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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
BEFORE THE TRADEMARK TRIAL AND APPEAL BOARD

Proceeding	92025859
Party	Defendant General Cigar Co., Inc.
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In the matter of Trademark Registration No. 1147309
For the mark COHIBA
Date registered: February 17, 1981

AND

In the matter of the Trademark Registration No. 1898273
For the mark COHIBA
Date registered: June 6, 1995

EMPRESA CUBANA DEL TABACO, d.b.a. CUBATABACO, Petitioner, v. GENERAL CIGAR CO., INC., Respondent.	Cancellation No. 92025859

<u>EXHIBIT 23</u>

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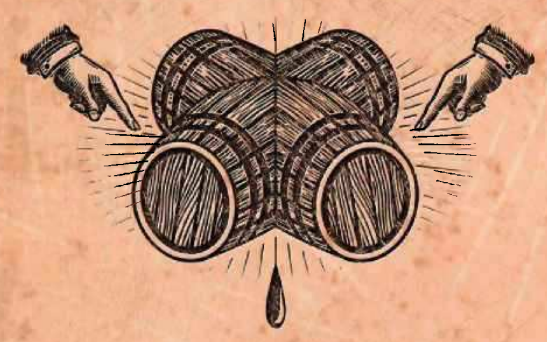

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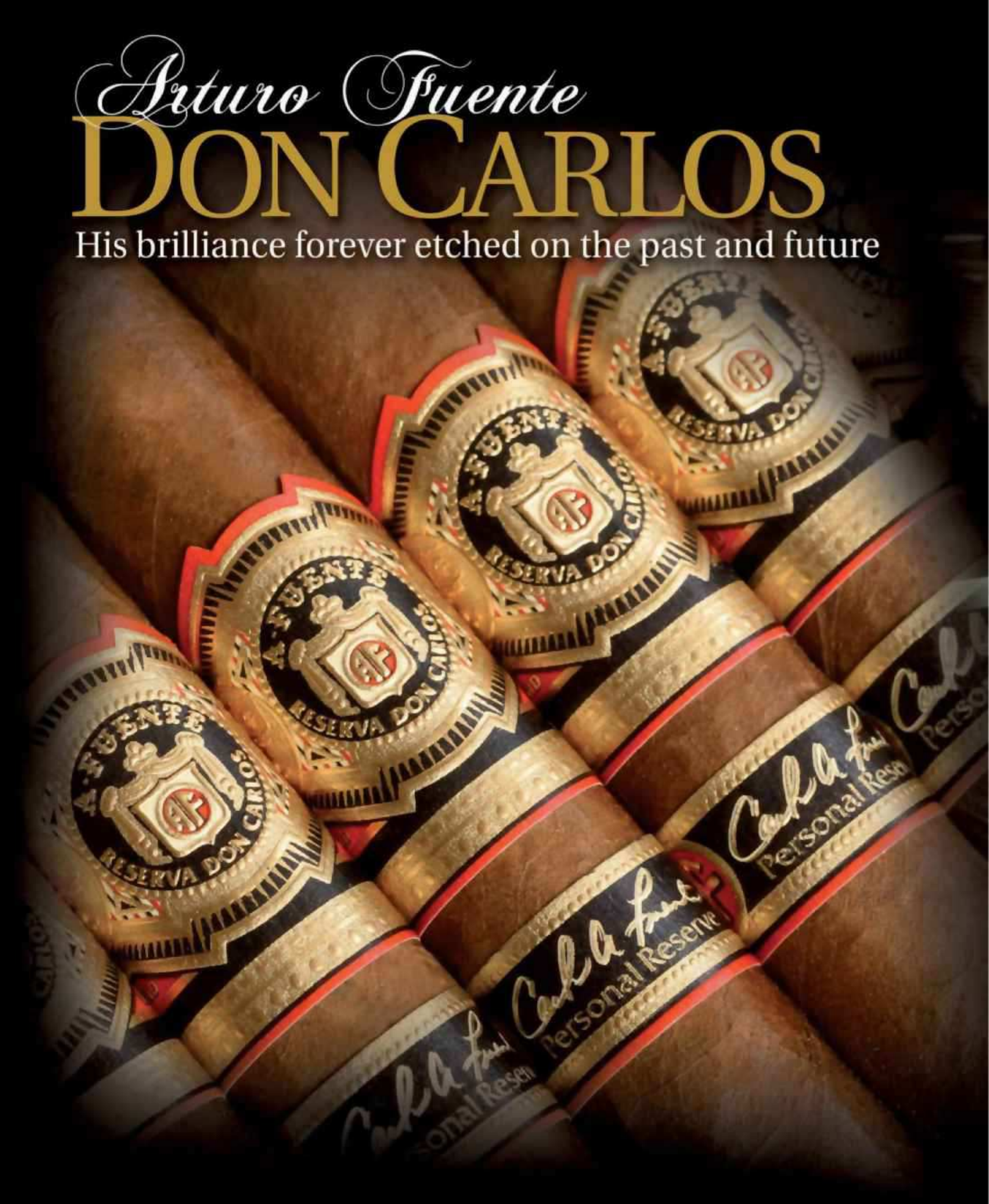

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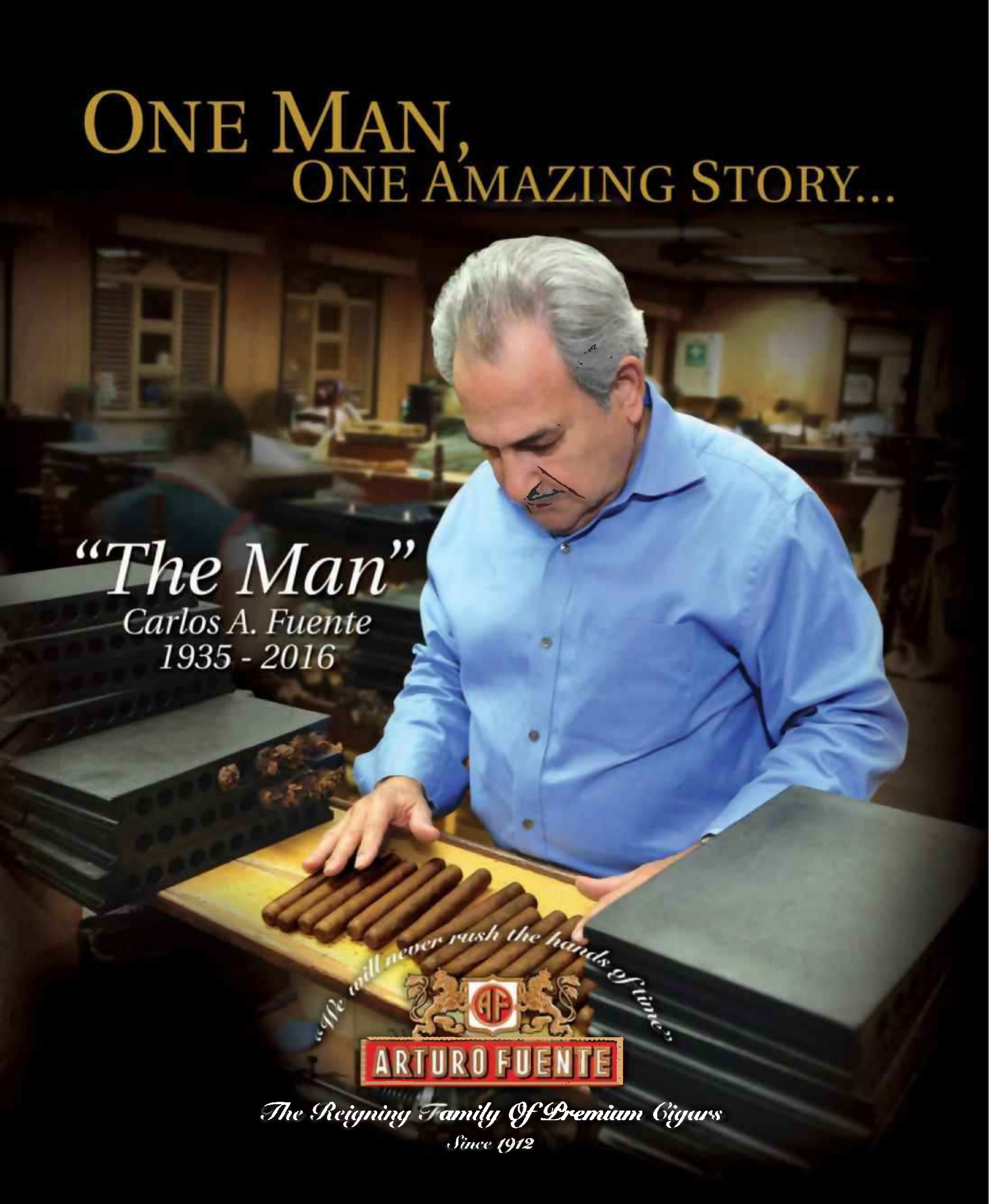

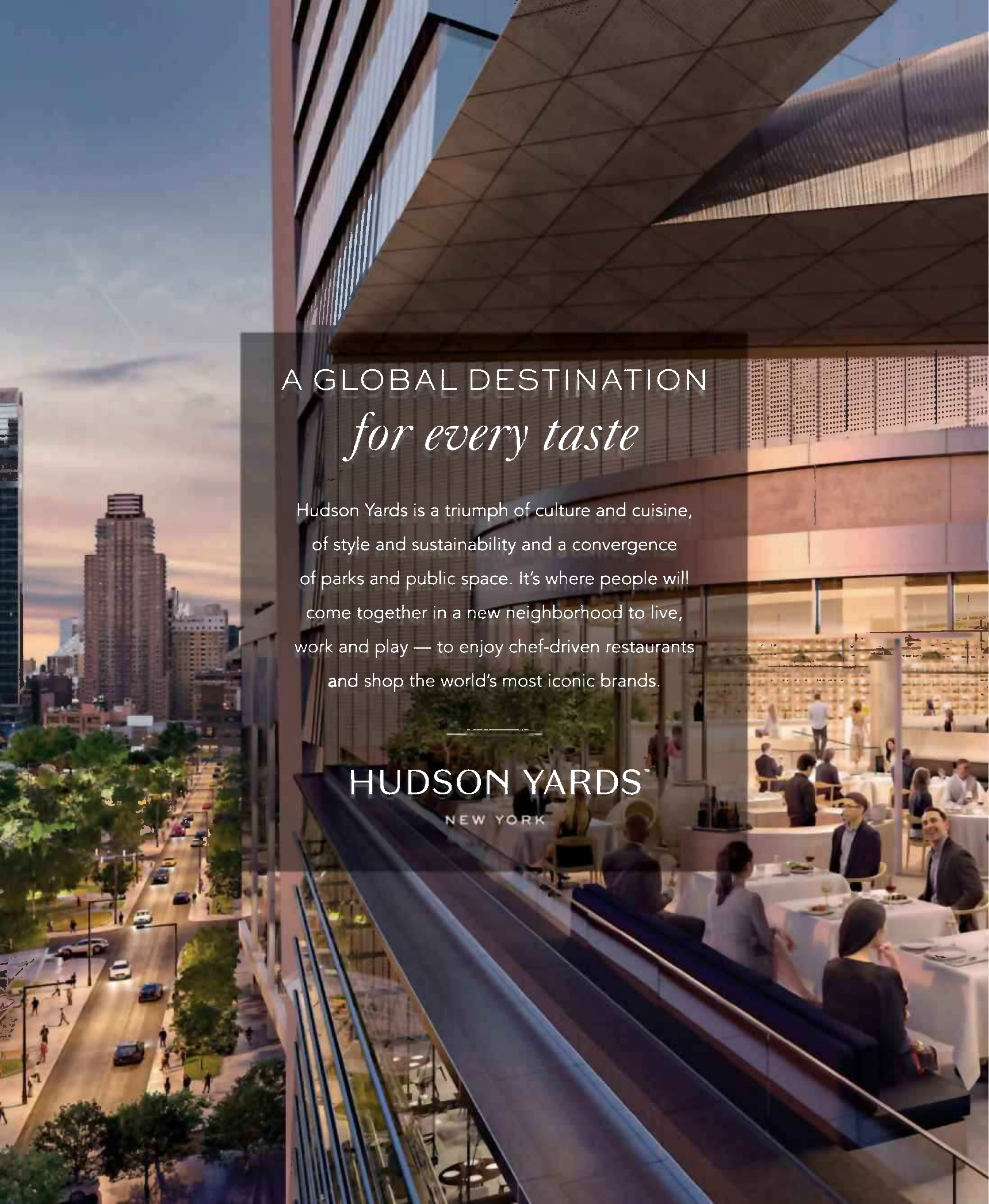

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contents

september/october 2018

74

84

56

ON THE COVER
An exclusive interview with A-Rod reveals a complex personality *photographed by David Yellen exclusively for* CIGAR AFICIONADO

up front

20 CIGAR HIGHLIGHTS

23 EDITOR'S NOTE

letters 25 OUT OF THE HUMIDOR

the best 31 THE GOOD LIFE GUIDE

33 PLACES Enjoying Lake Como without the A-list riffraff.

34 WHEELS A green ride that's Jaguar fast.

36 STYLE The spy who shopped at Savile Row.

39 GOURMET Deer me, it's time for venison.

40 TIME Watches that voyage to the bottom of the sea.

41 DRINK The flavors of autumn in a beer.

45 CIGARS Elie Bleu debuts a cigar accessory collection.

46 SPORTS Scuba diving: sport or deep sea revelation?

50 ELECTRONICS Putting heft back in your keyboard.

52 FUN Surviving the Formula 1 experience.

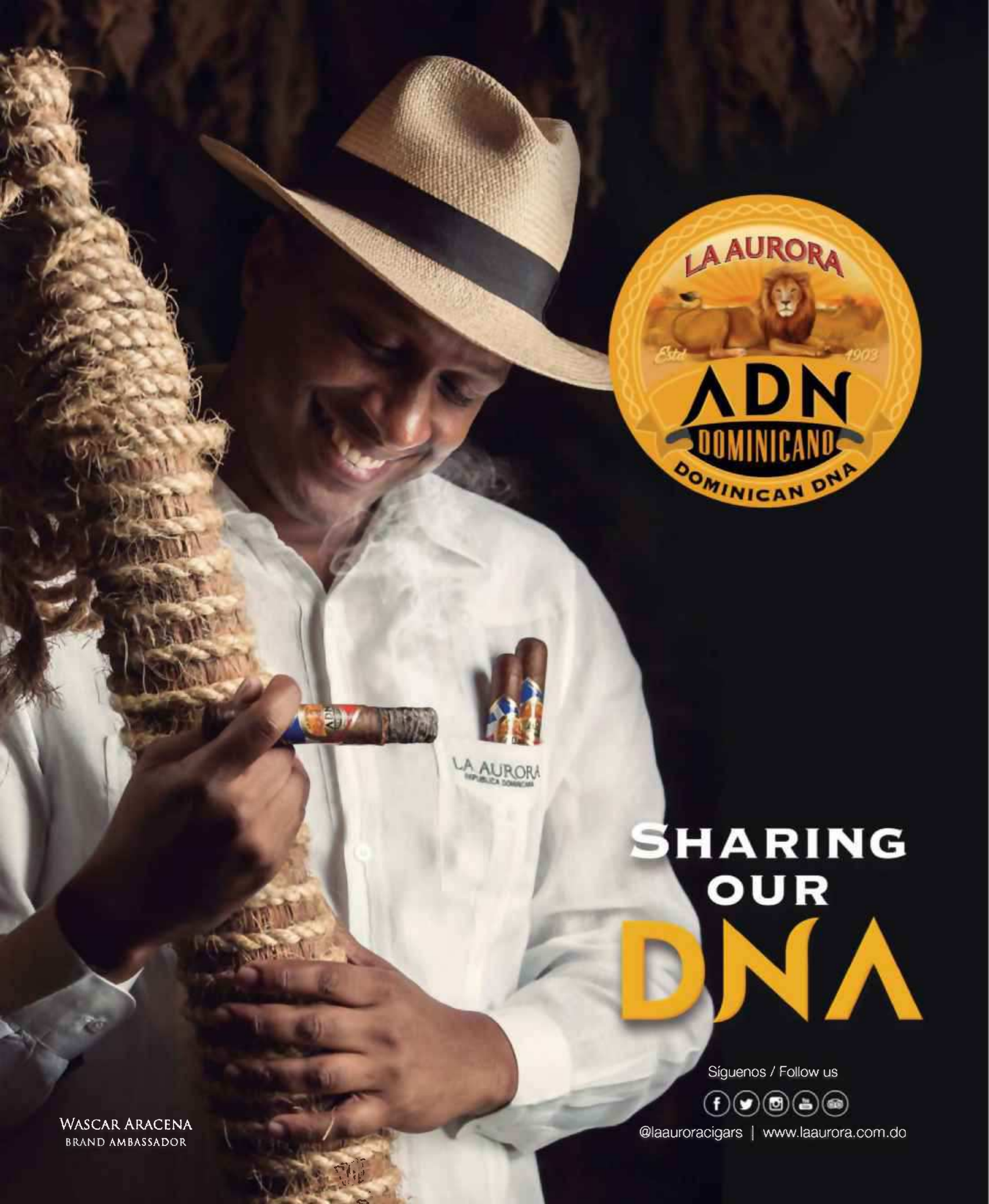
features

cover 56 DO YOU KNOW ALEX RODRIGUEZ?
In a conversation with CIGAR AFICIONADO editor and publisher Marvin R. Shanken, the legendary baseball player peels back the layers of a complex personality that is part superstar, part businessman and part soul searcher.

golf 74 THE SUMMIT ON THE GREENS
The Ryder Cup made golf a team sport. We replay the best of the biennial clashes and look ahead to the battle this fall between Europe and the United States.

NFL 84 PIGSKIN PREVIEW
Our pro football prognosticator gets down to the gridiron nitty gritty to predict which teams will make the postseason and who will bring home the loftiest prize: the Lombardi Trophy.

TOP: GARY KELLNER/PGA OF AMERICA; CENTER: PATRICK SMITH/GETTY IMAGES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WASCAR ARACENA
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culture 96 SMOKING ON-SCREEN
From Charlie Chaplin to Arnold Schwarzenegger, we look at movie actors who wielded cigars as effective props.

gambling 102 HARPOONING THE WHALES
Hooking players who lose seven figures in a weekend is more than sport for casinos, and the lures reach far beyond comp suites. Worm casserole anyone?

spirits 109 BLENDED BONANZA
Blended Scotch is the whisky that won the world. Now it's making a comeback with a wave of extra-aged and specially matured drams.

watches 113 THE YEAR'S 10 BEST
The watch market has roared back, led by an eclectic top-tier mix. The 10 best range from retro to sporty styles, from mind-boggling to no nonsense.

cigars

tasting 120 We rate 83 cigars in six sizes: Churchills (120), corona gordas (122), figurados (126), lonsdales (128), miscellaneous (130) and robustos (132), plus our new buying guide (134) as well as our vintage cigar tasting, Connoisseur's Corner, (136).

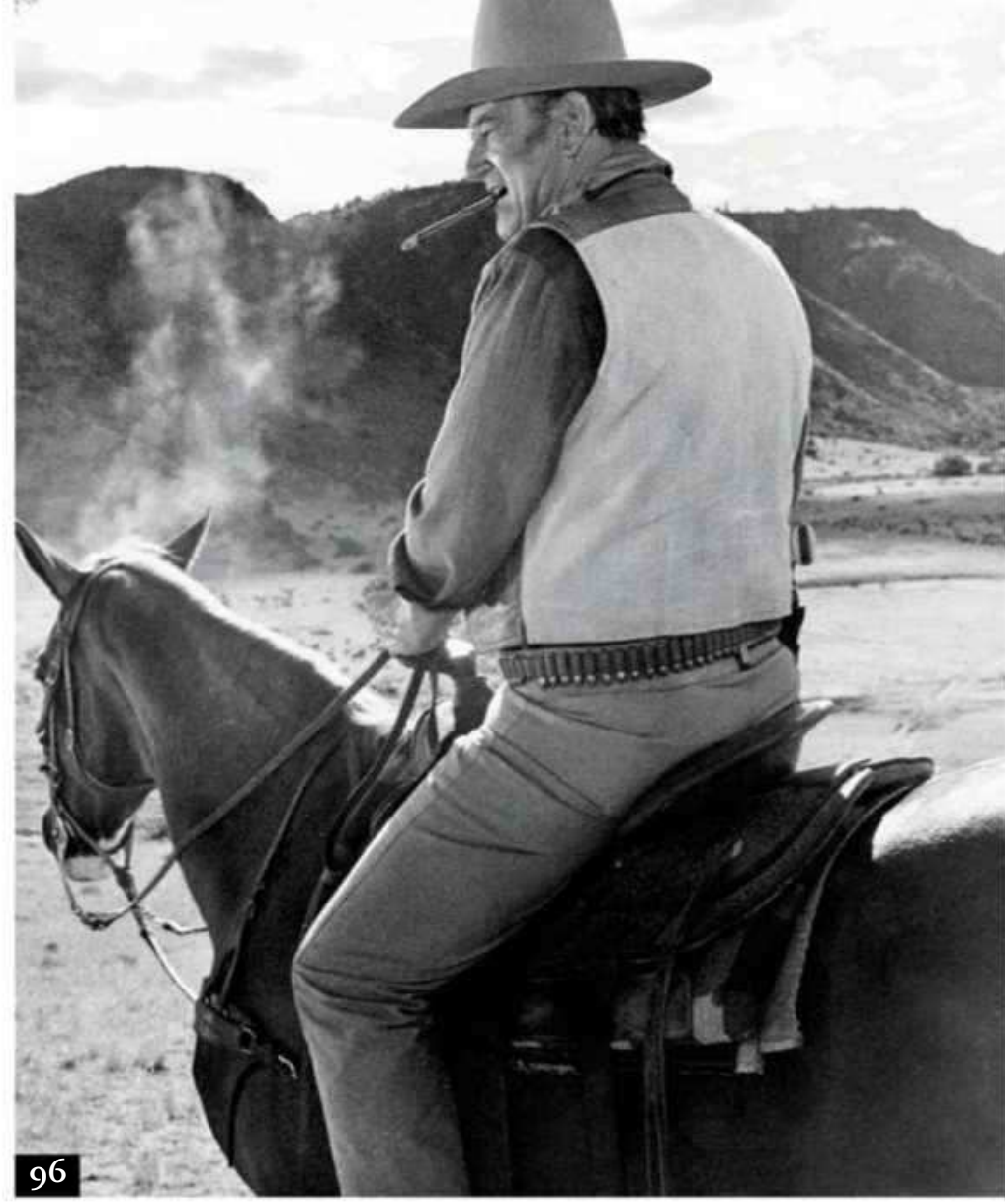
profile 139 RICH EISEN
The mirthful face of the NFL Network enjoys a fine cigar, but not when he runs his annual 40-yard dash in a coat and tie at the NFL combine.

interview 143 HEINRICH VILLIGER
The head of the family-owned, international cigar giant Villiger Söhne A.G. explains how he came to enter the premium market.

cuba report 149 CIGAR SOMMELIERS
Waiters trained in the smoke culture can pair your cigar with the perfect beverage.

152 MOMENTS TO REMEMBER
Photos from our readers as they enjoy themselves and their cigars.

160 MADE FOR YOU
Cheeky neckties; an all-in-one audio hub in a box; a top-flight Tennessee whiskey tour; two new Leica choices; cuff links for real men; and a cherried out Hummer.


96

113

139

TOP: JOHN SPRINGER COLLECTION/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM: JIM WRIGHT

highlights

This was quite a tasting. We reviewed 83 cigars in this issue, 32 of which scored 90 points or higher. Many were rolled in Cuba, but several of the top performers hail from Nicaragua. That Central American country has become a cigarmaking tour de force, and one that can also deliver bargains, like the $6.25 Oliva that scored 91 points.

TOP CORONA GORDA
E.P. CARRILLO ENCORE MAJESTIC — DOM. REP. — 93
Rolled in the Dominican Republic with only Nicaraguan tobaccos, this cigar led the corona gordas along with Cuba's Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure Especial.

TOP ROBUSTO
VEGAS ROBAINA FAMOSO — CUBA — 93
This Cuban is named after the late Alejandro Robaina's famous tobacco farm in Cuba, which is now overseen by his grandson Hirochi.

TOP CHURCHILL
ROCKY PATEL VINTAGE 1992 CHURCHILL — HONDURAS — 92
This box-pressed cigar tied with the Ramon Allones By AJ Fernandez and Villiger San'Doro Colorado for the top spot in the Churchill category.

TOP FIGURADO
MONTECRISTO NO. 2 — CUBA — 92
This classic, go-to Cuban, our 2013 Cigar of the Year, has become one of the world's most recognizable premium smokes.

TOP LONSDALE
COHIBA SIGLO V (TUBO) — CUBA — 92
Measuring slightly shorter than 7 inches, this darkly wrapped smoke was part of a three-pack, with each cigar in its own glossy yellow tube.

TOP MISCELLANEOUS
ILLUSIONE CRUZADO SHORT ROBUSTO — NICARAGUA — 92
This short, stout cigar, a Nicaraguan puro, bursts with flavor and is the perfect smoke to reach for when time is limited.

BEST BUY
OLIVA SERIE G CHURCHILL — NICARAGUA — 91
Covered in a dark, toothy Cameroon wrapper, this trunk-pressed cigar carries a retail price of only $6.25.

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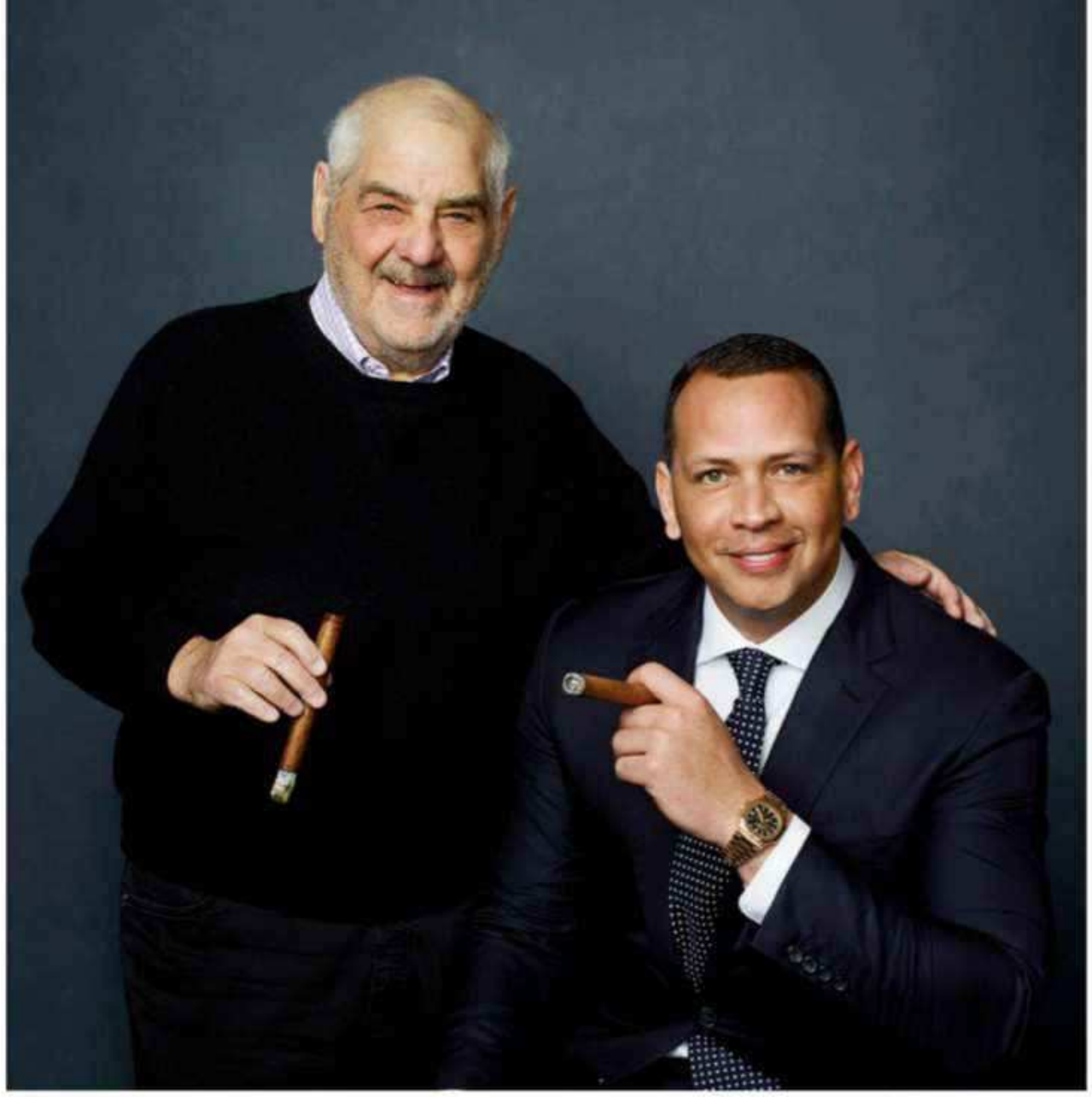


DAVID YELLEN

editor's note

One-on-One with Alex Rodriguez

Who is Alex Rodriguez?

We all know he was a great baseball player, certainly one of the best of all time. Only three people have hit more home runs, he's a 14-time All-Star and a three-time American League MVP. His records are too long to list, but one stands out, hitting 25 grand slams, more than any other man.

As a teenager, when he was drafted No. 1 by the Seattle Mariners, he was already a superstar. Even then people cheered him. But as the years went on, and he moved from the Mariners to the Rangers and then to the Yankees, he began breaking records with his salary as well as his bat. He became a polarizing figure, and some of those cheers turned to boos. And when the question of steroids arose, he first denied ever using them, then finally admitted what he did. Ultimately he was suspended by Major League Baseball for the entire 2014 season.

But something happened after that suspension. He came back to the Yankees with a new attitude, a new energy. He made his peace with baseball and retired during the 2016 season. And while he had a great career as a baseball player, today he's having a sensational second act. Not only is he a talented analyst, talking about the ins and outs of the game on FOX and ESPN, but he's a sharp businessman. Early on in his career, he began investing his money in real estate, and over the years he has built an enviable portfolio of rental properties—15,000 of them. He's shown off his business chops on the hit TV show "Shark Tank," and he's dating superstar Jennifer Lopez.

I met him. I interviewed him. And I got to know the real Alex Rodriguez.

His early life was far from easy. Abandoned by his father when he was just 10, Rodriguez was raised by his mother, who was forced to work two jobs. But hardship ignited a fire in Rodriguez, who determined to use his baseball talents to build a better life for not only himself, but his mother. When he signed his first contract, he proudly told her she would never have to work again.

One of my longtime employees is a die-hard Yankees fan. As I prepared for the interview with Rodriguez, I asked for her opinion of the man. "He owned his mistakes and thanked the fans for putting up with him," she told me. "He embraced the kinetic energy of New York City and helped make the game exciting to watch. He brought crowds to every stadium in the country—even if it was just to boo him. The Yankees won the World Series in 2009 and A-Rod was a big part of that. That makes him a Yankee for life."

I spent several hours with A-Rod in the Cigar Aficionado offices, smoking cigars and talking about his amazing story. To bring this interview to life, we also shot video. Read the interview, which begins on page 56. Watch the videos, which you can find at video.cigaraficionado.com.

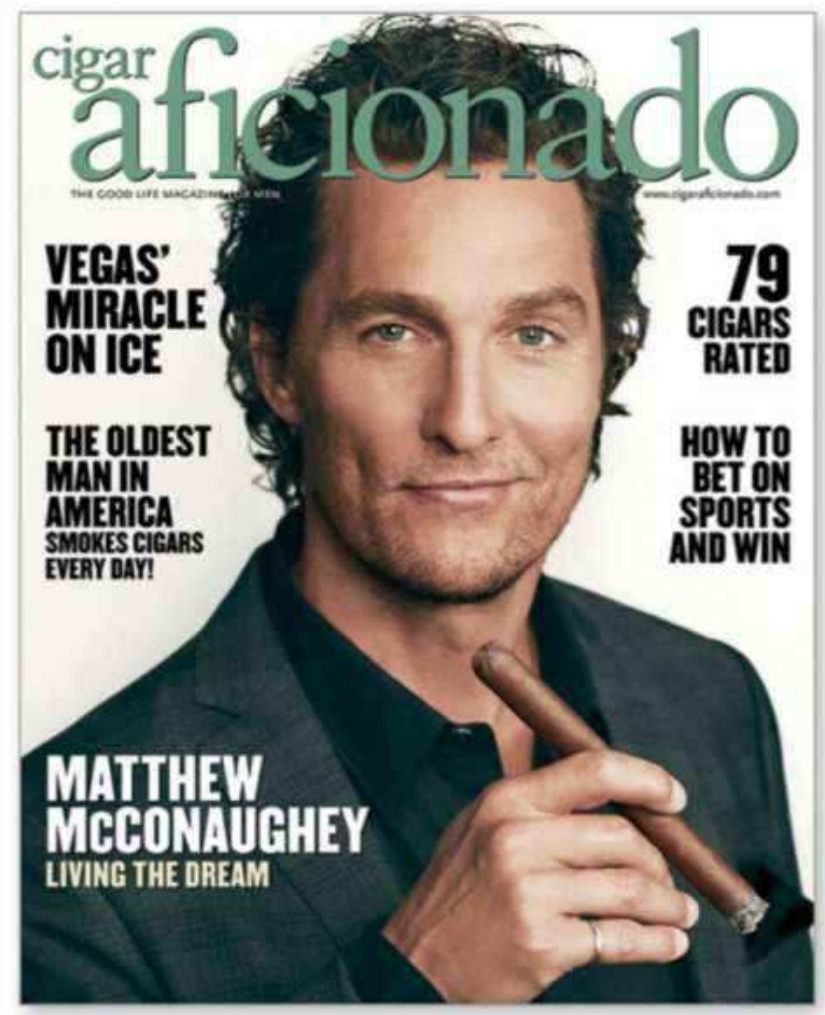
I think you'll enjoy getting to know the real Alex Rodriguez.

MARVIN R. SHANKEN
EDITOR & PUBLISHER

ESCAPE TO PARADISE
SAN CRISTOBAL

Dear Marvin,
As a longtime cigar enthusiast, but more recent reader of your magazine, I was delighted with the latest issue featuring the masterfully cool Matthew McConaughey [“Alright, Alright, Alright,” August 2018]. In my pursuit of becoming an esteemed gentleman in my own right, I have thus far found your sophisticated yet playful publication to be the perfect primer for cultivating a gentlemanly lifestyle.

The recent issue also featured genuine war hero Richard Overton [“112 And Feeling Fine”], who I believe serves as a shining example to young men everywhere and not just due to his loyal affection for a daily stogie. Men like him don’t seem to be manufactured anymore. I like to believe that true gents are conditioned, not unlike newly arrived dry tobacco from storage needing a little activation. They start off dry, unrefined, and closed off, only to be reinvigorated with a touch of genteel flare. After which point they can become a quality finished product full of refinement and depth. Cigar Aficionado provides the essential information for every fun-loving, high-minded individual. Keep up the fantastic work!
E.M. Lannan
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada



“I have found your sophisticated yet playful publication to be the perfect primer for cultivating a gentlemanly lifestyle.”
—E.M. Lannan, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

Dear Marvin,
I have been a subscriber to Cigar Aficionado for a few years and really enjoy perusing the articles and the adverts. However, your May/June edition excelled itself. As a longtime fan of the great Sir Winston, your articles about his life (Jon Meacham’s book *Franklin And Winston* is terrific), separating fact from fiction and the movie *Darkest Hour*, was fantastic and highlighted to fellow readers of the magazine some of the personality and sheer brilliance of one of the 20th century’s greatest and most important figures.

Talking of fact or fiction, it seems appropriate to share my favorite Churchill quotation, which one only hopes is true. There is a government position in the U.K. called the “Lord Privy Seal” and Sir Winston was not a big fan of the incumbent. One morning, when he was still Prime Minister, Churchill’s secretary knocked on the bathroom door and said, “Sir Winston, the Privy Seal is on the telephone.” Sir Winston replied “Please tell the Privy Seal that I am sealed to the privy, and I can only deal with one shit at a time!” There really wasn’t anyone like him.
Martyn Fisher
London, United Kingdom

Dear Marvin,
You came out forcefully against Altria’s position against FDA exemption for premium cigars [“America’s Largest Cigarette Company Comes Out Against FDA Exemption For Handmade Cigars,” July 31, 2018, cigaraficionado.com]. Will that forcefulness translate into not testing Nat Sherman cigars or accepting advertisements in Cigar

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AFICIONADO for that company's cigars? Will it mean no advertisements in *Wine Spectator* for Ste. Michelle winery? As you pointed out, both are owned by Altria.
James Wilkinson
Sarasota, Florida

Editors' Response: CIGAR AFICIONADO *will continue to test and rate Nat Sherman cigars just as before, as our editors deem appropriate. As for advertisements in* CIGAR AFICIONADO *and* Wine Spectator*, we shall leave that decision up to the companies that advertise. Whether they do—or do not—advertise has no influence on the ratings they receive in our blind tastings in* CIGAR AFICIONADO*, and the same holds true for wines reviewed in* Wine Spectator*, and all M. Shanken Communications publications.*

Dear Marvin,
I have really enjoyed reading your magazine. As a lifelong learner, I feel there is always something new you can learn that will make you appreciate even more things in life, especially those things you enjoy. Your magazines have done a tremendous job of growing my appreciation for my favored diversions of wine, Bourbon and cigars.

Your "2017 In Review" [February 2018] was a mind-blowing font of information, breaking down the many factors of creating great cigars. There is one thing that I found curious. Besides discussing origin and brand of cigars, you also discussed size of cigars. You wrote in your article: "lonsdales—another size that is fading." Why do you think that is occurring? Though I am not committed to one cigar or size, I have always felt the lonsdale to be a happy medium, and tend to shy away from sizes that go north of 48 ring gauge. What do you feel are the pros and cons of a lonsdale?
Jay Goad
Franklin, Indiana

Editors' Response: The lonsdale is a relatively slim and rather elegant size that once was considered among the most popular in the land. The Cuban standard is 6 1/2 inches long, with a ring gauge of 42, and perhaps the most famous example is the Cuban Montecristo No. 1. Lonsdales have been pushed aside by robustos, which are shorter (usually five inches or so long) and fatter (a ring gauge of 50), as people have gravitated toward fatter, shorter smokes. Nowadays people are looking for fatter smokes still, with the 60 ring gauge smoke becoming a top seller. We enjoy lonsdales on occasion. For pros, they don't take an enormous amount of time to smoke. For cons, they don't often have the depth of flavor that you'll find in a fatter smoke, such as a robusto. Our advice? If you enjoy them, stick with them. ❖

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Living well demands that we indulge in things that are of superior quality and excellent origin. This guide aspires to find and recommend the best of everything to aficionados of the good life.

places	33	VILLA D'ESTE, LAKE COMO, ITALY
wheels	34	JAGUAR I-PACE
style	36	THE SAVILE ROW SUIT
gourmet	39	VENISON
time	40	DIVE WATCHES
drink	41	AUTUMNAL BEER
cigars	45	ELIE BLEU ACCESSORIES
sport	46	SCUBA DIVING
electronics	50	RETRO KEYBOARD
fun	52	FORMULA 1 EXPERIENCE

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Villa d'Este, Lake Como, Italy

Once George Clooney is no longer seen on his Indian motorcycle, braving hair-raising, roller-coaster roads on Lake Como's wishbone-shaped shoreline, other "regulars" at this famed hideaway like Springsteen, John Legend and Madonna also disappear. But so do the crowds, making autumn a fine time to take in the emerald-green waters fed by trout-filled Alpine streams and enjoy the pervasive hedonism.

This is especially true at Italy's Villa d'Este, the palatial oasis located only one hour north of Milan. Blessed with views of the Alps, 25 acres of majestic, terraced gardens, and offering sumptuously furnished accommodations with Murano-glass chandeliers and antique sculptures, the Italian Renaissance–styled Villa has been enchanting guests since 1873.

U.S. presidents, European royalty and movie icons come for a refuge promising pampering and indulgent, unabashed extravagance. But they also crave its serenity against a backdrop of snow-capped mountains and jewel-like hillside towns.

Winston Churchill, who savored Romeo y Julietas in the Villa's Canova Bar, gushed over its tranquility and humor. Its cozy intimacy remains, but Romeos have been replaced by Upmanns, Cohibas and Montecristos and smoking now happens on the terrace.

Dining is equally delightful. After a Bellini, there's the jacket-and-tie Veranda or the more casual Grill. DeNiro prefers spaghetti with fresh tomatoes and basil. Clooney also goes for pasta. Autumn is also the time to celebrate fish specialties, whether at the Villa or two exceptional restaurants, Materia in Cernobbio and Locanda dell'Isola Comacina, found on a tiny, bewitching island.

"Fish aggressively go hunting in autumn and that means it's the best time for catching purple-hued Graylings (the salmon family) and trout," says Tom Whieldon, who organizes fly-fishing tours.

The adventurous will be similarly charmed (and frustrated) by the four nearby, hillside golf courses. With their views come devilishly narrow fairways. The severely sloped Menaggio & Cadenabbia is the greatest test of courage, reachable only by negotiating one-lane roads, steep inclines and hairpin turns.

So instead of driving, opt for the memorable luxury of a classic Riva wooden boat taxi to a nearby port. "There's nothing like sitting on the sundeck of a high-powered boat, a glass of Champagne in hand, watching the glassy waters glide by," says Duilio Reina, the owner of Como Classic Boats. "It's living the dream."

Visit villadeste.com/en/

—Ed Kiersh

Jaguar I-Pace

Everything you know is wrong. About battery cars, that is. If you think they're slow and stodgy, cramped, funny looking and boring to drive, well, you need to spend some time behind the wheel of the electrifying new Jaguar I-Pace.

A trip to Portugal's Algarve region during the height of cork harvesting season disproved the misconceptions. The British marque's first battery-electric vehicle endured about every possible test—on road or off—including track time at the Formula One–rated Autodromo Internacional Algarve before wrapping things up with a steep hill climb, and a splash through a stream.

An instant eye-opener as a 2016 concept car, the I-Pace changed little as a production model, and it borrows liberally from the classic Jaguar design book. The most obvious difference is its "cab forward" shape. The batteries, motors and control systems all sit below the load floor instead of under the hood, so they pulled the cabin forward, leaving lots of space for passengers and cargo. Despite the crossover's compact footprint, it has the interior space of the brand's stretch limo.

Mounting that hardware underneath also means a much lower center of gravity, and the I-Pace has the poise of a classic Jaguar sport sedan. It feels more nimble than the brand's two conventionally powered utility vehicles, the E-Pace and F-Pace, and *is* faster. The twin motors—one on each axle—whir out 394 horsepower and 512 pound-feet of torque. Because electric motors needn't rev up like a gas engine, you'll hit 60 in 4.5 seconds.

Another novel feature is called single-pedal driving. Like all battery cars, I-Pace uses "regenerative" brakes that recapture energy lost during braking and coasting, improving range. Set to maximum regen you simply modulate the throttle to slow down as you weave around corners and, in most around-town situations you can come to a halt without touching the brake pedal.

I-Pace resolves so many battery-electric complaints that it may speed demand. Its 90-kilowatt lithium-ion battery clocks an average 240 miles on a charge. Using a 240-volt charger it takes about 12.6 hours to top off a drained battery, but the new Level 3 public chargers can get an 80 percent range boost in 40 minutes.

The new Jaguar I-Pace starts at $69,500, with the heavily loaded First Edition model pushing up to $85,900. By comparison, the F-Pace starts at $44,600. Then again, Tesla's own Model X SUV has a base price that's $10,000 more.

Visit jaguarusa.com

—Paul E. Eisenstein

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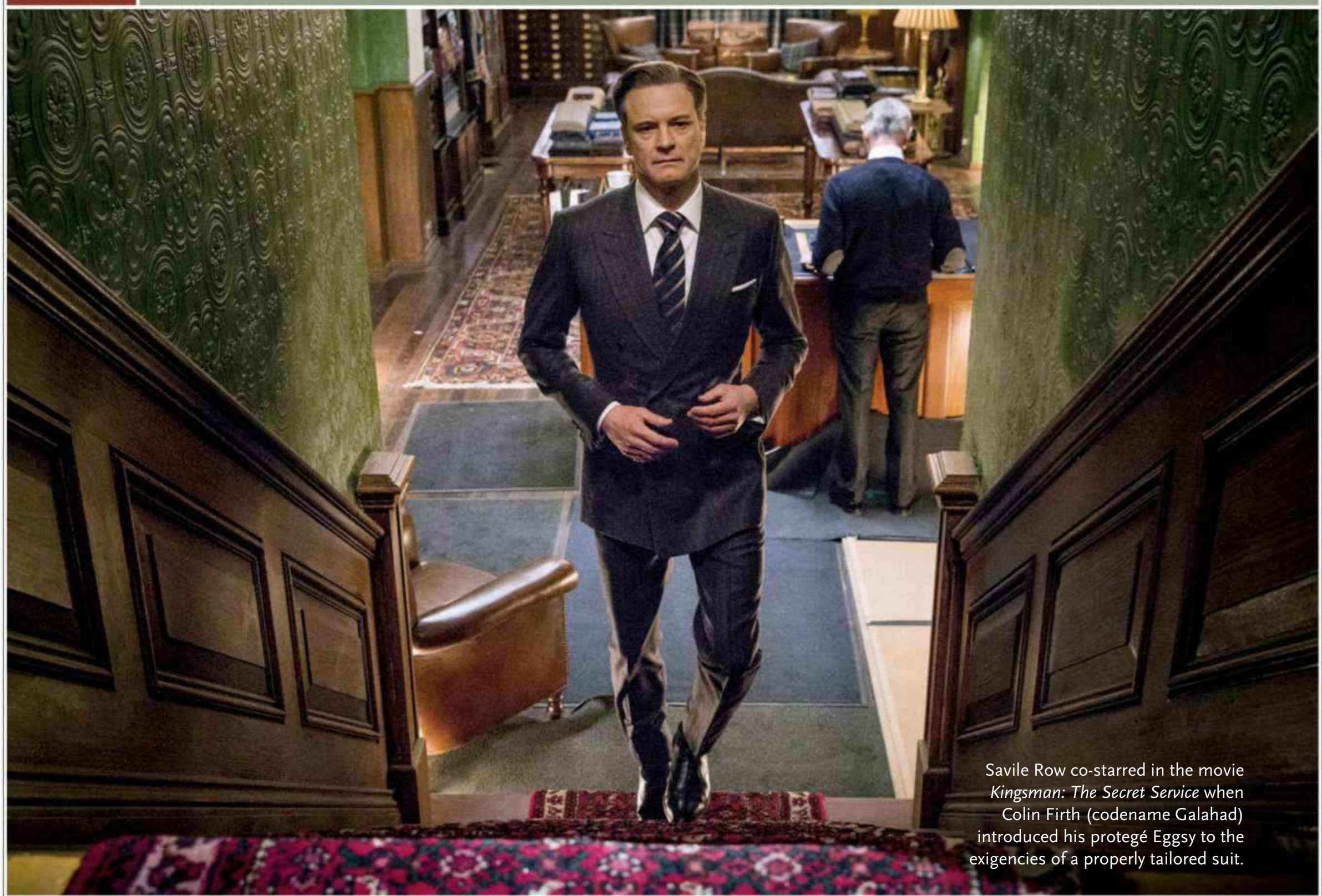

Savile Row co-starred in the movie *Kingsman: The Secret Service* when Colin Firth (codename Galahad) introduced his protegé Eggsy to the exigencies of a properly tailored suit.

AF ARCHIVE/ALAMY

The Savile Row Suit

When a London street has a 230-year history of tailoring custom-fit clothing for well-heeled businessmen, statesmen and soldiers across the globe, you expect its reputation to be understated. But every once in a while Savile Row makes a higher profile splash that reminds the world of how exquisite its wares are and just how broad its possibilities. For instance, when Hollywood went shopping to dress the spies of the *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, it went straight to the source. Martin Nicholls, tailor for his own Savile Row house as well as Alfred Dunhill, made the memorable suits for the movie as well as its sequel, drawing on not only his fitting prowess, but his real-life experience in adding hidden pockets for the kind of lethal things you'd expect secret agents to carry.

The Row, which built its reputation making military uniforms that eventually morphed into what is now the classic business suit, doesn't follow fashion, but sometimes ends up making it. Because the bespoke suit is essentially a blank canvas, you can have anything you want. Rock stars of the late '60s visited Tommy Nutter, who made sharply tailored outfits for the likes of the Beatles and Stones. His natural successor is former partner Edward Sexton who now operates on Beauchamp Place. Hardy Amies built a diverse reputation by making everything from dresses for the queen to the space costumes for *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Richard James and Ozwald Boateng are the contemporaries that now wave the fashion-forward banner on Savile Row.

Of course, you can always get the great fabrics and attention to detail (dozens of measurements, several fittings) at more staid outlets like the exclusive Anderson & Sheppard or Huntsman (the storefront that had a cameo in *Kingsman*) with its expertise in plaids. At Henry Poole, where they have paper patterns of all their most famous customers from Churchill to Napoleon III on hand, you can go full-on old-school. They'll replicate antique uniforms for you. You don't even have to be making a movie.

—*Jack Bettridge*

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Venison

Seldom remembered facts: our first Thanksgiving was celebrated in October and turkey was not the only meat course. Venison, or deer meat, a kind of tangy, gamey, musky alternative to beef, also graced the feast—even if it wasn't as notable to European guests already familiar with its charms.

Autumn remains a natural time to indulge in this storied, if underappreciated, cut of meat. In many parts of the United States, deer-hunting season occurs in the fall (when the animals have matured as well as fattened). However, unless you hunt it yourself or have friends that do, you are unlikely to encounter deer as game meat. Venison bought from a butcher or ordered at a restaurant has been farmed, or ranched, in large fenced in areas and then safely prepared and packaged under USDA regulations.

But certain compensations come with ditching the back-to-our-roots esthetic. This sort of free-range production contributes to a tastier (at least to many modern palates) cut. Farmers use selective breeding to strengthen the herds. The deer still enjoy a steady diet of the things like alfalfa, acorns and wild herbs that contribute to their interesting flavor, but their feed can also be supplemented with protein. The farmed animals aren't as lean as their wild cousins, owing to a steady diet. Furthermore, while recipes for hunted deer often call for marinating to soften more muscular cuts, when you're buying farm-raised deer you can select meat that's already tender.

Farm-raising also makes venison available all year, especially as much of it is imported from New Zealand. Plus, buying this way allows you to choose the most tender cuts. Backstrap is similar to rib-eye steak, while tenderloin is like a filet. We enjoy it simply grilled (medium rare please; well-done venison is notoriously tough) with some black pepper and plenty of salt. While it won't likely push aside your Thanksgiving turkey, adding it to your autumnal menu will serve as a palatable American history lesson.

—Jack Bettridge

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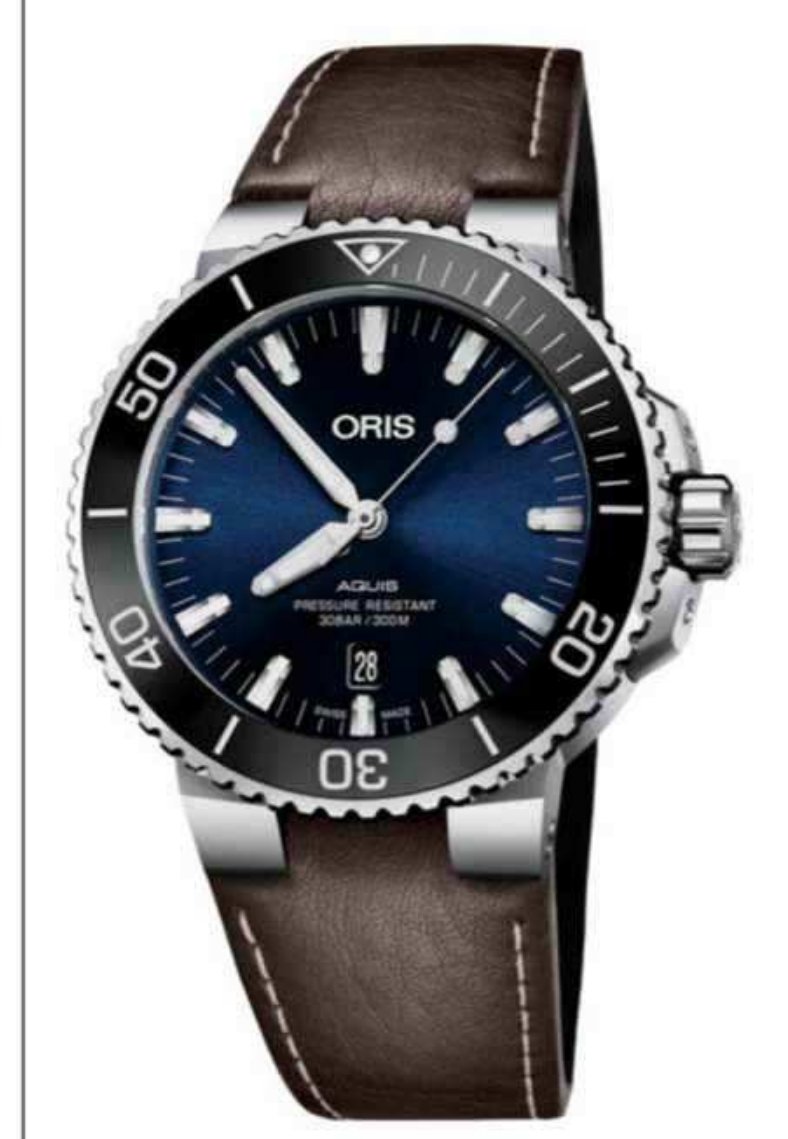

Dive Watches

Like so many men's items from gear to fashion, dive watches come courtesy of the military. In the mid-1930s, Rolex built one for the divers of the Royal Italian Navy. After World War II, scuba became a recreational activity, and the dive watch emerged as a pillar of the burgeoning sport-watch segment.

Omega's Seamaster Professional Diver 300M, born in 1948, just redesigned the 300 collection, which debuted in 1993. Upsized to 42 millimeters, it includes six stainless steel models and eight two-tone (stainless and gold) models. ($4,750 for steel with rubber strap; $4,850 for steel/steel; $6,500 for gold/rubber; and $9,700 for steel/gold.) A limited edition of 2,500, made mostly of titanium with gold trim, pays tribute to the original with the bezel's base and some band trim fashioned from tantalum ($13,000). The new conical helium-escape valve is endowed with a patented system that allows for underwater operation. The ceramic bezel has a diving scale in the brand's Ceragold (gold-infused ceramic) or white enamel. Reshaped skeleton hands turn over polished ceramic dials that are laser engraved with the collection's trademark wave pattern. The date window is at 6 O'CLOCK, while the indexes are raised and filled with luminous Super-LumiNova.

This year, Ulysse Nardin took its Diver collection to extremes with a 300-piece Diver Deep Dive ($12,000) with water-resistance to 1,000 meters. The brawny, 46-mm titanium watch has a helium-release valve at 9 O'CLOCK for deep dives and a removable titanium crown guard at 2 O'CLOCK. The rubber strap expands to help adjust to swelling wrists during dives, and the notched bezel can be easily manipulated while wearing diving gloves.

For those who style while at great depths, Oris debuted a downsized 39.5-mm version of its classic Aquis Date ($1,800 on strap; $2,000 on metal bracelet) with all the requisite dive elements: water resistance to 30 bar (300 meters), a unidirectional rotating bezel for keeping track of dive times, and a high-contrast dial design with Super-LumiNova for legibility even in the murky depths. Of course, many dive watches barely make it off the beach, so the Aquis Date pairs equally as well with jeans as it does with neoprene.

Visit omegawatches.com, ulysse-nardin.com and oris.ch

—Laurie Kahle

Autumnal Beer

Fall is beer's bridge season between the light coolers of summer and unabashedly boozy warmers of winter as the season's brews conceal a boosted alcohol content behind their combinations of malts and seasonal ingredients.

Beers that are brewed with such traditional fall spices as nutmeg, clove and allspice are the naturals. Cigar lovers looking to pair with suds should abide by a simple rule: the darker the beer, the better. The malts that make beer dark usually impart a natural sweetness that partners well with mild- to medium-bodied smokes.

New Belgium's 1554 Black Lager and Dogfish Head's Indian Brown are regular-production beers that shine in the fall. The 1554 Black Lager boasts fennel and toffee in the nose, with a dose of brown sugar and chocolate in the swallow. Indian Brown belies its India pale ale style by pouring dark brown and offering roasted caramel and brown-sugar notes.

For added alcohol warmth, look to Ommegang's Double Barrel Dubbel (9.9 percent alcohol by volume) and Boulevard Brewing's Bourbon Barrel Quad (11.2 percent). Both brews have been aged for a time in oak Bourbon barrels, with Ommegang also enjoying a slumber in ex-brandy casks. The Double Barrel has notes of vanilla, coconut and molasses, with subtle hints of licorice root and orange peel. Barrel Quad starts off with toffee, clove and vanilla before a cherry finish.

Pumpkin, the king of fall ingredients, is a tasty alternative when done well. Firestone Walker's El Gourdo features pumpkins that have been roasted in wood-burning ovens. The roasted pumpkin flavor is subtle in the tart brew, but nutmeg and walnut also show.

Märzenbier, the style traditionally served at Germany's annual Oktoberfest celebration, is paler in color and more sessionable (5 to 6 percent alcohol). Though not officially served at Oktoberfest, Ayinger's Oktober Fest-Märzen is a superb example of the style, presenting malty bread before a bright, biscuit finish. More widely available is Samuel Adams Octoberfest, a lovely alternative that imparts rye bread and brown sugar notes, with an underlying roasted caramel base.

—Andrew Nagy

JEFF HARRIS / DRINK STYLING: EUGENE JHO / PROP STYLING: SOPHIE LENG

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Elie Bleu Accessories

Seasoned cigar veterans and casual smokers alike know that the exquisite humidors of Elie Bleu are synonymous with quality and reliability. But for its 40th anniversary in 2016, the French maker wanted to branch out with a company first: cigar accessories in regular production. Because its home operation is not set up for large-scale manufacturing, the company partnered with a factory in Japan to create the four lighters and cigar cutter that the collection comprises. After a limited soft launch two years ago, the collection was further refined and has now been rolled out to more markets.

Built for portability, each piece looks stunning and comes in a variety of finishes. Despite their light weight, the pieces feel solid, durable and, most importantly, work flawlessly.

The EBC-1 double-guillotine cutter (bottom, $200) sports a stainless steel body with surgical-grade, stainless steel blades. The edges of the blades are not straight, but rather have been tempered to create a diamond when they come together. The maw is large and the blades are sharp enough to handle any cigar you throw at it, even 60-ring grandes.

The aficionado with a minimalist bent will likely gravitate to the J-11 (second from bottom, $175) and J-12 lighters (top, $200). Only .31 inches thick, the J-11's single-flame jet, triggered by a slide ignition, gently toasts your smoke. The J-12 lighter, while only slightly thicker, throws a flame like a paint brush to your cigar canvas.

The body casing of the J-14 lighter (third from bottom, $300) sports a bit of brass covered in a rhodium finish. Flip open its piston-operated cap to reveal a jet flame shaped like a diamond that's wide enough to easily light fatter smokes.

The standout piece is the F-1 lighter (second from top, $500 to $850 depending on finish). Instead of a piezo ignition, the F-1 uses good ol' reliable flint for easy replacement. When sparked by the side roller, the flint creates two soft flames that can be adjusted to suit your needs.

Visit eliebleu-usa.com.

—Andrew Nagy

JEFF HARRIS

Scuba Diving

I had a revelation the first time I went scuba diving. Actually, it was the second time. My first time I panicked and shot to the surface (only a few feet above me) when I had a common reaction: breathing underwater is the most unnatural of acts.

The second time, when I'd mastered that fear and dove 130 feet, circling an underwater pinnacle teeming with tropical fish and lobster off the Caribbean island of Saba, I had a greater insight. The revelation was this: scuba diving isn't just a sport. It's a sublime form of sightseeing. Instead of a culture of landmarks, you feast your eyes on forests of staghorn coral and undersea mountains and caves as crowded with life—from colorful parrot fish to massive, absurdly graceful manta rays and the occasional shark or barracuda—as Grand Central Terminal is at rush hour.

To have this revelation is easier than you might think. While it requires lots of equipment, several hundred dollars and days of training to win your Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) certification, a PADI certified "resort course" can have you communing with Neptune in three hours for closer to $100. You learn modest life-preserving skills like clearing your mask, sucking air from your instructor's regulator if something unforeseen happens and how to avoid the bends. Much of this instruction occurs on dry land, followed by a little quiz. Then you're ready for a guided tour of the deep.

The clear turquoise waters of the Caribbean, off islands such as Curaçao, Bonaire and the Caymans, rank among the world's top diving destinations. Others include the Red Sea and the 2,300-kilometer long Great Barrier Reef off the coast of Australia, the world's largest coral reef system. Don't assume above-ground calamities will foil your plans. I almost canceled a scuba trip to the British Virgin Islands last year after it was clobbered by the category-five Hurricane Maria. However, Keith Royale, of Blue Water Divers, apprised me that the weather was actually a therapeutic respite for the coral reefs and fish populations that are threatened by tourism. "It's amazing what the absence of humans will do."

