappuccino, and leather. Wood and light pepper nuances are added later on. The smoke is creamy. Black pepper towards the end.

**92**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 50x127mm (5") | $ 13 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA |




## *HOYO DE MONTERREY EPICURE NO.2*

*BALANCED AND CREAMY*

It opens with cedar wood and white pepper. Spice builds progressively, together with earthy notes. The smoke is creamy and smooth. Rich cocoa and aged wood emerge toward the end.

**90**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 50x124 mm (4⅞") | $ - \| € 19.5 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| CUBA | CUBA | CUBA |




## *LURE COROJO OSCURO THE LIL' TONY ROBUSTO*

*INTENSE AND AROMATIC*

A blast of pepper gives way to the smoke. Leather and hazelnut follow later on, rounded out by roasted coffee notes. The finale is spicy.

**90**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●●● | 50x127mm (5") | $ 12 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA |




## *CHATEAU DIADEM SPLENDOR ROBUSTO EXTRA*

*AROMATIC AND SMOOTH*

Earth and cocoa give way to the smoke, followed by aged wood. Vegetal nuances are also perceptible, but mainly in the background.

**90**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 52x140mm (5 ½") | $ - \| € 18 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | MEXICO | DOMINICAN REP. |




## *GOLD STAR ROBUSTO*

*BALANCED AND COMPLEX*

Vegetal notes, black pepper, and wood are revealed in the opening. They are flanked by mineral and coffee flavors. There is a subtle sweetness present in the base as well.

**89**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 52x127mm (5") | $ 12 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | INDONESIA | DOMINICAN REP. |




## *VIVA LA VIDA CONNECTICUT ROBUSTO*

*NUANCED AND SMOOTH*

It starts out with aromas of wood, incense, and a pinch of white pepper. The second half turns to earth, walnut, black pepper, and vegetal notes.

**89**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 54x127mm (5") | $ 16 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA |



## *SOBREMESA BRÛLÉE ROBUSTO*

*HARMONIOUS AND SMOOTH*

Once lit, the cigar opens with herbs, dry wood, and white pepper, all on a creamy base. Further into the cigar, mineral notes and lemon zest are added to the profile.

**89**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 52x133mm (5 ¼") | $ 14.7 \| € 12.4 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | MEXICO | NICARAGUA |



## *GREAT WALL 132 MEMORY ROBUSTO*

*BALANCED AND SMOOTH*

Once lit, the cigar opens with light spices, cream, and nuts. Nuances of leather and charred wood are added in the second half.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 50x124mm (4 ⅞") | $ - \| € 6.8 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | INDONESIA | DOMINICAN REP., CHINA |



## *RAÍCES CUBANAS LIGA DE REYES ROBUSTO*

88

*AROMATIC AND ROUND*

Leather and wood start off the smoke, followed by cocoa and nuts. Black pepper spice is introduced later on, with a light balsamic nuance in the background.

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 52x127mm (5") | $ 10 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| HONDURAS | HONDURAS, NICARAGUA | HONDURAS |



## *LA AURORA FAMILY CREED FUERTE SOL ROBUSTO*

88

*FLAVORFUL AND STRAIGHTFORWARD*

Hay, nuts, and earth are revealed in the first half of the cigar. In the second half, aromas of aged wood and vegetal notes are added to the flavor profile.

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 50x127mm (5") | $ 15.5 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| MEXICO | NICARAGUA | DOMINICAN REP., NICARAGUA, U.S.A. |



## *ROMEO Y JULIETA SHORT CHURCHILLS*

88

*INTENSE AND ROUND*

In the first half of the smoke, earth and wood alternate. A roasted nuts aroma is added in the second half, along with black pepper towards the end.

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 50x124mm (4 ⅞") | $ - \| € 20.5 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| CUBA | CUBA | CUBA |



## *CHIMOLLY DYNASTY ROBUSTO*

87

*FLAVORFUL AND RUSTIC*

Creamy hazelnut notes and faint spices give way to the smoke. Leather and coffee join later on. A balsamic aroma rounds out the smoke with a spicy finale.

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 54x127mm (5") | $ 16 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | MEXICO | DOMINICAN REP., NICARAGUA |






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# Toro






## *CALDWELL LLTK MAD MOFO HABANO SUPER TORO*

92

*COMPLEX AND FLAVORFUL*

Evident cappuccino, hazelnut, and white pepper open up the smoke. The base is creamy and an herbal note and baking spices are added later on. Balsamic towards the end.

