



THE BLEND
El Septimo
Mirifico Sapphire

PERDOMO CIGARS
A classic American
success story

THE INDUSTRY
Christian Eiroa finds normalcy
during abnormal times

PCA

THE MAGAZINE



“The Art, Tradition, and Style of Cuba.”



F O N S E C A



Epic



www.EpicCigars.com



**“We don’t make
boutique cigars,
we make the
best cigars!”**

Steven T. Duke

Dunbarton Tobacco & Trust

209 West River Rd., Unit 7

Hooksett, NH 03106

603.935.9814v

603.792.9524f

www.dunbartoncigars.com

ESTABLISHED SINCE 1887

GURKHA



Featuring the Gurkha Nicaragua Series, rated 92 by Cigar Snob and Top 20 by Cigar & Spirits, & The Grukha Treinta, rated 90 by Cigar Snob.



CIGAR SNOB



CIGAR & SPRITS



CIGAR SNOB

www.gurkhacigars.com



ACÁNORSA LEAF
NICARAGUA

CONTENTS

FEATURES

© SUMMER | 2020



30

Perdomo

BY WILLIAM C. NELSON

How do you define a classic American success story? Perdomo Cigars is the perfect place to start.

Community Outreach

BY WILLIAM C. NELSON

36

Actively engaging in your community through charity, volunteerism and events deserves planning, same as any business strategy. With the right approach, your brand can reap the benefits.

Two Generations, One Vision

BY LARRY WAGNER

40

The Serino Cigars portfolio encompasses a wide array of strengths, flavors and shapes, offering something for every type of smoker, from novice to seasoned epicure.

COVID-19 Survival Guide

BY ERIN HOLLAND

46

As any successful business owner will tell you, if you don't learn from past experiences, your business will never grow. Here are some survival strategies we've learned during the pandemic.

ON THE COVER

Illustration by Joe De Leon

Tabacalera Falto, Inc.



**LUIS J. FALTO: PRESIDENT, CEO
& MASTER BLENDER**

**La Garita Cigar Co. & Cigarros Falto
#40 Luis Mojica Valentín Street, Suite 101
Mayagüez P.R. 00680**

P.O. Box 3597

Mayagüez P.R. 00681

Ph: 787.433.4755

lfaltopr@hotmail.com • www.lagaritacigar.com



La Cohoba Magazine

Falto Ingenio #10

CONTENTS



DEPARTMENTS

© SUMMER | 2020



IN-DEPTH

- 18 *The Blend: Kristoff JT Signature***
The exclusive, event-only cigar your customers will be asking for again and again.
- 22 *The Blend: Tabacalera Falto Ingenio #10***
Capped at 500 cigars a year, Luis Falto's Ingenio #10 is the very definition of an "ultra-boutique" cigar.
- 26 *The Blend: El Septimo Mirifico Sapphire***
Mirifico translates to wonderful—which is the best way to begin describing this 100 percent Costa Rican tobacco cigar.

COLUMNS

- 50 *The Tobacconist***
Linda Squires sees a light in the darkness.
- 52 *The Pipe***
William Nelson knows whatever turmoil awaits us, there are some things you can always count on.
- 54 *The Industry***
Christian Eiroa finds a place of normalcy during decidedly abnormal times.

IN EVERY ISSUE

- 08 *Editor's Note*** **16 *In the Humidor***
- 10 *News & Notes*** **56 *Five Questions***



HIGH QUALITY DISPLAY CIGAR HUMIDORS AND LOCKERS

Retail Stores and Walk-in Humidors



Casa de Montecristo, Dallas, Texas

We are now the proud owners of American Cigar Accessories



HumidiFresh Cabinet Humidifiers

Displays & Cigar Lockers



U.S.A.-Made



Crafted from 100% Spanish Cedar

WHOLESALE ACCOUNTS WELCOMED Quantity Discounts



Follow us on Social Media

Wood Projections, Inc. 19200 SW 106 Ave., #20, Miami, FL 33157
Toll Free: (877) 971-9663 Tel: (305) 971-7883
Email: sales@woodprojections.com web: www.woodprojections.com

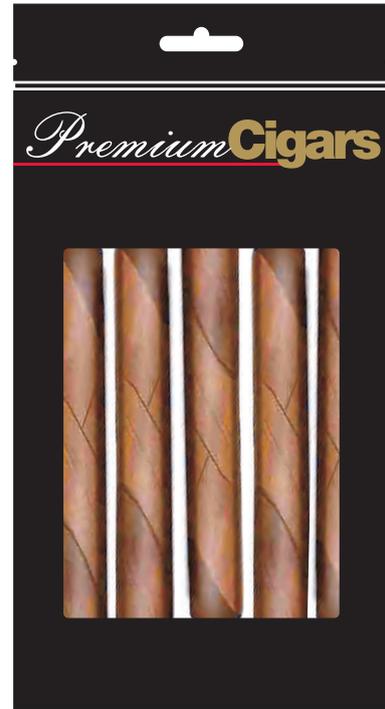


BAGS OF BAGS™

Introduces the next generation of resealable cigar barrier bags. Available in generic pre-printed or personalized designs.

The Ultimate Moisture Pad Cigar Bag

With Padded Moisture Barrier Protection
No Humidification Device Required



The Ultimate Laminated Metalized Foil Cigar Bag

With Matte Finish Front And Clear Window Back
Humidification Device Recommended



www.bagsofbags.com

www.bagsofbags.com

VAUEN

Pfeifen + Filter



VAUEN KENIA



VAUEN KARAT



VAUEN EDGAR WITH GIFT BOX



NEW VAUEN PIPES 2020. CALL US: 800 - 848 - 1480
WE WILL EMAIL A LINK - DROPBOX - FOR FULL CATALOG
UPON REQUEST



→ **"We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."**

- Oscar Wilde

I THINK IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT THIS QUOTE HITS HOME TO ALL PCA MEMBERS AND THE PREMIUM CIGAR INDUSTRY. By any measure, this year has got to be one of, if not the most, challenging and difficult years in recent memory. Maybe knowing that we are all in this together helps. You know, the old adage of misery loving company. But in the end, through all of it, we here at PCA are pushing forward, harder than ever.

While authorities may be mandating business closures, they certainly have made no such mandate for regulators or taxation. And so we fight on. Over the past several months, we have held numerous virtual townhall events with Senate and House members, pushing our agenda and getting commitments from them to fight for our small businesses and put pressure on the FDA.

I have been incredibly inspired by the perseverance, ingenuity and utter grit you all have demonstrated during these challenging times. While my hope is this all passes much sooner rather than later, I do look forward to a time next year, when we can at long last have a premium cigar family reunion, seeing old friends and meeting new, smoking and laughing, and taking some time to remember why we all love being a part of such a great community.

I want to personally thank all of you for your support, patience and understanding as we have figured our way through this. While we all might be in the gutters now, I think we can all still see the stars and know that tomorrow will bring a better day. You can trust that we are all putting in the work to help get us there.

So until we see you all again in person, be well, stay safe, sell and smoke as much as you can, because we all know it's good for the soul.

Scott Pearce
scott@premiumcigars.org

PCA

THE MAGAZINE

512 Capital Court N.E.
Washington, DC 20002-7709
Phone: 202.621.8064
www.premiumcigars.org
Email: info@premiumcigars.org

EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF **Scott Pearce**
MANAGING EDITOR **Greg Girard**
ASSOCIATE EDITOR **Erin Holland**
ASSOCIATE EDITOR **William C. Nelson**
ACCOUNT MANAGER **David Wilson**
COPY EDITOR **Rachel Dorrell**
DESIGN **DeLeon Design; Omak Partners**

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

**Christian Eiroa, Brian Ledtke, William C. Nelson,
Linda Squires, Larry Wagner**

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR **Scott Pearce**
Washington, DC
PRESIDENT **John Anderson**
Washington, DC
FIRST VICE PRESIDENT **Greg Zimmerman**
Lemoine, PA
TREASURER **Scott Regina**
Virginia Beach, VA
SECRETARY **Todd Naifeh**
Oklahoma City, OK
EX OFFICIO **Ken Neumann**
Libertyville, IL

DIRECTORS

Steve Castro *Frederick, MD*
Mike Condor *Nashville, TN*
Paul Groh *Germantown, WI*
Marvin Holthouser *Destin, FL*
Jessica Hutson *Springfield, MO*
Mame Kendall *Bridgeville, PA*
Phil Ledbetter *Chicago, IL*
Luz Normand *Miami, FL*
Harris Saunders *Birmingham, AL*
Randy Silverman *New Castle, PA*

ADMINISTRATION

SENIOR DIRECTOR, MEETINGS & EVENTS **Lisa Cox**
DIRECTOR, FEDERAL AFFAIRS **Josh Habursky**
SENIOR DIRECTOR, STATE LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS **Rachel Hall**
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER **Erin Holland**
ASSOCIATE MEMBER & OPERATIONS MANAGER **Christine Morgan**
RETAIL MEMBER SERVICES MANAGER **Greg Vickers**



© Copyright 2020. PCA The Magazine is a trademark of the Premium Cigar Association (PCA). All rights reserved. Reproduction or use in whole or in part of the contents of this magazine without prior written permission from the publisher is prohibited. PCA The Magazine makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of the content published. Neither the publisher nor the advertisers will be held responsible for any errors found herein, and the publisher accepts no liability for the accuracy of the statements made by advertisers in advertising and promotional materials. The opinions expressed by contributing editors are not necessarily those of the PCA, its directors, officers or staff. The information included and items promoted in this magazine are intended for an adult audience.



INTRODUCING
COHIBA ROYALE

Extraordinarily crafted. Full-bodied flavor.

COHIBA[®]

Experience Luxury at COHIBA.COM



Fighting the Bigger Smaller Battles

By Alex Harding, Kristoff Cigars

As the cigar industry copes with the effects of nationwide state-mandated shutdowns, it might be time to look to a more impactful front of an ever-growing battlefield. For years now, every cigar retailer, cigar manufacturer and cigar media outlet in the country has focused on the impending doom of the FDA regulation. While this is a true and noble cause, the FDA has been gridlocked by regulatory easing and the oppositional efforts from hardcore industry warriors. This is not to discount or discredit that battle or those who have fought it thus far, and, inevitably these regulations will rear their heads once again. There are, however, battles being fought constantly in every state in the nation that are being lost on a consistent basis that demand attention.

Some states are cigar-friendly, and some are not. That is not exactly new information, of course, but each legislative session usually brings about greater regulation that squeezes the possibility



for business. States like Colorado have instituted a 40 percent tobacco tax while the newly minted recreational marijuana businesses only pay 25 percent. On top of that, Colorado state legislators have implemented a permission that allows each county to charge its own tobacco tax rate on top of the 40 percent state rate already in effect. This is only one example of a state legislature run amok with its own power and idealistic agenda that hurts small business owners and their employees before ultimately exterminating a culture that fosters community and social inclusion. Other states like Arizona stay fairly consistent while implementing minor or unrecognizable

infringements on “cigar liberties” such as a 3-cent increase on the cigar tax. Even so, there is the rare occasion when local governments reverse their previous protocols and alleviate taxes and regulation. Even in these states where the cigar industry thrives with little oversight, the potential for legislative oppression is always one state congressional session away, which is why the industry as a whole needs to take a new approach to legislative concerns.

With the ongoing restrictions that businesses across the country are subjected to, there is a future to be had beyond pandemic pandemonium. The question that remains is what kind of new normal are participants in this industry

going to experience? Will each state enforce new social distancing measures that restrict the number of people permissible in each lounge? Will lounges be outlawed? Will nothing change? Will the cigar industry experience a boom when the dust and anxiety around the current pandemic settle? These are the kind of immediate and ever-changing scenarios that are haunting the thoughts of retailers and manufacturers alike. One thing is certain amongst varying predictions: The need to stand strong against government intervention is stronger than ever.

In order to ensure stronger business and more leisure in our industry, the fight must



first take place at the local level. Retailers in each state know the first fight is against local interference. State laws are more restrictive than the federal proposals every day of the week. In order to win these fights, the interests of retailers, manufacturers and cigar media outlets all need to coincide, and these three entities need to work in tandem. As the unity and strength of the combined efforts of the industry improve, so will the chances of success in the fight for free enterprise, first at the local level then ultimately at the federal level.

Retailers in each state first need to participate in their local state associations. This first step to success also goes hand in hand with the responsibility to acknowledge that there cannot be division and strife between neighboring retailers. This fight is not about special or exclusive interests, and that must be represented in the attitudes portrayed within each state association.

Manufacturers have incentive to participate in these state battles as well. By allowing themselves and their sales staff (who are present in each state) to participate in state

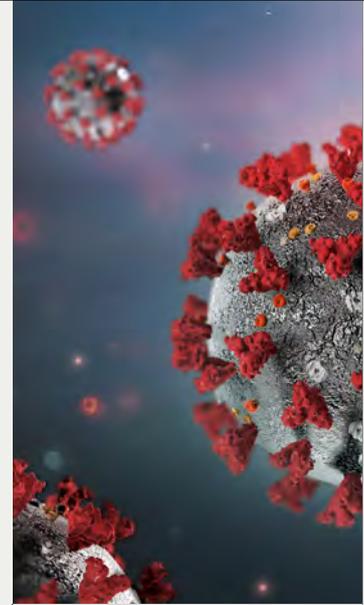
association meetings and hearings at state capitols, manufacturers are fighting to keep their customers thriving. This effort will not go unnoticed by anyone paying attention. Legislators will hear testimony from entities that have a larger scope on business and national regulation. Retailers will see that their partners in this industry care about doing business. And the manufacturers themselves are fighting to keep their business in each state intact.

Cigar media outlets have the capability to be of use as well. Manufacturers and media have been useful partners to promote sales and clout in the industry. These media outlets provide wonderful information and opportunities for the end-user to gain a new appreciation for cigars. What if this medium could be used to inform the consumer base more and more about state legislative battles across the country? By interviewing sales reps, shop owners and industry figureheads, the cigar media becomes more about the connection, the vines that bridge the various gaps between consumers, retailers,

manufacturers and the legislature. The more the outlets partner with PCA in particular on this front, the harder it is for legislators to avoid the ire of retailers and end-users.

The Premium Cigar Association has a unique opportunity to be heavily involved and to support each and every arm of the industry. By partnering with and sharing information between all of the concerned parties, the information battle is already won. Additionally, PCA has the resources to provide training and documentation to aid the lobbying battle with bolstered ranks of interested parties. By leading the effort, The Premium Cigar Association is proving its commitment to the survival of the industry along with everyone else.

2020 has already been a whirlwind, but the year has also provided us the opportunity to find a strong foundation to move forward into this new decade. Let us all do it together and let us create a new standard for the cigar industry across the nation that favors economic liberty and that we can all support.



