THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF PHILLIPS & KING — VOL27 NO2 * SPRING 2024

TOBACCO BUSINESS



Making Modern History

Explore Tabacalera de Garcia: the people, the factory, and the Grupo de Maestros behind legacy cigar brands like Montecristo, H. Upmann, & Romeo y Julieta.

THE RIGHT PRODUCTS ARE THEIR SUPERPOWER

Get an inside look at the success of this multi-store Kansas retailer.

TAKE A FIELD TRIP IN THE TROPICS

Your guide to sun, fun, and fine tobacco in the Dominican Republic.

M81
MADURO
TO THE CORE

M81 Maduro to the Core is an exploration into the deepest, darkest and heaviest depths of the mystical Maduro leaf.

MADURO TO THE CORE



2023 RATED 95 CIGAR AFICIONADO

2023 TOP 25 CIGARS #7 CIGAR AFICIONADO

S84
SHADE
TO BLACK

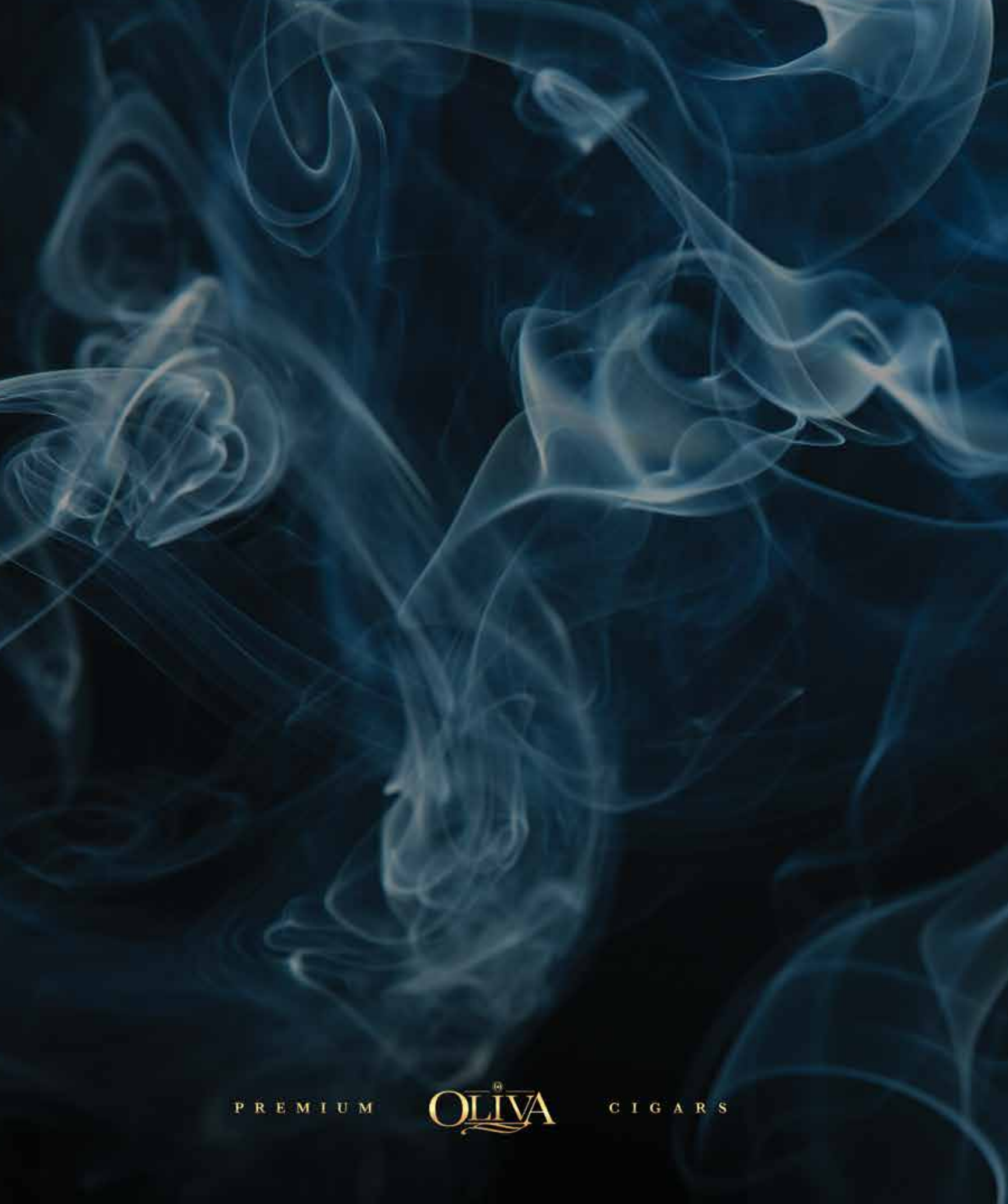
S84 Shade to Black pushes the very limits of ultra-rich and balanced blending within a shimmering shade wrapper.

SHADE TO BLACK



BLACKENED

By Drew Estate


PREMIUM
OLIVA
CIGARS


OLIVA
GRAN RESERVA LIMITADA
OLIVA
Serie
V
OLIVA
Serie
G
MELANIO
N RESERVA LIMITA
OLIVA
Serie
O
Serie
V

THE MARINA AT CASA DE CAMPO RESORT

Experience the charm of a coastal Mediterranean village in the heart of the tropics at Casa de Campo Resort's full-service Marina. Whether you're here to dock a yacht, catch a catamaran to a nearby island, book a fishing expedition, explore the community of cute shops and cafes, or enjoy dinner with a view, your seaside adventure is just starting in La Romana. (*casadecampo.com*)

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF CASA DE CAMPO





PUNTA CANA

With crystal clear waters in serene shades of blue and green, swaying palm trees soaring into the sky, and 30 miles of brilliant white sand beaches, a visit to Punta Cana is the perfect vision of a tropical island come to life. This is the quintessential Dominican Republic for most travelers—a beachgoer's destination with an abundance of spots to sunbathe and snorkel, and shiny resorts offering the ultimate in relaxation along with activities, fine dining, and a hopping nightlife.
(pictured here: Playa Blanca at the Westin Puntacana Resort & Club)

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF THE WESTIN PUNTACANA RESORT & CLUB





MEMBERS' FIELD DAY AT THE PROCIGAR FESTIVAL

Known for fields and factories that produce some of the world's best premium cigars, the Dominican tobacco industry deserves a good celebration. A yearly event that does just that, the Procigar festival serves up a lively schedule of activities, including a Members' Field Day, when attendees can roam through the aromatic, vibrant greens of growing tobacco while enjoying the tastes and sounds of Dominican culture.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF PROCIGAR





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THE TEAM

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Rachel McKnett

ART DIRECTOR
Harrison Brackett

CONTRIBUTORS
T.S. Donahue, Brian Rodak, Juan Sanchez, Ben Winokur

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Jim Coontz, Chris Hornaday, CLICK STUDIOS/@OGBILLYTHEKID

ILLUSTRATOR
Adam Cruft

FOR EDITORIAL OR ADVERTISING INQUIRIES
Please contact rachelmcknett@phillipsandking.com

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5449 Endeavour Court
Moorpark, CA 93021

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PACKAGED WITH Boveda 2-WAY HUMIDITY CONTROL

THINK OUTSIDE THE VAULT





Cigar Insider
WHALE
93
RATED

Innovation is the key to success in banking and cigars alike. **The Banker Daytrader**, a cigar crafted by **H. Upmann** with the same attention to detail since 1844, invites you to think outside the vault and experience a cigar that is sure to pay dividends in flavor and quality. Embrace the new and elevate your smoking experience with **H. Upmann The Banker Daytrader** today.

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THE BANKER
H. UPMANN
DAYTRADER

A NEW MONEY RELEASE

hupmann_usa hupmanncigars.com

SURGEON GENERAL WARNING: Tobacco Smoke Increases The Risk Of Lung Cancer And Heart Disease, Even In Nonsmokers.

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SPRING 2024









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PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF ADOBE STOCK; HARRISON BRACKETT; CHRIS HORNADAY



COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS HORNADAY





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Cigars + Coffee? Cigars + Rum? Yep—we'll take all of the above. Check out these Dominican duos that do not disappoint.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF JIM COONTZ AND ADOBE STOCK

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PHILLIPS & KING

Tobacco Business magazine is an official publication of Phillips & King, one of the largest distributors of premium cigars, tobacco products, and accessories in the United States. If you are a retailer interested in working with Phillips & King and receiving a printed copy of *Tobacco Business* magazine, please visit *PhillipsAndKing.com* or send an email to: *hello@phillipsandking.com*. New customers can receive $50 off their first order of $500 or more with the promo code **TBMNEW50**

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF ADOBE STOCK; HGIH TEA; AND TOM'S SUPER STORE

EVERY CIGAR WE MAKE PASSES THROUGH 300 HANDS – SORRY, 301

EACH WHITE BAND CIGAR IS HANDCRAFTED · EACH HAND APPLIES
A PERSONAL SKILL TO WHAT WILL BECOME A VERY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE ·



THE WHITE BAND IS

THE DIFFERENCE

SIGNATURE GRAND CRU ANIVERSARIO MILLENNIUM

#timebeautifullyfilled davidoffgeneva.com

EDITOR'S LETTER



A quick glance at the contents of a humidor can appear to be an indistinguishable sea of brown. It is only upon taking a closer look that the individual cigars reveal themselves in details. The different sizes, the varying shades, the pop of color from a box, a glint of gold embossed on a band, a tail presented or a cap affixed just so. These elements compel your customers to put a cigar in their hands and then be introduced to a whole new set of details from the blends and tobaccos, invisible to the naked eye but crucial to the smoking experience.

It's these particulars that set products apart and help customers make purchase decisions. But have you ever stopped to consider the craftsmanship that went into all of these impeccable details that are ultimately driving your sales? Behind every cigar in your humidor, and product on your shelf, there are hundreds of hands and people and stories that went into its making.

We're pleased to share some of these tales in this issue of *Tobacco Business* magazine, starting with a behind-the-scenes look at the new Tabacalera de Garcia factory in the Dominican Republic, which we recently toured with the Altadis U.S.A. team. I already had a deep appreciation for the magic of the blenders, but seeing the sorters, the rollers, the box-makers, the sticker-appliers, and the packers each doing their respective tasks was an eye-opening experience toward understanding the level of care and precision that go into the tiny details we don't even notice with a quick look inside a humidor.

Our trip to the Dominican Republic coincided with the Procigar Festival, a weeklong celebration of the country's tobacco and cigar industry, where we were able to connect with people behind some of your customers' favorite brands and get insight on their fields, factories, and cigars produced here.

At the retail level, we also saw the importance of details from a discussion with Tom Kessler of Tom's Super Shops in Kansas, and how his mastery of the right products and partnerships keep customers coming in and coming back.

And what's a trip to the tropics without a little fun? Our team enjoyed festival activities, a sunny afternoon at sea, and outstandingly tasty eats that we're sharing for your next Dominican adventure.

This issue shines a spotlight on the Dominican Republic, revealing all the details of this tiny but mighty island that are rolled, wrapped, and packed into every cigar, ready for your customers to experience.

¡Salud!

Rachel McKnett
Editor-in-Chief, *Tobacco Business* Magazine

BEHIND THE SCENES

From persistent felines to big cigars and packed schedules, hard work is always better in great company. Thanks for the good times, Altadis U.S.A.











PHOTOS COURTESY OF *TOBACCO BUSINESS* TEAM; CHRIS HORNADAY; CLICK STUDIOS/@OGBILLYTHEKID

TE-AMO®

THE ORIGINAL SAN ANDRĒS VALLEY CIGAR



A New Era

Crafted at the historic Turrent factory, Te-Amo celebrates craftsmanship with its original San Andres wrapper, blending deep-rooted traditions with a fresh artisanal approach.

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SURGEON GENERAL WARNING: Tobacco Use Increases The Risk Of Infertility, Stillbirth And Low Birth Weight.

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cigarlifer_

altadisusa.com

Create the Club

Looking to drive sales through increased customer loyalty? Give your people a reason to buy.

Written by Rachel McKnett

Smoking cigars. This is one thing every cigar enthusiast loves, no matter who they are or where they live. And as a tobacco retailer, this is one thing you know with certainty. But what isn't always crystal clear is exactly how to harness that passion in a way that's profitable to you. Sure, you have loyal customers who come in for their sticks like clockwork. But is there a way to accelerate their buying patterns or increase their units per transaction? And perhaps to also draw more customers into that inner circle of loyalists? Starting a cigar club might be just the right answer to these questions.

WHY A CIGAR CLUB?

Humans are social beings that like to connect with others who share similar values and pastimes. In fact, studies have often shown that people who are part of a group tend to feel happier than those riding solo. And smoking cigars, by its very nature, is a relaxing activity that's definitely optimized in the company of others. So, in starting a cigar club, your store is paving the way toward providing happiness for your customers. You are creating a platform for people to gather, talk, and relate to each other. To bond over cigars and feel a sense of belonging over a shared experience. Your club is giving them a reason to buy cigars from you, and these sales can move the needle on your bottom line.

FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS

Your Cigar Club members are destined become your best customers and brand ambassadors. You can provide them with a little log to record their experiences and cigars smoked, and offer them a first crack at recent arrivals and limited editions to help get the word out about their availability. As part of your insider team, they're most likely to be your first adopters in buying new products—especially when they are given the chance to have something that others cannot. And it goes without saying that they should receive some special perks like a small discount on each purchase, a free accessory at a certain spend level, or even entries to win products (or their own parking space?!) at the next club meeting. They're making purchases anyways, but these incentives can go a long way in fostering their loyalty and sense of exclusivity while likely increasing their transaction values, too.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NASHBOX STUDIOS

BLACKENED

By Drew Estate



S84 SHADE TO BLACK

FALL THROUGH THE LIGHT — INTO THE — UNFORGIVEN DARKNESS

WITHIN A MASTERFULLY CRAFTED CONNECTICUT SHADE BY THE TORCEDORS OF LA GRAN FABRICA DREW ESTATE





CONVENIENCE TRANSLATES TO SALES

If you have the space, it's ideal to hold the herf, or smoking event, inside your store, where everyone can enjoy their cigars together. Retailers with the room to congregate and the ability to smoke onsite make it easy for members to buy cigars on the spot, whether they plan to smoke them during the session or just bring some home for later. In-store events also provide the opportunity to upsell customers on necessary cigar accessories, like lighters or cutters they might've accidentally left at home but can easily replace with a quick trip to your checkout counter. To encourage these sales during or after the gathering, you might want to consider some sort of discount or promotion. It's a solid opportunity to push rarely discounted items, aging inventory, or general slow movers, as this is an audience that's already here and ready to buy.

NO SPACE? NO PROBLEM.

If there's one thing the Covid-19 pandemic taught us, it's that almost anything can happen online. A cigar club on a digital platform takes some planning, but it can be done. And it is really easy for people to attend (without you having to give away one of your coveted parking spots). If you're trying to coordinate so everyone is smoking the same brand, blend, and size during the herf, you'll want to give your customers plenty of time to buy the cigar in advance (and hey, maybe give them a small discount, too). Just note that if you're asking everyone to smoke the same cigar, you may want to start off with something mild and creamy that's easy for everyone, until you have a better feel for the palates in your group. Even if you're running a more relaxed club, where people can smoke any cigar they'd like, definitely take the opportunity to make recommendations and give people notice so they have time to buy from you, rather than pull something from their personal humidor. Since you can't easily upsell during a digital club event, we advise activating the event participants with a promo code sent via email afterwards, offering an in-store discount or gift with their next purchase.

A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER

In starting a cigar club at your store, you're giving customers a platform and a place to discuss one of their favorite pastimes and share thoughts with other enthusiasts. And you're providing a compelling reason to buy and smoke more cigars, especially in a group setting where members are regularly making recommendations to each other. We suggest that you start with a simple plan and grow from there. Be creative with the perks and post-meeting promotions, and be sure to ask for feedback along the way. Chances are, you won't really have to twist anyone's arm to buy their next cigar, but your store's club will give people a solid excuse to buy more than one. **TB**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADOBE STOCK

CAMACHO BROADLEAF

BIG LEAF BIG SMOKE



BIG FLAVOR, BOLD PERSONALITY

In the quest for excellence, no corners were cut. The result is an oversized Honduran Broadleaf packed with giant flavor and crafted with precision and passion. A cigar with an"ALL OR NOTHING" attitude. No compromises. No settling. This bad boy is tailored just for you - no questions asked.