And with that I was back to an alien world and one I didn't have to board a spaceship to reach.

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—Ralph Gardner Jr.

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Retro Keyboard

Back in my youth, I would sit down in front of a massive typewriter made of steel, a heavy and industrial beast so formidable it could have been smelted in a Soviet naval yard. My fingers would find the appointed keys and I'd be off to the races, pecking away as the keyboard sang back to me. The words would flow and the pages would fly.

I never missed the look of that particular typewriter, but its keys were marvelous, tactile and sturdy. Over the years, I have found myself ever more disappointed in computer keyboards. They seemed to evolve in a way directly opposed to cellphones—while the latter have become ever larger (say, is that an iPhone pressed to your ear or a phone book?) the former have grown ever smaller, more flimsy, lacking substance and soul. If you love to write, keyboards that slide around are not your friend.

Enter the Azio Retro Classic. Crafted on a zinc alloy frame, the keyboard is sturdy and stately. Its face is adorned with leather or wood (our preferred choice), and the rounded, metallic keycaps have just the right amount of give and a remarkably cool look.

The keyboard (starting at $110) looks old, but it has modern features—it's backlit, the height is adjustable and it has all the keys one would expect to operate a computer. The Azio Retro Classic comes in various styles, and works on PCs and Macs. It's not as loud as the typewriters that clacked throughout newsrooms of yore, but it will get you noticed in your office—in a good way. And it makes the copy flow, good for any writer, whether you're a novelist, journalist or just penning a memo to inspire the troops.

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—David Savona

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Formula 1 Experience

"Your senses are heightened," was the enigmatic, but enthusiastic response I got from a friend, a past winner of the 24 Hours of Daytona, when I asked what was the allure of driving 140 mph around a racetrack in the dead of night. However well meaning, it wasn't very helpful. Of course, your senses are heightened. That's what happens when you're afraid of dying.

I was headed to Formula Experiences, a new racecar driving concept at Virginia International Speedway, home of the world's first open-cockpit, night ride-along. Mingling the fragrance of the Virginia countryside with the smell of petrol, 2G downforces and hurricane-style winds, it is but one of the adventures.

The brainchild of Peter Heffring, a software entrepreneur and amateur racecar competitor, it boasts a fleet of 2018 British Radical SR series and Ligier Formula 4 racecars, the fastest able to reach 173 mph. The idea is to get clients as close as possible to the Formula One or Indycar experience. "This isn't a race school," Heffring explains. "It's a bucket list experience." I can attest that he achieves that goal, if anything too successfully. When the brakes slammed going into a curve at 140 mph I knew what it would feel like to fly from New York to L.A.—in the open air.

And the course itself isn't some monotonous oval. It alternates between straightaways and hairpin curves (a couple in rapid succession; one called the Bitch for good reason), and elevation changes that would test even a professional driver's reflexes.

The one- and two-day sessions (starting at $1,495) include one-on-one coaching, pro simulator training to help drivers reach top speeds, dozens of laps around the track and a cool T-shirt. I didn't reach the SR1's 138 mph top speed. On the other hand I didn't spin out, crack up cars or lose my breakfast as did several of my fellow drivers (mostly successful businessmen from the Raleigh-Durham area with a surplus of testosterone).

Part of the fun of the spare-no-expense experience—from the equipment to the personnel to the sparkling garage—is the venue, a 1,300-acre luxury racecar driving resort on the North Carolina-Virginia border. "We like to call this the B&B of driving experiences," Heffring said. After a day tempting mortality it's nice to know that you can avail yourself of the pool, spa and some excellent Southern cooking.

Visit formulaexperiences.com

—Ralph Gardner Jr.

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THE INTERVIEW

talented—and polarizing—baseball players to ever play the game

Alex Rodriguez was only 10 years old when his father walked out, leaving his mother Lourdes alone to support the family. The young Rodriguez watched his mother—who worked two jobs—struggle with the rent, and he became determined to use his budding athletic talents to give her a better life. He was a star in high school, and skipped college as he was drafted No. 1 by the Seattle Mariners in 1993 at the age of 17. In 22 seasons, he amassed statistics that are the stuff of legend: 696 home runs, 2,086 runs batted in, 14 times named an All Star. Only three men have hit more home runs in a career. No one has hit more grand slams. He was well rewarded for his efforts, signing record contracts with the Texas Rangers and the New York Yankees, and he tasted victory when he and the Yankees won the 2009 World Series.

But Rodriguez struggled at times in the bright light of superstardom. His salary made him a target for criticism, and Major League Baseball suspended him for the entire 2014 season for steroid use. He came back to the Yankees in 2015 with a new perspective on life, and played his final game on August 12, 2016.

Today, Rodriguez is back in the public eye as a critically acclaimed analyst talking baseball on Fox and ESPN. He is dating superstar Jennifer Lopez, appears on "Shark Tank" and is a savvy investor. He bought his first piece of real estate as a young athlete, and today his A-Rod Corp. manages more than 15,000 apartment units, among other business ventures. In mid-June, Rodriguez sat down with Marvin R. Shanken in the New York City offices of Cigar Aficionado *for a candid discussion about his life in baseball, his business empire, love of cigars and a great deal more.*

SHANKEN: Everybody knows who you are. Nobody knows who you are. Which statement is true?

RODRIGUEZ: In my playing days, pre-suspension, I think they're both accurate. Post-suspension, people are getting to know me a lot better.

SHANKEN: You live in a fishbowl. How do you handle your stardom? Your need for privacy?

RODRIGUEZ: You know Marvin, that's a difficult one, because I played for about 25 years, and for such a long time I just hid from it, I ran away from it. I didn't feel secure that I had to go play baseball and be the best that I can be. I just wanted to play baseball, hit home runs and help my team win championships. And pre-suspension/post-suspension, what I realized was that I needed to make a paradigm shift. Because somebody else was telling my story. And I knew I had made mistakes but I wasn't a bad guy. But I was being portrayed as a bad guy. And I needed the full year, the sabbatical, to understand that I better start taking control of my life, of my narrative. Start telling my story. Good, bad or ugly, just be real, just be honest and then take your chances. Because people hate you and it's not even you. At least be yourself. If they're going to hate me, hate the real me.

SHANKEN: I've asked a lot of people about you. Most of them have never met you. Some love you, some hate you. What advice would today's Alex Rodriguez, you, give to the 17-year-old Alex Rodriguez who was drafted by the Seattle Mariners?

RODRIGUEZ: I would say: think a lot. Act slow. Surround yourself with the greatest people you can find. You know we talk about collecting cigars, we talk about collecting art, some people collect cars. I think the greatest collection you can build is of people. People of character. People with integrity. People that are much, much smarter than you. In a sense, I know people say this all the time, but it's true: you are an average of the five people you hang out with the most.

SHANKEN: You've said that you came back from the suspension a different person. Tell me how you are different.

RODRIGUEZ: What I wanted to do in that year of suspension were three things. No. 1, I needed to heal physically and emotionally. I had two hip surgeries, two knee surgeries. My mind was a mess. I was exhausted and I just needed to rest. I disappeared to the Maldives for two weeks. I was completely on my own. The other thing I wanted to do was continue to get educated. I enrolled in business school at Columbia, I enrolled in the University of Miami, the business school. And then the third thing I needed to do, and most importantly Marvin, was get therapy. I wanted to understand why I kept beating myself. I was a pretty good guy making these dumb, silly decisions. And I wanted to dig into my childhood. My father left when I was 10. And I wanted to get a grip on that.

SHANKEN: I understand that you were searching for redemption. Who helped you?

RODRIGUEZ: It was such a tough and embarrassing time, what I had done to myself. For a while there, I played the victim. For a while I wanted to point fingers. There was no one to blame.

SHANKEN: But when you were at your lowest low, was there anyone that you leaned on to help you stand up?

RODRIGUEZ: Yeah. It was family. It was my mother, it was my brother Joe, it was my sister Susy. My daughters were incredibly supportive. And a collection of friends that I have who have been around since I was eight years old. And some people ran fast and some people dug in their heels and became even closer to me. I wrote down on a piece of paper about 10 names, people that I admired greatly. I wanted at my lowest point—in a world of Instagram, and emails and texts, where it's so easy to just send a message over email—I wanted to talk to everyone. I wanted them to hear my voice, when I was weakest and most vulnerable. And to this day, they're all my friends, they're all my partners, and they say that was the most impressive thing I've done in my entire career.

PREVIOUS PAGES: DAVID YELLEN

Rodriguez at bat in 2013, breaking Lou Gehrig's grand slam record.

WATCH THE VIDEO A-Rod talks about the Hall of Fame and more at video.cigaraficionado.com

JIM MCISAAC/GETTY IMAGES

SHANKEN: I read a lot of articles as background, and I never found the answer to a simple question. Did you ever look inside and ask yourself why?

RODRIGUEZ: I think, in simple form, I didn't think I was enough. And today I do.

SHANKEN: If your obituary does not list you as a member of the Hall of Fame, how does that legacy mark your career?

RODRIGUEZ: There's rules, and you have to follow the rules. I made those mistakes, and at the end of the day I have to live by those mistakes. Whether I get in or not—and let's be clear, I want to get in, I hope I get in, I pray I get in—if I don't, I think I have a bigger opportunity yet again. And the platform of my mistakes, the good the bad and the ugly, has allowed me to have a loud voice to the next generation, to say when in doubt, just look at my career. Look at the good, look at the bad, look at the ugly. And just make good decisions, have the power of restriction that I didn't have. The other message is, maybe I'm not a Hall of Fame player, but I get a chance to be a Hall of Fame dad, a Hall of Fame friend.

SHANKEN: This Sunday is Father's Day. Take me back to Father's Day weekend in 2000, when you hit two home runs [with your father, Victor, in attendance].

RODRIGUEZ: My father wasn't around for a large portion of my life. It was really important for me to have one Father's Day. I wanted closure. I also wanted to know that it wasn't my fault that my father left. It was very confusing as a 10-year-old boy. I always thought he would come back. We were in Miami, I lived with my mother, my brother Joe, my sister Susy. And he left to New York. And it was my understanding that he just didn't like Miami. So I felt it was just going to be three months or six months and dad was going to come back. And he never came back. I didn't understand how painful that was. And I just clouded it with playing baseball, trying to get good grades and earn my scholarship to schools. But when you fast forward to 2000, I knew he was getting older, so I didn't know how much longer he would be around. And I picked Minnesota because it's a very low-key city. And we didn't stay in the team hotel, we stayed in another hotel. I wanted to be able to connect and not have anybody see

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us together. I sent him out to get three suits 'cause he always wanted to be in a suit. And he came to four games. And on Father's Day I had one of the greatest offensive days of my career. And I always thought the Good Lord up there was just looking down and saying this one is from me to you. It was a day that I'll never forget. My father passed about three years ago. But going back to that day—I'm at peace with it.

SHANKEN: Did you ever reconcile further? Or was it just that particular moment?
RODRIGUEZ: It was basically that moment. And it was a pure moment. It was four days. That entire series I was playing like with my hair on fire, like I had a superpower. I was a skinny kid, I was in my early 20s, and it was so much fun, 'cause I knew how much my dad loved baseball. And I was kind of showing off and putting on a show for him.

SHANKEN: He was a baseball player in the Dominican Republic. When you were a kid, do you remember him teaching you, playing with you? Throwing the ball?
RODRIGUEZ: No, because he was older. But what I do remember was sitting on his lap as a toddler and listening to [Yankees announcer] Phil Rizzuto and [Mets announcer] Ralph Kiner.

SHANKEN: Did he ever look you in the eye and say, "Here's why I never called you, I never came to visit you, I opted out of your life?"
RODRIGUEZ: No. If I had the tools that I have today, it would have been a much different conversation, and a lot more pointed questions. As a young, 20-year-old with the world moving so fast, I was happy for the win.

SHANKEN: One of many quotes that I picked up from you is "I miss my four at-bats every day, I miss the fans, the clubhouse and the boys, but I don't miss the travel, I don't miss waking up in pain every day." That pretty much sums up a lot of things. I asked a Yankee fan about A-Rod and she said, "He brought crowds to every stadium in the country, even if it was just to boo him. Nothing was more fun than watching an away game and seeing the whole place go nuts when A-Rod came to bat." Do you remember those days?
RODRIGUEZ: Oh yeah. That part of it I loved. There's no greater compliment than having 50,000 people on the road booing you. It was a form of respect. With that said, there's nothing worse than getting booed by 56,000 people at home. And those who say they don't hear it, they're bullshitting you. They hear it, and it doesn't feel good.

> "Somebody else was telling my story. I knew I had made mistakes, but I wasn't a bad guy."

WATCH THE VIDEO Rodriguez describes living in the public eye at video.cigaraficionado.com

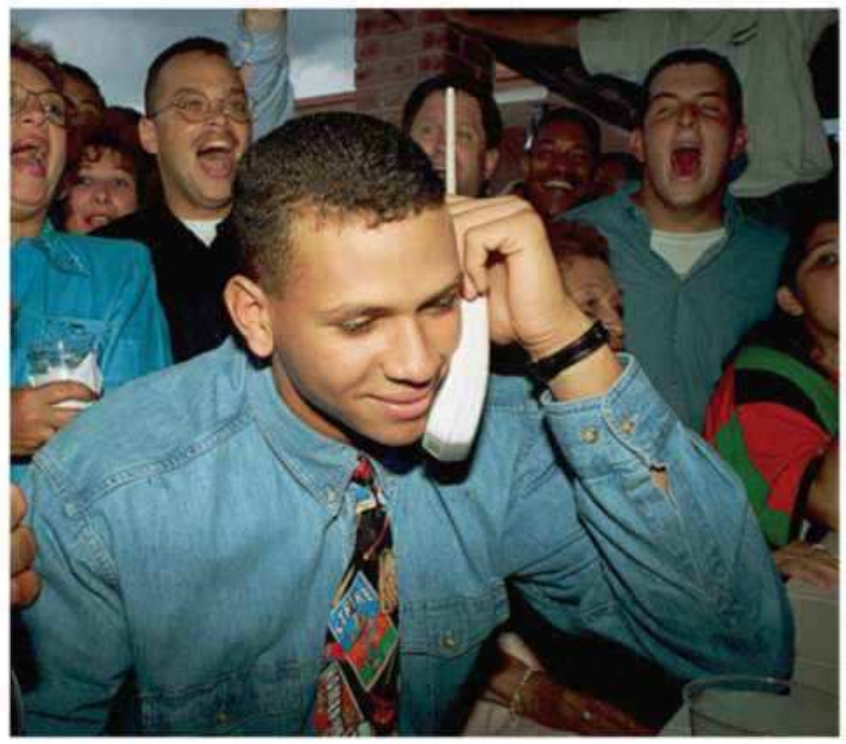
DAVID YELLEN

SHANKEN: When you were in high school in Florida, playing baseball, you must have had a team that you really wanted to play for. Who was that team?
RODRIGUEZ: The Mets. Growing up, there were three cable channels. You had WOR where you could watch the Mets, there was TBS and the Atlanta Braves, and every so often we had WGN with Harry Carey and the Cubs. For me, it was the Braves and the Mets.

SHANKEN: So when you got drafted by Seattle, did you care where you were going? Or were you just happy to be drafted No. 1?
RODRIGUEZ: I did care, because I said boy, this is the farthest place from Miami. I wanted to be drafted by the Dodgers so my mother could drive to see me in spring training. Seattle was the biggest blessing in disguise for me.

SHANKEN: And then, to Texas. [Rodriguez signed a 10-year, $252 million contract with the Rangers in 2000, a record at the time.] Forgetting about the money—maybe you can't forget about the money—was that a welcome place to go, or was that a worthwhile place to go?
RODRIGUEZ: It was worthwhile and I learned a great deal. I thought that with Tom Hicks as an owner, we had endless potential to turn that market around. It didn't work out that way. I had three very good years. The team didn't do so well. And then Tom ran into some liquidity problems, and asked me "do you mind if we shop you around?" And I gave him a list of three or four teams, and the process started.

SHANKEN: There's been speculation that your first choice was Boston. And that Boston wanted you, you wanted Boston, but the union wouldn't allow it and that's how you backdoored into the Yankees. Is that a true story?
RODRIGUEZ: That's a true story. What happened was, the commissioner at the time gave us a window for John Henry, the general partner of the Boston Red Sox,



An emotional Rodriguez at his final game in 2016 (above), with daughters Natasha and Ella and mother, Lourdes. Right, the 1993 phone call from the Mariners that made him baseball's No. 1 pick.

and Theo Epstein [then the general manager of the club] to talk to us for about 72 hours. And right here [in New York], around 2:30 in the morning, I had about a three-hour meeting with Theo Epstein and Jed Hoyer. They're now both with the [Chicago] Cubs. And we basically kind of went through this thorough plan of the organization, the team, how does it look today, how will it look in the future, and we were doing mock lineups. And the three of us, in our late-20s, all baseball nerds, just were thrilled. And the deal was done. There's a contract out there with Theo's signature and my signature. When we took it to the union, they said, "There's no way you can concede giving this money back, it will set a bad precedent," and they basically kiboshed the whole thing.

SHANKEN: And then how did it become the Yankees?

RODRIGUEZ: So a few weeks later I'm collecting my MVP award, right here in New York, and I'm sitting next to Brian Cashman [general manager of the New York Yankees] of all people. And Brian starts saying 'boy I'm glad that deal didn't go through, we were sweating over here.' And I'm like 'yeah, I can tell you I was really disappointed.' I was a shortstop, had just won the gold glove, had just won the MVP, and I thought going up against the Yankees, they had a great team, they had a great shortstop in Derek [Jeter] and I thought it would be a little bit of the Magic-Bird thing and it would be great for baseball. Obviously it didn't turn out that way. At the time I say, let me get a vodka club soda please, and Cash gets a drink, and he goes 'boy, I tell you, if you ever consider playing third base maybe this is a good place for you.' And that turned into, a couple weeks later, a press conference of me becoming a Yankee.

SHANKEN: So I need to go back before I go forward. I'm going to read off a few names and you tell me who they are. Vinny Testaverde. Ken Dorsey. Jim Kelly. Gino Torretta. Bernie Kosar. Steve Walsh.

RODRIGUEZ: Alex Rodriguez next. [laughs]

SHANKEN: Why do I bring that up?

RODRIGUEZ: All great quarterbacks, legendary at the University of Miami. When I signed my scholarship for the University of Miami it was to be quarterback and to play shortstop. I always wanted to play quarterback for the University of Miami.

SHANKEN: Did you stop playing football because you never had any serious interest, or were you just so in love with baseball?

RODRIGUEZ: Well I certainly wanted to play football, and the plan was that if I chose to go the NCAA route I would have played football and baseball. Once I decided to sign as the No. 1 pick in 1993, well then I just wanted to put all my energy and focus into baseball.

SHANKEN: So you never really seriously considered going to college?

TOP: KATHY WILENS/AP PHOTO; BOTTOM: MARTA LAVANDIER/AP PHOTO

A-Rod by the Numbers

He hit more home runs than all but three other men, and drove in more runs than all but two. When Alex Rodriguez walked to the plate, some cheered, some booed, but no one looked away. You knew you were in for a show.

He came into the league as a tall, skinny 18-year-old with a powerful right-handed swing, drafted No. 1 by the Seattle Mariners. "From the prom," he says, "to Fenway Park." He wasted little time making an impact. In 1996, his first full season as Seattle's shortstop, he batted .358, the highest average by a right-hander in the American League since Joe DiMaggio in 1939. He moved to the Rangers and finally to the Yankees, where he also switched to third base. "He's a weapon," said Yankees manager Joe Girardi in 2010. "Every time he steps up to the plate, everyone is in scoring position." When he played his last game on August 12, 2016, the record book was filled with his name. More grand slams than anyone else in Major League Baseball history. The most home runs in a single season by a shortshop—and a third baseman. The youngest to hit 300, 400, 500 and 600 home runs.

His numbers alone seem to pave the way for easy entry into the Baseball Hall of Fame, but a season-long suspension for steroids in 2014 casts doubt on what would have otherwise been a shoo-in to the illustrious group. He will become eligible for induction in 2022, when his fate will be in the hands of the voters. Said Yankees pitcher CC Sabathia of A-Rod: "I think he's probably the best player of our generation."

—David Savona

696
Home Runs
No. 4 all time

52
Most home runs by a third baseman in one season

2,086
RBIs
No. 3 all time

2-Time Gold Glove Winner

57
Most home runs by a shortstop in one season

25
Most career grand slams of all time

14
All-Star Appearances

Led American league in home runs 5 times

Youngest player to hit 300, 400, 500 and 600 home runs

2009 World Series Champion

3-Time American League MVP

TOP: ROB TRINGALI/SPORTSCHROME/GETTY IMAGES; CENTER: TONY GUTIERREZ/AP PHOTO; BOTTOM: HOWARD EARL SIMMONS/NY DAILY NEWS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

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Photo: Alvaro Mata

The day Rodriguez became a New York Yankee, February 17, 2004. With Yankee legends Joe Torre, Reggie Jackson and Derek Jeter.

EZRA SHAW/GETTY IMAGES

RODRIGUEZ: The plan was to go to college, and the negotiations got so tight at the end that my mom and I were completely committed—with many hours of conversations—to go to Miami for three years and then reenter the draft in 1996. At the very last moment the Mariners made their last pitch. The negotiations were at a long table like this, and I'm 17 and I don't know what the hell I'm talking about, I say, "I want my mother to have three first-class tickets to be able to visit me during the summer, because I should be a freshman in Miami and I'm going to be a freshman somewhere in Seattle." They said done deal, and I became a Mariner.

SHANKEN: Tell me what you remember about growing up, first in New York, then in Dominican Republic then in Miami with your mother.
RODRIGUEZ: New York was a great place to be as a young boy. I remember my brother always being out playing with rubber balls and stickball. Then I was kind of sad and bummed that at the age of four we headed down to the Dominican Republic. My mother wanted me in a safer environment. We went to the Dominican and I had a great time there. My father was happy and my mother was happy. And a lot of my baseball, my DNA, came in those four years. It made me gritty, it made me really appreciate a lot of things. And then when we landed here, at the age of 8 or 9, one of the first things I did was join the Boys & Girls Club [in Miami]. I thought I had walked into Princeton campus or Harvard. It was so nice—they had new balls, great aluminum bats. I was just so happy, so grateful. And that was kind of the start of my formal baseball life.

SHANKEN: Tell me who Eddie Rodriguez is and was.
RODRIGUEZ: Eddie Rodriguez was the director of the Boys & Girls Clubs [of Miami], and still is. He was the first coach that I had here when I got to Miami. And they call him The Rooster, in Spanish *El Gallo*. It was because he was feisty. He wanted to fight everyone. I loved him. He was really tough, tough love from day one. In many ways he was like Lou Piniella, my first manager in pro sports. Eddie is a real hero, he's dedicated his whole adult life to Boys & Girls Clubs. And I would say we've had over 25 Major League Baseball players come out of his program. It's phenomenal work.

SHANKEN: Was he your father figure?
RODRIGUEZ: I think I had two or three father figures. Eddie Rodriguez is No. 1—

SHANKEN: And he's not a relative, just for the record.
RODRIGUEZ: I think I was fortunate to have Rich Hoffman, who was my high school coach at Westminster, and then the third one was a gentleman who was very instrumental in my life, J.D. Ortega Sr. His son is like my brother. He's a pitching coach with the University of Miami. Those are the three mentors, father figures, who replaced my father.

SHANKEN: When you were in high school, before you were drafted, what were your dreams?
RODRIGUEZ: To get out of the hood. I

wanted a scholarship badly. I knew I wanted a better life. I saw my mother, after my father left the house when I was 10, and I saw her take on a second job. She was a secretary in the day and served tables at night. And she was only able to go to a handful of games in my entire Little League career and I wanted very badly to do well, to be able to help her. Then in 1993 when I signed my first contract, the first thing I did was buy her a house, and I bought her a car. And I said, "mom, you no longer have to work anymore." She quit both jobs and she hasn't worked ever since.

SHANKEN: Let me read you a list of names. Babe Ruth, Lou Gherig, Mickey Mantle, Joe DiMaggio. Alex Rodriguez.
RODRIGUEZ: [long pause] Pretty cool. We're all Yankees. We're all champions. Being a Yankee—there is really nothing like it. It's such a surreal experience, and I don't want to be corny but when George Steinbrenner brought me over in 2004 from the Rangers, I felt such great pride. Pre-suspension, I didn't really understand or value the privilege to put on the pinstripes everyday. I didn't understand how grateful I should have been. And post-suspension, I remember one day I was 40 years old, 10 minutes before the game, we're at home, the new stadium, and I look in the mirror and I said, "holy shit. I'm wearing pinstripes. I'm a Yankee." The same names you just rattled off. They wore this exact same uniform. And here I am at 40 years old, hitting third for the New York Yankees. Hitting 33 home runs. Going back to the postseason, and it's the same uniform that I wore as a child at the Boys & Girls Club. And I think that connection for me, and that appreciation, it kind of started this anew.

SHANKEN: You were good friends with Derek Jeter, then you weren't good friends with Derek Jeter. Where does that relationship stand now?
RODRIGUEZ: So, Derek and I are friends. I've known Derek since we were 15 years old. I remember he came to a University of Miami game. He had signed with Michigan. I looked up to Derek because he was one year ahead of me. He bypassed the University of Michigan, of course became a Yankee then a five-time world champion and the rest is history. I entered the big leagues as an 18-year-old. I basically went from the prom to Fenway Park. And we were very, very close. When I came to New York I would stay at his place, when he came to Seattle he would stay at mine. And like all relationships, there's ups, there's downs, there's ups, but where it sits today is where it's always sat—with respect. I have a lot of love and admiration for Derek, and he's a five-time world champion and what I remember most about our relationship is he's one of the greatest competitors, consummate professionals I've ever been around. And we were world champions together in 2009.

SHANKEN: So we're going to get into your business, but before we do that, I am—and probably a lot of my readers—an avid fan of "Shark Tank." How did it happen?
RODRIGUEZ: "Shark Tank"—this thing is a juggernaut. It's been one of the greatest shows ever. There's been over $100 million deployed out there in businesses. It's created more than 10,000 jobs. And I would venture to say that it's made more entrepreneurs than all the Ivy League schools combined over the last 10 years. And from my daughters, to my mother, to my friends to you, everyone loves "Shark Tank."

SHANKEN: How many times have you been on?
RODRIGUEZ: I've been on, I believe, four shows. And actually on Thursday, I'm going to go back to film for Season 10.

SHANKEN: How many times a year will you be part of it?
RODRIGUEZ: I'm hoping for at least four for Season 10.

SHANKEN: Have you made any investments?
RODRIGUEZ: I've made three or four investments. One I bought with Mark Cuban. We actually bought into a good company called Ice Shaker. Our partner is Gronk, [Rob] Gronkowski [of the Patriots]. Rob's brother has a finance background and has done a great job marketing this thing. And since Mark and I bought into this business it's probably gone up 2,000 percent. So we're very happy with that investment.

SHANKEN: One of the things I've heard, a lot of the deals that are done on camera don't actually close.
RODRIGUEZ: That's accurate. Fifty or 60 percent is where it lands. I know I bought

"There's no greater compliment than having 50,000 people on the road booing you. There's nothing worse than getting booed at home."

WATCH THE VIDEO A-Rod talks about cigars and investments at video.cigaraficionado.com

DAVID YELLEN

His playing days are behind him, but Rodriguez remains in the public eye. Above, on the hit show "Shark Tank," and at right in front of the paparazzi with Jennifer Lopez.

four companies, and our due diligence process, we've closed on two.

SHANKEN: Let's talk a little bit about cigars. Do you remember when you had your first cigar?
RODRIGUEZ: I don't remember my first cigar, but the first time I made a pivot from liking cigars to loving them was while playing golf with Michael Jordan.

SHANKEN: Oh, Michael's going to read this—he's going to smile.
RODRIGUEZ: So not only does Michael sell sneakers—I saw where he's doing $3 billion in sales in your interview [December 2017]—but he's a good ambassador for cigars. It was a Hoyo de Monterrey Double Corona.

SHANKEN: Did you get sick?
RODRIGUEZ: I didn't.

SHANKEN: How many did you have the first time?
RODRIGUEZ: Just one. And boy I just fell in love with it. Then I couldn't find them, they were hard to find for me.

SHANKEN: How many years ago was this?
RODRIGUEZ: Oh boy, it had to be around 2000, '99. I love having a cigar when I get home—especially when I'm in Florida—and I sit out by the pool and I turn on the Yankee game. I got to make sure my girls are asleep.

SHANKEN: Do you have any favorites?
RODRIGUEZ: Hoyo de Monterrey is my favorite.

SHANKEN: Have you ever had a pre-Castro Cuban?
RODRIGUEZ: Nope.

SHANKEN: Would you like one?
RODRIGUEZ: I would love one.

SHANKEN: [slides him a pre-Castro Don Candido cigar.] I'm going to have one myself.
RODRIGUEZ: Can I tell you about the best cigar?

SHANKEN: Up until now?
RODRIGUEZ: Well, I'm going to tell you before I light up. It's 2009, we [the New York Yankees] win the World Series and our entire team goes to a club called One Oak. It's downtown, right here in New York City. And we closed the place down. Then we went and had some pizza at one of these open pizza places at five or six in the morning. And right outside, we lit up some cigars. And we thought about that entire year. And for me it was a 15-year wait to be a world champion. That's the best cigar I've ever had.

SHANKEN: So let's talk about business and charity. I was very pleasantly surprised to learn that you have many different businesses. How did that come about?
RODRIGUEZ: It started out of fear. I saw some data points that scared the crap out of me. What I saw early on was that the average career is five-and-a-half years for baseball. You make 90 percent of your lifetime earnings from age 20 to 30. And of the 750 players that are in the Major Leagues, less than 5 percent have a college degree. And I'm not a stock broker, but with that information alone I would short that stock. So I didn't want to be one of those numbers. Early on, I said I wanted to buy real estate. And I remember my

LEFT: MICHAEL DESMOND/ABC VIA GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT: KARWAI TANG/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

Before he played Major League Baseball, Rodriguez was also a standout quarterback. Here he talks University of Miami football on ESPN with Rece Davis (far left) and Lee Corso.

first down payment for a duplex in Miami that I bought near the water. I bought it for $250,000, and I needed about a $48,000 down payment. I didn't want to go into my small savings, because I didn't have a lot, so I remember selling two watches. Because of course when you sign as a first round [pick] in Miami, the first thing you do is you buy a Rolex. So I was able to sell that Rolex. And then I did a car signing, and collected enough. Took my down payment and bought it. And then a couple of years later I sold it for double. And I said boy that's pretty good. And over time we got our portfolio to be about 15,000 apartment units in 14 states.

SHANKEN: Fifteen thousand. You must have partners—that's a huge portfolio.
RODRIGUEZ: When we first started I didn't have any partners, and then a great friend of mine from Miami, who was in the health care business, Ray Corona, became my partner.

SHANKEN: So these are all rental units, with cash flow?
RODRIGUEZ: All rentals, all cash flow, all non-recourse debt. All government financing, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac.

SHANKEN: Is this conventional apartments or government-subsidized public housing?
RODRIGUEZ: No public housing. Garden style. Average rent, call it $950. I saw my mother—we never had enough money to own anything. And I remember my mother having two jobs. And [the rent], feels like it comes every three days. I remember as a young kid thinking if I can ever trade places with the landlord, that's what I'm going to do. And the first opportunity I had to be the landlord I bought my small duplex.

SHANKEN: So, do you have other significant businesses?
RODRIGUEZ: For a long time it was three silos. It was real estate, fully integrated from top to bottom and management and all of that, to autos, and then health and fitness, meaning gyms. I had a great Mercedes-Benz store down in Houston, had a great business for more than 10 years, and then I exited that business in 2014. We just bought NRG eSports a few years ago. I sit on that board. [Note: Rodriguez and Shaquille O'Neil, among others, purchased a stake in NRG, a California company that invests in top-level video gamers.] The market is blowing up.

SHANKEN: How do you enter new businesses?
RODRIGUEZ: We want to always have someone who understands the business, usually 20 to 25 years of experience [as a partner]. I found a great guy, and a friend now, Mark Mastrov, who started 24 hour Fitness from basically his garage and he grew this to over 500 gyms. He sold to Ted Forstmann for $1.8 billion. He and I connected, and we started buying and creating gyms in Mexico, under Alex Rodriguez Energy. Then I bought the UFC rights in Florida, and recently bought a company called True Fusion. And we've created about $100 million in enterprise value.

SHANKEN: How do you keep track of all these things?
RODRIGUEZ: I have a great team. Like sports, you have to have a great team.

SHANKEN: So I'm going to mention three guys, and you have to tell me what they have in common: Michael Jordan, Wayne Gretzky and Derek Jeter.
RODRIGUEZ: Well they all have multiple championships...

SHANKEN: Tell me when you want a clue.
RODRIGUEZ: Oh—they all own a team. Of course. [laughs]

SHANKEN: Do you have a thought, an interest, a dream, to one day have your own team?
RODRIGUEZ: I did for a long time Marvin, and what I realized was that for me, right now—and I get calls all the time to be a strategic owner—for me it's not the right time for several reasons. I think the time to buy a team was four or five years ago, if not before. I think these numbers have gotten pretty high. Hard to make a return on your investment for the GP [general partner] and the LP [limited partner]. And these franchises don't come available very often. I was taught by one of my mentors not to go wide and shallow, but to go narrow and deep. And to go really deep into the things you like best. I didn't have enough time, focus or energy to be running a team full time. And of course, if I bought a team I would be running it full time.

SHANKEN: Tell me about your charitable interests. What are you proudest of? What are you most active with?
RODRIGUEZ: Boys & Girls Club in many ways saved my life. My mother was busy working, my father had left for New York. [I went to] Boys & Girls Clubs every day,

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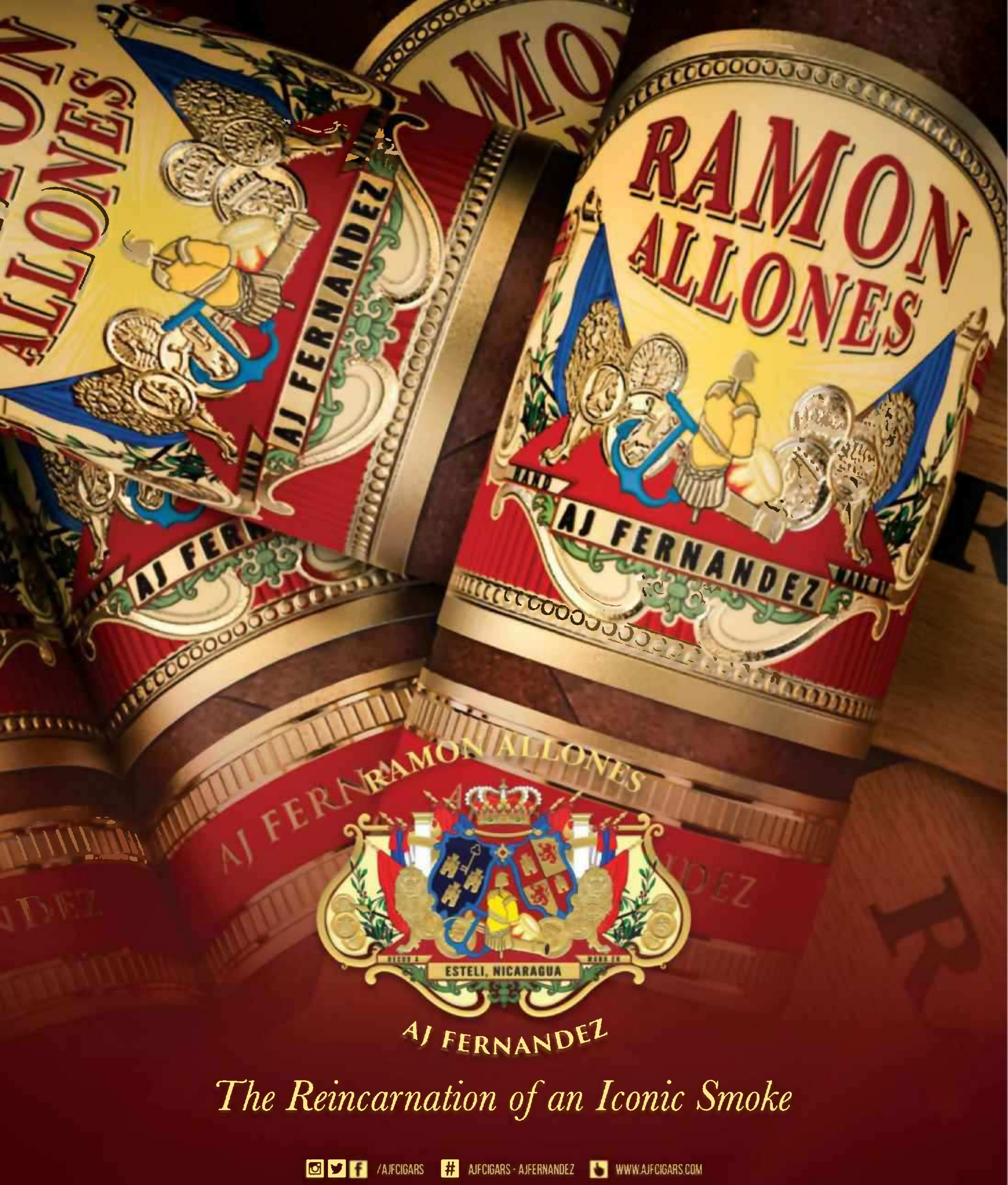
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from three sometimes to midnight. I was safe, my self-esteem got better, I did homework, I played baseball, it was heaven. I want to give that same opportunity to the next generation.

SHANKEN: At the University of Miami, there's a baseball stadium that has your name on it. What caused you to do that?
RODRIGUEZ: Well, I'm not that nice. When I was a young man I grew up loving Ron Frazier, who was the legendary [baseball] coach there. Of course, I didn't have money to go into games. They had these really old ushers. They were pretty slow and they couldn't see very well. My friends, we had a strategy—we would distract one, while the others would jump over the fence in the right-field corner. And once we were in by four o'clock we were there until midnight, just watching Hurricanes baseball. And I did this for a long time, so what I figured was—

SHANKEN: You owe them! [laughs]
RODRIGUEZ: I had a lot of debt that I had to pay, so I said the first time I get a chance to give a nice donation, I wanted to give what I give to name the field Alex Rodriguez field.

SHANKEN: Tell me about the women in your life.
RODRIGUEZ: Well, it starts with my mother. I'm big into women empowerment, women in equality. And that starts with watching my mother for many years. So much respect and admiration. I wish she had more power growing up. Obviously I have two daughters, and I want them to always aim for No. 1, aim for CEO, aim for president, don't concede that job or that place, that power. And I have a sister. So I've always wanted women to be treated just like men. At my company they have a seat at the table, my two highest-paid employees are women, and I love it.

SHANKEN: Are there any other women in your life these days? I've seen some pictures—it's not a secret.
RODRIGUEZ: Jennifer [Lopez], when you talk about power, and you talk about beautiful, both inside and outside. The way she mothers her twins, the way she's with my daughters. There's just so much admiration. And what I love about Jennifer is how genuine, how real, and how much she does for others, and how much she inspires others, men and women.

DAVID YELLEN

SHANKEN: You don't have to answer, but is there a plan? Is there a permanency?
RODRIGUEZ: Well, we have a plan to fly to Miami this afternoon, to see our daughters. [laughs]

SHANKEN: That's a plan!
RODRIGUEZ: But we're having a great time. Both of us are New York kids—she was born in the Bronx, I was born in Washington Heights—we're both Latinos, she's Puerto Rican, I'm Dominican. We've both been through a lot over the years, good and bad. And we're both in our 40s now and feel like we have an opportunity to give back. And we enjoy ourselves and we're having a good time.

SHANKEN: Final question. How would you like to be remembered?
RODRIGUEZ: [long pause] I think, someone that has been through a lot. Has accomplished a lot. Has made great mistakes, but he refused to be defined by those mistakes. ❖

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Quest For The Cup

Golf's best will battle for the Ryder Cup in September, reigniting a match-play contest that has burned blazing hot for 30 years

BY JEFF WILLIAMS

NEARLY A CENTURY AGO SAMUEL RYDER, an English businessman smitten with the game of golf, was looking to put his name on something beyond the penny packets of seeds he sold through the mail. Ryder had the very 21st Century idea that he could market his Heath & Heather seed company by using golf as a poster board. He began by sponsoring some small competitions among professionals in the United Kingdom. Then the idea of a competition between British and American professionals fell within his purview.

I'll donate the trophy, Ryder said. I'll pick up some expenses, Ryder said.

My, has the game of golf reaped the bumper crop of what Ryder had sown.

The Ryder Cup arrives on the outskirts of Paris at the end of September as a massive competition of fire and brimstone between American pros and those from Europe, competition that has elevated the taciturn game to its emotional acme. From the first Ryder Cup in 1927, backed by a seed business, has sprouted a financial gold mine worth tens of millions of dollars, or euros, or pounds sterling—whatever the currency of choice. And while Ryder, as an Englishman, might be appalled that the competition is being held on French soil for the first time, he no doubt would be elated that his name is now immortalized, and the game he so loved has benefited from his initial generosity (and, of course, his self interest).

GARY KELLNER/PGA OF AMERICA/GETTY IMAGES

TOP: BRIAN SPURLOCK/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM: RAMSEY CARDY/SPORTSFILE/GETTY IMAGES

REED & MCILROY

The Ryder Cup has unusually spirited displays. This year expect to see a rematch between 2016 competitors Patrick "Captain America" Reed and Rory McIlroy.

Seve Ballesteros breaks out the bubbly to celebrate Europe's first Ryder Cup victory on American soil, at Muirfield Village in 1987.

The Albatros Course at Le Golf National in the southwest suburbs of Paris is the host of this year's Ryder Cup, the 42nd edition of the ultimate match-play competition between the United States and Europe. The Americans are the defending champions, having won decisively at Hazeltine in 2016 and holding an overall 27 to 14 lead since the biennial competition began. But since the teams from Great Britain and Ireland were expanded to include players from continental Europe in 1979, the Europeans have an 11-8 advantage.

It was Jack Nicklaus in 1977 who pushed the idea of including European players on the Great Britain side. He was fearful that the event was fading into oblivion because the Americans had been so dominant. What a wise move it was. It would bring Bernhard Langer of Germany and José María Olazábal of Spain into the mix. But crucially, it brought the man who would come to symbolize the passion of the Ryder Cup, Spain's Seve Ballesteros.

Ballesteros ignited the Ryder Cup in the 1980s in a way that Arnold Palmer ignited the game of golf in the 1960s. Like Palmer, Ballesteros was perfect for the television age, his talent piercing through TV screens and bringing with it the highly charged emotional component of his personality. The Ryder Cup couldn't have had a better poster boy.

The spirit of Ballesteros carries on all the way to the Champs-Élysées this September. The Americans are captained by Jim Furyk, the Europeans by Thomas Bjørn. Patrick Reed, the reigning Masters Champion, has become the American firebrand. Sergio García has been the European counterpart. Golf fans around the world are eager to watch golf's ultimate duel. But this monumental tussle among the world's best players wouldn't have been possible without the groundwork of five Ryder Cups that fueled the imagination and showcased match play golf at it's very finest.

1983 PGA National

During the 1977 Ryder Cup at Royal Lytham in England, officials of the PGA of America and PGA of Great Britain tossed about an idea to make the Ryder Cup more competitive. The U.S. victory at Lytham gave the Americans 10 straight Cups, and it had become a yawner. Jack Nicklaus, a member of the team, suggested to British PGA head Lord Darby that players from continental Europe be included in the future. It was a seminal moment.

In 1979, the competition was now the United States versus Europe. The result was the same, a lopsided victory by the Americans, but for the first time a young, dashing, tremendously talented Spaniard was part of the team—Seve Ballesteros. At 22, Ballesteros was coming off his first major victory that summer, the British Open, and although he won only one point in four matches at the '79 Cup, a spark was lit within his golfing soul.

Ballesteros was at full fire in the 1983 matches at PGA National. Only 26 at the time, he was paired by captain Tony Jacklin with 20-year-old Briton Paul Way in the four team matches, and they won two and a half points out of the possible four. Ballesteros fought to gain a half with Fuzzy Zoeller in Sunday's leadoff singles match, hitting an outstanding 3-wood out of a fairway bunker on the 18th hole. The Americans barely won, 14 1/2 to 13 1/2, their 13th straight victory.

But as Way would recount later, Jacklin had given Ballesteros the task, eagerly embraced, to be Way's mentor, a job Ballesteros took upon himself for the remainder of his remarkable Ryder Cup career. "You have to be like a father to Paul, you have to guide him," Way recalled Jacklin telling Ballesteros.

"We were all pretty down as we had come so close to inflicting on America their first defeat in 26 years," said Way. "But Seve was an inspiration, telling us 'This isn't a defeat, this is a win.'" The stage for future victory had been set, and the future of the Ryder Cup would never be the same.

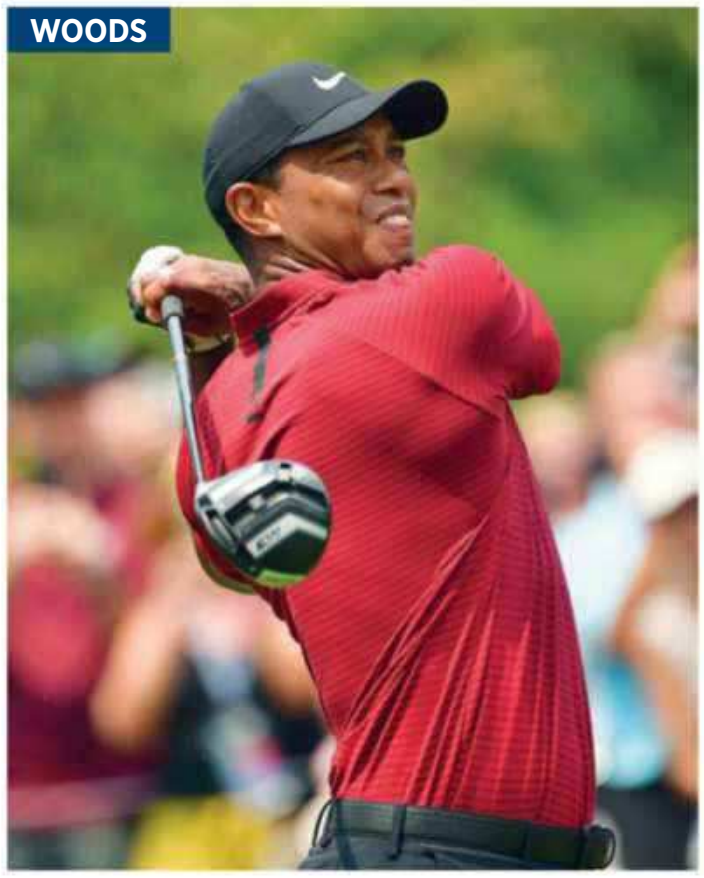
1987 Muirfield Village

Ten years after Nicklaus suggested to include European players, the Ryder Cup was played at his Muirfield Village Club in suburban Columbus, Ohio. It was 60 years after the first Ryder Cup at the Worcester Country Club in Massachusetts, and during that entire time the American team had never lost on its home soil.

But the 1987 Europeans were a powerhouse. Nick Faldo, Sandy Lyle, Bernhard Langer and Ballesteros were all major winners. Europe had six players who would accumulate 18 majors.

Olazábal was a Ryder Cup rookie that year. Ballesteros wanted

BOB THOMAS/GETTY IMAGES



The 2018 Cup: Will Tiger Play?

It's been six years since Tiger Woods played on an American Ryder Cup team, the 2012 squad that was overtaken by Europe on the final day at Medinah for a shocking victory. Since then he's been a hurting Tiger, his back so bad that a year ago he wasn't even sure he would ever play again. But spinal fusion surgery worked a minor miracle, and Tiger's determination to still be a major player on the world scene has worked an even greater one. Five years after his last win and 10 years since his last victory in a major, Tiger is not only competitive on the Tour again, but his recent play has made him the hottest talk as a potential Ryder Cup captain's pick. U.S. captain Jim Furyk will make his four selections in early September, and odds are that Woods will be one of the dozen U.S. team members playing against the Europeans at Le Golf National outside of Paris on September 28–30.

Woods finished sixth at the British Open in July, holding the lead briefly on the back nine on Sunday, and in August threatened to win the PGA Championship with a final round of 66. He finished second, only two shots behind champion Brooks Koepka, who won his second major of the year.

Furyk was coy about whether he would name Woods to the team. "I'm not sure the numbers are always that important when I look down the list," Furyk said in August. "What is important is how well Tiger has played. Sixth place at The Open Championship, a second place at the PGA. His game is trending... For me, the numbers are nice, good to look at, but not always the most important. We want the players who are going to help us be successful."

On August 13, the first eight members of the American squad were announced, based on points accumulated over the season. Players get one point for every $1,000 earned on a regular PGA Tour event, two points for every $1,000 earned as a winner of a major, and 1.5 points per $1,000 earned for those making the cut (but not winning) one of the majors.

The American lineup so far is pretty impressive: Koepka, a three-time major winner and the reigning U.S. Open and PGA Championship champion; Dustin Johnson, the No. 1 golfer in the world; Justin Thomas, who won the 2017 PGA title; Masters champion Patrick Reed, known in Ryder Cup circles as Captain America; two-time Masters winner Bubba Watson; Jordan Spieth, who has won every major save for a PGA Championship; Rickie Fowler, who has a top three performance in every major but has yet to win one; and Webb Simpson, the 2012 U.S. Open winner.

Bryson DeChambeau just missed making the team, scoring ninth in points, and could be one of the captain's picks. Phil Mickelson, Matt Kuchar, Kevin Kisner and Xander Schauffele are figuring into the mix. Mickelson has played on all 11 Ryder Cup teams since 1995.

Woods ended up finishing a remarkable 11th in points with his sizzling performance at the PGA Championship. "I'm just very pleased at what I've done so far and now to be a part of the Ryder Cup conversation, going from where I've come to now in the last year, it's been pretty cool," said Woods right after the PGA.

Woods' record in the seven of his Ryder Cups is solid, though not stellar. He's won four matches, lost one and halved two in singles play. In foursomes and fourball play he is 9-16-1.

In 2016, the U.S. scored a resounding victory at Hazeltine where the sidelined Woods was a vice captain. The Americans haven't defended a title against the Europeans since 1993.

As this issue went to press in late August, the European team was more of a mystery—that roster will not be complete until September, and its selection process is a bit different from that of the Americans. Four players come off the European tour points list and four more off a world points list, which accounts for European members playing in other events around the globe. It seemed certain that Francesco Molinari (who won the British Open), four-time Major winner Rory McIlroy, Justin Rose, Tommy Fleetwood, Tyrrell Hatton, Jon Rahm and Alex Norén would be in Paris. Ian Poulter, the heart of several European teams but who had to sit out injured in 2016, seems likely to make it on points. If he does not, he's certain to be one of captain Thomas Bjørn's four selections.

The Europeans might have a slight home course advantage on the Albatros Course at Le Golf National, the annual host of the French Open. All it needs is 100 palm trees to make it akin to a Florida-style course with plenty of water hazards, especially coming down the stretch.

Picking Woods is Furyk's hot-button selection. And he knows it. "I realize Tiger is a story," he says. "I realize he's playing very well, and I'm excited to see that."

So too, are American and European golf fans. And so, too, is Tiger himself. *—JW*

LEFT: STUART FRANKLIN/GETTY IMAGES; CENTER & RIGHT: SAM GREENWOOD/GETTY IMAGES

to play with him and mentor him, and captain Tony Jacklin followed his wishes. The two Spaniards would become the most potent pairing in Ryder Cup history.

Ballesteros and Olazábal edged Payne Stewart and Larry Nelson in the opening foursomes match. They followed with a victory in the afternoon fourball over Curtis Strange and Tom Kite. On Saturday they won their third straight match, a foursomes triumph over Ben Crenshaw and Stewart. In the afternoon they lost to Hal Sutton and Larry Mize, but their three points over two days (along with Faldo and Ian Woosnam's 3 1/2 points) had propelled the Europeans to a 10 1/2-5 1/2 lead heading into the Sunday singles.

The Americans launched a blistering counterattack on Sunday, closing the gap to 12-11. But in the 10th match of the session (out of 12) Ballesteros sank a putt on the 17th hole to defeat Curtis Strange 2 and 1. That turned out to be the Cup winner, giving the Europeans their first victory in America by a score of 15-13.

With the biggest crowds ever to see a Ryder Cup in America, there was a definite amping up of nationalistic noise in 1987, a precursor of the fervor that was to come in subsequent Cups. In a massive departure of the assumed etiquette of the game, there was some cheering for poor shots and missed putts by the opposition. The roars for the American team were sometimes deafening, but the Europeans weren't deterred one bit.

"We all went to America quietly confident," Jacklin would say later. "The different feeling from previous matches was that we had the Ryder Cup and wanted to put the icing on the cake by winning for the first time in America."

Golf was turning into a team sport.

There was a definite amping up of nationalistic noise in 1987, a precursor of the fervor that was to come in subsequent Cups.

1991 Kiawah Island

This was the Cup that changed everything. This was the War by the Shore.

The battle at Pete and Alice Dye's then-brand-new Ocean Course on Kiawah Island, South Carolina, in September of 1991 forever elevated the Ryder Cup and forever stirred its emotional cauldron. There was high drama, controversy, conflict and unprecedented spectator fervor (not to mention a fair amount of crudeness from the American fans). There was also some pretty compelling golf, from great shots to choke jobs. And for the first time, all three days of the event were televised. This is where the Ryder Cup moved into the upper echelon of sports.

The Americans had been dominant through the first six decades of the Ryder Cup, but the Europeans had won three straight and rode their Concorde across the Atlantic like a chariot in Ben Hur. And the simmering conflict between Ballesteros and Paul Azinger raised its ugly head. In 1989, Ballesteros wanted to replace a scuffed ball midmatch, but Azinger disagreed. During the opening foursomes match at Kiawah on Friday, Ballesteros questioned whether Azinger and partner Chip Beck had correctly changed balls on the seventh hole. Before the event began, Ballesteros referred to the American team as "11 nice guys plus Azinger."

"The king of gamesmanship doesn't like me?" responded Azinger. "Good. A feather in my cap."

Ballesteros and Olazábal were the only Europeans to win in the morning foursomes. The Americans took a 3-1 lead, spearheaded by the pair of veteran Ray Floyd and emerging star Fred Couples. The Europeans bounced back in the afternoon fourball to pull within a point with Ballesteros and Olazábal winning again.

The Americans stretched the lead to three points Saturday morning, then in the afternoon, the Europeans won 3 1/2 points, leaving it all square going into the Sunday singles. (American Steve Pate had been injured in an auto accident, so only 11 matches were played.) Europe galloped to the front with a match win by Nick Faldo over Floyd. That was followed by David Feherty—yes, that David Feherty—winning against Stewart.

Then came what seemed a crushing half in the match between Mark Calcavecchia and Colin Montgomery. Calcavecchia had been up four holes, then gave them all away down the stretch, including a snap slice into the pond on 17 followed by missing a two-foot putt that allowed Monty to win the hole with a double bogey. Calcavecchia retreated to the dunes after the match ended, to cry.

The U.S. team celebrating victory at "The War by the Shore" on Kiawah Island in 1991. Then–vice president Dan Quayle is in the front row.

BOB THOMAS/GETTY IMAGES

The Americans clawed their way back into it and it came down to the final match, Hale Irwin against Langer. Irwin needed a half to seal the victory. The tension wasn't just palpable, it was downright tortuous. Both players stumbled their way home. On the 18th both missed the green, then Irwin choked a 70-foot pitch shot halfway to the hole. Langer rolled his shot to six feet. Irwin two-putted for bogey, leaving Langer with a putt to win the hole and the Ryder Cup. You could just about see the pressure ridges in the air. Langer missed and the Cup went back to the Americans.

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"I couldn't breathe, I couldn't swallow," said Irwin afterward. "The sphincter factor was high."

The Americans carried captain Dave Stockton over the dunes and threw him into the Atlantic Ocean. Stockton knew that something had happened way beyond a golf match victory.

"It all came together," said Stockton. "It changed the dynamics of the Ryder Cup, the competition of it and what people thought of it."

1999 Brookline

The Americans followed up their 1991 victory with another at The Belfry in 1993. But then the Europeans triumphed at Oak Hill in 1995 and eked out another win at Valderrama in Spain in 1997 with Ballesteros as their captain. The 1999 American team assembled at the Country Club at Brookline outside of Boston was formidable and seemed the clear favorites. There was the fully fledged Tiger Woods, superstars David Duval and Phil Mickelson, plus stalwarts like Stewart, Tom Lehman, Davis Love III and Justin Leonard. But there was also a sense of disarray—the professionals were never paid to play the Ryder Cup, but its soaring revenues got some American players wondering why they weren't getting something out of it. With some of his team being branded as greedy, American captain Ben Crenshaw admonished several of his top players about their stance on Ryder Cup revenue. (The issue was ultimately settled with large donations to player charities.)

Whether the controversy had any bearing on the American play is open to debate, but after two days of foursome and fourball play they trailed the Europeans 10-6 going into the Sunday singles. No team had ever overcome such a deficit to win the Cup.

Crenshaw addressed the media upon completion of play Saturday, first taking the time for a cigarette to calm himself down. After answering a few questions, he started pointing his finger. "I'm going to leave you all with one thought," he said. "I'm a big believer in fate. I have a good feeling about this. That's all I am going to tell you."

Crenshaw gave a long, cigarette-filled pep talk in the team room that night, along with plenty of speeches by the players, and a speech by a guest, then-Texas governor George W. Bush.

The Americans won the first six matches on Sunday and never surrendered. It came down to Leonard's match against Olazábal where the American needed a half to win the Cup. Leonard drained a 45-footer, which ignited a tumult on the 17th green as American players, wives, television crews and a few spectators raced to congratulate Leonard while running across the line of Olazábal's putt, one he would eventually miss.

European assistant captain Sam Torrance called the celebrations "the most disgusting thing I've seen in my life." Lehman, who had been one of the exuberant celebrators, admitted the actions had been "over-the-top."

The Cup was notable for one other reason. The shirts the Americans wore in the final, which Crenshaw had a lot to do with designing, were a maroon number with historical golf pictures strewn about. They were likely the most memorable—and reviled—golf shirts in the history of the game.

2012 MEDINAH

In 2012, Europe's Ian Poulter was unstoppable, winning all four matches in which he played. He brought his team back from a 10-6 deficit.

2012 Medinah

Now it was Europe who would face the same 10-6 deficit that the Americans had overcome in 1999 going into the Sunday singles matches at Medinah Country Club outside of Chicago. Europe held the Cup, and needed 8 points to keep it. The Americans needed 4 1/2 points to take it back. This would become Ian Poulter's Ryder Cup, and his play in the Saturday afternoon fourballs started to turn the tide for Europe even though it ended the day down by four points. As Feherty said after Poulter had reeled off five straight birdies: "It's tied 10-6."

That night Olazábal, the European captain, invoked the spirit of the late Ballesteros, who had died a year earlier of a brain tumor. The Europeans again wrapped themselves in team spirit. Olazábal said they needed to win the first five matches, and they did just that.

They did it despite a timing error by McIlroy, who thought his match against Keegan Bradley, who had become an American firebrand, was at 12:25 when it was actually at 11:25. It took a police escort to get him to the course on time. That he arrived with 11 minutes to spare and had a chocolate bar for lunch didn't seem to matter. He put on a brilliant display and defeated Bradley in the third match out, which followed a victory by Poulter in the second match over Webb Simpson.

Rose defeated Mickelson in the fourth match, and Mickelson applauded Rose's 40-foot birdie putt on the 17th hole. After Jim Furyk made two late bogeys to lose his match, it would come down to the German Martin Kaymer against the usually dependable Steve Stricker. But when Stricker three-putted the 18th, that left Kaymer with a five-footer to win the match and retain the Cup. He poured it in and Europe celebrated with a 14 1/2-13 1/2 victory.

Poulter won all four matches he played, his putter a magic wand, his personality an inspiration. Afterward, he wouldn't take credit though he had certainly earned it. "It was not about me, or this putt or that putt, or this birdie or that bogey," he said. "It was about collective self-belief, about not accepting it was done. Absolutely nothing is over until it is over." ❖

Jeff Williams is a Cigar Aficionado *contributing editor.*

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The Eagles, led by backup quarterback Nick Foles, stunned the world by beating the New England Patriots in the Super Bowl. Will Philadelphia fly high again?

PATRICK SMITH/GETTY IMAGES

NFL PREVIEW

Can the Eagles repeat? Will the Patriots continue their record of excellence? And could the Browns and Giants continue to fail? We pick the winners and losers, all the way to the Big Game in February ***BY DANNY SHERIDAN***

The Miami Dolphins defense tries to stop the rushing attack of Dion Lewis of the New England Patriots during a game last year at Hard Rock Stadium.