Support for Pandemic Risk Insurance Act (H.R. 7011)

➔ The Premium Cigar Association, representing 3,000+ retail tobacconists, 30,000 employees, 250+ premium cigar manufactures and millions of consumers, expresses support for the Pandemic Risk Insurance Act (H.R. 7011) introduced by Rep. Carolyn Maloney.

H.R. 7011 is an important bill that helps protect events hosted by PCA members around the country, as well as events hosted by our association itself. PCA strongly believes we need to create the Pandemic





Risk Insurance Program, a system of shared public and private compensation for business interruption losses resulting from future pandemics or public health emergencies.

The losses suffered by the retail sector and the hundreds of events that were canceled in recent months due to COVID-19 affirm the need for this important program. This legislation is important to small businesses' economic recovery and certainty in times of public health crises. We look forward to working with Congress to advance this legislation and hope to be helpful in any way as the process continues. We are adding this bill to our blueprint to COVID-19 recovery for the premium cigar industry and will encourage our allies to support this bill.

2020 PCA Convention and Trade Show Cancelled

PCA announced in May it will cancel the PCA Convention and Trade Show that was scheduled to take place July 10–14, 2020, at the Sands/Venetian Convention Center and Hotel due to public health and safety

concerns related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

"After much deliberation and careful discussions of every aspect of our annual convention and trade show, the PCA Board and the Associate Member Advisory Board have made the difficult decision to cancel our event scheduled for July," said PCA Executive Director Scott Pearce. "The annual event is an important fixture in the premium tobacco industry, and we were very excited to bring a whole new experience to the industry this year. However, the public health and safety of our attendees, staff and volunteers outweighed any other considerations in our collective decision-making process."

Given the number of still-unknown factors related to the containment of the virus, and with PCA attendees coming from all over the country as well as internationally, PCA concluded that canceling the July face-to-face meeting was the safe and responsible action.

"We understand how important this event is to the business needs of both our manufacturers and our retailers, so we are redoubling our efforts to create innovative new ways

to aid our members this year," Pearce said.

Fourth Circuit Appeals Dismissed

On May 4, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit issued a ruling on the appeals of the U.S. District Court of Maryland's decisions in the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) case. In sum, the court dismissed the appeal on procedural grounds, claiming that Jan. 2, 2020, FDA guidance mooted the case for e-cigarettes and that the cigar industry should have sought to intervene sooner.

The Fourth Circuit case was about a very limited issue: whether the FDA acted through proper procedures when it extended deadlines for submitting marketing applications for "new tobacco products" in the "deemed" categories of products that the FDA began regulating in August of 2016, including e-cigarettes. Importantly, the deadlines at issue apply only to "deemed" products and only to those that qualify as "new tobacco products," that were on the U.S. market when the FDA began regulating these categories of products (i.e., Aug. 8, 2016), and

that do not already have marketing authorizations issued by the FDA. The case focused almost exclusively on e-cigarettes, and the only thing at issue for cigars and pipe tobacco was the FDA's authority to adjust the timing to extend the deadline until August 2021 for submitting marketing applications. The case had nothing to do with the substance of the application review process itself or whether it is lawful.

That the district court in this case has extended the May 12 deadline to Sept. 9 due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic mitigates the impacts of yesterday's decision to an extent. The FDA sought this extension after PCA and other industry members and groups petitioned the agency to extend the deadline.

Michael Edney, chair of the regulatory litigation practice at Steptoe & Johnson and lead counsel for the cigar associations, says he remains optimistic the premium cigar industry will ultimately be granted some relief: "The premium cigar industry continues to press ahead on its long-standing challenge to the legality of the substantial equivalence requirements as applied to our unique products. We are confident our challenge will prevail."●

Visol Private Label Cigar Accesories

- Small minimum quantity order
- No setup fee
- Free Logo Engraving



VCUT712
Your Cost: \$5

VLR405501
Your Cost: \$20

VLR402503
Your Cost: \$7

sales@visolproducts.com
www.VisolProducts.com
(877) 584-5149

VISOL

For my humidor, I use Boveda.

ROCKY PATEL
ROCKY PATEL CIGARS



CALL 952-243-2812
FOR WHOLESALE INQUIRIES

   @bovedainc  @bovedausa



SAVINELLI 1876

2020 COLLECTION



Federal Briefing



Small Business Recovery Over Regulation

By Joshua Habursky and Scott Pearce

→ Across the country, COVID-19 has decimated small businesses in nearly every industry, limiting sales, requiring new protocols, shuttering stores and resulting in droves of people heading to the unemployment line. The federal government has provided several beneficial programs to mitigate the negative economic effects of the pandemic, such as the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which has saved Main Street businesses during the downturn, but many of the challenges remain. As the country continues to reopen and address the far-reaching consequences of COVID-19, policymakers must create favorable conditions for mom-and-pop businesses to revitalize, rebuild and recover. Easing the regulatory burden on small businesses is an essential ingredient in the recipe for recovery.

The Trump administration has affirmed its commitment to deregulation and



acknowledged it as a necessary action to fuel economic recovery and create market certainty. The administration has an opportunity to save 3,000+ brick-and-mortar premium cigar retailers and over 30,000 retail jobs by addressing an unduly burdensome regulation in the Substantial Equivalence Rule (SE). Despite infrequent usage patterns, negligible youth usage and no significant public health threat according to the FDA/NIH PATH Study, premium cigars will become subject to costly (millions of dollars) and time-consuming testing and product marketing authorizations in September per the Substantial Equivalence Rule. This FDA regulation intended for mass market tobacco products poses an extreme threat to the sustainability of the artisanal craft of premium cigar making.

In January, the FDA acknowledged that premium

cigars are the lowest enforcement priority for premarket review, but nonetheless the requirements of the SE rule remain. In March, FDA Commissioner Dr. Stephen Hahn testified before a House Appropriations subcommittee and was asked about the SE rule as it relates to premium cigars. He affirmed that these products would have to undergo premarket review but indicated that additional guidance and a more streamlined process would be put forth by FDA for these products. Ultimately, the original deadline for SE was moved from May 12 to Sept. 9 by court order due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Trump Administration and the FDA now have an opportunity to provide regulatory relief and the rightsizing of an overreaching rule to prevent closure of small businesses.

The premium cigar

industry cannot survive if this rule goes into effect. Many brands and blends that are enjoyed by adults would be forced off the shelves and tens of millions of dollars would have to be spent by manufacturers to comply with a rule never meant for premium products. Consumer choice would also be significantly limited, and the market would be constricted to very few corporate powers at the price of family-owned companies and small businesses. Exemption from the Substantial Equivalence rule, or at the very least, tailoring it to premium cigars, is a perfect example of where the administration can support small business recovery over regulation in order to spur economic recovery and retain jobs following a difficult time for the retail industry.

Whether you enjoy a premium cigar socially or only for celebratory occasions, this is a rule that will have far-reaching consequences for consumers, as well as retailers and manufacturers in the industry. Unfortunately, the clock is running out and if action isn't taken by the administration, many of the cherished premium cigar brands will have their last dance.



PCA COVID-19 Federal Policy Blueprint for Recovery

→ PCA is calling upon Congress and the Trump administration to take action to create conditions where our members can not only rebuild and recover, but eventually grow their businesses. We hope that Congress and the Trump administration will consider key areas that are critical to recovery for our industry, consisting of FDA Regulatory Relief, Small Business Program (PPP) Reform, Liability Protection and Tax Policy.

For the full Blueprint Report, visit our website premiumcigars.org/news.

The House and Senate are currently negotiating another wave of COVID-19 relief and you can voice your concerns with Congress and support our Blueprint for Recovery by sending a message that only takes minutes to send.

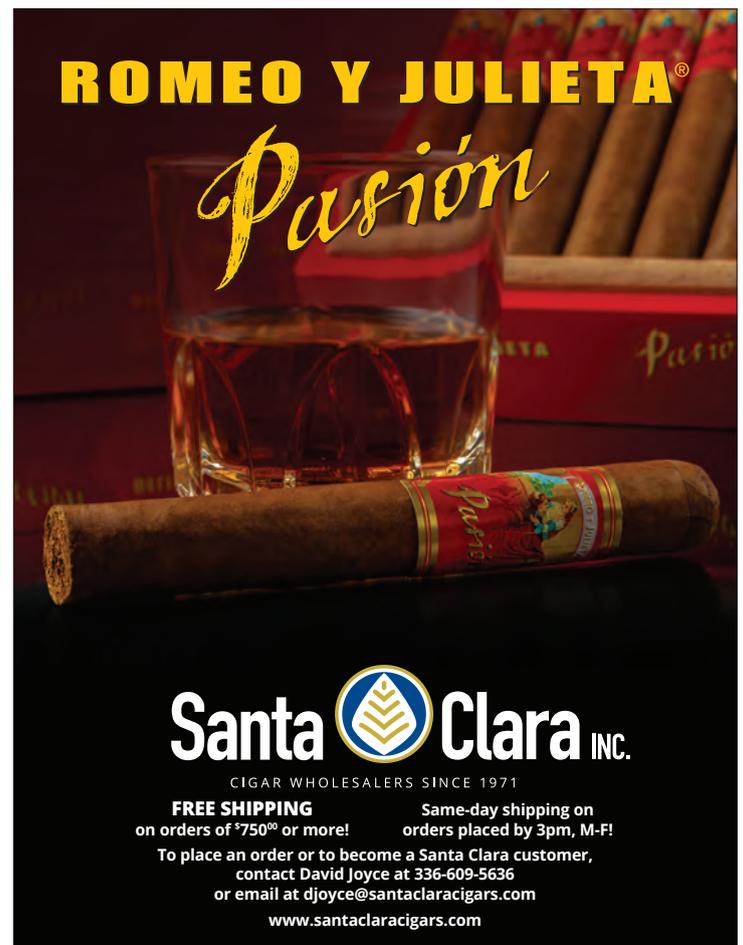
If your business is undergoing a specific challenge or if you have ideas on additional governmental relief measures, contact our Director of Federal Affairs Joshua Habursky at joshua@premiumcigars.org or 814-881-1618.

Supporting the American Consumer

→ As the national discussion shifts toward reopening of the economy, it is critical to support consumers who participate in face-to-face retail transactions. Whether motivated by personal or business demands, consumers are the primary participants in restarting the economy. For the economy to recover under these conditions, the market will require improved liquidity, bolstered confidence and incentivized safe interactions at the point of sale.

We encourage Congress and the Trump administration to consider the continued postponement of deadlines for certain tax filings and collections to assist the recovery of individuals returning to full-time employment; the restoration of the business entertainment tax deduction where business meals are brought in line with other regularly incurred business expenses; and the implementation of a temporary travel tax credit for qualified travel expenses.

For the full "Supporting American Consumers" PDF, visit premiumcigars.org. ●



ROMEO Y JULIETA®
Pasión

Santa Clara INC.
CIGAR WHOLESALERS SINCE 1971

FREE SHIPPING on orders of \$750⁰⁰ or more!
Same-day shipping on orders placed by 3pm, M-F!

To place an order or to become a Santa Clara customer, contact David Joyce at 336-609-5636 or email at djoyce@santaclaracigars.com
www.santaclaracigars.com



STORES NOW OPEN!
GET BACK TO WORK SPECIALS

BUY 1 GET 1 FREE
Serino Royale Maduro Petite Sublime
Serino Royale Belicoso Medio
Serino Royale Robusto Gordo Medio
Serino Wayfarer Dalia

BUY 2 GET 1 FREE
Serino Royale Maduro XX Belicoso
Serino Royale Maduro XX Toro

SERINO ROYALE

HAND CRAFTED CIGARS

➤ JRE Tobacco Company Aladino Habano

JRE Tobacco Company is releasing a new offering under its Aladino blend. The Aladino Habano is a Honduran puro with all of the tobaccos coming from the JRE Tobacco Farm. As the name indicates, it features a Honduran Habano. It's being initially released in one size, a 48 x 4 1/2 Rothschild. It will carry a price point of \$6 and be packaged in 50-count boxes. The Aladino Habano and the recently announced Aladino Cameroon are the fifth and sixth blends under JRE Tobacco's Aladino brand.

JRE Tobacco already offers Habano wrapper blends under its other brands Tatascan and Rancho Luna.



➤ Camacho Liberty Series

For the 18th year in a row, Camacho is releasing the Liberty Series limited edition to celebrate and honor the birth and history of the United States. Each year, the cigar gets released ahead of the Fourth of July.

This year the cigar is a 6 x 60 box-pressed Gordo that uses four different primings of tobacco, representing a single farm and single vintage. The tobacco has been aged four years, from the Ecuadorian Habano wrapper to the Dominican and Honduran Corojo fillers. The cigars are packed in single coffins within a box decorated with American imagery.

"To celebrate our 18th release that commemorates American heritage, we sought out unique tobaccos to create a special blend that showcases the versatility that the Camacho brand has to offer," said Edward Simon, chief marketing officer of Oettinger Davidoff AG. "Comprised of original Corojo tobacco from Honduras and tobaccos from the Dominican Republic, this blend provides a complex and memorable smoking experience that we feel best honors this remarkable series."



E.P. Carrillo Pledge

In August, E.P. Carrillo will unveil a third installment to its Perez-Carrillo Family Series called Pledge. The Perez-Carrillo Family Series is the most premium line in the E.P. Carrillo portfolio and it contains two of the company's most highly acclaimed cigars, the E.P. Carrillo Encore and the E.P. Carrillo La Historia.

The name was chosen from input from consumers who visited the E.P. Carrillo booth at Cigar Aficionado's 2019 Big Smoke Las Vegas event. E.P. Carrillo says Pledge is meant to be an homage to all cigar smokers.

The E.P. Carrillo Pledge uses a Connecticut Havana-seed wrapper over an Ecuadorian binder and all-Nicaraguan filler. The cigars are being released in two box-pressed sizes: a 5 x 50 Robusto and a 6 x 52 Toro.



> HVC Cigars Expands 500th Anniversary Lineup

In 2019, HVC Cigars launched 500th Anniversary to celebrate the founding of Havana, Cuba, where HVC Cigars' owner Reinier Lorenzo was born. "For me, the cigar is about remembering where we come from," said Lorenzo in a press release announcing the additional sizes to the 500th Anniversary line.

Originally released in one size, Tesoros (5 7/8 x 52), 500th Anniversary quickly sold out. The two new sizes to the 500th Anniversary lineup are Shorts (4 1/2 x 52) and Selectos (5 7/8 x 46). The Shorts are an online exclusive series for Privada Cigar Club and Selectos will be available at brick-and-mortar tobacconists. Each of the cigars is made from a Corojo '99 wrapper grown in Nicaragua's lush Jalapa Valley, a Nicaraguan Corojo '99 binder, also grown in Jalapa, and Nicaraguan Corojo '99 and Criollo '98 filler tobaccos grown in Estelí and Jalapa. Between the two sizes, 12,000 15-count boxes are available.