Navigating Changing Tides

The Emergence of Tobacco-Free Alternatives in Convenience Stores

By Benjamin Winokur

In the ever-shifting currents of public health and legislation, convenience stores find themselves in need of a compass. Recent legislative trends, particularly in states like California, have resulted in prohibitions against the sale of flavored tobacco products. Menthol cigarettes, flavored blunt wraps, and flavored e-cigarettes are on their way out to sea, disrupting traditional tobacco product sales and causing a shift in direction for the inventory strategies of tobacco and convenience retailers.

The impetus for such legislative shifts is easily traced back to public health concerns magnified by political opportunity. These concerns are particularly poignant regarding youth and vulnerable communities, who are disproportionately affected by tobacco products. In response, several states have introduced bills to ban all flavored tobacco products, echoing a nationwide movement toward tobacco-free alternatives.

Amidst this backdrop, brands like High Tea are a welcome profit-driver for retailers navigating these choppy waters. High Tea's offerings, including their Cones and Wraps, are an innovative pivot from traditional tobacco products. Crafted from simple ingredients—cacao, chamomile, and yerba mate—High Tea SKUs are tobacco-free, nicotine-free, and hemp-free, making them an appealing alternative for retailers and consumers who have been left adrift as tobacco flavored products disappear over the horizon.

The integration of High Tea products into convenience store shelves is more than a mere response to regulatory bans. It is a strategic maneuver aligned with broader public health awareness for the risks that come with tobacco and nicotine use. This pivot not only helps the bottom lines of convenience stores in the face of diminishing tobacco product sales, but it also positions them as forward-thinkers in favor of consumers' changing leisure habits, as well as their health trends.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF HIGH TEA

SEEING GREEN

Amidst legislative shifts and uncertainties on flavor bans, retailers are looking toward tobacco-free brands like High Tea to drive profits. One of the most popular wraps in the industry, its high quality ensures a sturdy leaf that won't crack and an even burn that maximizes the entire experience.


HERBAL WRAPS
HEMP-FREE
High Tea
NON-TOBACCO
GREEN
THE EVE
5 HERBAL WRAPS
GREEN APPLE
DON'T PANIC IT'S ORGANIC

HIGH TEA'S MARKET IMPACT: A CASE STUDY IN ADAPTATION

Nielsen reporting (based on the latest 52 weeks in Total US Convenience) underscores the burgeoning impact of High Tea in the convenience store landscape. Remarkably, the product has notched sales totaling approximately $1.2 million, with roughly 675,000 retail units sold in the latest reporting period. This robust performance is indicative of the brand's growing resonance within the tobacco alternative space.

The report further highlights a substantial 77.36% increase in sales value for High Tea, coupled with a 93.28% increase in unit sales. These figures are not just numbers; they represent a significant shift in consumer preferences and retailer adaptation strategies. High Tea's market penetration, indicated by 1.93% of the All-Commodity Volume (ACV), although niche, points toward a growing acceptance by retailers as they allocate shelf space in US convenience stores.

Regional data paints a diverse picture of High Tea's performance, with notable growth in specific areas like the Middle Atlantic Division, signifying varying consumer trends across the United States.

Such insights are invaluable for retailers and market analysts alike, offering a clear view of the evolving landscapes in tobacco-free alternatives, and an encouraging forecast for those looking to navigate the tides of trend, legislation, and opportunity. **TB**

Benjamin Winokur has 17 years of business experience and over a decade experience in the tobacco and alternative products industry. Currently he is Brand Manager of Emerging Products at Kretek International, Inc., managing the Kretek portfolio of proprietary brands. Previously, Benjamin was the Editor-in-Chief for Cigar & Spirits Magazine.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF HIGH TEA

EXPLORE MORE FROM HIGH TEA

WHY STOCK ONLY ONE?

Eye-catching at the retail level and versatile for consumers, High Tea wraps and cones are 100% tobacco- and nicotine-free, crafted from cacao, yerba mate, and chamomile.





SURGEON GENERAL WARNING:
Cigars Are Not A Safe Alternative
To Cigarettes.

Top 15 New Arrivals

Written by Rachel McKnett

Stay on the cutting edge of customer demands by stocking the some of the latest and greatest products available in the Phillips & King portfolio. Think new blends, new trends, and fresh inventory to stir up your profit potential.

1 ASYLUM 867 AUNTIE

ASYACA

Part of the Asylum 13 series, the Asylum 867 Auntie cigar puts expert craftsmanship and a crazy good experience into the hands of enthusiasts. Offering a bold symphony of aromatic flavors and profile notes, including dark chocolate, espresso, and exotic spices, which evolve throughout the smoke, this medium-bodied cigar is an impeccably constructed, extremely enjoyable Honduran puro.

2 AGANORSA NEW CUBA SUPERIOR CONNECTICUT

111120

Now available in beautifully presented boxes, Aganorsa's New Cuba Superior cigars are ready for your store's humidor. These mellow-bodied customer favorites were previously available in bundles, but their new packaging steps up the swag factor of this solid everyday smoke. Sweet and salty with aromatic notes of cedar and florals on the finish, these cigars feature Aganorsa's signature Nicaraguan tobaccos with an Ecuadorian Connecticut shade leaf wrapper.

3 CUBAN ROUNDS MADURO

151883

Handcrafted yet readily affordable, the well-balanced blend of Cuban Rounds has received a new maduro wrapper, giving it a new look and an extra punch of sweetness enveloping its layers of textured flavor. Refined yet nuanced, each perfect smoke is a satisfying nod at tradition and the complexity and quality of the leaves within.

4 DJARUM BLACK BLISS EMERALD

DJCBBE

A next-level offering for retailers looking to add tobacco-free and nicotine-free products to their inventory, Djarum Black Bliss Emerald offers the same relaxing enjoyment as Djarum clove-filtered cigars, but without the tobacco or nicotine. Djarum Black Bliss delivers their enigmatic, aromatic experience with a natural blend of Indonesian cloves and perfectly balanced botanicals like extracts of key lime, tamarind, and fig leaf.

5 ROCKY PATEL DARK STAR

RPDSRB

A stellar cigar by one of the industry's most recognizable brands, Rocky Patel's Dark Star shines brightly (darkly?) with a rich, moody Honduran Corojo wrapper enveloping a blend of premium tobacco fillers from Nicaragua, Honduras, and Paraguay. This well-balanced, medium-bodied cigar is meant to be savored, with evolving flavor notes of dark chocolate, espresso, spices, and dried fruits.

6 TATIANA ARCTIC BLAST

TATART

Available exclusively through Phillips & King, set your inventory apart from competitors with the new Arctic Blast from Tatiana. Featuring a box that's ready to catch your customer's eye, this mellow smoke is handmade in the Dominican Republic and offers a satisfying subtle breath of minty freshness on every puff.

7 EL SEPTIMO EMPEROR COLLECTION YAO MADURO

EMPYAM

A cigar that lives up to the impressive stature of the legendary ruler it was inspired by, the Yao Maduro from El Septimo's Emperor Collection delivers a rich, top-shelf experience expected from this premium brand. This medium-bodied smoke offers a luxe journey through notes of dark chocolate, oak, espresso, and hints of spice on the finish.

8 FRATELLO NAVETTA ENTERPRISE TORO

NAVENT

Give your customers an out-of-this-world cigar with Fratello's Navetta Enterprise. Founded by NASA veteran Omar de Frias, the name is a nod to his background with space shuttle missions, while the blend offers a full-bodied flavor journey from its all-Nicaraguan Jalapa tobacco core, Dominican Viso binder, and richly dark Ecuadorian Habano wrapper leaf.

9 GUARDSMAN 3 FINGER CIGAR CASE

901109

Bring style to your store's cigar accessory selection with the new 3 Finger Cigar Case from Guardsman. An easy upsell item to the cigar enthusiast or a gift suggestion to an enthusiast's loved one, this sleek, leather case holds and protects three cigars at a time, and provides impress-your-friends transport to casual get-togethers or important nights out.

10 GUARDSMAN TRAVELER CASE

901116

Ready to store or carry 20 favorite cigars in one convenient, protective case, the Guardsman Traveler Case is richly outfitted with a luxurious leather exterior that says this cigar aficionado means business. It's an essential accessory for premium cigar sellers to stock, and can double as a sales tool as you encourage customers to fill the box with sticks from your humidor.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM COONTZ


NAVETTA
CUBAN ROUNDS
DARK STAR
BLACK
ASYLUM 247
AUNTIE
八百六十七
NEW CUBA
NICARAGUA
SUPERIOR
NEW CUBA
SUPERIOR
25 TORO
CONNECTICUT
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10



11 SUGAR DADDY BAR

L to R: DPVSD11, DPVSD1, DPVSD15

Whether you're looking to expand your vape inventory or jump into a new category, Sugar Daddy Bar has the right cache and products to fit your bill. Made with high-quality materials, this popular brand is a customer favorite, with a broad assortment of enticing flavors and equally enjoyable unflavored options.

12 BACCARAT RESERVE COLLECTION ROBUSTO

900972

With a big name and exclusive blend made only for Phillips & King retail customers to sell, the Reserve Collection Baccarat cigar is a handmade, medium-bodied smoke wrapped in a 3-year-aged Corojo leaf from Ecuador. It's topped with a sweet molasses cap that offers delightful notes of honey and coffee, which mixes well with its full, earthy richness of cedar, cocoa, and a refined leathery finish.





13 OLIVA RESERVE COLLECTION TORO

ORCTR

With a name that every cigar enthusiast recognizes, Oliva has joined the Phillips & King Reserve Collection with an exclusive blend that delivers on Oliva's signature enjoyment. Sure to be a customer draw, this handcrafted cigar is made with perfectly aged long-filler tobaccos, and is available only through Phillips & King.

14 CAO FLATHEAD RESONATOR

CAORES

CAO is going big with their new Flathead Resonator, a box-pressed icon coming in at a massive 8 x 60. Featuring a 95-rated blend of Dominican Piloto Cubano and Nicaraguan Ligero tobaccos and a Connecticut Broadleaf wrapper, this medium- to full-bodied cigar paves the way for a long, long flavor-filled ride. And the box is an eye-catcher with a plasma-cut metal lid that doubles as a cool keepsake once the cigars are gone.

15 BLACKENED BY DREW ESTATE S84 SHADE TO BLACK DOUBLE CORONA

BLKDBL

A collab between Metallica's James Hetfield and the iconic Drew Estate, Blackened S84 Shade to Black is an instant classic. A rich, heavy cigar handcrafted with a blend of Nicaraguan, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania Maduro tobaccos and wrapped in a creamy Ecuadorian-grown Connecticut Shade leaf, it's a medium-bodied experience that's satisfyingly chewy, and when smoked, you'll find that Nothing Else Matters.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM COONTZ

A CIGAR *120* YEARS IN THE MAKING.

Discover La Aurora 120 Anniversary.



Fernando León Asensio

Guillermo León Herbert

Eduardo León Jimenes



Rated 95 C&S

Rated 91 Blind Man's Puff

Rated 90 Cigar Snob Magazine

#3 CIGAR & SPIRITS CIGAR of the YEAR 2023

For 120 years, La Aurora and the León family have crafted premium cigars that stand on the shoulders of tradition. Now, this legendary family legacy and a new, innovative approach at our historic factory in the Dominican Republic have culminated in a cigar that is 120 years in the making – **La Aurora 120 Anniversary**.

With a cedar aroma, the first draw reveals smoky flavors of peppered cinnamon and anise. Sweetness then enters the fold with flavors of cocoa and creamy coffee bean, which soon evolve into a smooth vanilla. A flavor ride to the finish, 120 then transitions to dry fruit and rich tropical notes, with subtle hints of wild honey and rich earth.



Find La Aurora 120 Anniversary near you

@LaAuroraCigarUS

STAYING ABOVE THE CLOUDS

The vaping industry remains profitable for retailers as regulators work to limit product availability.

Written by T.S. Donahue

The vaping industry is growing at a feverish pace. The U.S. vaping market was estimated to be valued at $8 billion in 2023. According to IBIS World, a global industry research firm, it grew by 1.4% in 2023 and has grown 3.9% per year on average between 2018 and 2023. In 2024, revenues in the e-cigarette segment in the U.S. are projected to reach an unbelievable $8.8 billion, according to Statista, with an anticipated annual growth rate of 3.24% from 2024 to 2028 (CAGR 2024-2028).

Amanda Williams, manager of News & Smokes in Grants Pass, Oregon, said vaping product sales have grown steadily in her shop over the past several years. She said a trend that she's noticed is many customers are no longer just buying traditional machine-made cigarettes. Consumers are now transitioning through several products, usually settling on the next generation nicotine products.

"It's just one of those things that varies because we have different types of customers coming into the smoke shop," she said. "We have people who are no longer constantly buying tailor-made cigarettes and are now going to roll their own. Then, from rolling their own to switching to vaping, and not necessarily even a flavored vape, but maybe a [tobacco flavor]. It just really depends on that individual person."

A shift away from traditional tobacco products is driving the rapid growth in the vaping segment. This is good news for retailers. As sales of traditional cigarettes decline, many shop owners say vape products are helping mitigate any profit losses from slowing combustible sales. Williams said it's similar to any other consumer product category; everyone wants the newest and latest devices.

"It's just like anything else: out with the old and in with the new. Everyone wants the latest product and has their personal preference for the device that they like and which flavors, too. I know that right now what's new and really popular are the digital devices." explains Williams. "People really like those because they can see their battery life and flavor (e-liquid) life."

Technically speaking, vaping hardware is becoming more interactive with diverse features. Devices, especially disposables, are now accommodating larger tank capacities based on consumer demands. Disposable devices are integrating the best features from previous pod systems and box mod devices. Many new disposables offer smart screens that provide more intuitive information, including displays for e-liquid and battery levels, along with their current use mode.

Disposable pods are becoming more advanced as they integrate innovations such as rapid charging and new smart technologies like dual mesh coils. These innovations enable the creation of devices with larger capacities and improved taste. This trend indicates a shift toward better quality and functionality in the market.

STOCKING SHELVES

When deciding what to stock, retailers say it is often based on customer requests and a feel for what is popular in their area. Many shop owners say there's a major benefit to having a quality relationship with their distributor. Often, a new device begins growing its presence in the market, and consumers might be responding positively to the product, but it isn't widely known yet. A good distributor can inform retailers of new product releases and availability. Williams said the most popular product in her shop is the 6000-puff Strawmelon-flavored Flum Pebble.

"Phillips & King is our main distributor right now for the Flum. With them, it's nice because we do have a personal relationship with our reps. So, anytime we have problems with anything, she's just a phone call away, and she does everything she can to ensure we are happy," said Williams. "With vapes, it's nice because there are what we call duds. Some brands have more

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADOBE STOCK





than others ... With Philips & King, we have that good relationship where we get credit for those defective devices. We're not losing money, and therefore, we are able to make sure that our customer is 100% satisfied and pleased with their product because it is working when they leave our store."

The Flum Pebble disposable device is one of the most popular disposable vape products on the market, and a prime example of the industry's innovation. It features 14.0 mL of salt nicotine e-juice and a rechargeable battery that lasts approximately 6,000 puffs. The disposable e-cig has a mesh coil and comes in numerous flavors at 5% nicotine. Flum also offers the Flum Float disposable vape, which provides users with approximately 3,000 puffs and is made with 5% salt nicotine e-juice. It features a cylindrical design and uses a draw-activation firing mechanism for quick and easy vaping.

Bert Leeper, with Fox Peak Station in Fernley, Nevada, said she has a board that decides which vaping products are sold in Fox Peak Station stores. Usually, the board will visit trade shows, such as the Total Products Expo (TPE) held in Las Vegas every January, to discover the products they will stock. Leeper said the best-selling vapes in her stores are the Sugar Daddy and Hyde brands.

"Our vaping products are selling well. They've been selling steadily for the past few years," she said. "We don't have any flavor bans, so we do see customers from California come to our stores looking for flavored products that they don't have access to in their state."

Several vaping brands are building new customer bases. Sugar Daddy Bar, for example, offers products with 0%, 2.8%, and 5% nicotine. The company claims to offer products for consumers who only vape for pleasure and those seeking to enjoy a mild or stronger nicotine experience. Similar products are also selling well in the U.S. The Hyppe Max Air Disposable Vape is a flat-designed device with a rechargeable 650 mAh battery and an estimated 5,000 puffs. The Hyppe Max Flow Supreme has added an adjustable bottom airflow control ring and mesh coil heating element in the 2,000-puff devices.

Amanda Hines, with Hanzawa's Variety Store in Haiku, Hawaii, said that she also does not notice many smokers switching to vapes, as they've already made the switch. She said her most popular vaping product is the Elf Tank BX6000 in a variety of flavors. They choose the brands they sell by doing research and taking customer requests.

"The flavored Elf products are some of our best sellers. Vape sales have been steadily rising over the past several years, and combustible cigarettes have been on the decline," she said. I don't see many people transitioning these days, but many people who have transitioned in the past are continuously purchasing those products."