AFC EAST

WINNER: New England Patriots

Despite just missing their sixth Lombardi Trophy, the Patriots remain the NFL's model franchise. Owned by the Kraft family and led by QB Tom Brady (who recently turned 41) they went 13-3, setting an NFL record of eight straight seasons with 12 or more wins. Brady led the league with 4,577 passing yards and threw 32 TDs. Rob Gronkowski, who will be an action figure in the movies one day, was his main target with 69 catches (1,084 yards), most of any TE. The Pats lost LT Nate Solder to the Giants, and receivers Danny Amendola (now in Miami) and Brandin Cooks (who was traded to the Rams). But genius grouch Bill Belichick hasn't gone anywhere and offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels changed his mind about the Colts head coaching job and stayed. Brady won't have No. 1 draft Isaiah Wynn (Achilles) protecting him now that Solder is a Giant, and Julian Edelman will be a major plus once his four-game suspension ends. Brady wants to play for two more seasons. Will Gisele let him? And can he stand being underappreciated by the genius grouch?

Miami Dolphins The 6-10 Dolphins went further south than South Beach. QB Jay Cutler was lured out of retirement with a $10 million contract but it didn't work. Miami was inept on defense, too, with a 17th-ranked squad. First-round pick defensive back Minkah Fitzpatrick better help, because owner Stephen Ross would have preferred executive VP Mike Tannenbaum to trade down for more picks. Miami traded star receiver Jarvis Landry (112 catches, 987 yards) to the Browns with the hope that ex-Pat Danny Amendola can replace him, and good luck replacing a Boy Named Suh. Unless fragile quarterback Ryan Tannehill remains healthy, Miami's only happy hours will be at Joe's Stone Crab.

Buffalo Bills First-year coach Sean McDermott got the 9-7 Bills into the playoffs for the first time since 2000 as he maximized the talent of a mediocre roster. Hiring former Alabama OC Brian Daboll will pay dividends. Buffalo has a couple of playmakers to build around in RB LeSean McCoy, who delivered 1,138 yards rushing and another 448 with 59 receptions, and TE Charles Clay. No. 1 draft pick Josh Allen, a big-armed project, will be the starting QB over A.J. McCarron and Nathan Peterman the second the coaches deem him ready. With a decimated offensive line and pedestrian receiving corps, Allen's rookie season will be better spent wolfing down the wings at the Anchor Bar and Duff's.

New York Jets Gang Green (5-11) traded their No. 6 overall pick, two second-round 2018 draft choices and one next year to move up and make Sam Darnold their franchise QB. "I want him to start NOW!" coach Todd Bowles jokingly bellowed. "I think people are going to look back 20 years from now and say that this is the moment that the Jets shifted into a new gear and became a great team," said owner Christopher Johnson. Someone tell him that the Jets are nearing the 50-year anniversary of their only Super Bowl victory. Until then, 39-year-old Josh McCown returns for another year (with Teddy Bridgewater signed as insurance) and maybe more if he's healthy again. The Jets have gone seven straight seasons without a playoff berth and Bowles is 20-28. He might want to treat the owners to the branzino arrosto at Sandro's.

CHRIS TROTMAN/GETTY IMAGES

AFC NORTH

WINNER: Pittsburgh Steelers

The Steelers (13-3) have remained consistent by winning 45 games in the past four seasons. The main reason has been the Killer Bees: Ben Roethlisberger (4,251 yards, 28 TDs); Antonio Brown (101 catches, 1,533 yards) and Le'Veon Bell, who rushed for 1,291 yards and caught 655 more. But the defense was certainly no Steel Curtain after playmaking LB Ryan Shazier suffered a horrific spine injury. Pitt drafted WR James Washington to replace troubled Martavis Bryant, and second-year WR JuJu Smith-Schuster (58 catches, 917 yards) is a star in the making. Journeyman free agent Jon Bostic will try to replace Shazier on a defense that needs to take the pressure off Roethlisberger, who told the club he wants to play three more years. Not exactly what third-round draft choice Mason Rudolph wants to hear.

Baltimore Ravens Coach John Harbaugh is feeling the heat after missing the playoffs for the last three years. Joe Flacco hasn't been an elite QB since Harbaugh beat his brother (and Colin Kaepernick, remember him?) to win the 2013 Super Bowl. Flacco's 18 TDs and 13 INTs are a concern, which is why departing GM Ozzie Newsome jumped to the bottom of the first round to draft former Louisville Heisman Trophy QB Lamar Jackson, who may be a righthanded Michael Vick. Signing free agent WRs Michael Crabtree and speedster John Brown were good moves. First-round draft pick TE Hayden Hurst should be a godsend for Flacco. Pass rusher Terrell Suggs (11 sacks) will be 36 in October.

Cincinnati Bengals Three years ago, the Bengals were considered Super Bowl contenders, but regressed into a losing culture. Cincy has never won a playoff game under Coach Marvin Lewis, yet he has survived an 0-7 playoff record. It must be frustrating for the team's best players, QB Andy Dalton (3,320 yds, 25 TDs); WR A.J. Green (75 receptions, 1,078 yards) and Pro Bowl DT Geno Atkins (9 sacks). Second-year RB Joe Mixon will be the focal point of an offense that ranked last in 2017.

Cleveland Browns There's a new sheriff in town for the sad sack Browns, who were drowning by the lake with one win in two seasons. "The guys before me didn't get real players," said GM John Dorsey. Taking undersized QB Baker Mayfield with the No. 1 overall pick earned him criticism. Even more surprising was drafting CB Denzel Ward with the fourth pick instead of DE Bradley Chubb to bookend Myles Garrett. Dorsey did earn praise for grabbing ex-Miami WR Jarvis Landry (112 catches) and ex-49ers RB Carlos Hyde (938 yards). Mayfield, who won the Heisman, eventually will be in a spirited battle with ex-Bills QB Tyrod Taylor for the starter job. Can he end the QB Curse of Cleveland? Since 1998, there have been 28 busts—almost as many as a slow night at the Playboy Mansion for the late Hugh Hefner. President Trump will kneel for the National Anthem before the Browns win a Super Bowl.

AFC SOUTH

WINNER: Jacksonville Jaguars

The Jags exploded for their first winning season since 2007, going 10-6 under first-year Coach Doug Marrone and first-year VP of football operations Tom Coughlin. They got the Jaguars to growl, and almost knocked off the Patriots in the AFC Championship game. Much-maligned QB Blake Bortles had a breakout year (3,687 yards), and was helped immensely by rookie RB Leonard Fournette's 1,040 yards. A fast defense, led by Calais Campbell (14.5 sacks) and loudmouth shutdown corner Jalen Ramsey, crowned the team's nickname "Sacksonville" and was a big reason why they swept their division. The Jags will be predators once more in their new uniforms.

Houston Texans After 54 games with 18 QBs, Coach Bill O'Brien finally found his franchise quarterback in rookie sensation Deshaun Watson, who lit the NFL on fire before going down with a torn ACL after seven games. All-Pro WR DeAndre Hopkins (96 receptions, 1,378 yards, 13 TDs) was the go-to guy. The Texans tightened a weak secondary with ex-Cardinal Safety Tyrann (Honey Badger) Mathieu, and expect a big comeback from humanitarian DE J.J. Watt after missing 24 games the last two years following leg surgery.

Tennessee Titans The Titans went 9-7 and won a playoff game for the first time since 2007, yet fired Coach Mike Mularkey. It's up to new coach Mike Vrabel to resuscitate Marcus Mariota, who had his worst season in three years with only 13 TDs and 15 INTs. The offense was anemic. Only TE Delanie Walker (807 yards), WR Rishard Matthews (795 yards) and RB Derrick Henry (744 yards) were noteworthy. WR Corey Davis, the 2017 first-rounder, needs to emerge. Ex-Patriot RB Dion Lewis adds versatility to the offense, while ex-Pats CB Malcolm Butler brings stability to the secondary.

"President Trump will kneel for the National Anthem before the Browns win a Super Bowl."

Indianapolis Colts Years of bad drafts make Indy (4-12) a huge reclamation project. They're like a hamster going around and around on a wheel. No QB was sacked more than Jacoby Brissett (52), which leaves Andrew Luck, returning from a yearlong shoulder injury, wondering about a weak offensive line. It's a wonder 35-year-old RB Frank Gore, who left as a free agent, ran for 961 yards. WR T.Y. Hilton (966 yards), and TE Jack Doyle (690 yards) were the rest of the offense. At least Luck should be heartened by first-round pick Quenton Nelson, a nasty guard from Notre Dame. Indy lost a good coach in Chuck Pagano, who was replaced by former Eagles offensive coordinator Frank Reich. Not even the atomic cocktail sauce at St. Elmo's can wake up this team.

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AFC WEST

WINNER: Oakland Raiders

After 10 years in the TV booth, Jon (Chucky) Gruden is returning to The Black Hole where it all began for him in 1998. The Raiders were a playoff team in 2016 but fell to 6-10 last year. An offensive guru, Gruden inherits some talent. QB Derek Carr (3,496 yards, 22 TDs) is the kingpin who played hurt most of the year. Signing ex-Packers WR Jordy Nelson to replace Michael Crabtree was a smart move that gives Carr another weapon to go along with TE Jared Cook (688 yards) and WR Amari Cooper (680 yards), while RB Marshawn Lynch (891 yards) supplies the Beast Mode. Cooper is primed for a bounceback season as long as he learns how to be a Gruden Grinder. Like his father, Mark Davis is a trendsetter—he's taking the Raiders to Las Vegas in 2019, where a prime table at the new Spago will surely be waiting for him. Al Davis was never afraid to roll the dice on anything. Somewhere up there, he's smiling.

Quarterback Blake Bortles of the Jacksonville Jaguars is tackled by D.J. Hayden of the Oakland Raiders. Expect both teams to lead their respective divisions this season.

Los Angeles Chargers The Chargers are nobody's team. San Diego is mad at them and Los Angeles didn't invite them, but the nomad Chargers were a feel-good story last year anyway. After opening 0-4, they went on a 9-3 run to finish 9-7. At age 36, QB Philip Rivers can still fling it (4,515 yards, 28 TDs) and has solid playmakers in WR Keenan Allen (1,393 yards) and dual threat RB Melvin Gordon. WR Mike Williams, the No. 1 pick in 2017, needs to emerge to help offset the season-ending loss of TE Hunter Henry. On defense, coach Anthony Lynn has a dynamic duo in DEs Joey Bosa and Melvin Ingram, who combined for 23 sacks. No. 1 draft safety Derwin James is an enforcer.

Denver Broncos The Broncos won the 2016 Super Bowl, but they were broken last season by an eight-game losing streak and a 5-11 finish. First-year head coach Vance Joseph was undermined by an underperforming defense. RB CJ Anderson (who is now with Carolina) and WR Demaryius Thomas did the best they could with sub-par play from a trio of quarterbacks. After failing to find a starting QB in his last two drafts, GM John Elway played it safe by signing ex-Viking QB Case Keenum (3,547 yards, 22 TDs). He strengthened the weakened No Fly Zone secondary by drafting N.C. State DE Bradley Chubb, to pair with All-Pro OLB Von Miller.

Kansas City Chiefs The Chiefs were an enigma. After looking like a Super Bowl contender with a 5-0 start, they stumbled yet managed to salvage a playoff berth by winning their last four games, finishing (10-6). They were surprisingly potent on offense as QB Alex Smith (4,042 yards, 26 TDs) had a career year, Rookie of the Year RB Kareem Hunt led the NFL in rushing (1,327 yards) and electric WR Tyreek Hill and athletic TE Travis Kelce were standouts. Adding WR Sammy Watkins is a positive move, but the big question is what happens to the Chiefs without Smith, who went to the Redskins? Can second-year gunslinger QB Patrick Mahomes II replace him?

SAM GREENWOOD/GETTY IMAGES

NFC EAST

WINNER: Philadelphia Eagles

Unsung hero GM Howie Roseman built a Super Bowl roster that sustained itself after starting QB Carson Wentz (knee) went down in December. Backup Nick Foles turned in a 127 rating in the playoffs, caught the winning "Philly Special" reception in the fourth quarter and was named Super Bowl MVP. He'll be back for the 2018 season, and ready to step in again if Wentz isn't ready for the season opener on September 6. The Eagles went 13-3, flying high with TE Zach Ertz (824 yards), WR Alshon Jeffery (789 yards) and WR Nelson Agholor (768 yards). Coach Doug Pederson was a fearless riverboat gambler. The defense, which recorded the most pressures (336), was bolstered in the offseason with the addition of DE Michael Bennett, who came from the Seahawks. The cheesesteak lines have gotten even longer at Pat's and Geno's.

New York Giants The Giants endured their worst season in history (3-13) since 1978. That—plus six years of bad drafts—caused GM Jerry Reese's firing. Big Blue traded Jason Pierre-Paul to the Bucs and is switching to a 3-4 defense under new defensive coordinator James Bettcher. New GM David Gettleman, who hired Pat Shurmur as head coach, is convinced that 37-year-old Eli Manning can bounce back from his worst season since 2013. The Giants made the draft's biggest splash by tackling RB Saquon Barkley at No. 2. "He's been touched by the hand of God," Gettleman gushed. He also addressed a pathetic offensive line by making LT Nate Solder ($62 million) the NFL's highest-paid offensive lineman and drafting belligerent G Will Hernandez in the second round. Shurmur will get more juice out of the offense with the return of a healthy Odell Beckham Jr. Classy owners John Mara and Steve Tisch—who might want to fuel their new coach with the lobster salad from Freds at Barneys—hope to make Beckham a Giant For Life.

Dallas Cowboys There was no "How 'bout them Cowboys!" last year. QB Dak Prescott had a mediocre season (86.6 rating) and the team went 9-7. The six-game suspension of RB Ezekiel Elliott had a huge effect. "I want to be the best quarterback that the Cowboys ever had," said Prescott. And Kim Jong-Un wants a Nobel Peace Prize. Receiver Dez Bryant was let go, while TE Jason Witten left for ESPN's Monday night gig at $4.5 million a year. No. 2 draft pick Connor Williams bolsters the elite offensive line, run by coach Paul Alexander, who claims he can rule out certain linemen by the way they dispense ketchup from a bottle. (With no Dez and no Witten, the Boys will struggle playing catchup). The Cowboys have won only one playoff game in seven years, leaving some to wonder why Coach Jason Garrett hasn't been fired. "I just don't understand why this guy still has a job," said former Cowboy Terrell Owens.

The Cowboys have won only one playoff game in seven years, leaving some to wonder why Coach Jason Garrett hasn't been fired.

Washington Redskins Not only politicians have low ratings in the nation's capital. Redskins owner Daniel Snyder is unpopular for letting QB Kirk Cousins get away. Alex Smith, the new gunslinger in town, will find that he doesn't have any top receivers after a 7-9 season. The best available are Jamison Crowder (789 yards) and TE Vernon Davis (648 yards). No. 2 pick Derrius Guice (knee) was lost for the season, wounding the ground attack. With a 64-95-1 record the last 10 years, Snyder is eligible for Federal Aid.

NFC NORTH

WINNER: Minnesota Vikings

The Vikes, who lost four Super Bowls in the 1970s, almost got back to another, but were crushed by the Eagles 38-7 in the NFC Championship. Case Keenum, a backup QB for two different teams, had a monster year, but he's gone, replaced by Kirk Cousins. He'll have an upgrade over what he had in D.C., with WRs Adam Thielen (1,276 yards) and Minnesota Miracle Man Stefon Diggs (849 yards). Mike Zimmer's defense was No. 1 in the NFL, allowing the fewest points and yards. They get second-year RB Dalvin Cook back, who was averaging 4.8 yards per carry before a knee injury. Skol!

Green Bay Packers After dominating the North for eight years, the Packers got boxed-in and missed the playoffs. QB Aaron Rodgers played only seven games after breaking his collarbone in Week 6. His favorite WR Jordy Nelson, who notched four 1,000-yard seasons, is gone, much to Rodgers' disgust. At least he can commiserate with racy gal pal Danica Patrick. WRs Davante Adams (885 yards) and Randall Cobb (653 yards) will be helped by red-zone target TE Jimmy Graham, who came from Seattle. But with no running game and a tepid pass rush, the Packers have a ways to go to catch the Vikes.

Detroit Lions The Lions (9-7) are hopeful Coach Matt Patricia can bring the Patriot Way to Motown. Detroit hasn't won a division title since 1993 and no one is more frustrated than QB Matt Stafford, who had another productive outing (4,446 yards 29 TDs). He has two dependable WRs in Marvin Jones Jr. and Golden Tate III. Defensive specialist Patricia will like CB Darius Slay, but needs to fix the pass rush to help DE Ezekiel (Ziggy) Ansah and come up with a run game, which was the worst in the league. No. 1 draft center Frank Ragnow will help.

Chicago Bears John Fox was shown the door after three anemic years of double-digit losses, and Chicago brought in innovative Matt Nagy to get Da Bears off life support. His first goal is to resurrect 2017 No. 1 draft pick QB Mitch Trubisky, who needs better playmakers than the Fullback Filet Mignon at Ditka's Restaurant. LeGarrette Blount (from the Eagles) will help, and so will WR Allen Robinson (from the Jags) and Taylor Gabriel (from Atlanta). First-round pick MLB Roquan Smith should be a Monster of the Midway for the defense.

NFC SOUTH

WINNER: New Orleans Saints

As long as Sean Payton and Drew Brees are around the Saints will be contenders. Last year, Brees threw for 4,334 yards, 23 TDs and set the NFL record for completion percentage. Imagine if he could see over the offensive line! RB Mark Ingram is suspended for the first four games, but Alvin Kamara will fill the void, and the defense gets more punch by drafting pass rusher DE Marcus Davenport. Brees can still lead a parade on Bourbon Street, and his two-year, $50 million deal means he can splurge on the Crabmeat Yvonne at Galatoire's. Remember, he was only a Minnesota Miracle away from the 2017 NFC Championship game in Philadelphia.

Atlanta Falcons Something's wrong in Atlanta. The Falcons (10-6) need to rediscover their 2016 offense, when they averaged a league-best 33.8 points-per-game. New offensive coordinator Steve Sarkisian couldn't harmonize with QB Matt Ryan as the points decreased dramatically. Julio Jones (1,444 yards, only 3 TDs) did his part, as did RB Devonta Freeman (865 yards), but that's not enough in a tough division. No. 1 draft WR Calvin Ridley is the perfect complement to Jones.

Carolina Panthers Overnight, the Panthers (11-5) went through a transitional turmoil with new ownership and new offensive and defensive coordinators. Hedge-fund billionaire David Tepper spent a record $2.5 billion for the team. After leading the NFL in 2015, averaging 33.8 points a game, they slumped to 22.1. Cam Newton regressed but led the team in rushing (754 yards). Wondrous offensive coordinator Norv Turner should help Newton boost his completion percentage and the defense, sparked by All-Pro LB Luke Kuechly, remains strong. The City of Charlotte owes a debt of gratitude to former owner Jerry Richardson, who brought the NFL to town in 1995.

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No team scored more points last NFL season than the upstart L.A. Rams, led by QB Jared Goff. Look for Los Angeles to have another superb year.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers The Bucs went 5-11 but Coach Dirk Koetter didn't walk the plank. QB Jameis (Infamous) Winston has learned the hard way that grabbing the crotch of a female Uber driver is a violation of the league's personal conduct policy and will cost you a three-game suspension, pending appeal, to start the 2018 season. The Yucks failed to reach the postseason for the 10th consecutive season. Only WRs Mike Evans (1,001 yards) and DeSean Jackson (668 yards) showed any life. Tampa acquired quality pass rushers Jason Pierre-Paul from the Giants and Vinny Curry from the Eagles to help a defense that ranked last in sacks, third-down stops and yards allowed per game.

NFC WEST

WINNER: Los Angeles Rams

The rambunctious Rams (11-5) won the West for the first time since 2003, while topping the league in points (478). In his second season, QB Jared Goff gave an indication of being a franchise QB (3,804 yards, 28 TDs, 7 INTs, 100.5 rating), while RB Todd Gurley returned to his rookie form with 1,305 yards and 13 TDs. Rookie WR Cooper Kupp emerged with 869 yards. Adding WR Brandin Cooks (1,082 yards with the Pats) was huge. DT Aaron Donald was named NFL Defensive Player of the Year, and rookie coach Sean McVay was named Coach of the Year. Ndamukong Suh, Aqib Talib and Marcus Peters make the defense stronger. L.A. will conquer the West again.

Seattle Seahawks The Legion of Boom turned into the Legion of Gloom as the once-mighty Seahawks flopped and missed the playoffs for the first time since 2011. Russell Wilson did all he could at QB (3,983 yards, 34 TDs) and even led the team in rushing (586 yards). Coach Pete Carroll was devoid of playmakers except for WR Doug Baldwin (991 yards), and TE Jimmy Graham, who left for Green Bay, and he's hoping 34-year-old Brandon Marshall has enough left to be a red-zone weapon. The once-elite Seattle secondary was weakened considerably with the loss of All-Pro Richard Sherman, now a 49er.

San Francisco 49ers What a difference a QB can make. Jimmy Garoppolo came from the Pats in November and went 5-0. WR Marquise Goodwin (962 yards) was his No. 1 guy. RB Carlos Hyde, who took care of the ground game with 1,288 yards, (938 rushing, 350 receiving) is gone, as the 49ers signed ex-Viking Jerick McKinnon. Grabbing ex-Seattle CB Richard Sherman will immediately improve a weak secondary.

Arizona Cardinals Desperately needing a QB, Arizona traded up for UCLA's Josh Rosen, who suffered two concussions his final year. "There were nine mistakes made ahead of me," snapped the cocky Rosen, drafted 10th overall. The return of Larry Fitzgerald and David Johnson (who missed 15 games last season after leading the NFL in yards from scrimmage in 2016) will help Rosen once he takes over for Sam Bradford. Chandler Jones and his NFL-leading 17 sacks leads the defense.

SEAN M. HAFFEY/GETTY IMAGES

SUPER BOWL LIII PREDICTION

Eagles Defeat Steelers 27-24

Look for role reversal inside Mercedes-Benz Stadium, because this time it will be Carson Wentz catching the "Philly Special" touchdown while Nick Foles is on the sidelines. Wentz, his surgical knee as good as new, warms to the challenge of an early shootout with Ben Roethlisberger, two hulking quarterbacks who effortlessly shed would-be sackers. Big Ben's bomb to Antonio Brown gives the Steelers a 24-17 lead before Wentz responds with a TD strike to Zach Ertz.

And then it happens. Michael Bennett forces a Le'Veon Bell fumble that Fletcher Cox recovers near midfield with less than two minutes remaining. Wentz breaks the tension in the huddle just like Joe Montana did back in Super Bowl XXIII. "Look," he says, pointing into the stands, "isn't that Vladimir Putin?" Wentz rifles a pass in the flat to a wide-open Nelson Agholor, who takes it deep into Steelers' territory. Jake Elliott's field goal as time expires gives the Eagles—who ended their 47-year championship drought a year earlier—a 27-24 victory, and back-to-back Super Bowl championships. ❖

Danny Sheridan appears frequently in newspapers and on TV.

Carson Wentz of the Philadelphia Eagles scrambles to avoid the defense of the Pittsburgh Steelers. The next Super Bowl could be the battle of Pennsylvania.

SHERIDAN'S SUPER BOWL LIII ODDS

The Favorites

New England 7:1
Five Super Bowl victories since 2001, 10 AFC titles and Tom Brady. Enough said.

Philadelphia 9:1
The defending champs are a strong bet to repeat.

Pittsburgh 10:1
More Super Bowl wins than any other team.

Strong Bets

L.A. Rams	12:1
Minnesota	12:1
Green Bay	15:1
New Orleans	15:1
Jacksonville	18:1
Atlanta	20:1
San Francisco	20:1

Possibles

L.A. Chargers	25:1
Dallas	30:1
Houston	40:1

Worth A $50 Chance

Carolina	50:1
Oakland	50:1
Denver	50:1
Kansas City	60:1
Seattle	75:1
Tennessee	75:1

The Long Shots

Baltimore	100:1
N.Y. Giants	100:1
Detroit	500:1
Buffalo	1,000:1

Avoid Like A 40-Cent Smoke

Indianapolis	100,000:1
Tampa Bay	250,000:1
Miami	1 Million:1
Washington	1 Million:1
Cincinnati	5 Million:1
Arizona	1 Billion:1
Chicago	1 Trillion:1

Are You Nuts?

Cleveland	10 Sextillion:1
N.Y. Jets	1 Googolplex:1

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Four Roses
Gentleman Jack
George Dickel
George T. Stagg
Glen Grant
Glen Moray
The GlenDronach
Glenfiddich
Glenglassaugh
Glengoyne
Glenlivet
Glenmorangie
The Glenrothes
Hakushu
Heaven Hill
Heaven's Door
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Little Book
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Maker's Mark
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Paul John Indian Single Malt
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The Pogues
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Stranahan's
Taylor
Teeling Whiskey
The Temple Bar
Thomas Handy
Tincup
Tobermory
Toki
Tomatin
Tullibardine
Tyrconnell
Walsh Whiskey
West Cork Distillers
Western Spirits
Westland
Wheatley Vodka
WhistlePig
Widow Jane
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William Larue Weller
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Woodinville
Writers' Tears
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Cigars *in the* Movies

Cigars and the silver screen have had a love affair almost from the beginning. But far from being typecast, these burning costars have played a range of roles **BY MARSHALL FINE**

What is the most indelible cigar image from the movies? That depends on how you judge. Does it belong to the actor whose screen image is most closely associated with cigars? The obvious answer then is Groucho Marx, who made his cigar an almost inseparable part of his persona—first on film, then on television and in real life.

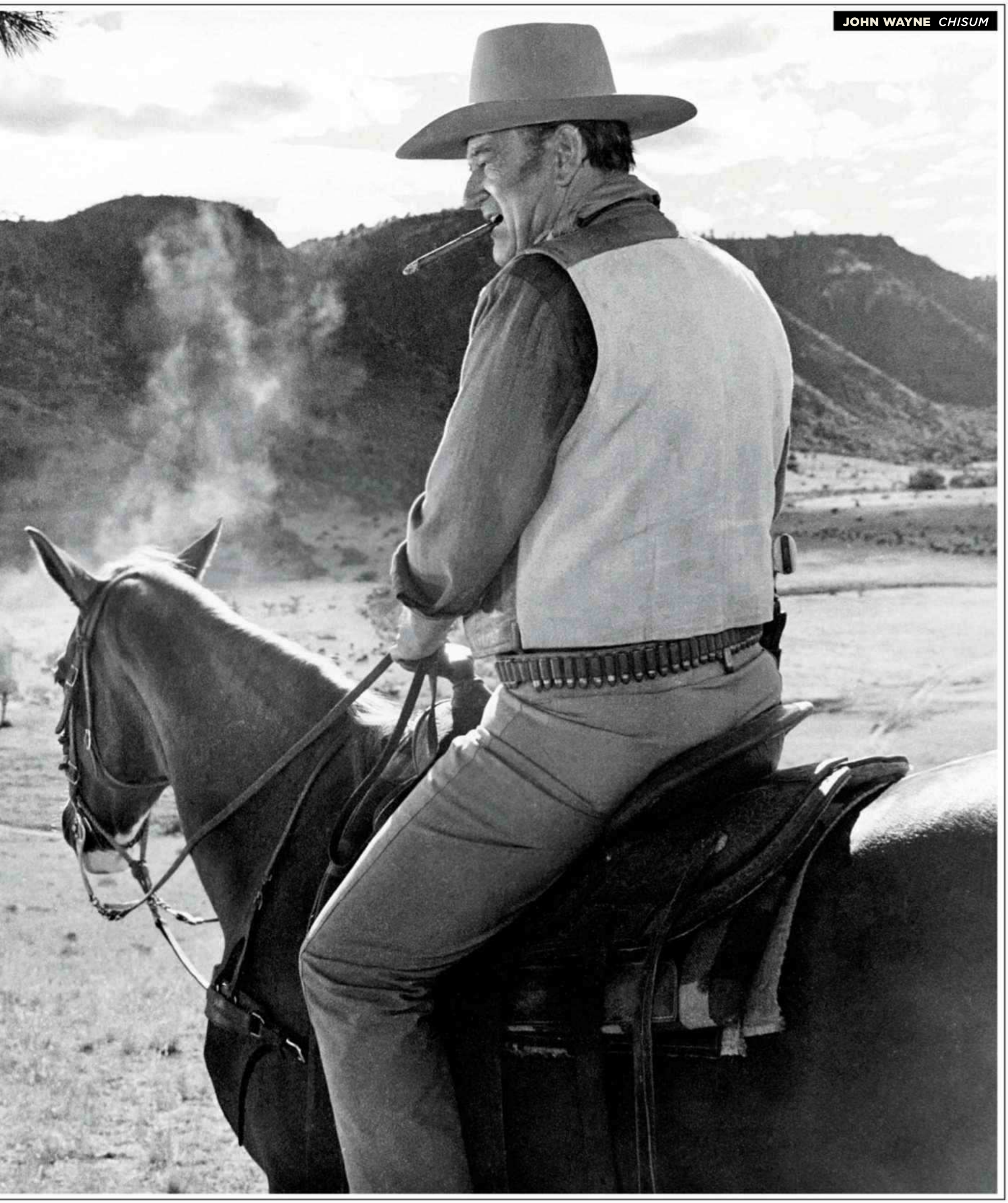
Then again, it could belong to Clint Eastwood. Now an Oscar-winning filmmaker, he rode into cinematic history with a cheroot plugged into the corner of his mouth in the spaghetti westerns of Sergio Leone. Beginning with *A Fistful of Dollars* in 1964, he kept the cigar through most of the westerns that charted his career rise. It became as much a part of his image as his trademark squint and unshaven jaw.

Or maybe you judge a cigar's impact based on a specific moment—the way it makes you practically smell a cigar when you recall that scene. Think Robert De Niro puffing away in a movie theater in *Cape Fear,* and Steve McQueen being offered his first cigar after his prison escape in *Papillon*. Those scenes don't work without the cigar.

Sometimes the cigar is a prop that perfectly telegraphs a character: the aggressive swagger of Al Pacino's Tony Montana in *Scarface*, for example, or the huckster confidence of W.C. Fields as he mutters to a child trying to interrupt his sales pitch, "Go away kid—you bother me."

If you examine the most famous movie moments involving cigars, you find themes that tie them together.

JOHN SPRINGER COLLECTION/CORBIS/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES


JOHN WAYNE *CHISUM*

Cigars can be symbols of power, whether wielded by crime kingpins (De Niro in *The Untouchables*) or business magnates (Michael Douglas in *Wall Street*). Yet there's also a scrappy, blue-collar element to a stogie gripped happily in the corner of the mouth of a working guy, sleeves rolled up. Think of George Kennedy playing TWA mechanic Joe Patroni, using common sense to avert disaster with a cigar clenched in his jaw in 1970's *Airport*.

The ultimate large-and-in-charge, on-screen cigar smoker is based on a real person. Winston Churchill smokes in the movies dozens of times as CIGAR AFICIONADO documented in the June 2018 issue. The Gary Oldman portrayal in *Darkest Hour* even had the prime minister enjoying a breakfast-in-bed smoke.

Macho honchos of filmdom often wield cigars as scepters that signify their stature as leaders of men: the muscled Arnold Schwarzenegger as the head mercenary in *Predator*; Ron Perlman as a long-suffering and good-hearted demon in *Hellboy;* or Hugh Jackman as the Wolverine in no fewer than nine films. Each chomps down on a cigar as they kick ass and take names.

Then come the sophisticates: the movie characters who make a stogie look dashing. In their hands, cigars become accessories of the well-heeled man, whether it's Sydney Greenstreet in *The Maltese Falcon* or McQueen in *The Thomas Crown Affair*.

The cigar was the smart-aleck punctuation to the wit of Groucho, just as it was with Fields, the perfect accoutrement to the snide hustler that he inevitably played in all of his films. Fields' cigar could function as a baton, with which he conducted business, or as a shield meant to ward off indignities.

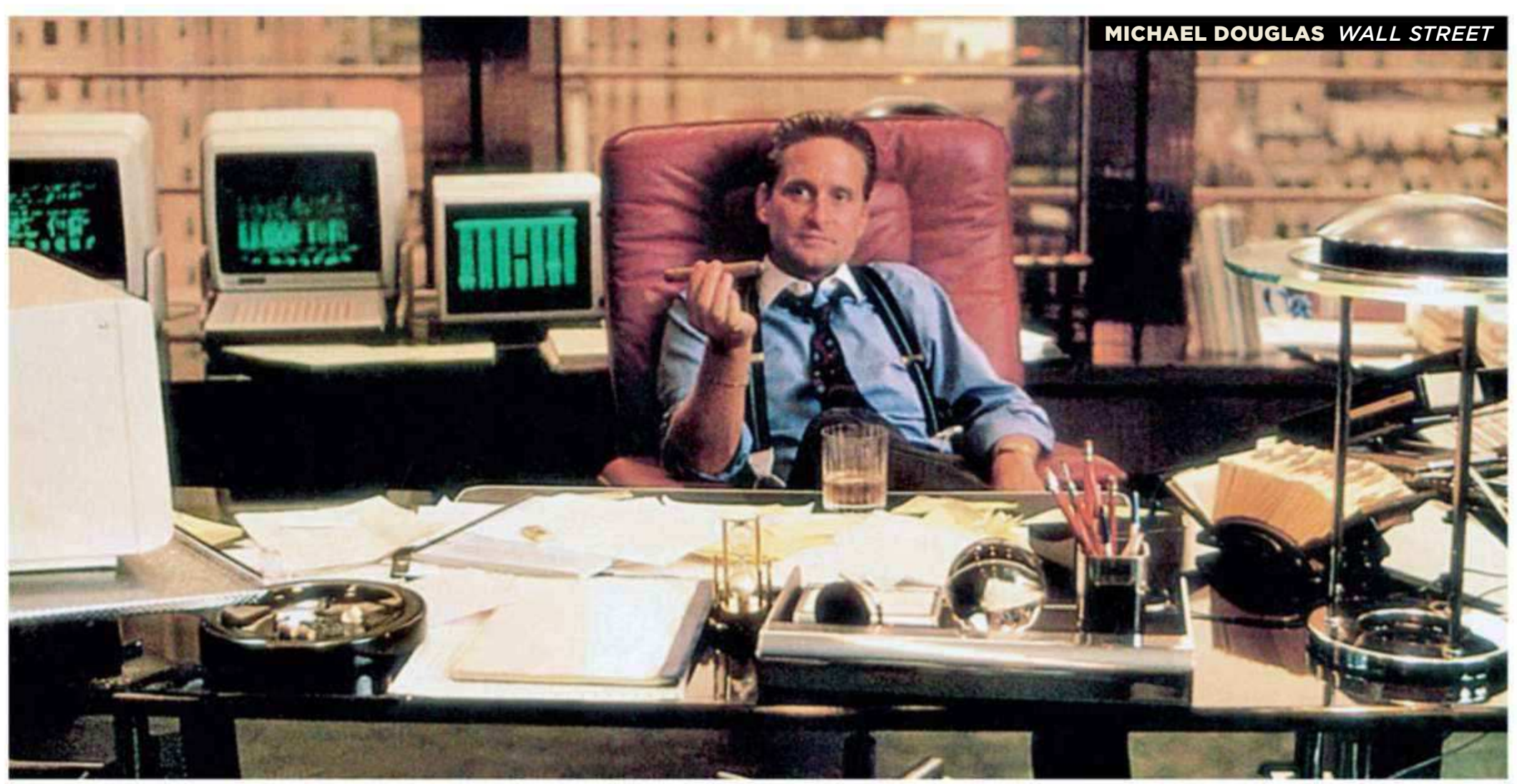
Dr. Strangelove, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb offers one of the great cigar smokers in cinema: Gen. Jack D. Ripper, played by Sterling Hayden. In this dark sendup of the Cold War, Ripper enthusiastically smokes a Churchill as he launches an unauthorized nuclear attack on Russia to prevent what he imagines is an international Communist plot "to sap and impurify all of our precious bodily fluids."

Mel Brooks found a way to make cigars monstrously funny in *Young Frankenstein*. He parodies a famous moment from *Bride of Frankenstein* in which the monster is taught civilizing manners by a blind hermit, with the monster puffing delightedly on a cigar while saying, "Good! Good!" In Brooks' version, the monster (played by Peter Boyle) receives similar schooling from another blind hermit played by Gene Hackman. However, this character is hilariously inept, casually lighting the monster's thumb on fire.

Cigars meant something different in the comedy of Charlie Chaplin, whose Little Tramp lived a life on the fringe, where a cigar—even a discarded butt of a cigar—was a treasure. In the right comic actor's hands, cigars become emblems of rebellion, at times contributing to joyously crass bits of business. The cigar stuffed into the corner of the mouth (along with that dangerously cocked eyebrow) lent a note of crazed bravado to John Belushi's Capt. Wild Bill Kelso in *1941*. A long, slim cigar added to the rule-bending, rakish air of John Candy in *Uncle Buck*.

The movies also have their share of a certain kind of working-stiff cigar smoker. Jack Nicholson had a blue-collar swagger as the stogie-smoking sailor forced to bring a confused young seaman to the brig in *The Last Detail*. So did Lee Marvin as a Depression-era hobo in *Emperor of the North* and Will Smith as the alien-blasting pilot in *Independence Day*.

In *Papillon*, McQueen plays the title character, a thief wrongly convicted of murder and sentenced to Devil's Island. During an escape attempt he lands at a leper colony where he is captured and taken to their leader (Anthony Zerbe). His face a mask of



MICHAEL DOUGLAS *WALL STREET*

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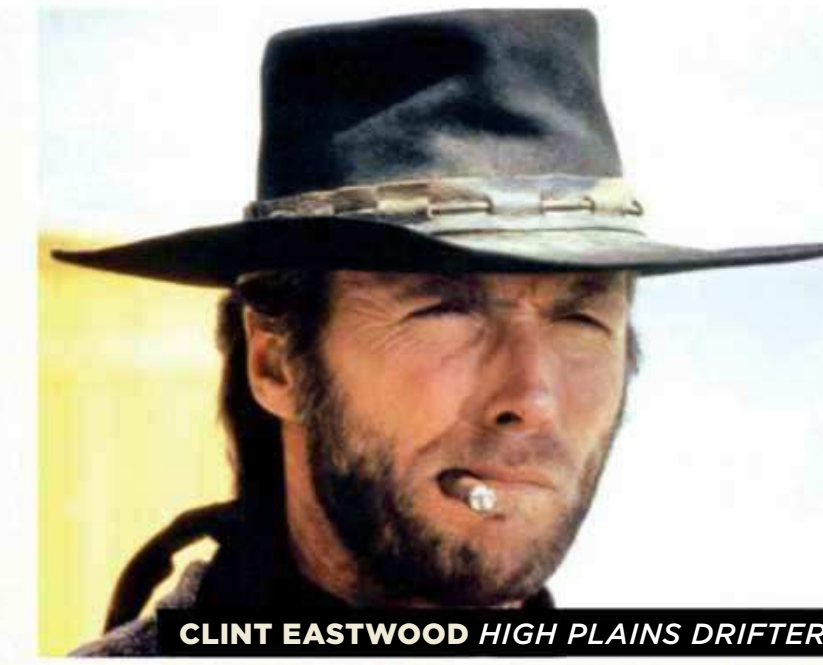
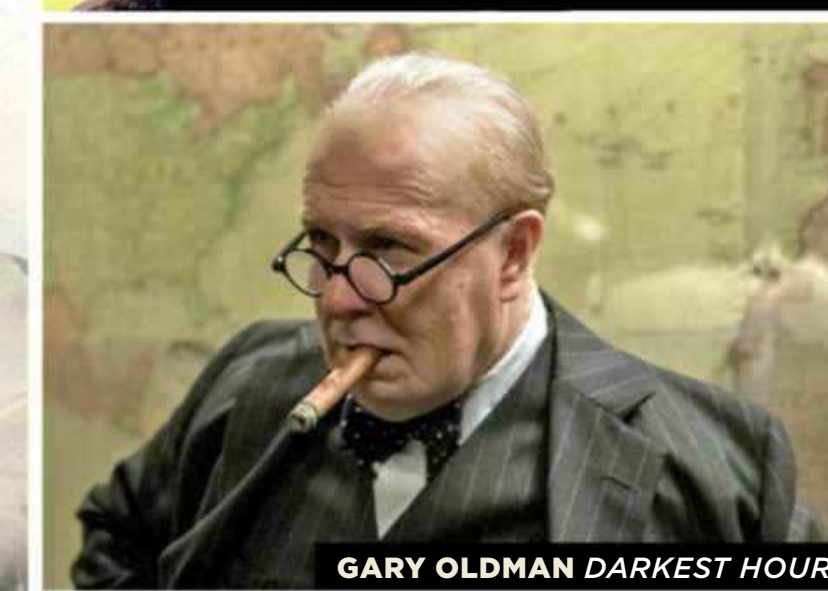
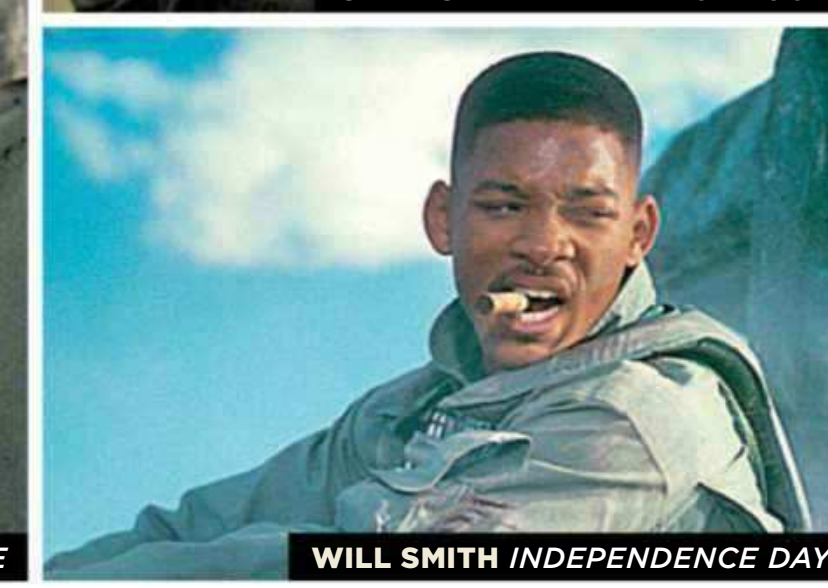
AL PACINO *SCARFACE*



CLINT EASTWOOD *HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER*



GARY OLDMAN *DARKEST HOUR*



WILL SMITH *INDEPENDENCE DAY*

LEFT: SCREENPROD / PHOTONONSTOP / ALAMY; RIGHT FROM TOP: SCREENPROD / PHOTONONSTOP / ALAMY; COLLECTION CHRISTOPHEL/ALAMY; 20TH CENTURY FOX/PHOTOFEST

disfiguring growths, his fingers mostly stumps, the leper chief tells Papillon that his people tend to kill intruders, then puffs on the cigar he is holding and says, "Do you like cigars?"

"When I can get 'em," Papillon replies.

"Try this one," the leper chief says, leaning into the light to reveal his horrifying face and extending the gnarled remains of his hand, holding out a half-smoked robusto. McQueen's eyes flash with fear that is quickly overtaken by his defiant urge for freedom—and he wraps his lips around the cigar and puffs up a storm. Amazed and amused at his audacity, the leper asks how he knew his leprosy wasn't contagious, to which Papillon replies with contained fury, "I didn't."

De Niro's cinematic romance with fine tobacco is most often associated with dangerous characters. As Max Cady in Martin Scorsese's 1991 remake of *Cape Fear*, he weaponizes a maduro-wrapped monstrosity, firing it up in a movie theater crowded with families as he begins a psychological war with his quarry. His chillingly raucous laughter makes his clouds of cigar smoke seem like poisonous fumes meant to infect the life of his target.

As Al Capone in *The Untouchables*, De Niro employs a cigar in one particularly memorable scene, when Kevin Costner's Eliot Ness invades the lobby of the hotel where Capone lives, inflamed by the murder of one of his men.

Descending a massive staircase to confront Ness while surrounded by armed henchmen, De Niro's Capone is dressed like an Italian nobleman: gray suit under a luxurious camel hair Chesterfield coat, white fedora cocked fashionably to one side, a stylish pair of sunglasses (even though he's indoors)—and a large unlit cigar, snuggled into the corner of his mouth like a pet. When he threatens Ness he clutches the cigar like a tiny version of the baseball bat he so memorably uses on an underling's skull in another scene in which the hapless victim was the one smoking a cigar.

The original cigar-chomping movie gangster was Edward G. Robinson. From his career-launching role as Rico Bandello in 1931's *Little Caesar*, Robinson was identified by a trademark snarling sneer created, in part, by keeping a cigar gripped tightly

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER ***PREDATOR***

in a corner of his mouth. Robinson's distinctive delivery inspired comic impressionists for a couple of generations—and cigars became a Robinson signature, in films as diverse as *Double Indemnity* and *The Cincinnati Kid*, in which Robinson played a sophisticated gambler with a taste for commanding smokes.

In the Coen brothers' gangster flick *Miller's Crossing*, a cigar leavens an otherwise chillingly violent scene. Mob boss Leo O'Bannon (Albert Finney) is enjoying a cigar before turning in. Alerted that a brace of hit men have entered his mansion, he snuffs out his smoke, puts it in his robe pocket and crawls under the bed. Shooting one of the intruders in the leg, he takes his Tommy Gun and slides to safety down a low-hanging roof. After dispatching the other gunman, O'Bannon riddles the retreating getaway car with bullets. Convinced that his work is done, he calmly retrieves the cigar butt and returns it to his mouth.

When you look a little closer, you'll find that a lot of the most sophisticated cinematic cigar smokers also had some sort of outlaw streak, whether it's Paul Newman's tuxedo-clad con man in *The Sting* or Clark Gable's Rhett Butler in *Gone With the Wind*, a gambler and privateer with a heart of gold. Business sharpie and master-thief Thomas Crown favored lonsdales and tailored suits, whether he was played by McQueen or Pierce Brosnan.

The gluttonous Orson Welles, who consumed large cigars by the bushel offscreen, most famously smoked on-screen in his restored masterwork, *Touch of Evil*. Welles plays corrupt American cop Hank Quinlan, who growls at everyone with a Churchill permanently implanted in one side of his face. In a similar vein, John Huston plays the villain in *Chinatown*, casually caressing his cigars as he talks about how far a father's love can go.

Cigars meant different things in the Old West. When John Wayne was seen enjoying a cigar, it usually seemed to be just that: a moment of enjoyment, relaxation or contemplation. Think of the opening scene of *Chisum*, in which he sits atop his horse on a hill, surveying his domain, unaware of the forces of history heading his way. In this film and several others, cigars were for that moment of kicking back, showing the Duke was just one of the guys.

With Eastwood, the cigar seemed to work as a brake on a temper that was quick to favor violence. With his cigar in his mouth, whether it was his Man with No Name in Leone's films or the Stranger in his own *High Plains Drifter*, Eastwood was a taciturn loner not looking for trouble. When trouble found him, the cigar usually came out long enough for Eastwood to explain what a mistake that was—and then returned to his mouth in order to coolly blast the problem out of existence.

Smoking cigars is seen as a macho pursuit, and while women smoking cigars in films are rare, there are some notable examples: Angelina Jolie seducing Antonio Banderas with a cigar in *Original Sin*; Sharon Stone as a cigar-smoking gunslinger in *The Quick and the Dead*; Famke Janssen as an assassin who likes a killer smoke in *Goldeneye*.

The closest thing to a movie that actually celebrates the art of the cigar is the aptly named 1995 film *Smoke*, written by novelist Paul Auster and directed by Wayne Wang. It is set in the Brooklyn cigar store owned by Auggie Wren (Harvey Keitel), who serves as a kind of curator for the stories of his customers' lives. The film's numerous storylines include a subplot about a shipment of illicit Cubans but, really, it's as much about the camaraderie of time and tobacco shared in a comfortable space.

At one point, William Hurt (as Paul, a writer and a regular customer) walks into the store during what Auggie describes as "a philosophical discussion about women and cigars."

Hurt's character connects the two subjects to the story of how Sir Walter Raleigh introduced England's Queen Elizabeth I to tobacco. That leads to the tale of how Sir Walter won a bet that he could weigh the smoke in a single cigar.

"You can't do that—it's like weighing air," one of the cigar-store kibitzers objects.

"I admit it's strange. It's like weighing someone's soul," Hurt replies.

Sir Walter's solution? He weighed the unsmoked cylinder, then smoked the cigar, saving the ashes. He weighed the ashes and the butt, deducted the second number from the first and—voila!—the weight of the smoke in a cigar.

"Sir Walter," Hurt observes, "was a clever guy." ❖

Contributing editor Marshall Fine is critic-in-residence at The Picture House Regional Film Center in Pelham, NY.

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Whale Tales

Stories Of High Rollers And Their Over-The-Top Casino Amenities

The gambler sits under glass. Out on the massive terrace of his villa, inside the air-conditioned solarium of Las Vegas's most elite casino within a casino, reserved for the highest of high rollers, he asks me to not reveal where he is as he luxuriates in his posh surroundings. "They will offer you stuff like promo chips and private aviation and discounts based on loss," he says nonchalantly. "Plus they have to treat you exceptionally well—which they all do."

They, of course, are casino personnel, and they hunger for high-stakes action from deep-pocketed customers like him.

He has just eaten a superb lunch of Dover sole, and smiles as he recalls his all-time largest win on a single hand—$250,000. But last night was a hard one, and the losses piled up on the blackjack tables as he made five-figure bets, his norm.

His name is RJ Cipriani, a controversial figure who courts press. According to published accounts, he worked with the FBI to shut down a cocaine and money laundering operation

BY MICHAEL KAPLAN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GARY HOVLAND

ROLEX
Harland

and was once banned from Vegas casinos under suspicion of having been involved in the operation himself. (A letter from the FBI confirmed he was not, and he's once again welcome.) He speaks in the easy lingo of so-called whales, talking about about his promo chips (basically free money to gamble with, offered by casinos as inducements for merely showing up), discounts (rebates on loss, as much as 20 percent) and gifts received from casinos (including a Rolex Yacht-Master II, valued at around $50,000).

Cipriani, also known as Robin Hood 702 (due to his tendency to give chunks of winnings to those in need) ranks among the elite casino players who wager $25,000 per hand or more. He claims to have gambled alongside numerous celebrities, including boxing legend Joe Frazier. It didn't go well. "He split 10s and hit 10s; then the dealer got a six card 21," Cipriani says, still sounding steamed. "I almost got into a fight with him over that. Who splits 10s?"

"My guys are entrepreneurs, owners of strip clubs and bars, people who have invented stuff. My biggest player has a $10 million permanent line of credit."

Most of those who circle in the same orbit as Cipriani tend to not come from the most blue-chip of backgrounds or have the most buttoned-down of rich-guy livelihoods. "Doctors and lawyers are stiffs; forget about them," says Steve Cyr, director of player development at Palms Casino Resort. "My guys are entrepreneurs, owners of strip clubs and bars, people who have invented stuff. My biggest player has a $10 million permanent line of credit. He wants privacy but also loves big events. He sat up front for the McGregor vs. Mayweather fight—and he had 14 tickets. This guy is among maybe 100 people who can go to a casino and casually blow $1 million. They all get what they want."

Despite having access to all those goodies—and happily partaking—Cipriani states that he gambles for the money, not for the perks. He claims to do it for a living. "My goal is to take as much money as possible out of these places," Cipriani says. Sometimes, when he does well the perks are reduced. "This trip they cut off my up-front because I did well when I came out here last," he says, referring to promo chips casinos give for checking into the hotel and agreeing to gamble. "Keep beating them and they will cut it off. Luckily, though, there are casinos all over the world and casinos will take a shot at you when you are willing to post $1 million or more."

Wrapped around his wrist is a Rolex Sky-Dweller. I wonder if he got that one as a result of gambling-den largess. "No, this is mine," he says. "It's my lucky watch. But I've got boxes of Rolexes at home." Some were birthday gifts from casinos. "I just got a thing from Foxwoods where they are having a weekend in Tuscany with Andrea Bocelli," he says. Will he go? "No. I already know him. Been there, done that. Through being a high roller, I've pretty much done it all."

There is no question that casino whales are jaded and difficult to impress. The latest joint to take a shot at grabbing their collective attention is Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas. Late last year, the casino debuted its 21 brand new Boulevard Penthouse suites, all unique, all spacious, all designed by top-flight names. They are modern and cheeky and plush, loaded with original art and only-in-Vegas details: an ivory-colored grand piano, Pegasus on a pole, a cage with a swing inside it and wraparound terraces with views that seem to go on forever.

They occupy four floors and loudly announce that the casino is now going after the highest of high-rollers, offering them all the accommodations and accoutrements that they expect. For one, in order to make the trip into Vegas more pleasant, Cosmopolitan recently purchased a Gulfstream jet that replaces the chartered flights it had been arranging for top customers.

Since the largest players are drawn to Vegas primarily by gambling, what's likeliest to resonate is a private gaming room that Cosmopolitan has dubbed The Reserve. Designed by Adam Tihany, it's a luxurious, wood-paneled hideaway, centered by a lounge area featuring a well-stocked bar (rare single malts and a $56,000 bottle of Louis XIII Black Pearl Cognac reside behind the bar) and private gaming enclaves on either side. Cuban cigar boxes are on display in the large humidor.

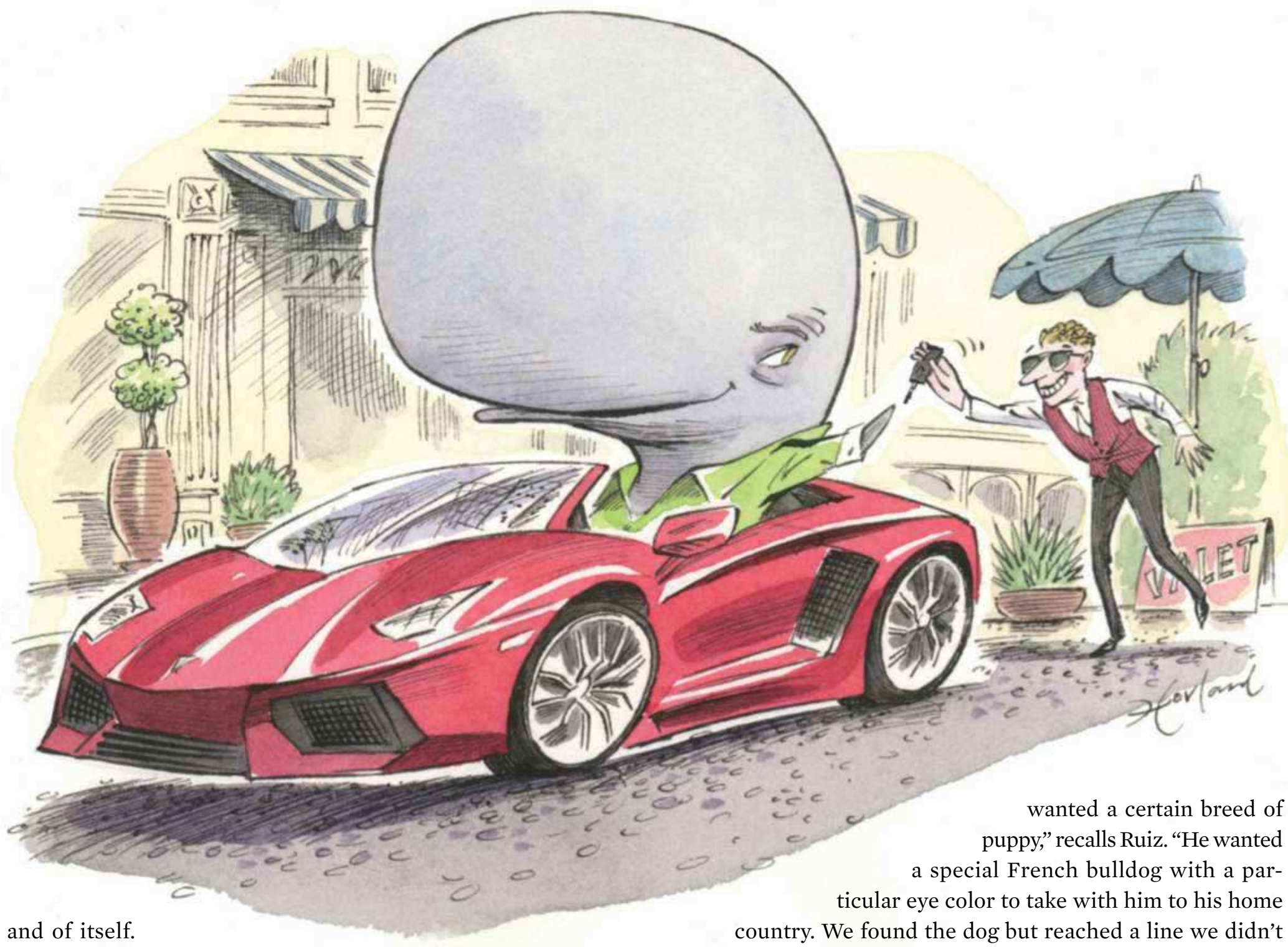
Each gambling refuge contains a single table. Entry is by invitation only, and getting a seat—actually, getting the entire table—requires a willingness to risk $1 million or more. Single bets top out at around $200,000. "That is the maximum," asserts Brian Benowitz, the senior vice president of casino operations for the Cosmopolitan. "That is the maximum risk we are willing to take at this time."

Considering the gusto exhibited by The Reserve's heartiest gamblers, it's easy to believe that they would bet more if only the casino would allow it. Perhaps they compensate with time spent at the table. "Guys come to The Reserve and gamble for two to three days straight," says Benowitz. "A lot of players don't sleep. They go back to their rooms for showers, take some time to eat, go to the terrace for a smoke," he says, even though smoking is perfectly fine inside The Reserve. "Or [they] spend some time in the massage chair."

The chair is no ordinary device that you might find in a Brookstone catalog, but a $9,000 contraption that gives sublime rubdowns. It's a coveted item in China, but here in Vegas it provides no competition for a seat at the table, where the gamblers' retinues enjoy being close to the action for as long as they're welcome. "These guys will often show up with an entourage," says Benowitz. "But the entourage can last only so long."

The friends take breaks from the marathon gambling sessions, rotate in and out, and know when it is time to leave the gambler to his own devices. Inevitably, probably in the thick of a losing streak, the player will say, "Everyone gone!"

"Then the doors to the gaming room close and the entourage moves to the lounge," continues Benowitz, "which can be a party



in and of itself. They eat, drink, watch sports, use our gambling app to bet."

Wooing the big whales is far from easy, and each one of the highest-rolling casinos in Las Vegas competes for millions of dollars in potential revenue from the world's largest bettors. At the Cosmopolitan, it falls upon Danny Ruiz, executive vice president of international marketing, to make sure the casino gets its slice of the action. "We go all over the world for marketing trips," says Ruiz, referring to the jaunts he takes to woo players from their home turf to Las Vegas. "We are not allowed to market in Mainland China, so I take trips to Hong Kong for meetings and private dinners and luncheons."

As is the Chinese way, Ruiz is often invited to casino customers' homes for lavish banquets that feature unusual dishes. "I ate a worm casserole," he all but brags, recalling a trip to Hong Kong. He didn't let a hint of discomfort show. "It was worth eating," he says. "The person I visited wound up making the trip out here."

Once a whale arrives at the casino, Ruiz goes to great lengths to keep the player happy and gambling. He'll greet the whale with bottles of fine wine, boxes of cigars, perhaps a hard-to-find handbag for the wife or girlfriend. Ruiz even gave one guest the sexy swing setup, and guided another to the English company that makes an elaborate safe situated in one of the penthouses.

How far will Ruiz go to meet an outlandish request? "Somebody wanted a certain breed of puppy," recalls Ruiz. "He wanted a special French bulldog with a particular eye color to take with him to his home country. We found the dog but reached a line we didn't want to cross when it came to the veterinary process. We told him we could get him the dog but he's on his own after that. The guy wound up not taking the dog but he was not that disappointed. He could have had the dog if he wanted it."

Another hard line at the Cosmopolitan involves allowing gamblers to play their casino hosts against one another. Cipriani does it routinely: "I call hosts and say, 'Foxwoods is giving me $100,000 in promos for walking through the door. Can you beat it?' Sometimes they do; sometimes they tell me it's too strong."

"We don't discuss deal points or bargain on price," says Benowitz, acknowledging that others do. "If someone offers something more somewhere else, and that serves as the tipping point, then that player is not for us. We don't get into bidding wars [for players]. We believe in what we are offering."

It's an easy position to take now, with Cosmopolitan having the newest and coolest digs on the Strip, but that will not be the case forever. An upcoming enterprise called the Drew is under construction on the other end of the strip. And right down the block and around the corner from the Cosmopolitan, the Palms is in the throes of a $620 million renovation that will include a revamping of its once infamous high-roller suites that came complete with a basketball court and rooftop infinity pool. Plus there will be new restaurants, nightclubs and craft cocktail lounges.