XIKAR Meridian Lighter

> XIKAR, the world's leading cigar accessory brand, announces the XIKAR Meridian triple soft flame lighter. The XIKAR Meridian lighter pays homage to tradition with a classic soft flame in a triple format which blends elegance, innovation and function. The powerful triple soft flame, the first of its kind, fully envelops the foot for a perfectly lit cigar. The XIKAR Meridian's fuel system creates three separate flames that join together to create a large and powerful

flame perfect for today's larger ring cigars.

The XIKAR Meridian lighter also features a prominent roller bar for easy ignition, a large faceted body for a comfortable grip, XIKAR's signature red EZ-View fuel window, and an easy-to-access compartment for XIKAR flint refilling.

Available in six finishes: black, gunmetal, red and blue, each with polished gunmetal accents; black with gold accents; and black with rose gold accents. Suggested retail is \$149.99. ●





The Kristoff JT Signature



RISTOFF IS KNOWN to many cigar lovers as a “boutique” brand, simply because that is how the company got its start. But in truth, Kristoff outgrew its boutique descriptor some time ago. The company’s production now reportedly runs into the millions of cigars per year. Yet it continues to be a tightly held business, run by family and friends. Owner Glen Case named the company for his son Christopher. His Britannia line is named for his daughter Brittany. The JT Signature, subject of this piece, is named for his national sales vice president, Jarrid Trudeau. All of this tells us that Case is a man who honors and values the people closest to him.

Case had come from a career as a successful finance executive—vice president of marketing and product development for a large bank—but he also adored cigars. So, in what he claims was something of a midlife crisis, Case decided to launch his own cigar brand. It takes a big investment of time and money to make a move like that, but Case evidently had enough of both. He launched Kristoff in 2004, and the brand has succeeded splendidly.

About the JT Signature: The first thing that tobacconists need to know is that if they wish to add this product to their shelves, they will have to book a Kristoff event. This is to say that, so far, it has been an exclusive, event-only cigar. It is also Kristoff’s only box-pressed cigar.

Trudeau’s position in Kristoff, and as a cigar professional generally, came to him thanks to a spot of good timing. He remembers meeting Case at a cigar event in his native Rhode Island. “There happened to be a cigar magazine in the lounge with an article about Kristoff Cigars,” Trudeau recalls, “so just before Glen arrived to run his event, I’d had a chance to read up on the company.” Trudeau says that, as part of the event, Case ran a sort of quiz contest, asking those present who knew the facts about his company. “As it happened,”



Above, Glen Case, owner.
Left, Jarrid Trudeau, vice president, national sales.

Trudeau says, “Glen found me well-briefed. So we struck up a fast friendship.”

Trudeau was, by vocation, a high-level marketing specialist, at Target and at Bed Bath & Beyond—and by obsession, another cigar lover, like Case. “But both Glen

and I are businessmen,” Trudeau emphasizes. “We enjoy doing business with cigar people who know the numbers in their businesses.”

Case remembers their first meeting similarly. “It is rare to be able to work with someone that you truly want to hang with, let alone, someone you consider a true friend,” Case says. “I always get my ab workout from laughing when I’m with Jarrid. I don’t think I’ve met someone who



is so quick-witted. After we spoke for a while at that first meeting, I told him if he was ever looking to get into the cigar industry, I'd like to talk to him. We stayed in touch over the next year or so, and one day he said he was willing to make a switch from his very successful corporate career. As he would be Kristoff's first in-house sales rep, neither of us knew what this would look like. Fast-forward three years, he is now our VP of sales! In short," Case sums up, "it is a privilege to work with a man I call my brother."

These reflections go far toward explaining what is perhaps the most striking departure for Kristoff in its JT Signature: While Case himself

had always been the creative driver on previous releases, the JT Signature is in fact the brainchild of Trudeau—thus the JT in the product name.

Trudeau says development of the JT Signature took two years, from concept to its release date in August of last year. "I knew I wanted to make this cigar from the very day I first tasted the wrapper leaf," Trudeau says. "I picked out the tobaccos. I specified the shape and the packaging."

Customers are responding well. Trudeau reports that he and his sales team have shepherded the JT Signature into more than 40 shops to date. Bill Coyne, Kristoff's mid-Atlantic regional sales rep, says, "The JT Signature brings

"We were one of the first retailers to help launch the JT Signature. Our customers seem to like it very much, because I notice they are making repeat buys." Laramie Navrath, manager at ZT Cigars in Oklahoma City, says: "It's a fantastic blend—nice box-press, Kristoff's first box-press. The flavor is rich and full-bodied, and the cigar sells great."

a new angle to our product portfolio. I think every blender has certain things that they tend to look for in a blend, or ways of going through the blending process. Getting Jarrid involved adds a different perspective to the way we make Kristoff cigars, without forsaking the foundation that has made Kristoff one of the fastest growing cigar brands on the market."

Scott Sinclair, manager at Renegade Cigars in Richardson, Texas, said, "We were one of the first retailers to help launch the JT Signature. Our customers seem to like it very much, because I notice they are making repeat buys." Laramie Navrath, manager at ZT Cigars in Oklahoma City says: "It's a fantastic blend—nice box-press, Kristoff's first box-press. The flavor is rich and full-bodied, and the cigar sells great."

As previously mentioned, stores wanting to stock the JT Signature will need to book a Kristoff event to get that ball rolling. Email Jarrid Trudeau at jarrid@kristoff.com to get your venue onto his schedule.



JT Signature

Manufacturer: Kristoff Cigars

Blender: Jarrid Trudeau

6¼ x 54 ring gauge

Vitola: Toro Extra, box-pressed

Wrapper: Ecuador (HVA Habano)

Binder: Sumatra

Filler: Mexican San Andrés and Dominican Republic

Country of manufacture: Dominican Republic

Factory: Tabacalera Von Eicken

Available in 20-count boxes

Limited edition, marketed exclusively through event booking

Pricing: Determined by retailers

The cigar for this review was provided by Kristoff Cigars

Smoking time: 90 minutes



To be sure, the bands are pretty. The primary band is a tasteful gold upon gray. The shiny, black foot band is accented in red and gold script *JT*—the color scheme chosen in homage to blender Jarrid Trudeau’s fondness for the Boston Red Sox. Both bands hint at investment, and they both effortlessly slide right off their respective ends, which is a nice touch.

⦿ Liberated from its cellophane, the JT Signature exudes a pre-light aroma evocative of moist, herbal plowed garden soil. The cigar features reasonably firm construction, although the rounded

edges of the rectangular box-pressed shape give it a slightly softened hand feel. The shiny wrapper leaf exhibits almost no veininess detectable to the touch, and the seams are visible only on account of some color variation in the wrapper leaf, which ranges from dark chocolate to nutmeg red. The cold draw is easy, almost loose. Cold notes are fairly conventional, delivering further on the earth and herbal notes foreshadowed in the box fragrance.

⦿ A guillotine cut was the way to go on this pigtail head, and a single wood match was all it took to blaze up the shaggy foot. I have always loved putting soft flame to a shaggy foot, whose hanging loose-leaf tags

make for an ideal sort of “kindling,” usually delivering a nice, round cherry instantly on light-up—which this cigar did deliver.

⦿ First flavor notes after light-up bring a burst of black pepper and cappuccino, but in five minutes the flavors are already multiplying: buttered bread, sage and black tea. The retrohale tweaks the sinuses with some chili pepper, but softened with earth, it’s not so powerful as to overwhelm the senses. This is a smoky cigar, right away filling the room with an agreeable blue haze. To my taste, already I can tell the JT Signature leans toward the full-bodied end of the scale. The nic hit is about medium, at least at first.



☉ At 20 minutes I've got a 1½-inch ash helping regulate the burn, a bit ragged on the end owing to the shaggy foot; but the burn and the burn line are thus far well-behaved. We'll see how long the ash holds on of its own accord. (Turns out it held for 36 minutes, finally dropping when it was just over 2 inches long.) The ash sheds flakes now and then, but generally comes through with the solid performance we'd expect of a premium handmade. The burn line is slightly wavy, but the cigar has so far required no touch-up or relight.

☉ At 40 minutes the flavors are caramelizing and mellow—just good, strong, fermented tobacco and creamed coffee over a sort of blue-clay background, if you can try to imagine blue clay burning—an intriguing and appealing profile, if a bit unconventional.

☉ Only after an hour of smoking does the cigar need its first touch-up to restore a perfectly formed burn line, but that's OK. The cigar is fairly singing now, asserting its abounding personality in full-bodied heft. For a softy like me, this is just about all the power I need in a late-afternoon smoke. It really could use a good scotch on the rocks for fullest gustatory

perfection—which, fortunately, I am equipped to provide, and I recommend others do likewise. Now I'm not sure whether my head is swimming from the JT Signature or the Johnny Walker Black ... but I must say, the two products play well together, and it's a thoroughly pleasant, dreamlike state they've brought me to. I note that the Vitamin N is coming on somewhat stronger now as well.

☉ At 75 minutes I'm down to the final 2 inches, and if anything the flavors are again mellower, with some dark chocolate entering the picture—a nice transition I had not expected so late in the game. After an hour and a half, I finally have to set this baby down. It's feeling toasty, and I am sated.

☉ One thing's for certain: At least for me, this is no morning smoke. The JT Signature is an alluringly complex experience that deserves the attention of any who want a commanding cigar with a unique personality. Your local tobacconist will need to arrange an event with Kristoff to get the JT Signature into the store. Have them email company vice president of sales Jarrid Trudeau to make that happen, at jarrid@kristoff.com. This cigar makes it well worth strolling the extra mile. 🍷



Tabacalera Falto Ingenio #10



VERY CIGAR maker could claim that their cigars are “the most unique” or “different from the other guy,”

and it would probably be true—to a point. But Luis Falto, founder of Tabacalera Falto Inc., has found a way to make each cigar truly special. You see, each of his 23 blends comes in only one vitola and size. Falto has achieved the creation of ultra-boutique premium cigars.

To further the ultra-boutique mystique, Falto has also chosen to only make small quantities of each blend, with a production size capping at just 160 boxes for each cigar that come in boxes of 20–26, and 250 boxes for the cigars that come in boxes of 10. This means Falto typically only produces about 2,500–4,000 of each blend, per annual production.

“I choose only one size because it is my belief that that specific size is the one that best complements and develops the tastes and characteristics of the tobaccos used,” Falto explains.

A lifelong cigar smoker, Falto credits his loving father, who showed him how to properly enjoy a premium



Luis Falto

cigar, with jump-starting his journey into the premium cigar industry. It was during the cigar boom of the mid '90s that Falto, while studying at George Washington University, decided to travel to the Dominican Republic to learn as much as he could about tobacco and the blending process. He soon met Manuel Inoa, master blender at La Aurora Cigar Company, and they hit it off instantly. Falto's enthusiasm and ideas were shared by Inoa and a partnership soon began—

one that has lasted for 25 years.

“No one would have thought of making a cigar with only a single size per blend,” Inoa says. “The normal way of doing things is that you have a blend, then you use that blend for at least four sizes. At that time nobody had that boutique concept down. Now, the new generation is imitating it; something that seemed illogical in those days is now a huge success.”

One of Falto's blends I've been particularly taken with



Can you provide some sales tips that retailers can use when selling the Ingenio #10?

Falto: The biggest selling point is that the yearly production is only 500 cigars a year (100 boxes of 5 cigars each) and comes in a 6 x 60 Figurado/Perfecto size. That concept is unheard of in the cigar industry. That is why I call them ultra-boutique premium cigars; small quantities with the best tobacco from around the world and excellence in quality control. You will be smoking something that is very unique.

recently is the Falto Ingenio #10, originally released in 2010. It is only the second Perfecto cigar Falto has blended (the first being the Falto Prominente Gran Reserva Especial.) The word *ingenio* is Spanish for ingenuity; it is named for his father who used his ingenuity as a professional engineer.

“I called it # 10, because it was the tenth blend I tried until I got the right one,” Falto says. “When I am blending, I am always looking for a balanced complexity and lots of taste. For this cigar, I used Corojo grown in Ecuador for the wrapper. I used a Nicaraguan binder and a blend of four different countries for the filler. The combination of all these tobaccos was exactly what I was looking for in a cigar at that moment.”

The Ingenio #10’s production is capped at 500 cigars a year and is made by just one roller at the La Aurora factory, Manual Salas, who Falto says is one of the most skilled rollers in the factory. The fact that Falto knows Salas’ name is no surprise, as he

tries to meet and know every torcedores who rolls his cigars.

Falto shares that most of his cigars will take about two years from conception to finished product, and the Ingenio #10 was no exception. “I had to choose from the tobaccos that La Aurora provided me with and then tweak the ratios,” Falto says. “It is a process of trial and error. Normally, when blending, I already have an idea of what I’m looking for. The challenge, which is actually an adventure, is trying different tobaccos and see how they harmonize or not; their aromas, tastes, and characteristics.”

Finally, to make sure you don’t forget these are special cigars; Falto puts each of his Ingenio #10 cigars into its own coffin case and then that case goes into an unvarnished box of five cigars.

“I’m 45, so I’ve been involved with tobacco for more than half of my life,” Falto says. “In this industry you never stop learning, so I want to keep exploring and I look forward to the next 25 years.”



Ingenio #10

6 x 60 ring gauge (Figurado/Perfecto)

Wrapper: Ecuador Corojo

Binder: Nicaragua

Filler: Nicaragua, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Cameroon

Manufactured in the Dominican Republic at La Aurora Cigar Company

\$80 MSRP for a 5-count box

\$16 retail for single

Time to smoke: 1 hour and 10 minutes

When reviewing a cigar, I usually make it a point to smoke the cigar indoors, where I can steep myself in the aromas; however, COVID-19 decided to wreak havoc on my cigar smoking plans so I had to resign myself to sampling the Ingenio #10 outdoors. But I didn't just want to smoke this cigar on any ol' apartment balcony—no, I took this special cigar to the roof of my office on a blindingly sunny Wisconsin afternoon, basking in the warmer weather after a shockingly long winter and an even longer quarantine.

⦿ First off, I love when cigars come in coffins: It's like opening a present. The pre-light inspection reveals a mocha-colored wrapper with a few visible veins but otherwise smooth. Of the five cigars in my box, each one appeared like the cap was affixed a little on the shoddy side. This did not affect the taste nor

my enjoyment of the cigar; it's simply aesthetics.

⦿ The Ingenio #10 seems tightly packed, maybe a wee bit on the dry side, but the pre-light draw is open and features pleasant initial flavor notes of cedar and earth.

⦿ The cigar lights up easily, and I immediately get welcome aromas of cedar, and a hint of something sweet. These aromas are abundant despite my being outside with a slight breeze. I can only imagine how wonderful these aromas would be if I were inside.

⦿ I'm not sure if it was the breeze or not but the first third of the cigar canoed a bit but it soon corrected itself and I didn't need to touch it up at all. The burn line did stay a little wonky throughout but it wasn't an issue.

⦿ This cigar is definitely more on the full-bodied side. I can really feel the strength in this one.