The Elf Tank BX6000 disposable vape is a hugely popular brand across the U.S. Made with a rubberized coating and smooth edges, this disposable device was designed to fit comfortably in hand. It comes pre-filled with 14.3mL of nicotine salt e-liquid and features a 650 mAh internal rechargeable battery for up to roughly 6,000 puffs.

REGULATORY CONCERNS

While business may be booming for some shop owners, many states have also passed or are considering legislation to limit a retailer's ability to market vaping products. The e-cigarette regulatory landscape is exceptionally difficult for retailers. While the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has been slow to enforce its own decisions, many states and localities have begun to pick up the pace by implementing flavor bans and product registry lists.

Numerous states and municipalities have passed vape registry laws, including Alabama, Louisiana, Utah, and Oklahoma. Many of them use the same list, which includes the 23 products authorized by the FDA and several other products that currently have a premarket tobacco product application (PMTA) under review by the regulatory agency. Other regions can be harsher. The City of San Francisco, for example, prohibits the sale of any e-cigarette products that do not have marketing orders issued by the FDA. As of January 1, 2024, the U.S. had 283 municipalities that enacted laws restricting flavored vaping and other tobacco product sales in some manner.

Hines said that while Hawaii doesn't currently have a flavor ban, state lawmakers have tried numerous times to create one. She said that the biggest obstacle in Hawaii currently is the 70% wholesale tax placed on vaping products. "The wholesale tax started on January 1. It almost doubled the cost of vaping products overnight," she explained. "It was a big shock to consumers. A flavor ban alongside that tax would probably destroy the industry here."

Many states that have flavor bans lose taxes to nearby states that don't have flavor bans. In Massachusetts, a recent report from the Commonwealth's Illegal Tobacco Task Force found sales tax revenue dropped by $7 million in 2023, most of which resulted from the state's failed ban on menthol cigarettes and flavored tobacco. Williams sees a similar trend happening

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF FLUM

> ***Phillips & King is our main distributor right now for the Flum. With them, it's nice because we do have a personal relationship with our reps. So, anytime we have problems with anything, she's just a phone call away, and she does everything she can to ensure we are happy.***
>
> —Amanda Williams,
> Manager of News & Smokes in Grants Pass

in her store, with increased sales thanks to customers coming from nearby California, which have risen because California has a strict flavor ban, while Oregon does not.

"Overall, I don't see a whole lot of change. It's steady. I may have even sold a little less than last year, but maybe it's just that I'm not seeing as many locals buying more devices (those that are going to transition already have). But we make up for that difference because we have more customers traveling and coming to a state that doesn't have a flavor ban," she explains. "These are mostly adult former smokers who enjoy flavored products that aren't available where they live."

In Oregon, several municipalities have attempted to enact flavor bans, but they have all been overturned in the courts. In February 2020, Oregon lawmakers considered a statewide ban on flavored vapes, but it died after heavy lobbying by the tobacco and vape industries. In nearby California, however, there is a strict flavor ban in force, and the state is also considering a state vaping product registry. Williams said that wondering which direction the tobacco regulatory environment winds are blowing is a constant concern for retailers.

"I mean, I think with any business, this is a fear because we just don't know what will come about. And in my opinion, it's probably going to happen sooner, rather than later," she said. "And it will impact a lot of businesses. I mean, for any business that carries tobacco products and vapes ... It's going to be a big, big deal."

There will continue to be significant positives for the vaping industry moving forward. The FDA has said it will approve more vaping products, though they have not identified when that will take place. Industry insiders say innovation and science will continue to drive the vaping industry. New products are also coming on the market that offer a nicotine substitute, 6-methyl nicotine, that won't be subject to the FDA's tobacco regulatory process.

The vaping industry has also had positive news from the U.S. court system. On Jan. 3, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruled that the FDA acted "arbitrarily and capriciously" in rejecting PMTAs for two vaping companies. The 9-5 decision by the New Orleans-based court reversed a July 2022 decision by a three-judge panel of that court.

The Supreme Court of the United States is also considering action on Chevron deference, which limits a court's ability to question the FDA's interpretation of its authority under the Tobacco Control Act in vaping-related federal lawsuits. This decision could have a devastating impact on the FDA's ability to regulate the vaping industry.

When asked what store owners can do to prepare for regulatory action, Williams said that her team has been limiting the number of brands they carry. "I don't know the best solution. I know we lean on the knowledge of our distributor and have been cautious in our ordering," she said. "Especially with new brands or ones that might not move as well as another, just because of the fear that it could be something we just end up sitting on for a long time and losing money. We are just trying to run a business selling legal products. That's getting harder every day." **TB**



HOME FIELD ADVANTAGE

The Dominican Republic is a big player in the tobacco business.

Written by Rachel McKnett
Photography by Procigar and Harrison Brackett

When most people think about the Dominican Republic, they dream of beaches, sunshine, and azure waters. But when a premium cigar enthusiast thinks about this tropical island, they're dreaming about the stuff their favorite pastime is made of: tobacco.

This coveted leaf has been growing in the Dominican Republic for centuries, taking advantage of the fertile soils of the Cibao Valley and its agreeable climate. Tobacco took a significant root in the country's agricultural output upon the arrival of immigrants from the Canary Islands in the mid-1700s. The industry received a boost in 1903 when the La Aurora cigar factory opened near Santiago. And it leapt to new heights after Cuba's 1959 revolution sent so many of its top growers and cigar manufacturers to nearby countries, including the Dominican Republic. This, of course, was followed by the United States' embargo of Cuban goods, which meant the world's biggest cigar market now needed to import products from other nations. Enter the Dominican Republic.

In addition to its fertile farmland, the Dominican Republic has enjoyed a relatively stable political climate, making it an attractive investment for growers and crafters, many of whom have created a footprint on this island. And thanks to the increased demand for premium cigars following the boom of the 1990s, tobacco is now one of the country's top agricultural products, and is being grown here by and for some of the biggest names in the industry.

At this year's Procigar Festival, which celebrates Dominican tobacco and premium cigars, we were able to ask a few questions of Guillermo León Herbert from La Aurora and Espinal Hamlet from Davidoff of Geneva, and get their perspectives about why the Dominican Republic makes such a difference to their growing fields and final products.



What sets the Dominican Republic apart from other tobacco-growing and cigar-making countries?

Herbert: This country stands out as a grower and manufacturer because of its fertile soils and ideal climate, the exceptional quality of the tobacco leaves grown, and its long tradition in the art of premium cigars. As a whole, the Dominican Republic is home to a wide variety of internationally recognized brands known for their craftsmanship, and the industry is very collaborative and supportive amongst the manufacturers.

Hamlet: The Dominican Republic is rich in history, with a cultural landscape that's deeply rooted in the art of craftsmanship and cigars, which stretches back over centuries and has long been an important part of the country's economy. Today, the Dominican Republic is the world's largest cigar-producing country in terms of volume, thanks to its fertile soil and favorable climate. But in my opinion, what really makes the difference is the expertise, passion, and quest for detailed perfection from the people growing tobacco and making cigars here.

How does the soil in your Dominican fields contribute to the flavor profiles of the tobacco leaves and ultimately the cigars they're crafted into?

Herbert: Our soil's unique mineral- and nutrient-rich composition imparts distinct characteristics to the tobacco plants as they grow. This, along with our agricultural practices, influences the flavors, aromas, and the overall quality of the tobacco leaves that we grow. Our master craftsmen are very aware of these flavor nuances, and they expertly blend them into the wide range of cigars that comprise La Aurora's portfolio.

Hamlet: The soil or terroir is the essence of every tobacco plant. And when combined with the climatic characteristics of the Dominican Republic—its humidity, rainfall, and sunshine—along with the special care we provide, it gives birth to different taste sensations. And it's our master blender who considers these flavors when crafting a new blend.

How do the farming techniques contribute to the quality of the tobacco grown here?

Herbert: Our agricultural techniques are imperative to achieving our high-quality tobacco. These involve adequate soil preparation, planting high-quality seedlings, effective hilling, and preventative sanitary measures. As part of our vertical integration strategy, we've established our own Agronomy department, which works closely with growers to uphold standards that ensure top-quality tobacco.

Hamlet: Our growing techniques and the constant care and attention we provide to our tobacco are crucial to its superior quality. We have specialized agronomist teams who visit our fields several times a week to oversee the growing process and give technical directions to the farmers. As each tobacco leaf has its own maturity level, we only pick the leaves when they are ready. Because of this, harvesting a tobacco field can take weeks, but this cannot be rushed. All of the leaves are picked by hand and individually cured in our closed curing barns, where we carefully hand-sew the tobacco leaves together for curing so they dry evenly and have the perfect balance.



LA AURORA
DOMINICAN DEFINED

MORE FIELD NOTES FROM GUILLERMO LEÓN HERBERT OF LA AURORA

What kind of tobacco is being grown on these fields?
We grow Habano tobacco in different varieties, like Carbonell, Corojo, and Criollo 98.

Is the tobacco grown here specifically for La Aurora brands?
The tobacco we cultivate is used exclusively for our brands and products. We oversee the entire process and implement the best environmental practices and agronomy techniques to ensure the quality of the leaves used in each cigar manufactured.

Which brands are crafted at your factory in the Dominican Republic?
La Aurora produces a variety of cigar brands, each with its own flavor profile and distinctive characteristics. Some of our best known brands are: La Aurora Anniversary Edition, La Aurora 1903 Edition/Preferidos, La Aurora ADN Dominicano, and La Aurora Family Reserve.

How are you helping the cigar-making community in the Dominican Republic?
As a company, we are committed to advancing and strengthening the tobacco community. We actively engage with organizations like Procigar, and we work closely with other industry leaders to uphold the highest standards of quality, sustainability, and ethics in cigar production. We also play a big role in the industry through research, training, and educational initiatives to elevate knowledge and skills across the community.

How long have these fields and factory been used by La Aurora?
Our factory started 120 years ago in Guazumal, Tamboril. We relocated to the center of Santiago city in 1912 but returned to Guazumal in 2007, which is where we are currently situated.









OVER 120 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

Tours to La Aurora's fields and factory are separate, but both locations offer a strong sense of the passion for high quality and fine craftsmanship that honors the family legacy of the brand, whose heritage has transcended generations in the Dominican Republic.











Davidoff of Geneva

MORE FIELD NOTES FROM ESPINAL HAMLET OF DAVIDOFF OF GENEVA

What kind of tobacco is being grown on these fields?
On our farms, we produce a vast variety of traditional, specialty cultivated, and hybrid tobaccos which have been established by our agronomist team. Some of these developments can take up to 10 years before the perfect seed for its soil is created.

Is the tobacco grown here specifically for Davidoff of Geneva brands?
The majority of the tobaccos we grow in the Dominican Republic is used for our Davidoff cigars. However, we also use them for other cigar brands we own, like AVO, Griffin's, Cusano, and Zino Platinum.

Which brands are crafted at your factory here?
In the Davidoff factory, we exclusively make Davidoff cigars. Other brands that we own, like AVO, Griffin's, and Zino Platinum, are created in the OK factory on the same premises, which is located in Villa Gonzalez near Santiago de los Caballeros.

How are you helping the cigar-making community in the Dominican Republic?
As an engaged member of the Procigar organization, we work hand-in-hand with our colleagues, the government, local authorities, and farmers to embrace sustainable, best-practice farming and fair working conditions, all of which keeps our tobacco competitive in the market and creates new job opportunities for locals. In addition to this, we opened the Tabadom Learning Center in spring of 2023, where children of our employees can attend complimentary English classes. We currently have 104 bright minds, aged between 6 and 14 years, who are attending these classes.

How long have these fields and factory been used by Davidoff of Geneva?
We have been using the fields and our factory here for over 30 years, since we started production in the Dominican Republic back in 1991.

FROM IN-GROUND TO IN-HAND

Visitors to the Davidoff of Geneva fields and factory enjoy first-hand insight to the storied brand's "crop to shop" process, from seeding the tobacco to the finished cigars being packed and shipped to over 130 markets.

Procigar: to Protect & Celebrate

This organization keeps the business of tobacco growing, thriving, and having a good time in the Dominican Republic.

A collective of the cigar industry's power players with roots in the Dominican Republic, Procigar was formed in 1992 to protect and preserve their country and craft. Members are committed to upholding high standards of quality and consistency, and uplifting their communities, ensuring the Dominican Republic's esteemed role in humidors all around the world.

February 2024 saw the 16th Annual Procigar Festival—a lively affair of music, dancing, cocktails, catamarans, culture, parties, fine dining, and of course, premium cigars in spades. The weeklong event celebrates the Dominican Republic cigar industry with an immersive experience of factory visits, field days, and festivities, all of which culminate in a gala fundraiser with an auction that raised more than half a million dollars for several local nonprofit organizations.



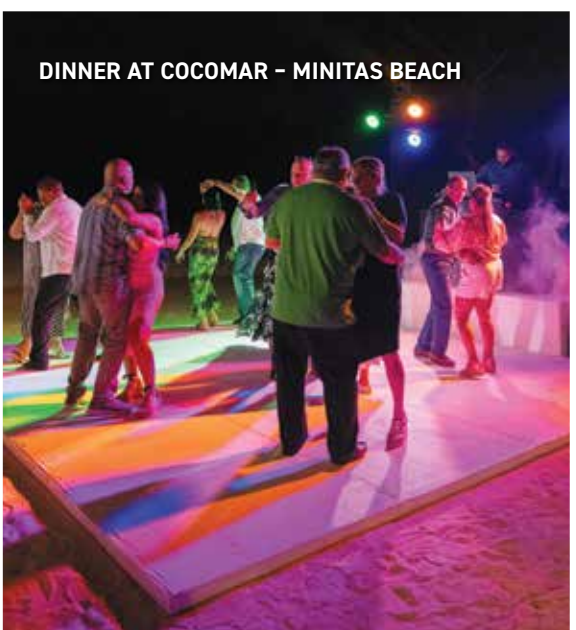
WELCOME COCKTAIL DINNER AT LAGO GRILL



CATAMARAN TO LA ISLA DE CATALINA



TABACALERA DE GARCÍA FACTORY TOUR



DINNER AT COCOMAR – MINITAS BEACH



TABACALERA DE GARCÍA FACTORY TOUR



WELCOME COCKTAIL PARTY



WELCOME DINNER PARTY



LA FLOR DOMINICANA TOUR

> “Attended by businessmen, consumers, and store owners from around the world, special guests and cigar aficionados from the Dominican Republic, Procigar members and sponsors, and the national and international press, the Procigar Festival is an unforgettable way to experience of the passion and pleasure of Dominican cigars.”
>
> **—Hendrik Kelner, President of Procigar**



ARTURO FUENTE TOUR



GALA DINNER PARTY



Making Modern History

Steeped in tradition and streamlined for success, get an inside look at Tabacalera de Garcia, the new factory behind some of your favorite premium cigar brands.

Written by Rachel McKnett
Photography by Chris Hornaday and Altadis U.S.A.



It was just past 8am when our van rolled through the gates of Tabacalera de Garcia as it appeared to be waking up for the day. There was a small crowd gathered outside the 2-year-old premium cigar factory with resumes in hand, waiting to apply for positions within. And there was a steady stream of workers with backpacks swarming through the entrance turnstiles, glancing at us curiously as we piled out of the van and received our security badges, but then moving on with business as usual, chatting with their companions before disappearing into one of the many low, pristinely white buildings stretching across the compound. We were there to explore Tabacalera de Garcia, one of the largest hand-rolled cigar factories in the world, and makers of some of the most recognizable names found in a good humidor, like Montecristo, Romeo y Julieta, VegaFina, and H. Upmann. Tabacalera de Garcia has been a tobacco industry fixture for over 50 years, but following its separation from Imperial, it was given a fresh start and a newly built, 350,000+-square-foot campus in the La Romana region of the Dominican Republic to focus on its now entirely premium products. A rarity for an established company of its size to build anew, Tabacalera de Garcia is a younger, state-of-the-art version of its previous self, with an air of freedom and pride seen and felt from the investment bestowed upon the future of the company, its products, and the caliber of people who work here.

Welcoming us at the front office were three key members of Tabacalera de Garcia's leadership team: Ricardo Nieto, Head of Manufacturing and General Manager; Javier Elmudesi, Industrial Affairs Manager; and Pedro Ventura, Director of Operations. Despite their high-ranking titles, we were met with the warm smiles and easy conversations of longtime friends, elements they brought to every building of the factory we visited as they greeted people with handshakes and compliments on their work while also expressing genuine care for their well-being. Ventura's signature laugh punctuated the morning with a relaxed vibe that we felt throughout the tour. Tabacalera de Garcia may produce 40 million cigars a year, but it felt like we were being brought into a family-owned restaurant for a peek into its kitchen and a taste of its secret sauce. Notes Nieto, "We are a big factory, but that means we have the opportunity to make cigars in a different way. The ability of resource gives us access to the best tobaccos in the world because we buy so much of it. And we are now able to put complete focus on premium cigars, and how to craft the very best products to share with the world."