Chances are then that the Cosmopolitan will not soon be welcoming a wealthy customer who is known for putting ungodly sums of money at risk in casinos. He also drives a hard bargain before stacking his chips. "When this player comes in, there are 30 deal points that get signed off on," says Cyr, making the man's gambling trips sound more like corporate negotiations than Vegas getaways. "He wants to split Aces four times. He wants to double down on any two cards. He can switch dealers any time he wants. As soon as he lands, he gets $20,000 for airfare. If he loses $1 million and pays in 60 days"—like a lot of high rollers, he plays on markers—"he gets an 18 percent discount. So he loses only $820,000."

According to one casino executive who asked not to be named, that practice is hardly unusual. "Discounts are the bottom line," he says. "Maybe the villa is better at Bellagio or there are new penthouses at Cosmo, but—provided that one casino is in a similar universe with the others, when you are a top-tier player choosing where to gamble—it is a business deal: comps, discounts, rules are what they care about most."

The executive adds that new and splashy spaces from hot competitors can make whales particularly slippery to hold onto, especially when they leave the casino. "I took a big player to dinner at a competing casino and a top guy from there walked up to us," he remembers. "He said to me, 'Oh, I am so happy to see you. Welcome to the property. You need to check out these rooms that we just remodeled.' The player I was with was, like, 'Oh, really? Let's go see them.' Meanwhile, I'm afraid of losing him...The goal is to keep players in the building but people want to leave for a variety of reasons."

Sometime they even want to leave the country. "Things have become more corporate and systems have become tighter" in the United States, says the unnamed casino executive, explaining the wanderlust of whales. "Since a big baccarat player can light you up for $20 million, we're constantly assessing his play and calculating what we want to give him."

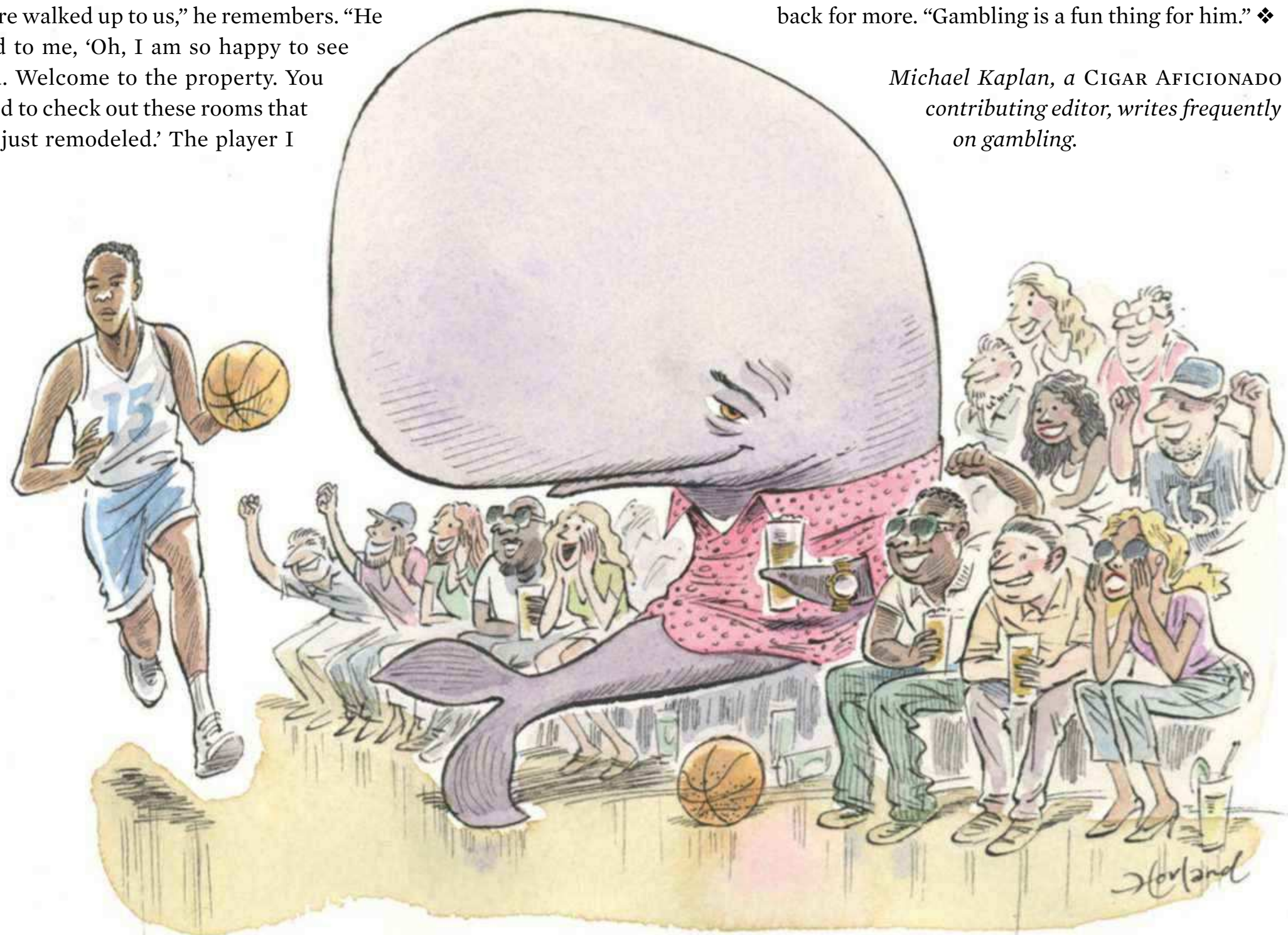
One way around the tight oversight is to forsake Las Vegas for less obvious destinations. Cipriani, for example, recently flew to the Hard Rock in Punta Cana Dominican Republic, lured there by piles of promo chips and a high-stakes blackjack tournament with a comped entry fee.

Prior to joining Palms, Cyr took one of his big customers to Baha Mar, the recently launched island resort in the Bahamas. "He bets $50,000 per hand at baccarat and three spots of $20,000 at blackjack," Cyr says. "When he and his wife wanted to take a private yacht to a private island for dinner, I was there and sent them on their way."

No doubt, Cyr was waiting for them when they returned.

"Over the course of the trip, my player was up a lot and down a lot and ended up losing $400,000," says the host, making it clear that his whale didn't mind all that much and will surely be back for more. "Gambling is a fun thing for him." ❖

Michael Kaplan, a Cigar Aficionado *contributing editor, writes frequently on gambling.*



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Blend Ambition

The Scotch whisky that conquered the world—but lost its groove—is resurgent

by Jack Bettridge

Whisky appreciation made great leaps in past decades. Bourbon got some well-deserved props. Straight rye was reborn. Connoisseurs snagged trophy single malts. Craft distillers emerged and Asian entries appeared on store shelves. But one brown spirit—the one that first spanned the globe—lagged behind in enthusiasm: blended Scotch.

Look for that to change as blend makers are marketing older and finer examples, even applying aging techniques usually associated with single malts. From relatively low-cost brands like John Barr Reserve, with a recent makeover that includes a Sherry cask finish,

JEFF HARRIS

Making a sublime blended Scotch involves the careful mixing of aged grain and malt whiskies from some of Scotland's more than 100 distilleries.

to the highly limited The Last Drop, priced at a nosebleed $4,000, the once-sleepy segment is gaining traction. You'll do yourself a favor by leaving your malt arrogance at the saloon door and taking a second look at blended Scotch.

Few spirits have a more venerable past. More than a century and a half ago, Scotch blends brought brand names and consistency to the sometimes-raw whisky world. Whisky alchemists with names like Dewar, Usher, Bell and Walker offered reliable and approachable drams, which they soon marketed the world over, gaining a popularity that single malts of the time couldn't have hoped to equal. In fact, blends still account for 90 percent of Scotch whisky sales. A little understanding of the category reveals its impressive potential.

While a slew of terms from geographic regions to types of aging vessels can define Scotch whiskies, they all come from two basic types of mash: malts or grains. Malt whisky is made strictly from barley. Grain whisky contains such cereals as corn and wheat. When made in one distillery, they can be called single malt or single grain whiskies. Blending creates other categories. Blended malt whiskies are mixtures of malts made at different distilleries. (You may have heard them called pure or vatted malts, but the law no longer permits those terms.) Blended Scotch whiskies are melded from both malt and grain whisky. Malts add body to a blend. Grains, while milder, contribute ethereal notes and play an important role in bonding the component malts.

So, why the knock on blended Scotch? Some of that is due to misapprehension. Outside Scotland, blended whisky can contain neutral grain spirits—that is, liquor that is not aged. But, in Scotland grain whisky must be matured at least three years. Another dig on blends relies on the perception that greater expense necessarily renders better quality. A few factors make malts generally costlier. The high cost of barley increases the price of malts. Furthermore, malt whisky must be made in a pot still, one batch at a time. Column stills, used for grain whiskies, are operated continuously making them cheaper to run. They also render fewer impurities, meaning the whisky needn't be aged as long to mellow off notes. The result is that cheaper blends often contain 60 to 80 percent of the younger, lighter grain whisky, which is sometimes regarded as filler.

The logic behind malt snobbery starts to fail when you move into high-priced fare—particularly those blends with age statements. Aging is expensive. At a certain age malt and grain whisky approach parity in how much they cost to produce. Say you make a 25-year-old blend. By law, all the whisky in the blend, including the grain, must be 25 years or older. At that point grain whisky ceases to be so economical and as a result less may be used in favor of a more complex mixture of malts.

You'll do yourself a favor by leaving your malt arrogance at the saloon door and taking a second look at blended Scotch.

Whatever its age, you shouldn't expect a precise formula. Not just because recipes are proprietary, but because they don't exist—exactly. The blender's art lies in targeting a specific taste profile, not recreating a recipe verbatim. The components are gathered from some number of the 100 or so distilleries operating in Scotland at any given time. But they don't create a constant flow of liquid. New ones open, some close or sell their wares elsewhere. And just like cigar tobacco, even the same malts may vary from batch to batch. Nailing the identical taste in every bottle is what made blends so popular in the 19th century. At a time when malts could be erratic, blenders cracked the consistency code.

Components are not a complete secret, however. If a blender owns a malt distillery—or even a few—you can bet the blend is based on those whiskies. Dewar's built Aberfeldy in the Highlands in 1898 to ensure a steady supply of honey-like malt for its popular blend. Chivas Bros. owns the Speyside distillery Strathisla, so it's little surprise that its creamy and fruity sweetness is at the heart of

MARTIN HUNTER

Chivas Regal. Spirits giant Diageo owns a dozen Scotch distilleries as well as the Johnnie Walker blend. The soft and sweet Cardhu is at its core, but they also typically contain Islay's Caol Ila to deliver a distinct peat smoke.

House styles—a smooth Speyside taste, say, or a distinct smokiness—differ from blend to blend, and sometimes you'll taste an obvious connection as you taste through a brands expression by price point. Competing schools of thought also dictate how each blender works. Some like to feature a certain malt by making it stand out. Others aim at a nuanced mix that doesn't speak loudly of any one component. Once the Scotch is blended it can either be bottled immediately or set aside for several months or even years in a marrying process.

Whatever the method, our tasting of nine blends showed that the category is brimming with possibilities. We paired each with two cigars: the mild-to-medium Padrón Dámaso No. 34 (87 points, $14.50) with its honey charms; and the fuller bodied Rocky Patel Vintage 1990 Churchill (91 points, $10.10) with notes of licorice, chocolate and cinnamon. We indicate our favorite partnership with each tasting note, but—the secret can be told—there were no losers. The whiskies range in price from $18 to $4,000 per bottle, showing the impressive possibilities of this eminently quaffable spirit. ❖

Blended Scotch and Cigars

Buchanan's Red Seal

(80 proof, $165) The top-of-the-line Buchanan's Red Seal recalls a blend that was a favorite of Britain's Edward VII upon his ascension in 1901. Among its malts are rare examples from the Highland distillery Dalwhinnie. It is full of caramel, hard candy, toast and nuts, with light smoke and a touch of Stilton cheese. The blend drank best with the Padrón Dámaso, the almonds of which brought on toffee, while the cigar gained sweetness.

Chivas Regal 18 (80 proof, $70)

The Chivas company is studded with age-statement blends, ranging from its 12-year-old to 25, and the company also makes a 21, a 38 and a 40 under the mark Royal Salute. Don't think of this as the adolescent expression, however. It chimes with caramel, toffee, vanilla, berry, chocolate and hazelnut. The Dámaso's nuttiness made it the best partner, coaxing out peat from the whisky.

Compass Box Circus (98 proof, $250)

Compass Box, known for its blended malts, created a three-ring circus with this blend of malts and grains. The components were allowed to marry for several years before bottling. The use of Sherry casks for aging confers the character of dried fruits, especially pear. Caramel and flowers are followed by tingly spices, smoky toast and an orange finish. It balanced well with the Rocky Patel, its sweetness playing off the cigar's earthiness.

Dewar's 25 (80 proof, $200)

You may know Dewar's for its light and bright White Label, but the body is ramped up on its age-statement blends (12, 15, 18 and 25).

The senior citizen in the bunch was double-aged, using casks from the company's Royal Brackla distillery. It enjoys the signature Dewar's honey smoothness, with roses, toffee, berries and a toasty finish. The Rocky Patel gives it tanginess, while the cigar gets a sweet cocoa note.

The Famous Grouse Smoky Black (80 proof, $27)

The popularity of peaty Islay malts has led to a spate of specialty blends with names like Big Peat, Big Smoke and Smokey Joe. Johnnie Walker has its Double Black and this is The Famous Grouse iteration (formerly called Black Grouse). The added peat has a toast-and-marmalade effect on the bread, honey and caramel of the standard Grouse. The Rocky Patel marriage represents the anomaly where smoke on smoke makes a wonderful combination, begetting leather.

Grant's Reserve Blend

(80 proof, $18) Our budget choice delivers loads of complexity with a healthy dose of Speyside malts (Glenfiddich, Balvenie, Kininvie) that come from distillers owned by the parent company William Grant & Sons. Given the components, its mild body with vanilla, caramel, flowers, cereal and pear is expected. The surprise is the understated peat. The Padrón Dámaso's smoothness burnished it, supplying almond and toast.

John Barr Reserve Blend

(80 proof, $25) This brand, with an unremarkable recent history, was revitalized when Richard Paterson, the gifted nose behind The Dalmore Cigar Malt and Shackleton blended malt, reimagined it by adding a Sherry-cask finish. Now it crows with butterscotch, dried fruit, toast, olive oil, hard candy and a distinct maltiness. It sang harmony with the Rocky Patel, creating a subtle jam note and a bit of leather.

Johnnie Walker Blue Label Ghost and Rare Port Ellen

(87.6 proof, $350) This is the second edition of the limited Ghost and Rare collection. Based on Johnnie Walker Blue, the expressions add malt left over from mothballed distilleries. In this case, the Ghost is Islay's Port Ellen (now a malting facility, it will reopen as a distillery soon). Slightly less smoky than the standard (if that is the appropriate term for such a blend) Blue, its toffee leather, vanilla, orange and hazelnut pop a bit. The leather soars with the Rocky and adds a salty, maritime note.

The Last Drop 1971 (94.4 proof, $4,000)

For 10 years industry veterans James Espey and Tom Jago have been sourcing almost vanished stocks of spirits (mostly Scotch) and bottling them in highly limited editions. This blend debuted at 1,352 bottles. In a rare triple maturation, components originally aged in Bourbon barrels for 12 years were blended and put into Sherry butts in 1983 for nine more years, then returned to Bourbon barrels for 24 years. The result is exquisite with spice, vanilla, butterscotch, sawdust, orange marmalade, figs and smoke. The figs add girth to the Padrón Dámaso, which repays it with mulled spices. *—JB*

ASHTON
VSG
ASHTON
Cabinet
SYMMETRY
ASHTON
ESG
Estate Sun Grown
IMPORTED
ASHTON
MADE BY HAND
ASHTON
Heritage
PURO SOL
IMPORTED
ASHTON
MADE BY HAND
ASHTON®
Trust Your Taste
ashtoncigar.com

This year's top 10 watches deliver enhanced value and timeless styling—plus some over-the-top grail watches for good measure • *by Laurie Kahle*

TIME'S TOP TIER

With a double-digit increase in U.S. sales during the first half of 2018, the outlook for watches priced above $1,000 is rosier than it has been for years.

This year's models continue the ongoing emphasis on retro-classic designs sourced in historical archives and an emphasis on value with the prolific use of stainless steel at more affordable prices. The influence of the dominant millennial market was also evidenced by designs that are clearly targeted to attract them with sporty styling and vintage flavor.

Of course, a handful of extreme complications with six-figure price tags from the usual contenders such as Greubel Forsey, A. Lange & Söhne, Richard Mille, and Patek Philippe still wow elite collectors and hardcore enthusiasts.

Ultrathin watches also made powerful strides this year with some record-breakers from Bulgari and Piaget that we will discuss in an upcoming issue.

From mind-boggling complications to no-nonsense timekeepers, here are our picks for the watches to keep an eye out for this fall.

Retro classic was a major theme this year. IWC dug deep into the past with the Tribute to Pallweber Edition 150 Years wristwatch, modeled on the maker's Pallweber pocket watch that dates to 1884.

Richard Mille

A. Lange & Söhne

Greubel Forsey

Richard Mille
RM 53-01 Tourbillon Pablo Mac Donough

Always one to deliver extreme performance (as well as pricing), Richard Mille once again turned to polo star Pablo Mac Donough for inspiration in creating the RM 53-01 Tourbillon Pablo Mac Donough. The piece was previewed with a video detailing the polo champion's many bone fractures and injuries, dispelling any notion that polo is a genteel sport.

Mille, who designs extravagant sport watches built for his elite athlete ambassadors to wear in competition, introduced the first Mac Donough polo watch in 2012. Ready for hard knocks, it resembled a Civil War-era submarine with a hefty metal case revealing the time in a porthole. By contrast, this year's 53-01 was built to show off the intricate tourbillon movement for all to see.

A tourbillon is a delicate mechanism, so building one that can withstand the rigors of a six-chukka match was a daunting challenge. The solution was to suspend the movement with tiny braided steel cables that allow the watch to take shocks of up to 5,000 g. The mechanism is housed in a tough Carbon TPT case, which is notched for heightened durability.

To reinforce the sapphire crystal over the dial, Mille turned to a favorite source, the automotive world. The patented result is two pieces of sapphire glass separated by a thin sheet of polyvinyl film that holds the glass together like automotive safety glass even if it were to be shattered by a mallet strike. The $900,000 watch is limited to 30 pieces. *richardmille.com*

A. Lange & Söhne *Triple Split*

Germany's A. Lange & Söhne took the split-seconds, or *rattrapante*, chronograph to an unprecedented level of complexity with the Triple Split ($147,000), the first of its kind to track comparative times as long as 12 hours.

A simple chronograph functions as a stopwatch, whereas the rattrapante features two aligned timing hands that start simultaneously and can be stopped separately allowing you to time two separate concurrent events. In 2004, Lange's Double Split featured a groundbreaking dual rattrapante function, allowing it to track aggregate times of up to 30 minutes, a considerable increase over the standard 60 seconds. Limited to 100 pieces, the Triple Split ups that by a factor of 24 with three pairs of blued-steel rattrapante hands for seconds, minutes and hours. This ultimate split-seconds chronograph also features a fly-back function that allows timing to be reset and restarted with a single push of a button.

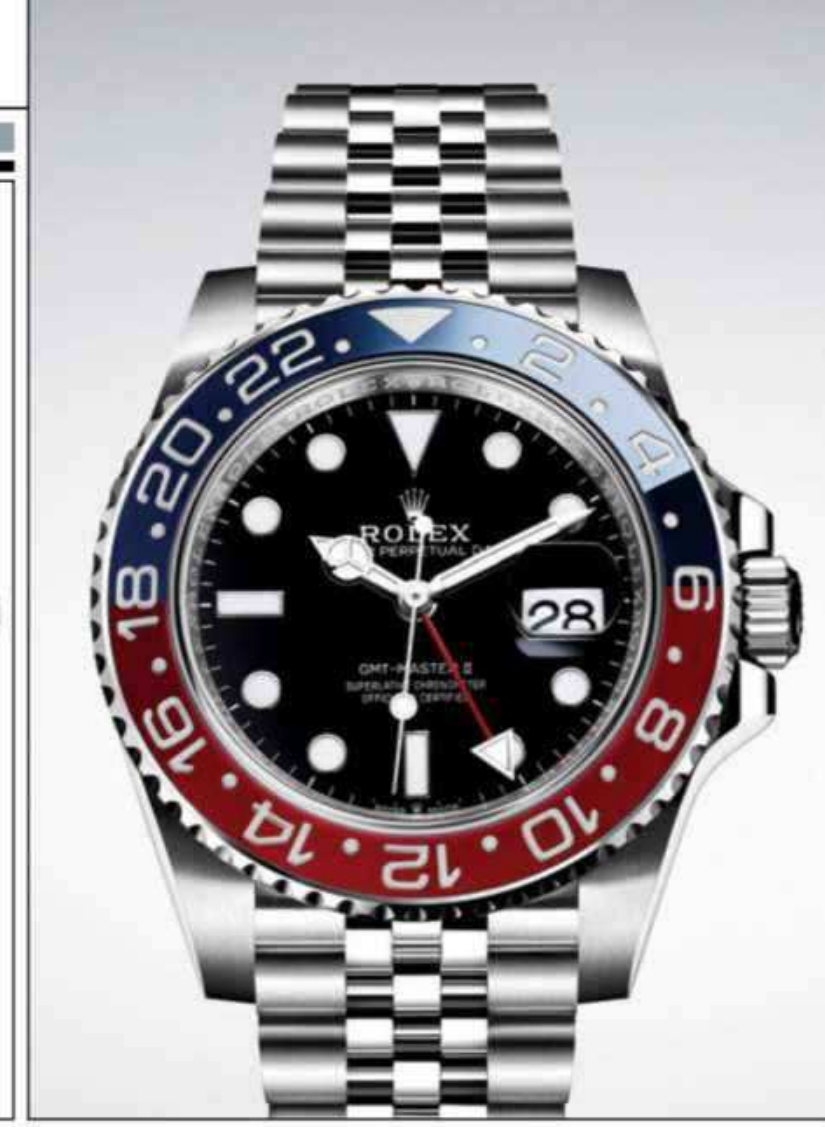
The new *manufacture* calibre L132.1 movement is a technical triumph consisting of 567 components. A sapphire crystal case back invites you to admire the intricate, beautifully finished, multilayered architecture and contemplate this staggering feat of micro-engineering. *alange-soehne.com/en/*

Greubel Forsey *Différentiel d'Égalité*

Robert Greubel and Stephen Forsey take their time when developing and perfecting their horological masterpieces. This year's unveiling of Greubel Forsey's fifth invention, the Différentiel d'Égalité (about $268,000) enjoyed a decade of R&D since the watchmakers presented the original concept in 2008.

In the pursuit of timekeeping perfection, the mechanical tour de force uses a spherical differential to ensure a steady and consistent transmission of power from the mainspring barrel to the regulating organ. Because the same amount of energy is released to the escapement each second, constant amplitude is maintained throughout the entire 60-hour power reserve. Typical mechanical watches lose precision as the energy in the movement winds down. The constant transfer of energy is regulated by a secondary spring on the differential that rewinds itself every second. This feature allowed the boutique brand to introduce its first jumping, or dead-beat, seconds on a sub-dial at 4 O'CLOCK with a hand that moves in precise increments akin to a quartz watch, rather than the usual sweeping seconds hand.

Patek Philippe



Rolex

Baume & Mercier

Performance is further heightened with the brand's 30° inclined balance wheel, which counteracts the impact of gravity when the movement runs in different positions. When you pull out the crown, the balance wheel stops and the seconds hand resets to zero to set the time with precision. The Différentiel d'Égalité is limited to 33 pieces in white gold. *greubelforsey.com*

Patek Philippe *Aquanaut Ref. 5968A*

While we have come to expect such sublime complications as the Ref. 5531R World Time Minute Repeater from Patek Philippe, the Geneva institution also showed off a lighter side this year with the sporty Aquanaut Ref. 5968A chronograph ($43,770) designed with—gasp—orange accents and an alternate rubber strap also in orange. While such a vibrant flourish elsewhere would not bat an eyelash, at the usually reserved Patek Philippe, some eyebrows were undoubtedly raised.

The Ref. 5968A marks the first chronograph in the Aquanaut range, which makes a clear appeal to a younger client, albeit one with a healthy bank account. It is equipped with Patek's CH 28-520 C caliber, a self-winding flyback chronograph with column-wheel construction and a vertical disc clutch for smooth and precise operation. In other Patek news this year, Aquanaut's big brother, the hard-to-get Nautilus introduced its first perpetual calendar, unconventionally merging a sport watch with a high complication. But the Aquanaut best represents the brand's evolution with a nod to millennials, complete with an Instagram story. *patek.com*

Rolex *Oyster Perpetual GMT-Master II*

Rolex's star launch this year is the Oyster Perpetual GMT-Master II, with a new in-house movement, the caliber 3285 with a 70-hour power reserve and chronometer precision of -2/+2 seconds per day, plus the GMT function to display local and home time for globetrotters. The 40-mm, Oystersteel version ($9,250) is fitted with a 24-hour bidirectional "Pepsi" bezel in graduated red and blue Cerachrom, a proprietary ceramic. Since 2014, the Pepsi bezel had been limited to the white-gold GMT II.

Another update is the five-link Jubilee bracelet, marking the first time Rolex has combined that bracelet, an Oystersteel case, and the Pepsi bezel, causing Rolex collectors to salivate. The watch is also available in two-tone steel with Everose gold ($14,050), and solid 18-karat Everose gold ($36,750) for the first time. Those models are appointed with a complementary brown-and-black Cerachrom bezel. For those with shallower pockets, Rolex's sister brand Tudor launched a steel Pepsi-bezel Black Bay GMT ($4,210) at less than half the price. *rolex.com*

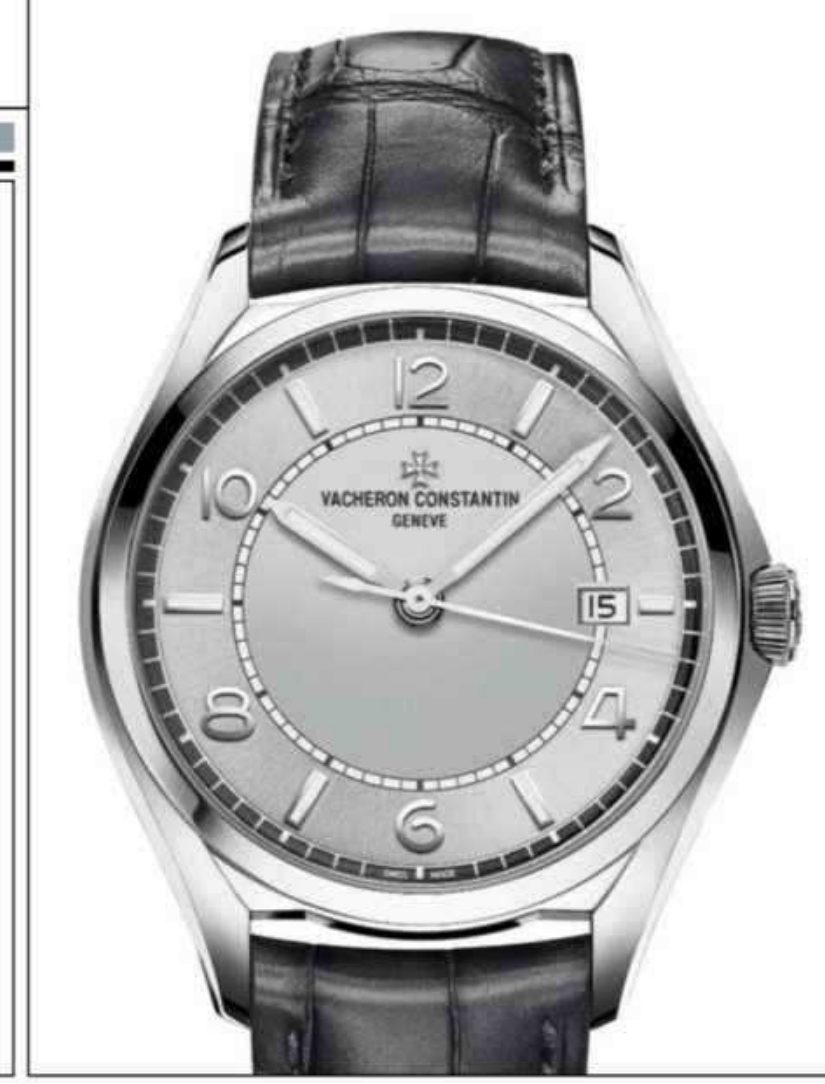
Baume & Mercier *Baumatic collection*

Baume & Mercier made news this year with the launch of its first proprietary automatic movement in the new Baumatic collection (from $2,590). The caliber was developed with parent company Richemont's ValFleurier, which produces movements for sister brands Montblanc and Panerai, in collaboration with the Richemont Research & Innovation team. Baumatic is endowed with cutting-edge technology, such as a silicon hairspring and escapement for extreme antimagnetic resistance of up to 1,500 gauss and an extended recommended maintenance interval of five years. The movement delivers a five-day power reserve and COSC chronometer certification with precision of -4/+6 seconds per day. It will have the exclusive use of this high-performance movement for the foreseeable future. *baume-et-mercier.com*

Carl F. Bucherer *Manero Tourbillon Double Peripheral*

Carl F. Bucherer combined its proprietary peripheral winding system with a peripherally mounted flying tourbillon at 12 O'CLOCK in the Manero Tourbillon Double Peripheral ($72,300). The CFB T3000 automatic movement was developed in house with a silicon escapement that reduces friction and requires no lubrication. The

Carl F. Bucherer



Vacheron Constantin

Laurent Ferrier

striking tourbillon appears to float at the top of the dial. Rather than mounting the tourbillon to the main plate or an overlying bridge, the tourbillon cage is supported on the periphery with ceramic ball bearings. The movement, which required years of development, also features a stop-seconds function that allows you to stop and start the rotating tourbillon cage. The highly accurate COSC-certified chronometer movement is housed in a robust 43.1-mm rose-gold case with a silver-colored dial appointed with rose-gold plated indices, making a classically pure design statement that puts all the focus on the star attraction, the spinning tourbillon. *carl-f-bucherer.com*

Vacheron Constantin *FiftySix collection*

Vacheron Constantin lowered the bar of entry to one of watchmaking's Holy Trinity (Vacheron, Patek Philippe, and Audemars Piguet), with the FiftySix collection directly aimed at affluent millennials. With a retro sector-dial design inspired by 1956's ref. 6073, the collection opens with a steel automatic watch powered by a movement developed by Richemont Group and assembled and finished by Vacheron. At $11,900, it is the most affordable Vacheron available in the current collection. The rose-gold version goes for $19,900. For those with complicated tastes, there is the Day Date model ($17,900 in steel; $33,400 in pink gold) and the Complete Calendar ($23,500 in steel; $36,800 in pink gold) powered by in-house Vacheron movements that are awarded the prestigious Geneva Seal. Rumor has it that even more complicated FiftySix models are in the pipeline this fall. *vacheron-constantin.com*

IWC *Jubilee collection*

IWC Schaffhausen marked its 150th anniversary this year with a Jubilee collection of 28 limited-edition Portugieser, Portofino, Pilot's Watch and Da Vinci models. Also debuted was a series of Tribute to Pallweber Edition 150 Years wristwatches, modeled on its historic Pallweber pocket watch, which dates to 1884. The display shows jumping hours and minutes through apertures using a digital format via rotating discs. The glossy white and blue lacquer dials recall the original Pallweber's enamel dial. Twenty-five watches are in platinum ($57,800), 250 in red gold ($36,600), and 500 in stainless steel ($23,100).

For purists, IWC also introduced a 50-piece, limited-edition pocket watch in red gold ($66,500). The Tribute to Pallweber Edition 150 Years pocket watch is the first digital pocket watch IWC has produced since 1890, when it phased out the Pallweber, and the brand's first 21st-century pocket watch. *iwc.com*

Laurent Ferrier
Galet Annual Calendar École Piece

Independent watchmaker Laurent Ferrier has always impressed with its elegant timepieces with superlative finishing. With the Galet Annual Calendar École Piece, the brand launches its fifth in-house movement with a practical annual calendar function that is designed for smooth and easy adjustment. Just turn the crown forward and backward to set the date and month and use the push button at 10 o'clock to set the day of the week.

An annual calendar automatically accounts for months of varying lengths, so it requires adjustment only once per year on March 1. The Galet Annual Calendar's retro dial evokes 1940s-era triple-calendar flair and the indicators are designed for instant legibility with the date displayed by a central hand and the day of the week and month in apertures. The manual-winding movement delivers a power reserve of 80 hours, with the power reserve indicator on the movement side.

On the dial, vintage-style numerals are painted in blue, while the date hand pops in burgundy or red. The watch is available in steel ($58,000), red gold ($63,000) and a new pale yellow gold ($63,000), with silver-toned or anthracite gray dials decorated with a vertical satin brush finish in the centers, encircled by a contrasting circular satin brush finish. The result is a refined design married with a practical function. *laurentferrier.ch* ❖

Laurie Kahle is a contributing editor for Cigar Aficionado.

4
Consecutive Years in
Cigar Aficionado's top 25

91
Timeless Prestige Churchill
(Formerly Timeless Dominican)

92
Timeless Supreme 652T
(Formerly Timeless Nicaragua)

93
Timeless Prestige No.2
(Formerly Timeless Dominican)

93
Timeless Prestige Divinos
(Formerly Timeless Dominican)

"A handsomely box-pressed torpedo offering a rich range of molasses, oak and semisweet chocolate."
Cigar Aficionado - 652T

"A sign of newfound energy and commitment Nat Sherman has made to its cigar brand."
Cigar Aficionado - No.2

THE TIMELESS COLLECTION. ACCOLADES TO BE CONTINUED...

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WARNING: Smoking cigars regularly poses risks of cancer of the mouth, throat, larynx, and esophagus similar to smoking cigarettes.

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2018 SMALL BATCH RELEASE

FROM OUR AGING ROOMS TO YOUR HUMIDOR

cigars

120 CIGAR REVIEW
From classic Cubans to new Nicaraguans—and everything in between—our tasting of 83 cigars turned up some spectacular smokes.

134 THE NEW BUYING GUIDE
Are you looking for the strongest cigars of the issue? The best bargains? Maybe you just want to go straight to the top scores. Our entire tasting section is now broken down and categorized for your convenience.

136 CONNOISSEUR'S CORNER
We revisit our first-ever Cigar of the Year: the Padrón 1926 40th Anniversary from 2004. Fourteen years later, it's traded power for elegance.

139 THE COMEDIC SPORTSCASTER
While sports talk can quickly turn contentious, Rich Eisen has been keeping it light and funny for more than two decades. No surprise, he enjoys a good smoke.

143 A CONVERSATION WITH HEINRICH VILLIGER
"Mr. Villiger's" wide reach includes premium cigars, machine-made cigars into the billions and the sole rights to distribute Cubans for five European nations. We sit down with him for an enlightening Q&A.

149 CUBA REPORT: CIGAR SOMMELIERS
Every year in Havana there's a contest to decide who's best at pairing cigars and drinks. Senior contributing editor Gordon Mott takes us into the competition.

JEFF HARRIS

churchills

This tasting of Churchills turned up five outstanding examples of the classic size, three of which scored 92 points. The non-Cuban Ramon Allones brand is now in the hands of cigarmaker A.J. Fernandez. He makes and distributes the brand, although the trademark still belongs to General Cigar. It debuted this year. The Rocky Patel Vintage 1992 has been around for 16 years. As exciting as new releases can be, it would be a mistake to overlook this Honduran cigar. Not quite as old, the Villiger San'Doro Colorado is made in Nicaragua and represents Villiger's commitment to making fine handmade cigars. The new Diesel Whiskey Row and bargain-priced Oliva Serie G scored 91 points.

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

RAMON ALLONES BY AJ FERNANDEZ CHURCHILL
Each puff of this toothy cigar leaves big notes of semi-sweet chocolate, leather and cherry on the palate before a sweet finish that shows more of the same.
U.S.: $14.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

92

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROCKY PATEL VINTAGE 1992 CHURCHILL
Dark and squarely pressed, this Churchill imparts a dense, creamy smoke that's bright and cedary with plenty of almond and orange peel notes. The finish smacks of baking spices.
U.S.: $10.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

92

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

VILLIGER SAN'DORO COLORADO CHURCHILL
A dark and attractive Churchill with rich notes of nuts and leather enlivened by black pepper spiciness and a sweet, malted-chocolate finish.
U.S.: $9.56 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

92

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DIESEL WHISKEY ROW CHURCHILL
The earthy, chocolate notes of this cigar frame a hearty core of wood and cedar, all combining for a finish of bread and brown sugar.
U.S.: $8.49 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

91

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

OLIVA SERIE G CHURCHILL
Distinct notes of chocolate ganache and dark toast bring complexity to this sweet and earthy cigar. It's a trunk-pressed Churchill cloaked in a colorado claro wrapper.
U.S.: $6.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LA AROMA DE CUBA CHURCHILL
Beautiful to behold with a dark, attractive wrapper. There's a touch of resistance to the draw, which imparts notes of leather, almonds and tangy wood. Lemon and cedar emerge on the finish.
U.S.: $6.70 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

MY FATHER LE BIJOU 1922 CHURCHILL
A hearty smoke full of oaky vanilla notes that are enriched by sweeter hints of black cherry and chocolate before a boozy, rum-like finish.
U.S.: $11.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

89

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA, PERU
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

H. UPMANN THE BANKER INGOT ROSÉ CHURCHILL
Draped in a coarse, rustic cover leaf, this Churchill has a tight draw that imparts elements of cedar and earth. Hints of citrus and nougat also come through.
U.S.: $12.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

LA AURORA 100 AÑOS CHURCHILL
Enveloped in a veiny wrapper that's slightly darker than medio claro. It's a nutty smoke, showing notes of walnut and hazelnut with a touch of honey, but the charry finish offset the score.
U.S.: $14.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

LA FLOR DOMINICANA CORONADO DOUBLE CORONA
Richly hued and gleaming with oil, this attractive cigar draws well but combustion is a bit uneven. It's a sweet and spicy cigar showing red and black pepper notes alongside sweet vanilla and brown sugar.
U.S.: $9.30 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

BLIND MAN'S BLUFF CONNECTICUT CHURCHILL
Yellowish in appearance, this Churchill draws well, forming a solid ash. It's a light smoke, showing herbal qualities, straw notes and vague nuttiness.
U.S.: $9.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

87

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 7/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

JOYA DE NICARAGUA ANTAÑO 1970 CHURCHILL
An herbal, cedary smoke with muted notes of citrus, cocoa and saffron that emerge and then disappear. The finish is a bit muddled.
U.S.: $8.30 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

87

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

KRISTOFF CAMEROON CHURCHILL
This dark Churchill is rolled with a coiled pigtail cap and uncut foot. It's woody and earthy with damp hints of mustiness and traces of sweetness. Tasters noted inconsistencies in the draw.
U.S.: $9.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

86

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 6 7/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

CASA MAGNA COLORADO CHURCHILL
Wrapped in a coarse cover leaf, this Churchill has a firm draw. It's earthy and oaky with a hint of hickory, a touch of sweetness and a bitter, oily finish.
U.S.: $8.44 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

85

corona gordas

More than half of the corona gordas we tasted scored 90 points or higher—so many that the 90s have spilled over onto the next page. Two cigars had especially impressive scores of 93 points. The E.P. Carrillo Encore is the newest brand from Ernesto Perez-Carrillo. While this smoke is made in the Dominican Republic, it contains only Nicaraguan leaves, and it's Perez-Carrillo's first Nicaraguan puro. What started as a Cuban Edición Limitada is now a delicious staple in Habanos S.A.'s regular-production portfolio: The Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure Especial. It's one of the thicker cigars in the Epicure Series. Corona gordas, also known as toros, are among the cigar industry's most popular shapes.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 3/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

E.P. CARRILLO ENCORE MAJESTIC
Elegant impressions of English breakfast tea, orange peel and sweet caramel are balanced by a hearty, woody backbone of oak.
U.S.: $11.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

93

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: NOVEMBER 2017

HOYO DE MONTERREY EPICURE ESPECIAL
Smoking this cigar is like chewing on a luxurious caramel, as its sweetness is profoundly dense and elegant. Notes of coffee bean and chocolate-covered almonds add to its richness.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £27.80 STRENGTH: Medium

93

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ALEC BRADLEY BLACK MARKET ESTELÍ TORO
The smoke from this well-made cigar layers the palate with notes of caramel and cocoa balanced by a ripe and concentrated, dried-fruit sweetness.
U.S.: $8.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

92

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

MOMBACHO LIGA MAESTRO HERMOSO
An opulent smoke that captures the richness of maple, toffee and leather with every puff. Bold notes of black pepper and cedar fortify the cigar for strength and resonance.
U.S.: $9.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 55 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2018

MONTECRISTO LÍNEA 1935 LEYENDA
A richly hued cigar made with a three-seam cap. Bold notes of oak and baking spices usher in sweeter, precise hints of honey and candied apple.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £39.30 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

PLASENCIA COSECHA 146 SAN LUIS
Well made with an even burn, this cigar delivers woody notes of oak and fresh tobacco interspersed with red pepper spice. The finish shows some vanilla sweetness.
U.S.: $13.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROCKY PATEL 15TH ANNIVERSARY TORO (TUBO)

Rich and nutty in character, this dark toro also delivers plenty of dark chocolate and oaky vanilla notes that lead to a long, tasty finish redolent of cashews and peanuts.

U.S.: $12.40 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

L'ATELIER LAT56

This large, thick cigar is topped with a pigtail and three-seam cap. Initial puffs are nutty and floral before the smoke picks up some earthy notes and a sweet, hickory finish.

U.S.: $10.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

VIAJE EXCLUSIVO DOUBLE R

Solid to the touch, this toro is packed with tobacco but draws and burns evenly. Up-front earthiness fades to the background for notes of oak, chocolate and baking spices.

U.S.: $9.04 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

E.P. CARRILLO CARDINAL IMPACT MADURO NO. 54

This dark, box-pressed cigar is covered in a splotchy, rustic wrapper. Its nutty and citrus qualities are joined by sweet notes of raisin and cocoa.

U.S.: $8.70 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

HVC CERRO MADURO TORO

This dark toro has a bit of a tight draw, but shows strong notes of earth and coffee against a palate of licorice and dark toast, though the finish is gummy.

U.S.: $8.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: CAMEROON
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CROMAGNON AQUITAINE ANTHROPOLOGY

Soft spots on the cigar result in an airy draw and blistery burn. Notes of earth and vanilla take on an herbal quality, all leading to a sticky, molasses finish.

U.S.: $8.65 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

88

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: MEXICO

THE OSCAR MADURO TORO

A brownish cigar with a coarse wrapper. Muted notes of licorice and nuts are vague and diluted, as are the tobacco's floral and toasty elements. Some of the flavors seem closed.

U.S.: $11.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., U.S.A./PENN. BROADLEAF, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

GURKHA HERITAGE TORO

Dark and hefty, this cigar has an open, airy draw that delivers a woody, earthy smoke that leaves a slightly bitter, oily aftertaste.

U.S.: $9.36 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

85

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figurados

Sometimes it pays to tread the familiar. The Montecristo No. 2 scored 92 points, and is one of the most recognizable cigars in the world of handmade smokes. It has also become a classic go-to for fans of not only Cuban cigars, but cigars in general. Every enthusiast should try a Monte 2 at least once—especially now. This particular sample came from a box dated December 2017. The La Flor Dominicana Air Bender Chisel scored 90 points and is named for its unique, chisel-shaped head. The unorthodox Chisel made its first appearance as part of La Flor's Double Ligero line, but brand owner Litto Gomez thought it would be a good idea to make one in the Air Bender series as well.

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2017

MONTECRISTO NO. 2
The complex smoke of this torpedo offers an elegant interplay of almond and orange peel notes that frame a leathery, woody core.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £27.00 STRENGTH: Medium

92

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA FLOR DOMINICANA AIR BENDER CHISEL
Shaped like a chisel, this dark cigar gleams with oil. While there's some resistance to the draw, it imparts a spicy, leathery and earthy smoke sweetened by hints of raisin and marshmallow.
U.S.: $9.70 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ARTURO FUENTE AÑEJO RESERVA NO. 888
A long, slim cigar with a pointy, pre-cut head. It comes on strong with bold notes of wood and leather before showing a vanilla sweetness, black pepper and a touch of honey. A notably firm draw affected the score.
U.S.: $12.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JUNE 2017

SANCHO PANZA BELICOSO
A chunky belicoso with a slightly uneven burn. The creamy smoke is sweet and woody showing light notes of orange peel, cinnamon and cashews.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £21.30 STRENGTH: Medium

89

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

CAMACHO LIBERTY 2005 THROWBACK 11/18
Bulging in the middle, this double-tapered figurado is strong and spicy, showing big notes of smoked meat before a toasty finish. The draw is lush and even.
U.S.: $22.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

88

U.S.A.
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

CASA FERNANDEZ AGANORSA LEAF TORPEDO
A predominantly woody, spicy cigar with hints of minerals and a bit of vanilla bean sweetness. Box-pressed and nicely colored, this torpedo draws and burns evenly.
U.S.: $8.40 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, U.S.A./FLORIDA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

FLORIDA SUN GROWN BELICOSO
An oily figurado that produces a brilliant white ash. Its nutty, wheaty smoke is complemented by hints of herbs and spice, but the finish is a bit dry.
U.S.: $13.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 57 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

AGING ROOM SOLERA COROJO FANFARE
Topped with a lumpy belicoso head, this cigar shows an earthy palate of coffee bean and spices with bitter woody notes and slight sweetness.
U.S.: $8.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: HONDURAS, PERU, NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

CLE HABANO 11/18
A curvy cigar that bulges in the middle and tapers at the end. It smokes evenly, offering a tangy, cedary smoke with floral elements and oaky notes of white wine. The finish is herbal.
U.S.: $8.16 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: MEXICO

PADILLA VINTAGE RESERVE FIGURADO
Tangy and cedary, this big, dark figurado takes on a marshmallow sweetness before the faint cedar finish. The cigar smokes evenly, producing a flaky ash.
U.S.: $10.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

87

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PADRÓN DÁMASO NO. 34
The draw and burn of this cigar are even and consistent. It offers a creamy smoke with dry notes of straw and hay, hints of honey and a light, woody finish.
U.S.: $14.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

87

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS/ NICARAGUA
BINDER: BRAZIL
WRAPPER: MEXICO

UNDERCROWN BELICOSO
Initial notes of earth and tropical fruits clash, but the cigar becomes more cohesive showing a balanced mix of cocoa and vanilla bean. The finish is dry and woody.
U.S.: $8.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

LAST CALL MADURO BY AJ FERNANDEZ FLAQUITAS
Nearly black in appearance with an uncut foot. Bright and cedary, this cigar takes on a warm, sweet note of oatmeal cookie with hints of raisin and cinnamon, but the finish becomes musty and earthy.
U.S.: $6.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

REGIUS EXCLUSIVO U.S.A. OSCURO ESPECIAL PRESSED PERFECTO
The draw of this box-pressed figurado is notably firm. It imparts an herbal, wheaty smoke that becomes earthy with a hint of malty sweetness, but the draw never fully opens.
U.S.: $13.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

lonsdales

The once popular lonsdale size still struggles to find a large audience, but fans of tradition continue to smoke them, and why not? Even though it's a niche size there are still plenty of great lonsdales produced today, and the tasting results prove it. Almost half of the lonsdales here scored at least 90 points. The most exceptional example came from Cuba in the form of a Cohiba Siglo V Tubo, which achieved 92 points. These samples came from those sturdy three-packs that Habanos produces in case you don't want to carry around loose sticks. At 91 points, the Rocky Patel Decade Lonsdale is part of a line released in 2007 to celebrate Rocky Patel's 10 years in the cigar business.

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2017

COHIBA SIGLO V (TUBO)
Though the draw is a bit firm, this dark lonsdale imparts delicious notes of leather and chocolate-covered almonds balanced by hints of dried fruit and a sweet mocha finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £40.30 STRENGTH: Medium

92

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROCKY PATEL DECADE LONSDALE
Voluminous amounts of smoke pour out of this slim cigar with each puff. It's an earthy, herbal smoke showing notes of sage, anise and coffee bean before a finish that tastes distinctly like buttered toast.
U.S.: $10.55 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

ASHTON 8-9-8
The leather and citrus notes of this lonsdale become nutty before transitioning to a sweet nougat and marzipan finish.
U.S.: $9.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild

90

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: OCTOBER 2017

MONTECRISTO NO. 1
A slim smoke with a tan wrapper and slightly firm draw. Notes of sweet tea and honey become cedary and tangy with nutty touches of pecan and a slightly salty finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £21.80 STRENGTH: Medium

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MY FATHER CEDROS DELUXE CERVANTES
The lush draw of this toothy lonsdale, delivers a woody, spicy smoke supported by a foundation of leather and a rich nuttiness.
U.S.: $8.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., MEXICO
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

PARTAGAS NO. 1
A slender cigar topped with a round head. It draws and burns evenly, exhibiting a solid core of oak and leather with tangy notes of citrus and hints of black pepper. The finish is flinty.
U.S.: $8.79 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 5/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

DON DIEGO LONSDALE
Golden-brown in color, this lonsdale imparts a toasty smoke with hints of peach tea, saffron and a tangy touch of lemon meringue.
U.S.: $5.18 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

89

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: INDONESIA

ROMEO Y JULIETA 1875
CEDRO DELUXE NO. 1
The large pores of this grayish cigar give it a rustic appearance. It's a tangy smoke full of citrus and lemon peel notes, a touch of acidity and a bit of sweetness.
U.S.: $7.38 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

89

U.S.A.
RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 6 3/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

TATUAJE CABINET HAVANA CAZADORES
Long and thin with an oily wrapper and perfect draw. Its dense creamy smoke is full of leather, black pepper and a bit of char. Hints of mustard seed appear on the finish.
U.S.: $11.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ARTURO FUENTE SELECCION PRIVADA NO. 1 MADURO
Near black and softly pressed with glue spots and a scaly cap. Muted hints of licorice and hazelnut become more pronounced before the herbal, woody finish.
U.S.: $6.57 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

FOUR KICKS SELECCIÓN NO. 5
Topped with a four-seam cap, this dark lonsdale starts sweet with notes of molasses, coconut and maple, but the smoke is gritty in texture and leaves a slightly chemical aftertaste.
U.S.: $8.70 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN 1964 ANNIVERSARY SERIES SUPERIOR
Light and papery at first, this box-pressed lonsdale becomes a bit weightier with notes of cedar and almond. The draw and burn are even throughout.
U.S.: $11.30 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 45 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PUNCH PUNCH EMS
The initial mintiness of this cigar dissipates to usher in notes of earth, coffee bean and a yeasty touch of bread. The finish is muddled.
U.S.: $5.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

THE GRIFFIN'S NO. 300
A bright, cedary cigar covered in a claro wrapper. Floral notes and hints of earth and toffee also come through, with a touch of mustiness.
U.S.: $10.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild

88

miscellaneous

Short, fat and stubby cigars tend to make up the miscellaneous category, but unusually long lanceros, twisted-up culebras and other oddities are just as welcome. The Illusione Cruzado Short Robusto from Nicaragua is the top smoke in this line-up of cigar misfits, as it scored 92 points. For a small cigar, it's full of spice and sweetness, making it the perfect size when time is limited. Five cigars from various countries scored 90 points: two Cubans (Cohiba Medio Siglo, Romeo y Julieta Petit Churchill); two Dominicans (Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Trés Mystique, Nat Sherman Timeless Collection Super Lancero) and the La Palina LP Number 1 Petit Corona, which is made in Honduras.

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 4 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ILLUSIONE CRUZADO SHORT ROBUSTO
The punchy, chewy smoke of this short cigar exhibits an elegant interplay of raisin sweetness, cinnamon and a piquant, red pepper spiciness. Complex and delicious.
U.S.: $8.35 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ASHTON VIRGIN SUN GROWN TRÉS MYSTIQUE
This dark little cigar forms a gray, flaky ash as it burns. It's a toasty smoke with hints of licorice, spice and vanilla that lead to a sweet, maple finish.
U.S.: $10.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

90

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2016

COHIBA MEDIO SIGLO
Short and squat with a flat head and neat cap. It's woody and spicy at first but becomes quite nutty showing notes of cocoa powder and minerals.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £27.70 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: COSTA RICA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA PALINA LP NUMBER 1 PETIT CORONA
The woody smoke of this small, well-made cigar is fortified by leathery notes and a touch of licorice. The finish is long and resonant.
U.S.: $7.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

NAT SHERMAN TIMELESS COLLECTION SUPER LANCERO
This long, skinny cigar burns slow and evenly. Its toasty smoke unfolds to show an almond nuttiness with touches of honey, graham cracker and anise.
U.S.: $11.65 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2015

ROMEO Y JULIETA PETIT CHURCHILL
A salty-and-spicy smoke whose leathery qualities are brought together by notes of coffee and walnuts, all making for a hearty cigar.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.70 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP., PERU
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

AVO SYNCRO NICARAGUA SHORT ROBUSTO
A box-pressed robusto that offers a predominantly earthy smoke accompanied by notes of anise, vanilla and wheat.
U.S.: $8.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: INDONESIA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PAPPY VAN WINKLE TRADITION CORONITA
Minty at first, this little cigar becomes more toasty with earthy touches of barnyard and honeyed wood. A slow starter.
U.S.: $14.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MAY 2015

PARTAGÁS SERIE D NO. 5
Notes of wood and earth come in and out, as do hints of fruit, herbs and black pepper, resulting in a slightly muddled finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £20.00 STRENGTH: Medium

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 58 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA, DOM. REP., PERU, U.S.A./PENN. BROADLEAF
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

PSYKO SEVEN GORDITO
A primarily woody, oaky cigar with some herbal undertones and a boozy, Armagnac sweetness.
U.S.: $8.48 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 3 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR, NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

A. FLORES GRAN RESERVA 1975 DESFLORADO HALF CORONA
Tannish in color, this little smoke is nutty and spicy with woody undertones, but it burns a bit hot, causing a charry finish.
U.S.: $5.09 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

87

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 58 LENGTH: 3"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

NUB CONNECTICUT 358
Short and fat with a tan wrapper, this stub of a cigar smokes evenly, showing a peppery smoke with hints of lemon zest and wood, but the finish is a bit dry and charry.
U.S.: $7.14 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

87

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: COLOMBIA, NICARAGUA, MEXICO, HONDURAS
BINDER: COSTA RICA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ALEC BRADLEY MAXX NANO
A predominantly woody, spicy smoke with some lingering tangy notes that become a bit harsh. The cigar is short, dark and oily.
U.S.: $5.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 45 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

COHIBA NICARAGUA N45
Strong and powerful from the first puff, this short, fat robusto starts with notes of oak and coffee that quickly become bitter and harsh.
U.S.: $11.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

83

robustos

Though not exactly one of the most popular brands, the Cuban Vegas Robaina Famoso scored 93 points, one of the top performers of the entire issue. It's named after the famous tobacco farm once owned by the late Alejandro Robaina and now in the hands of his grandson, Hirochi. The farm has become a tourist destination for cigar fans, but the brand symbolizes the Robaina farm in name only. Habanos makes no claim or assertion that the tobacco in the Vegas Robaina brand is from any specific farm, Robaina's or otherwise. Regardless, this Famoso is everything a classic Cuban cigar should be: sweet in the right places, savory in the right places, and distinct enough to represent one of the finest tobacco appellations in the world. The Matilde Serena Robusto scored 91 points and is made in the Dominican Republic at Jochy Blanco's Tabacalera Palma factory. The brand is owned by tobacco veteran José Seijas and his son Enrique. Two cigars scored 90 points: the Casa Turrent Serie 1942 Robusto, which contains mostly Mexican tobacco, and the Montecristo Epic Craft Cured Robusto, produced in Nicaragua by the Plasencias.

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2017

VEGAS ROBAINA FAMOSO
First puffs of this robusto are floral with mineral notes, but it soon segues into a nutty, creamy smoke full of leather and cocoa intonations with a bit of spice.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £19.30 STRENGTH: Medium

93

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MATILDE SERENA ROBUSTO
Sweet notes of wood, walnut and citrus flow freely through the lush draw of this robusto, which leaves the sweet impression of malted chocolate on the palate.
U.S.: $7.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

91

MEXICO
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, MEXICO
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: MEXICO

CASA TURRENT SERIE 1942 ROBUSTO
Sharply trunk pressed and tightly packed with tobacco. Citrus notes of orange peel swell on the palate, becoming more intense over the cigar's sweeter hints of caramel and oaky core.
U.S.: $8.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

MONTECRISTO EPIC CRAFT CURED ROBUSTO
The bright cedar notes of this well-made robusto meld pleasantly with notes of earth, citrus and toasted wheat before its rich and earthy finish.
U.S.: $14.65 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

601 RED LABEL HABANO ROBUSTO
A well-made robusto with a toothy, medium claro wrapper. It's a woody smoke, full of oaky, cedary notes that take on hints of cashew and cumin, but the finish is light and herbal.
U.S.: $7.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

EL GALAN SEMILLA CUBANA HABANO ROBUSTO

A large cap covers the flat head of this robusto, which has a bit of a firm draw. Its earthy and woody notes hint of brown sugar and warm bread before leaving a walnut aftertaste.

U.S.: $5.40 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

FUENTE FUENTE OPUSX ROBUSTO

First puffs of this robusto burst with spicy notes of clove and cinnamon before a honey and graham cracker sweetness and a smoky, woody finish.

U.S.: $14.26 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

89

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO

DIAMOND CROWN BLACK DIAMOND RADIANT

An earthy, cedary robusto with notes of cocoa and licorice, however a persistent chariness offset the score.

U.S.: $17.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: CAMEROON
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

FRATELLO ORO ROBUSTO

A tan robusto with a slightly airy draw. It's tangy and spicy, with notes of white pepper and lemon. Some intermittent sweetness leads to a straw-and-hay finish.

U.S.: $8.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

88

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2018

MONTECRISTO LÍNEA 1935 DUMAS

Finely constructed with a three-seam cap, this robusto is a predominantly woody smoke with hints of cinnamon and a sweet note of pecan sandie cookie.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £26.60 STRENGTH: Medium

88

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2014

POR LARRAÑAGA PICADORES

There are some greenish veins on the wrapper of this tawny robusto, which draws and burns evenly. It's a sweet-and-spicy cigar with notes of ginger snap, tangy earth and almond paste.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £19.30 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

LA AURORA 1962 COROJO ROBUSTO

Covered in a reddish wrapper, this cigar begins with some notes of burnt mesquite and black pepper, but the finish is earthy and slightly vegetal.

U.S.: $5.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

87

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA, U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

QUESADA SELECCIÓN ESPAÑA ROBUSTO

Tawny colored in appearance, this robusto smokes evenly showing a floral character underscored by notes of tart cedar.