⦿ The farther along I get, and the larger the ring gauge, the more the flavors seem to pop, and the draw opens up even more. There are some spicy flavors that make their way into the cigar in the second third—some pepper, cinnamon and nutmeg. I'm getting a significant kick of pepper in the back of the throat and in the retrohale. It actually tickles the nose a little bit.

⦿ The smoke output is superb and the draw continues to be fantastic. The solid ash holds for about an inch and a half, but I'm convinced it would have held on longer had I not been outside. This is a very well-constructed cigar.



☉ Flavors and aroma stay spicier and woody into the final third of the cigar. As I mentioned earlier, no further touch-ups were needed.

☉ I paired the Ingenio #10 with a foreign stout called Fade to Black from Left Hand Brewing Company. This beer is jet black and is like drinking delicious motor oil; a perfect companion to this fuller-bodied cigar. Just be careful standing up after consuming both of these.

☉ Smoking Falto's fantastic cigar on the roof was such an enjoyable experience—the first cigar I got to enjoy in almost three weeks due to the quarantine. I can't wait until the lounges are open so I can try one of these indoors and just let the smoke dance around my head rather than blowing away with the wind. As a matter of fact, this cigar would be an excellent choice for a celebration cigar to enjoy when all of this craziness is over. 🍷



El Septimo Mirifico Sapphire



AS A SECOND-GENERATION tobacconist, with over 40 years of retail and wholesale experience, I can affirm that I have never encountered a cigar company quite like El Septimo!

A relative newcomer to the premium cigar-manufacturing scene, El Septimo began production in 2005, boldly proclaiming to have “launched a lifelong project to move away from tradition that limits the quality of the world’s most important brands, and instead offer something new.”

In their mission statement they proudly proclaim: “El Septimo Cigars are completely organic, with zero preservatives or chemicals added, and are free of nitrosamines, tars, and impurities. While holding an El Septimo Cigar, you will instantly recognize the superiority over other known brands, as even the product’s packaging exudes El Septimo’s greatness.”

As if that assertion weren’t enough, they go on to declare, “El Septimo symbolizes the seventh day of creation in which God rested and appreciated his work, creating a unique smoking experience that represents the joy of living and being here, in this exact moment.”

Wow! That’s setting the bar pretty high, putting cigar production on a level with Divine creation! If nothing else, that’s got to pique your interest.

In 2019, El Septimo Cigars was acquired by La Grande Maison Younan Collection, a global luxury brand of consumer products, estate properties and lifestyle services. Company President Zaya Younan bought the company after having smoked the cigars in Paris, and determined that no other cigar could compare to what he now considered the best cigar in the world. The company’s media kit explains: “Because El Septimo Cigars were only available for purchase in Europe, Younan purchased the company with the goal of making it accessible to its devoted customers and loyal followers worldwide.”

The cigars are rolled in El Septimo’s factory in Costa Rica, and then shipped to the company’s headquarters in Geneva to be inspected and packed. From there they are sent to the



Above, Zaya Younan. Opposite page, Alexandra Younan.





U.S. offices in Woodland Hills, California, for distribution to the American market.

Mr. Younan's personal story is no less audacious than that of his nascent cigar company. He came to the U.S. from Tehran, Iran, as a youth, after having been accepted to a boarding school in Chicago.

"When I came here I was 13, back in 1977, on my own. As parents we wouldn't let our kids do that anymore; now I call my parents irresponsible," he says, laughing. He parlayed that tuition-free education into matriculation at the University of Illinois, graduated with a degree in engineering, and went on to work for Fortune 500 companies such as General Motors, Johnson Controls and TRW.

Younan's next move was to invest in commercial real estate, becoming the largest

holder of commercial office space in Dallas. He later spent over 15 years working with high-technology companies in Silicon Valley.

He currently presides over a vast enterprise encompassing luxury hotels and resorts in France, including several vineyards in Bordeaux, and a beachside resort in Portugal, in addition to the recently acquired premium cigar maker El Septimo in Geneva.

Younan was joined at his company by his daughter Alexandra, after she graduated from Chapman University in 2019 with a degree in business management. She began her training at the company as a digital marketing analyst, moving on to become the company's digital marketing and branding manager. Her influence can be detected everywhere from the French Chateau named for her, the

“When we saw El Septimo, they had made so much progress in literally reinventing every aspect of the process of cigar making, we were so fascinated by it, we saw the cigar as an extension of the luxury lifestyle.”

Alexandra Palace, to the eponymous cigar line she helped shepherd through trial blending and packaging, utilizing market research to determine the final versions of each.

The Alexandra Collection comprises two distinct cigars, designed and blended for women without pandering to preconceived notions of what a woman's cigar should be. The medium-bodied Marilyn is a hefty 5 x 58 ring robusto offering flavors of coffee and nutmeg, with the “smaller” (5 1/4 x 54), milder Coco presenting a floral, cedar aroma and tasting notes of sweet cream and spice. These are cigars clearly meant to be enjoyed by all types of smokers, regardless of gender.

El Septimo Cigars stand out by virtue of their unique waterproof acrylic boxes, bold graphic designs, vivid



primary colors, and, most significantly, an in-your-face lineup of unique shapes, ranging from a mind-bending 2 1/4-inch by 56 ring gauge torpedo, to the aptly named 6 1/3 x 68 Fabuloso.

The cigars are entirely Costa Rican puros, with dark, oily wrappers grown at an elevation of 650 feet, in the volcanic soil of their mountain valley plantations. The tobaccos used in the more than 30 distinctive vitolas range from 5 to 15 years in age.

Although several prominent cigar manufacturers had previously approached him, Younan had little interest in owning a cigar company. However, when he discovered El Septimo, he became captivated by the brand's unique shapes, extra-aged tobaccos and inventive packaging.

"When we saw El Septimo, they had made so much progress in literally reinventing every aspect of the process of cigar making, we were so fascinated by it, we saw the cigar as an extension of the luxury lifestyle," he recalls, with great enthusiasm. To that end, the entire product range of cigars, accessories and wines is available in the exclusive lounges located in their chateaus throughout France.



Sapphire

Brand: El Septimo

Series: Diamond Collection Sapphire

Shape Name: Mirifico, 7 X 58

Country of Origin: Costa Rica

Components: All Costa Rican Tobacco

Smoking Time: 1 hour 40 minutes

Samples furnished by The Younan Collection

Where to begin? The word *mirifico*, as translated from Spanish and Portuguese, signifies admirable, wonderful. Frankly, that doesn't even come close to describing how incredibly fantastic this cigar is.

Let's start with the appearance. This bomb is impressive; at 7 inches long and a generous 58-ring gauge, it's like holding a stick of dynamite in your hand! The cigar is firm to the touch, with good weight. It features a well-executed Spanish marble head with a triple seam cap. The foot of the cigar is pressed flat with the wrapper leaf folded together, producing a small, tight pigtail. The Costa Rican wrapper is a reddish-brown mahogany color; with a light, oily sheen. Adorning the cigar is a glossy, navy blue cigar band, trimmed in reflective silver. In the center of the band is the brand's logo—a numeral seven imposed over a bright silver ink splotch. The

look is contemporary, contrasting nicely with the classic Cuban look of the cigar itself.

The cigar's cold aroma is of earth, leather and a touch of dried fruit. A 1/4-inch punch cut to the head offers a slightly resistant draw, until the single jet flame of my trusty S.T. Dupont Xtend gently ignites the folded wrapper, opening up a full-flowing draw. The Mirifico produces copious amounts of thick, layered smoke. Flavors of sweet marzipan and vanilla coat the mouth, while a tingling sensation invigorates the palate and the nasal passages.

The cigar burns slowly and evenly, producing an ever-so-slightly wavy burn line. The ash is a steely gray—and dense. It's solid enough that the pigtail is still visible in the ash.

The taste evolves to baking spices and molasses, and there's a pastry-like sweetness that's difficult to pin down, possibly graham cracker.



⦿ The first third of the ash taps into the ashtray with what could almost be a thud. The burn line remains even and the Mirifico is cruising without a thought of going out.

⦿ The draw is ideal, with the slightest of resistance but plenty of smoke production. Flavors of raisins, dates and fruit jam take over, with the spices receding into the background. The tingling on the palate persists.

⦿ In the second half the strength picks up. It's still sweet but getting stronger. The burn is beautiful, with the carbon line razor sharp.

⦿ In the final third, the flavors remain fairly constant. There's not much in the way of transitions, but I'm fine with that. I like the flavors and sensations I'm getting and am not looking to get away from them.

⦿ At the end, the burn line is straighter than any time previously. This cigar just keeps getting better as it goes; beautifully textured gray ash, full flavor, no heat and firm construction, all the way to the final nub, when I reluctantly set it down at the 100-minute mark, and it's still burning! The Mirifico cruised for over an hour and a half, and never needed touching up or relighting. Pretty impressive for a 7-inch log!

⦿ The final analysis is that this cigar is a winner. It's pricey as hell at the suggested retail of \$79, but I'd have to say, from a standpoint of sheer enjoyment and the duration of the smoking experience, it's worth it.

In the words of company president Zaya Younan himself: "Not every aficionado can smoke an El Septimo every day, but everyone should be able to once a month!" 🍷



PERDOMO CIGARS:

SUCCESS



THROUGH

DEDICATION,

SCIENCE AND

PURE LOVE

*— The Perdomo family
is living out a classic
American success story*





Nick Jr. and Nicholas Perdomo

STORY BY WILLIAM C. NELSON PHOTOS BY LAWRENCE REAM

P

Perdomo Cigars projects such a sprawling presence in the cigar world, and presents such a complex story, that it is difficult to know how we can do it justice in a brief magazine treatment. Nicholas Perdomo Jr., president and CEO (people call him Nick), started his company in 1992 in Miami, in his garage, as Nick's Cigar Co.—this, while holding down a full-time job as an air traffic controller, a vocation he had learned while in the U.S. Navy. Perdomo and wife, Janine, who is now COO of the company, oversaw three rollers while handling the packaging and shipping themselves, and in their first year of business they sold 9,000 cigars.

By 1994 Perdomo was out of the garage and into more capacious facilities, first in Miami and then additionally in Tampa. Soon enough the company found itself selling a million cigars, whereupon Perdomo's father, Nick Sr., came out of retirement to help guide the growth. In 1995 the father urged a move of production to Estelí, Nicaragua, where the company built its own large factory.

That's one nutshell view of developments. But to get down into the nitty-gritty and see the details is to appreciate the seriousness with which Perdomo Cigars approaches product development, quality control, numerical analytics, strategic product merchandizing, and a careful balance of technology and tradition. Their formula obviously works: Today Perdomo



“IT’S A BLESSING TO BE ABLE TO WORK SO WELL WITH YOUR FAMILY. IT CERTAINLY DOESN’T HURT HAVING SUCH A DEDICATED AND LOYAL WORKFORCE WHO REALLY ARE AN EXTENSION OF OUR FAMILY.”

Cigars is one of the largest cigar makers in the world, a vertically integrated business machine employing several thousand people, offering dozens of product lines, everything humming along under the watchful eye of the Perdomos and their trusted staff.

Nick says: “It’s a blessing to be able to work so well with your family. It certainly doesn’t hurt having such a dedicated and loyal workforce who really are an extension of our family. Our workforce, we’re proud to say, has averaged over 19 years with our company, and surely that makes our team very special.”

The Perdomos pursue a philosophy that asserts,



“THE COMPANY’S AGRICULTURAL OPERATIONS RESIDE IN THREE OF THE MOST FERTILE REGIONS IN NICARAGUA: THE ESTELÍ VALLEY, THE CONDEGA VALLEY AND THE FAMED JALAPA VALLEY, WITH MORE THAN 1,200 ACRES OF TOBACCO GROWN YEARLY.”

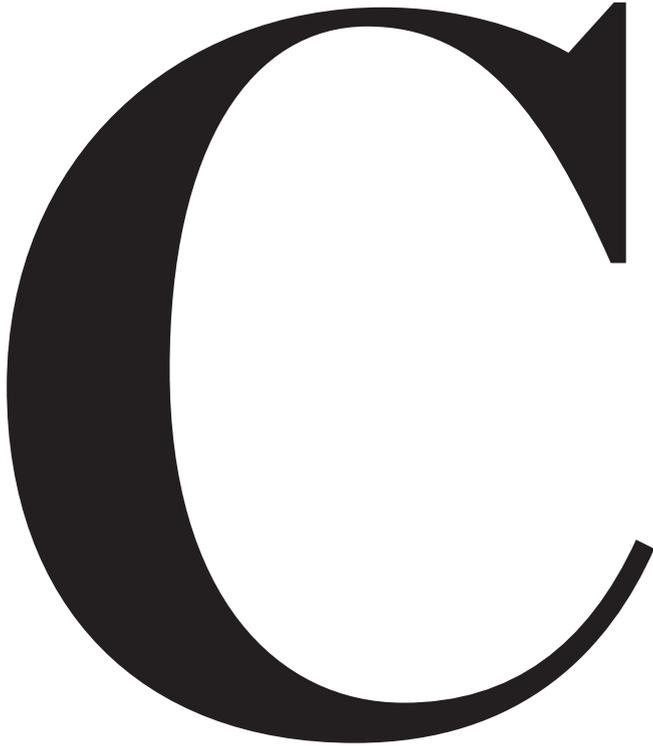
“Quality will always bring quantity.” But keeping tight control of that quality meant retaining in-house ownership of production in every detail. Today Perdomo Cigars has its own agronomy department to manage water and soil on its farms. They hybridize their own seed lines. They monitor and record the weather conditions on their farms. They filter and precisely fertilize their irrigation water using the most advanced Israeli water-treatment technology—all this, while retaining use of simple ox-and-plow methods for turning the volcanic soil, which they regard as a sacred gift of Nicaraguan tectonics. They fabricate their own boxes and packaging. Before each Perdomo cigar is sealed in its box, it undergoes 17 quality checks, including draw testing.

Achieving excellence in any cigar line is one thing; achieving it *consistently* throughout a full portfolio is more than a step beyond. And Perdomo Cigars is known and appreciated for the product consistency their process brings to market, and for top value for the price. Nick says formulating a vision of mastering and owning every step of the production process, from genetics to final product, amounted to a real turning point for the company.

Another turning point was the move of production from Florida to Estelí—Nick Sr.’s idea. The soils, climate and abundance of water he had found in

Nicaragua, and the powerhouse tobaccos that country can produce, all coincided perfectly with the cigar boom of the 1990s and the changing consumer tastes the boom fostered. It was Nicaragua’s turn to shine—and it was really the Perdomos who led the industry’s big push into that country. The timing seemed perfect to make something big happen, but Nick says they “started meager” in Estelí. “There were only three cigar factories in the entire town. But we worked very hard and pushed on. In 1999 we built the largest cigar factory in Nicaragua and we began our vertical integration efforts. That gives us assurance that only the very best quality goes into everything Perdomo does, because it is under our total control.”