MEET THE LEADERS OF TABACALERA DE GARCIA



These three make it look easy to run a factory that produces millions of impeccably handcrafted cigars each year. From left to right: Javier Elmudesi, Industrial Affairs Manager; Pedro Ventura, Director of Operations; Ricardo Nieto, Head of Manufacturing and General Manager











IT STARTS WITH THE TOBACCO

Our first stop was the Tobacco Warehouse, where we got a firsthand look at some of these top tobaccos that Nieto had previously referred to. Tabacalera de Garcia consumes over 1,000 tons of tobacco each year, and generally has about two years' worth of the leaf within its inventory at all times. This helps ensure continuous production and keeps the factory's in-demand premium cigars in the hands of their enthusiasts, regardless of outside factors that might affect crop supply. The expansive Tobacco Warehouse holds boxes and boxes and boxes of tobacco from all of their suppliers—the Mendez Family in the Dominican Republic, and Plasencia and AJ Fernandez in Nicaragua— each of whom establish the high quality of the tobacco from the get-go by painstakingly cultivating the seeds and growing the plants in greenhouses and fields before harvesting, curing, and shipping the leaves to Tabacalera de Garcia for use.

Next up was the Fermentation Room, one of the factory features that received an upgrade in square footage with the new facility. Beckoning us into the room was the earthy, spicy scent of the tobacco piles (or pilónes), whose weight produces pressure and releases heat as the chemical and physical changes to the plant leaves occur. Fermentation makes the tobacco taste and smell better, reducing its bitterness and bringing out some of its more pleasant flavor notes. As we took in the scene, watching workers stacking and restacking the pilónes and checking the temperature of their leaves, Ventura explained, "What you are seeing here is the tobacco's final fermentation. Most manufacturers add this last touch to its tobacco—especially for the wrappers. In my opinion, this is the most important part in the process of creating a good quality cigar, as it's where we can guarantee the tobacco leaf's favorable coloring, combustion, and taste. After we receive the tobacco, it stays in the pilónes for six to nine months as this final fermentation occurs. How do we know when it's time for the next step? I always say the tobacco talks to us when it's ready for use."

We all leaned in closer to determine if we had heard him correctly.

We had. Ventura continued. "We monitor the temperature of the tobaccos daily. And that number tells us when the pilónes need to be repositioned. There comes a time when the temperature is no longer increasing, and that's the tobacco telling you 'I'm ready for the next step.' It is very important not to rush this process, and the space we have here at Tabacalera de Garcia is ideal to allowing this fermentation to occur properly."

Nieto agreed. "With the expanded size of our Fermentation Room, we can accommodate even more tobacco than before, increasing our production capabilities without risking our standards for crafting the highest quality cigars."

ALL IN GOOD TIME

The final fermentation is a critical step in the cigar-making process, affecting the taste, burn, and overall enjoyment of the cigar. A close eye is kept on the tobacco leaves, which are stacked and restacked until they're ready to go.

INTO THE HANDS OF EXPERTS

Elmudesi, Ventura, and Nieto led us from the quiet whispers of the aging and fermenting tobacco to the busy hive of the next few (air-conditioned!) buildings of sorting, prepping, bunching, and rolling. It is often said that 300 hands touch each premium cigar from seed to smoking consumer, and this hands-on craftsmanship was front and center here. There were rows of people swiftly yet meticulously working on their respective parts in the process, and a constant thrum of movement as the tobacco leaves moved along the different steps of their journey. Some employees were diligently hand-sorting wrappers for color to ensure visual consistency within every box. Others were working to strip the central vein out of tobacco leaves. And still more were scoring and separating filler leaves one by one to create small tobacco bundles for the cigar rollers and bunchers. It is in these rooms where the secrets of the blender and the work of the craftspeople join together and the blends come to life.







IT'S GO TIME

Top: When the tobacco is ready for use, it heads to these busy rooms where, once stripped of its central vein, the now-separate two sides of the tobacco leaves are sorted for color and quality.

Below: At Tabacalera de Garcia, cigars are each rolled with the utmost care, followed by an intense inspection process to ensure their high quality.











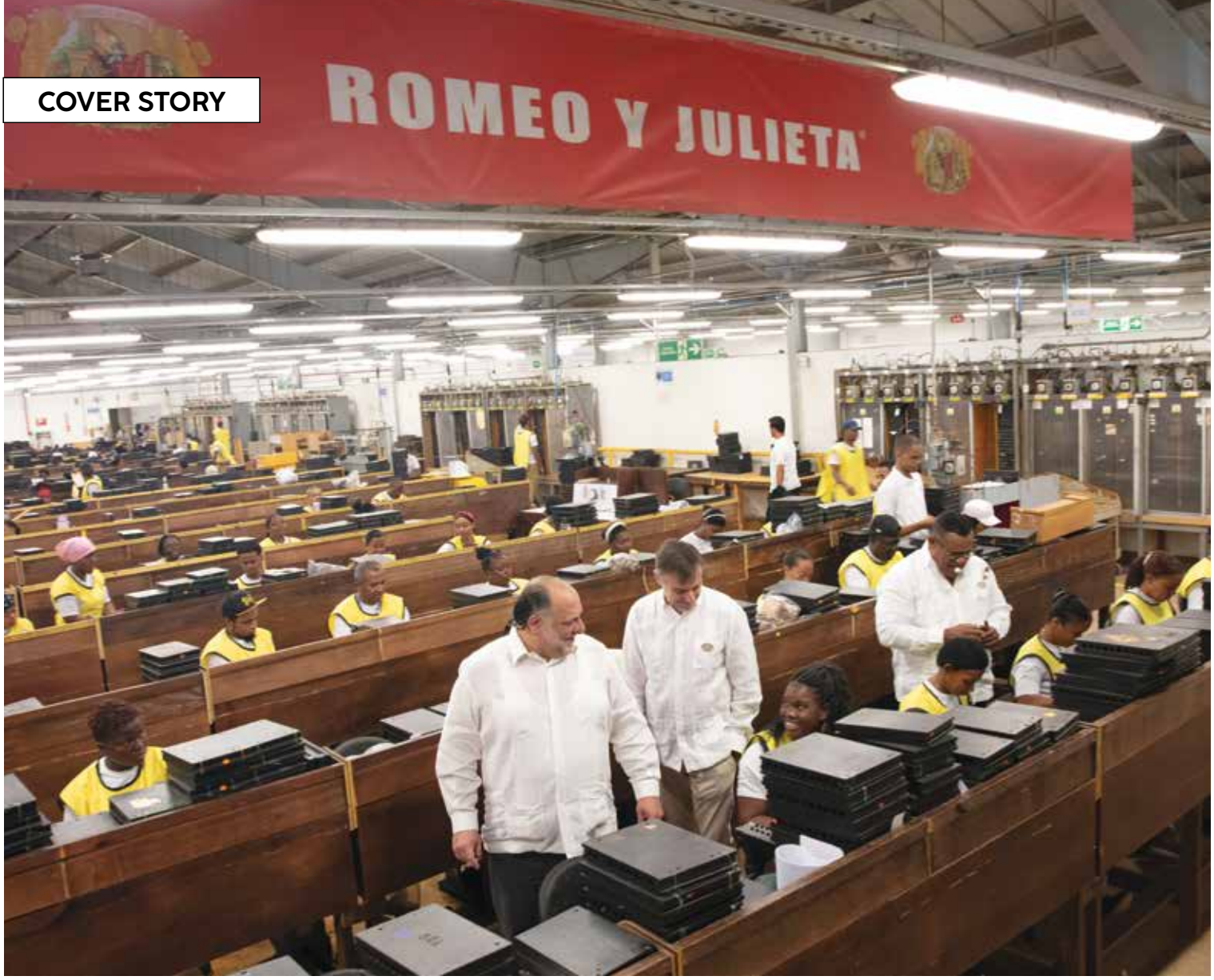
THESE CIGARS ARE IN GOOD HANDS

Top: From rolling to wrapping, to expertly applying the cap, crafting perfect cigars is the highly detailed work of skilled artisans.

Below: Each cigar is sized and weighed by hand to ensure consistency and quality before they receive their final touches.







To further explain the blending process, Ventura gestured to the labeled boxes sitting on nearby shelves. "The recipe for each blend requires a certain proportion of filler tobaccos. It might be 60% of one leaf, 30% of another, and so on. The workers refer to the recipe, separating the correct amount of each tobacco leaf for every cigar, then they place it in these boxes to be bunched and rolled into cigars. Once the filler is ready, it goes into a holding room, though it doesn't sit there for very long because we produce such a large amount of cigars here."

We followed the three men into the expansive rolling room, where rows and rows of people worked industriously with their hands, sitting in partitioned sections under large brand banners: Montecristo, VegaFina, Romeo y Julieta, and H. Upmann. As we watched cigar after cigar of our favorite brands being hand-rolled flawlessly and topped with a perfect cap, then being measured for accurate sizing, Elmudesi, Ventura, and Nieto walked through the aisles, shaking hands, nodding at the products in progress, and smiling and speaking to both workers and supervisors. They were welcomed in a way that said their presence in this room was a frequent occurrence, and people were proud to share their work with them. There are large teams of bunchers and rollers at Tabacalera de Garcia, each of whom receive special training and can make between 200 and 300 cigars a day, depending on their skill level. Nieto explained further, "We have a program here called Maestros en Cigarros. Regardless of a roller or buncher's age, if they consistently perform high-quality workmanship, hit their production numbers with well-crafted cigars, and most importantly, have a partner who says that they are a good partner to work with, they can be selected to become a Maestro. If chosen, they receive an additional six months of training in rolling and bunching, and then cross training, so they are experts in both skillsets. They also receive lessons in basic English and manners, so they can travel to places like Spain or the United States and educate others about their craft at special events and exhibitions."

WHERE THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE MEET

Tradition runs strong at Tabacalera de Garcia. Many of the brands crafted here have extensive histories, like Romeo y Julieta, which will be celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2025. A testament to the respect the legacies command, the rollers and bunchers in these rooms are still hand-crafting cigars with the same care and precision of those who came before them, though now with additional efficiencies, thanks to this new factory.





The Maestros en Cigarros sit in a different space than the majority of the rollers, in a room that's elevated above the rest with big glass windows so the entire rolling room is visible to them. These highly respected workers are tasked with bunching and rolling special projects for the brands.

And while I could've observed the activity in the bunching and rolling rooms for the rest of the day, just like the freshly made cigars, our next stop was the Cedar Room.

TIME TO REST

If you've ever wondered what 6 million cigars might look like, the answer is in Tabacalera de Garcia's Cedar Room, which actually has the capacity to hold 7 million cigars at a time. It is here, in what is essentially a giant humidor, where millions of cigars that have passed all the rigorous quality checks are resting and waiting to be boxed, shipped, and ultimately smoked.

"This is a new facility," says Nieto. "We've made a lot of modifications to the Cedar Room to maintain the high quality of the products we create at Tabacalera de Garcia. It's not just the size of this room that's impressive, it is the state-of-the-art design and capability to maintain the stability of the conditions to ensure that every one of our cigars is impeccable."

The cavernous Cedar Room with rows and rows (and rows and rows and rows!) of cigars houses about 1 month to 1.5 months' worth of Tabacalera de Garcia's inventory at a time, which speaks to both the massive scale of cigars produced at the factory, and the demand for these brands in the marketplace. At the same time, as these cigars spend from 2 weeks to up to 10 years aging here, (yes, you read that correctly), this very patient step attests to the level of care for each cigar. This is a process that can't be rushed, and an extraordinary space that commands respect for the product and the many hands that have worked to fill this room with their craft.

"The Cedar Room is my favorite place in the factory," says Ventura, waving his arm. "The smell, the look—all of the walls are covered with cedar. It just makes people say 'Wow.'"

Elmudesi agrees. "The most special part about Tabacalera de Garcia is the Cedar Room. The ability to keep 7 million cigars aging properly in stable conditions for long periods of time is pretty amazing and a unique feature of this factory. Last year we released a cigar for VegaFina that had rested here for 10 years."

Upon leaving the quiet of the Cedar Room, the cigars are each inspected again to ensure that the quality and humidity are perfect before they go to packaging, and back into the hands of many more workers adding finishing touches like bands, cellophane sleeves, and stickers.



> We've made a lot of modifications to the Cedar Room to maintain the high quality of the products we create at Tabacalera de Garcia. It's not just the size of this room that's impressive, it is the state-of-the-art design and capability to maintain the stability of the conditions to ensure that every one of our cigars is impeccable.
>
> —Ricardo Nieto



INNOVATIONS, SOLUTIONS, AND A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD

One of the biggest challenges that many cigar factories face is getting boxes. As an answer to that, Tabacalera de Garcia has invested in its own on-site Box Factory, which gives it the capability to create any type of box it needs. This flexibility allows it to customize boxes based on market demands or customer requests, rather than being saddled with generic options or high minimum order quantities. The Box Factory is another part of Tabacalera de Garcia that demonstrates the company's dedication to high quality, down to the tiniest of details. We explored the noisy, busy rooms, admiring the letterpress in action, noting that the lids and bottoms are made and painted separately. We walked along aisles marked with elements like "Latch & Hinge," "Assembling," and "Inspection." And we saw tape being cut with small scissors, blemishes being painted out with little brushes, and the striking green H. Upmann The Banker Daytrader boxes being buffed to a shine. Every step is considered, and every one of them is important. The activity within the box factory was constant from room to room, but the work was meticulous and unrushed, despite my own nagging thoughts of the six million cigars waiting to be boxed just a building over. It's all in the tiny details here, which are being administered with the care and pride of each person's part in the big picture masterpiece.



And of course, as Oliver Hyams, Vice President of Marketing at Altadis U.S.A. reminds us, this is all the result of a stellar team effort. "Altadis U.S.A. is proud to bring some of the most well-known premium cigars to market in the United States, thanks to our strong alliance with Tabacalera de Garcia's new factory and its artisans," he says. "Rafael Nodal, Vice President of Product Capabilities for Tabacalera de Garcia, has been instrumental to our work and success, driving our product complexity brilliantly over the past four to five years, yielding some of our highest rated cigars. He is constantly visiting the factory, supporting the team, and working with the Grupo de Maestros to ensure the cigars made here are exceeding expectations. From top to bottom, it's a collaborative effort. And all hands are always on deck."

As an overall entity, Tabacalera de Garcia is a force to be reckoned with. It employs over 2,000 people, consumes over a 1,000 tons of tobacco yearly, and produces millions of boxes and premium cigars per year across 15 different legacy brands and their respective blends, packaging specificities, and requirements, which are then shipped worldwide. It's a company that has invested in its future with a new facility designed to optimize both capability and quality while maintaining a level of care and precision that feels unexpected for the scale of the major brands it produces. However, a walk through the factory quickly separates the sum from its parts, giving keen visibility to every step in the process of creating and bringing a premium cigar to market, and the many, many, many hands involved along the way. Everyone specializes in their craft here, and it shows in the exceptional quality of every perfect roll, box, wrapper leaf, filler bunch, and expertly applied band. Looking at both the present and the years ahead, Tabacalera de Garcia, its people, and its products are setting the bar high for the entire industry.

Says Elmudesi, "I see a very strong and positive future for Tabacalera de Garcia. For 55 years, we've successfully navigated obstacles and persistently produced outstanding, artisanal products that are reflective of our attention to both quality and detail, as well as the people and culture here in the Dominican Republic. The newly concentrated efforts of the premium-cigar-focused Tabacalera de Garcia gives us additional opportunities to continue to provide our top-quality cigars and brand experiences to traditional markets, while paving the way toward expanding into emerging ones."

And while the plans are big and the future as bright as the Dominican sun (which, I can attest, is both bright and hot), it all comes down to the cigar itself. Olivia Saad, Senior Brand Manager at Altadis U.S.A., summed up our morning and the workings of Tabacalera de Garcia in one sentence: "When you see the amount of love that goes into every part of the cigar-making process, it's really special when yours is the last hand holding the final product." **TB**

BUILDING THE BRANDS

Every bit of care and craftsmanship that goes into the cigars at Tabacalera de Garcia, also gets applied to their boxes. From design to construction to touching up the details, its onsite Box Factory offers the opportunity for both customization and complete perfection.


ROMEO
20 CHURCHILLS








MONTEC
ONTECR
PLATINUM SE




RESERVA REAL

Playing Favorites

We asked Pedro Ventura, Ricardo Nieto, and Javier Elmudesi to share a few of their top picks.