U.S.: $9.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

TOP SCORES

93 **E.P. Carrillo Encore Majestic**
Dominican Republic • $11.50 • Corona Gorda • Medium

93 **Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure Especial**
Cuba • £27.80 • Corona Gorda • Medium

93 **Vegas Robaina Famoso**
Cuba • £19.30 • Robusto • Medium

92 **Alec Bradley Black Market Estelí Toro**
Nicaragua • $8.50 • Corona Gorda • Full

92 **Cohiba Siglo V (Tubo)**
Cuba • £40.30 • Lonsdale • Medium

92 **Illusione Cruzado Short Robusto**
Nicaragua • $8.35 • Miscellaneous • Medium-Full

92 **Mombacho Liga Maestro Hermoso**
Nicaragua • $9.95 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

92 **Montecristo No. 2**
Cuba • £27.00 • Figurado • Medium

92 **Ramon Allones by AJ Fernandez Churchill**
Nicaragua • $14.00 • Churchill • Full

92 **Rocky Patel Vintage 1992 Churchill**
Honduras • $10.10 • Churchill • Medium

92 **Villiger San'Doro Colorado Churchill**
Nicaragua • $9.56 • Churchill • Medium

TOP VALUES

91 **Oliva Serie G Churchill**
Nicaragua • $6.25 • Churchill • Medium-Full

89 **Don Diego Lonsdale**
Dominican Republic • $5.18 • Lonsdale • Mild-Medium

89 **El Galan Semilla Cubana Habano Robusto**
Nicaragua • $5.40 • Robusto • Medium

88 **Punch Punch EMS**
Honduras • $5.99 • Lonsdale • Medium-Full

MILDER CIGARS

91 **Matilde Serena Robusto**
Dominican Republic • $7.99 • Robusto • Mild-Medium

90 **Ashton 8-9-8**
Dominican Republic • $9.75 • Lonsdale • Mild

89 **Don Diego Lonsdale**
Dominican Republic • $5.18 • Lonsdale • Mild-Medium

89 **Romeo y Julieta 1875 Cedro Deluxe No. 1**
Dominican Republic • $7.38 • Lonsdale • Mild-Medium

88 **Fratello Oro Robusto**
Dominican Republic • $8.50 • Robusto • Mild-Medium

MEDIUM-BODIED CIGARS

90 **L'Atelier LAT56**
Nicaragua • $10.00 • Corona Gorda • Medium

90 **Montecristo No. 1**
Cuba • £21.80 • Lonsdale • Medium

90 **My Father Cedros Deluxe Cervantes**
Nicaragua • $8.90 • Lonsdale • Medium

90 **Partagas No. 1**
Dominican Republic • $8.79 • Lonsdale • Medium

89 **La Aroma de Cuba Churchill**
Nicaragua • $6.70 • Churchill • Medium

STRONGER SMOKES

91 **Diesel Whiskey Row Churchill**
Nicaragua • $8.49 • Churchill • Full

91 **Montecristo Línea 1935 Leyenda**
Cuba • £39.30 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

91 **Plasencia Cosecha 146 San Luis**
Honduras • $13.50 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

91 **Rocky Patel 15th Anniversary Toro (Tubo)**
Nicaragua • $12.40 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

90 **Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Trés Mystique**
Dominican Republic • $10.25 • Miscellaneous • Full

90 **La Flor Dominicana Air Bender Chisel**
Dominican Republic • $9.70 • Figurado • Full

CIGAR AFICIONADO'S 100-POINT SCALE

Classic 95–100 • Outstanding 90–94 • Very good to excellent 80–89 • Average to good commercial quality 70–79
Don't waste your money 0-69 • Not available N/A • *Note: all prices are manufacturers' suggested retail, before taxes.*

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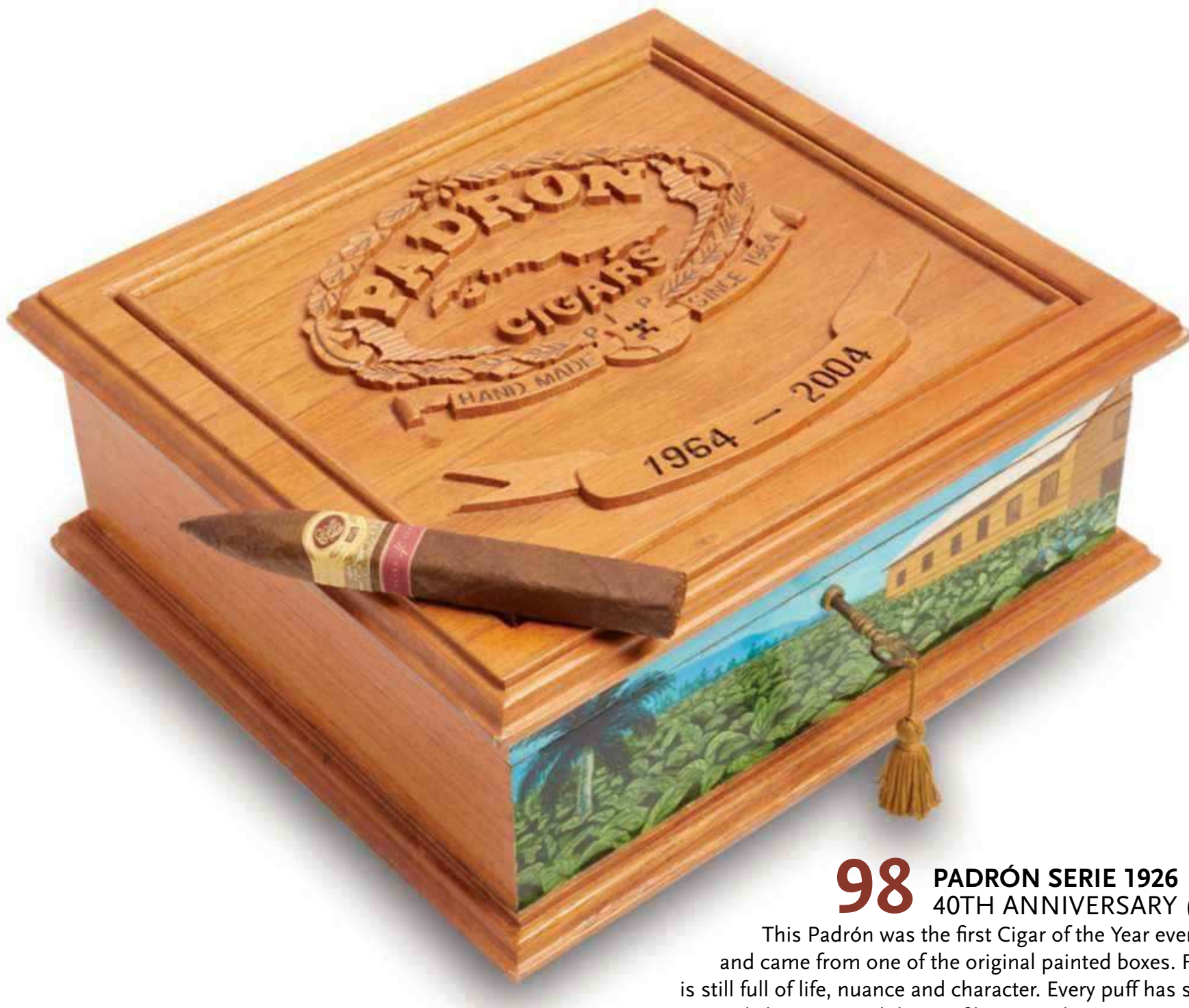
A TASTING OF VINTAGE CIGARS



98 **PADRÓN SERIE 1926**
40TH ANNIVERSARY (2004)

This Padrón was the first Cigar of the Year ever bestowed by this magazine, and came from one of the original painted boxes. Fourteen years later, the cigar is still full of life, nuance and character. Every puff has subtle, yet delicious notes of nutmeg and chestnuts with hints of licorice. The wrapper is pristine and the cigar has maintained its box-pressed shape perfectly. A memorable smoke. —*Marvin R. Shanken*

98 **PUNCH**
CHURCHILL (1991)

Large Punch cigars age extremely well. Most that I've sampled have come from cabinets, but this has been resting in a dress box for 27 years. It's rich and refined, still brimming with flavor and with plenty of power. Along with hearty notes of coffee bean and honeyed wood, there's a bit of pencil lead and a wisp of leather. A sublime smoke that still has plenty of life remaining. —*David Savona*

97 **TATUAJE**
"A" UNO (2007)

More than 10 years on, this nine-inch "A" is a powerhouse that is rounding into a perfectly balanced smoke, but with years of life left. It has a perfect draw and burn. The earthy profile is filled with coffee bean and dark chocolate flavors. The finish has a pleasant mineral overtone with a sweet, dark berry note which goes on and on. A great cigar full of vibrant tobacco that's aging very well. —*Gordon Mott*

93 **ROMEO Y JULIETA CEDROS DE LUXE** NO. 2 (1993)

A solid Cuban corona in a cedar sleeve with no soft spots. Oils seep through the wrapper, which is medio-claro. The draw is substantial, and the burn is perfect—even, cool and slow. It's dry and woody at first, but warms to show a creamy, nutty character of almonds and hazelnuts. Touches of chocolate malt sweeten the finish, but the smoke maintains its creamy mouthfeel the entire time. —*Gregory Mottola*

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The Running Man

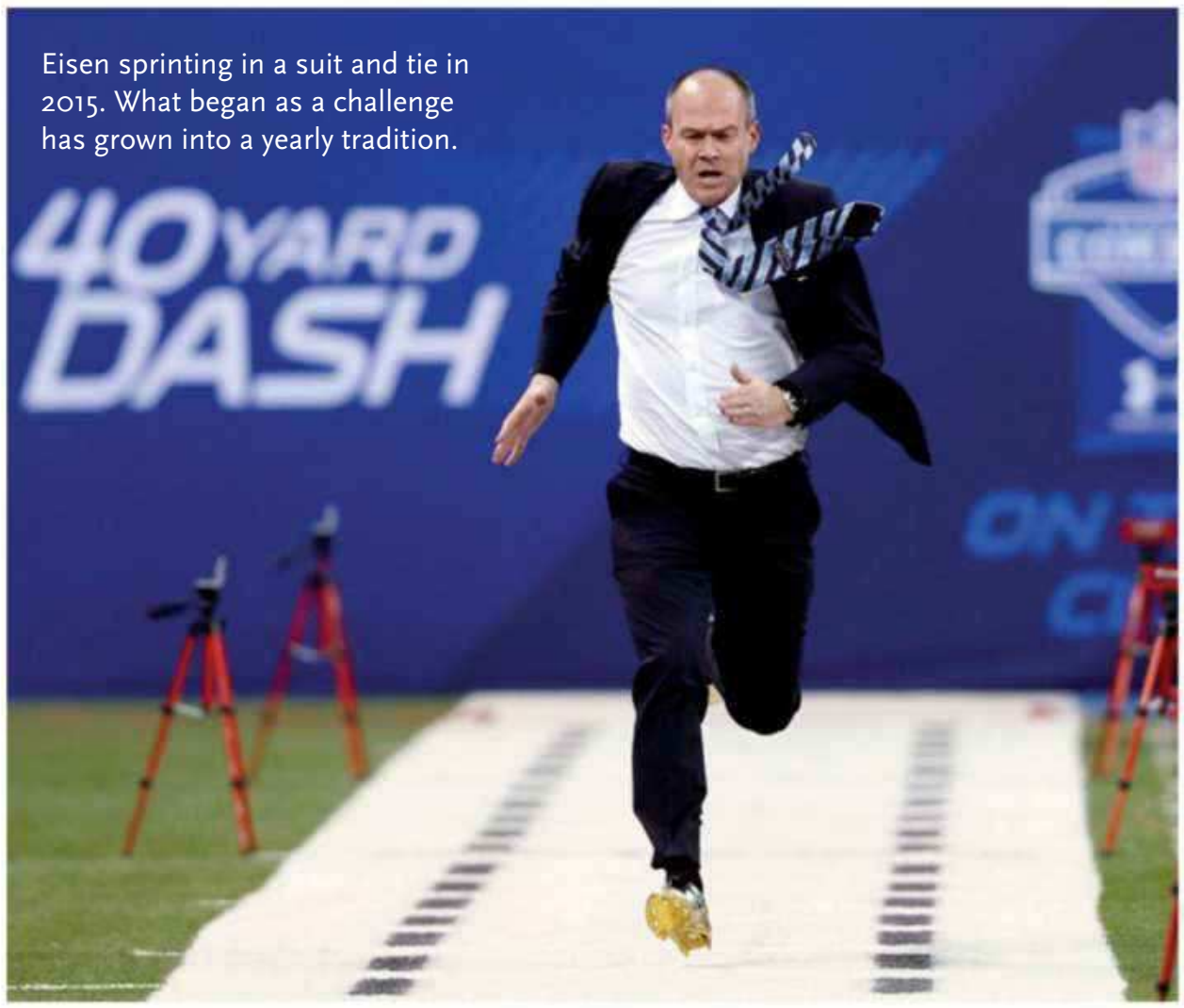
RICH EISEN HAS BEEN TALKING SPORTS WITH A HEFTY DOSE OF HUMOR FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS

BY JACK BETTRIDGE • PORTRAIT BY JIM WRIGHT

"I definitely don't smoke cigars to train for the 40, but I definitely don't train at all."

Rich Eisen, sportscaster, face of the NFL Network, talk-show host and all-around funny guy, is removing his makeup after recording his daily show. He's preparing to head for Los Angeles International to fly to Dallas to cover the NFL draft for the 13th time. He starts to riff on a question about his cigar regimen vis-à-vis his yearly 40-yard dash at the NFL Scouting Combine. Prompted by a challenge from running back Terrell Davis, it has become an annual charity benefitting St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, in which Eisen runs in a suit, shirt and tie.

"Maybe I should run with a cigar. It might change my luck. If I'm running down the track with my Partagás Serie



Eisen sprinting in a suit and tie in 2015. What began as a challenge has grown into a yearly tradition.

D No. 4—my favorite robusto—would it be lit is the question." He ponders the physics of sprinting with a stogie as he sits in the DirecTV studios in Los Angeles. "If it's lit, I don't run fast enough to put it out. But I don't know if the NFL would appreciate if I ashed all over the place."

When it's pointed out that his performance actually has been improving (his best times—sub six seconds—have all been recorded in recent years), he switches subjects to another gustatory passion. "So I'm like a fine wine—my vintage is improving with each passing year."

Sports delivered with a healthy dollop of humor has been the trademark of Eisen since he first broke on the national broadcasting scene as a 26-year-old in 1996 with ESPN. Comedy could have been his singular calling, as he dabbled in it as an undergrad at the University of Michigan. "I did stand-up comedy there for three years and thought I might do that. I did it for a couple weekends and I found I just wasn't cut out for talking to 20 people, making very little money and being around comedy clubs [while I figured] out how to do that."

"I got a taste of what it was to write and do stand-up comedy. I always wanted to marry the two. I always wanted to crack that code."

But another collegiate extracurricular activity captivated him as well. "I also worked for my school newspaper, the *Michigan Daily*, and I covered Bo Schembechler's final season there. I got a taste of what it was to write and do stand-up comedy. I always wanted to marry the two. I always wanted to crack that code."

He tried the scribe part first. "I got a call from my hometown newspaper editor the day of my graduation. So I wrote for the *Staten Island Advance*. And man I sure wasn't cut out for hard news. That just wasn't my bag. I covered local community boards, the Koch administration, transportation, environment, the cops beat. I would always have this walkie-talkie with the codes being blurted out. I would think something was a double homicide and it would turn out to be a cat in a tree instead."

Eisen returned to school at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism in Chicago, and this time he focused on becoming a sportscaster. "It was really what I wanted to do growing up," Eisen says. "When I realized I couldn't hit a curveball or make a jump shot or do anything like that, I realized that I needed to talk about it."

Eisen brought his sense of humor to his first gig, at ABC affiliate KRCR-TV, in the remote northern California market of Redding. Asked to cover a rodeo, the young sports reporter did a one-on-one interview—with one of the bulls.

After building up a portfolio, Eisen submitted a tape to a headhunter "under the category of it never hurts/what the hell," he says. The headhunter called back a few months later, asking for more. A network wanted to see more, and it turned out to be ESPN, the King Kong of the sports TV world. He was hired in 1996.

"I was aged 26. I went straight from Redding, California, to the desk at ESPN."

For Eisen, who had watched ESPN from his college frat house as Chris Berman reported on the NFL draft, it was the promised land. "Just the ride of my life," he says. He would rub shoulders with sportscasters whose style he'd admired, such as Berman, Keith Olbermann and Craig Kilborn. Like Eisen, Kilborn had come from a small California market and flourished on "SportsCenter," and as an ESPN rookie Eisen questioned if he could make the same transition. "I had no idea if it was possible. I thought it could be. And it did happen. They threw me right into the deep end of the pool."

The deep end included a pairing with Stuart Scott, who had arrived two years earlier. Eisen had watched Scott on television, and the two became close, developing a charming on-air camaraderie. Scott died of cancer in 2015 at the age of 49. "One of the most joyful, full of life individuals I have ever come across," Eisen said during an emotion-charged TV segment the day that Scott died. "As you go to bed tonight," he said, choking back tears, "flip your pillow over to the cool side," he said, using Scott's most famous catchphrase.

Back in 2003, as ESPN was changing its format from highlights with storytelling banter to analysis, Eisen left to become the first on-air personality for the fledgling NFL Network. He would soon develop his annual 40-yard dash in a suit and tie. "No one should be subjected to see me wearing spandex," he has quipped about his reasoning. It's also his work uniform, although this day he's wearing slacks, a sports shirt and a crewneck sweater

JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

as he welcomes Jon Hamm of "Mad Men" fame, who is plugging his new movies *Beirut* and *Tag*—all punctuated with good-natured ribbing about sports.

Despite Eisen's connection to the NFL, most of today's talk is directed to baseball (the Cardinals-Cubs rivalry) and hockey (and the failure of Hamm's favorite team the Blues to win a Stanley Cup). They first met long before Hamm found fame as Don Draper. "I had gone out with some friends," recalls the actor. "Someone said, 'That guy from "sports centers" is coming,' and I said, 'Oh cool! I like sports, at least I'll have someone to talk to.'" Eisen's wife-to-be, the former Suzy Shuster, was there and that is how they met. The rest is history. "I was a bartender and a waiter. He was a Staten Island kid who done good."

"Conversation is king. A good conversation trumps a half-hearted argument."

Eisen often has celebrities on his eponymous show, such as Matt Damon (right) and "Saturday Night Live" alum Bill Hader (above).

The two share a comfortable on-air presence. "I like Rich's sensibility, back from the old "SportsCenter" days. His sense of humor and intelligence and humility and genuine interest in what he's talking about shows through," says Hamm. "When I come here we talk about sports, we talk about this, we talk about that. It's always easy. It's the best kind of interview show to do because it just flows."

It's the kind of interview Eisen prefers to do. "It's comfortable," he says. "That's what I want to have, a fun conversation. I find that a lot of celebrities when they go on panel talk shows feel like they have to create humor or create the story. With Jon I know there are a couple of sports stories you can tell, you can show his clips and go from there."

Being comfortable with friends off screen is an opportune time for cigars, says Eisen, who enjoys smoking at poker nights and on the roof of West Hollywood's Soho House. "I smoke as a treat or a celebration," he says. "Normally I like to get out of Dodge right after a long event cause I've got three kids at home. But finishing the draft I will probably have a nice glass of wine with my guys and a cigar to sort of cap it off."

A certain relaxed quality pervades the show, which is partly by design: "What I'm trying to do with this show right now is bring an entertainment aspect and comedy feel to an all-sports platform, and on occasion keep my journalism hat on and break news. But I would rather have a two-segment conversation like the one I had with Jon Hamm today than a deep dive with a fellow journalist on the subject of the NFL draft. And so far so good."

The show, which is produced by AT&T, is simulcast on more than 150 radio stations. With its radio presence and video podcasts at richeisenshow.com, the production is an odd mix. "It's different," says Eisen. "It's technically a TV show on radio rather than a lot of other simulcasts that are more like radio shows on TV. All I know is I'm enjoying it."

Material like the Jon Hamm interview will be sliced up into different bite-size pieces for the app, tweets and Facebook posts. "That's to me the metric, to have a digital platform and get more and more people watching it if they haven't already seen it live."

And there's always laughter. The host has cultivated a coterie of comedians and a relationship with website Funny or Die to continue the mirth. Eisen's approach—the lighthearted conversation, the satires on the sometimes oh-so-serious reportage—is a fresh departure from the typical sports talk show in which experts bicker over what cornerback is the league's best or which rule change would improve the game. And it's one that he revels in.

"Conversation is king," he says. "A good conversation trumps a half-hearted argument." ❖

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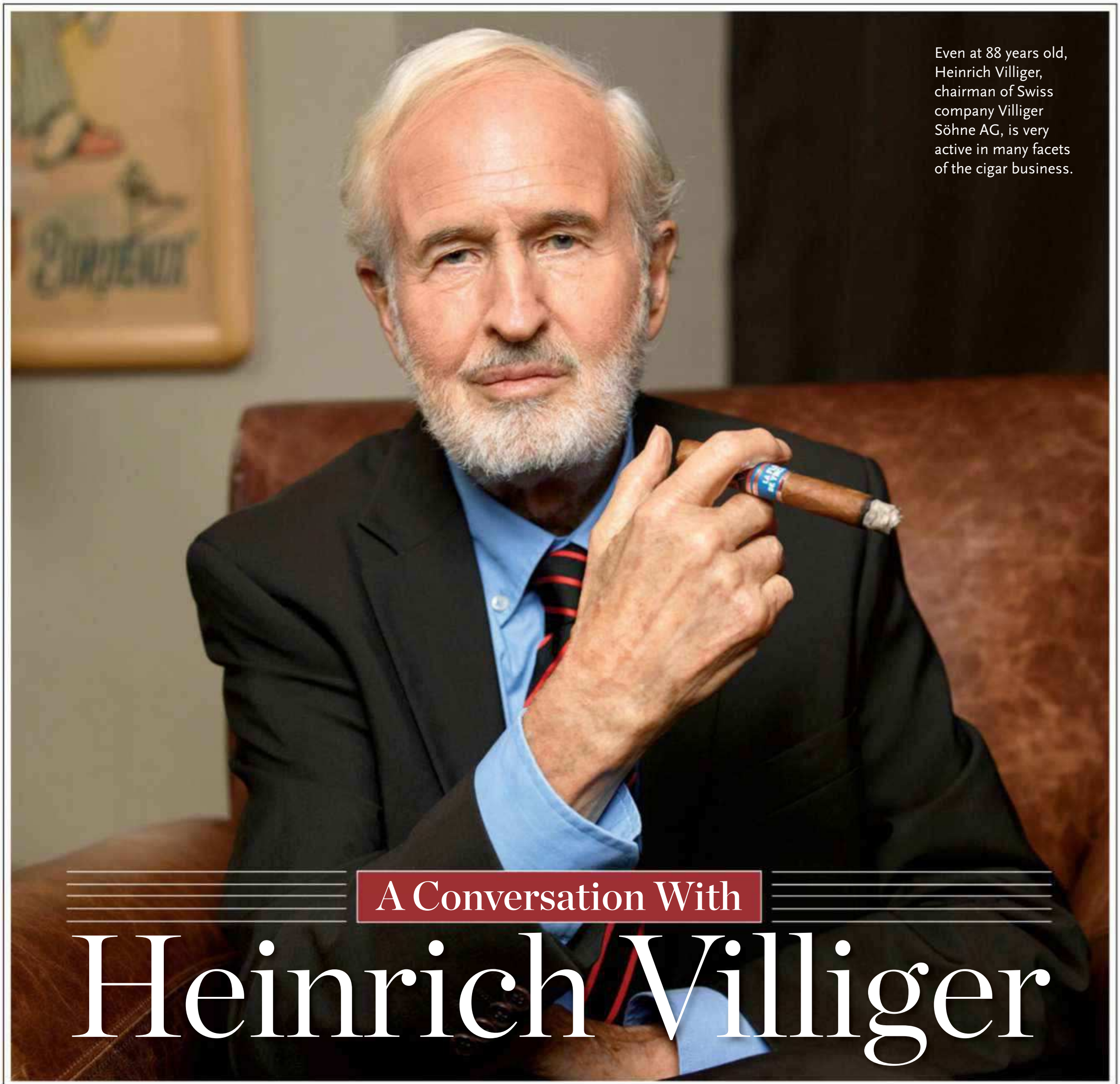


Even at 88 years old, Heinrich Villiger, chairman of Swiss company Villiger Söhne AG, is very active in many facets of the cigar business.

DAVID YELLEN

A Conversation With

Heinrich Villiger

Slender and soft spoken, Heinrich Villiger may be one of the most formidable players in the cigar industry. He owns Villiger Söhne AG, a massive cigar operation based in Pfeffikon, Switzerland that produces more than a billion dry cured, European-style cigars every year. He is the exclusive importer and distributor of Cuban cigars to five countries in Europe. And he owns a growing portfolio of premium cigar brands sold in the United States, most notably Villiger La Flor de Ynclan, which was named the No. 10 Cigar of the Year in 2017 by this magazine. Active and sharp, the 88-year-old came to Cigar Aficionado's offices in New York City to have a smoke and share his stories of a career in tobacco that goes back to the 1950s, when he first visited Cuba, a country he has traveled to more than 100 times. Executive editor David Savona and senior editor Greg Mottola sat down with "Mr. Villiger" for a fascinating lesson in cigar history.

CIGAR AFICIONADO: How did you get started in the business?
VILLIGER: My grandfather started the company in 1888. He was in charge of finance for one of the big cheroot companies. Then he decided to open a cigar factory himself, and he became independent. His boss gave him a credit to start his own company. In 1902 he died when he was 42, so my grandmother managed the company for about 16 years until my father and my uncle continued, but my uncle had no children so my uncle sold his shares to my father. And my father and myself continued together until my father passed away. I was the only shareholder.

Q: What did you do in your earliest days in the business?
A: There were auctions for cigarette and cigar tobacco, not anymore for cigars, but the auctioneering was very quick, and there was a little sign if you wanted to buy one basket of tobacco, was maybe a hundred pounds, 200 pounds. The farmers usually put the good quality on top and the low quality inside, and my job was to follow the auctions. I'd lift up the tobacco, pull it out, put it on the top and compare the quality. If it was not the same, I could tear up the ticket.

Q: So it was tobacco that you had already purchased by bid but after you inspected it, you could cancel the bid?
A: Yes, cancel the bid. I had all the farmers on my back. I came with my schooling from Switzerland. They didn't understand me. I didn't understand the farmers with their slang. But I did this for a whole season. Then I was sorting Connecticut Shade in Hartford, and then I sorted broadleaf tobacco in Massachusetts. To learn, we have to do the work. That's how I started.

Q: What year was this?
A: It was 1951. The auction was for flue-cured tobacco in South Carolina, North Carolina. Then, in winter, came the burley, the Kentucky. We bought a lot of dark-fired Kentucky. Then it got too expensive and we bought dark-fired tobaccos in Malawi. Malawi's economy depends on tobacco.

Q: Were you exporting Villiger cigars to the U.S. at the time?
A: Shortly after World War II we started to export our machine-made cigars to the U.S. We had an importer in New York. Many American soldiers knew our products from their sojourns in Germany.

Q: Do you use tobacco from Malawi for your Villiger dry-cured product?
A: Yes. You need a lot of wood to dry it, to cure it. We buy a lot, we need it. Last year we made 1.5 billion units, so we need a lot of tobacco.

Q: Where is your biggest market?
A: Germany. Our German market share is maybe around 70 percent.

Q: You must have to buy enormous amounts of tobacco.
A: We buy a lot from many countries. We buy a lot of tobacco from Cuba, but Cuba has always been exporting leaf. It's good tobacco, it's good leaf. We buy from the south, we buy from Vuelta Abajo—that's in the west part of the island—and we buy also from the east part.

Q: Villiger has a long relationship with Cuba, and as you said, you use Cuban tobacco in some of your machine-made cigars. Can you describe how that relationship began?
A: Cuban leaf tobacco is considered as one of the best cigar tobaccos in the world. But since the establishment of our company by my grandfather in 1888, we were and are using Cuban leaf tobacco in a substantial part of our different [machine-made] blends. The most important buyer of Cuban leaf, and also Cuban cigars, in the past has always been the United States.

Q: But that's no longer the case.
A: Things changed dramatically when the U.S. enacted the embargo against Cuba. From one day to another Cuba lost its most important market. Then Cuban delegates from Cubatabaco started touring around the world looking for new markets. They came also to see us and presented the high quality of their leaf, grades which were not known to us before. They invited me to visit Cuba and to inspect their tobacco in their processing plants and warehouses. And they offered good prices. This was the beginning of our relationship with Cuba. We increased substantially the share of Cuban tobacco in all our blends and became one of the largest buyers of Cuban tobacco.

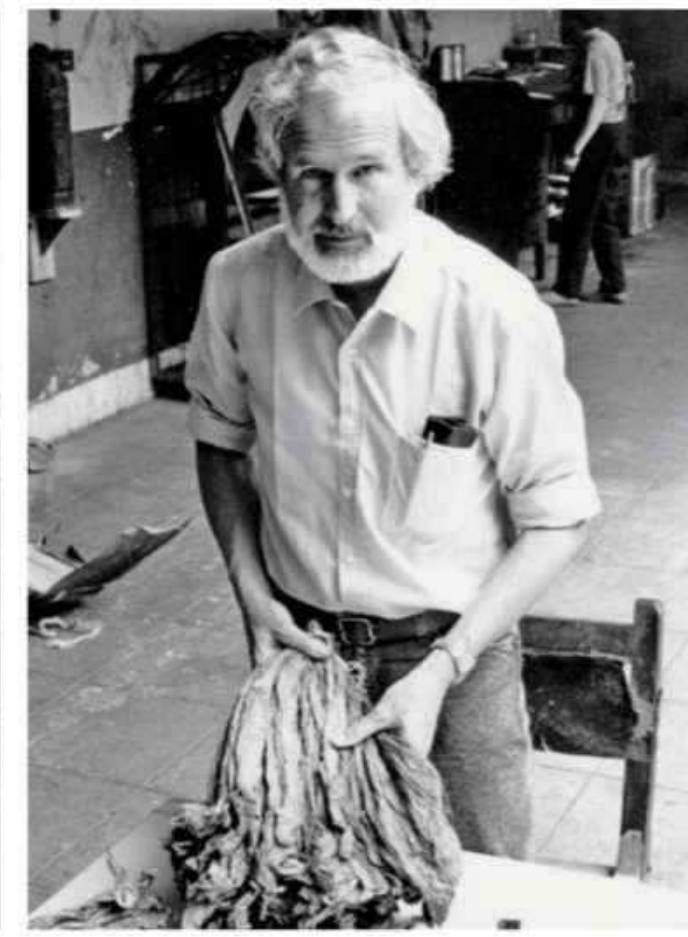
Q: You don't put Cuban tobacco in your premium cigars, do you? Or anything that comes to the U.S.?
A: No.

Q: In addition to your own cigar manufacturing company, you import and distribute Cuban cigars in Europe. How many countries do you distribute Cuban cigars to?
A: We have two companies with Habanos. One in Switzerland, that's Intertabak. Then we have 5th Avenue in Germany.

Q: How did that come about?
A: Thirty or 40 years ago, the cigar image was negative. The main cigars sold were 30-cent cigars. Nobody dared to increase the cost, so the quality was going down to save money and this made the image of the cigar quite negative. Then I had an advertising man, he was excellent, he said, "Mr. Villiger, you must lift the image of the cigar. The cigar must have a better image as a luxury product."

Q: How did you do it?
A: I recommended we make a mail-order catalog business with luxury goods—the best cigars, the best watches, Swiss watches—so, in 1976 we added to our mass-production business a 40-page catalog of all luxury products. And then we needed a name for this organization, and the most famous street for luxury products was 5th Avenue [in New York]. So we called this organization 5th Avenue Tobacco Gallery. We had cigars, we had pipes, pipe tobacco, the best of the best.

"Things changed dramatically when the U.S. enacted the embargo against Cuba. From one day to another, Cuba lost its most important market."



Villiger with legendary grower Alejandro Robaina (left photo) on the porch of his Cuban farmhouse. Right, Villiger inspects tobacco in Cuba, circa 1988.

Q: Were you doing business directly with Habanos at that time?
A: No. That was only for us. But then Habanos had a president named Francisco Padrón. I think he was the first president of Cubatabaco. Padrón came to me and said, "Look, we have a problem, we have taken over all those private companies." Each country had four or five distributors for Cuban cigars—one for Partagás, one for Montecristo, and so on—and he said that logistically that was a problem.

Q: How many Cuban cigar distributors were in Germany at the time?
A: In Germany there were two or three. In England there were four or five. In Switzerland, there were a couple. So Padrón invited all the distributors to a meeting in Zurich airport. He said to the people there—about 40 people from all around—"We cannot have three or four distributors in each country. One! One distributor per country, and he gets everything. All the brands. But we want the share of 50 percent."

Q: Habanos wanted 50 percent of the distribution?
A: Yes. But the distributors were very reluctant and they refused. Padrón came to me and asked, "Villiger, how are you doing it?" We were not an importer. Then we integrated and we stopped with our catalog business, and then 5th Avenue Products Trading GmbH became the [Habanos] agency for Germany. The other [distributors] said to me, "Villiger, you are a traitor."

Q: What year was 5th Avenue established as the sole importer for Cuban cigars in Germany?
A: I think it was 1989.

Q: And Intertabak distributes to Switzerland. Do you own Intertabak too?
A: The idea of Padrón was 50-50. In Switzerland, it was 50 percent Habanos, but what about the other 50 percent? He said, "I have another friend, another good friend in Switzerland, the Levy family." It's a family in Geneva. Very nice people. So in Switzerland, we have 25 percent, and Levy has 25 percent. Better 25 than nothing.

Q: As a distributor, you sell to the tobacconists, including the La Casa del Habano shops?
A: Yes, and the Casa has everything. The Casa must have the whole range. We are short on the special editions and limited editions, but the Casas have them. The Casas have priority.

Q: You say you are short on special editions, but I remember you mentioning that you got 10 of those expensive Cohiba humidors, those big, 50th Anniversary humidors with the gold-leaf panels.
A: We sold 10. The retail price was 195,000 euros each ($228,000). That's for 50 cigars. You buy, of course, the humidor. It's a beautiful piece of furniture.

Q: Did you sell these humidors to any private collectors?
A: No. Just to the Casas del Habano.

Q: There's a rumor that some countries get preferential treatment and receive better quality cigars from Cuba than others. Have you found this to be true?
A: I am convinced that this rumor is not correct. Cuban cigars are sold worldwide with the same quality. The origin of presumed quality differences may come from inappropriate storage without enough ventilation and humidity.

Q: Tell me more about your first premium brand for Villiger, because that's a rather new venture given the company's long history.
A: The first premium brand was from Matias Maragoto [owner of the ABAM factory in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic]. I had a very good friend and he died a few years ago, Alfredo Perez, the owner of A.S.P. I asked if he could recommend a good company, and he recommended Matias. It's a nice factory. It's like a subsidiary, but we have no interest in the company.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VILLIGER

Heinrich Villiger shares stories with executive editor David Savona and senior editor Greg Mottola.

Q: What was the name of the brand?
A: It was Bock. Gustav Bock, a cigar manufacturer of German origin in Cuba, is said to be the inventor of the cigar band to identify his cigars. After the Revolution, the Cubans stopped producing a lot of different brands. Many were discontinued. Bock was discontinued. La Flor de Ynclan was discontinued. La Vencedora was discontinued, so we registered some of those brands. The lawyer from Imperial accused me of pirating. But a trademark, when it is not used for more than five years, is unprotected. If you don't use it, you lose it. I told him, "Look, if you have not used the brand for five years, that's not my problem, that's your problem."

Q: Wasn't Bock sold only in Europe?
A: Yes.

Q: What year did you launch Bock?
A: In 1998, in Germany and Switzerland.

Q: What about the other premium cigars that you sell in Europe?
A: We also have cigars from Nicaragua. We have San'Doro. It's a Latin name for the tobacco plant. The ships went to India and came back with tobacco, and this was the name. I created San'Doro. You have San' Doro from Nicaragua and one from Brazil. We started in Brazil many years ago. We called the company Tobajara, but nobody knew what that meant, so we changed our brands from Tobajara to Villiger do Brazil.

Q: Did you find it difficult to sell non-Cuban premium cigars in Europe?
A: Yes, because the Cubans—Montecristo, Partagás—had been on the market for 100 years. Nobody knows the new brands, so the new brand must have a story. The smoker wants to know the history of the brand.

Q: What are your observations on the U.S. premium cigar market?
A: It's a big market, and it's increasing. And, you know, last year, Nicaragua was No. 1. Some big European companies are coming now to Nicaragua too, like Vandermarliere, the Belgians who own and import Oliva. Oliva was then sold to Vandermarliere. Vandermarliere is quite aggressive.

Q: Isn't J. Cortez the company?
A: Yes, J. Cortez, but the family's name is Vandermarliere. They are one of our biggest competitors [for machine-made cigars]. They are very strong in France, but we have had bad luck in France. We have very little market share in France. It is a problematic market.

Q: In 2016, when you opened up your U.S. headquarters in Florida, you told us that machine-made cigars were 99 percent of your business, but that you hoped it would grow. So here we are, two years later.
A: Well of course, now it's more. Our core business is still the production of machine-made small cigars and cheroots. In value, the machine-made share is around 85 percent of our sales, the remaining 15 percent are handmade.

Q: From 1 percent of the business to 14—that's quite a change. How many premium cigars do you sell to the U.S. each year?
A: We sold approximately 1.2 million premium cigars during the first six months of this year in the U.S. market.

Q: The Villiger Flor de Ynclan was named the No. 10 Cigar of the Year by Cigar Aficionado for 2017. How has the U.S. market responded to Villiger's premium cigars like Flor de Ynclan?
A: We are satisfied with the reaction of the U.S. cigar trade and the U.S. cigar smokers to our range of premium cigars. They were, without exception, positive. This compliment is also due to the manufacturers of our cigars in the Dominican Republic and in Central America.

Q: What is your best-selling premium cigar brand?
A: The best sellers differ from one country to another. In the U.S. it is La Flor de Ynclan.

Q: Do you have children in the business?
A: I have on the board a daughter. She's a doctor in medicine. I have just elected on the board a grandson. I hope that we can keep it in the family. Villiger is privately owned. All shares are held by the family.

Q: Of all the premium cigars that you make, which is your personal favorite?
A: I very much like the Villiger San'Doro from Brazil. It's a Brazilian puro. Brazil has good tobacco.

Q: Given your success with machine-made cigars, why did you enter premium?
A: I believe in the premium cigar. There is potential for the category to grow. But usually you do what you like yourself. And I smoke only premium cigars.

Q: That was your incentive? Because you like to smoke premium cigars?
A: Yes. Because I like them. You should do in your life what you like. I started to work in our company at the age of 20 in the year 1950, that is 68 years ago, all fascinating. The most significant change is the success story of the premium cigar. ❖

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Cuba's Cigar Sommeliers

These trained cigar waiters recommend a brand, cut and light your cigar, then pick the perfect beverage to accompany your smoke BY GORDON MOTT

Darius Namdar of London's Mark's Club, the Habanos Sommelier of the year.

The meal at La Guarida, Havana's best private restaurant, was over, and everyone's thoughts turned to cigars. We asked to see the cigar selection. Marcelo Leonel Rodríguez approached the table with a wooden tray with dividers, each section filled with cigars: Montecristos, H. Upmanns, some Romeo y Julietas and a few Cohiba Siglo IIIs and IVs. His first question explored if we were regular smokers or not. The former Festival del Habano sommelier contestant asked what we had eaten for dinner, and what we wanted for an after-dinner drink. When I said I wanted an aged rum, preferably a Santiago 11-year-old, he pondered for a minute and suggested a Romeo y Julieta Wide Churchill. Being particular about my cigar, I declined his offer to light it, but the service was readily available.

While not as ubiquitous as wine sommeliers are today, the cigar waiter is more and more common in Cuba, and in some major cities like London, Dubai and Hong Kong. Their arrival on the fine-dining scene isn't just by chance. The Cuban government is supporting a training program, created and overseen by Fernando Fernandez, one of the country's leading cigar and spirits experts. Up to now, the sole professional cigar training was given by the Master Sommelier program, but it constituted a small part of their program.

"We are trying to enhance the tourist experience with Cuban culture," says Fernandez, puffing on a Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2. "And, tobacco is part of our culture. We wanted professionals educating people about it." He said that there are many restaurants in Havana that have cigar sommelier graduates including La Guarida, Castropol and El Templete, a government-run seafood restaurant where two women oversee the cigar service.

The Habanos Sommelier program started 15 years ago. The original program was designed by Fernandez, a gregarious, loudly opinionated man who loves cigars, and loves to talk about the best way to enjoy them. He earned a Wine and Spirits Education Trust diploma years ago. But he said he realized no similar teaching text existed for cigars. Using the same basic format of WSET's program of lectures, tastings and hands-on experience, he designed a sommelier course for cigars.

The entire course takes between 18 months to two years to complete, because most students have other jobs and the classes are given in sections. Each graduate receives about 480 hours of instruction, Fernandez says. He estimates that fewer than 25 percent of the students who begin the program, finish it. There are tests at each stage, which deal with all aspects of wine, spirits, tobacco and cigars, the latter divided into brands, service and beverage accompaniments. For instance, in 2016, 61 students began the program in April, and by October, only 23 were left, Fernandez says, and the course still had more than a year to go. Since inception, the program has graduated about

"If you want to learn Samba, you go to Brazil. If you want to learn about cigars, you go to Cuba."

Fernando Fernandez (left photo, seated second from left) started the Habanos Sommelier program. At right, Namdar presents to judge Gary Heathcott.

300 people, with more than 250 of them living and working in Cuba. He expects Habanos to begin offering the courses in other countries around the world, but for now, if a foreigner wants the official Habanos training, he must come to Cuba. And, there are several distributors around the world—including Hunters & Frankau in the United Kingdom—that train people using materials based on the Habanos course.

"First, we train them as a wine sommelier," Fernandez says. The students take classes in wine appreciation, wine service and restaurant operations. The detailed courses even show what type of glass to serve each type of wine (or spirits) using Riedel stemware. The training then shifts to tobacco. Fernandez says the students visit fields and farms, getting to know growers. They also are allowed entrance into factories that normally are closed to outsiders, where they smoke cigars with rollers and top tobacco men. "We teach them about how difficult it is to make a good cigar, and what goes into the construction," Fernandez says, "and then we teach them how to taste a cigar."

The next step, Fernandez says, is to study—"in depth"—all Habanos' brands. "There are 289 vitolas in 27 brands, and they have to know everything about each size," Fernandez says. "And, there are new ones every year that they have to learn about." He says the training includes the cutting and lighting of a cigar and how best to marry the cigar with a particular spirit.

"They have to know the difference between say, a short cigar, like a robusto, and a double corona, the time of day to smoke a particular strength cigar, and then the preference of the smoker," Fernandez says. "If they are occasional smokers or regulars, or if they are a female, all that can make a difference in deciding which cigar to suggest, and then recommending a drink to go with it."

Fernandez says the Habanos Sommelier program is now taught regionally inside Cuba. Each year, the program brings the best students from each region for a competition to represent Cuba in the annual Festival del Habano sommelier contest. Cubans have won the contest at least three times since its first year in 2002, and there is always a Cuban representative among the contestants. A panel of international judges, which includes Fernandez, observes the contestants in preliminary rounds where they must identify two cigars and five spirits, all presented blind. They then present their own beverage and cigar and discuss the merits of the pairing to the panel. The judges select three, sometimes four, persons to take part in the final round on the closing day of the Festival. In that final round, the judges present the candidate with a specific scenario, with two live actors posing as cigar smokers. In 2017, a Chilean, Felipe Rojas, who had taken the course in Cuba, won a tight verdict.

Darius Namdar, a graduate of the Hunters & Frankau master cigar sommelier program, earned the title of Habanos Sommelier for 2018. He is also the general manager of Mark's Club in London. "Both of my guests in the competition said they liked full-flavored cigars," Namdar said. He chose a slim Partagás 8-9-8 and a Partagás Serie P No. 2, a figurado, from the humidor on the stage. For the 8-9-8 smoker, who wanted an aged dark rum, he paired the cigar with a Havana Club Selección de Maestros, and for the other man, a Scotch drinker, he picked a Glenlivet 18-year-old. "I've been surrounded by cigars all my life. My father was a big cigar smoker," said Namdar. He entered the Hunters program after taking over Marks Club, and realizing that his patrons wanted someone with serious cigar knowledge to help make their selections. He said he would celebrate with a Trinidad Fundadores from 1998, but since this expert doesn't actually drink alcohol himself, he said he would probably pair his smoke with a cup of tea.

In 2017, Slawomir Bielicki, a crowd favorite who represented the United Kingdom, finished second in the competition. "Every experience, every cigar served, was always a different approach due to the occasion, personal preferences, meal or drink which accompanied it and it always revealed an interesting character or story," said Bielicki, a former cigar sommelier at the Churchill Bar & Terrace in London. "Every cigar has a different story."

In the end, Fernandez said that the cigar sommelier program is building on the tradition and culture of cigars worldwide, and there is no better place in the world to learn the craft. "If you want to learn Samba, you go to Brazil. If you want to learn about cigars, you come to Cuba." ❖

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Richard Overton, America's oldest man—and cigar smoker—at home in Austin, Texas, with his Cigar Aficionado.

A group of good friends from Little Rock, Arkansas, travel to Havana, Cuba, in March 2018 to attend the 20th annual Habanos Festival. During the final night gala dinner, the guys shared a cigar alongside Cigar Aficionado senior contributing editor Gordon Mott. From left, Charlie Spakes, Carlton Saffa, Mott, Keith Emis and Nathan Reed.

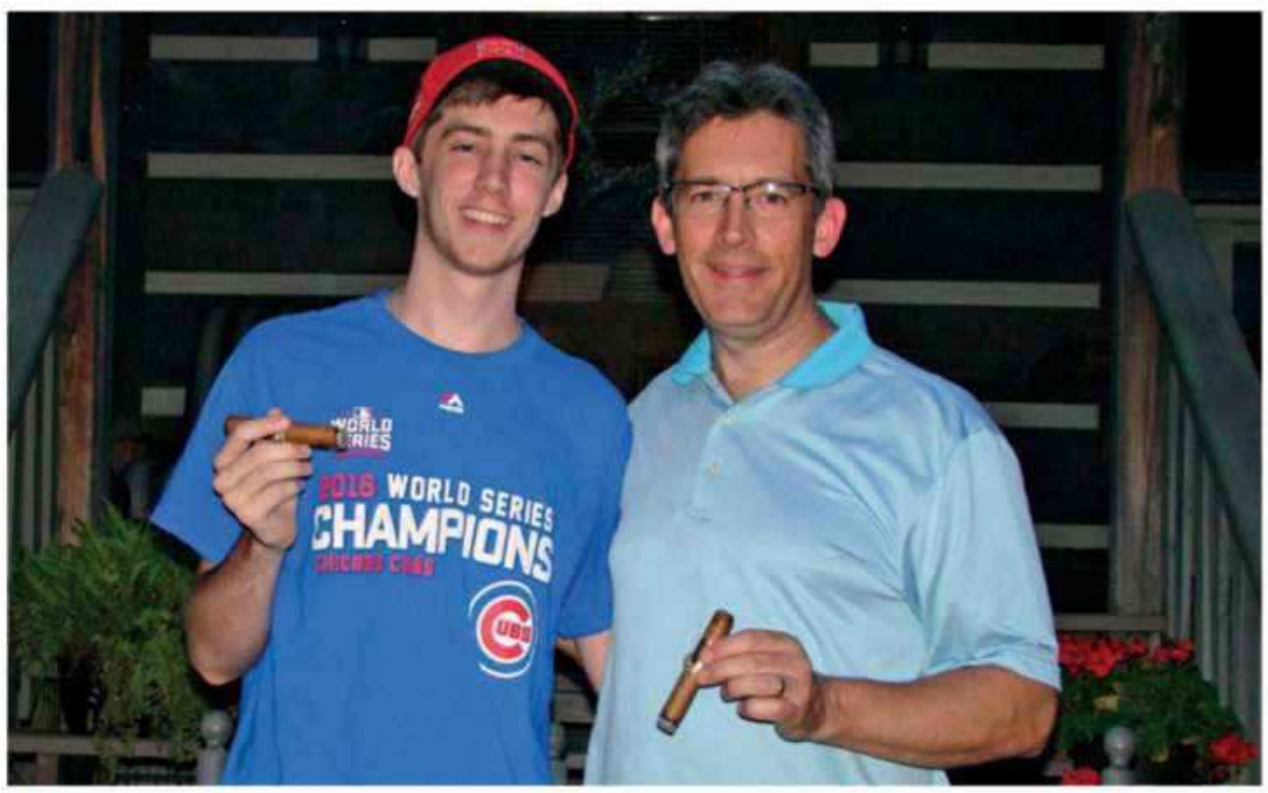
After a successful grand opening of Lord Puffer Cigars in Escondido, California, Liana Fuente, left, Cynthia Fuente, center, store owner Angela Yue, right, and Carlos Fuente Jr., back, wind down by smoking Fuente Fuente OpusX cigars.

Nish Patel of Rocky Patel Premium Cigars Inc. lights up with members of The Cigar Club at The Ritz-Carlton in St. Louis, Missouri, during their 20th Anniversary Scotch & Chocolate Jubilee Dinner.

Lou Sciarretta and Tim Galu smoke Cohiba and My Father cigars at Brooklawn Country Club in Fairfield, Connecticut.

There's no better way to enjoy the good life than catching up with friends while enjoying premium cigars and libations. Pictured from left to right: Lou Solly, Edgar Enriquez, Richard Barrett, Edgar Rodriguez, Steve Pajor, Jim Jackson and Hunt Coracci from Vancouver, Washington, gather for their semi-annual cigars and whiskey night.

Adrian Fernandez, Frank Mujica, Don Paul, Ariamna Contino Mendoza and Alex Fernandez hoist their copy of Cigar Aficionado's Cuba issue at an art studio and gallery in Havana.



John Kane and his son Adam enjoy a couple of fine cigars during their summer vacation in Asheville, North Carolina, before Adam heads back to school at North Carolina State University.

A very happy anniversary to Alyce and Chuck Grover of Tucson, Arizona, pictured here in sunny Breisach, Germany, last June, as they puff on premium cigars and sip excellent libations.

Amir Zoveini, Alex Ravari and Alon Ofir puff on handmade cigars as they play a round at Tijeras Creek Golf Club in Rancho Santa Margarita, California.

Christopher Zarycki savors cigars on his wedding day with good friends Joe Bindert, Anthony Naia and Pete Vandervalk at La Terrazza in Belmar, New Jersey.

Carmine Somma and Virgen Carrasquillo from the Bronx, New York, get ready to light up cigars while on vacation in Aruba for a good friend's 50th birthday.

Veterans Heath Holcomb, George Sykora, Dan Buttery and Chad Brown hit the links to support fallen soldiers and their loved ones in Fort Hood, Texas.

Mike Piergrossi, Nick Piergrossi, Paul Curry and Rob Giraldi enjoy cigars at The Carolina Hotel after golf at Pinehurst No. 2 in Pinehurst, North Carolina.

Don Miller and Brad Parent relax with their cigars after winning the Pentacle Golf Tournament at Geneva National Golf Club in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

Dr. Marc Factor and Dr. Jeffrey Spodek celebrate Marc's 50th birthday with La Flor Dominicana cigars in Toronto, Canada.

Shannon Girouard challenges cigar-smoking NBA legend John Salley to a game of one-on-one at Cigar Aficionado's Big Smoke Miami.

While deployed in Africa, Kenneth Mantle of Georgia, Forrest Antioco of Georgia and Tim Kring of Tennessee relax with a little Scotch whisky and a round of premium handrolled cigars.

Phi Beta Sigma fraternity brothers Louis Lord and Marc Ellis light up on the links at Alfred Tup Holmes Golf Course in Atlanta, Georgia.

Daniel Kozloski savors a Cuban Cohiba Pirámides Extra with his wife Bianca on their five-year-anniversary trip to Cinque Terre, Italy.

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While on vacation in Cuba, Janell and Brian Hahn, along with Geri Hutchings and Gage Kent relax with cold beers and premium cigars in the V.I.P. room of the Partagás Factory in Havana.

U.S. Army 2nd Lieutenant David P. Mitchell lights up Casa Magna cigars with his brother Tim and father David upon graduating from the Georgia Military College in Milledgeville, Georgia.

Friends Gary Hopper, Terry Storm, Tom Hennie and Kelly McKay celebrate the Philadelphia Eagles Super Bowl victory with Arturo Fuente and Drew Estate cigars in Alta Loma, California.

Celebrating cigars at Habana Palooza in Albany, New York. Standing, from left: Bruce Hidley, Tony Gilberti and Charlie Diamond. Seated, from left: Ed Rice, Paul Bombard and Mark Cady.

Mark Pratt, Dominic Parisi and Justin Morris enjoy Liga Privada No. 9 cigars and libations while getting ready to cheer on the New England Patriots from Yorba Linda, California.

Matt Anaya, Alex Benes, Matthew Kang, Stan Lee and Wonho Frank Lee savor premium cigars and a *lechon asado* (a whole roast pig, who also enjoys cigars) in Thousand Oaks, California.

Longtime fans of the Philadelphia Eagles, Paul Hentrup and Roger Allen from Jasper, Indiana, enjoy a Super Bowl cigar with their inflatable friend "Bubba."

Tim Rieckmann of Mooresville, North Carolina, and Tom Haben of Shawnee, Kansas, savor Cohiba Siglo VI cigars at the Ashford Castle in Cong, Ireland.

John Fronza, left, and his good friend Mike Roveccio share a couple of premium cigars in the memory of John's wife Deborah in Tampa, Florida.

Mark Eastin and his son Stephen Eastin of Bowling Green, Kentucky, celebrate the good life while admiring the long ashes on their Oliva Serie V cigars.

The Ormsby men—Russ, A.J., Aaron, Robert and Rusty—reunite in Orlando, Florida, to spend some quality time together over premium cigars and libations.

Friends Todd Alfonso, Scott Barnes, Roger Kramer and Ron Winkley light up a round of fine cigars on their Adirondack fishing trip in Speculator, New York.

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#13 Cigar of 2017 by cigar aficionado

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made for you

In a world of fast food and one-size-fits-all sensibilities, how often does something feel made especially for you? The "Made for You" section celebrates those items that are created with such high quality of hand workmanship and degree of customization that they become individual to you. In each issue, our editors will endeavor to bring you special things from anywhere on the globe, choosing them solely on the basis of outstanding quality. Our goal is to give you guidance on the best of everything.

1 BESPOKE BEHEMOTH—MIL-SPEC AUTOMOTIVE

The vision of Mil-Spec Automotive is the Hummer reenvisioned, and now, with the Truck #002, it adds a customer's vision. Six of the 12 hand-built units in its Launch Edition series will be tailor-made for each customer. Customizations include a fully adjustable air-ride system and seats that allow heating and cooling, massage selection and adjustable seat supports. The interior is tricked out with plenty of leather and the slant-back top design has a Kevlar texture. Price tag starts at $218,499. *milspecauto.com*

2 ROUND SOUND IN A BOX—CAMBRIDGE AUDIO

The burgeoning all-in-one home audio hub segment continues to grow with the addition of the Yoyo (L) ($399) from British audio specialist Cambridge Audio. The Yoyo (L) offers powerful, immersive sound courtesy of six speakers nestled inside its stylish, cloth-covered 10-by-10-inch box. Connectivity options include built-in Chromecast, Spotify Connect, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth as well as optical, aux and HDMI wired connections, meaning it can serve as a TV soundbar and also control your favorite music from your phone, without the hassle of pairing. *cambridgeaudio.com*

3 PHOTO FINISH—LEICA

The German maker of precision cameras has new entries. If your groove is collectors' items with a racy edge, consider the Leica M10 Edition Zagato. Designed by Andrea Zagato, owner of the Italian design house that specializes in automotives, it combines the M10 camera body with a Summilux-M 35-mm lens. Limited to a run of 250, each set goes for $21,600. A little too fast for your blood? Consider the Leica C-Lux, a pocket-sized shooter with a 20-megapixel sensor that goes for $1,050. *leica.com*

4 OFF THE CUFF—TOM TAYLOR

The bromide that men don't wear jewelry is often countered with an argument for watches, but cuff links are the real starting line in male ornamentation. And with Tom Taylor, the New Mexico silver and leatherworks artisan, the adornment will never come off too precious. Motifs range from Maltese crosses and skulls to the kind of star you usually see on a sheriff's badge. Links can also be inlayed with stones like turquoise. Remember, you'll need a shirt with French cuffs. The company also makes belts, belt buckles and sturdy leather bags. *tomtaylorbuckles.com*

5 TENNESSEE TOUR—MINT JULEP EXPERIENCES

Mint Julep Experiences, the company that made its name providing high-end visits to Kentucky distilleries, is really rolling out the barrel with its Tennessee sour mash whiskey experience. For $65,000 you get a helicopter ride from Nashville to Lynchburg's Jack Daniel's distillery, pick a barrel of whiskey to be bottled just for you (approximately 240 bottles), go on $5,000 shopping sprees at Col. Littleton's Leather Co. and Lucchese custom bootery and stay in the Omni Nashville Presidential Suite. *mintjuleptours.com*

6 TIE IN CHEEK—EMERSON BESPOKE

When suited up, you can only be so cheeky with your jacket, slacks and shirt. Your tie, however, leaves room for expression. Emerson Bespoke makes ties that allow you to express yourself in fun ways. Grand Old Party shows elephants holding Martini glasses. Let's Cook (pictured) with its blue plume coming from a white and orange RV, pays homage to Walter White, the humble math teacher turned meth lord in the superb AMC drama "Breaking Bad." The ties are made from silk milled in Como, Italy. *emersonbespoke.net*

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IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
BEFORE THE TRADEMARK TRIAL AND APPEAL BOARD

In the matter of Trademark Registration No. 1147309
For the mark COHIBA
Date registered: February 17, 1981

AND

In the matter of the Trademark Registration No. 1898273
For the mark COHIBA
Date registered: June 6, 1995

EMPRESA CUBANA DEL TABACO, d.b.a. CUBATABACO, Petitioner, v. GENERAL CIGAR CO., INC., Respondent.	:	Cancellation No. 92025859

<u>EXHIBIT 24</u>

<u>TO RESPONDENT GENERAL CIGAR CO., INC.'S NOTICE OF RELIANCE</u>

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contents

november/december 2018

up front

22 CIGAR HIGHLIGHTS

25 EDITORS' NOTE

letters 27 OUT OF THE HUMIDOR

the best 33 THE GOOD LIFE GUIDE

35 PLACES Tokyo modern meets Kyoto tradition.

36 GOURMET The fruitcake you won't regift.

38 WHEELS BMW's M5 puts power to the pavement.

41 STYLE The timeless style of a vest.

44 TIME Ultrathins: watches on a slimming diet.

47 DRINK Letting the experts age your Champagne for you.

49 CIGARS The space-saving humidor that tucks into your wall.

50 TOOLS The Cowboy Cauldron and the call of the wild.

features

cover 52 GETTING DEEP WITH DANNY
Danny DeVito isn't really a curmudgeon. He just has a knack for playing them. Off-screen he reveals his warm side.

travel 70 **SPECIAL SECTION**

THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The DR is a cigarmaking mecca. But it also offers world-class resorts, fine dining and gorgeous golf. We'll tell you where.

74 SANTIAGO: THE CITY OF CIGARS
Home to many cigar brands, Santiago has grown into a fine place to smoke, eat and lay your head.

83 LA ROMANA: THE CHARMS OF CASA DE CAMPO
From the beach to the tennis courts and shotgun range, La Romana's Casa de Campo has something for everyone.

86 GOLF: TEETH OF THE DOG
The legendary Teeth of the Dog golf course is only one of the golfing havens in La Romana.

ON THE COVER
Danny DeVito: a nice guy who plays ruthless people
photographed by Peter Yang

TOP: PETER GARRITANO; ON THE COVER: GROOMING BY FABIOLA FOR TRACY MATTINGLY

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Hand José O. Padrón 1964 *Crafted*

92 DINING: CARIBBEAN CUISINE
The DR serves food from across the globe, but don't miss the local delights.

94 SANTO DOMINGO: COLONIAL CAPITAL
The oldest permanent European settlement in the Americas, Santo Domingo is home to great sightseeing and smoking opportunities.

100 PLAYA GRANDE: AMAN JOY
Expect white-glove treatment at the Aman Resort. The deluxe chain's first golf property, already a stunner, just got an upgrade.

103 PUNTA CANA: THE DREAM REALIZED
Fifty years ago, Frank Rainieri envisioned one of the finest destinations in the Caribbean.

golf 110 THE TIGER RETURNS
Was Tiger Woods' win at the Tour Championship a comeback for the ages?

sports 113 FABULOUS FINALES
The stories of great champions who put up powerful performances in their final hour.

cocktails 131 HOLIDAY MIXING
Winter warmers and spirits on ice can each say "Seasons Greetings."

cigars

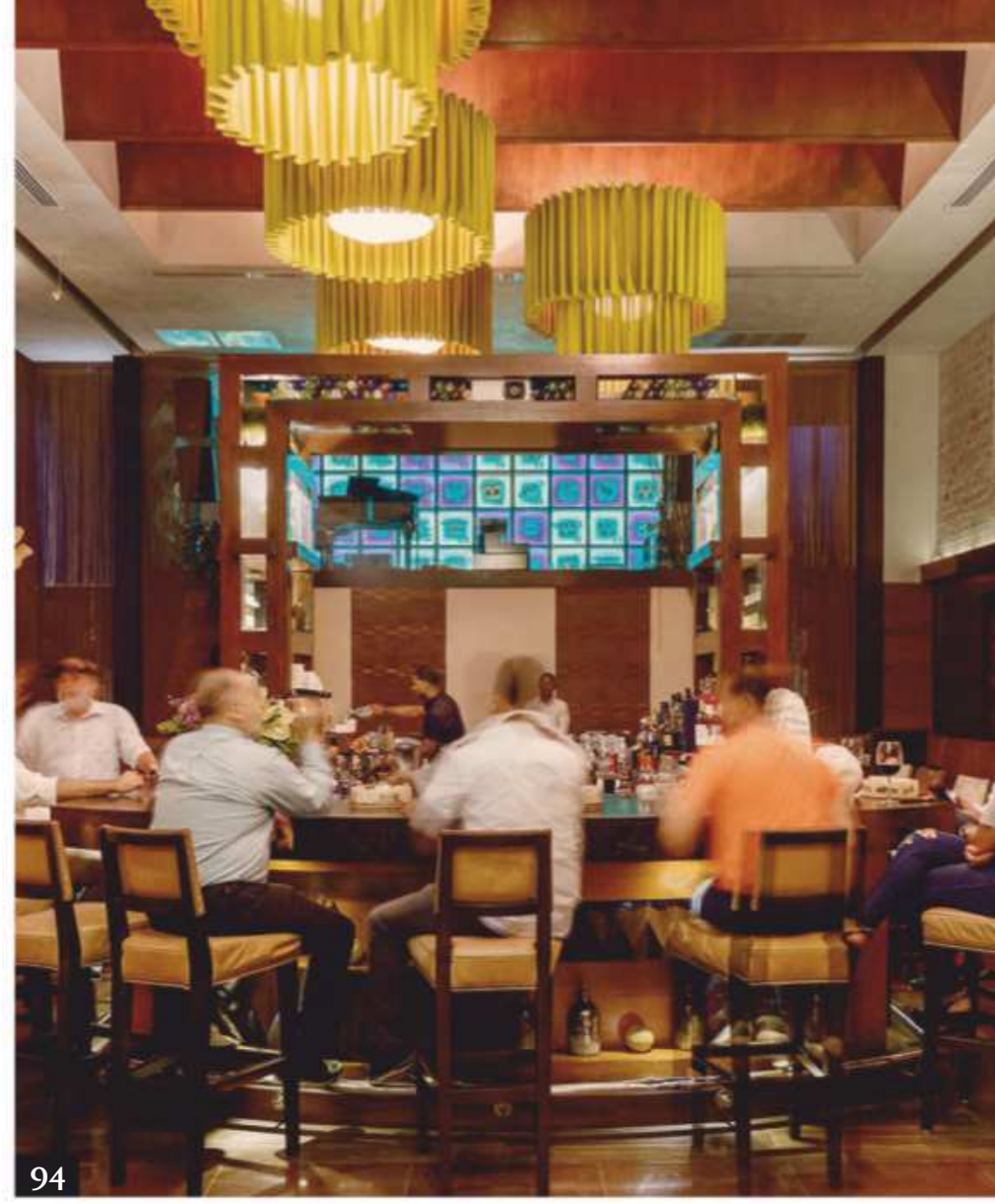
tasting 141 We rate 81 cigars in six sizes: Churchills (141), coronas (145), corona gordas (149), figurados (153), grandes (157), and robustos (161), plus our buying guide (164) and our vintage cigar tasting, Connoisseur's Corner, (166).