Today, the Perdomo Cigars Nicaraguan factory and facilities occupy 14 acres, with the cigar factory, box factory and warehouse complexes encompassing more than 700,000 square feet of space. The 35,000-square-foot aging room is a wondrous place. “The company’s agricultural operations reside in three of the most fertile regions in Nicaragua: the Estelí Valley, the Condega Valley and the famed Jalapa Valley, with more than 1,200 acres of tobacco grown yearly,” Nick says. And the company continues to develop additional farms, the newest named Finca Janine after Nick’s wife, and Finca Natalie after his daughter, who is now attending law school at the University of Miami.



Continuing the family tradition is a more recent employee, Nick's 27-year-old son, Nicholas III, himself a graduate of the University of Miami.

Trade show attendees have been seeing Nicholas hanging around in his father's shadow since he was 14. Nicholas started working at Perdomo sweeping floors and worked his way up. (Nick wouldn't have it any other way.) Today Nicholas is in his second year as director of sales. It was he who championed the idea for Perdomo to offer samplers in humidified bags, and they have proven successful as an impulse add-on buy. Nicholas says: "I knew that I would be working alongside my dad since I was a kid. There was never a time in my life where I considered pursuing any other career. This business, this industry, is all I know. I was born for this job." Nicholas says his parents routinely took both him and his sister to cigar business functions. "So I knew how to interact with adults from a very young age," he says. "Our retailers are like family to me, since I grew up around them. I also feel the same about our salesmen. We are all family."

Arthur Kemper, company vice president, brings news that some new Perdomo products are in the offing this year. "We are very proud to introduce the

"I KNEW THAT I WOULD BE WORKING ALONGSIDE MY DAD SINCE I WAS A KID. THERE WAS NEVER A TIME IN MY LIFE WHERE I CONSIDERED PURSUING ANY OTHER CAREER."

new Perdomo Reserve 10th Anniversary Box Pressed Sun Grown and Maduro," the 20-plus-year company veteran reports. "The leaf selection was meticulously hand-selected by our team. The blend is very precise. Not only did we select tobaccos from our very favorite regions in Nicaragua, we carefully picked each leaf from specific lot numbers from each of our farms so the blends would be exact." Kemper says he is very proud of the flavor profile Perdomo achieved in these blends. "We worked extremely hard to not only produce a very rich and smooth cigar, but we also wanted a cigar that had a little more natural sweetness and roundness. And we accomplished this by using tobaccos from our farms with higher mineral content, located in the Jalapa Valley," Kemper says. "The Sun Grown and Maduro wrappers are all hand-selected and bourbon barrel-



aged to perfection, and they pair beautifully with the 6-year-aged Nicaraguan fillers and binder tobaccos.” Both blends will be available in the following sizes: Figurado (4 ¾ x 56), Robusto (5 x 54), Epicure (6 x 54), Churchill (7 x 54), Torpedo (7 x 54), and Super Toro (6 x 60) with a retail price point ranging from \$7 to \$10.

The COVID-19 pandemic makes these difficult times in the cigar business, as much as any other industry. But Perdomo Cigars is, thus far, weathering the storm without undue dislocation. As of this writing, no COVID-19 cases have been reported anywhere near the factory. “We pray for everyone’s health during these tough times. The cleanliness of our facilities and our top-shelf health record give us great pride. We have also been resolute in supporting our brick-and-mortar shops around the world, now more than ever,” Nick says.

Young Nicholas agrees: “During the pandemic, my main concern has been concentrated toward the safety

↑ Nicholas playing dominoes with his dad (and maybe winning?)

of our salesmen and our business partners. The main challenge is for us to help our retailers and assist them any way we possibly can. Our team has done their best to help, even helping retailers with their curbside service. I hope everyone will support their local brick-and-mortar stores.”

Nick Jr. says about the enterprise he has nurtured for nearly three decades: “We always live by the Golden Rule. Our greatest asset is certainly not Nick Perdomo, but our people. I truly believe that. We treat our entire work staff, whether it be here in the United States or in Nicaragua, like family. That’s the way it should be, because they are our family.” Summing up, he says, “Our story is pretty well-known, and it’s really the American dream, the vision and drive starting out of a garage. Having Janine, my wife of 31 years, supporting me through thick and thin, I know I am the luckiest man alive.” We should all be half as lucky.

Merchants wishing to become a part of the Perdomo family of retailers can reach the company by calling (305) 627-6700. 🍷



THE SOUL OF CHARITY



For businesses, targeted community outreach can turn altruism to our advantage. Sometimes.



H

ow goes the giving out there? It's a difficult question to put to retailers who are now coping with unprecedented managerial challenges.

Tobacconists are, for the most part, a gregarious and civic-minded lot, long accustomed to giving back to their communities in ways that often escape notice, except to the beneficiaries they help. We wondered how community outreach was faring these days, so we reached out to a couple dozen tobacconists around the nation to “take the temperature” of the giving spirit

during these interesting times. We asked whether they are still giving, and why and in what ways they give. We heard quite a range of responses.

Ryan Sturman, the owner of Sturman's Smoke Shop in Boise, Idaho, said: “I'm not sure there is ever a downside to helping others. We donate to any local charity that comes knocking. First, we enjoy helping others, and second, it's nice to help people view smoke shops in a different light—help them realize that cigar stores are all about community and relationships. It always brings a sense of pride.”

Jeff Packer, who owns Tinder Box Tacoma in Tacoma, Washington, elaborated on the theme, saying his shop had participated in a wide variety of outreach efforts—“charity motorcycle rides, silent auctions, golfing events, several organizations with a variety of agendas, including police investigative conferences, first responder conferences and military family events.” However, he did add this: “Charity is just that. Don't expect to get a side benefit for donating. You are doing it for the right reasons. The



promotional aspect of getting your name out there has never paid off for my store.”

Nina Batson, who operates Classic Cigars in Owasso, Oklahoma, said she takes a careful and selective approach to giving. “I can’t consider, for instance, donating to schools, because of the 21 age limit associated with tobacco. A few of my customers ask for donations for their own charities, and if I know them, I try to do all I can.” But she added the following cautionary note: “My advice is to give only what you can afford, because everybody has wants and needs, and I get frequent requests. If you give to everyone who asks, you’ll go broke.” Packer, our Tacoma respondent, agreed: “Everyone thinks that if you run a small business, you are rolling in money. But the reality is that I live deposit to deposit, and bill to bill.”

We observed, too, that not every giver has managed to capture even a spark of karma’s magic. One Virginia merchant reported: “We’ve done that kind of thing in the past, but it was just a giveaway. We realized no benefit.” A shop owner in New York state said that, while his store continues to donate auction items to favorite charities, the time, effort and expense of more customized activism “gives us a warm, charitable feeling but does nothing for the bottom line.”

Yet there are tobacconists that have seen outreach produce a direct, positive impact on their bottom line. Angela Yue, of Lord Puffer Tobacconist in Escondido, California, explains, “Community outreach has helped us tremendously. Our customers have always been there for us since day one, so we like to give back to their businesses and projects as much as we can. We have a particularly good relationship with our local police and fire department. We like to sponsor them whether it be financially or through cigar donations. If you give back to your community, your community will give back to you.”

She adds that even in a high-tax, high-regulatory state like California, she can still find beneficial ways to reach out. “I come from the state of high taxes but we have not experienced any pitfalls because if you do your homework there are legal ways to make charitable contributions in your state. If we can do it in such a high-tax state as California, anyone can do it! One example is that we pay full retail price for all donations we make towards our community. This way, all the federal AND state taxes have been paid.”

Harris Saunders, owner of Birmingham Cigars in Birmingham, Alabama, takes an intentional approach to community



DAVE GAROFALO WROTE THE BOOK ON MAKING DONATIONS PAY

Dave Garofalo, the owner of Two Guys Smoke Shop, with three locations in New Hampshire, has done lots of promotions over his 35 years in the cigar industry. Indeed, Garofalo is such an inveterate promoter that last year he was finally moved to write a book on business marketing: *David vs Goliath: How to Compete, and Beat, The On-Line Giant. 100 Proven Promotions for Brick & Mortar Retailers*. Available on davidgarofalo.com and Amazon, the book

is a compendium of marketing tips and wisdom useful for any description of B&M shop, not only tobacconists ... although Garofalo’s methods have been tested in his own cigar stores. Part of the book focuses specifically on ways that Garofalo has turned charitable giving and community outreach to his business’s advantage.

The way Garofalo puts it: “You can simply donate, or you can turn your donations into a spectacle, and that’s what I do. We are asked by our customers and

neighbors all the time to give to all kinds of causes. Some of them cost a lot of money and produce little to no recognition or new customers or sales. Still, the fact is, we all want to be charitable, and the more successful we become the more charitable we can be. So you should look at your charitable donations as opportunities to come up with creative methods for getting a good return on investment. If you can gain some recognition for your business’s charitable activities, at the same time you will

activism, one that he recommends other shop owners consider. “We get requests all the time for donations,” Saunders said. “If it is a silent or live auction we always say yes.” But his most innovative suggestion takes the form of charity cigar parties.

Saunders says: “We donate a party for up to 25 people, which includes a cigar for each guest, plus they are allowed to have it catered if they want. We serve alcohol so they are not allowed to bring that in.” These parties are donated to the nonprofit. They auction off the party and raise the money on their end, and then call Saunders to set up the event at the shop. “And they give me a tax deduction receipt for the value of the party,” says Saunders—normally a \$500 value, which makes for a nice benefit on Tax Day. Saunders calls such parties “a fun and easy way to get new people in your store.” He says, “The event is in our lounge, but not private. We reserve a section for the group. This works great, and if they never redeem it you still helped the group raise money at their auction and you are not out anything.”

Saunders calls such a party “a great opportunity to educate the group on cigar basics.” And he adds: “Most will end up purchasing other items while there and become new customers to join your loyalty and reward programs to market to in the

future. We get quite a few new customers from this, and we have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for great causes over the last 14 years. Also, your regular customers like it since they feel like you are supporting their cause. It makes them even more loyal.”

So it appears the soul of charity in the world of tobacconists is not dead, even if it is perhaps a bit attenuated in current conditions. Fact is, with some people, a difficult economy actually intensifies the impetus to do good, to find some way of making the world outside our four walls a better place, even if only by a small increment.

The wish to do good is innate. Maybe you have left an overgenerous tip for a waiter who seemed on the verge of breakdown—something extra for a young man or woman who was radiating stress and near-panic during an overcrowded dinner rush. A \$20 tip left for a \$5 sandwich can reduce a hardworking server to tears of joy. It’s a perfectly natural impulse, the wish to feel that someone’s life was made just a little easier because of something nice that we did. To alleviate suffering makes us sleep better at night. And after all, it is not really true that every good deed gets punished. Often, for a variety of reasons, good works really can redound to the benefit of the do-gooder,

even if just in the form of a tax write-off.

Beyond the obvious dollars-and-cents considerations, do not discount the more intangible benefits of *relationship-building* in your town, which can come of a deliberate approach to community outreach. Even the smallest gesture, properly handled, can register in the memory of a beneficiary, one who might someday reciprocate in some surprising way. Consider: In everyone’s home county, right now, there are people laboring for the safety and health of us all, 24/7—people who could use a kind gesture today as never before. We all know that law enforcement officers and health care workers have real reason to feel worried, beleaguered and underappreciated in these times. Even if you can’t afford to give away the store, no one was ever insulted by a nice case of warm donuts delivered to the workplace. Slap your store logo on whatever gift you can make—and, for sure, keep your receipts for Tax Day. But do something nice, and see if karma can work some of its magic for you.

At worst, you will have added a touch of kindness to the world. At best, you will bolster the image of our industry, and you’ll have won some new friends and admirers. Tobacco people can never have too many of those. 🐼

grow and be able to be even more charitable in the future.”

But you cannot give to them all, right? “I always wrestled with choosing donations to make,” Garofalo says. “If a good customer asks you to donate to a cause that is important to them, how can you say no? How about one of your competitors’ customers? Maybe they asked your competitor, and were told no. So if you say yes, will you be doing something nice and at the same time you might just win that customer over.” Still, Garofalo cautions, you have to be smart about it, lest you donate yourself right out of business. So he thought to himself, “If only you could give and make

money doing it.”

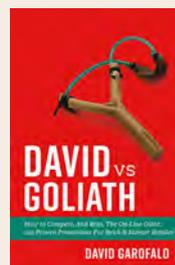
Garofalo says in the past he would give away boxes of cigars for promotional consideration, but those efforts didn’t seem to go anywhere. “I would never get the person to come to the store or be a customer. I’d just lose product with no gain.” Nowadays, Garofalo prefers the idea of giving away, not just a product, but an “experience”—cigar tastings, for example. In keeping with his book’s mission, Garofalo notes that this concept can be adapted to other kinds of shops. “You can do a cupcake tasting, cake decorating class, wine tasting, wine lessons, sewing class, or a DIY class for whatever you sell. But

the “Cigar Tasting for 8” is an experience I have been doing for years.”

Garofalo says: “This breakthrough concept turned my charity donations into more customers, more fans and more profit. How is that possible? It’s all in the type of donation you make. Done properly, this kind of event adds eight new customers—new customers who need a humidor, lighter, cutter, travel cases, ashtrays, butane gas and everything to have a great experience like they did the night they spent with you, their new friend. Those eight cigars may have cost me \$30 or so, but before the customers left, I have brought in 10

times that amount in sales from the event alone. Which adds up to tens of thousands of dollars for the lifetime value of the customer.”

Garofalo is, through and through, a giving soul. If you call him for advice about running a charitable event, no doubt he will help all he can. He’s got plenty of additional ideas. But he already has helped in the biggest way we could ask for. You could light up a good smoke, curl up with Garofalo’s book *David vs Goliath*, and pick the brain of one of the most successful B&M marketing guys in the industry. There is no need to give until it hurts, if you can give your way into growth.



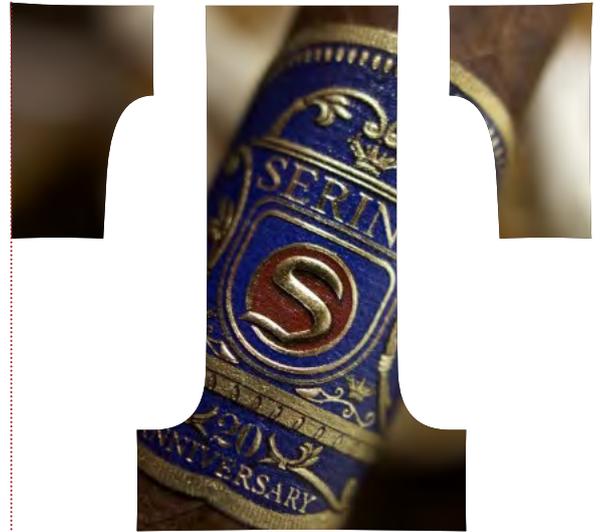


TWO GENERATIONS,

Photos courtesy of Serino Cigars



ONE VISION *Serino Cigars Branches Out*



TONY SERINO was not born into a cigar producing family. He grew up in Boston, where his father owned an Italian frozen food company. He didn't attend college, or even a regular high school. He went to trade school, where he learned carpentry, plumbing and auto and electrical repair. He was not a prolific reader or versed in foreign languages, but he recalls: "I was the type of person with a lot of common sense. My father raised us to have a really good work ethic."