Pedro Ventura

What is your favorite cigar made here?
It's hard for me to choose, since every cigar is special, but some of my favorites are Montecristo Epic Blue, Montecristo Epic Yellow, VegaFina 1998, and Romeo by Romeo y Julieta.

What is your favorite cigar to smoke right now?
Montecristo Epic Yellow.

What is your favorite cigar and drink pairing?
A good cigar and Dominican rum.

Where is your favorite place to be in the Dominican Republic?
I love to be at the beach smoking a good cigar.



Ricardo Nieto

What is your favorite cigar made here?
I've loved the Montecristo Epic Selection 07 ever since I first tried it.

What is your favorite cigar to smoke right now?
At any moment, a VegaFina 1998.

What is your favorite cigar and drink pairing?
The best pairing for me is a cigar with coffee and rum, but at night, just with rum. Dominican rums, in particular, are excellent. I couldn't name just one.

Where is your favorite place to be in the Dominican Republic?
The Samaná Bay in the wintertime, when the whales are migrating. And my favorite thing to do in the Dominican Republic is to take a boat to an island and go snorkeling with the tropical fish.



Javier Elmudesi

What is your favorite cigar made here?
After working at Tabacalera de Garcia for 28 years and knowing the extent of our portfolio, it is almost impossible for me to choose just one cigar. Over the years I have had the very fortunate opportunity to smoke a diverse range of amazing cigars including Montecristo, Romeo y Julieta, H. Upmann, Onyx, Trinidad, and more.

What is your favorite cigar to smoke right now?
There are several cigars that I try to always have nearby: Montecristo Epic Yellow, VegaFina 1998, H. Upmann Grupo de Maestros, and Montecristo 50th Anniversary, among others.

What is your favorite cigar and drink pairing?
Especially after dinner, I like to pair a VegaFina 1998 or a Montecristo Epic with a white barrel aged extra old rum.

Where is your favorite place to be in the Dominican Republic?
Today, my favorite place to be is on my home terrace, enjoying good company, a fine cigar with rum, and a BBQ, surrounded by the amazing garden full of orchids and beautiful plants that my wife left us before going to heaven. That is exhilaration.









1 ROMEO Y JULIETA 1875 BELICOSO NO. 2 EMS
154489
Wrapper: Indonesia
Binder: Dominican Republic
Filler: Dominican Republic

2 H. UPMANN 1844 RESERVE ROBUSTO
900500
Wrapper: Ecuador Habano
Binder: Nicaraguan
Filler: Dominican/Nicaraguan

3 MONTECRISTO PLATINUM TORO
200242
Wrapper: San Andrés
Binder: Dominican Republic
Filler: Dominican/Nicaraguan/Peruvian

4 MONTECRISTO WHITE TORO
200253
Wrapper: Ecuador Connecticut Shade
Binder: Nicaraguan
Filler: Dominican/Nicaraguan

5 ROMEO Y JULIETA RESERVA REAL TORO
RYRRTO
Wrapper: Ecuador Connecticut
Binder: Nicaraguan
Filler: Dominican/Nicaraguan



More Than Just a Factory, It's a Family

Meet the people of Tabacalera de Garcia

Written by Rachel McKnett
Photography by Chris Hornaday

Walking into Tabacalera de Garcia, we were met with a sign that said "Nuestros Valores" (Our Values). And while in most workplaces, a bulleted list at the entrance might serve as a checklist for proper conduct once inside, here the sign feels like a reminder to the people of Tabacalera de Garcia of who they are and that their employer feels they are exceptional.

NUESTROS VALORES/CORE VALUES

- Maestros de la Tradicion/Masters of Tradition
- Innovadores/Innovators
- Lideres Responsibles/Responsible Leaders
- Multi-culturales/Multi-cultural
- Gente Cercana/Tight-knit Community
- Orgullosos de Nuestro Trabajo/Proud of Our Work

There are over 2,000 artisans dedicated to their craft at Tabacalera de Garcia, each working in specialized roles that put 40 million impeccable premium cigars into humidors every year. This is a factory that is proud of its people and understands that their expertise is crucial its success.

"The key here is the people, not the factory," says Ricardo Nieto, Head of Manufacturing and General Manager at Tabacalera de Garcia. "We have 2,000 people and some basic machinery, so the majority of the work we do here is manual and relies on our workers and their skillsets. We produce millions of cigars each year for very major brands like Montecristo, Romeo y Julieta, VegaFina, and H. Upmann, all of which have a reputation to maintain. So, it's incredibly important to make sure our workers are proud of where they come every day and that they are motivated to continue producing and packing the best products they can create."

Located in a struggling area, Tabacalera de Garcia recognized the need to start at the ground level to support its workers, their families, and their communities. As a result, the factory is like a little town, offering many services to help their employees with necessities, both in appreciation of their contributions, and so that they have the mind space and creative capacity to put into their work.



"We offer free transportation, so our people can get to and from Tabacalera de Garcia each day," says Nieto. "Buses pick people up in their neighborhoods, then bring them home after their shift. And we have a cafeteria with highly subsidized food offerings, where workers can enjoy meals during their shift. The factory also has an onsite bank and medical facilities with a doctor, providing basic health care that many of our workers might otherwise not have access to—and it's free."





They're looking out for the rolling room: Yurmi Alejandro Perez, Rolling and Bunching Line Supervisor; Cariz Jimenez, Rolling and Bunching Line Supervisor; Fernando Santana, Rolling and Bunching Line Supervisor



All smiles for the finished product: Geordy Rodriguez, Product Development Specialist, and Doris Santana, Packing Area Supervisor

Tabacalera de Garcia also gives back to support its communities with philanthropic efforts, like its Reforestation Project, Scholarship Programs, and organized support for the elderly. And back at the facility, there's a concerted, year-round effort to celebrate and elevate their people. Top employees in different departments are prominently recognized on a quarterly basis, and there are training opportunities that help workers develop skills and further their careers. These include Roller programs, which can lead especially gifted workers into becoming part of the Maestros en Cigarros, and a Talents Program, which is currently being cultivated to identify and nurture people who show an aptitude for some of the more senior positions, so workers can be promoted from within.

Yurmi Alejandro Perez, a Rolling and Bunching Line Supervisor who has worked here for 12 years, says, "One of my favorite things about Tabacalera de Garcia is the opportunity for development and growth. I am an example of that. I have traveled outside the country and have seen the world by demonstrating how to make a cigar by hand."

Roberto Mercedes, a Utility Worker who has been with the company for 24 years, shares a similar sentiment: "I like that Tabacalera de Garcia gives opportunities to all types of people without discrimination."

Says Cariz Jimenez, a Rolling and Bunching Line Supervisor who has been with the company for 17 years, "Every day here is full of goals, challenges, and commitments. And what I really like about working for Tabacalera de Garcia are the opportunities to collaborate and the courses that have helped me grow professionally and personally."

Company culture is very important at Tabacalera de Garcia, with events held throughout the year to build camaraderie and encourage team spirit, while also rewarding employees for their time and efforts.

"We have lots of activities here," says Nieto. "We have folklore celebrations with dancers, employee health fairs, company lunches, Valentine's Day parties, Spring Break events, and much more. With baseball being so big in the Dominican Republic, we even invited the Los Toros mascot, our local team, to join us for some fun. My favorite event is always the Christmas party, as everyone gets really excited about the gift drawings where people have won items like televisions and portable party speakers, and then we finish up with a special meal. It's always a really good time, and it's nice to see everyone enjoying each other."

The investments that Tabacalera de Garcia has made in its company, community, and people are paying off immensely, as evidenced by the



Top quality is at his fingertips: Jesus Francisco, Filler Preparation Supervisor









Days are always eventful at Tabacalera de Garcia. And this is just a snapshot (or four snapshots) of factory fun and special celebrations held throughout the year.

> “My days at Tabacalera de Garcia are really fun because I get to do what I’m passionate about. My schedule is always busy and full, but everyone does their work with good energy, and our leaders are right here with us. We are like a family.”
>
> —Jesus Francisco, Filler Preparation Supervisor

amount of cigars it produces and its brands’ continued presence and worldwide popularity. But it’s from the mouths of its people where it really counts.

“I love working with my colleagues,” says Doris Santana, a Packaging Area Supervisor who has been with the company for 28 years. “And one of my favorite things about being here is the opportunity to learn new things.”

Yurmi Alejandro Perez chimes back in to say, “Every day is an adventure with challenges, but there are many more opportunities for success with a team that is committed to being its best every day.”

Jesus Francisco, a Filler Preparation Supervisor who has worked here for 16 years, says, “My days at Tabacalera de Garcia are really fun because I get to do what I’m passionate about. My schedule is always busy and full, but everyone does their work with good energy, and our leaders are right here with us. We are like a family.”

Javier Elmudesi, Industrial Affairs Manager and one of the leaders Francisco refers to, smiles as he says, “My favorite part of this factory is the people. We have 2,000 people working here, and about 400 have been working here for over 25 years and they love it. It is amazing to interact with these longtime workers, the multiple generations of workers, and even those just starting out.”

From the Nuestros Valores sign just steps inside the gates of Tabacalera de Garcia to all of the programs and possibilities it offers, it is pretty clear that this is a company that places a high value on its people. And its people return the sentiment.



THE BEST OF THE BEST

With years of training under their belts, the highly skilled Maestros en Cigarros sit in a space separate from the main rolling rooms. It is here where these artisans work on specialty projects for the Tabacalera de Garcia brands, crafting top-tier, premium cigars in good company.



Meet Lucrecia,

Maestra of Tabacalera de Garcia

Lucrecia Valdez has been working at Tabacalera de Garcia since 1979. A charming woman, with a smile that makes you wish she was your grandmother, Lucrecia got her start at the factory as a roller and buncher. Today, she is a Quality Supervisor and the Master Roller of Tabacalera de Garcia, with a wealth of knowledge that makes her a truly special fixture here. We caught up with her to ask a few questions, and we just wish we had more time to hear the many stories she's accumulated over her long career.

Who taught you how to roll cigars?
Victor Avila and Minerva Gehoben.

Have you worked anywhere other than Tabacalera de Garcia?
No.

Why is your role so important to the quality of the cigars you make?
My dedication and product knowledge shine through everything I do here.

How do you ensure the cigars are being made correctly?
We review the cigar's specifications and make sure the quality is optimal. We inspect and evaluate it thoroughly. The final stamp of approval comes from our customers, when they enjoy our cigars.

What are you looking for when you inspect the cigars being rolled?
I'm looking carefully at their beauty, aesthetics, rigidity, measurements, and if their wrapper color is appropriate to the brand and expectations.

Who is the most interesting person you've met in the cigar industry?
Everyone I've worked with who enjoys the world of tobacco has held something of interest for me.

Where is your favorite place to be when you're at Tabacalera de Garcia?
I love to be wherever the product is. That has been my entire life.

When you are not at the factory, where is your favorite place to be?
I love to be with my family, walking, visiting church, and attending events in my community.





A TRUE MAESTRA

Lucrecia Valdez makes rolling cigars look easy, but she's had a lot of practice. When asked what sets her apart from other rollers, she says, "I think we all have passion and the commitment to creating the best product. I've been rolling cigars for a long time, so I have a lot of product knowledge to add as well."




MONT

Prime Pickings

Get Your Humidor Ready for These Dominican Republic-Made Cigars

From the verdant tobacco fields of the fertile Cibao Valley to the factories where it's all blended, bunched, and rolled together, the Dominican Republic is known for putting truly stellar cigars out into the world. History, craft, and innovation all roll into one on this tiny island country, with some of the best names in the business creating standout cigars upon its soil. And whether you're stocking your shelves or relaxing with a good Dominican stogie, here are a few we think you'll want to try.



HEMINGWAY CLASSIC ARTURO FUENTE

Wrapper: Dominican Republic

Binder: Dominican Republic

Filler: Dominican Republic

Profile: wood, cinnamon, leather, baking spices, and cocoa



HAMPTON COURT MACANUDO CAFÉ

Wrapper: Connecticut

Binder: Mexico

Filler: Dominican Republic, Mexico

Profile: creamy, nutty, and woody with a hint of sweetness



ILLUSION ASHTON VIRGIN SUN GROWN (VSG)

Wrapper: Ecuador

Binder: Dominican Republic

Filler: Dominican Republic

Profile: rich earth and roasted peanuts



METROPOLITAN FERIO TEGO

Wrapper: Connecticut Broadleaf

Binder: Dominican Republic

Filler: Dominican Republic

Profile: earth, espresso, leather, and honey molasses brown bread

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADOBE STOCK



1875 BULLY EMS ROMEO Y JULIETA

Wrapper: Indonesia

Binder: Dominican Republic

Filler: Dominican Republic

Profile: hazelnut, cedar, cocoa, and subtle hints of spice



RED DOT COHIBA

Wrapper: Cameroon

Binder: Mexico

Filler: Dominican Republic

Profile: leather, coffee, cinnamon, and caramel around a core of sweet spice



ENCORE E.P. CARRILLO

Wrapper: Nicaragua

Binder: Nicaragua

Filler: Nicaragua

Profile: zesty, spicy, and woody



FARCE MADURO ROOM101

Wrapper: Dominican Republic

Binder: Sumatra

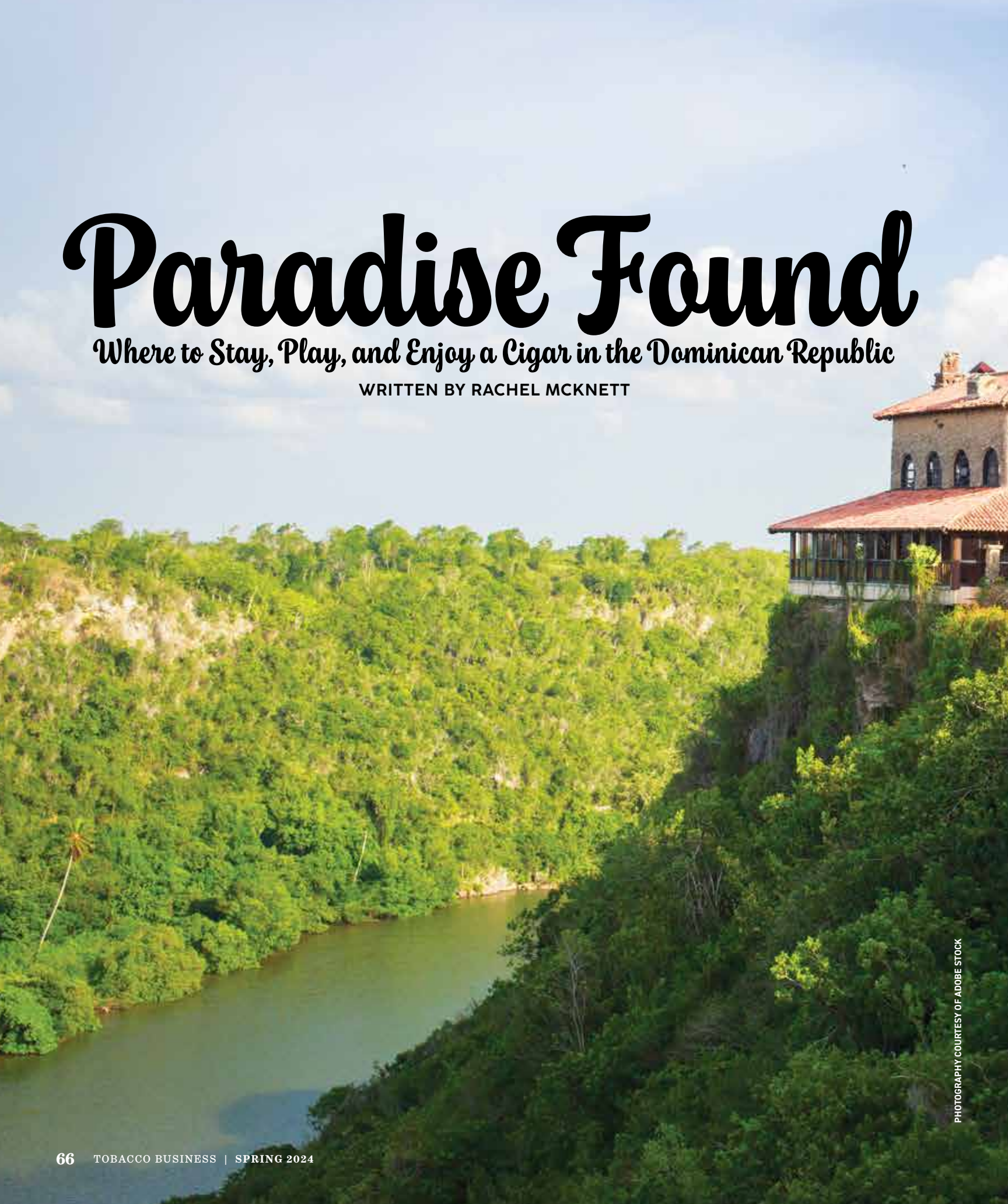
Filler: Connecticut, Nicaragua, Pennsylvania

Profile: spice, chocolate, and leather

Paradise Found

Where to Stay, Play, and Enjoy a Cigar in the Dominican Republic

WRITTEN BY RACHEL MCKNETT



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF ADOBE STOCK



With the sparkling Atlantic Ocean in the north and the azure waters of the Caribbean Sea to the south, it's no wonder that the Dominican Republic is the most visited island in the Caribbean (and a top five tourist destination within North, South, and Central America!). The lush, tropical island boasts almost 1,000 miles of coastline with world-renowned resorts, beaches, national parks, and golf courses, while delighting travelers with a vibrant culture that's a colorful mix of Caribbean, African, European, and indigenous influences. Music is the heartbeat of the Dominican Republic, and the sounds of Bachata, Reggaeton, and Merengue fill the air of events and everyday life, while the fertile Yaque Valley and factories of Santiago and La Romana give the island a special place within the hearts of premium cigar enthusiasts. When it comes to travel here, there's a lot to be covered, so we're going to focus on some of the favorite spots of the cigar folks and encourage you to take a deeper dive on your next visit.