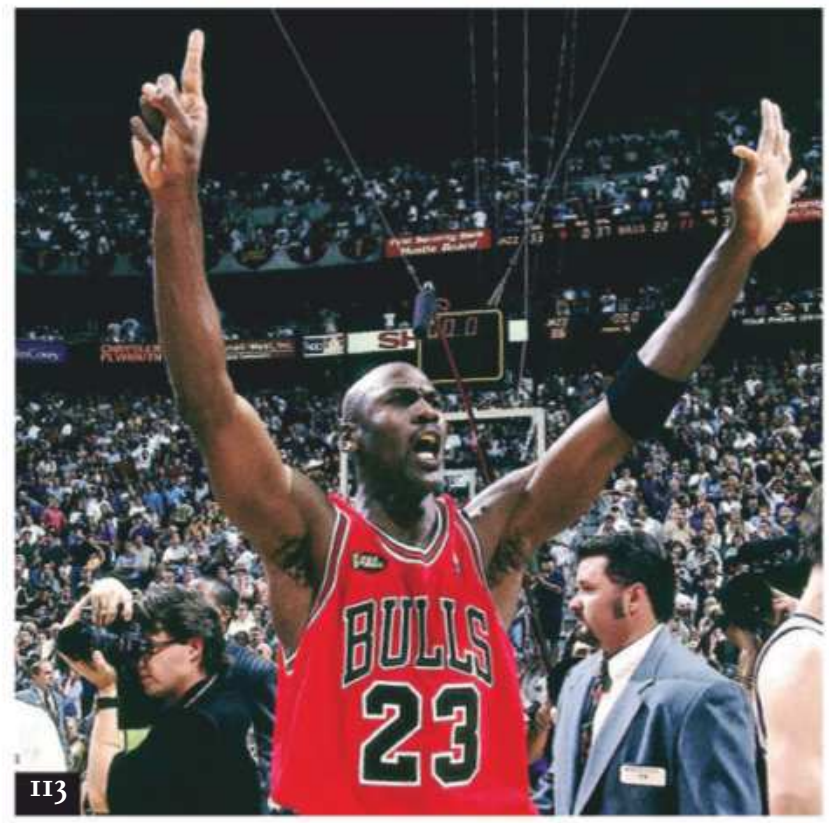
169 TOP DOMINICAN CIGARS
The 11 top-scoring DR cigars of 2018 plus three that were Cigars of the Year.

cuba report 171 FIELDS OF DREAMS
There are no official lists, but aficionados know certain tobacco farms stand out as best.

176 MOMENTS TO REMEMBER
Photos of our readers enjoying their cigars.

184 MADE FOR YOU
A grand Airstream; padlocks that open by fingerprint; a Cuban cookbook; smoky olive oil; duck carvings and wooden cases.


94



113

131

FROM TOP: PETER GARRITANO; NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES; CAVAN IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

highlights

What a showing for Nicaragua—the Central American country led (or tied) four of our six size categories in this tasting. And what a tasting: 31 cigars scored 90 points or more, plus a 95 pointer—classic on our 100-point scale. Price-conscious shoppers will also be happy to see that many of these outstanding smokes retail for less than $10.

TOP FIGURADO
FLOR DE LAS ANTILLAS BELICOSO
This shapely smoke, rolled entirely with Nicaraguan tobaccos, was first released in 2012 as the Garcia family's tribute to Cuba's cigar heritage.

NICARAGUA 95

TOP CORONA
CASA CUBA DOBLE TRES
Rolled in the Dominican Republic as one of the last blends from Carlos Fuente Sr., this smoke tied with the American-made La Colmena Amado No. 44 for best corona.

DOM. REP. 93

TOP ROBUSTO
CHARTER OAK CT SHADE ROTHSCHILD
A love letter to Connecticut, brand owner Nick Melillo's home state, this smoke wears a rare Connecticut Shade wrapper and only costs $5.

NICARAGUA 93

TOP CORONA GORDA
RAMON ALLONES BY AJ FERNANDEZ TORO
This Nicaraguan puro tied with the Cuban Hoyo de Monterrey Le Hoyo de San Juan and the San Cristobal Quintessence.

NICARAGUA 92

TOP GRANDE
ROOM101 FARCE IT IS A MAGNUM
A curiously named smoke from Matt Booth rolled with an Ecuadoran wrapper, Indonesian binder and filler from three countries.

DOM. REP. 92

TOP CHURCHILL
NAT CICCO ANIVERSARIO 1965 LIGA NO. 4 CHURCHILL
This Nicaraguan-made cigar tied with the La Aurora 1903 Cameroon and a limited-edition Cuban made exclusively for Hong Kong.

NICARAGUA 91

BEST BUY
GILBERTO OLIVA RESERVA BLANC 5.75X43
Enrobed in a golden-brown Ecuadoran Connecticut wrapper, this exquisitely rolled corona retails for a mere $5.75.

NICARAGUA 92

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editors' note

Traveling in Cigar Country

There's nothing quite like it—visiting a country where cigars are made. You can walk through tobacco fields and tour cigar factories, witness tobacco being harvested and cigars being rolled. You'll never forget the alluring, sweet and earthy aroma of a room filled with aging tobacco, nor the sound of the rolling gallery as hundreds of pairs of hands turn leaves into beautiful cigars. It should have a place on every cigar lover's bucket list.

Longtime readers are familiar with our frequent profiles of Cuba, the birthplace of the handmade cigar. But you've never seen anything like what awaits you in these pages—our extensive travel guide to the Dominican Republic.

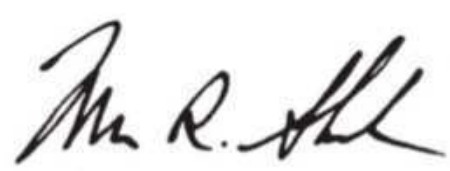
Cigars have been rolled in the Dominican Republic for more than a century, and this Caribbean country has been at the forefront of handmade cigar production for years.

The Dominican Republic has some of the world's finest golf courses, ideal weather for wintertime travel and a cigar-friendly atmosphere that's hard to match.

Both of us have been to the Dominican Republic many, many times, and we've come to love our trips there. We've also watched this country grow and become ever more welcoming to travelers. When we first came to Santiago, the city where most Dominican cigars are made, it was rustic, with lackluster hotel rooms and few places to dine. Today, there are several exceptional restaurants, as well as better places to stay. The capital city of Santo Domingo has exceptional cigar lounges, as well as a long and storied history. Punta Cana, once a quiet city on the northeastern coast of the Dominican Republic, has grown into a tourist mecca. And farther west, in a town called Playa Grande, the resort group Aman has crafted a property designed to coddle even the most discerning travelers to this 2,000-acre site with its emphasis on privacy. Our coverage begins on page 70.

This issue has much more to offer. The story of Tiger Woods' unlikely comeback from injury. A primer on making superb cocktails for the holidays. The compelling final acts by some of the biggest names in the history of sports. An expert's guide through the finest tobacco farms in Cuba. And finally, our story about one of our favorite people in the world, the legendary actor Danny DeVito, appearing on the cover of CIGAR AFICIONADO for the second time. His story—and his attitude—are certain to bring a smile to your face.

Enjoy the issue.



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Dear Marvin,
I enjoyed your wide-ranging interview with Alex Rodriguez in the October CIGAR AFICIONADO. For someone as well-known as A-Rod, it was surprisingly full of revealing insights. If Hall of Fame voters had the opportunity to read the interview, I believe A-Rod's chances of joining the Hall would greatly increase.
Rich Foley
Fayette, Ohio

Dear Marvin,
It's been super interesting to see the way public perception of Alex Rodriguez has changed the past couple of years. In his playing days, he seemed to suffer from comparisons to Derek Jeter, despite being the superior player. I always felt like he came in for a bit too much flak.

Since then, there's been a reversal of fortunes with Jeter's Marlins ownership getting a ton of criticism, while A-Rod has been a huge hit as a broadcaster.
Dan Hester
Fremont, California

Dear Marvin,
I'm a new subscriber to CIGAR AFICIONADO, and I enjoy reading each issue cover to cover. I particularly found the "Living the Dream" article [August 2018] about Matthew McConaughey interesting. He has a very honest, no-nonsense work ethic that suits his lifestyle and good moral standards. He seems to enjoy the challenges of his craft and seems genuinely involved in all his undertakings. I respect his confidence and outlook on life and family. I particularly like the fact that he enjoys a good cigar and Bourbon on occasion. As do I.
James Farrant
Belford, New Jersey

Editors' Response: As do we. Welcome.

Dear Marvin,
I was so pleased to read the article "The Cowboy Hat" [Good Life Guide, August 2018] that I decided to write and add my two cents. For full disclosure, I am from Wyoming—lots of cowboy hats here!

"It's been super interesting to see the way public perception of Alex Rodriguez has changed the past couple of years."
—Dan Hester, Fremont, California

Anybody can wear a baseball cap; where is the style in that? And backwards? Please! As the article stated, get some professional guidance. Go to a good hat store, or any big rodeo, like Cheyenne Frontier Days. Get some expert advice—they will tell you if it looks good or not. Be confident that you can pull it off, don't feel dumb. I assure you, all of your friends may tease you a bit, but deep down, they will be envious because they wish they could wear one.

You don't have to be a cowboy to wear a cowboy hat but it will surely make you feel like one. Not everyone can be from Wyoming, but you can all feel like a Wyoming cowboy the moment you put your hat on.
Scott Ostlund
Gillette, Wyoming

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Dear Marvin,
I am writing to thank you for publishing your fabulous Churchill issue [June 2018], both for its tribute to the most interesting man to walk the earth and also for the excellent article titled "Did He Really Smoke That Much?" I was fortunate some years ago to have lunch in London, Ontario, with the official Churchill biographer, a wonderful man, Sir Martin Gilbert. During a delightful lunch I specifically asked him about Churchill's cigar smoking habit. His answer puzzled me, as he indicated that Churchill didn't smoke cigars, that cigars were merely a prop for the unique image that Sir Winston wished to present to the world. I wondered whether this indeed could be true or whether Sir Martin was simply attempting to discourage me from indulging in my own personal enjoyment of one of life's greatest pleasures. After reading your article, recounting how Churchill purchased 825 cigars during one six-month period in 1964 in the year before he died, and then how his collection had significantly dwindled by the time of his passing, I can only reasonably conclude that he had to have consumed them.

Thank you for setting the record straight for me and for the cigar-loving world.
Dan Mailer
London, Ontario, Canada

Dear Marvin,
We have made many friends in Cuba. Their diet appears healthy, but even simple things like fish oil are not available. On our last trip, we carried in over 30 pounds of vitamins and supplements, all impossible to find in a country that cannot keep toilet paper in stock. If you go anywhere else in the Caribbean you find the World Hunger Organization, Feed the Children and hundreds of American Missionaries and their money. Cuba has no one, but they don't beg and they don't steal. They are proud people, survivors of the regime, survivors of the hunger, survivors of the hurricanes. I don't care about their politics or our policies. My concern is for the proudest people I have ever known, and a prayer that someone will crack the door and restore hope to the people.
Craig Smith
Odessa, Texas

Editors' Response: We share your sentiments for the Cuban people, who have always been kind on our visits. The challenges they face are daunting. ❖

Correction In the October CIGAR AFICIONADO, the Good Life Guide article on Formula Experiences misstated the name of its location. It takes place at the Virginia International Raceway.

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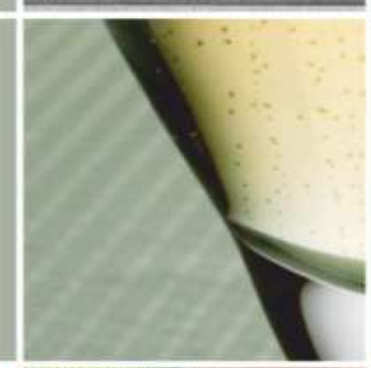
good life guide



Living well demands that we indulge in things that are of superior quality and excellent origin. This guide aspires to find and recommend the best of everything to aficionados of the good life.

places	35	JAPAN: PRESENT AND PAST
gourmet	36	FIRST-CLASS FRUITCAKE
wheels	38	BMW 5-SERIES M5
style	41	IN-VEST IN YOUR BEST
time	44	ULTRATHIN WATCHES
drink	47	HOUSE-AGED CHAMPAGNE
cigars	49	VIGILANT RELIANCE WALL HUMIDOR
tools	50	RING OF FIRE

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SUIRAN

Japan: Present and Past

Tokyo's vast skyline, its towers aglow with blinking red lights, fans out beneath the 33rd-floor windows of your room at the new Prince Gallery Tokyo Kioicho hotel. The mesmerizing urban landscape is the focal point of the design through spans of glass with a daybed in the window inviting you to contemplate the futuristic metropolis. And yet, in Kyoto, just a few hours to the southwest by bullet train, the same hotel collection presents Suiran, where Japan's ancient cultural traditions are still preserved and revered. Visitors can have the best of both eras.

In its way Kioicho leaves some of the frenetic buzz of Tokyo's pulsing streets solidly on terra firma as the 36th-floor reception area reveals an overlook of the dramatic two-story Levita lounge with the skyline beyond. The hotel occupies the skyscraper's top seven floors with two restaurants, a Kioi spa featuring an indoor swimming pool and fitness center and 250 rooms and suites designed to evoke residential apartments.

At the restaurant Washoku Souten you can indulge in traditional Japanese culinary delicacies, including melt-in-your-mouth blowfish. The chandeliers are designed to resemble the huge blocks of ice at the Tsukiji fish market, the seafood source for the refined omakase tasting menus presented on various plates with artistic flair. From there you head into the intimate Bar illumiid for a Japanese whisky and a cigar.

RALF TOOTEN

Until 1868, Kyoto was Japan's capital. It is still the seat of its cultural traditions. Behind an imposing wooden gate, Suiran occupies the pastoral grounds of a former royal palace. The peaceful sanctuary in the Arashiyama district combines antique and modern architecture with 39 guest rooms, some of which have private al fresco *onsens* (natural thermal hot tubs).

The Suiran staff is happy to immerse you in the ancient culture—from a rickshaw tour to an audience with a geisha to a private meditation session with a monk at the neighboring Tenryuji Temple, a World Heritage Site. Also nearby, the remarkable bamboo forest is an idyllic destination for a tranquil early-morning stroll before the crowds descend.

The two hotels are a unique opportunity to feel as if you have traveled centuries through time.

Visit princehotels.com/tokyo and suirankyoto.com

—Laurie Kahle

First-Class Fruitcake

You're to be forgiven if you think of fruitcake as a punch line rather than a culinary treat. We've all encountered that stale doorstop of a cake embedded with iridescent fruit that inspired the old joke: There's only one fruitcake on Earth and people endlessly regift it to each other.

Prepare to rethink this holiday tradition/terror. Today, there's an extremely refined version that even fruitcake haters will love. Robin McKay, a professional chef in New York's Hudson Valley, first attempted a fruitcake for her British boyfriend, himself a fruitcake connoisseur, and ended up taking it to a level that even Americans will appreciate. It's 100 percent natural. No preservatives of any kind. Not a single radioactive looking candied red or green cherry. The result is a dense flavor bomb, each slice containing a cornucopia of organic currants, flame raisins, figs, apricots, dates, roasted almonds, hazelnuts, as well as candied orange and lemon peel that McKay cures herself.

There are also eggs from local pastured hens, molasses, cane sugar and small-batch craft brandy—a cup of it in every cake. McKay says the fruitcake will keep fresh on your kitchen counter for one to three months. However, the chef recommends watering it occasionally with your own brandy or Bourbon. (You won't get any complaints here.)

The six-inch cake that weighs in at almost three pounds costs $50—it's also available in a set of three 1-pound cakes for $56. And no less an authority than Ruth Reichl, the food critic and bestselling author, described McKay's as "the fruitcake you've always longed for." But a loyal customer came up with this tagline that just might serve as the ultimate compliment when it comes to this beleaguered holiday treat: "The fruitcake you don't have to regift."

Visit robinskitchenview.com

—Ralph Gardner Jr.

JEFF HARRIS

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Skillfully crafted, Enjoy responsibly. *Glenfiddich Single Malt Scotch Whisky, 43% Alc./Vol. ©2018 Imported by William Grant & Sons. New York, NY.*

2019 BMW 5-Series M5

While the 3-Series may be the most popular—read: financially attainable—BMW, the brand's heart and soul is in the 5-Series, a sedan that blends luxury and performance into one delightful package. At least it was until the last-generation 5-er seemed to lose a little bit of the passion that made it such a standout.

So it was with trepidation that auto scribes awaited the latest version of their midsize model, the 2019 BMW M5. Would it lack some of the crisp steering and handling of earlier models? Could any BMW really be an M if it swapped out the manual or double-clutch gearbox for…wait for it…an eight-speed automatic? What about the idea of punching power to all four wheels, rather than the back axle?

On a day's drive through the badlands bordering California's Salton Sea, it didn't take long to discover our worries were for naught. The from-the-ground-up makeover is everything one could want: easy on the eyes, but unstinting on performance. The 2019 model now makes 600 horsepower and 553 pound-feet of tire-spinning torque from its twin-turbo 4.4-liter V-8—a full 40 hp and 53 lb-ft increase over the old Beemer.

As for that new eight-speed automatic? Sure, you don't get the pleasure of rowing a manual, but it is incredibly quick and intuitive, seemingly always in the right gear. And those intent on trying to outsmart the computer control system can still tap the paddle-shifters. In fact, serious performance fans can select from five different drive modes, each ramping up the aggression factor while dialing back nanny systems like traction and electronic stability controls. And rather than hindering the fun, the all-wheel-drive system ensures all that power goes to the pavement. It also means that Snowbelt buyers can use the new M5 as their year-round daily driver.

With a starting price of $102,700—which quickly jumps to $120,000 the way you're likely to configure it—the 2019 BMW M5 isn't cheap. But put in perspective—a car that gets from 0 to 60 in less than 3 seconds and gives a good chase to many a supercar on the track, while still hauling five people and your groceries around town in style and comfort—it may be one of the year's big bargains.

Visit bmwusa.com/5series

—Paul A. Eisenstein

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In-Vest In Your Best

In the movie *Catch Me If You Can*, when the young imposter/con man Frank Abagnale sees *Goldfinger* and sets his sights on impersonating 007, the ejector seat and grille-mounted machine guns on Bond's Aston Martin aren't what he insists on getting just right. It's the three-piece Savile Row suit. A vest on a man goes a long way to making him look suave, confident and powerful without having to revert to gadgets. Consider also Steve McQueen in *The Thomas Crown Affair*. He's always the coolest man on the screen and in the caper, often styling with a gold chain and pocket watch.

Part of the charm of a vest—or waistcoat, if you want to put on Anglo airs—is the way it tidies up an ensemble. It can hide away billowing shirtfronts or guts that creep over the belt line. Moreover, a vest creates sight lines that frame the chest, while drawing the eye to the face. It's a good look for almost any body type. The bonus for cigar smokers is that its pockets afford accessible storage for lighters and cutters.

An entire three-piece suit isn't necessary for pulling off a vest. You can wear a vest that contrasts your suit coat or your jacket and slacks. Or the waistcoat can be the only coat you wear, with jeans and a shirt. Furthermore, your jacket can stay unbuttoned without looking slovenly. In fact, only a few caveats apply. Your vest should cover your belt. With the exception of the bottom button, it shouldn't be worn unbuttoned—unless you're into the Wild West sheriff look. And do not pair vests with short sleeve shirts—unless, of course, you're riding with a motorcycle gang. In which case, go with cutoff sleeves or no shirt at all. Just don't expect to ride with James Bond.

—*Jack Bettridge*

While pulling off the perfect heist in *The Thomas Crown Affair*, Steve McQueen kept himself neat and trim in a three-piece suit.

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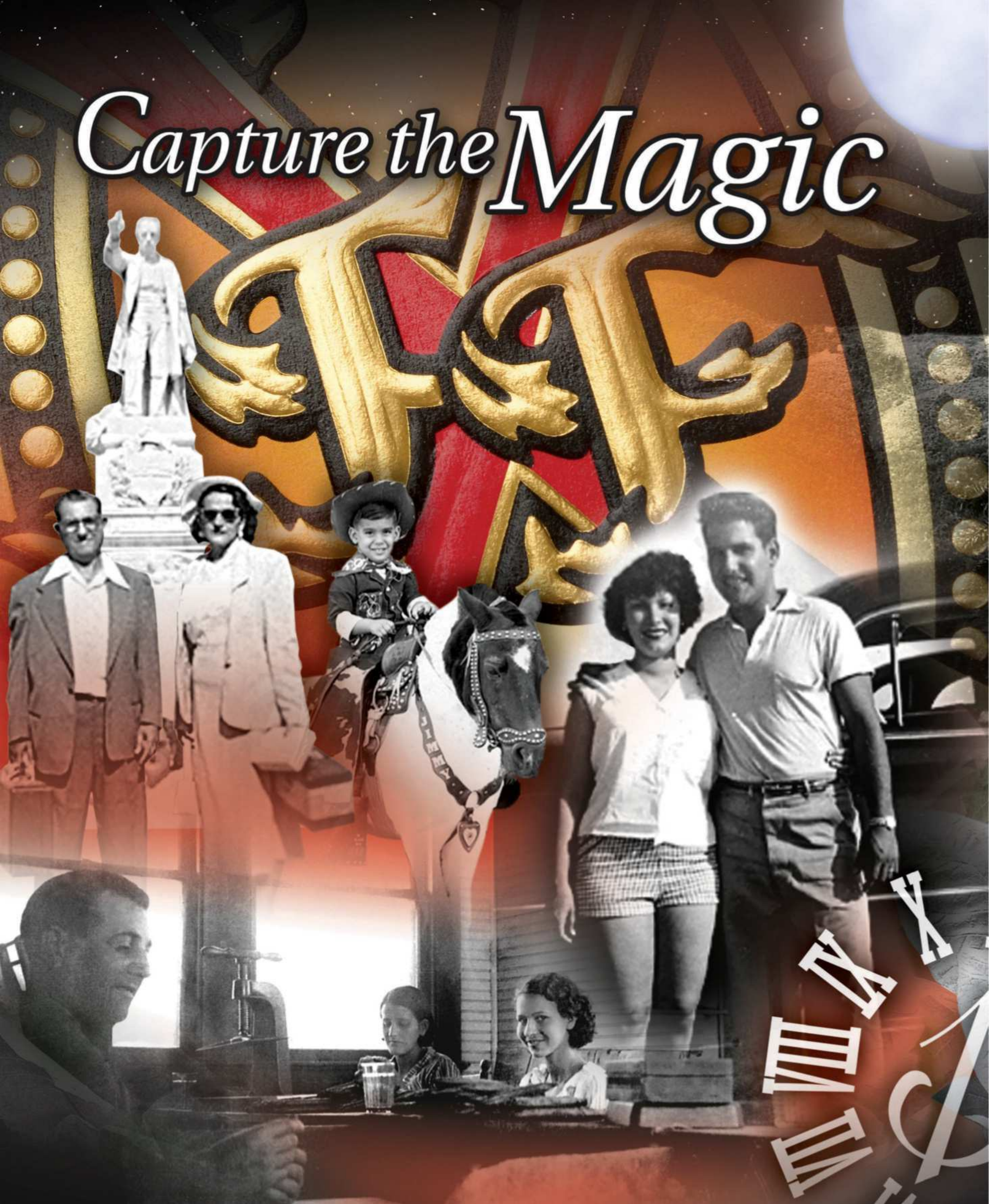
Capture the Magic



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Ultrathin Watches

Only true masters of the art of watchmaking can take the craft to minimalist extremes. This year, Piaget, a specialist in ultrathin watchmaking since it introduced the 2.0-mm-thick 9P manual movement in 1957, continues to square off with Bulgari, a newcomer to the genre.

Piaget marked the 60th anniversary of its elegant Altiplano collection with the Ultimate Automatic 910P ($27,300 in rose gold and $28,400 in white gold), measuring only 4.3 mm thick. The automatic watch builds off the manual-winding 900P from 2014, similarly condensing space by utilizing the case as a base plate. Other tweaks were made to the movement architecture to further reduce the height of the exposed movement.

The brand further flexed its ultra-thin muscles with a concept piece, the Altiplano Ultimate Concept, which, at 2 mm, is a little thicker than a quarter. The wafer-like case is made of a stiff cobalt-based alloy, and the movement integrates the barrel into the case with a telescopic flat crown that recesses into the case band.

Audemars Piguet also unveiled a concept watch with its Royal Oak RD#2, which, at 6.3 mm, claims the record for the thinnest automatic perpetual calendar, a format that tends to be thick even without a winding rotor. Audemars' engineers devised a fully integrated single-level solution with the patented 5133 caliber, which is expected to filter into the main collections.

Bulgari has focused its thinning sights on high complications. In 2014, the manual-winding Octo Tourbillon Finissimo set a new record for thin tourbillons with a movement measuring 1.95 mm thick in a 5-mm-thick case. Next up was a record-breaking 6.85-mm-thick minute repeater followed by a 5.1-mm-thick automatic, and this year's 3.95-mm-thick Octo Finissimo Tourbillon Automatic (price upon request), which set a new benchmark for automatic watches in general, plus adds a tourbillon for good measure. The sandblasted titanium case and skeletonized movement make a striking modern statement that tells everyone that this is not your grandfather's watch.

Visit piaget.com, audemarspiguet.com and bulgari.com

—Laurie Kahle

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House-Aged Champagne

Everyone knows a sandwich tastes better when someone else makes it for you. And if you want a perfectly aged bottle of vintage Champagne, you let the experts do it. That's the concept behind Champagne library releases, allocated bottlings of top vintages from a handful of producers.

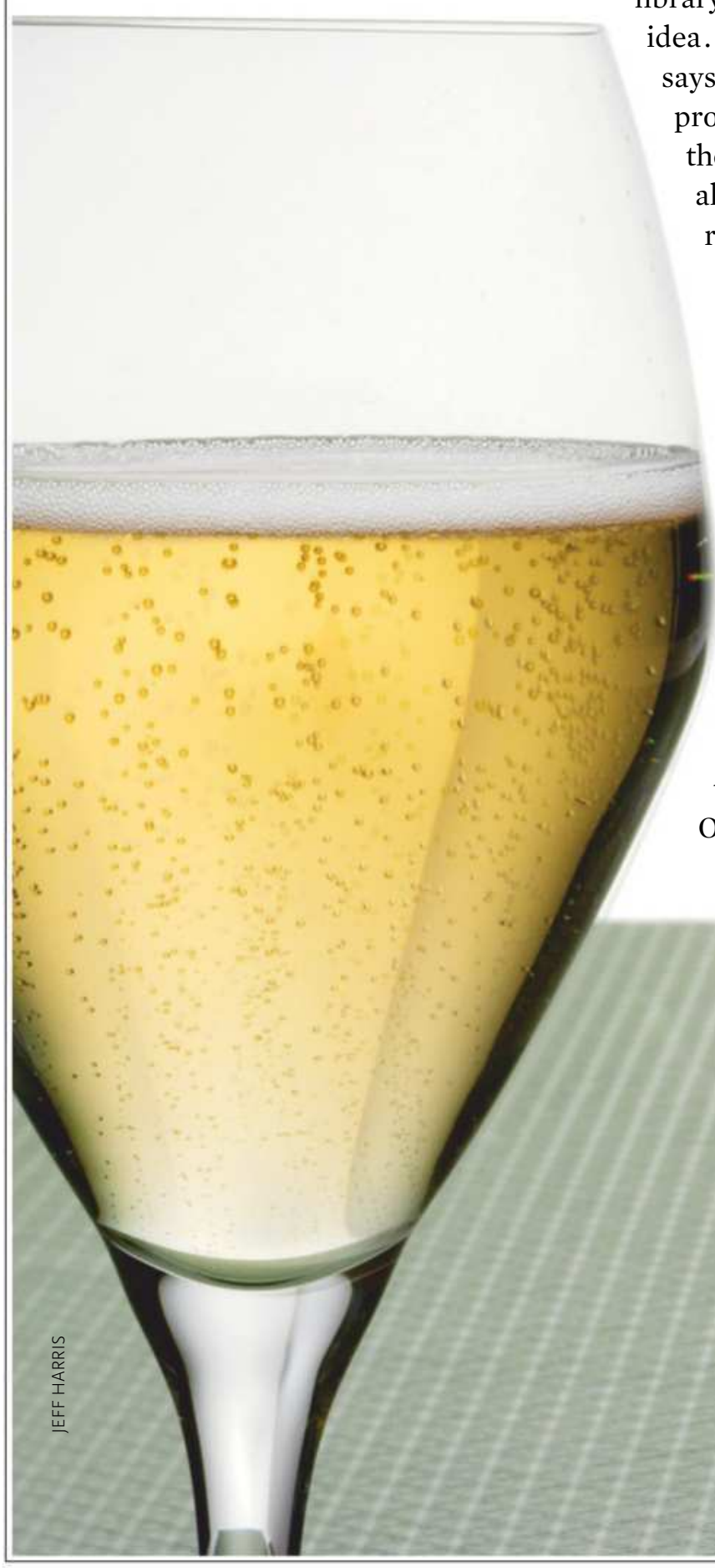
Unlike most wines, Champagne undergoes a secondary fermentation in the bottle to create its bubbles. The final production step is disgorgement in which sediment in the neck is removed (for a top vintage-dated cuvée that moment typically comes four to seven years after harvest). Standard Champagne aging—something anyone with a good wine cooler could do—is a post-disgorgement cellaring process. But real aging expertise comes before disgorgement. The *chef de cave* (head winemaker) extends maturation and contact with the enriching sediment, carefully monitoring select wines for the ideal moment to disgorge.

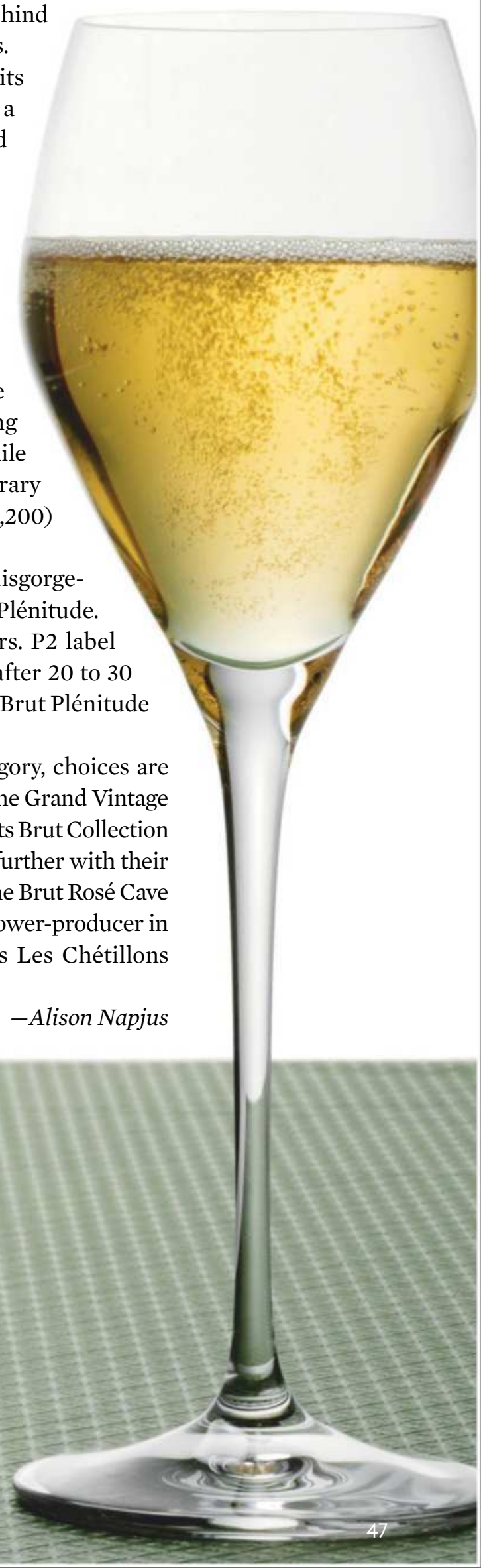
That may take decades, as was the case with this year's editions of Vinothèque, the Cristal library releases from Champagne Louis Roederer. "The idea…was really to show Cristal in the 20-year window," says chef de cave Jean-Baptiste Lécaillon. He feels the program "catches the best of both worlds," showcasing the concentration and richness of aged Champagne, while allowing the wine's minerality to emerge. Current library releases include the 1996 Brut Cristal Vinothèque ($1,200) and Brut Rosé Cristal Vinothèque ($2,400).

Dom Pérignon chose to reflect three phases of disgorgement when it relabeled its Oenothèque program as Plénitude. Initial releases are disgorged after about six years. P2 label indicates 12 to 16 years. P3 means disgorgement after 20 to 30 years. The Brut Plénitude P2 2000 ($395) and the Brut Plénitude P3 1988 ($1,000) are currently being offered.

While availability may be limited in the category, choices are expansive. Moët & Chandon has its Brut Champagne Grand Vintage Collection 2002 ($140). Krug focuses on 1990 with its Brut Collection 1990 ($600), while Veuve Clicquot goes back even further with their Brut Cave Privée 1989 ($185), the 1982 ($355), and the Brut Rosé Cave Privée 1979 ($420). Pierre Péters is the lone small grower-producer in the game. Its single vineyard Brut Blanc de Blancs Les Chétillons Oenothèque 2002 ($280) is a beautiful example.

—Alison Napjus





JEFF HARRIS

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Vigilant Reliance Wall Humidors

You've always wanted a bigger humidor but never had the space. Cabinet models take up too much room and end-table humidors are as bulky as a small refrigerator. The Vigilant Reliance Wall Humidor is an elegant solution. It delivers more storage with no footprint by tucking into unused space in the wall.

The four Reliance models are designed to fit between studs in your walls. As such, installation requires a bit of carpentry, but in the end you have a handcrafted unit framed in mahogany wood with a sturdy glass door and adjustable Spanish cedar shelves. They come in four sizes, each named after its approximate cigar capacity: Reliance 350 ($2,385); 450 ($2,385); 550 ($2,685); and 750 ($2,685). The units range in size from 30 inches wide by 40 7/8 inches high by 6 1/2 inches deep to 30 inches wide by 60 7/8 inches high by 8 1/2 inches deep. (The two deeper units cannot be fitted into exterior walls.)

The humidifier runs on distilled water with a removable 1½ quart acrylic reservoir. It also includes a Sentry Analog system with a time-to-fill LED indicator and high and low alarms. An upgraded humidity system and low-voltage interior lights are available options.

The acrylic fronts serve to hold loose cigars in place, but may be removed to provide more space for box storage. Vigilant's Dover, New Hampshire, shop will also customize units for size and wood type (including oak, cherry, walnut, pine and maple). And for those who have the luxury of extra living space to display even more cigar furniture, the company also makes a range of freestanding cabinets, lockers and armoires, as well as wine-storing facilities.

Visit vigilantinc.com

—David Clough

Ring of Fire

There's a tribal pull to a firepit: Friends gather, conversation flows, the smoke of your cigar blends with the cinders. It's magnetic, like the kitchen in your home. So why would you put a Sub Zero and a Wolf stove inside and not build anything but an investment grade centerpiece for the backyard?

"This is something you'll pass down to your children," says Mike Bertelsen, the creator of the Cowboy Cauldron, a suspended firepit that—like the Big Green Egg and other "heirloom grade" hard goods—has inspired devotion. "It suits your most primal instinct. Around a circle, face to face, not looking at it like a screen."

Bertelsen, a D.C. lobbyist, says the Cauldron idea sprung from a visit to George Washington's Mount Vernon. "They had a couple of braziers hanging to keep the onlookers warm, and it just clicked for me. I had a guy make one out of steel and next thing you know I had people opening up about their personal lives, which is a rare thing in Washington, D.C."

The Cauldron lifestyle soon spread among seemingly unconnected customers. The Prince of Qatar has nine of them. Meadowood Restaurant in Napa, the Four Seasons, Mayacamas Vineyards and Blue Smoke all have one (or more). With names like the Urban Cowboy, the Wrangler and the Ranch Boss, they range in price from $1,695 to $2,995.

Today, the units are stamped out of American steel by a ball-field-sized press in Ohio. Functionally, the alloy is formulated to stretch into the half-sphere structure, which allows it to radiate evenly to your legs and feet while concentrating the heat inside the grill. The Cauldron can also be a cooking surface with the addition of a grate, made in Indiana.

But the Cauldron would be a failure if it were only a cook top or social catalyst. It works because it's a damn good pit to stand around. "The warmth is closer to your core, while the smoke is already accelerating past your head as it rises," says Bertelsen. "It's beautiful, functional, practical."

Just about the only thing wrong with the Cauldron? Getting one. "We don't have trouble selling cauldrons, we have trouble making them," says Bertelsen.

Visit cowboycauldron.com

—Matt Bean

Welcome to Whisky's Best Kept Secret

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Devilish Danny

BY MARSHALL FINE • PORTRAITS BY PETER YANG

Acerbic, devious and sometimes insane on-screen, Danny DeVito is compassionate and relaxed when the cameras aren't rolling

DANNY DEVITO can visualize it perfectly, as though through a director's viewfinder: A large tobacco field in Cuba. A carpet of green fills the frame, as viewed from overhead by that latest tool in the cinematographer's bag of tricks, a drone camera. And in the middle of this emerald vision stands...Danny DeVito, a triumphant smile on his face, enjoying his favorite cigar, a Partagás Serie D No. 4.

"Imagine that cover," DeVito says of his imaginary shoot for this story. He adds with a conspiratorial smile, "We should have gone to Cuba for this interview."

It's probably redundant to call DeVito's smile conspiratorial. Subversive and devious have been his default comic modes from the time he claimed his place in American popular culture playing acerbic dispatcher Louie De Palma in the classic sitcom "Taxi," which originally aired in 1978. They've remained his stock-in-trade for decades, right up through today, portraying the impossibly venal (and possibly deranged) Frank Reynolds on the wild FX comedy "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia," which kicked off its 13th unruly season in September, and will return for season 14 next year.

On film or TV, DeVito's rubbery, uninhibited mug and firecracker physicality create a cartoonish energy that recalls characters from the golden age of *Looney Tunes*. Comparisons to Yosemite Sam and the Tasmanian Devil regularly dot the reviews of his performances in films like *Ruthless People*, *Twins* and *Romancing the Stone*. In person, however, DeVito is happier, warmer and a lot more chilled-out than the average character he plays—not that he can't put on gruff comic bluster at a moment's notice.

He may not be in Cuba, but he seems pretty content, enjoying lunch in an expansive private room at the Century City, California, branch of Craft, part of the growing restaurant group owned by chef Tom Colicchio. DeVito looks amused when he enters to find a dining table set for two, the only furnishings in a space the size of a corporate boardroom. He is working his way through lunch—a plate of wild arugula with parmesan and pine nuts and another with baby beets, Point Reyes Bay Blue cheese and tarragon—when the server, whose name is Cassandra, enters to ask, "How are you doing?"

"Why do you care?" DeVito snaps, then laughs along with Cassandra, who is giggling with surprise.

He solicits her opinion of his choice of greens. "There's something about arugula," he says. "I put it on everything. I like anchovies on a margherita pizza, well-done. Then I throw arugula on top and fold it up. It's like heaven." His smile disappears when Cassandra inquires whether he'll be following his vegetarian choices with something sweeter. "You know I can't eat dessert," he says, his voice a mixture of shame and accusation. Then the malice quickly dissolves into another hearty DeVito chuckle.

It has been 22 years since Danny DeVito graced the cover of CIGAR AFICIONADO. At that point in 1996, he was an Emmy- and Golden Globe–winning actor on a roll. He'd made the transition from TV acclaim to big-screen stardom, then trumped that by moving behind the camera, both as a producer and as a director.

Today, the man is an institution: a respected filmmaker and beloved comedy actor with strong dramatic chops and a career as prolific as a contract player under the old studio system. DeVito is still guaranteed to give a canny, balls-out comic performance in anything he takes on, even as he happily explores the numerous opportunities that come his way.

DeVito, who turned 74 in November, is ready for whatever comes next. As "It's Always Sunny" has proved, there's almost nothing he won't do for the sake of a bit, even if that means emerging naked and sweaty from inside a couch in the middle of an office Christmas party. (Google "Frank in the Couch" and feast your eyes on a side of DeVito that almost 90,000 YouTube viewers—not to mention the million or so who watch the show in real time or rerun—can't erase from their memories.)

Longtime pal Michael Douglas, who has collaborated with DeVito several times, recently teamed up with him again when DeVito filmed a guest spot on "The Kominsky Method," a series Douglas is doing for Netflix. "He loves taking chances," Douglas says. "He's got a great energy level and imagination. He really has the ability to fly without a net."

"I've told the writers nothing is off-limits for me," DeVito says of "Sunny." "That show is a lot of fun. The season we just finished was a whirlwind time, a three-month shoot. I've been with those guys for, like 15 years. [He joined the show for its second season, which aired in 2006.] Working at FX has been easy as pie. They leave the creators alone."

Talking over a two-plus-hour lunch at Craft, DeVito is refreshed after taking some time off after the show wrapped: "I got to go to Sicily," he says. "I went two-and-a-half hours up into the mountains, to a town called Polizzi Generosa. It's a little mountain town. And my good friend, Vincent Schiavelli, an actor, it's his grandpop's town. Vinnie died in 2005 and he's buried there. So I went up to see him."

Which is where being Danny DeVito comes in handy.

"By the time we got up there, though, the cemetery was closed. I thought, OK, that's that and was going to have a sandwich in town with the guy who was driving me. As we're walking in the street, a car stopped—and the people recognized me and stopped me. They didn't speak much English, but we took a picture and, with my meager Italian, they asked me, 'Why are you here?' And I told them I was there to visit my friend Vincent—and they lit up. They called the mayor, who sent someone to open the cemetery for us. So, yeah, sometimes it's good to be recognized."

Dressed in a gray long-sleeve shirt and black cotton drawstring pants, his white hair still darkened by remnants of the coloring he uses to play Frank Reynolds, DeVito remains one of the most distinctive physical presences in film. That singular talent is

ALL PORTRAITS: GROOMING BY FABIOLA FOR TRACY MATTINGLY

TAVICUSA

Celebrating Rocky Patel's boutique cigar factory
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BATMAN RETURNS

TAXI

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

THROW MOMMA FROM THE TRAIN

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: AF ARCHIVE / ALAMY (3); PHOTO 12 / ALAMY

packed into a fireplug frame whose height Wikipedia and IMDB both list as 4-foot-10, but which at least a handful of online sources claim as 5 feet.

"Five feet?" hoots actress Kathleen Turner, a long-time friend. "Who are they kidding?"

With his almost-neckless, high-waisted physique, bald pate and large horned-rim glasses, DeVito could play a live-action Minion, one of the capsule-shaped yellow characters from the *Despicable Me* animated series. He's already played the candy version: a talking M&M magically transformed into its human equivalent. "Yeah, my 'Sunny' fans dug that," he says of the commercial, which debuted during Super Bowl LII.

"Working with him was so much fun. He's one of those guys who doesn't take life too seriously," says Tony- and Emmy-award-winning actress Kristin Chenoweth, who played his wife in *Deck the Halls* and worked with both DeVito's wife, actress Rhea Perlman of "Cheers" fame, and his daughter Lucy off-Broadway. "He doesn't get too worked up about things. I can get my panties in a bunch so quickly, but not him. It was a good lesson to learn."

If DeVito is able to follow his bliss in his 60s and 70s, it's only after years of single-minded hard work. "He's always been a restless cat," Douglas says. "His head was always going. He was always pursuing, looking for more, never settling. He was always a very creative guy."

DeVito's first break came when he landed a role in an off-Broadway production of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* that led to his playing the same role, Mr. Martini, in the Oscar-winning 1975 film, produced by Douglas. That film's star, Jack Nicholson, cast DeVito in his own film, *Goin' South*, even as DeVito parlayed guest-starring stints on TV shows like "Police Woman" into his role on "Taxi," which launched DeVito in 1978.

Besides making him a star, "Taxi" made a cigar lover out of DeVito. The mostly male cast "would celebrate every holiday with a box of Cubans—and don't ask where we got them," DeVito

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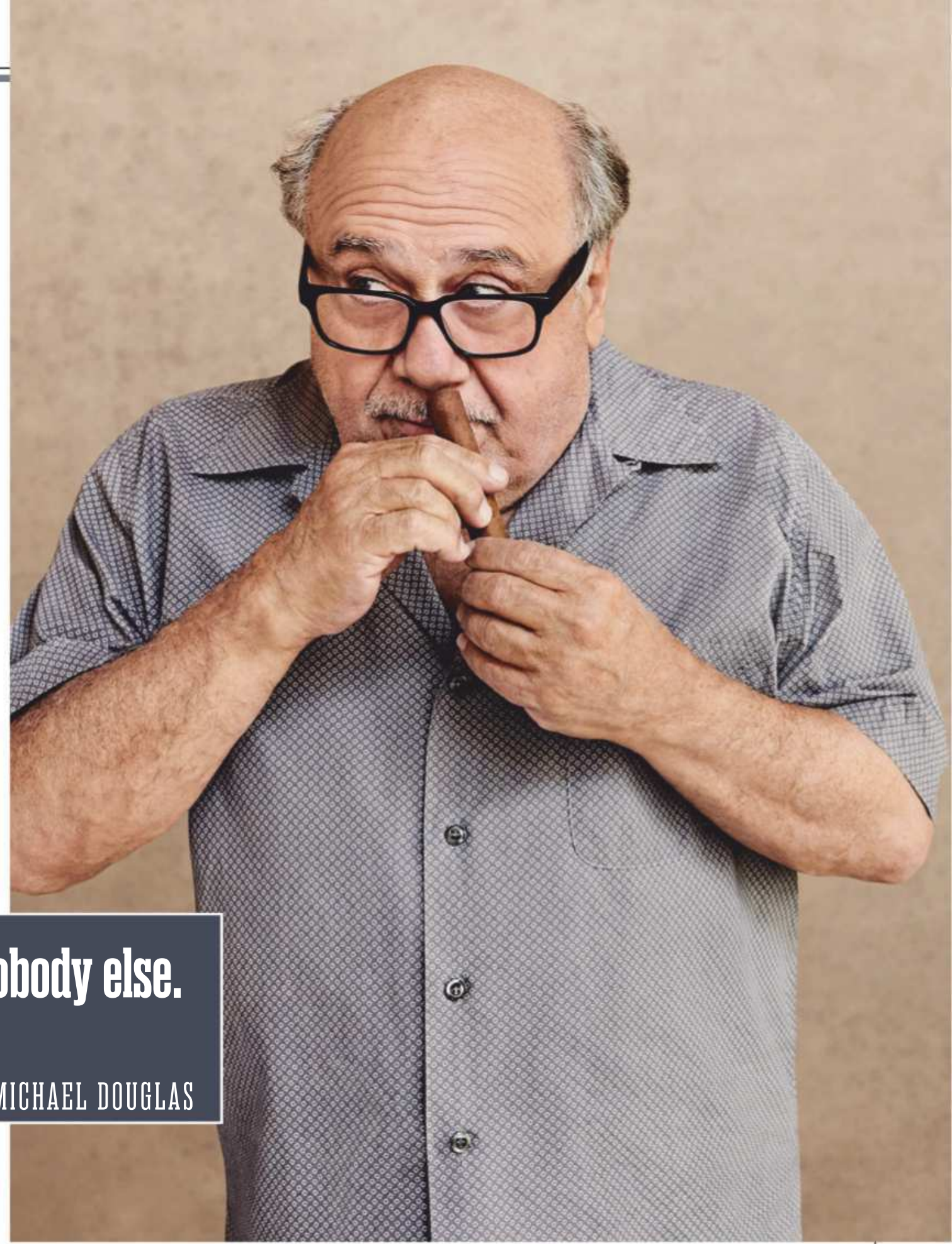
recalls. "Then it became holidays and birthdays." Today, DeVito keeps humidors in New York and Los Angeles, reminiscing about one of his early ones: "My agent gave me a big beautiful one during 'Taxi'—you needed someone to come in and service it, like a Rolls-Royce. The ones I have now I take care of myself."

His favorite time to enjoy a cigar is after a really good dinner. In his 1996 CIGAR AFICIONADO cover story, he told a story about a memorable meal in first class on a Lufthansa flight to Berlin in the late 1980s. When he asked if he could end the meal by lighting a stogie, DeVito was told by the flight attendant that, while it was against the rules, she would allow him to do so, under the condition that everyone else on the plane agreed. DeVito then asked every other passenger; on the verge of a unanimous verdict, he approached one final first-class resident, who told him, "Danny, I'm not going to let you smoke that cigar—unless you give me one, too."

Luckily, says DeVito, chuckling as he recalls the incident, "I had another one with me."

That was a social smoke, but today he typically smokes his cigars while solo. "Right now, I usually smoke alone, after dinner," he says. "I find a nice spot and fire up. The other night at the beach, I sat out and looked at the crescent moon and had a nice smoke. There's something very calming about that feeling. I've been through a lot of phases, but it's always been Cubans for me. There's just something about them. I've always wanted to go to Cuba and watch them make them."



"Danny does nastiness like nobody else. He relishes his nastiness."
—MICHAEL DOUGLAS

DeVito was mentored in his appreciation of fine tobacco by TV legend Ed. Weinberger, one of the creators of "Taxi," "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and numerous others.

"Ed. Weinberger was pretty serious about the whole cigar-smoking thing. We had a lot of discussions about that. One of the things we used to discuss was: Do you take the band off or leave it on? Are you taking it off because you don't want to seem to be showing off? Or because you don't want people to know how much the cigar cost?" DeVito says. "It's kind of easy for me to understand taking the band off so you're not broadcasting what kind of cigar you're smoking. Even when I used to go on the subway, reading a book, I always made a book cover out of a grocery bag. I didn't want people to know what I was reading. That was nobody's business. I have a very possessive thing about what I do." He pauses and smiles at the irony: "Even though I'm an actor sitting here talking my ass off."

With a professional career closing in on a half-century, DeVito is far more than a star—he is a comedy icon, whose very presence in a movie ensures at least a couple of sure-fire laughs. Credit 1984's *Romancing the Stone* as the film that translated DeVito's's wolverine-like comic instincts to the big screen, with a role that showed just what DeVito could do when it came to finding the lighter side of darker impulses.

"When I started producing *Romancing the Stone*, it was a romantic adventure," Douglas says. "Danny is fully responsible for making it a romantic-comedy-adventure—which made it a success. That character that he brought was all him—and I was so grateful at how much he added. Danny does nastiness like nobody else; he relishes his nastiness. He enjoys busting balls in character."

Born November 17, 1944 in Neptune Township, New Jersey, DeVito's early years were spent in nearby Asbury Park, where, as an adolescent, he saw friends succumbing to the heroin that was invading his neighborhood, and asked his parents to send him to private school to get away from bad influences. After high school,

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LIVE TRUE

IT'S ALWAYS SUNNY IN PHILADELPHIA

he enrolled in night classes at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts to learn makeup techniques to use working in his sister's New Jersey beauty salon. Instead, he fell hard for acting and began taking classes, then started to earn credits on stage while rooming with Douglas.

The two met in the summer of 1967, when both were working at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in New London, Connecticut. "I was on the beach, looking out at the Long Island Sound and this guy walks up to me, with this long head of hair, if you can imagine," Douglas recalls. "He says, 'You get high?' We were both 1967 potheads, so we smoked a joint and that was a beginning of a long, long friendship."

After a lauded and varied career, DeVito is that rarity: a true cross-generational star. His earliest fans, the baby-boom audience that watched "Taxi" and his films of the 1980s and 1990s, still cheer him. Children giggle at him as a slapstick M&M; their parents chuckle at the meta humor of his playing the comic brute transformed by smoothie George Clooney in a recent commercial for Nespresso. Meanwhile, a millennial audience discovers DeVito's uninhibited, id-fueled wit anew on "Sunny," their springboard to his voluminous filmography.

"I always loved his willingness to throw himself into things," says Kathleen Turner, with whom DeVito teamed on three films with Michael Douglas. "It made him fun to work with. He knew what he wanted and it was great fun to ride along."

DeVito brushes off the idea of his own appeal, pointing instead to the characters he's played and the films themselves: "This new generation of fans has to do with the TV show," he says. "There are people who loved the movies I was fortunate enough to do." He rattles off roles: Louie De Palma from "Taxi," Sam Stone from *Ruthless People*, playing the villian The Penguin in one of the *Batman* films. "Hey, those are great parts," he says. "I've been lucky that way."

For all of the conniving, mean-spirited comic villains he's so memorably played, DeVito also has a lengthy résumé as a serious actor, capable of vulnerable, soulful performances. Check him out as a struggling single dad in 1993's *Jack the Bear*, as a broken-hearted janitor tentatively romancing a fragile Holly Hunter in 1998's *Living Out Loud* or as an elderly man finally ready to commit to marriage to his longtime partner in his own 2016 short film, *Curmudgeons*.

"He is a true actor at the highest level," Chenoweth says. "Like the best comedians, he can play tragedy and, the next second, have you laughing."

Look a little deeper at DeVito's résumé and you'll find that he's worked with many of the major directors of his era, from Francis Ford Coppola to Woody Allen, David Mamet to James L. Brooks, Brian De Palma, Milos Forman and Robert Zemeckis.

DeVito went back to the stage in 2012, his first time in 40 years, when British director Thea Sharrock sought him out to play Willie Clark, a bitter, aging, ex-vaudeville performer, in a West End production of Neil Simon's *The Sunshine Boys*, opposite British actor Richard Griffiths. The role proved magical for DeVito, earning him raves from the London critics. Griffiths'

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untimely death in 2013 ended the plan to transfer the production to New York, though DeVito brought the show to Los Angeles for a brief run, with "Taxi"-mate Judd Hirsch in Griffiths' role.

"London was a leap of faith I made with these two people, Thea and Richard, who had such strong backgrounds in theater," DeVito says. "Going there and working with them, I felt like I was nestled in Willie Mays' glove."

DeVito made it to Broadway in 2017, in a revival of Arthur Miller's *The Price*. His Broadway debut earned him a Drama Desk Award and a Tony nomination, both as actor in a featured role.

DeVito started directing with a few "Taxi" episodes, then moved into film, with a résumé that includes *Throw Momma From the Train*, *Hoffa* and *War of the Roses*. As a producer, he's been more prolific; his Jersey Films production company was responsible for a list of Oscar nominees and winners that includes *Pulp Fiction*, *Erin Brockovich*, *Garden State*, *Reality Bites*, *Gattaca*, *Out of Sight* and DeVito's own films.

"I had the ability to embrace young filmmakers and that's what I did," DeVito says. "I felt I was somebody who could protect their integrity, to support them and keep others from tampering with their ideas or vision. They turned *Pulp Fiction* down at TriStar because it was 'too dark.' Meanwhile, their big film of the moment was *Cliffhanger*, with people hanging off of cliffs. I remember we had 20 walkouts at the first screening of *Pulp Fiction*. But my deal with Quentin was that I would give him anything he needed and Harvey [Weinstein, then cohead of Miramax Films] had to go along. Harvey went nuts when Quentin wanted to cast John Travolta, instead of Daniel Day-Lewis. But Quentin was right. If someone handed me a 155-page script today by a basically unknown person who had the spirit and commitment that Quentin Tarantino had, I'd get that movie made."

At this point, DeVito is a guy with a deep appreciation for how long, varied and expansive his career has been. It comes through in his relationship with his friends, who speak of DeVito's thoughtfulness and loyalty.

"When I got sick with rheumatoid arthritis, he was one of the

first to call and tell me, 'Whatever you need,'" Turner says. Adds Douglas, "He's a good friend because he's a good listener and he's compassionate. He has the ability to feel what others feel—and he's funny."

DeVito has a sharp memory for the kind of encounters that bowled him over early in his career, when he—an emissary from a new generation—found himself rubbing shoulders with performers who had entranced him as a kid. There was the time he was backstage at his first Emmy Awards, and came face to face with Lucille Ball: "I mean, it's Lucy!" he says. "She was so meaningful to me. What do you say?" He recounts an unexpected encounter with James Stewart, and a cross-country plane trip on the defunct luxury airline MGM Grand, when DeVito and his nephew shared a private compartment with comedian Milton Berle, who asked the flight attendant for a deck of cards: "It turned out he was a great cardsharp, a great card manipulator, and knew every trick in the book. So we spent five hours watching him do card tricks and telling stories about show business."

DeVito's three kids—Lucy, 35; Gracie, 33; and Jake, 31—are grown and launched. His relationship with Emmy-winning actress Perlman (they married in 1982, having moved in together two weeks after meeting in 1971) has weathered storms since 2012. Various announcements of separation and reconciliation have been issued, without the couple ever actually proceeding to divorce.

"We're separated but we're very good friends," DeVito says. "We've been together 50 years. We still have deep feelings and these three wonderful kids. And we always will."

So what's the secret to marital longevity? "A big house," DeVito jokes.

DeVito's take-it-as-it-comes approach has its roots in his parents' attitudes. "When I was a kid, I always learned the lesson that things are just things. Your bike gets stolen? Well, that's tough, but it ain't the end of the world." He tells a story about taking a brief vacation with Perlman in Key West after their oldest daughter was born. At one point, Perlman realized she'd lost her wedding ring, which had been given to her by DeVito's mother, who told her it was her own mother's ring. The couple frantically, fruitlessly searched their hotel room, until they gave up. They called DeVito's mother to confess the loss. "Eh," she said, "it's a piece of jewelry."

"Things are just things. Your bike gets stolen? Well, that's tough, but it ain't the end of the world."

The comment made its mark. "Really, it's stuff. It's just stuff. You're gonna get crazy about things?"

And so Danny DeVito, at once intrepid and sanguine, faces the future, by not thinking about it very much at all. It's more entertaining that way.

"I hope I live as long as I can and have fun while doing it," he says. "You've got to look at the bright side. I don't have projects in my mind or thoughts about what I want to do once I leave this table. I've visited a lot of places and I'd like to see more. I don't know what will happen. I just look forward to the next step." ❖

Contributing editor Marshall Fine is critic-in-residence at The Picture House Regional Film Center in Pelham, NY.