Serino also had a natural facility for sales and marketing. After being injured in a motorcycle accident in the late '70s, he moved to South Florida, took the small settlement he received, and purchased a TV store, which he soon converted into a thriving video rental business. "We would take those big video cameras to the movie theater, then sell those movies for \$75 each. And I was selling 5,000 a month!"

What would become a booming chain of five stores and several franchises was noticed by the executives at Blockbuster Video, at the time owned by mega-entrepreneur Wayne Huizenga, who founded Waste Management and AutoNation, and owned or co-owned

BY LARRY WAGNER

The MLB Florida Marlins, The NFL Miami Dolphins, the NHL Florida Panthers, as well as Blockbuster Music and several Hyatt and Radisson hotels in South Florida. Huizenga and his team wanted to bring Serino on board.

Serino sold the video stores and formed a new company providing marketing consultation services for Blockbuster: “I didn’t work for them. I started my own company, National Video Marketing, and they hired me to do all their grand openings, for all their businesses, and to come up with ideas for renting more videos.”

Some of Huizenga’s ventures thrived while others went bust, and he eventually decided to retire, putting Serino out of work. He had been well paid, had saved some money and was looking for his next venture. It was now the 1990s, and one of his former colleagues suggested they take advantage of the ongoing cigar boom, using their Blockbuster marketing experience to sell their own brand of cigars. Serino readily admits the transition had its bumps.

“It’s really easy marketing something when you have Wayne’s money behind you. Try doing it yourself. I got humbled real quick. The first couple of years were terrible. I realized the people in the cigar industry knew what they were doing. It was hard to break into a new market.”

At the beginning of his nascent cigar business, in 1994 and 1995, Serino was primarily selling cigars manufactured locally in Miami and some imported from Honduras. While sales were spotty, and mostly to consumers, Serino persevered until he eventually landed a gig supplying cigars for



promotional humidors, distributed to businesses throughout greater Miami. He recalls how things got started: “They would place humidors in stores, and they were buying cigars from me to fill them. I was making cigars for that company, it was called El Supremo Cigars. And that kept me busy for two or three years.” With his foot in the door, he began to seek his own lines, eventually making his way to the Dominican Republic.

“The first person I came in contact with in the Dominican Republic was Sergio Cruz from Tabacalera Cibao, and we’ve been partners now for over 20 years. Then I met Maurice (Koks), from Intercigar, because I was distributing La Caya cigars and Maurice was working with them at the time. He’s one of the nicest guys you’d ever want to meet, and he makes great cigars. And he’s highly intelligent, speaks eight languages.”

From those two manufacturers, Serino went on to build up a portfolio of value-priced, handmade cigars, primarily marketed

in bundles. Through his importing and distributing company, APS Distributors, Serino offers bundles of 20 cigars from the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua, in a wide variety of shapes, blends and wrapper leaves, ranging from 1 to 2 dollars wholesale per cigar. His catalog currently features 24 different types of bundles, in addition to three boxed, premium brands, a line of Corona size cigars in 16 flavors, and an “It’s a Boy/It’s a Girl” box of 25. Nearly every cigar in the catalog is available for private label, offering retailers the exclusivity of a premium house blend cigar to sell at their own established retail price.

APS has grown into the industry’s leading seller of premium bundles, in addition to importing cigars for a number of major brands and distributors. APS fills out all the paperwork and pays all the taxes on every brand they import, and does the fulfillment for many of the better-known companies. And yet, with all of that importing and distributing,



Serino had the desire to move toward branding his own lines of cigars. That’s where the next generation became involved.

Carson Serino, Tony’s son, was raised in South Florida and graduated from Florida State University with two degrees in business. Carson spent his formative years in the Serinos’ retail store, waiting on customers and learning the business from his father and the many sales representatives who called. “I grew up in cigar shops—my whole life,” says Carson. “It’s

been a big part of my life, and something I wanted to do when I graduated from college.”

Carson also faced some obstacles breaking into the world of business. He planned to use his business degrees to go into branding at an advertising firm, but he says, “I took some internships and found that, as a young person coming in with all these ideas, you don’t have control and you don’t have that much input.”

But he knew his skills would serve him well when he decided to join his father at APS Distributors and help launch their new venture, Serino Cigars. “I love cigars and I love branding, and I thought why don’t I combine the two, and help my dad at the same time. I tried to take everything I learned at school, and everything from being around the industry when I was growing up, seeing all the packaging and the branding, and really investing myself in this.”

Around the time that Carson was graduating from college, Tony had increased his networking, and was expanding his portfolio, having met Omar Gonzalez Aleman, owner of the La Corona factory in Nicaragua. Gonzalez had been factory director for the original La Corona factory in Cuba, and the Serinos realized they had found the right partner to vault them into the premium cigar business.

The first project was a high-end Nicaraguan cigar, Serino Royale, offered in four different wrappers, each with a distinctive blend. The rough outlines were established, but as Carson recalls: “I was there right at the inception. After years of my dad knowing Omar, it hadn’t really materialized until right when I came on board. The



“I LOVE CIGARS AND I LOVE BRANDING, AND I THOUGHT WHY DON’T I COMBINE THE TWO, AND HELP MY DAD AT THE SAME TIME.”

branding had already been done for the Serino Royale series, and then I started to take over everything after that.”

While Carson felt the drive to immerse himself in the entire process from pre-industry to finished product, Tony started out having to learn the cigar business on the fly: “When I started I didn’t know the business at all. To this day, I don’t get involved with the blending. All my partners and associates, that’s what they’ve done their whole lives. I let them take care of it. My son is more in tune to the different tobaccos and the different blends. I’m a numbers guy, a

marketing guy; management and organization. My son has a better taste for it than I do.”

Carson’s training involved a stint at the La Corona factory, learning the business from the ground up, including how to roll a cigar. His philosophy: “To be a brand owner you have to understand retail, you have to understand the infrastructure of distribution, and you really need to understand your product.” Having mastered those aspects, Carson was then in a position to create Serino Cigars’ next lines of cigars.

How those other lines developed was a result of Carson’s post college



experiences. He had taken a year off after graduating to go on a backpacking tour of Iceland. He had left his travel humididor behind and was compelled to smoke what was available, namely Cuban cigars. Smoking exclusively Cuban cigars inspired him to create a new blend, which became the Wayfarer line. The name is derived from his traveling experience, and the blend is his interpretation of the qualities of a Cuban cigar. It’s a medium- to full-bodied blend of Nicaraguan fillers and binder, with an Ecuador Corojo ’99 wrapper. The blend is intended to capture the balance, complexity and vibrancy of the classic Havana cigars.

The next project in Serino Cigars’ portfolio was a joint effort between father and son. Following up on the success of Wayfarer, Carson embarked on reviving one of Tony’s established brands,



Taino. It had been previously marketed as a bundle, but Carson saw the value of using a pre-2007 trade name, and an opportunity to pay tribute to indigenous people credited with introducing tobacco to Christopher Columbus.

Taino cigars are medium-full, featuring an Ecuador Habano 2000 wrapper, with binder and fillers from the three major growing regions of Nicaragua. It's a blend geared to younger smokers, but can appeal to anyone who enjoys a balance between flavor and strength.

Next up for Serino Cigars is a line extension for Taino. For this iteration, Serino is having the cigars produced by Jochy Blanco, at Tabaclaera Palma in the Dominican Republic. He explains that, while the debut line from Omar Gonzalez

of La Corona factory in Nicaragua was everything he hoped for, "The Taino people, which is what this project is documented around, weren't a part of Nicaragua. It was the Dominican, Cuba, Jamaica and then the Caribbean islands. I wanted to have some honesty for our branding and create a Dominican product that highlighted these people."

The line will offer a profile similar to the original blend, "... with a bit more muscle to it, a fuller flavor" says Serino. As to why they are currently building up the Taino brand, he adds: "Taino was a brand my dad created, so we can keep extending Taino, even with the FDA. We have a lot of sales and advertising behind it, even way before 2007."

For now, Serino Royale and

Wayfarer will remain as they are, but Carson notes, "If we did extend Wayfarer I'd like to do some unique sizes, like a figurado, and keep extending the vitolas, staying within the same formula."

Tony Serino did create one line extension for his eponymous Serino Royale brand, a 9 1/4-inch x 47 ring Vintage 2012 "A," presented in its own lacquered coffin. Carson explains how it came about: "2012 was a really big growing year in Nicaragua. That's where we pulled the tobacco for our original Maduro XX from. There was only enough tobacco left to make about 150–200 cigars, not enough to roll out a new line from. So it was really good for a line extension." Only 1,000 were produced, and the Serinos often give them as gifts,

or as a token of gratitude for retailers who support the line.

Where the father/son partnership will take their premium division from here depends largely on how the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) rulings on substantial equivalence play out. The company is very active in dealing with all the aspects of compliance with any FDA regulations. What is certain: The two generations of Serino cigar men will continue to share a vision of providing both value-priced bundles and ultra-premium cigars to receptive cigar enthusiasts worldwide.

The Serino Cigars portfolio encompasses a wide array of strengths, flavors and shapes, offering something for every type of smoker, from novice to seasoned epicure. 🍷

THE SERINO CIGARS

1 SERINO ROYALE The debut line from Tony Serino is a true Nicaraguan cigar in the modern sense: Big, bold flavors paired with a strength ranging from mild/medium to extra full, in today's generous ring gauges. There are currently three variations:

***CONNECTICUT** A tawny Ecuador Connecticut wrapper envelops a sweet and savory blend of Nicaraguan binder and fillers. The look is deceptive; more medium than mild, this blond bombshell is layered with just enough spice to give it some oomph.

***MEDIO** The name connotes both the strain of Habano wrapper and the cigar's strength: medium. A full array of spices is topped off with graham cracker sweetness, resulting in both full body and a smooth delivery.

***MADURO XX** Even the name fires a warning shot across the bow. The Jalapa and Estelí fillers are tucked into a deep, dark and delicious Ecuador Habano Oscuro wrapper. Hale and hearty, this bravura blend melds strength with smoothness.

2 WAYFARER The wayfarer in this case is Carson Serino, who explored a range of Cuban cigars while backpacking in Iceland, and wanted to bring that experience to the Serino portfolio. The blend of Nicaraguan fillers topped off with a Corojo '99 wrapper from Ecuador replicates the balance and finesse of the great Habanos, and is expressed through a lineup of classic Cuban vitolas.

3 TAINO This homage to the native people of the Dominican Republic, reputed to be the earliest users of tobacco, is represented in a straightforward package meant to let the cigars tell their own story. A cigar band featuring a stylized indigenous bird symbol showcases a blend of Nicaraguan tobaccos from the three major growing regions, encased in an Ecuador Habano 2000 wrapper. The offering of three sizes, again emphasizing an authentic simplicity, are evocative of classic Cuban shapes. Full flavor and medium body are experienced in equal measure.



NOVA officially launched with the Ultra-Premium limited edition line in February 2019. The second release debuted in July at the PCA with a premium regular production and special edition lines.

Currently, 17 lines are available for purchase. Our cigars are handmade and aged at least one year after being rolled. Each cigar contains premium full filler vintage tobacco from the best tobacco regions around the world.

Only the highest quality vintage tobacco and the most skilled hand workmanship go into making each **Nova** Cigar, resulting in a timeless blend of art and craftsmanship.

Our exquisite cigars are carefully contained in the finest wooden packaging, from the beautifully detailed cigar bands to the Spanish cedar wooden trays, our product is designed elegantly with a vintage flair.



Leonor Abzaradel, CEO
leo@novacigar.com



Aurelio Riego
Brand President
ari@novacigar.com

Use Promo Code PCA20 to receive 20% discount on any orders on our website

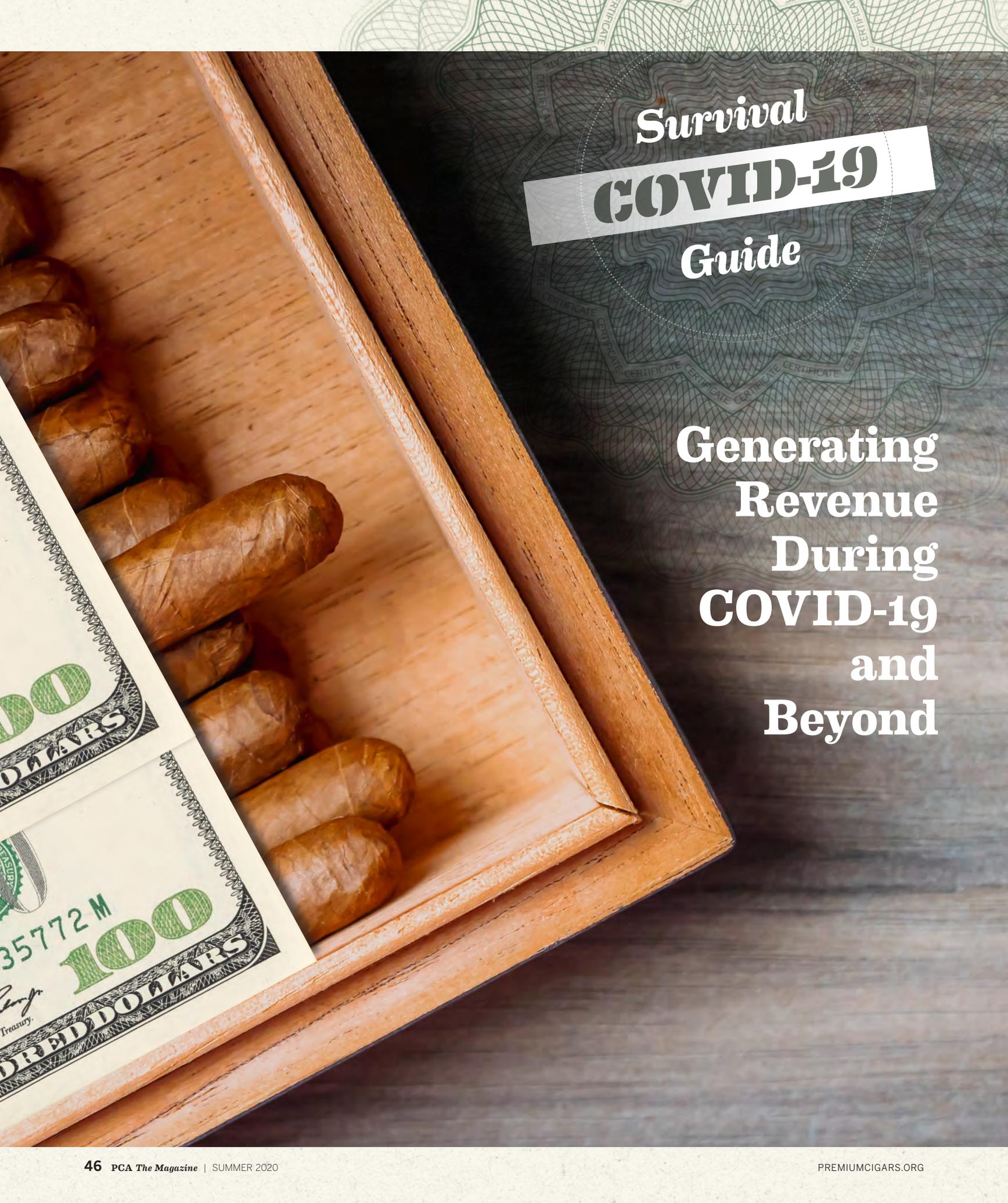
@novacigar



#MakeNovaBig

www.novacigar.com

561-774-9005



Survival
COVID-19
Guide

Generating
Revenue
During
COVID-19
and
Beyond

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have an unprecedented impact on individuals, businesses and our economy as a whole. To help you continue to generate revenue during this time, we have developed a list of short-term strategies, with potential long-term benefits, to help generate much-needed revenue for your business.