THE SPA











LA ROMANA

Situated between the glittery resorts of Punta Cana and the Dominican Republic's busy capital city of Santo Domingo, La Romana is a world-class destination for beachgoers, golfers, and travelers seeking indulgent luxury in a quieter space. With pristine beaches, sparkling Caribbean waters, top-rated golf courses, the impressive Cotubanamá National Park, and delectable fare of all types, it's no wonder why visitors flock here for relaxation and an unforgettable experience in the Dominican Republic. As a bonus, Tabacalera de Garcia is located in La Romana, for those wanting an insider's look at the craftsmanship behind some of their favorite cigars. Ready to hop on a plane? Let's go!

WHERE TO STAY

There are hotels. And there are complete destinations. If you're headed to La Romana, there's really just one place to stay.

Casa de Campo
Resort & Villas
855-657-5955
casadecampo.com.do

Much more than just a place to lay your head, Casa de Campo is a 7,000-acre hotel, resort, and residential community with amenities and activities of every type. Hit the courts for a game of tennis, or one of three courses for a round of golf. You can learn to ride a horse, swim a few laps in a pool or two (or three), relax on a perfect beach, watch a movie, go yacht-spotting in the marina, and outfit yourself for island life in one of many fine boutiques—all before lunchtime. Or slow your pace at this officially designated Leading Hotel of the World and just savor every moment, knowing you'll depart with stones left unturned for your next visit. Hotel rooms are luxurious and exceptional, and beautiful villas are available for larger parties or people just wanting more space. There are restaurants, cafes, swim-up bars, food trucks. and juice bars located all over the property, and every guestroom is issued a golf cart to get around, adding an extra element of thrill for both riders and drivers (shuttles are also available, for those not wanting to be in charge of a cart). Whether you're here to relax or take in every offered activity, a stay at Casa de Campo is an experience like no other.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF CASA DE CAMPO

WHERE TO EAT

There's a multitude of delightful restaurants in La Romana, but Casa de Campo has some exceptional spots, both for their fare and their views. So we stuck close to where we stayed for the good eats.

La Casita Restaurante

La Marina de Casa de Campo
La Romana 22006
809-523-3333
casadecampo.com.do/dining/restaurants

Enjoy the sunset with two sides of the sea at La Casita, the open-air restaurant literally in the middle of Casa de Campo's marina. Lulled by the relaxing waters of the Caribbean Sea, diners can watch the yachts come and go while being treated to delectable Spanish-inspired fare, like their famous seafood paella or grilled mahi-mahi in a tangy garlic mojo sauce. The appetizers don't disappoint either, with offerings like creamy goat cheese croquettes with a tart quince marmalade, locally made mahi-mahi ceviche, or their Galician-style octopus with sweet paprika, garlic, and olive oil. *Dinner is served from 6pm to 11pm daily, and reservations are recommended.*

SBG

La Marina de Casa de Campo
La Romana 22006
809-523-3333
casadecampo.com.do/dining/restaurants

With views for days and days, guests of SBG can dine inside, seaside, or poolside, enjoying a well-rounded international menu with Mediterranean flair. Situated in the Marina at Casa de Campo, this chic and beachy-elegant restaurant serves up starters like sushi rolls and mozzarella carpaccio, before stretching out into popular mains like miso sea bass over oven-fried Thai rice or the 42 oz. Tomahawk steak with add-on sides like mashed yucca or parmesan truffle fries. Live bands and DJs may crank up the volume here occasionally, bringing an extra pulse to an already lively vibe. *Open Monday through Friday from 5pm to 11pm, Saturdays from 12pm to 11pm, and Sundays 11am to 11pm. Reservations are recommended.*

Chilango Taqueria

Higüey Hwy Calle Chavón Blvd
Casa de Campo
La Romana 22000
809-523-3333

Colorful, casual, and just the right spot for both a quick bite or a relaxing meal over mojitos and a cigar from the nearby shop, Chilango Taqueria is a jewel in the Altos de Chavón area of Casa de Campo. Guests are served the bold flavors of Mexican street food while overlooking the cobblestone streets of a recreated 16th-century Mediterranean village with expansive views of the Chavón river. The Baja-style fish tacos are outstanding, as are the aforementioned mojitos. Don't miss the pork taquitos or the super fresh guacamole. And keep an eye out for friendly roaming felines who just might decide to dine with you. In a spot this epic, how could they resist? *Open daily from 12pm to 11pm.*





PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF CASA DE CAMPO



CHILANGO TAQUERIA



CHILANGO TAQUERIA



LA CASITA RESTAURANTE

WHERE TO PLAY

We're on the coast in La Romana, so it shouldn't be a surprise that our chosen activities are all in close proximity to water. Ocean, river, or underwater spring, the fun is afloat here.

Catamaran to Isla de Catalina

What trip to the Caribbean would be complete without an adventure at sea? We recommend taking a catamaran out to Isla de Catalina for an afternoon on a palm tree-lined white sand beach with snorkel-friendly crystal clear waters and colorful tropical fish. This tiny, uninhabited island is on the eastern edge of Parque Nacional Cotubanamá, about 30 to 40 minutes by boat from La Romana. Expect to relax and marvel at the deep blue of the sea and beachside mansions on the way out and back. And depending on the tour and craft you book, it may include lunch, lively music, and an open bar. Just make sure you know if your boat will be docking at the short pier, or be prepared to wade to shore. Either way, Isla de Catalina is going to be a great day.

Cotubanamá National Park (Parque del Este)

La Romana-Bayahibe Region

Just about an hour's drive from Punta Cana, Cotubanamá National Park lures visitors with 50 miles of stunning coastline, lush tropical forests, and its shining star, Saona Island, where paradise was clearly never lost. Each are teeming with exotic wildlife, beautiful beaches, coral reefs, and mysterious grottos to discover. The caves of Cotubanamá National Park deserve a special callout, as there are 400 of them to find, some with subterranean springs bubbling up, and others with bright blue underground lagoons fed by rainwater, like those found along the Sendero Padre Nuestro (Path of Our Father). There are many tour operators that offer transport by boat, car, or bus to this amazing place. Or if you're feeling extra adventurous, you can arrive by helicopter and view the whole park by air while flying close by the spot where the original Jurassic Park movie filmed its helicopter scenes.

Altos de Chavón

Casa de Campo Resort and Villas
La Romana 22000
casadecampo.com.do/experiences/altos-de-chavon

An unexpected gem found within the grounds of Casa de Campo, Altos de Chavón is a beautifully detailed historic replica of a 16th-century Mediterranean village set against expansive views of the Chavón River, its lush surroundings, and the seemingly bluest blue skies you can imagine. Opened in 1982 and designed jointly by renowned Dominican architect Jose Antonio Caro and Italian master designer and cinematographer Roberto Coppa, the village was handcrafted by local artisans and continues to draw working artists and visitors from all over the world to its medieval-feeling cobblestone streets, cafes, studios, and boutiques. Altos de Chavón is also home to a Parsons-affiliated school of design, an archeological museum, the active St. Stanislaus church, and a 5,000-seat Grecian-style amphitheater, which has welcomed performers like Frank Sinatra, Andrea Bocelli, Elton John, Marc Anthony, and Plácido Domingo. Existing charmingly in both the past and present, Altos de Chavón brings a truly magical vibe to the Dominican countryside.


CATAMARAN TO ISLA DE CATALINA


COTUBANAMÁ NATIONAL PARK


COTUBANAMÁ NATIONAL PARK

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF SHUTTERSTOCK, ALAMY, ADOBE STOCK, AND CASA DE CAMPO



CATAMARAN TO ISLA DE CATALINA



ALTOS DE CHAVÓN





TEETH OF THE DOG GOLF COURSE

If golfing is your thing, we're sure you've heard about this highly ranked course: #1 in the Caribbean and #75 in the world for 2023-2024, according to *Golf Magazine*. But if you're just starting to dabble on the links or are ready to check a big one off your bucket list, don't miss the Teeth of the Dog. Legendary golf architect Pete Dye's signature course, the aptly named Teeth of the Dog was hand carved from the jagged rocks and coral of the La Romana coastline, using about 300 workers wielding sledgehammers, pickaxes, and chisels. The result is a stunning 18-hole course that offers breathtaking views, natural landscapes, and seven oceanfront holes. Now THAT's a water hazard worth the trouble.
Higüey Hwy, Casa de Campo, La Romana 22000, 809-523-3333
Casadecampo.com.do/golf/golf-courses/

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF CASA DE CAMPO

SANTIAGO DE LOS CABALLEROS

Once the Dominican Republic's capital until it was destroyed by an earthquake in 1562, Santiago still carries big influence despite its oft-shortened name. The second-largest city in the Dominican Republic and the fourth-largest in the entire Caribbean, Santiago is a lively cosmopolitan mix of old and new, with modern architecture, ideas, culinary finds, and artistic expressions mingling with traditional influences from its rich heritage and culture. Also known as the Ciudad Corazón, or the City in the Heart of the uber-fertile Cibao Valley, it's situated in the vicinity of farms where some of the world's best tobacco is grown, making it a destination for cigar enthusiasts to visit and explore the fields and factories behind some of their favorite brands.

WHERE TO STAY

You won't find a beach resort in this city, but if you're staying in Santiago, you're likely seeking a travel experience immersed in history, culture, music, art, and, of course, cigars. But first, you'll want somewhere to put your suitcase.

Hodelpa Gran Almirante Hotel & Casino

Estrella Sadhalá Avenue
Santiago de los Caballeros 51000
809-580-1992
Hodelpa.com/gran-almirante/

The only 5-star hotel in Santiago de los Caballeros, the Gran Almirante offers an elegant respite to a busy travel schedule. With exceptional hospitality and large updated rooms with modern accoutrements like flat-screen TVs, free Wi-Fi, and a pillow menu (yes, you read that correctly), guests can relax in luxury, try their luck in the lively casino, enjoy a cigar in the lounge, or refresh in the sparkling second-level pool and Jacuzzi overlooking the cityscape. It's a top-shelf experience at the Gran Almirante, right down to its location and close proximity to key points of interest in Santiago, including the popular Catedral de Apóstol.

Hodelpa Centro Plaza

Calle Mella No. 54
Santiago de los Caballeros 51000
809-581-7000
Hodelpa.com/centro-plaza/

Situated in the heart of Santiago, within walking distance to the Restoration Monument and only minutes to the business district, the Hodelpa Centro Plaza is a solid home base for a visit to this city. Each of its 82 rooms are well-appointed with comfortable, Egyptian linen-clad beds, flat-screen TVs, and most importantly... air conditioning! Guests have the option of enjoying the quiet of interior accommodations or embracing the sounds (and sights) of urban living with attached balconies. Welcome cocktails are presented upon arrival, a tasty breakfast buffet is included daily, and as the name implies, the on-site Vista restaurant offers incredible views of the city and the distant mountains.

Camp David Ranch Hotel

Carretera Gregorio Luperon Km 7.5
Gurabo, Santiago 51000
809-276-6400
Campdavidranch.com

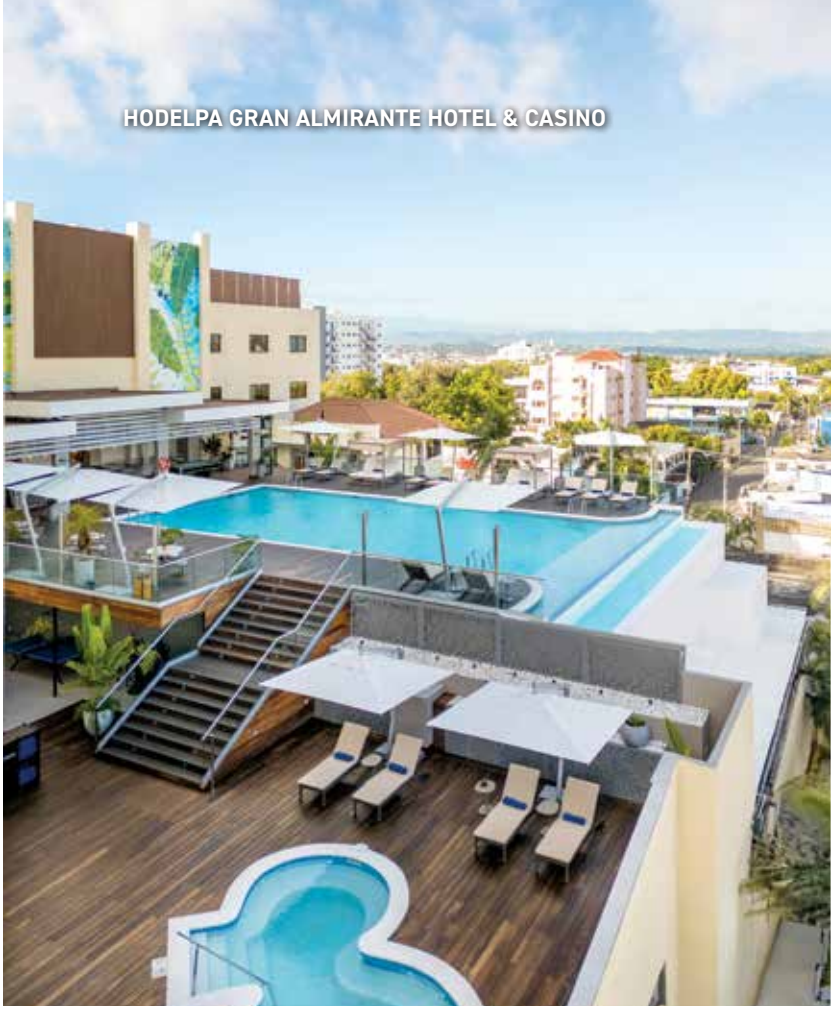
If big views are a must-have for your Santiago stay, you'll want to check in to the Camp David Ranch Hotel. This 18-room boutique property is located about 15 minutes outside the city and high above it, offering an outstanding vantage point overlooking Santiago de los Caballeros, the Cibao Valley, and the northern mountain range. Start the day enveloped in calm with a beautiful sunrise amidst a backdrop of chirping birds enjoyed from the comfort of your room. And as evening approaches, relax your busy travel pace with a stunning sunset and nightcap in the on-site bar and restaurant. Rooms are spacious and air-conditioned, with balconies and views so delightful, you may never want to leave.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF CORPORATIVA HOTELES HODELPA AND CAMP DAVID