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83 La Romana
92 Dining Dominican
94 Santo Domingo
100 Playa Grande
103 Punta Cana

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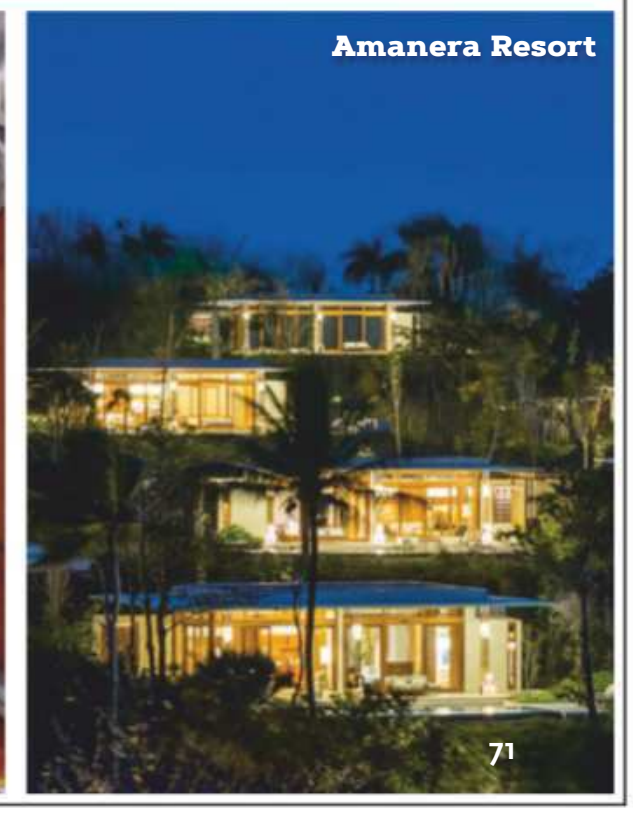
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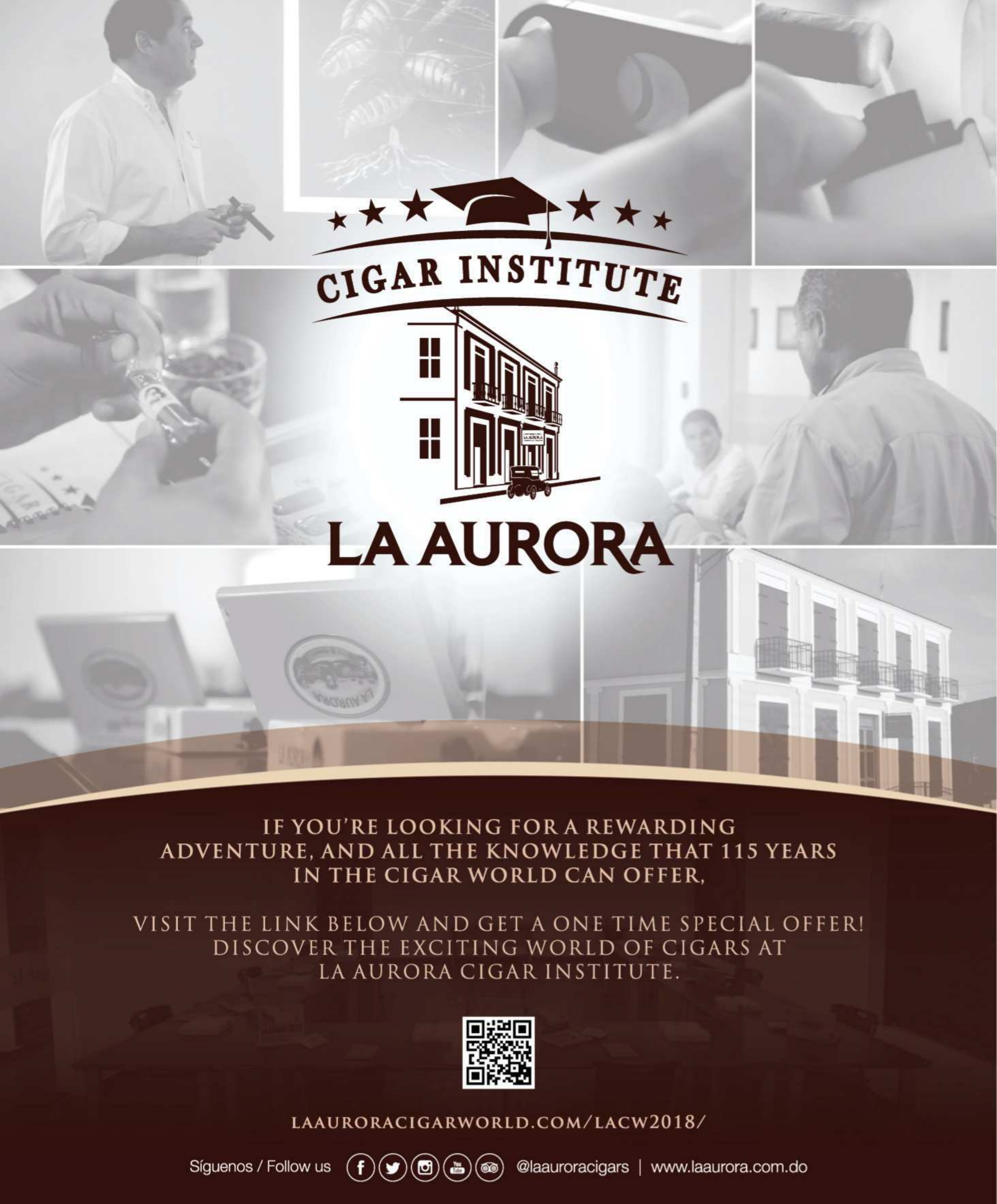
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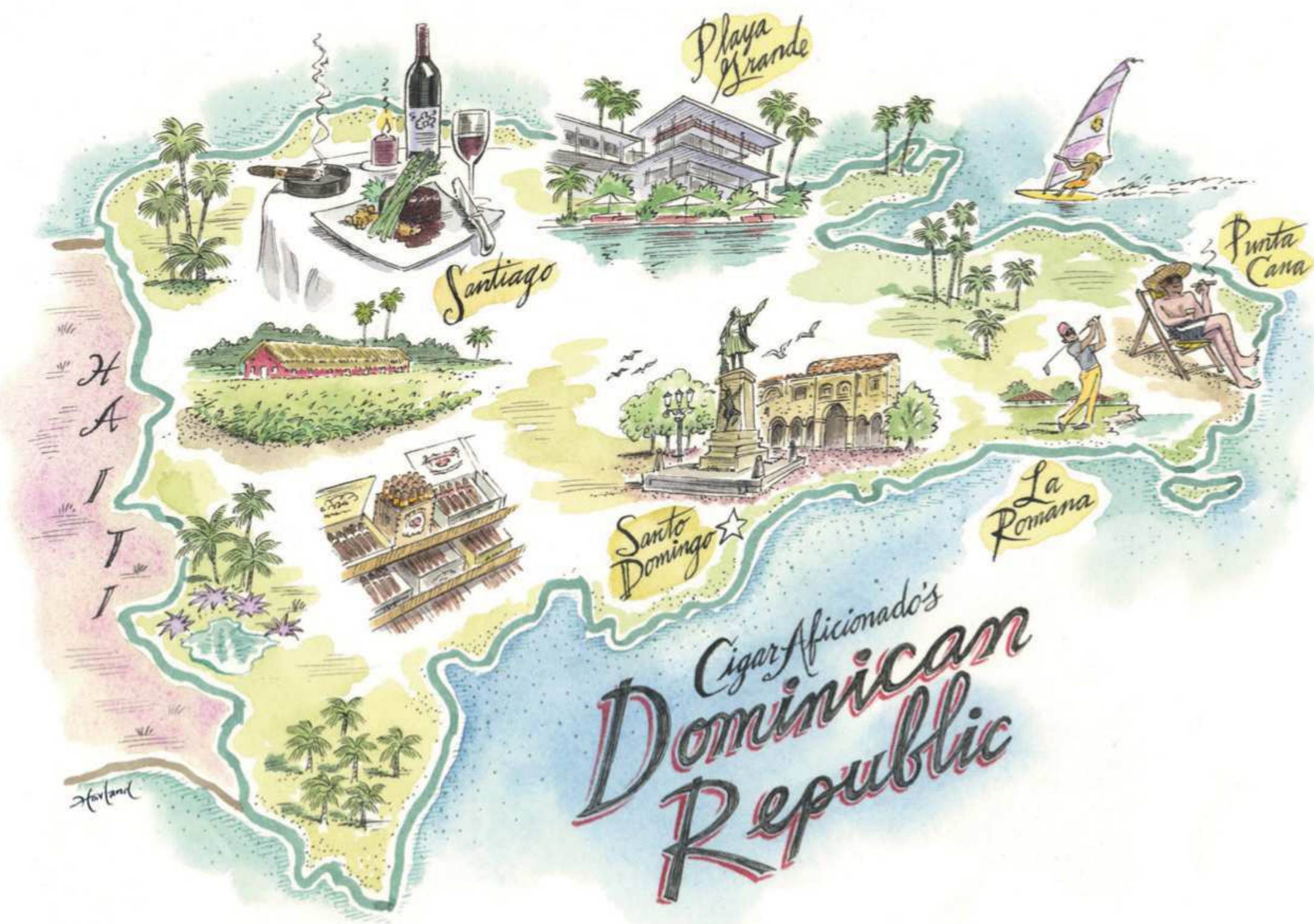

MAP: GARY HOVLAND; PREVIOUS PAGES INSETS 1 / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 / 7 FROM LEFT: PETER GARRITANO

The inherent beauty of the Dominican Republic makes itself known to the first-time traveler from the sky. As the plane begins a slow bank in the thick, tropical air, grand stretches of green fill the land below. Tobacco fields and plaintain farms, mountains and lush valleys. The world teems with life.

This is a land where tourists have plenty to keep them busy, from white-sand beaches and blue waters to world-class golf. One can walk through history on cobblestone streets, sit down to a flavorful meal of local cuisine or simply relax in style.

And this is also a country of cigars. They have been rolled here since 1903. Over the past two decades, more cigars have been made by hand in the Dominican Republic than any other place on earth. As it's a land where fine tobacco is grown and cigars are artfully rolled, the editors of CIGAR AFICIONADO have been traveling to the Dominican Republic for more than 26 years. We've walked the nation's tobacco fields and visited its myriad cigar factories, dined with cigarmakers and smoked endless numbers of their cigars. Because we know it well and have come to love our frequent trips to this country, today we are sharing our favorite places to visit with you. The following package is, by far, the most complete guide to enjoying the country we have ever published.

If you've never been to the D.R., we hope this guide entices you to visit. And if you've been before, our stories will likely show you new places, foods and experiences to try the next time you go. Bon voyage.

SANTIAGO

Cigar City

Santiago, home to some of the world's greatest cigarmakers, is a thriving metropolis with a superb lineup of cigar-friendly dining

BY DAVID SAVONA AND GREGORY MOTTOLA
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER GARRITANO

The lights of Santiago are like a carpet of stars on display for diners at Camp David Ranch.

Hodelpa Gran Almirante

The waiter pours your coffee, strong and hot. As you take that first, bracing sip, you stare out from your perch and look down upon the verdant green carpet stretched out far beneath you, the lush Cibao Valley of Santiago, Dominican Republic. Puffs of morning mist blanket the hills below, rising slowly, and you light your first cigar of the day.

The view from the wraparound balcony at the Camp David Ranch, a hotel and restaurant perched high above the city of Santiago, is breathtaking in the morning, and nearly as beautiful at night. From up here one can look down upon nearly the entire city, where most Dominican cigars are rolled. The small homes and buildings far below that dot the landscape—bright and green, small plots of farmland between houses and offices—seem to go on forever. It's the second-largest city in the Dominican Republic.

It's a city built on cigars. Arturo Fuente, La Flor Dominicana, Ashton, Macanudo, E.P. Carrillo, Aging Room, Davidoff, La Aurora, Quesada and so many other brands are rolled here. Much of the tobacco that goes inside of them (as well as cigars made in Nicaragua, Honduras and elsewhere) are grown in the fertile fields nearby. But Santiago didn't always look this way. Thirty years ago, it was far smaller, more sleepy. As the demand for handmade cigars began to boom in the early-1990s, so did Santiago. The city grew, cigarmakers expanded their operations, and the owners and workers prospered. The hotels and restaurants in the city grew as well, and the airport was expanded, allowing easy access from many major cities in the United States.

Where once there were only Spartan hotel lodgings and few choices to dine, today there are comfortable places to lay your head and an ever-growing collection of restaurants for superb dining, as well as plenty of places to light up.

RECOMMENDED HOTELS

Camp David Ranch

Secluded, small and picturesque, Camp David has become our preferred spot for staying in Santiago. Getting there the first time is an eye-opening experience. It's built at the top of a 2,000-foot peak (some call it a hill, but miniature mountain might be a more apt description) and at times the car taking you there might struggle with the incline. But once you arrive you are treated to relaxation and a particularly cigar-friendly atmosphere.

There are 18 rooms at Camp David, and 14 of them have small balconies for you to enjoy a smoke, but the ideal spot is on the porch that surrounds the restaurant. Part of it is smoker friendly, and it offers views that cannot be beat. You'll look down from high above, basking in the reward of that long drive up. The food here is good, particularly at breakfast, and grilled meats or perhaps a platter of *jamón* sate your appetite in the evening. We often end a day seated outside, smoking a cigar.

The rooms were once quite rustic, but a recent renovation has made them far nicer. Renovation on that long road taking you to the hotel has also made the drive easier.

This is no five-star resort, and it lacks a pool, but Camp David is relaxing. Rooms begin at about $50 per night in season.
Carretera Gregorio Luperón, (809) 276-6400

Hodelpa Gran Almirante

The largest and most popular hotel in Santiago, the Gran Almirante is a five-story tall hotel with 154 rooms and a casino. Back when the Dominican cigar industry was in its pre-cigar boom stage, the hotel was small, but as the cigar industry surged, the Almirante expanded. Today, it's large and comfortable, with a beautiful pool.

One sad side effect of the expansion is that the hotel no longer fully caters to the cigar smoker. The lobby, once the preferred place to puff, is no longer cigar friendly, and for a time there was no spot to smoke except for the pool. (For a short time, the hotel tried to put smokers at a table inside the parking garage, if you can believe it.) A few years ago, the Almirante created a small but workable cigar smoking area just off the lobby, in the open air. The hotel also has a cigar shop with a very good selection.

Meals in the hotel are decent, especially for breakfast or a quick bite, but for dinner you can do much better elsewhere in Santiago. Its central location on an extremely busy street makes it easy to get to just about everything in the area, including the airport. The rooms here are clean and modern, although they can be loud, especially in the vicinity of the casino or the pool. And they

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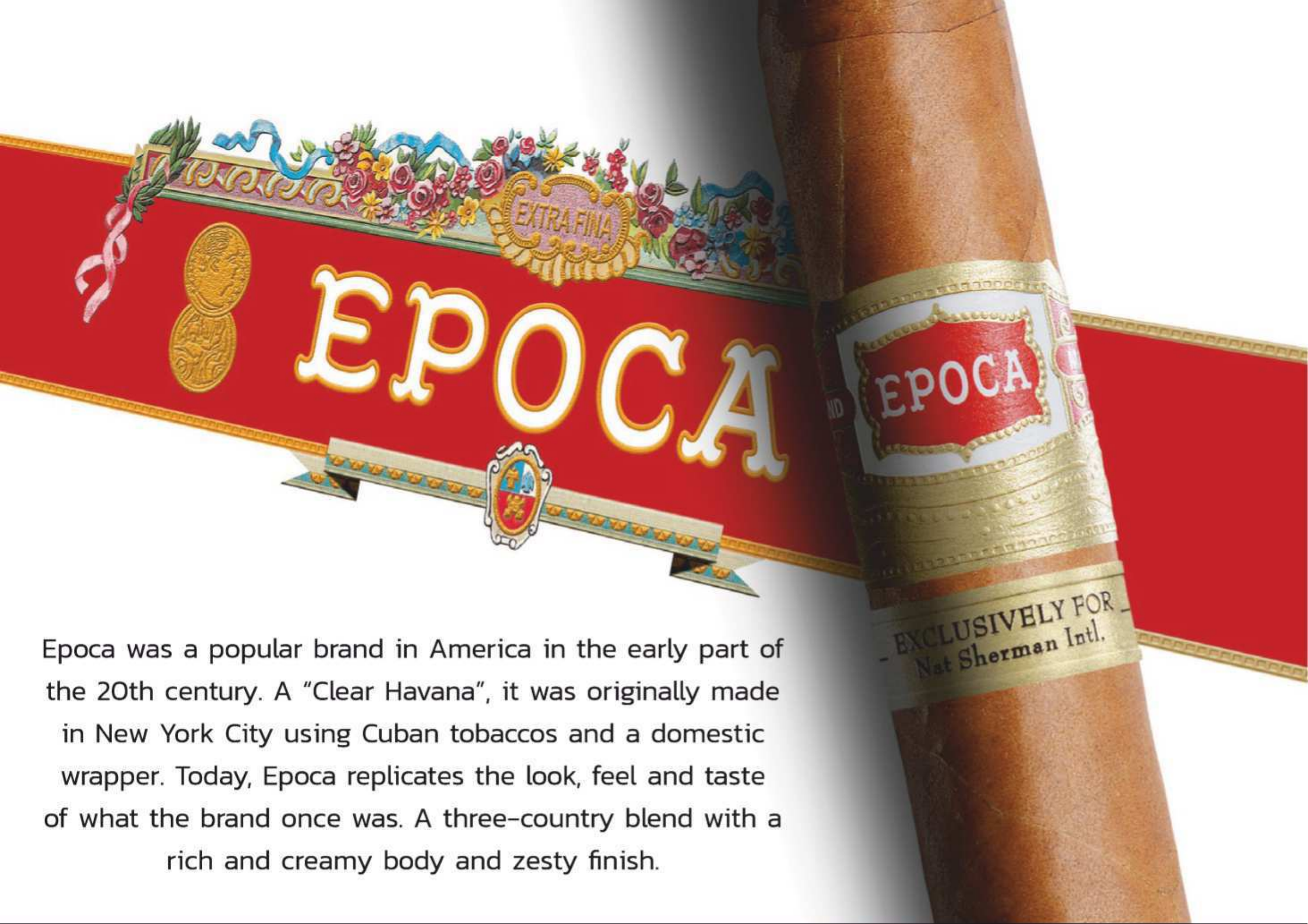

Epoca was a popular brand in America in the early part of the 20th century. A "Clear Havana", it was originally made in New York City using Cuban tobaccos and a domestic wrapper. Today, Epoca replicates the look, feel and taste of what the brand once was. A three-country blend with a rich and creamy body and zesty finish.

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are especially good on the executive floor, known as Club Imperial, which features its own check-in area, a private restaurant and much better room amenities, including Egyptian cotton linens and quite a comfortable bed. Rooms in season begin at $170.
Av. Salvador Estrella Sadhalá Santiago, (809) 580-1992

CIGAR TOURISM

La Aurora Cigar World

The oldest cigar factory in the Dominican Republic has proudly put its entire operation on permanent display. A visit to La Aurora S.A., which has been making cigars since 1903, will give you a fascinating lesson in its long family history to enhance your appreciation for Dominican cigars.

Company owner Guillermo León's vision was to create a cigar experience that goes beyond a mere stroll through the factory floor. A highlight is the tobacco museum, an elaborate exhibit designed to detail the art and craft of cigar production as well as the cultivation of tobacco. There's a great sense of history and romance to every part of the exhibit, which is full of industry props and interesting displays, and even makes full use of live plants and real tobacco, adding a bit of fun to an otherwise academic presentation. The tour ends in the factory store, which sells the entire range of La Aurora cigars, plus rum and coffee.
Ctra. Santiago–Tamboril, Km 5, (809) 734-2563

ProCigar Festival

If you've never smelled the honey-like aroma of tobacco as it hangs in a curing barn or witnessed the focus of cigar rollers in action as they toil at their rolling tables then you've yet to take your cigar appreciation to the next level. Normally, most cigar factories and tobacco fields in this country are closed to the public, but the festival is a time of hospitality and unusual transparency. Cigarmakers open their doors, giving you full access to their operation, from cigar factories to tobacco fields. While the five-day festival begins in La Romana, most of the action takes place during the second leg, in Santiago. Almost every major cigar company in the Dominican Republic participates. Each night, there's a big cigar dinner where all the attendees and industry members converge. The dinners go late, the dancing goes later, the music is loud and you are always flush with cigars—sometimes even more cigars than you can comfortably carry.
Visit procigar.org

La Aurora Cigar World

Saga Restaurant & Cigar Club

RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS

There's no better way to connect with local culture than through its cuisine. This is especially true in the city of Santiago, where certain dishes help to define the region's identity. But the search for authentic experiences can sometimes be confusing, if not intimidating, especially for less adventurous diners. Here are some of our favorites, as well as those of Santiago's cigarmakers.

Barttola Brasserie

"Everything is spectacular," says La Flor Dominicana maker Litto Gomez, a frequent guest of Barttola. The menu is broad, with eclectic choices ranging from miniature tacos to risotto with *chivo* (goat). Chef Francisco Javier Cabrera Peréz has a Michelin star from his previous work in Spain. The cigar-friendly terrace is ideal for puffing while you dine.
Av. 27 de Febrero, Jardin Plaza, (809) 971-9294

Il Pasticcio

Il Pasticcio Cucina Italiana

The reason you can smoke in the backroom of this pleasant bistro on a quiet street is that years ago cigarmaker Carlos Fuente Sr. was so impressed with the cuisine that he offered to enlarge the space and make a cigar room. Walk inside and you'll likely be greeted by gregarious host Paolo Modolo. Once the food begins hitting the table you will smile. Each bite is artfully done, reflecting the creativity of the owner.
Av. El Llano Esquina Calle 3, Cerros de Gurabo, (809) 806-1277

La Campagna

You may find yourself at La Campagna for breakfast and then again for lunch in the same day. The restaurant's *desayuno Criollo* (native breakfast) is a gut-filling combo and the restaurant makes a great Cuban sandwich. You can smoke under the thatched roof.
Av. Juan Pablo Duarte
(809) 724-2353

La Parrillita

Mofongo might be an odd-sounding word to Americans, but it's a beloved, starchy staple in the Dominican Republic (see page 92) and an essential must-eat if you want to dine like a local. A good place to start your mofongo research would be La Parrillita, which serves it five different ways.
Av. Juan Pablo Duarte 162
(809) 583-1925

La Trattoria de Claudio

Italian cuisine is particularly strong in the Dominican Republic, and you'll find superb Italian fare at Trattoria Claudio. The open kitchen to this centrally located restaurant features a large brick oven, which produces superb pizzas. Just off the entrance is a covered terrace, where cigars are welcome.
Calle Eusebio Manzueta n. 12 | Los Jardines, (809) 581-1602

DR TRAVEL TIP

Dominican Pesos

The first time you see prices in the Dominican Republic, your eyes will pop out of your head. Those numbers are in RD$, aka Dominican pesos, and at press time it took nearly 50 of them to make one U.S. dollar. That burger that looks like it costs $430? It's about $8.50.

Mar y Fuego

Mar y Fuego is a cigar-friendly Spanish restaurant with a strong emphasis on fish, serving up dishes like Galicean-style octopus and grilled langoustines. Diners rave about the paella.
Lic. Agustin Acevedo, (809) 736-4488

Noah Restaurant and Lounge

Noah is visually striking, and its ceviches and risottos are particularly good. Cigarmaker Manuel "Manolo" Quesada goes there for quality sushi. "It's hard to get sushi in Santiago," he says. The restaurant has an area up front where smoking is allowed.
Calle del Sol Esquina Francia, (809) 971-0550

Pedro Restaurant

Spain may be the birthplace of paella, but Santiago has co-opted the classic rice dish. Abe Flores says Pedro serves a solid rendition, and in a cigar-friendly atmosphere. Be sure to get a table in Pedro's smoking room. It's a closed-off area of the restaurant where your cigars can happily coexist with your crustaceans.
Salome Ureña #18, Los Jardines, (809) 582-2144

Restaurante El Zaguán

As one of the Dominican Republic's national dishes, *mofongo* is available almost everywhere in Santiago. According to Ernesto Perez-Carrillo, you'll need to leave town a bit if you really want to experience the gold standard. The casual, ranch-style restaurant in question is called El Zaguán, and it's in the La Vega Province, which is about a 25-minute drive from downtown Santiago. They simply stick to script and make it with traditional technique and national pride—no different than the country's cigarmakers.
Av. Pedro A. Rivera, Concepción de La Vega 41000, (809) 573-5508

Saga Restaurant & Cigar Club

You smell it first, and hear it soon after. It's beef—great beef—sizzling in protest against the phonebook-sized slab of salt that it sits upon. The salt is black and angry, holding what seems like the heat of 100 suns, and the meat is thick and juicy, its fat oozing onto the salt and adding even more aroma to the air. Welcome to Saga, home of the Cowboy Steak. The Tomahawk-style ribeye is the trademark dish of a restaurant that will change the way you feel about a meal in Santiago.

Saga takes cigar friendly to a new level. The standout wine list comes in a cigar box, and smoking is welcome here. It won't surprise you that it is owned by cigarmakers: Augusto "Fufi" Reyes and his daughter Nirka, from De Los Reyes cigars. The restaurant has an upscale, modern décor, and there's far more to the menu than beef. There are pastas and risotto as well as sushi, *croquetas* made with decadent *jamón ibérico* and more.

Saga is among the more expensive places to eat in the city, and deservedly so. ❖
24, Av. Benito Juarez, (809) 276-7900

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LA ROMANA

Casa de Campo

This oasis has something for nearly every desire, including doing nothing at all **BY DAVID SAVONA**

The infinity pool stretches out before you, cool and inviting. You light your cigar as a waiter brings an icy cocktail, and peruse the day's menu, pondering your next move. At Casa de Campo, the choices are considerable. The resort is vast—7,000 acres—and all guests are assigned a personal golf cart upon check in. You may be here for golf, but the cart is not for the course. You'll use it to get around the property.

The resort has a little bit of everything, first and foremost some of the finest golf in the Caribbean (see page 86). Casa de Campo opened in 1974 as an executive retreat for conglomerate Gulf + Western. If you stayed here many years ago and think you know Casa de Campo, you don't. A $40 million renovation in 2011 resulted in better rooms, a better pool and a stunning new lobby. In 2017, more money still was invested. And while there are the things you would expect—beach, pool, tennis—there are also the items you just won't find in most other places. The equestrian center allows for everything from a simple, pleasant ride with the family to expert polo lessons. Casa de Campo's 245-acre shooting center is set up with Beretta shotguns and expert guides. Of course, one of the best choices may be to do nothing. Recently renovated and redesigned, the new Minitas Beach Club has the look of a restaurant in St. Barths or Miami. The food here is quite good, the wine list is short but workable, and the cocktails are better than one would expect in the typical resort setting.

While the rooms are superb, for extra luxury—or for larger parties—Casa de Campo has a vast selection of villas, ranging in size from three to 10 bedrooms. Each has a private pool, some are on the ocean and others overlook one of the golf courses. All of them come with maid service and breakfast prepared in the villa.

The resort proper has several restaurants. In addition to the fine dining at the beach, there is La Caña (right off the lobby), which offers a pleasant meal in a beautiful setting overlooking

the main pool, and for ambiance it's hard to find a more gorgeous spot than La Piazzetta, a traditional Italian restaurant overlooking Altos de Chavón, a quaint village with the look of a European city.

For cigar smokers, the resort is quite cigar friendly. Most rooms have balconies where you can relax with your evening smoke, and most of the dining facilities have outdoor areas where your cigar is welcome. There's also no shortage of places to buy a cigar at Casa de Campo, and if you're interested in seeing how great cigars are made, tours can easily be arranged, for you're next door to Tabacalera de Garcia, one of the world's largest cigar factories.

Home to such iconic brands as Montecristo, Romeo y Julieta and many others, tours to Tabacalera de Garcia are handled by Cigar Country Tours. The operator will arrange for you to see all the aspects of cigar construction from the preliminary steps of sorting raw tobacco to the actual cigar rolling, and even the final packaging stages.

Two tours are available: the extensive Tabacalera de Garcia factory tour and the smaller Vega Fina Experience, which focuses on Vega Finas. Keep in mind, you can't take any photos at Tabacalera de Garcia, and there's even a dress code: long pants, and no sandals or open-toe shoes of any kind. Looking at all those cigars will get you in the mood to purchase one, no doubt, and the tour operator also owns a store complete with a smoking lounge in which to puff. Cigars are available for purchase, duty free, at the Cigar Country Megastore. ❖

casadecampo.com and cigarcountrytours.com

DR TRAVEL TIP

Bring A Nice Shirt

You won't need a suit, but it's good to bring dress clothes—It's not all beaches and resorts. While you're on vacation, nice restaurants require dressing well.

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LA ROMANA

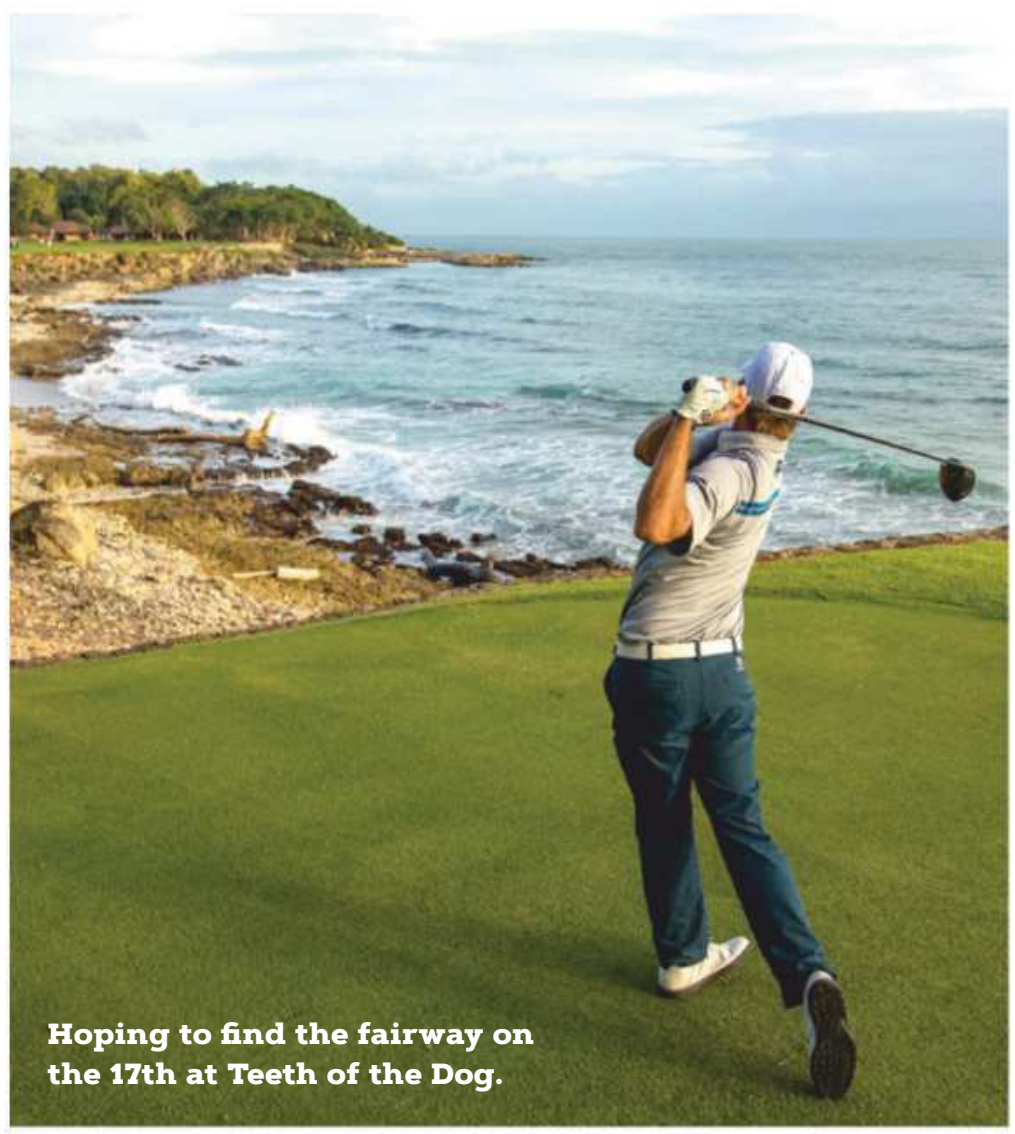
Golfer's Paradise

With three golf courses—including the best in the Dominican Republic—Casa de Campo is tailor made for a long golf trip **BY DAVID SAVONA**

The right side of the fairway is jagged, as if a towering sea god had risen from the crystal blue waters of the Caribbean to rend the earth with his mighty, clawed hands, removing safe landing areas for your golf ball. Welcome to the 17th hole at Teeth of the Dog in Casa de Campo.

The resort has three golf courses, the best of which is this one, which has been delighting and challenging golfers since it opened in 1971. Designed by Pete Dye, the course was created by more than 300 workers over the span of a year. As legend goes, the workers noted the bite of the sharp coral near the sea, calling it *dientes del perro*, Spanish for "teeth of the dog," and the course had its name.

More than coral bites here. Seven of the holes are on the water, and aside from the obvious peril of putting a shot into the ocean, those seaside holes make for tough conditions. One of the more striking holes is the fifth, a short par 3 that has a tee box and green that both jut into the water. The entire carry is over lapping waves, and one day those ocean breezes can be tamed with a wedge, while on others it could call for a five-iron. Watch the winds, and listen to the caddies, who are long on experience here. Playing from the black tees, the course stretches more than 7,300 yards and has a well-earned 140 slope rating.



Hoping to find the fairway on the 17th at Teeth of the Dog.

One of the many beauties of playing Teeth of the Dog is its convenience. If you're staying at Casa de Campo, the golf course is mere steps away from Lago Grill, the thatched-hut breakfast restaurant at the resort. No need to budget travel time in; drive your golf cart up to the facility and walk into the pro shop, past the statue of Pete Dye, the course designer.

In the past, warming up before your round was a straightforward affair. There was a large putting green, and a sizeable

No. 7, one of Teeth's many seaside holes.

LARRY LAMBRECHT

driving range. But in May 2018, Casa de Campo unveiled a marvelous new Golf Learning Center, spread across 21 acres of grass. Run by Charlie Epps (who coached two-time major winner Angel Cabrera) the Center has indoor and outdoor hitting bays, swing lessons, golf fitting, all you need to tune up your game before a round—or to take some serious lessons.

The gear here is now top-notch. Rent a set and you'll be playing with gleaming new Titleist irons and woods, and you'll warm up with Pro V1s in the learning center.

There are few downsides to playing golf here. Yes, the pace of play can be slow, but that's understandable given the desire to snap photos of the stunning vistas. And after the one-two-three punch of the gorgeous 15th, 16th and 17th holes, the inland 18th is a somewhat disappointing finish. But a round here will show you why *Golf Digest* calls Teeth of the Dog the best golf course in the entire Dominican Republic. A round costs $250 in season for hotel guests, $395 for non-guests.

Bring more balls than you think you need, as those ocean holes tend to devour your Titleists. After you finish, stop at the grill house, which serves a surprisingly good Cuban sandwich and has a small selection of cigars for sale. Order a cold drink and light your cigar. You've earned it.

Dye Fore

If you're spending serious time at Casa de Campo, you must also play Dye Fore. Opened in 2004, this course is also picturesque, but you'll see more green and less blue than on Teeth. Rather than the ocean, the course abuts the Chavón River.

Dye Fore

Dye Fore ($236 a round in season for guests) has an 18-hole course and a nine-hole course, and each set of nine is named for nearby landmarks, Lagos, Marina and Chavón. The 18 holer is a 7,700-yard monster from the back tees, with a 139 slope and a 76.8 rating. Seven of the holes feature views of the Chavón River, some 300 feet below. You'll also see the mountains, the marina and the sea in the distance.

Dye Fore isn't as close to the main resort as Teeth, but you can drive your cart the 20 minutes or so to the facility, or take a shuttle. It lacked a pro shop until recently, but now it has its own area to buy balls and other golf gear, and the resort was in the process of building a short-game area on site for warming up as well.

After your round, consider exploring nearby Altos de Chavón, which features several restaurants and shops.

DR TRAVEL TIP

The Winters Are Lovely

The average temperature in the DR is a sublime 77 degrees Fahrenheit. Our favorite times to visit are during late winter and early spring, when it's cold and snowy up north and the DR tends to be dry and sunny, with temperatures reaching the mid 80s. Summers are very hot and can be rainy, and bring the risk of hurricane season.

The Links

The third course at Casa de Campo isn't in the same league as its bigger brothers, but it's fine to play if you're looking to mix it up. Not as busy as the other two, The Links ($150 a round) is also a good choice if you're playing with your children or newcomers to the game who could benefit from an easier track. Located just next to the pro shop, it shares the convenience of Teeth.

The Links

While the course plays easy from the upper tees, played from the longest of the five tee boxes, The Links is no pushover. Playing from the tips, the course is as long as Teeth of the Dog, but the slope rating is only 133, and you won't have to contend with the wavering winds from the ocean.

"At least 50 percent [of visitors] play Teeth of the Dog," says Robert Birtel, director of golf operations for Casa de Campo. "If they're on a golf trip, they play all three."

Improvement continues on all three courses, Birtel says, with an irrigation project nearing completion. By May of 2019, he says, "all three will have full irrigation." GPS systems are being added to the golf carts. ❖

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CIGAR COUNTRY

Mangú

Vestida de Novia

Chivo

Mofongo

Dining Like a Dominican

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA AND DAVID SAVONA

You can get great steak, Italian and other worldly cuisines in the Dominican Republic, but whenever we visit we also indulge in traditional Dominican fare.

Mangú

You'll see *mangú* (pronounced main-goo) on just about every breakfast menu in the Dominican Republic. We'll admit—the beige, lumpy pile is not a looker, but this is a filling breakfast we've grown to love. Mangú is made from mashed, green plantains topped with vinegary red onions and is typically served with eggs. It's an ideal way to prepare for a day of smoking cigars.

Sancocho

It's earthy, it's elemental and it's one of those dishes at the core of Dominican cuisine. *Sancocho* is a hearty stew made from a variety of meats that can include pork, beef, sausage and chicken. It's cooked slowly to tenderize the proteins and to fortify the heavy, brownish broth with meaty richness. You'll also find large pieces of yucca, and it's served with rice.

Roast Pig

While many have had pork chops and bacon, the pig-eating experience changes drastically once you've had the whole hog—namely the flavor goes up by many degrees. In the Dominican Republic, the pig is cooked for hours until chunks and shreds of meat fall off the bone. But it doesn't end there. The porcine joy of a pig roast comes from getting a piece with the crispy, salty skin, called *chicharrones,* guaranteeing each bite will be equal parts crunchy skin, luscious meat and unctuous fat.

Mofongo

This mash of plantains is studded with chunks of fried pork rind and ridiculously tantalizing amounts of garlic. This is the type of dish you eat later in the day, ideally al fresco with an icy cold beer and a good Dominican cigar.

Chivo

In Spanish, it means goat. And when you ask for *chivo* in the Dominican Republic, it normally comes braised in a tomato-based stock to meaty, fall-off-the-bone effect. It's made with the animal's fattier cuts to ensure it stays tender throughout the long cooking process. The result is something not as gamey as lamb, not as safe as beef and probably one of the tastiest braised meats you'll ever have.

Vestida de Novia

Nothing refreshes like an ice-cold beer on a hot day, and when you're in the Dominican Republic your beer of choice should be Presidente. This easy sipping pilsner is ubiquitous in the country, and despite occasional power failures an exceptionally cold one is never far away. How cold? There's a common expression in the Dominican Republic for a Presidente with a thin layer of frost—*vestida de novia*, slang for "the dress of the bride." A sip on a hot day and you may wish to propose.

The Three Bs of Rum: Barceló, Bermudez & Brugal

Ron means rum in the Dominican Republic, and this rum-producing country has three major brands: Barceló, Bermudez and Brugal. When sipping it neat it pays to go with the premium pours: Brugal 1888 Gran Reserva, Barceló Imperial and Ron Bermudez Aniversario. ❖

PETER GARRITANO

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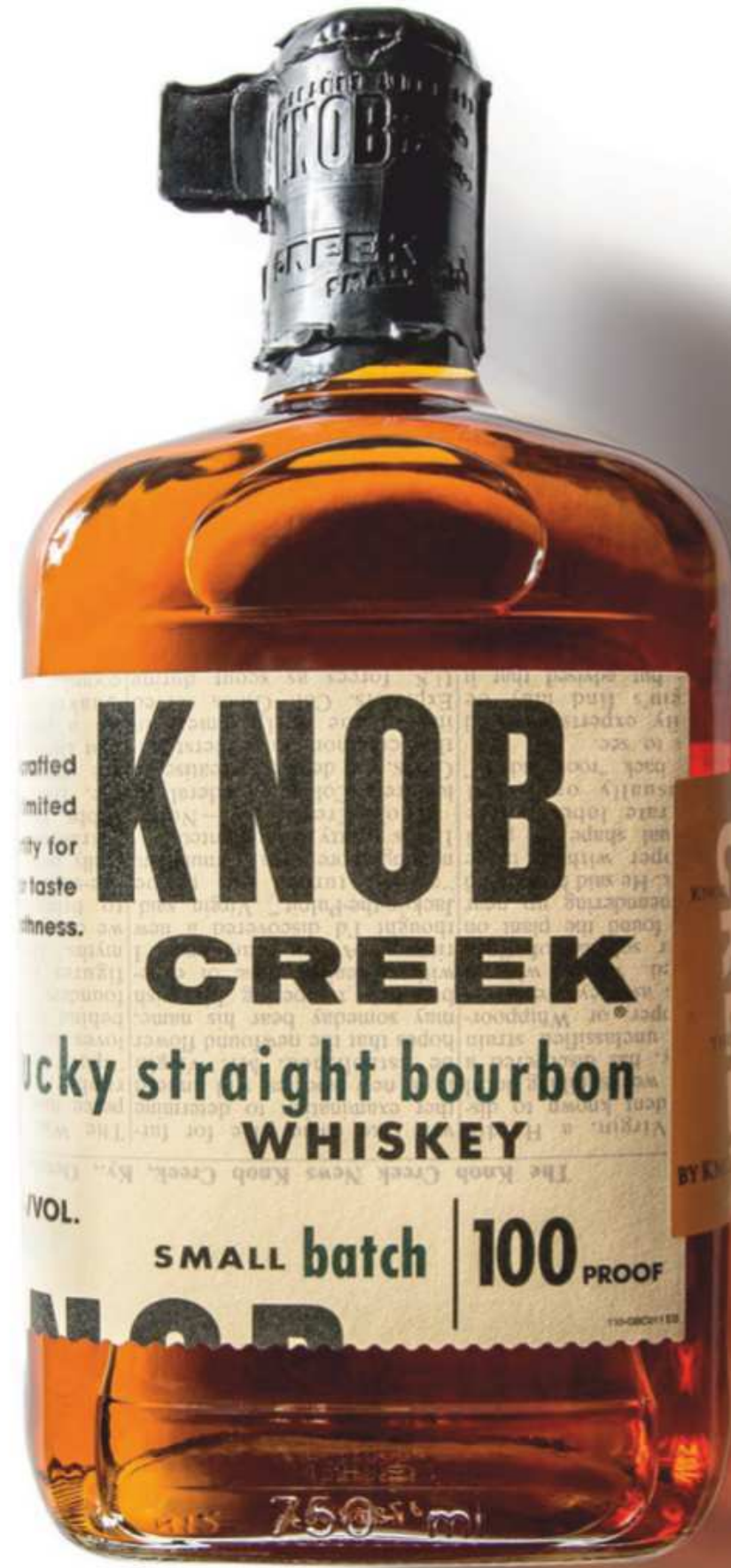

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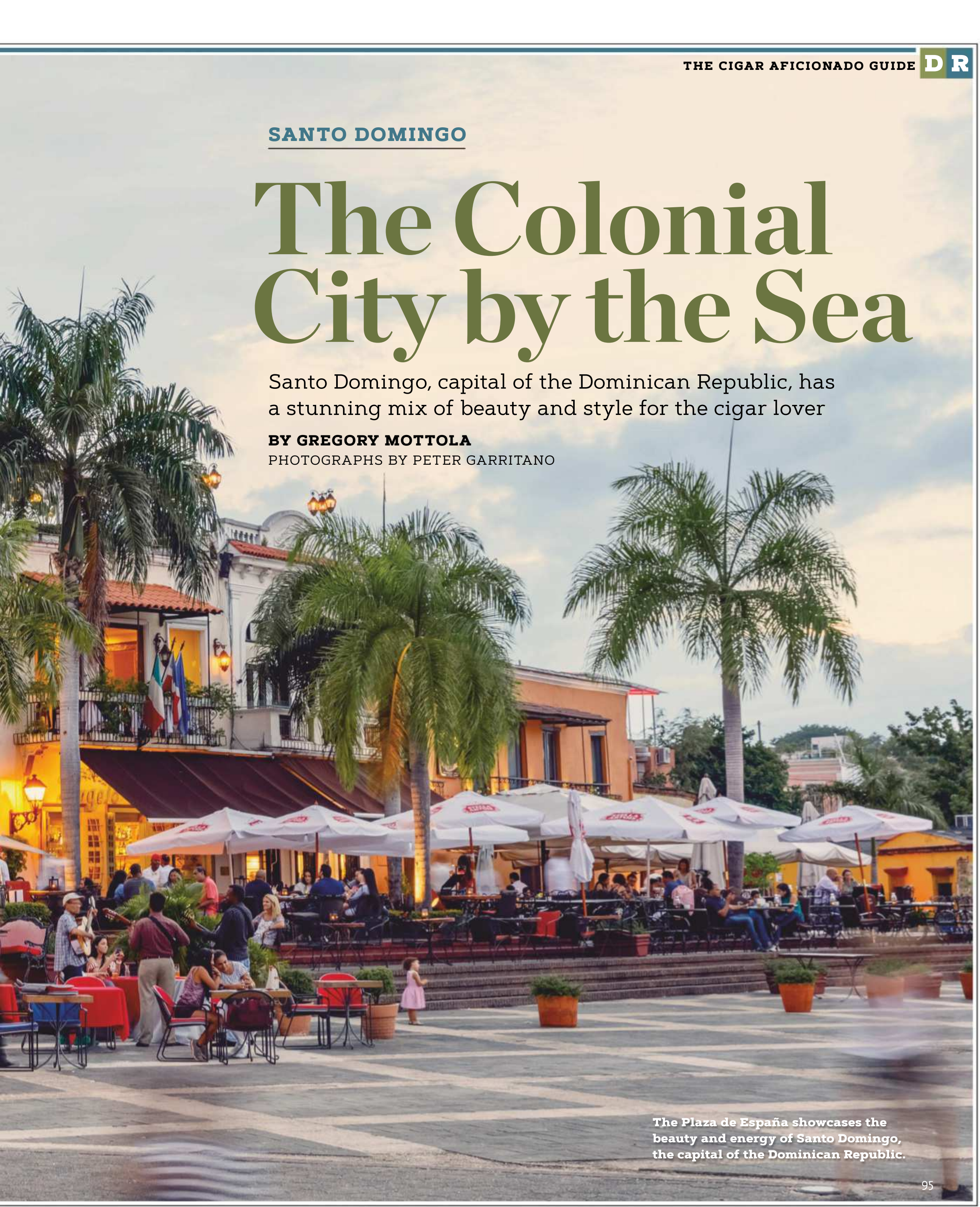
SANTO DOMINGO

The Colonial City by the Sea

Santo Domingo, capital of the Dominican Republic, has a stunning mix of beauty and style for the cigar lover

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA
PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER GARRITANO



The Plaza de España showcases the beauty and energy of Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic.

Hodelpa Nicolás de Ovando

The ABAM factory's Villiger Lounge

A statue of Nicolás de Ovando stands atop a marble base in the middle of a piazza that dates back to the 16th century. Cast in bronze, he's a bit shorter and a bit stouter than his famous contemporary Christopher Columbus, but his pose and dark patina are no less dignified.

Columbus might get all the glory for discovering the New World, but here in the colonial section of Santo Domingo, Ovando is the real rock star. A respected figure in this part of the Dominican Republic, Ovando helped to found the capital city of Santo Domingo and is properly memorialized for it.

Cigars aside, one of Santo Domingo's biggest attractions is its famed Colonial City, a seaside district set on the Ozama River whose ancient fortresses and massive defensive walls have miraculously survived modernization, making this part of town the oldest permanent European settlement in the Americas.

Here are our preferred spots for enjoying this special city.

RECOMMENDED HOTEL

Hodelpa Nicolás de Ovando

Here's a curious fact: Santo Domingo claims to be home of the first, and oldest, paved road of the Americas. The road is called Calle Las Damas, or "street of the ladies." On that street is Hodelpa Nicolás de Ovando, a hotel built in 1502 and the former home of the Spanish nobleman and governor responsible for so much of the city's beauty.

After standing for more than 500 years, the Nicolás de Ovando hotel has been upgraded to include all the amenities of a modern facility without losing its historical character. The beauty lies in both its overall architecture and the attention to details—ornate arcades open up to outdoor, cigar-friendly courtyards tiled in terra-cotta, while interiors are appointed with tapestries, iron candelabras and other period furnishings to enhance the Spanish colonial ambience. Rooms begin at $140 per night, in season.
Calle las Damas, Colonial City, (888) 403-2603

RECOMMENDED CIGAR ATTRACTIONS

ABAM Factory

One of the main star cigar attractions of Santo Domingo is undoubtedly the ABAM factory. This is the place where Villiger produces most of its premium cigars, most notably the Flor de Ynclan, which was named the No. 10 Cigar of the Year by Cigar Aficionado for its Robusto size last year. It's a short car ride outside of the colonial district in the northern part of the city.

A scheduled visit will get you a tour of the factory, a bunch of cigars and drinks at the bar in the factory's second-story lounge. Like most cigar factory tours, you'll get to see how tobacco is treated along its entire industrial journey before it becomes a finished cigar.

In addition to serving as Villiger's primary producer of premium cigars, ABAM is the home of the Villiger Lounge, a beautifully appointed walk-up space located on the second level of the factory. It overlooks the factory floor with a great panoramic view of the rolling gallery.

BOTTOM: COURTESY OF ABAM FACTORY

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ERNESTO PÉREZ-CARRILLO

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SERIE SIGNATURAS

DUETO is the result of a special collaboration between two of the most passionate and dedicated Dominican boutique premium cigar makers, Ernesto Pérez-Carrillo and Boris Wintermans. While each cigar maker has a unique and distinguished personal tobacco history, they share the philosophy that relentless, passionate curiosity is essential to discovering and enjoying the best life has to offer.

Blended by the legendary Ernesto Pérez-Carrillo to excite the senses, DUETO captures the complex intersection of two distinct premium cigar blending signatures. Incorporating each cigar makers' hand-selected, preferred tobaccos, this cigar blend delivers a special, one-of-a-kind sensorial experience for the curious – the signature elegant robustness of Ernesto Pérez-Carrillo cigars and the signature balance of sophisticated complexity and smoothness of Boris Wintermans' Balmoral handmade cigars.

#CuriosityDrivesDiscovery

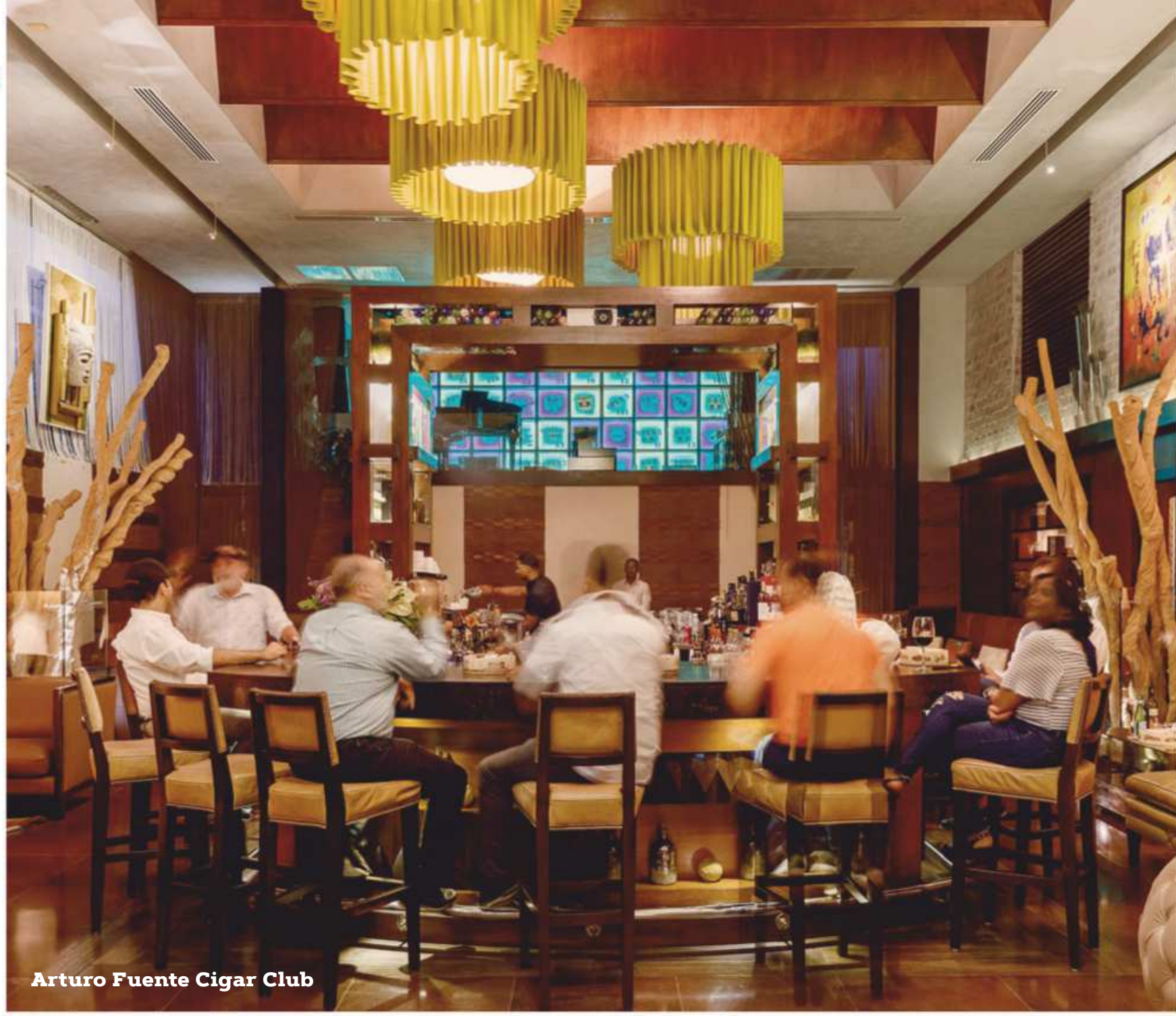
BALMORALCIGARS.COM

According to lounge lore, the gnarly tree-trunk base used for one of the tables was repurposed from a tree that used to belong to former Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo.
Zona Franca Industrial de Villa Mella Nave #6, Buena Vista Primera, Villa Mella (809) 569-9494

Arturo Fuente Cigar Club

If there is an ultimate monument to all things Fuente it's the Arturo Fuente Cigar Club, which is probably the most upscale cigar bar in the entire country. It's a bi-level building with common areas downstairs, private lounges on the second floor, conference rooms, a bar-restaurant and even a stage for live performances.

The humidor is flush with entire verticals of Fuente, Don Carlos and Fuente Fuente OpusX cigars, as well as hard-to-find OpusX sizes, and at very reasonable prices (or at least reasonable for OpusX).


Arturo Fuente Cigar Club

The club is the brainchild of Ciro Cascella, a Dominican restaurateur and businessman who also serves as executive vice president of Fuente's cigar operations in the Dominican Republic. Start with a cigar and a drink in the intimate atmosphere of the common seating areas before getting a bite to eat at the bar-restaurant and attenuating the night with more cocktails and cigars. We recommend that your clothes match the environment. You don't have to wear a suit and tie, but it wouldn't be out of place. This is not a spot to wear your shorts and flip-flops.
Av. 27 de Febrero No. 211, Ens. Naco, (809) 683-2771

RECOMMENDED RESTAURANTS

La Cassina

If you're spending a few days in Santo Domingo and wish to eat beyond the walls of the colonial district, we suggest stopping by La Cassina, a Mediterranean restaurant with plenty of atmosphere and a great kitchen that takes its pasta and risotto as seriously as its meat and fish. No matter what you order, be sure to sit outside in their garden-like oasis where smoking is more than welcome.
Av. Roberto Pastoriza 504, (809) 363-4444

Restaurante 1502

Restaurante 1502 at Nicolás de Ovando offers fine dining in the convenience of the best hotel in Santo Domingo. The room is quaint and the cooking seems to court the Michelin star set by attempting to elevate traditional Dominican fare. It's certainly one of the fancier options in town. All the seats in this restaurant are indoors, meaning your cigar is not welcome while you dine, but cigar-friendly courtyards and bars are just a few steps away.
Calle las Damas, Colonial City, (888) 403-2603

DR TRAVEL TIP

Don't Buy Cubans

Don't buy Cuban cigars in the DR. Distribution of real Cubans in the Dominican Republic is spotty, and there are many fakes. Besides, you're there to explore the Dominican Republic as a tobacco destination of origin. Also, Dominicans take great pride in their cigars. Asking for a Cuban could be insulting.

Pat'e Palo

Take a short walk through the picturesque city streets of Santo Domingo and make your way to the Plaza de España, a gorgeous square abuzz with casual restaurants situated right on the piazza. We recommend getting an outdoor table at Pat'e Palo. There are plenty of safety options on the menu like steaks, salmon and even a burger, but the native dishes are far more interesting and immersive. Be sure to try their *chivo encendío*, a hearty, signature entrée of stewed goat and risotto.

Feel free to light up a cigar at the table before, during or after your meal. The waiters won't give you any trouble. They'll simply give you an ashtray.
Plaza Espana, Ciudad Colonial (809) 687-8089 ❖

ICON: GARY HOVLAND

PLAYA GRANDE

Dominican Deluxe

Aman Resorts has created a world-class, luxury retreat in a quiet part of the northern coast of the Dominican Republic **BY LARRY OLMSTED**

Three decades ago, Adrian Zecha's search for a beachfront home in Phuket, Thailand, led him to open a small resort he called Amanpuri. The term "boutique resort" was not yet in vogue, but the escapist luxury property drew a passionate and loyal following. Today, there are now almost 30 Aman Resorts worldwide, and "Aman junkies" are among the most devoted customers in travel. The brand spans four continents, with urban properties, mountain properties, and even UNESCO World Heritage Sites. But one luxury travel niche Aman has lacked has been a golf property—until now.

The Dominican Republic has long been the king of Caribbean golf, but its hidden gem is the Playa Grande Golf Course, a stunning Robert Trent Jones Sr. clifftop design on the country's less-visited north shore. Evocative of a tropical Pebble Beach, it debuted two decades ago, anchored by a long defunct hotel. "In this particular case, the destination and location provided us with the perfect opportunity where we could provide an experience on par with our brand," says Aman CEO Olivier Jolivet. "The foundation of this course already had a rich history, which we wanted to bring back to life."

They turned to the famed designer's son, Rees Jones. The original hotel stood in the middle of the course, but with it gone, Jones was able to completely replace the few less-than-thrilling holes, moving the inland 14th to the edge of the sea, kicking off a five-hole, clifftop finish unrivalled in a sport where three consecutive oceanfront holes is considered excessive. Playa Grande has an amazing 10 coastal holes. When the new Amanera resort opened just before Christmas 2015, the Playa Grande Golf

Course was immediately acclaimed as one of the best in the entire Caribbean. But that wasn't enough for Aman—it just brought Jones back for another comprehensive overhaul for peak fall season 2018, including a complete re-grassing, better drainage, all new sand for the bunkers, extensive decorative landscaping, new greens or tees on half a dozen holes and two new luxury "comfort stations" with farm-to-table delicacies and custom cocktails.

Membership at the course is limited to owners of Amanera residences, and a few specialty selected non-residents. Aside from members, Amanera hotel guests are the only other players allowed access to the course, making tee times here essentially irrelevant. It has caddies, exclusivity, and a rare mix of stunning beauty, forgiving playability and dramatic daily changes based on wind. It is simply a stunning golf experience.

The resort itself is no slouch, with some two dozen decadent guest casitas with private pools, outdoor showers and dining areas, and first-class amenities. Service is far above the usual Caribbean standard, and white-glove treatment begins when you land. Flying into Puerto Plata (90 minutes from the resort) every arriving guest is met planeside by a VIP host and escorted to a hospitality lounge with snacks, cold drinks and cocktails, while staffers recover your luggage. Immigration and customs are expedited, and soon you are taken to a waiting chauffeured Mercedes, well worth the $200 per car transfer rate. (Guests can also fly into Samana or Santo Domingo, but those airports don't have the VIP lounge, and Santo Domingo is nearly twice as far away.)

If there is one theme throughout the resort, it is emptiness: restaurants, bars, the infinity pool, and the beach are grossly oversized. The 2,000-acre resort has plenty to wow non-golfers, including a private beach, private hiking trails that lead to a private picnic cabin on Aman's private mountain, and in-house guides for yoga, pilates, cooking classes and more. There is a lavish spa—an Aman trademark—and the Salon del Tabaco cigar lounge, which has cigarmaking demonstrations and a custom puro, hand rolled in four sizes. ❖

From $1,650 per night, in season.

DR TRAVEL TIP

DR Time

Sometimes the clocks match Eastern Standard Time, but because the Dominican Republic doesn't follow Daylight Saving Time, you will have to adjust your watch ahead one hour when you travel during peak season.

ICON: GARY HOVLAND

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PUNTA CANA

The Punta Cana Experience

Emanating from one developer's golf dream, this Dominican outpost now offers two of the Caribbean's best courses **BY JEFF WILLIAMS**

Jack Nicklaus' vision comes to the Dominican Republic at Punta Espada.

EVAN SCHILLER TK

MAKE YOUR VISIT TO
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC COMPLETE
WITH THE REAL CIGAR FACTORY EXPERIENCE!