While this may not solve every challenge you're facing, we hope it will offer some solutions and ideas to help you stay connected to your customers and continue generating revenue. And as we try to emerge from this epidemic within our various states, it's important to be prepared for additional disruptions later in the year and into 2021.

Collaborate with Other Local Businesses



Many businesses are offering alternative sales options to customers. To stand out and reach a wider audience, consider collaborating with other businesses to create co-marketing opportunities. For instance, is there a great local brewery nearby? Talk with them about creating a unique package to include both cigars and beer. With both businesses promoting the collaboration, you'll both get double the exposure! Make sure both parties are promoting the unique offering through social media, email, websites, etc., with links back to one another's website and social media accounts.

Promote Gift Cards



Gift cards offer an immediate injection of cash for retailers, and most often ensures a customer will return to the business in the future. For retailers with thin margins, gift cards can offer some much-needed relief during these difficult times. You might also consider offering a free gift card (of a small denomination) with every order to help incentivize customers now, while simultaneously helping to secure future sales.

Short-Term Sales on Underperforming Stock



Businesses deemed nonessential are now experiencing a significant decline in sales. To help offset this, consider promoting a time-limited (such as one week) sale on inventory that isn't moving.

Use your inventory management system to perform an ABC analysis of your products, thus allowing you to accurately prioritize your products.

Following the ABC analysis, consider selling your "C-grade" products through a short-term (time-limited) sale (discount, bundling, etc.).

A few ways to reduce dead stock:

- Donate a portion of the sale to a charity like Feeding America or others working to help people during COVID-19.
- Give it away as a gift with purchase.
- Bundle it with other products for a price that is less than it would be if buying individually.
- Deploy product alerts to combat inventory issues.

Some retailers have started moving away from promo campaigns and are instead pushing out "back in stock" emails to combat inventory challenges. These product alerts are a simple yet highly effective way to let your customers know about their favorite products. Price drop, low inventory and back-in-stock detection helps you quickly target customers who have interacted with specific products—based on viewed, carted, purchased and wish list activity, and automate high-conversion messages.

Consider a Preorder Program



This is an incredibly difficult time for small businesses, and people know it. For retailers, keeping a healthy cash flow is paramount, and many are asking customers to preorder products by leaving a deposit or paying up front. To help jumpstart a preorder program, you can send a multichannel message

(email, text, social media, video) to your subscriber list to let customers know you'll be taking preorders. Let customers know you'll notify them as soon as the product is back in stock (either through social media messenger, email or text) and ready to be fulfilled.

Offer Payment Plans



Across the board, when we're doing our online shopping now, we almost expect some sort of discount. To protect your cash flow during this economic downturn, consider offering a payment plan for larger orders, with the option for customers to break payments up over a 3- to 4-month timeframe.

Uplift and Engage Your Community



Now is a great time to share your knowledge and expertise with your customers and community in a fun way. Posting tutorials on "how to properly cut a cigar" or "how to keep cigars fresh" or "a few of my favorite cigars" are a few examples that will connect you with loyal customers and larger audiences alike. Creating and sharing videos like these are fun ways to enrich people's lives while encouraging people to stay safe and stay home. You could even expand this and combine a few things you enjoy, like grilling out while enjoying a cigar and talking about both. This is a great way to connect your shared passions with others who may also share them, while encouraging people to know you better,



It is important to let customers know of any changes to your business. Check to make sure your listings on Google, Facebook, Yelp, Bing, etc., are up to date to reflect your current store hours and services

and thus feel more connected to you and your business. This is also a great time to help people get to know your entire team, through Zoom calls or over live broadcasting to social media, or by simply choosing one day each week to invite people to get know someone on your team, wherein the chosen team member could talk about their passion for the industry, their role in the business and more!

Be Transparent



Social media is a great way to connect with your audience and keep them involved. Let customers know how your business is adapting, alternative options available and, if you're having difficulties. People connect with authenticity and truthfulness, especially now.

Free Shipping and Delivery Options



People are shopping online now more than ever, but many online stores are still charging for shipping. Combine that with the widespread delivery delays, and you have an opportunity to stand out like a shining star. By offering free shipping, curbside pickup or local delivery, customers are more incentivized to shop with you over the competition. And once things begin to reopen, customers will remember this, and will often come back and shop with you again. If you are shipping, skip expensive packaging and get free packaging, available from all major U.S. couriers (USPS, DHL Express, UPS).

Update Your Business Listings



It is important to let customers know of any changes to your business. Check to make sure your listings on Google, Facebook, Yelp, Bing, etc., are up to date to reflect your current store hours and services. A lot of these online platforms have now included options to include a message about any additional services you are offering. This is critical, as many will see your business on these sites first, especially when they're searching from mobile devices.

Get Reviews



With sales going online, it is now more important than ever before to stand out over the competition. Online reviews are highly effective

and influential for consumers who are considering a purchase. Ask for reviews on every channel where you make sales and ask for a review after every purchase.

Launch an E-Commerce Site



Although launching an e-commerce site can be a big undertaking for many small retailers, if you have the time and resources, it can be a huge success. Before you get started, you'll want to learn more about e-commerce and decide if this is the right path for you to take. For premium tobacco retailers, e-commerce platforms can be a bit more complex. Retailers should consult state laws to ensure compliance, as different states have different requirements and regulations.

Step Up Your Digital Marketing



Meet your customers where they are. As consumers are largely working from home and practicing safe social distancing, they're spending more time online than ever before. This presents a new opportunity for you to connect with them, and also means you'll have to be a bit more aggressive to get their attention. It's time to step up your digital marketing game.

Reanalyze your marketing spend, improve the effectiveness of your virtual communications, and optimize your website (and e-commerce site if available).

Focus on Your Website



Treat your homepage like your storefront. With limited or nonexistent physical foot traffic, your website homepage is now acting as the experience a customer would normally have when walking into your store. Try to incorporate some of the physical store experiences into your site. Use product pages, ensuring all inventory is up to date, and consider adding virtual tours or videos to personalize the experience. Also consider adding live chat to your website to further connect with customers when face-to-face contact is limited.

Welcome site visitors with warmth, empathy and compassion on your homepage. Your homepage is like a first impression. If they immediately feel you are with them in this and care about them,

visitors will feel a stronger connection to you and your business.

Be transparent. Be sure to communicate honestly to customers on your homepage, product detail pages and shopping cart page to clearly indicate shipping delays or changes in product availability.

Invest in SEO



Search engine optimization is essential to growing your online presence and promoting your business. To ensure your store shows up first, it is important to research and implement keywords that will drive people directly to you. When your SEO is optimized, search engines will rank your site higher and drive more traffic to your site, which will likely produce increased sales.

Don't Neglect Social Media



Your social media pages are an extension of your website and should offer a similar experience. Think of your social media posts more like conversations and adjust your verbiage to be more inviting and engaging. Post often, engage with your customers by posing questions and set up virtual events. If you don't have a large following, now is a great time to start building on this! Invite friends and customers to like and follow your page and consider running contests to help grow your audience.

By creating experiences through social media—in the absence of “in real life” (IRL) experiences—your customers in isolation are looking more to social media for content and connection. Consider live-streaming virtual “herf” sessions, talks with your customers or hosting virtual chat sessions with some of the brands your customers love. Tools like Instagram Live, Facebook Live, IGTV, Zoom and others allow you to broadcast to an unlimited number of people.

Another idea is to bring the “cigar lounge” experience to the digital platform and invite people to “come smoke with us.” Attendees can type in questions and comments and engage in an inclusive experience.

Utilize Email



Reach out to your customers directly, letting them know of your alternate store operations and

sales options, while remaining sensitive to the situation. While generating revenue is even more important now, businesses must first and foremost remain sensitive. Sending out a direct sales blast would be ill-advised, especially if there has been little to no contact in the past few months. It would be better to imagine each email as a one-on-one letter or note, letting people know you're in this with them and sensitive to their plight before going into the details of your new offerings.

Connect via Text (SMS)



Your customers are more connected to their phones than ever before. Push notifications can be a great tactic to connect with your audience, but it is important to be mindful of the way you communicating. To run a successful SMS campaign, you'll want to know your audience's preferences and multichannel activity, consider the other communications you're sending to them on other channels and dial those down as needed, and make sure to make the messages as relevant as possible to that particular audience.

Use Video Chat



A premium tobacconist is so much more than a local retailer. More often than not, when customers come into your store, they spend a great deal of time talking with shop owners and staff, and other customers. With social distancing now in place, the same in-person conversations are no longer an option, however, there is still an opportunity to connect. Through video chats, you can talk with your customers and build a stronger connection than you can through phone calls, emails or text messaging. Consider creating a schedule where customers can block off time to talk with you on a video chat session, or simply by offering video calls as an added option when people call your business.

Monitor Customer Wish Lists



While some of your customers may not be spending the way they were before, they're still saving items to their wish list to buy later (if you have that feature available). Others may simply be favoriting items as a way to distract themselves through window shopping. Identify your audiences who have saved

items in specific categories or brands and let them know when the products are “now on sale” or consider featuring these items in future messages to pique their interest now or later, when they're ready to purchase again.

Talk with Manufacturers



As the coronavirus continues to impact the world, premium cigar manufacturers have stepped up to offer support to PCA retailers. Los Caidos Cigars, the brand that gives a portion of every purchase to a 501(c)(3) financially supporting family members of fallen police officers and firefighters, recently announced additional exclusive offers for PCA retailers. Steve Zengel, owner and founder of Los Caidos, also told us on a recent livestream that the company would provide extended terms of 45–60 days or longer on his special 11-count boxes to any retail member of the PCA who needs help at this time.

Recently, Ace Prime and Crowned Heads formed a strategic alliance and launched Bulb to support local cigar retailers. The Bulb Box is a monthly subscription that directly supports the local cigar retailer. Subscribers receive exclusive content, special deals and access to live experiences with special guests, with profits going to retailers.

Nat Sherman is also helping out, shipping Retailer Support Kits to their retail partners still operating during the pandemic. Retailers receive free (no charge and free shipping) curbside pickup support kits (limited to 2 per store), which include 25 shopping bags, 50 zipper bags, 25 cardboard carrying sleeves, a box of 25 matches and 25 cigar cutters. The items are meant to help keep cigar retailers stocked with items necessary to keep their businesses running.

All in all, the most important thing brick-and-mortar retailers can do right now is to stay in contact with customers. Despite store closures, reduced foot traffic or reduced hours, this connection must remain intact. Even when your physical store is inaccessible, customers need to feel you are still there, and should still feel the strength of their loyalty and engagement with your business and your brand. 🍷



A California Cigar Retailer's Experience During the COVID-19

WE WERE CAUGHT totally off guard. We had just gotten through an extremely trying 2019 with California's increased OTP taxes. We already had a survival plan: Get through the slow, cold weather of 2020's first quarter by reducing inventory and curbing our spending, and then get ready for it to pick up come April. But this virus, the absolute paralysis that took place in trying to prevent it from spreading and the effects of shutting down the economy, was an unthinkable storm.

We continued to operate as usual (although there was definitely fear in the air) for most of the month of March. Business was a little flat, but our plan of watching our spending had us coming out stronger by the end of the first quarter. Then on April 13, 2020, we were told we were considered "nonessential" and that we could only deliver or ship our products for the foreseeable future.

Mind you, liquor stores, dispensaries and convenience stores were deemed essential. That is when Kim, my daughter and our general manager, decided she would make deliveries locally, free of charge. We opened noon to 4 p.m. daily and delivered all over the county. After returning calls and filling orders, Kim would hit the road for deliveries, returning to the store several times a day to do it all over again. It was exhausting and stressful but it saved our business during this crisis.

She would end the day with any number of heartfelt stories. One very good customer lives in west county, out toward the coast, and he ordered a box for delivery. It takes 30-40 minutes to get out there.



”

So, we do the best that we can. We try to “keep it between the lines.” We take care not to put ourselves or others at risk.

Kim was blown away by their gorgeous mountaintop property, and they twisted her arm to enjoy a glass of an exceptional pinot that they produce. They sent her home with several bottles, some that she even shared with her dad. I'd say that was one of her best deliveries!

When we were allowed to implement curbside service on May 8, we still had our customers and our business, which is extremely fortunate. And as I write this, we are eagerly anticipating we'll be able to open our store soon, which will at least allow our customers to look at, if not touch, our selection. It's unimaginable in our brick-and-mortar business to sell without taking the time to show our products to our customers. Fortunately, we have a reputation that is built on trust—our recommendations are taken seriously because we've established that type of relationship with our customers over the years. That has been key to our survival.

Personally, I've stepped back from daily retail sales. I've moved my office home, where I can work and communicate with Kim and our staff whenever they need. I miss the people, though. I've made some great friends over the years, watched some kids grow up and some grow old. It's that way in brick and mortar—you get to know your customers.

We are located in Sonoma County, one of California's most desirable wine growing regions. We have hundreds of wineries and tasting rooms surrounding us. People come here for the wine experience, as well as the amazing restaurants. This shutdown has taken its toll on every industry we see here.

As we begin to hear talk of fewer restrictions and more businesses being allowed to open, what a strange a statement coming from an independent businesswoman in the democratic USA. This entire situation has gotten so out of control—some people in power are relishing their positions of power. Obviously, they don't have to worry about the effects that their decisions have on local businesses. And we are seeing the devastation, high unemployment and homelessness as a result. I can only believe crippling inflation will follow.

So, we do the best that we can. We try to “keep it between the lines.” We take care not to put ourselves or others at risk. Let's hope we come out of this intact. Let's hope that getting back to normal is something that happens sooner rather than later. Let's hope that scientists get a handle on this virus. And let's hope we become less dependent on other countries for medicine and medical supplies.