CAMP DAVID RANCH HOTEL




CAMP DAVID RANCH HOTEL



HODELPA GRAN ALMIRANTE HOTEL & CASINO



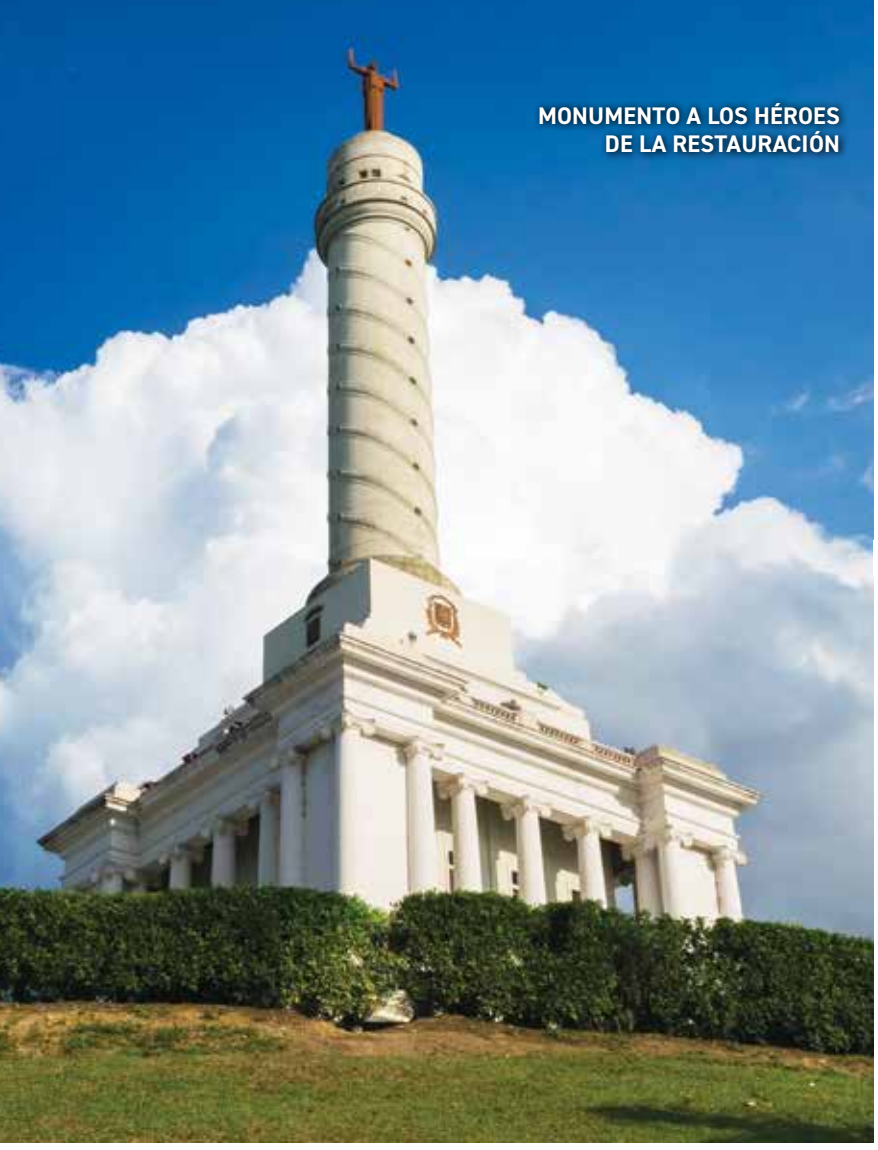
HODELPA CENTRO PLAZA



CAMP DAVID RANCH HOTEL



HODELPA GRAN ALMIRANTE HOTEL & CASINO



MONUMENTO A LOS HÉROES DE LA RESTAURACIÓN



LA AURORA CIGAR FACTORY



LA AURORA CIGAR FACTORY

WHERE TO PLAY

There's many more things to do in Santiago de los Caballeros than there is room in your travel itinerary. However, you'll definitely want to hit up the can't-miss cultural sites and be sure to leave time for relaxing with a freshly made cigar and a local music performance to really feel the vibe of this colorful city.

Monumento a los Héroes de la Restauración

F824+946 Daniel Espinal
Av. Monumental
Santiago de los Caballeros

Even if you're an off-the-beaten-path kind of traveler, you'll want to check out this impressive building, which has good reason to be one of the most often visited place in the Dominican Republic. Towering 70 meters high from its hilltop location on the east side of Santiago's city center, this is a monument that celebrates Dominican history. Originally built by, and named after, dictator Rafael Trujillo in 1953, the currently named Monumento a los Héroes de la Restauración (Monument to the Heroes of the Restoration of the Republic) was completely renovated in 2007, and now houses exhibitions of the country's storied past, including its struggles for independence and celebrations of local heroes like bronze statues of famous generals and former players of the city's baseball team. Ground-floor entrance is free, though we recommend paying the inexpensive fee to explore all five floors recognizing the efforts and achievements of the Dominican Republic people. *Open Mondays & Tuesdays 6:30am to 5pm, Wednesday through Friday 8am to 5pm, Saturdays 9am to 5pm, and Sundays 9am to 4pm.*

La Aurora Cigar Factory

Avenida Tamboril-Santiago
Santiago de los Caballeros 51000

If you're staying in Santiago, chances are big that you're here for the cigars. From this city, it's just a short trip to the fields, and an even shorter trip to the Dominican Republic's oldest continually operating cigar factory. We're talking about a visit to La Aurora, which initially opened in Guazumal in 1903 before moving to the city of Santiago de los Caballeros in 1912. A tour of La Aurora offers an inside look at the fine construction, blends, and craft behind one of the industry's most celebrated brands, as well as its history and the storied Leon family, who have been behind the cigars for generations. A La Aurora factory experience wouldn't be complete without a trip to the gift shop, so be sure to leave time at the end to pick up a few cigars right from the source. *Tours available from 8:15am to 3:30pm.*

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF HARRISON BRACKETT; LA AURORA; ADOBE STOCK; LA TABERNA DE PEPE

WHERE TO EAT

In a city so full of culture and flavor, Santiago's lively culinary scene should come as no surprise. The only real challenge is narrowing down the options. Lucky for you, we've done the hard work for you, and have some tried, true, and absolutely don't-miss options for you to try. One suggestion? Come hungry!

Saga Restaurant & Cigar Club

Avenida Benito Juárez 24
Villa Olga
Santiago de los Caballeros 51000
809-276-7900
Sagarest.com

Mixing the best of cigar culture and fine dining, the table is set for relaxation and conversation at Saga. This swanky restaurant serves up the Saga Experience in a diverse menu of high-end Dominican and international fare, along with an impressive selection of cigars, thanks to their Procigar membership and direct connection to the Reyes family and Saga cigars. Cocktails are unique and tasty here (try the Yuzu Martini), and the 55 oz. Tomahawk steak served in a Himalayan salt block just might be the best we've ever had. Other culinary standouts include the salmon involtini appetizer with cream cheese and a strawberry emulsion, the crema de auyama— a Dominican-style pumpkin soup—and their many delightful risottos. Guests can enjoy their cigars and sustenance on the tastefully appointed front and back terraces, while indoor dining is available for those who prefer a non-smoking section. *Saga Restaurant is open Tuesday through Thursday & Sundays 12pm to 12am, Fridays & Saturdays 12pm to 2am; reservations are recommended.*

La Taberna de Pepe

Calle Mauricio Alvarez 6
Santiago de los Caballeros 51000
809-226-5099
Bocao.com.do/restaurantes/la-taberna-de-pepe

If you're looking for small bites with big flavor and cocktails that don't disappoint (and in fact, are really, really good), La Taberna de Pepe is the place for you. This traditional Spanish-style tavern serves a robust menu of tapas and entrees in a lively, comfortable atmosphere that makes you want the plates to keep on coming. Choose from delectable dishes like artisanal yucca empanadas filled with ropa vieja, queso manchego, and a chipotle aioli, a tenderloin satay with a house chimichurri, or a grilled miso salmon with coconut, honey, and Moroccan rice. Your palate will thank you for taking a meal at Pepe's Tavern. *Open Sunday through Wednesday from 12pm to 12am and Thursday through Saturday from 12pm to 1am.*


SAGA RESTAURANT & CIGAR CLUB



SAGA RESTAURANT & CIGAR CLUB


LA TABERNA DE PEPE


SAGA RESTAURANT & CIGAR CLUB


LA TABERNA DE PEPE

¡Salud!

These Duos Have Great Taste

There is magic in the soil of the Dominican Republic. Rich and fertile with flavor and possibility, these are practically hallowed grounds for fields that yield exceptional tobacco, sugar cane, and coffee beans. This is a country known for some of the world's best cigars, rums, and coffee. Each tasty in their own right, their common terroir means they're even better when sipped and smoked together. So, we've put together a few pairing suggestions that go hand and hand. In other words, you'll need one in each hand to enjoy.

TASTING NOTES:

A solid way to start the day or finish a good meal, get ready for a taste adventure in the H. Upmann Special Edition Barbier paired with the Dominican Republic's Café Tostao coffee. This lively duo keeps your palate on high alert as the cigar burns from light to dark, and the flavors constantly shift and play off each other.

SIP:

Café Tostao

Rich and complex in both aroma and flavor, this specialty artisan-roasted coffee is crafted with hand-selected beans grown under the watchful eye of a single producer. Inhale. Exhale. Now take a sip.

SMOKE:

H. Upmann Special Edition Barbier

Wrapper: Connecticut, Sumatra

Binder: Indonesia

Filler: Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Undisclosed

Interestingly complex, this mellow- to medium-bodied cigar evolves in its journey with notes of creamy cedar, pepper and spice, light florals, and sweet cocoa.





PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF CHRIS HORNADAY


H.UPMANN
SPECIAL EDITION
BARBER


ASHTON
VSG
VIRGIN SUN GROWN
VSG
VIRGIN SUN GROWN
VSG
VIRGIN SUN GROWN
VSG
ASHTON VSG ROBUSTO



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JIM COONTZ

TASTING NOTES:

Dive into the deep relationship of this full-bodied Ashton VSG Robusto paired with the rich flavors of Brugal's 1888 Rum. Dynamic and engaging, this is a relaxing journey of subtle contrasts and liquid sunshine.

SIP:

Brugal 1888 Gran Reserva Rum

Warm your palate with the essences of toffee, vanilla, cocoa, peaches, and cloves found in this premium sipping rum.

SMOKE:

Ashton VSG Robusto

Wrapper: Ecuador Sumatra

Binder: Ecuador Sumatra

Filler: Dominican Republic

Hearty, robust, and masterfully enjoyable, this full-bodied cigar excites with a spicy, peppery taste and a smooth draw.

TASTING NOTES:

Whether you're on a Dominican beach or just dreaming of one, you'll be sweet, salty, and in full relaxation mode as the earthy, peppery notes of the La Aurora 107 hits a velvety wave of Kirk and Sweeney's Reserva Dominican Rum.

SIP:

Kirk and Sweeney Reserva Dominican Rum

Lean back into this smooth premium spirit as the dreamy essences of vanilla and sweet wood swirl through your palate.

SMOKE:

La Aurora 107

Wrapper: Ecuador Sun Grown

Binder: Dominican Republic

Filler: Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Peru

A medium- to full-bodied cigar that offers a rich, layered profile with notes of cedar, spice, and peppery earth along with a smooth, nutty finish.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF JIM COONTZ


Topbrands
LA AURORA
107
La Aurora 107 marks over one hundred years of hand-crafting fine cigars. This medium to full-bodied blend is made with a Sun Grown wrapper from Ecuador, over six years old fillers and binder from Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. La Aurora 107 provides a rich and complex smoke.
21 TOROS
LA AURORA
107

STOCKING THE RIGHT PRODUCTS IS THEIR SUPERPOWER

Tom Kessler, of the Wichita area's Tom's Super Shops, knows what his customers are looking for.

Written by Rachel McKnett

Tom Kessler wanted to sell ice. The kind you'd put in a cup to make drinks cold. And he wanted to sell those cups. And bottle openers and snacks, and basically anything else a person would need to throw a party. The trouble? It was 1997, and Kessler owned a liquor store in Kansas. And at that time, liquor stores in Kansas could only sell...liquor. Although the laws have since changed, the people of Wichita can thank that bit of legislation for the creation of Tom's Super Shop. Initially opened to complement the needs of his liquor store customers, Tom's Super Shop has become a destination in its own right as a full-fledged tobacco store with five locations. But how did they get from Point A to Point B? By quickly figuring out how to meet and exceed their customers' needs with products that drew them in and ensured they'd be back for more.

"It was 1997 when I decided to open a party shop adjacent to my liquor store," said Kessler. "It was right next door, but a different business with a different entrance. And in that store, I could sell everything. Ice, pop, mixers, bottle openers, you name it. At the time, I knew cigars were fun, so I decided a party store should sell tobacco products as well. I came from a grocery background and had knowledge of the category, though mostly in cigarettes. There were only a few tobacco shops in the area at the time, so I built a small walk-in (or actually, reach-in) humidor and went around to see what the others were doing."

When stocking the new store, Kessler researched the market and started out by bringing in a little bit of everything. He relied on his sales staff, customers, brand reps, and distributors, learning by default and narrowing his offerings as he went along, especially as changing legislation loosened the handcuffs on the liquor store business. Tom's Super Shop is now fully focused as a destination for all things tobacco. And he's made crucial moves to allow for expansion while keeping the competition at bay.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF TOM'S SUPER SHOP

TOM KESSLER GETS TOBACCO

A cigar enthusiast for many years and a current member of the Kansas House of Representatives, where he's very involved with both state and local tobacco laws, Tom Kessler doesn't have a favorite cigar, but benefits from having stores with humidors full of them. "When you have hundreds of brands in front of you, you'd like to try them all."


BRICK HOUSE
TORO
BUY 10 OR MORE
DREW ESTATE
CIGARS
ACID
DEADWOOD
JOYA
ISLA DEL SOL
TABAK ESPECIAL
KENTUCKY FIRED CURED
GET 10% OFF 10 SINGLE CIGARS
AND
FREE HAT OR CIGAR CUTTER
ACID
Acid Cold Infusion
$9.49
ACID
Acid Kuba Candela
$9.99
ACID


Carry on!
$3.39
Carry on!
$3.39
WARNING: This product can cause mouth cancer.
BLACK to BACK
Copenhagen
WARNING: Smokeless tobacco is addictive.
A FEDERAL COURT HAS ORDERED PHILIP MORRIS USA & R.J. REYNOLDS TOBACCO TO STATE
Black Mild
Tom's



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF TOM'S SUPER SHOP

THE RIGHT MIX OF PRODUCTS

"We are a tobacco specialty store," says Kessler definitively. "When you walk into one of my stores, you know exactly where you are. We don't sell chips or candy at Tom's Super Store now. All the inventory in here is tobacco-related, and we have just about everything that you can imagine."

Variety is both the spice of life and one of the reasons why Kessler's stores stand out from others in his area. He's not afraid to stock his shelves with a mix of unique items and top sellers, knowing that customers will come looking for both.

Kessler notes, "We have literally everything a nicotine or tobacco user could want, and a good assortment of each. If you're seeking roll-your-own products, we have tubes, machines, and injectors of all different types. And cigarettes. We carry all the cigarettes, even ones that aren't as popular anymore. We know we have longtime, brand-loyal Carlton smokers, so we make sure to have Carltons in stock, since those can be hard to find. We cater to customers with affinities to certain products and brands, and those willing or wanting to try what's new."

Because of this smart approach to inventory with a broad appeal, Tom's Super Stores draw customers from a pretty wide area, with each location having its own character and specialty.

"In addition to the locals, we have a lot of people from all walks of life who drive in from out of town—especially from the rural areas surrounding Wichita. We find that customers shop differently in each of our stores. In some of my more rural locations, we sell a high density of chewing tobacco. Whereas in others, our premium cigar sales are higher. Each store has its own personality and product selection depending on the market it's in."

Kessler largely relies on his store managers to stock their respective locations correctly, understanding that they know their areas and customers best. And by talking to their customers and watching their buying habits, these managers are empowered to expand into different categories of interest, keeping their inventory fresh knowing the market is there and ready to buy.

KEY PARTNERSHIPS ARE CRUCIAL

Kessler and his sales managers also partner with their distributors to help guide their product assortment.

"When we first began stocking tobacco, we learned to lean on our distributor for inventory direction. We then went through a period where we were buying from many, many different companies individually, and it became a pain. A lot of time was spent trying to place orders, getting people to call us back, etc. Sometimes it was an all-day affair just to get some cigars. So, we joined up with Phillips & King, initially as a time-saving venture. But they have such a wide variety of products, and it's so quick and easy to place orders, that they've become much more vital to our business. Our sales rep, Brent Baker, is particularly good about letting us know what's new, and at making suggestions about products that might sell well for us. He recommended High Tea herbal wraps for a couple of our stores, and our customers have responded nicely. Working with distributors can be key, because they know what's out there and can streamline our time spent researching and ordering. We still have the benefit of offering a diverse inventory to our customers, but are only spending a fraction of the time on the details and logistics."

DYNAMIC DUO

Tom's Super Shop stores are owned and operated by Tom Kessler and his wife, Rachel, who plays a big role in their inventory assortment, attending trade shows and working with vendors and distributors.





Kessler also quickly uncovered another way to draw customers with inventory—by joining forces with Smoker Friendly. An industry powerhouse of over 800 independently owned and operated cigarette and tobacco retailers, Smoker Friendly has an authorized dealer program that offers private label products to its stores, while ensuring they're the only ones carrying the items within a specific vicinity.