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 54x152mm (6") | $ 15 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| N/A | N/A | DOMINICAN REP., NICARAGUA, U.S.A. |



## *NOTORIOUS TORO*

92

*HARMONIOUS AND REFINED*

Fine wood, white pepper, and nutty notes give way to the smoke. Citrus aromas and vegetal nuances are added later on. Chili spice is introduced towards the end.

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 50x152mm (6") | $ 14 \| € 16.5 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | MEXICO | DOMINICAN REP., NICARAGUA |




## *MATILDE PARA JOSÉ SEIJAS*

89

*BALANCED AND SMOOTH*

Pepper and nuts are followed by coffee in the opening. Leather is added further into the smoke. Balsamic and creamy nuances can also be made out.

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 52152mm (6") | $ 18 \| € 19 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | DOMINICAN REP. | DOMINICAN REP. |




## *HR BLUE TORO*

89

*ROUND AND RICH*

Cocoa and roasted coffee beans are followed by earth and black pepper in the first half. A vegetal note is introduced in the second half of the smoke.

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 50x152mm (6") | $ - \| € 14 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA |




## *HIRAM & SOLOMON TRAVELING MAN TORO*

*BALANCED AND FLAVORFUL*

The first half is marked by walnut and vegetal notes. The profile is supported by a mix of spices, made up of black pepper, chili, and star anise.

**89**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 54x152mm (6") | $ 11.8 \| € 12.8 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| INDONESIA | INDONESIA | BRAZIL, DOMINICAN REP., NICARAGUA |




## *ALEC BRADLEY SAFE KEEPINGS TORO*

*RICH AND EVOLVING*

Earth and white pepper kick off the smoke, joined later on by roasted nuts. Vegetal notes and walnut appear in the background, with balsamic notes towards the end.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 52x152mm (6") | $ 14.1 \| € 12.8 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA | NICARAGUA |




## *NICA RUSTICA ADOBE TORO*

*RUSTIC AND BOLD*

Earth and wood give way to the smoke, followed by black pepper. A coffee note is added later on. The black pepper and wood take over in the second half, and the finale is spicy.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 54x152mm (6") | $ 8 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | BRAZIL | NICARAGUA |



## *GURKHA NICARAGUA COLECCIÓN ESPECIAL TORO*

*INTENSE BUT LINEAR*

The flavor profile of the cigar is made up of herbs and wood in the foreground, joined later on by nuts and earth. There is a creamy component present in the background.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●●● | 54x152mm (6") | $ 15 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | MEXICO | DOMINICAN REP., U.S.A. |






## *1502 ANIVERSARIO 10*

*SMOOTH AND ROUND*

The cigar opens up with black pepper and coffee. Later on, wood and walnut notes are added to the profile. The smoke is very creamy throughout.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 52x165mm (6 ½") | $ 14 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | MEXICO | NICARAGUA |




## *MAYFLOWER DUSK TORO*

*RICH BUT LINEAR*

Black pepper and earth are the main flavors of the smoke, supported by aged wood, walnut, and roasted coffee throughout. Hot spices appear towards the end.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 52x152mm (6") | $ 16.3 \| € - |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| ECUADOR | ECUADOR | NICARAGUA |




## *MONTECRISTO OPEN SLAM*

*STRAIGHTFORWARD BUT STATIC*

The first half of the smoke is dominated by nuts, wood, and white pepper. A leather aroma is added in the second half, with the base being creamy.

**88**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 52x143mm (5 ⅝") | $ - \| € 25 |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| CUBA | CUBA | CUBA |




## *TRINIDAD ESPIRITU NO. 2 TORO*

*LINEAR AND HARSH*

A mix of black pepper, undergrowth, walnut, earth, and vegetal notes make up the flavor profile. An unpleasant bitterness is introduced after the first third.

**84**

| STRENGTH | SIZE | PRICE |
|---|---|---|
| ●●● | 54x152mm (6") | $ 13 \| € -v |

| WRAPPER | BINDER | FILLER |
|---|---|---|
| BRAZIL | NICARAGUA | BRAZIL, NICARAGUA |

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