Of course, I am positive about the future. I just wish it would get here! 🐍

LOTUS

VIPER V-CUT CIGAR CUTTER

64 ring gauge
single v-cut blade
spring loaded locking mechanism
lightweight aluminum housing
free standing design

NEW!



Instagram: @lotuslighters, @vertigobylotus



Twitter: @lotuslighters, @vertigobylotus



Facebook: www.facebook.com/LotusLighters/

WWW.LOTUSLIGHTERS.COM



Pipe Smoking Abides

— *Some things we can count on, no matter what*

→ **WHAT WAS I SAYING?** Oh yes, in the last issue I toasted the charms of corncob pipes. It seemed important at the time. So, might there be some topic of interest arresting people's minds today? Let me rack my brain

It has been a long spring, has it not? Speaking only for myself (it is my column), as of this writing I have not experienced human contact in six weeks. No wife or kids in the house. I don't even own a dog—or a goldfish. Being a fairly antisocial type, this separation is not the greatest sacrifice the virus has imposed on my household. I can do a year of solitary confinement standing on my head. If anything, I am a bit less cranky now than I used to be. Mostly, I miss restaurant food. (No, I will not in present conditions hazard take-out services, thank you very much.) I am well-fed on my own mediocre cooking, having stored boxes and bags of rice and beans. I've got canned goods coming out my ears. The only use my garaged car is getting these days is overflow storage for dry goods. There are masks and gloves aplenty stockpiled in this house, should some circumstance force me unwillingly out of my lair. I've got enough toilet paper in here to last until the Second Coming. I stocked up way back in February, when local store shelves were full and so-called "prep" buying was still something of an eccentricity. (Most of my friends and relatives thought I was touched in the head. Oh well.)

Just finding agreeable ways to pass the time can be something of a challenge, since I do not even own a working TV. YouTube clips and Twitter can only take one so far. Reading needs gustatory



accompaniment. So, inevitably, thoughts began to turn to my Armageddon tobacco stash. I've always wondered (and now I wonder if you've given it thought) what circumstance might drive me to start popping containers of my most precious, irreplaceable blends, stuff that I'd held back for the End of Days. Admittedly, a virus lockdown is squalid and boring stuff compared to imminent extinction by meteor ... but now I'm thinking: This will do. My mind keeps returning to a certain quart jar in the back of my cabinet, packed solid with McClelland's 5100, dated year 2001. That seems a good place to start. I can then move on to my tins of McClelland's #27, and some 40-year-old tins of Mac Baren Stockton coin-cut. Actually, I've got a whole case of those. Stockton, aged for four decades, takes on a delightful, peanutty taste that is sublime. And then there are my dozen tins of Charatan Mild Flake, which may not be the most famous or popular choice, but the last time I tried to score a tin on eBay some dude outgunned me with a triple-digit bid, so I am not alone in relishing of that beautiful, fruity, black flake.

All through this period of house arrest, the pipe has continued to be my friend. It's a remarkable thing, enjoying access to an unaffected pastime, one so stalwart and true that we can count on it even when all the world around us is mad. It reminded me of the Polish labor leader Lech Walesa, who kept smoking his pipe even when the communists had him under arrest way back in the



This pandemic could perhaps change the country forever—for good or ill, we cannot yet tell—but we can be very certain that in a year, in a decade, we'll still be enjoying the immeasurable solace our pipes bring us.

late 1970s and '80s. News footage showed Walesa being shuttled from cellblock to courtroom, back to cellblock ... but always his pipe accompanied him, smoldering, a perfect symbol of comfort in distress, of patience and thoughtfulness when the so-called leaders persecuting him were losing their minds. His pipe was his friend; and so my pipe is my friend. You pipe smokers know exactly what I'm talking about: Just having recourse to a comfort so constant and dependable makes us luckier than our non-pipe neighbors—at least by one measure. *Pipe smoking abides*, and so do pipe smokers. We'll get through.

And, to keep the fires burning, we will navigate whatever impositions local and state regulations inflict on us, until a return to normal times. That seems to be what pipe shops are doing, each in its own way. I checked in with Brian Telford, owner of Telford's Pipe & Cigar in Mill Valley, California, about five miles north of the Golden Gate Bridge. The Bay Area has had no easy time with the virus, including state-imposed business restrictions. And indeed business is down. But Telford says their curbside pickup service allows them to survive. Same story at Pipes by George in downtown Raleigh, North Carolina, where owner George Hoffman has placed a table at the front door to block any foot traffic. Hoffman is completing sales over that table. Just tell him what you want, and he'll fetch it. Hoffman, too, says it's slowed his volume, but he's surviving. In Champaign, Illinois, Jerry at Jon's Pipe Shop reported that his entire state was closed to foot traffic by order of the governor, restricting their sales to mail-order only. But it's kept the lights turned on so far, and as of this writing we read that Illinois is now moving to open up enough at least to permit pick-up service, so business at Jon's should be ... picking up. The moral of the story is that our local pipe merchants are still finding ways to serve us, despite inconveniences. We should support them whenever and however we can.

A report from the pipemaking world: Artisan pipemaker Steve Liskey in Crestline, California, says the handmade pipe market was slowing down even before the pandemic, and now with so many potential buyers out of work, selling pipes is an even greater challenge. But commission work keeps coming in, Liskey says, and international orders keep arriving as well; and Liskey notes that most of his pipemaking friends are pursuing sidelines to keep revenues augmented. After all, pipemakers tend to be an inventive bunch. Liskey says they, and he, are surviving—"which," he adds, "is what pipe people do."

Yes, that is what pipe people do. We are not high-strung like the cigarette crowd. Rather, we are a philosophical lot. We read; we think ahead; we prepare for the unexpected. And when the unexpected strikes, we relax into the altered circumstance and find a way to flourish, always with our pipes serving to take the edge off. This pandemic could perhaps change the country forever—for good or ill, we cannot yet tell—but we can be very certain that in a year, in a decade, we'll still be enjoying the immeasurable solace our pipes bring us. Pipe smokers abide, and so does our wonderful hobby. Stay safe, and keep the home fires smoldering. 🍷

Pandemic 2020

(The only time in my life when being a germophobe has felt normal to me)



→ **I CAN CLEARLY REMEMBER** the two previous occasions when our industry was rocked: November 1997, marking the end of the Cigar Boom, and 2009, when S-CHIP went into law. In between, our industry has been challenged by smoking bans and tax increases, and, throughout, the resiliency of retail stores to adjust has never disappointed. Cigar lounges were built inside stores, others purchased their own self-standing buildings and some added a bar to provide even more services for their customers.

COVID-19, of course, is yet another game-changer in the way we do business. My approach to this pandemic has been a lot more academic and studious than reactive. I thought it would be a great lesson for us and, if we took a very careful and detailed approach, our industry would make it out of this just fine; maybe a little banged up but fine in the end. There were only two priorities on my mind: Protect our employees and protect our brands.

By taking care of these—our two core and most important assets—we would also be protecting our stores. There was a need to talk to our customers and be their friend, *really* be their friend. As business owners and entrepreneurs, we were all nervous. We all have debt, financial commitments and bills that have to be paid. Our salespeople, very often, have built tight relationships with their friends and customers. If even one of our stores was able to talk to their salesperson and feel that everything was going to be alright, I was sure that this would provide great relief moving forward (even if it was just for one day). So we scheduled three Zoom calls a week and created a regular meeting place to air out what was happening. In taking care of our



brands and not panicking, we made sure that the inventory our stores had on their shelves wasn't devaluated. If a store was holding \$20,000 in inventory of our products, it had to still be worth \$20,000 on the other side of this.

As unemployment kept increasing in the U.S., it was great to see we had done our part in not adding to the problem. We still had the problem, however, with our people in Honduras who had been sent home March 15 by presidential decree. Unlike the U.S., there were no stimulus checks being sent out via direct deposit, and we did not have the benefit of anything like the Paycheck Protection Program at the corporate level. We were going to have to ride this horse bareback! Yet, we were equally as committed to all of our people at the factories to make sure they could still receive an income to feed their families.

Paying our workers at the factories only solved a small part of the problem, though. We knew very well that the virus would still be around the moment we reopened the factories, so we needed to retrofit our entire operation—I'm talking every single nook and cranny of our building. Fortunately for us, and largely due to my OCD, from which I have suffered for 39 years, we have had a covenant with Bayer's Better Manufacturing Practices for 16 years and our farms were certified in 2009 as being the cleanest, most hygienic and



most environmentally friendly. Our factories are not certified by Bayer because, as a human health company, if they certified our business they would be exposed to accusations of "endorsing" a tobacco company. However, we follow the requirements of Bayer's Better Manufacturing Practices anyway.

For 20 years we have had our own doctors, one at the farm and the other at the factory. To enter the work area, you have to go through a disinfecting tunnel, we have cleaning stations in several places and everybody has been conditioned to wash their hands every two hours. Nevertheless, these measures were still not enough. We've now separated our tables, we set up a thermometer station and separated work stations. When we finally reopened in Honduras in early May, our factory was deemed to be the example for all factories in Honduras as a whole, not only for cigars.

Sure, it is a lot more expensive and I've had to use parts of our building in Honduras that I did not want to use, but if I wanted to start back up without a single person losing their job, I was going to need to use more space.

Our whole existence cannot just be about profits. It is our responsibility as entrepreneurs to protect all of those who work for us and provide each person with a safe space—with masks, eyewear and education, when necessary—for our workers and their families to understand what exactly it is that we are going through. The only thing pending is for us to administer testing, for which we are awaiting approval for 500 units that we have purchased.

If it is true that COVID-19 will eventually infect 80 percent of the world's population, we will not be able to guarantee no infections, but we can certainly assure our team that we will limit the exposure inside our buildings and also that our cigars will have been made in the most hygienic of environments.

As I write this, not one job has been lost, not one of our workers has gotten sick, and we never resorted to discounting our brands or cutting anybody's pay. And our salespeople have begun to visit our customers under the new conditions.

Most amazing to me has been how quickly stores are revving back up and how much cigar smokers have been yearning to go back to their local shops. I make 35 calls every day and the excitement I hear on the phone is encouraging. There is energy and optimism. It is this energy and optimism that guarantees that we will be back to normal very quickly. As a matter of fact, I am so motivated that, starting in June, I have a plan to visit with 300 stores in 60 days.

Throughout this experience, I have nothing but gratitude for all of our customers and everyone on our team. They too kept me going on the days that I was nervous or discouraged. Moving forward, I only have one thought in my head: We are all in this together, and by staying together we will make it, just fine! 🍀

Liana Fuente

Vice President, Brand Development **ARTURO FUENTE**



1. FIRST, WE HOPE EVERYONE IS HEALTHY AND SAFE. HOW HAS ARTURO FUENTE HELD UP DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

It goes without saying that this global pandemic has been hard on all of us, both personally and professionally, and the entire Fuente family sends our most sincere thoughts and prayers to all those who have been directly affected. With a 100-plus year history, our cigar company has gone through its own share of battles—revolutions, embargos, fires and other major tragedies—and we have always made it through each one with the sheer determination, passion and hard work that has made us who we are today, and this pandemic is no exception. Our immediate focus was the safety of all our employees and to assist them in any way we could. After that, we are determined to weather the storm based on years of preparation and a strong company foundation and,

in the end, come out of this stronger than ever, God willing. We must all continue to push forward and keep fighting!

2. WHAT HAS YOU EXCITED ABOUT ARTURO FUENTE IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

Well, it is always an exciting time at Arturo Fuente because we are constantly striving to do things the right way and keeping our quality standards as high as possible for our consumers, whether it is for new cigar blends, new nontobacco products or any other venture we take on. That is a commitment we have always made to them by consistently sticking to our tried-and-true motto of “never rushing the hands of time.” Speaking of time, we will celebrate 110 years in 2022 and look forward to raising a glass as we hopefully have conquered the COVID-19 pandemic by then, not only in the U.S. but all over the world. Finally, as everyone who knows Fuente can testify, my father, Carlos “Carlito” Fuente, is named the “Toy Maker” for a reason—he always has something exciting up his sleeve, so be on the lookout for some cool stuff!

3. WHAT'S AN IDEAL WEEKEND FOR YOU?

As much as I love attending cigar events all over the world and engaging with our extended Fuente family of consumers and retailers, I truly look forward to those weekends that I can be at home with my loving husband and our amazing dogs. We are lucky to live in the historic Cigar Capital of the World, sunny Tampa, Florida, so we take advantage of the beautiful weather as much as possible and the great things our city has to offer. We definitely invite all of those reading this to visit Tampa whenever they can, especially the internationally famous Ybor City—they will not be disappointed!

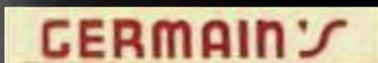
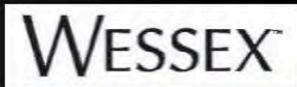
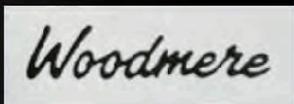
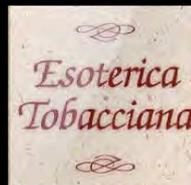
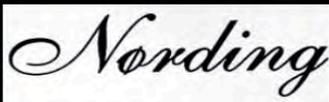
4. IF YOU WEREN'T IN THE PREMIUM CIGAR BUSINESS, WHAT KIND OF CAREER WOULD YOU HAVE AND WHY?

When you're a fourth-generation cigar maker, that's a tough question! I can't imagine doing anything else. But if I had to choose, it would definitely be something dog-related. As much as I love people, especially those who make up our amazing cigar industry, I love animals, especially dogs, and would be doing something to help those in need. Those in my family who came before me, like my father and my grandfather Don Carlos, taught us the importance of always giving back. Indeed, I currently volunteer at the Humane Society of Tampa Bay, so I guess that is where I would be.

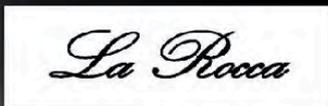
5. IF YOU COULD SHARE ONE PIECE OF WISDOM TO SOMEONE STARTING OUT IN THE PREMIUM CIGAR BUSINESS (EITHER A RETAILER OR A MANUFACTURER), WHAT WOULD IT BE?

As my father always says, “It's not about cigars, it's about the people.” Focus on being a good business partner, having strong values and always doing what's right, even when it is the harder of the choices. Your reputation matters more than anything else and in the long run, it will do right by you. And during these tough times we are living in, take a page out of the Fuente book: Work hard, stick to your principles, be guided by your passion and always, always, always keep fighting!

FAVORITES



800-22-CIGAR
800-222-4427
sales@arangocigarco.com
arangocigarco.com



3170 Commercial Ave.
Northbrook, IL 60062

ACE PRIME CIGARS

HUMANITY ELEVATED BY
ARTISTRY

A C E P R I M E . C O M



Distributed by
**CROWNED
HEADS**