Says Kessler, "When I became a Smoker Friendly retailer, they only had cigarettes. But even just selling those as a house brand helped my store stand out from others near our locations. Smoker Friendly makes private label versions of everything now—pipe tobacco, tubes, moist chew, and even premium cigars. At one point, they were our #1 sellers in every category. Now with shifting markets and preferences, they're just #1 for us in roll-your-own, tubes, and pipe tobacco, but our exclusive Smoker Friendly Rocky Patel is still our #1 selling premium cigar. Overall, these house brands have been great tools for customer retention since I'm the only Smoker Friendly store in the area and people can only get these products at one of my locations."

A CONTINUED FINGER ON THE PULSE OF THE INDUSTRY

Being part of Smoker Friendly means Kessler gets to attend the Rocky Mountain Cigar Festival every year, which is something he enjoys doing.

"It's always fun to see our friends in the business, both manufacturers and retailers," says Kessler. "But the biggest reason we like going to the Rocky Mountain Cigar Festival is because it's a consumer event, and these are our customers. It's so great to get all these cigar smokers in one place and be able to speak with them, see what's on their mind and what they're liking. I talk to my customers all the time, but there's nothing like being surrounded by thousands of new perspectives from all over the place. It really helps us retailers identify trends and understand what our customers are looking for now, or soon will be."

"I think attending events is integral to this business," Kessler continues. "I've been to Nicaragua and toured factories like Drew Estate, Oliva, and Joya, where I gained a whole new appreciation for cigars. I've been smoking and selling them for many years, but seeing the whole process, from the fields to the factories, it's hard to believe that you can buy a cigar for under $10 with all that work and craftsmanship done by hand. The experience has really helped me speak to my customers and connect them with the products. And I use the videos and pictures I took for trainings with my managers and staff, so they can share this understanding as well."

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

As most seasoned retailers would agree, the tobacco business is full of transitions and trends. Some of them are big, like what stores can and cannot sell. Others are related to shifts in preferences like moving from machine-made cigars to handmade cigars. And some transitions may seem small, but can have a profound effect on the market, like the changing popularity from Robusto cigars in favor of Churchills.

Kessler's biggest piece of advice to retailers just starting out or looking for growth this year? "Find someone like Brent Baker from Phillips & King to help you. There are people in this industry who really know what they're doing and can help you through the process. They are the specialists in products, trends, and geographic regions, and can guide you through what you should and shouldn't carry. That's how I started and it's a big part of my success today. I rely on the experts. Don't be afraid to do that."

It's products that ultimately draw customers in and keeps them coming back. Through key partnerships and really understanding the ever-changing demands and desires of tobacco and nicotine consumers, Kessler has put the right items on his shelves in all five of his Kansas locations—three in Wichita, one in Derby, and the other in McPherson. Tom's Super Shop is indeed, a super place to shop. **TB**

TOM'S SUPER SHOP LOCATIONS

133 E. 47th Street South
Wichita, KS 67216
316-522-9463

6659 E. Harry Street
Wichita, KS 67218
316-944-1500

720 W. Kansas Avenue
McPherson, KS 67460
620-241-8711

201 E. Madison Avenue
Derby, KS 67037
316-789-0007

2308 S. Meridian Avenue
Wichita, KS 67213
316-941-9811







PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF TOM'S SUPER SHOP

WE ASKED; THEY ANSWERED.

In an issue largely centered around the Dominican Republic, there is only one question we could ask of Phillips & King staffers: "What is your favorite Dominican cigar?"







ARCTIC BLAST

TATIANA



Daniel Learned
Senior Manager,
Sales Planning & Development

I tried the new Arctic Blast by Tatiana at Total Products Expo '24 and was pleasantly surprised by the experience. You get the initial profile of the perfectly aged Dominican tobaccos, but then you're left with a fresh, minty-wintergreen taste. And that freshness continues well after you put the cigar down. My brain couldn't decide if I was smoking a Certs breath mint or a cigar. It was mellow-bodied, it was relaxing, it was enjoyable, and it was a refreshing spin on a traditional stick. Good for an after-dinner smoke? Yes. A great light smoke? Yes. A smoke to transport me to the Arctic with an icy blast? Yes, sir. This is definitely one cigar that I'll be having again.

BREVAS FINAS

HENRY CLAY



Clint Johnson
National Inside Sales & Service Manager

Created in Cuba in the 1840s, Henry Clay Brevas Finas cigars continue to honor their brand's rich history. My go-to for over 20 years, this original line is still "wet packed," meaning the cigars are bundled and placed in their box without the typical aging process. This results in an imperfect-looking cigar that appears to have spent time in the bottom of a backpack. However, the process also captures more oils and develops a unique flavor profile. The wrapper is a rustic, oily, toothy Connecticut broadleaf, and the smoke offers a straightforward dose of black pepper and oak, with bits of baker's chocolate sweetness darting in and out. The finish is lengthy, with notes of red wine tannins. Despite its rustic, unusual appearance, this is a great Dominican cigar, and a testament to its tradition.

PREFERIDOS PLATINUM CAMEROON

LA AURORA



Juan Sanchez
Purchasing Agent Lead

My family is from Santiago, so Dominican cigars hold a special place in my heart. Every year, when school was out, we'd have two months of running around, playing baseball, and hanging with friends around the tobacco crops. There are very few cigars that can bring back all the memories with its flavor profile, but the La Aurora Preferidos Platinum Cameroon is a standout. A favorite of mine for over 15 years, every puff is a smooth, calm unraveling of cocoa notes with a slight pepper on the finish. And it's the aroma that seals the deal, floating through the air like a toy airplane made of silk. Experiencing this cigar feels like the exhilaration and reassurance of a coach patting your shoulder for a job well done as you step off the field with your team on top.

ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY OF ADAM CRUFT

PHILLIPS & KING

Order now by calling your sales rep at **800-532-4427** or visit **PhillipsAndKing.com**

THE RESERVE COLLECTION



Draw customers into your store with heritage brand cigar blends **created exclusively for Phillips & King** by industry legends. Handcrafted with perfectly-aged long-fill tobaccos, having these premium cigars on your countertop or in your humidor will set you apart from the rest.

2 WAYS TO SELL & DISPLAY



20 Ct. Boxes



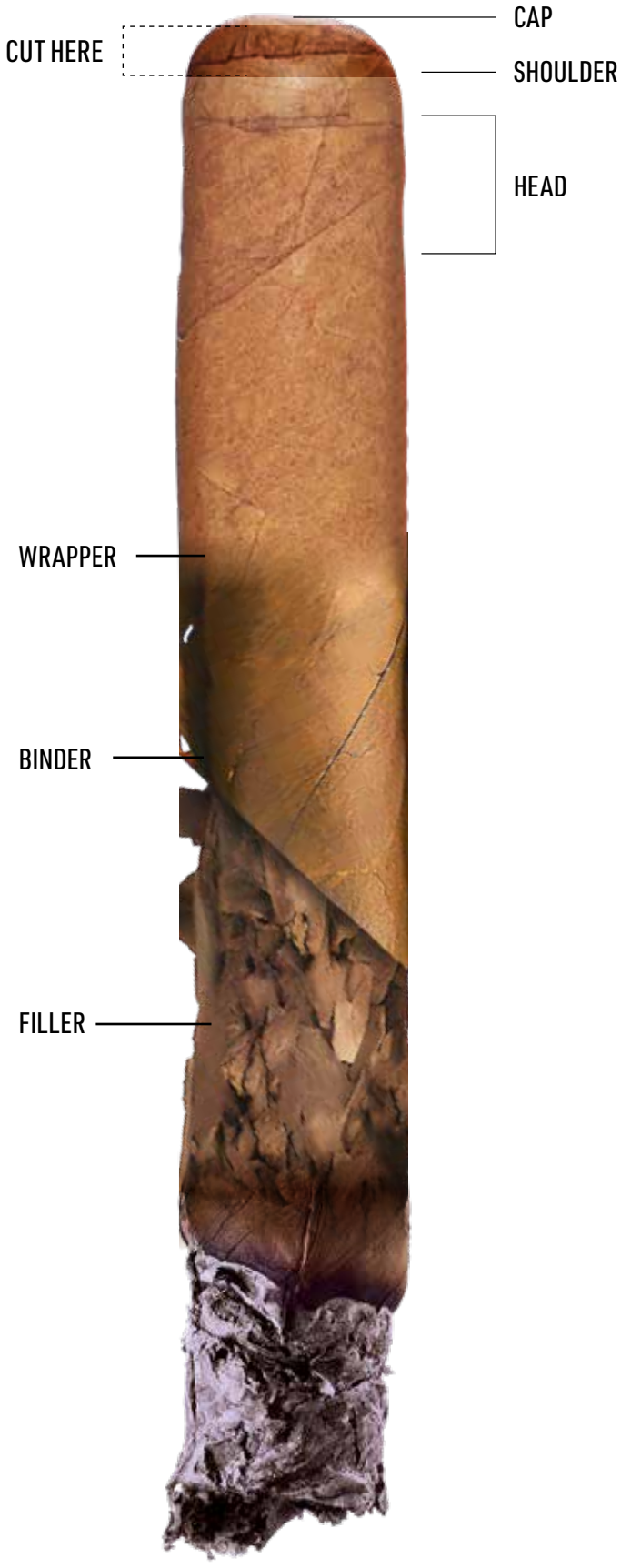
30/3 Ct. Countertop Display

Selling or Smoking Cigars?

Here's What You Need to Know.

Written by Rachel McKnett

Cigars are supposed to be a relaxing business. Whether you're lighting one up for a day on the links or making recommendations for a customer who's ready to buy, cigars are a good time item. But it can all feel pretty complicated once you factor in all the insider terminology, product variants, expert opinions, tricks of the trade, and social pressures to pick and smoke like a pro. So we've compiled a list of terms and tips to help keep your facts straight and the overall experience as enjoyable as it should be.



BASIC ANATOMY

A cigar's construction is key to all things, including its burn and draw, but it starts with the right components.

- The **wrapper** is a cigar's outer leaf, encasing its binder and filler tobaccos in flavorful goodness. If you're counting, this is the most expensive part of the cigar, as it needs to be aesthetically pleasing without veins, blemishes, or unnecessary roughness.
- The **binder** is a tobacco leaf that sits directly under the wrapper and keeps the filler tobaccos in line. Invisible to the naked eye, the look of this leaf isn't as important as its outer counterpart, so the binder may be the same tobacco as the wrapper, just with a few invisible-to-you blemishes or rough spots. The burn of the binder is imperative, however, as it can help the filler burn more evenly.
- And speaking of **filler**, this is where the master blender will show us their chops. It's here in the inner workings where various long-filler tobaccos are blended for their strength, flavor, and complexity, all of which contribute to the cigar's overall experience.

CUT, LIGHT, AND SMOKE IT RIGHT



There's a skill to smoking, and it starts with the prep work and the right tools. You already know the cigar's head must be cut, but you're very aware that a bad cut could ruin your investment. To keep your cigar from unraveling (a sign that you took it too far), make your move above the cigar's shoulder line, or its slight tapering at the top. Don't be too conservative on the cut, as not enough can have adverse effects on the draw. That said, it's better to start cautiously, as you can always cut more if needed.

Once cut, the cigar is ready to light. This action should be approached like the art of toasting a marshmallow, unless you're the savage sort who sticks their skewer directly into the fire. Too much contact of tobacco to flame will result in a charry taste that was definitely not the intention of the master blender. Ideal lighting conditions would be in a low- to no-wind environment, again to alleviate the time the tobaccos spend directly in the line of fire.

Now it's time to smoke. Remember when we said construction was key? That's because a well-constructed cigar will have a consistent burn and enjoyable progression of flavor notes. A word to the wise? Puff at the right pace, about every 30 to 60 seconds. Some smokers will puff too often, which can overheat the cigar and make it taste bitter. Others won't puff enough, and will constantly need to relight their cigars. And while some cigar relighting is just fine, too much of it can add unpleasant flavors of char and bitterness, and that will definitely wreck the vibe.

DOLLARS AND SENSE

A higher price isn't necessarily indicative of a better smoking experience, but there are elements of premium cigars that will inevitably make some pricier than others. There are the hard costs of top-quality raw materials, especially when it comes to rare or low-yield tobacco crops, or those requiring longer aging and fermentation times. And there's the price of engaging skilled rollers, bunchers, and state-of-the-art facilities and factories, which all contribute to a cigar's overall value. All of that means nothing, however, if you don't take the smoker's palate into account. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and one's personal preferences of strength, flavor, and intensity will determine whether they enjoy a cigar, not its price point. So, make sure to infuse some common sense into the conversation of buying or selling your next cigar, and don't necessarily get blinded by the idea that a high price means it's the best. The only way to know if it's truly worthy of your time and money? Give it a try.

NICE ASH

Pro tip: As you smoke, keep the ash on the cigar for as long as you can. An unsung hero, the ash actually helps enhance flavor and regulate temperature, as it keeps contact between the air and lit tobacco to a minimum. **TB**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADOBE STOCK AND JIM COONTZ



GUARDSMAN TRIPLE TORCH LIGHTER
PKL7024
Offering a solid, consistent flame that doesn't dance away, a high-quality Triple Torch lighter is a reliable way to light a cigar.

GUARDSMAN 64 RING GAUGE CUTTER
900770
Sharp and sturdy, get a clean, precise cut on up to a 64-ring gauge cigar on this sleek and affordable cutter.



SCAN TO SEE MORE GUARDSMAN ACCESSORIES

Q&A

QUICK 5

Zaya Younan, Chairman & CEO, Younan Company & El Septimo Cigars

Q What makes El Septimo cigars special and sets them apart from others in the industry?

A El Septimo cigars are considered the best ultra-premium cigars on the market, and even the consumer-based Cigar Aficionado named our Da Vinci as one of the best 14 cigars to smoke in the world. We use only Grade A tobacco for the entire cigar (wrapper, binder, and filler). And we age our tobacco from 5 to 15 years, whereas the industry average is 2 to 3 years. Cigar tobacco is a natural and organic material that continuously changes and ferments over time. The additional aging and fermentation improves its taste by releasing various flavors that are realized in a cigar's progression. A well-aged cigar is flavorful, burns better, and will temper its harshness when smoked.

Q What is your favorite El Septimo cigar to smoke? And what makes it your favorite?

A We have over 50 different cigars, so it's hard to pick because there's really something for everyone. I smoke 8 to 10 cigars a day, choosing them depending on the time of day. I start off with a powerful morning wake-up call from El Septimo Kolosso Amethyst. Next up might be the Bomba Orange, and then, the Mirifico Diamond. In the afternoon, I turn to more mild cigars, like the Alexander, the Napoleon, YAO, and the Rembrandt. A benefit of having 50 different cigars in our portfolio means I can change my combination every day. But my top 3 cigars that I regularly smoke are: Bomba Orange, Kolosso, and YAO Connecticut.

Q What is your best tip to help a retailer merchandise and sell El Septimo cigars?

A We're an ultra-premium brand, so it's important that retailers understand how the differences of our raw materials, techniques, and products contribute to the superiority of El Septimo.

- Our tobacco is organic and we don't use pesticides.
- We utilize a long aging process for our tobaccos, which opens up new flavors unique to our brands and blends.
- We offer a huge selection of cigars that appeal to all different palates and smoking preferences. There's literally something for everyone.
- Every smoke is a memorable, high-quality experience.

Q What is your ideal El Septimo cigar and drink pairing?

A Cigar and beverage pairings are an unforgettable way to bring out the flavors of both elements, so it's no wonder that 80% of cigar enthusiasts enjoy wine and spirits while smoking. Because of this insight, we have invested over $450 mm to acquire some of the best wine companies in France, as well as a Cognac factory and a vodka distillery, also located in France. In keeping with El Septimo's brand, the wine and spirits are all aged for a short period of time in tobacco barrels before bottling.



The combination of great cigars, wines, cognac, and vodka really activates the taste buds in your mouth, allowing people to experience all the flavors. In my opinion, the best cigar pairing is first with wine, second with the cognac, and third with the vodka.

Q What's on the horizon for El Septimo in 2024?

A We've just introduced our Culinary Art Collection, which is inspired by the unforgettable experience of El Septimo cigar and wine pairings. The collection features four different El Septimo cigars that celebrate wines from finest regions of the world: Bordeaux (gordo, $18 msrp), Toscana (toro, $15 msrp), Nigori (corona gordo, $12 msrp), and Rioja (robusto, $9 msrp). We have been working on this project for the last two years, and are pleased to offer cigars with El Septimo's signature high-quality and perfectly aged Grade A tobaccos, but at a lower price point than others in our portfolio. We're excited to make El Septimo cigars accessible to everyone and hope that you give them a try!



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