As Frank Rainieri went about realizing his dream by developing what would be called Punta Cana on the northeastern tip of the Dominican Republic, he would sometimes find himself on a low-lying cliff with a small cove beneath him awash with the turquoise waters of the Caribbean.

It was here he came to dream more than 50 years ago, when he was putting together the plans that swirled in his mind about building a luxury resort with all the amenities that went with it.

That little spot is now part of the Corales Golf Club, one of the finest golf destinations in the world. And while Punta Cana may not yet be as famous as its neighbor Casa de Campo, the area has its own world-class golf, and it's all part of Frank Rainieri's world-class dreams.

"Our golf courses, we know they appeal to people who love life, love fine things and who want the best," says Rainieri, a cigar lover who not only owns the Puntacana Resort & Club, but also the local airport. (He's such an ardent fan of cigars, it was his idea to have the Westin Hotel add a cigar bar, called Don Queco.) Rainieri isn't a golfer but he can occasionally be found driving around his courses, admiring the landscape and smoking a cigar. He knows what people visiting Punta Cana want. "Many of them," he says, "want a fine golf course and fine cigars."

Over the years Punta Cana has added much in the way of golf. Two of its courses are extraordinary—the Corales Golf Club, designed by Tom Fazio, and the Punta Espada Golf Club, designed by Jack Nicklaus. Corales is part of Rainieri's Puntacana Resort & Club, which also includes the original La Cana course, a fine resort layout by P.B. Dye, son of Pete Dye. The Punta Espada course is part of a separate development known as Cap Cana and all three courses can be packaged together.

"If there is bucket-list golf, certainly Corales and Punta Espada would fall in that category," says Jay Overton, a former PGA Tour player and the resident pro at Corales. "If we aren't one and two in the Caribbean, the combination of being able to play both within minutes of each other makes us No. 1. It would be like putting Pinehurst and Pebble Beach side by side."

Corales and Punta Espada are what you might expect when top-flight designers like Tom Fazio and Jack Nicklaus work with spectacular sites.

At Corales, six holes play along the Caribbean—the seventh through ninth and the 16th through 18th. This is a trademark Fazio course with very wide fairways and multiple tees that give golfers of all handicaps a chance. There are a few alternate greens.

The back tees on the par-4 18th require a substantial carry over a cove whose waters can get pretty angry, a challenge that PGA Tour players face in the Corales Puntacana Resort & Club Championship, a PGA Tour event played on the course in March. Because Fazio hates cart paths the holes have a distinct separation.

A caddie is mandatory at Corales and they are well versed in the course and the game, and excellent companions to boot. Only about 10,000 rounds a year are played between members and hotel guests. Guests of Tortuga Bay and the Westin Puntacana Hotel have automatic access and the course also has a membership roster.

Punta Espada has all the elements of drama and style associated with Nicklaus' design work. Those who have played Nicklaus' Punta Mita course near Puerta Vallarta, Mexico, will find Punta Espada very familiar. Nicklaus has been given substantial seaside property to work with and has taken full advantage of it. That is nowhere more apparent than on the back tees of the par-5 second hole, where the limestone has been raised by an ancient upheaval, making the views breathtaking.

The views are striking at the ninth at Corales, designed by Tom Fazio.

EVAN SCHILLER

The connection with the water couldn't be closer than at the par-3 13th, which is mindful of Robert Trent Jones' oceanfront par 3 at Mauna Kea in Hawaii. The hole requires a carry over the Caribbean to a green planted on a ledge above the water. From the back tee this is a 250-yarder, and the prevailing winds are often in your face.

The original 18 at La Cana is where P.B. takes some cues from his father Pete. Enough quirkiness is here to label it a Dye course, with an island par 3 and an island par 4. It touches briefly against

Puntacana Resort's Tortuga Bay

Eden Roc's Blue Grill and Bar

the sea on the front nine, then plays alongside it over the final two holes. The par-4 seventh has a pot-bunkered approach area and a green surrounded by sand. Dye calls the pot-bunkering Hecklebirnie after a purgatory of Scottish lore.

The accompanying luxurious accommodations are well up to the standard. Rainieri's original Puntacana Resort & Club, now a Westin marketed property, is fabulously supplemented by the decidedly upscale Tortuga Bay Club, a collection of 13 villa structures that front the Caribbean.

The hotel, a member of Leading Hotels of the World, is the country's only AAA Five Diamond hotel. It's embraced largely by both the Corales and the La Cana courses and has recently undergone a revitalization in the spirit of the late Dominican-born fashion designer Oscar de la Renta, who was a friend and neighbor of Rainieri, and a huge proponent of Punta Cana.

All 30 rooms have kitchenettes, plush but casual furniture, linens and bathroom amenities. Each villa has a manager/concierge as well as a golf cart and bikes.

A major amenity, and an absolute boon to the luxury traveler, is what the hotel calls its Whisking Service, which moves guests through the airport both on arrival and departure with complete ease, avoiding long lines for ticketing and security. (After all, it is Frank Rainieri's airport.) Together with limousine service, it gets guests to their rooms in about 20 minutes.

Right next door to the Punta Espada course is the luxury Eden Roc Hotel, which opened in 2013. The acquisition of a beach club in 2015 has added beachfront suites and villas right next to the golf course. The Eden Roc, technically in Cap Cana, is part of the Relais & Chateaux group.

The 26 posh beachfront suites, posh and attuned to the sea that they serve, are enveloped by oceanfront golf holes. The 34 boutique suites that are off the water each have their own pools. High ceilings, wood beams and expansive windows assure connection to the outdoors. There are up to four bedrooms in the boutique suites, two in the beachfront suites.

Golf packages at Eden Roc, Tortuga Bay and Puntacana Hotel include play on the courses at each of the resorts. The Eden Roc has one package, called Golf and Gastronomy, that combines golf with fine meals.

Less expensive alternatives to this luxury triangle include the Hard Rock Hotel, which has quite a nice golf course of its own, the Hard Rock Golf Club at Cana Bay. It's by Nicklaus Design (which means Jack wasn't a direct participant in its design or build), but it has a lot of the signature Nicklaus characteristics, including wide fairways. With a little less tranquility, but more action, the all-inclusive Hard Rock is a big place—1,790 rooms—and is located at the northern end of the Bávaro Beach resort strip. Keeping with the Hard Rock theme, the hotel offers a "Sound Of Your Stay" experience, which includes a Fender guitar delivered to your room. It might be just the thing you need to shake off the frustration of a few three-putts.

The Punta Blanca Golf & Beach Club includes a course by Nick Price that winds through native vegetation and rocky outcrops and along wetlands. Despite its many hazards, the fairways are wide enough that most players should have enough room to play through them. Two island par 3s (13 and 15) are probably the best holes on the course.

Rainieri dreamt of a paradise on the Dominican Republic's north shore and so five decades later it has become just that. Whether it be hotels, restaurants, cigar bars, beach clubs or golf courses, the Rainieri family holdings share a distinct signature.

"Simple elegance," he says, "with Punta Cana style." ❖

Jeff Williams is a contributing editor for Cigar Aficionado.

DR TRAVEL TIP

The Ashtray Request

While indoor spaces of many restaurants won't allow your cigar, there's no shortage of cigar-friendly places throughout the Dominican Republic. The Spanish word for ashtray is one to remember: *cenicero* (sehn-ee-SERR-roh). Ask your waiter for *un cenicero por favor* as you take out your cigar case, and you'll look like a natural.

ICON: GARY HOVLAND

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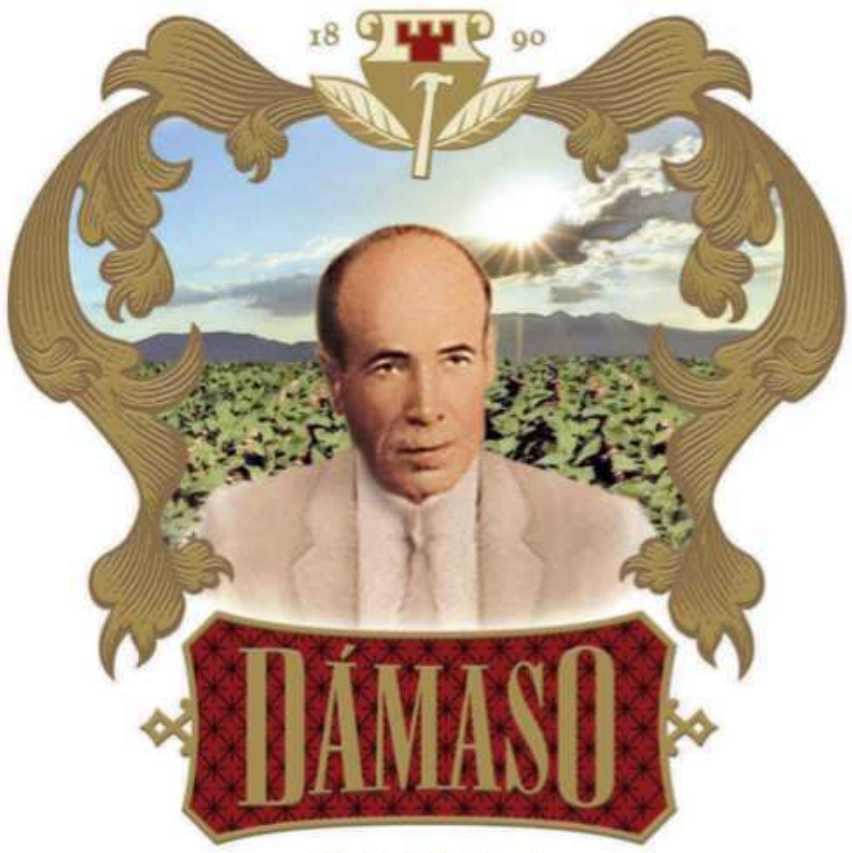

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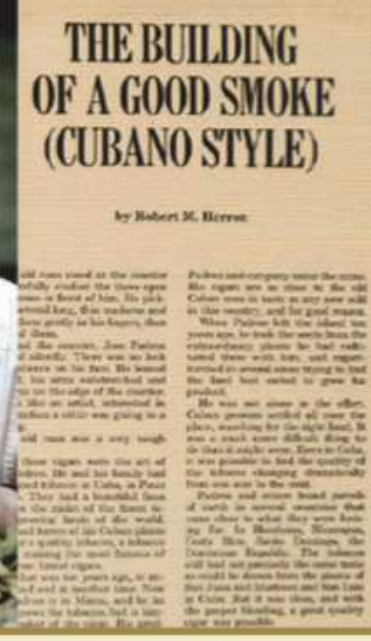
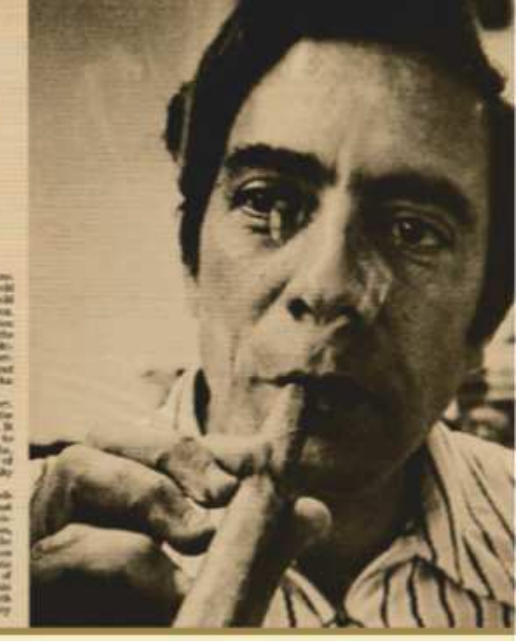
1964


THE BUILDING OF A GOOD SMOKE (CUBANO STYLE)

by Robert M. Herron



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www.padron.com/damaso

Was Tiger Woods' victory in the Tour Championship on September 23 the greatest comeback in sports history?

It was, to be sure, huge. Even more, it was Hoganesque.

Only 18 months before the win, Woods could barely move, let alone swing a golf club. "I was beyond playing. I couldn't sit. I couldn't walk. I couldn't lay down without feeling the pain in my back and my leg," he says. In April 2017, he was lying on an operating table undergoing spinal fusion surgery, an operation that finally seemed to end years of physical and emotional agony, years that he no longer competed like the all-time great with 14 major championships, years that he barely competed at all.

But a year and a half after that surgery, the vast throngs at the East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta were celebrating the 42-year-old Woods' 80th Tour victory, his first in five years. How far he had come in such a short time was astounding.

"Probably the low point was not knowing if I'd ever be able to live pain-free again," Woods said after his victory. "Am I going to be able to sit, stand, walk, lay down without feeling the pain that I was in? I just didn't want to live that way."

Yes, Woods overcame a lot to win again on the Tour. But Ben Hogan nearly died.

In February 1949, while driving with his wife Valerie in rural West Texas on a foggy patch of road, Hogan's car collided head-on with a Greyhound bus. He threw himself in front of his wife to protect her, an act of heroism that also saved his own life. The steering column was driven through the back of his seat. Hogan broke his pelvis, ankle, collar bone and chipped his ribs. While in the hospital he also developed blood clots that required delicate surgery. Like Woods, Hogan doubted that he would ever be a Tour player again.

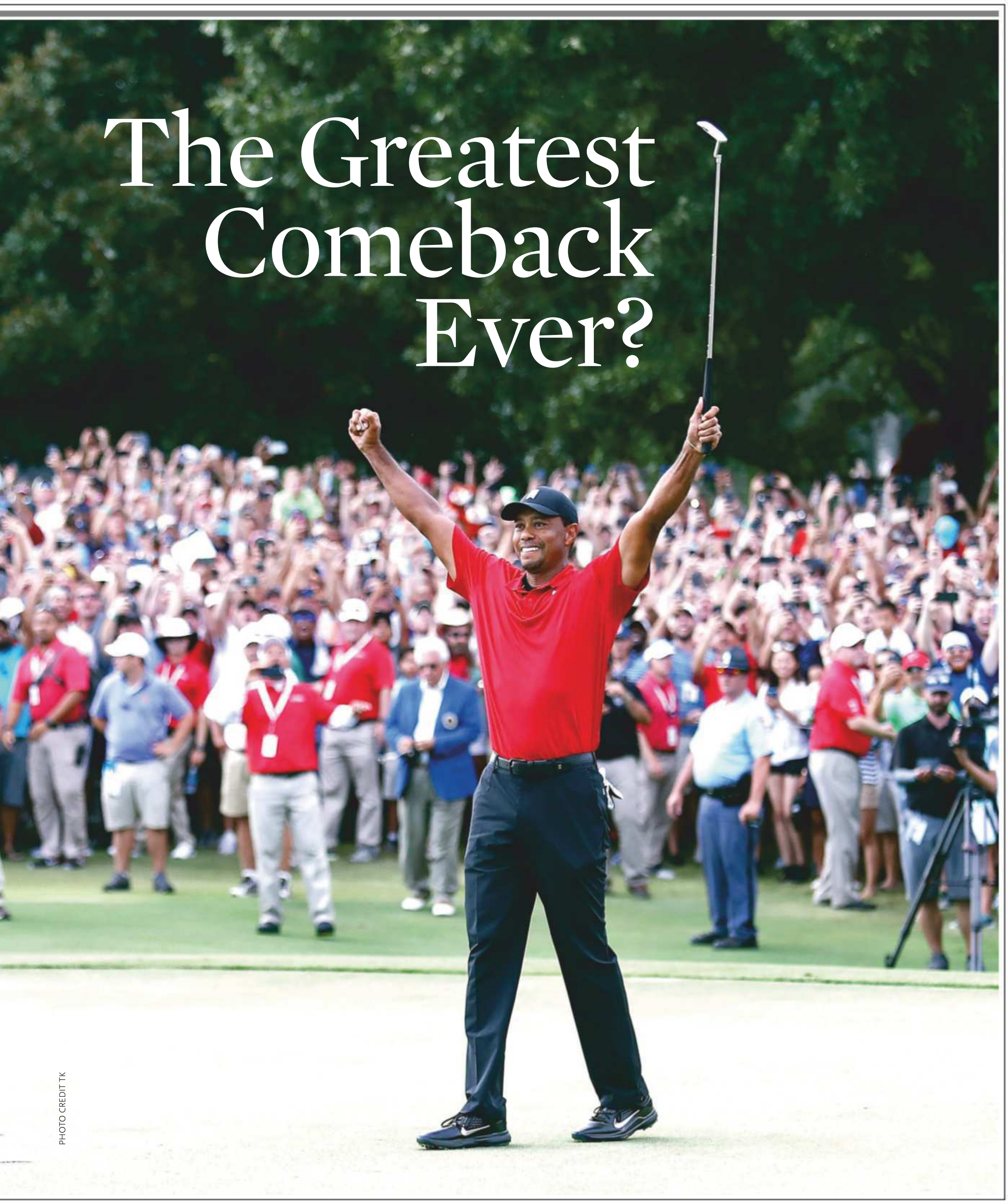
"It's going to be a long haul," Hogan told reporters back in '49, "and in my mind, I don't think that I'll ever get back the playing edge I had last year. You work for perfection all your life, and then something like this happens. My nervous system has been shot by this, and I don't see how I can readjust it to competitive golf. But you can bet I'll be back there swinging."

Yet, like Woods—famous for a strong work ethic and dedication to the game—Hogan returned to the Tour. It was February 1950, he was 38, and he lost in a playoff to Sam Snead. Then, in June, he won the U.S. Open at Merion. He would win six of his nine majors after the accident that nearly killed him.

It can be argued that Jack Nicklaus and Woods are 1 and 1A among golf's all-time greats. So, too, it can be argued that Hogan and Woods are 1 and 1A when it comes to the all-time comebacks from injury—and they deserved to be linked in the game's lore because of it.

—Jeff Williams

TIM BRADBURY/GETTY IMAGES



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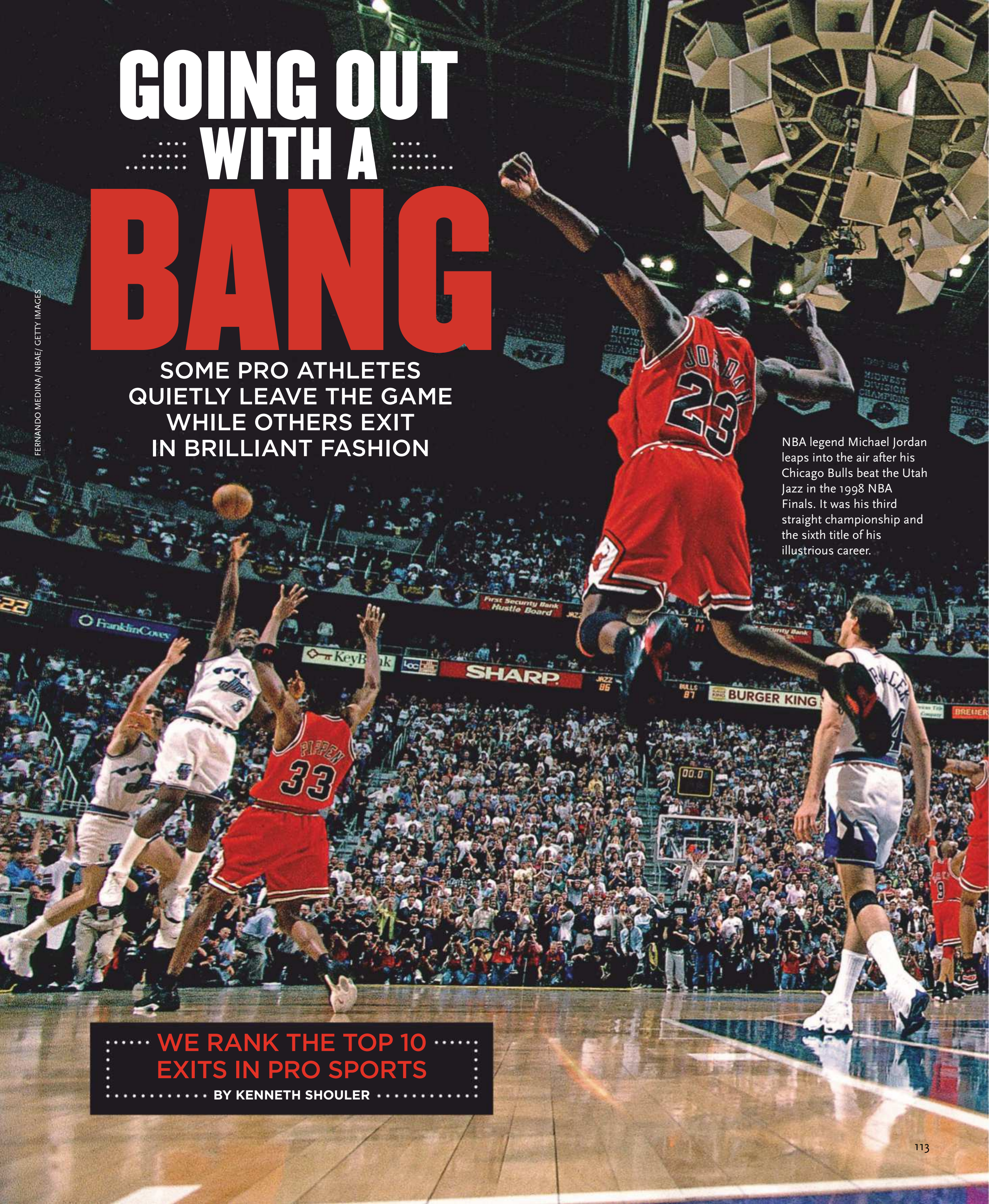
GOING OUT WITH A BANG

SOME PRO ATHLETES QUIETLY LEAVE THE GAME WHILE OTHERS EXIT IN BRILLIANT FASHION

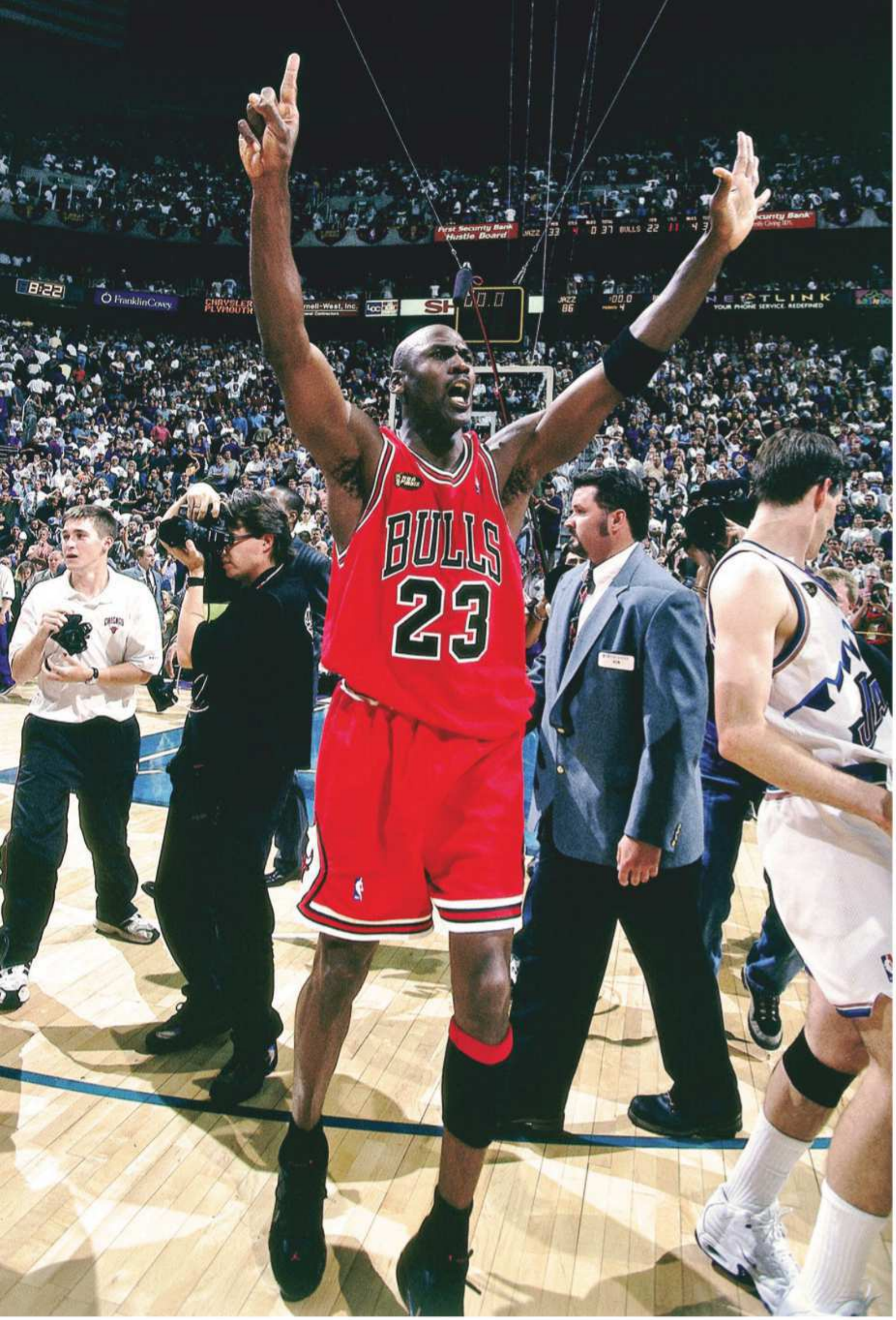


FERNANDO MEDINA/ NBAE/ GETTY IMAGES

NBA legend Michael Jordan leaps into the air after his Chicago Bulls beat the Utah Jazz in the 1998 NBA Finals. It was his third straight championship and the sixth title of his illustrious career.

WE RANK THE TOP 10 EXITS IN PRO SPORTS

BY KENNETH SHOULER



Michael Jordan walked proudly off the court and into retirement from the Chicago Bulls in 1998. He sank the game-winning shot from 18 feet away in the closing seconds, giving him his sixth NBA title.

When an athlete's career is built of awe-inspiring moments, beginning, middle and end, then it reads like an essay—balanced and complete. Such was the career of one Derek Jeter, who played in his last game at Yankee Stadium on September 25, 2014.

With Antoan Richardson on second and one out in the ninth, Jeter leaned over the plate in his familiar stance. Baltimore righty Evan Meek delivered a thigh-high heater on the outer edge, where his objective met Jeter's intention. Jeter drilled it between first and second. Nick Markakis' throw home was too late to nab Richardson. The Yankees won Jeter's last-ever home game, 6-5. How many will remember the number 3,465, Jeter's exact number of hits? How few will forget his last at bat at Yankee Stadium?

Moments. None of us gets a second chance to make a first impression. But in sports that works: for on playing fields, it's often the last impression that counts. From Babe Ruth to Ted Williams, from Bill Russell to Michael Jordan, from Rocky Marciano to Pete Sampras, from Roberto Clemente to Derek Jeter—athletes have staged fantastic finishes, accomplishing grand exits that are tucked away indelibly in the files of our brains. Which are the best moments? It's hard to rank them, since we must not only choose the greatest players, but size up the importance of their final games.

›››1 Michael Jordan

Some players begin retirement boasting one fabulous finish. Jordan entered two retirements, five years apart, with two fabulous finishes. (His comeback with the Washington Wizards, beginning in 2001, didn't result in a playoff appearance. He retired for good in 2003.) In 1993, the Chicago Bulls sought to cement their legacy with a third straight title. Against the Phoenix Suns and their most valuable player Charles Barkley, Chicago had only 12 fourth-quarter points in game six: Jordan scored the first nine before John Paxson drained a game-winning three-pointer with 3.9 seconds remaining in the game. Jordan—grieving over the murder of his father, James—announced that he was retiring from the game in October. He was off to play baseball with the Chicago White Sox's minor-league affiliate.

After playing on grass, Jordan returned to basketball in March 1995. He led his Bulls to championship seasons in 1996 and 1997, and entered the 1998 NBA Finals seeking a third straight. The last 59.2 seconds against Utah comprised his magnum opus: he hit two free throws and followed a John Stockton three with a layup before double-teaming and swiping the ball from Karl Malone. He let seconds tick away before driving hard right on Byron Russell, stepping back and hitting an 18-footer to give the Bulls an 87-86 win. Shooting arm extended, he held the pose. His 45 points led Chicago to its second three-peat of the 1990s.

NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/ NBAE/ GETTY IMAGES

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Jim Beveridge
JIM BEVERIDGE, MASTER BLENDER
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2 John Elway

Denver Broncos quarterback John Elway had heard it before. He couldn't win the big game. In Super Bowl XXIV he was 2 and 0—as in two interceptions and no touchdowns—in a 55-10 loss to San Francisco, landing him galaxies away from the 49ers' Joe Montana. Sure, he had "The Drive" against Cleveland, when he took his team 98 yards in the final 5:43. "Everything is reaction," Elway shrugged when asked about his uncanny escape-artist mobility and unsurpassed arm strength. In comeback situations, even opposing coaches admitted that their defenders were fearful and back on their heels against Elway. But in January 1998, he was still a 37-year-old playing in his 16th season without a Super Bowl victory.

Elway's fanatical resolve to grab Super Bowl XXXII was never as clear as it was on the "helicopter play." Late in the third quarter with the game tied at 17, he darted right and dove. Nailed in mid-flight and sent twirling, he still made the first down deep in Green Bay territory. Two runs later by Terrell Davis and Denver held a 24-17 lead. Undeterred, Brett Favre and the Packers marched downfield to tie the game in the fourth quarter. With less than two minutes left, Davis scored again to give Denver a 31-24 victory. That title was Elway's penultimate moment.

His last hurrah superseded the first championship. Following a stellar 14-2 season, Denver navigated its way back to Super Bowl XXXIII, this time against the Atlanta Falcons, also 14-2. Heavily favored, Denver built a three-touchdown lead late in the fourth quarter. Their last touchdown came, fittingly, on Elway's three-yard quarterback draw. The man who passed for more than 50,000 yards, and averaged 4.4 yards when he carried the ball, ended it on a running play. Elway's aerials netted 336 yards and Davis ran for 102. Playing in his last game, Elway won the Most Valuable Player award. No great player's finale in Super Bowl history comes close.

John Elway, top, celebrates after winning his second consecutive Super Bowl title in what would be his final NFL game. In his last game, Bill Russell, above left, defeated rival Wilt Chamberlain for his 11th NBA title.

3 Bill Russell

The duo of Sam Jones and Bill Russell were 35, but sought to pull it together one last time in 1969. "One thing we've always had on the Celtics is mutual respect," said player-coach Russell, when asked about the chances of his Boston team making another title run. "And we think that is the most necessary ingredient for a winning combination." No smack-talking from Russell some 50 years ago—just a succinct, confident prediction. Boston finished fourth with a 48-34 record. No team in the 23-year history of the league had finished that low and won a title. But Russell served notice in the first playoff game against the Philadelphia 76ers, blocking 12 shots. After dispatching the Sixers and the upstart New York Knicks in the next round, Boston dueled the Los Angeles Lakers for the title for the sixth time in eight years.

The Celtics fell behind 2-0, then 3-2, before taking game six at home. When a reporter asked about the chances of winning a seventh contest on an opponent's hardwood, Russell said, "We've done it before," and smiled. Before the game, he got hold of a flier detailing the Lakers' plans for a postgame victory celebration, which included dropping 10,000 balloons from the rafters at the Los Angeles Forum and piping "Happy Days are Here Again" through the arena. "This cannot happen," Russell told his teammates, flier in hand. "Tonight, we are going to find out how good they are at track and field. We are going to fast-break."

With Russell sweeping the boards and releasing outlet passes, Boston bolted to a 91-76 lead after three quarters. Russell scored only six points, but contributed rebound after rebound to Boston's patented break. Jerry West single-handedly kept the Lakers in it, netting 42 points, and bringing them within a point of catching Boston. But on several straight possessions West was double-teamed, and no teammate could hit a shot. Boston held on for a 108-106 victory.

"Bill, this must have been a great win for you," said broadcaster Jack Twyman in a postgame interview. Overcome with emotion, Russell couldn't speak. "I know it's hard to say what is in your mind now, Bill," Twyman followed, cueing Russell for a second start: "This has been such a great bunch of guys, and it's been so fabulous the way they played for me," said Russell. It was also Jones' last game. He was second to Russell, and finished with 24 points.

As ever, the subtext was the Wilt Chamberlain-Russell plot. Amidst the Lakers' comeback, Chamberlain twisted his knee on a rebound, and posted 18 points. No matter. The Celtics won.

Russell had played his final basketball game. That victory gave him his 11th title in 13 years.

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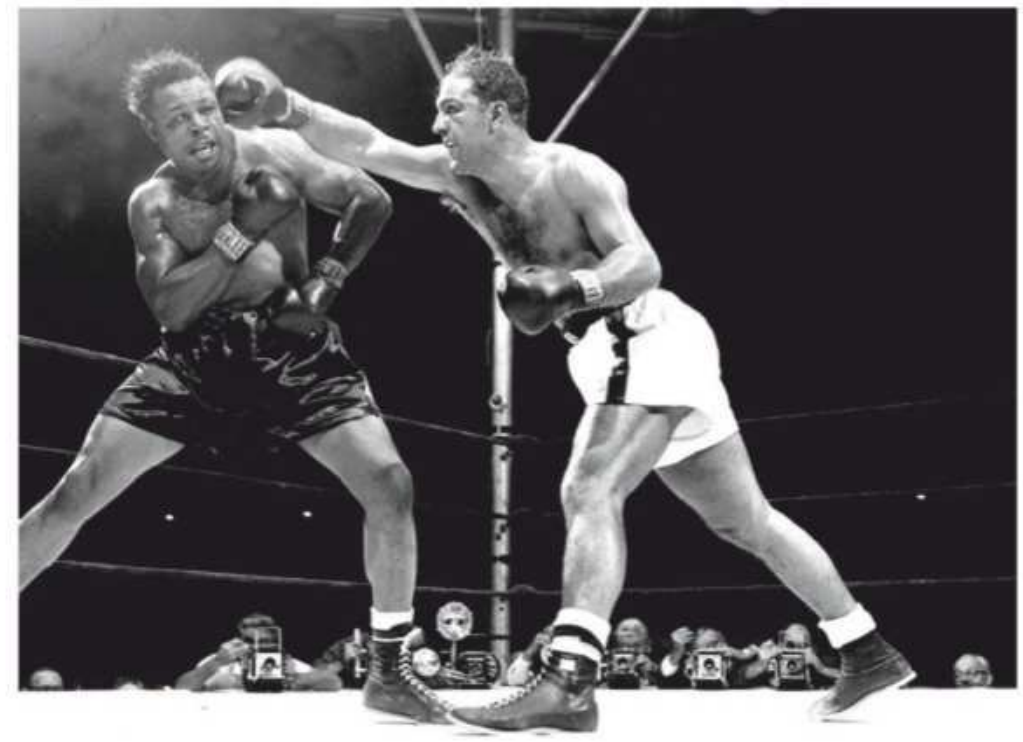

Despite the naysayers, Pete Sampras, top left, captured the U.S. Open title in his last professional tournament. Baseball legend Ted Williams, top right, smacked a 420-foot home run in his last at bat. In his final match, Rocky Marciano, above in white trunks, knocked out Archie Moore in a bout that took place inside the confines of Yankee Stadium.

4 Pete Sampras

Tennis players usually don't last. If one plays well into his early 30s, it's a rarity. Observers murmured that Pete Sampras was old, slow and a bit softer due to his marriage to actress Bridgette Wilson. But Sampras, already a winner of 13 majors, didn't get that memo. Nothing in Sampras' recent performances hinted at a late-career charge in 2002. In the two previous U.S. Opens he had lost to Marat Safin and Lleyton Hewitt—not exactly Roger Federer and Björn Borg. More to the point, he had lost to George Bastl, ranked 145, just two months before the U.S. Open.

Seeded 17, Sampras showed little court rust in disposing of Germany's Tommy Haas and rising American Andy Roddick. In the semifinals he knocked off the Netherlands' Sjeng Schalken in straight sets. But there was no time off between the Saturday semi and the Sunday final. But his Finals opponent, Andre Agassi, then 32, had played a tougher four-set match on Saturday against Lleyton Hewitt. Now Sampras would face the same man, in the same tournament, against whom he'd won his first Grand Slam title in 1990 as a lean 19-year-old.

In the end, Sampras used his familiar serve-and-volley and aggressive get-to-the-net approach to top Agassi 6-3, 6-4, 5-7 and 6-4 to win his 14th and final major title. "I had the last word," said Sampras. "I felt vindicated, like I had just shoved it up everyone's ass." Agassi was exceedingly generous in defeat: "Pete was overall a better player than me on the biggest occasions." Sampras didn't compete in another professional tournament, but waited until after Wimbledon in 2003 to announce his retirement, lest the urge to return came back. Asked if he regretted retiring, Sampras was direct. "No regrets, no," he said. "It wasn't because I couldn't play anymore. It was because emotionally I was done. It wasn't the plan—to win a major and end it. It just sort of happened that way. To look back on it, it's a cool way to go out. To win your last one."

5 Ted Williams

Ted Williams stood one last time with a bat in his hands. George Patton with a pistol, Winston Churchill with a cigar—those images are no more fitting than Williams with a bat. It was the bottom of the eighth inning at Fenway Park on September 28, 1960. It was not a World Series game; the Boston Red Sox didn't reach a Series from 1947 through 1966. Just 10,454 fans attended the game to watch their seventh-place team. No matter. Williams had told the Sox that he would not play the last three games scheduled in New York.

Often touted as the greatest hitter who ever drew breath, he was "The Splendid Splinter," a hitting savant who would later write *The Science of Hitting* in which he divided the shoulders-to-knees strike zone into a grid of 77 boxes. He had calculated, for instance, that a belt-high offering on the outside corner was a .380 hot zone, while one low and outside was a .230 sucker's pitch.

Now he stood in. Now Baltimore's Jack Fisher threw one by Williams. He peered out and something in the kid's cocky demeanor hinted that he would get another fastball. He did. Williams drove it into the bullpen in right-center, about 420 feet away. Williams circled the bases "like a feather in a vortex," wrote novelist John Updike. He toed home and disappeared into the dugout. He had had his battles with the Boston fans and press and would not come out to tip his cap. "Gods do not answer letters," Updike explained in his essay "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; AP PHOTO; MATHEW ZIMMERMANN/AP PHOTO

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6 Rocky Marciano

It was September 21, 1955, at Yankee Stadium, and boxing's heavyweight championship of the world was at stake between challenger Archie Moore and Rocky Marciano. The fight had been scheduled to take place the night before, but the threat of Hurricane Ione postponed the bout. Now, thunder in the form of applause rained down on Marciano when he was introduced.

Why not? The native of Brockton, Massachusetts, was entering his 49th fight. The man whose real name was Rocco Francis Marchegiano had already knocked out 42 of his 48 opponents and was the only undefeated heavyweight champion (no losses or draws). How was it that this smallish 5-foot, 11-inch fighter, who usually fought under 190 pounds, always landed with such heavy blows?

Opponents had been wondering about it for years. Even Moore, who would go on to end his long career with an eye-popping 131 knockouts, got his fill of Marciano's blows. "Moore is not worrying about being in the corner, but it's still not a good place for him," said commentator Bill Corum in round six, his tone ominous. Seconds later, Marciano felled Moore with a chopping right cross to the temple. Moore rose at the count of six. Marciano's punches kept coming and he floored Moore again. Both fighters seemed exhausted as round eight began. Moore's right eye was nearly swollen shut, and he was saved by the bell in the eighth. Finally, Marciano landed two thundering left hooks and knocked out his opponent at 1:19 of the ninth round. "I did the best I could," Moore said. "But Rocky's a great puncher."

Few doubted that Marciano would fight a 50th bout. But he announced his retirement seven months later, at the age of 32. "I didn't get hurt physically while fighting," Marciano said. "My physical condition has nothing to do with it. My lonesome family convinced me that I should quit while I'm still in shape." Nearly 60 years after his last fight, he remains the only undefeated heavyweight.

Legendary New York Yankees slugger Babe Ruth was traded to the Boston Braves at the age of 40. In one of his final games, he slammed three home runs, the last of which sailed out of Forbes Field.

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

7 Babe Ruth

It is unsurprising that "The Sultan of Swat" would land on a list such as this. It is surprising that he would land as low as seventh. The Yankees had done the unthinkable: they traded the 40-year-old right fielder to the Boston Braves, who viewed Ruth as a gate attraction, even though Braves' owner Judge Emil Fuchs promised Ruth a shot at managing in 1936. Ruth soon chafed upon learning that Fuchs had no intention of honoring either the promises of his being a manager or working in the front office.

A declining part-time player, with an average hovering around .150, Ruth asked Fuchs in May to grant him an early retirement. Fuchs persuaded Ruth to stay until Memorial Day, when Boston was playing a double-header.

On May 25, 1935, Ruth gave one last demonstration of the thunder in his bat. Playing against the Pirates at Forbes Field, Ruth logged four hits in four at bats, including three home runs, the 712th, 713th and 714th of his titanic career. The last two blasts came off Guy Bush—the onetime Chicago Cub who Ruth and the Yankees had rocked for nine runs in five innings in a 1932 World Series sweep. The ball sailed clear over the right field grandstand, bounding into the street and rolling to a stop at nearby Schenley Park—the first ball ever hit out of Forbes Field since the park had opened in 1909. The Pirates prevailed 11-7 over the dismal Braves, who would go on to finish with a 38-115 record, one of the worst winning percentages (.248) in history.

Friends suggested that Ruth quit after he hit those final home runs. But he had given his word to Fuchs to remain through the holiday. He retired on June 2, 1935.

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8 Roberto Clemente

On September 30, 1972, Roberto Clemente cocked his bat against New York Mets' left-hander Jon Matlack. He sized up an off-speed pitch, uncoiled from his crouch and lashed a ringing double into the gap in left-centerfield. The scoreboard at Three Rivers Stadium read: "Roberto is now one of 11 players in major league history to get 3,000 or more hits." It would be his last regular season hit. Three months and a day later he would be dead, as the DC-7 cargo plane he was taking to deliver relief supplies to earthquake victims in Managua, Nicaragua, went down off the coast of Puerto Rico and was lost at sea.

Truth be told, Clemente had established his own baseball immortality (for anyone who still doubted it) a year before, in the 1971 World Series. In that affair, Clemente, 37, was a one-man tour de force, raking 12 hits, hitting .414 and belting a home run to give the Pirates the lead in game seven of the World Series against Baltimore. Baltimore had led the Series 2-0. In 1972, he was hurt for much of the season and missed 60 games, hitting "only" .312, his lowest mark since 1968.

After his 3,000th hit, Clemente found himself playing three days later, entering as a defensive replacement in the ninth for Gene Clines in right field. But he did not bat in that game. He also played in a losing playoff series against Cincinnati.

A special election of the Baseball Writers' Association of America was held in March 1973, less than three months after Clemente's death. He earned 393 of a possible 424 votes. With 93 percent of the vote in his favor, he was inducted into baseball's Hall of Fame. His body was never found.

9 Bob Cousy

He was the first of the great Celtics. Cousy made his way to Boston by way of the College of the Holy Cross and was the third pick overall in the 1950 draft, when an outfit known as the Tri-Cities Blackhawks snapped him up. Boston coach Red Auerbach drafted first, but passed up on Cousy in favor of center Charlie Share. His reply to New England fans who wanted Cousy? "I'm supposed to win, not go after local yokels." Luckily for Boston, Cousy wanted $10,000, $4,000 more than was being offered by Tri-Cities. He didn't report to camp. He was snapped up by the Chicago Stags, who then folded. Cousy and two other players went into a dispersal draft. Three owners drew lots and Boston owner Walter Brown picked Cousy and signed him for $9,000. Scouts were skeptical. One said, "The first time he tries that fancy Dan [dribbling and passing] stuff in this league, they'll cram the ball down his throat."

Red and the others would soon eat their words. In the mythic lore surrounding Boston drafts and trades, Cousy was one of the greatest tales. He was the NBA's first great point guard. How great? Using his blind passes and behind-the-back maneuvers, he led the league in assists eight years in a row, from 1953 through 1960, while posting 18 to 21 points per game. Moreover, the "Houdini of the Hardwood" invented the Celtics' running game and made the fast break synonymous with Boston basketball. Despite the diminutive guard's dazzle, the Celtics, in the rueful words of Auerbach, "couldn't get the ball." They lacked an inside game. Signing center

Pittsburgh Pirates great Roberto Clemente, top, tragically died in a plane crash three months after getting his 3,000th hit. In his final game, Bob Cousy, above, scored 18 points en route to his fifth consecutive title.

Bill Russell for the 1956–57 season brought a title right off. From 1959 through 1966 the Celtics won eight in a row.

In his 13th season, Cousy played his grand finale on April 24, 1963, scoring 18 points to beat the Lakers as Boston won its fifth title in a row, 112-109 before 15,652 fans in Los Angeles. At a retirement ceremony a month earlier, Cousy broke down twice while addressing the fans at Boston Garden. With his wife and two daughters at his side, he spoke of the camaraderie he would miss. A standing ovation showered down on him.

Looking back on his Boston years he recalled, "Red's position was always 'You want to pass a little differently? That's fine as long as it works.'"

BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES

Michael Strahan, left, contributed two tackles and a sack in his final game, a Super Bowl victory, with the New York Giants. The superb play of running back Jerome Bettis in his 13th and final season was a rallying cry for the Pittsburgh Steelers as they went on to win Super Bowl XL.

››› 10 Jerome Bettis / Michael Strahan

"Just get me to Detroit," Pittsburgh Steelers running back Jerome Bettis told his teammates during the playoff run in 2005. Detroit was the site of Super Bowl XL. Bettis, now in his last season, had never played in one. Michael Strahan, prior to his last game on February 3, 2008, had played in one Super Bowl as a member of the New York Giants. But it's one he'd like to forget, as the Giants lost to the Baltimore Ravens 34-7 in Super Bowl XXXV in 2001.

Both men enjoyed fine careers. Bettis, known as "The Bus," because of his ability to carry defenders along who were trying to tackle him, ranks seventh in all-time rushing with 13,662 yards. Strahan owns the record for sacks in a season, but the record-breaking sack was recorded when Green Bay quarterback Brett Favre went into a dive and Strahan fell on top of him. More to the point, both won their first Super Bowl on the last days of their careers.

Bettis' title game came first in Super Bowl XL in 2006. The Steelers beat the Seattle Seahawks 21-10 as Bettis ran for 43 yards on 14 carries. The build-up had been more memorable, as Bettis became the rallying cry for the Steelers. Finishing his 13th season, the last 10 with Pittsburgh, Bettis had been a Steeler workhorse, a 5-foot, 11-inch, 252-pound side of beef who had rushed for 1,000-plus yards for six consecutive seasons and who would have fit well with the Steeler's dynasty of a generation before.

Two years later, Strahan was playing in Super Bowl XLII, the last contest in his 15-year career. He contributed two tackles and a sack, but with under a minute left the outcome was very much in doubt. Not until Eli Manning connected with Plaxico Burress for a 13-yard touchdown pass with 35 ticks left did the Giants take a 17-14 lead. New England's Tom Brady missed on two long passes to Randy Moss and the Giants had their third Super Bowl.

HONORABLE MENTIONS Several other players deserve honorable mentions. One of the great middle-linebackers of all-time, Ray Lewis ended his storied career with the Baltimore Ravens with his second world championship. Lewis' contribution in his last go around was stellar: he led the NFL with 51 tackles in the postseason. His finale was a 34-31 victory over San Francisco in Super Bowl XLVII.

In the last at bat of his legendary career, in game six of the World Series against the New York Giants on October 10, 1951, Joe DiMaggio rapped a double in the bottom of the eighth inning. The Yankees held on for a 4-3 victory and their third consecutive Series triumph. It was the ninth championship team DiMaggio played on in his 13-year career, second only to Yogi Berra's 10.

Joe Montana exited in style, too. As a Kansas City Chief, Montana connected on 26 of 37 passes for 314 yards in his last game, a 27-17 loss against Miami in the wild card playoff game on December 31, 1994.

Before turning over the coaching reigns to Bill Russell, Red Auerbach coached his last game, a game seven NBA Final against the Lakers, on April 28, 1966. Boston won 95-93, giving Red his eighth consecutive title and ninth overall in his stellar 20-year career.

In sports, the next memorable finish will likely come sooner than we expect. ❖

Kenneth A. Shouler, a frequent contributor to Cigar Aficionado, *is an associate professor of philosophy at the County College of Morris in Randolph, NJ.*

LEFT: ROSS D. FRANKLIN/AP PHOTO; RIGHT: JOHN G. MABANGLO/EPA/SHUTTERSTOCK

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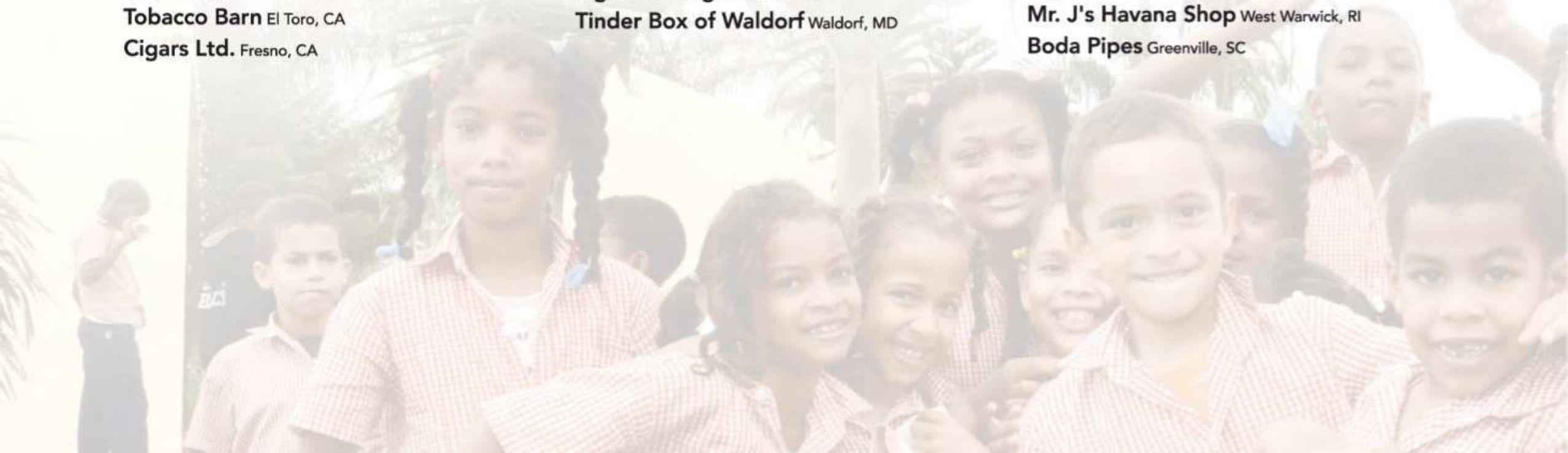

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APRIL 10, 2019

Holiday Drinks Run Hot & Cold

A warm and rich Tom and Jerry (left) and the cool and potent French 75 (right) are ideal holiday sippers.

When toasting in a winter wonderland, the choices range from warming cups to elegant cheer

BY JACK BETTRIDGE • PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF HARRIS

"I was just thinking of a flaming rum punch,"

muses Clarence, the simple angel of the holiday film classic *It's a Wonderful Life*. Even though it's a snowy Christmas Eve and he hasn't had a drink for 200 years, Clarence defers to winter-drinking protocol, deciding it's not nearly cold enough for that bit of liquid pyrotechnics. Instead the angel orders mulled wine. Unfortunately, he has materialized in a 1940s shot-and-a-beer joint where they serve hard drinks for men who want to get drunk fast, and Clarence gets bounced.

Back in his day of wassails and steaming Dickensian punch bowls, cold-weather imbibing was dictated by temperature and calendar. (Not to mention the type of bar one was visiting, as poor Clarence discovered.) Today, we strike a sublime balance between the two outlooks. While a December Piña Colada might prompt odd looks, no one will pull out a thermometer to check that it's cold enough for your Eggnog or grouse if you just want an all-purpose Highball. Furthermore, along with the hearty, savory drinks traditional to the holidays, plenty of cleaner, colder cocktails still manage to say "Seasons Greetings"…and will allow Clarence to keep his seat at the bar.

Eggnog

This sublime mixture of eggs, milk, sugar and the brown spirit of your choice comes to us from the English punch tradition, but it reached prominence in the Colonies due to a ready supply of its ingredients on farms. The many theories behind the origin of the term "nog" almost rival the recipe variations. Proponents will argue the best type of spirit, whether to use milk or cream, keep or discard egg whites, flip or shake the mixture and more. And if you're thinking the standard Eggnog isn't potent, consider this: cadets smuggled gallons of whiskey into West Point at Christmas in 1826 to spike what was supposed to be a virgin version of the holiday quaff. The resulting reveling—now called the Eggnog Riot—resulted in some 20 court martials. Implicated were Jefferson Davis as well as two future Confederate generals. Our recipe (turn to page 135) shouldn't get you in such trouble—but we've substituted dark rum in the place of whiskey, just in case.

Tom and Jerry

Tom and Jerry, Eggnog's more complicated, but warm-hearted cousin, has been around almost two centuries. Back in 1932, the Damon Runyon piece "Dancing Dan's Christmas" suggested that the holiday may have been invented as an excuse to drink this very cocktail. The picaresque characters in the short story manage to down more than a few before marching off to play Santa Claus for a destitute grandmother's last Christmas. While the drink waned in popularity (except in Wisconsin and Minnesota) during Prohibition because of its involved preparation, today's creative bartenders are looking to this venerable cocktail to bring smiles during the cold months of winter. The Tom and Jerry is almost a meal in a cup, perfect to keep you warm on a bitter night.

Champagne Cocktail

When the holiday season concludes with New Year's Eve, Champagne toasts are inevitably the order of the evening. If you're on a budget or have no access to housed-aged bubbly (see the Good Life Guide), it's not a sin to make something more interesting out of a lesser Champagne—or even sparkling wine. For this time-honored solution, sugar and bitters provide a welcome and well-balanced oomph. Cutting the lemon peel garnish into a long, sinuous spiral (a la the Horse's Neck cocktail) makes this drink's appearance all the more festive. You can swap in an orange peel if you wish to be more seasonal, but resist the urge to quote Frank Pentangeli in the classic film *The Godfather Part II* when you're serving this to a friend.

Cognac French 75

Those who know their classic cocktails may be thinking we've made a mistake. Yes, the French 75 is commonly formulated with gin, not Cognac. While the gin version is a great drink, too, this is a winter cocktail story and for that you need substance. (Imagine being stranded in the snowy Alps and a St. Bernard brings you gin!) Besides, plenty of evidence shows that this drink has long been made with brandy. One of the earliest written recipes, dating back to 1922, includes Calvados (apple brandy) in the mix. In New Orleans, Cognac versions are popular, for obvious reasons. What is undisputed is that the drink was invented in World War I and named for an advanced piece of artillery known for shelling with speed and precision. Drink too many and you'll see why.

Hot Toddy

More than simply a cold weather drink, the Hot Toddy has long been touted as a remedy for the common cold. Science might not support it as a cure, but the ingredients will certainly treat the symptoms. The honey soothes the throat, the spice and lemon open the sinuses and the liquor, well, you know what the liquor does. When the Wild Turkey distiller Jimmy Russell introduced his American Honey liqueur (essentially a Toddy in a bottle), he said, "It's good for a cough. So I always try to have a cough." Like Jimmy, we like it with Bourbon, but feel free to substitute your favorite spirit.

(See page 135 for recipes)

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Hot Toddy

Hot (not boiling) water
2 oz. Bourbon
1 tsp. honey
Lemon wedge
Cinnamon stick
Pinch of nutmeg

Pour Bourbon in a mug. Fill with hot water. Add garnishes. Sip by a roaring fire and watch your spirits improve.

Cognac French 75

2 oz. Cognac
½ oz. lemon juice
½ oz. simple syrup
Champagne

Shake brandy, lemon juice and simple syrup over ice and strain into a Collins glass. Fill with Champagne.

Eggnog

1 egg
6 oz. whole milk
2 oz. dark rum
1 tsp. sugar
Vanilla or grated nutmeg as garnish

Give the mixture a good long shake in a mixing cup with ice. Strain into a highball glass. Garnish. To make this into a crowd-friendly punch, multiply ingredients by number of servings desired. May be made in advance and briefly refrigerated.

Tom and Jerry

Serves 8–10 people

8 eggs
2 cups sugar
1 tsp. allspice
1 tsp. ground nutmeg
1 tsp. ground cloves
1 tsp. cinnamon
3 tbsp. vanilla extract
Hot water
Hot milk
Rum
Brandy

Separate egg whites from yolks. Whip yolks separately with spices. Beat egg whites to a stiff froth. Fold whites into yolks, making a batter. (Refrigerate if preparing ahead of serving on the same day.) Use water to warm cups and then discard. Half fill cups with batter. Add 1 oz. rum and 1 oz. brandy and fill with hot milk (hot water can be substituted). Stir vigorously until smooth. Garnish with nutmeg.

Champagne Cocktail

Champagne
Sugar cube
Bitters (Angostura is the classic choice)
Lemon peel, cut into spiral if desired

Place sugar cube in the bottom of a Champagne flute. Dribble on a few drops of bitters. Allow to soak through. Fill glass with Champagne. Add the lemon peel; if cut into spiral allow it to hang by the rim. ❖

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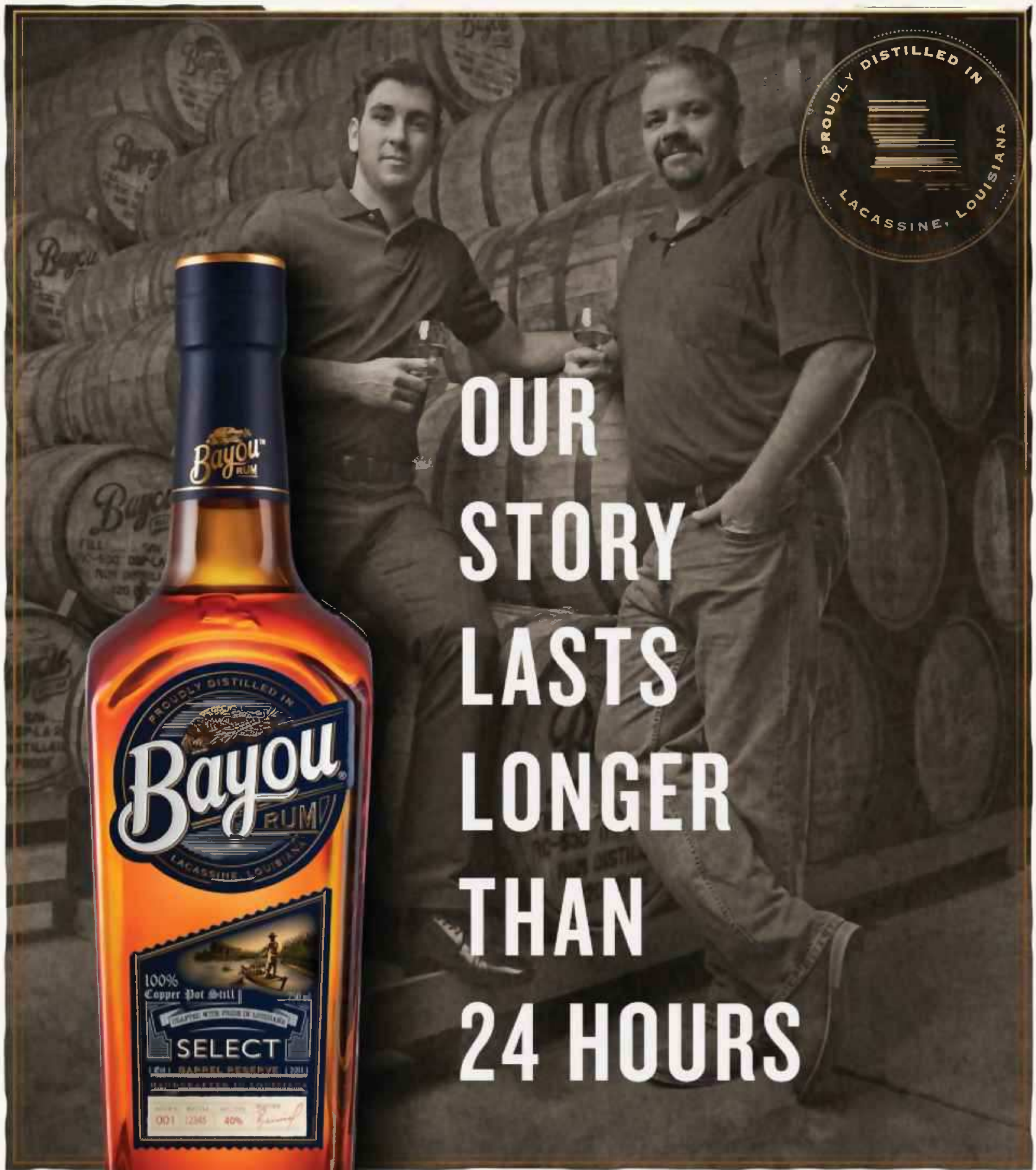

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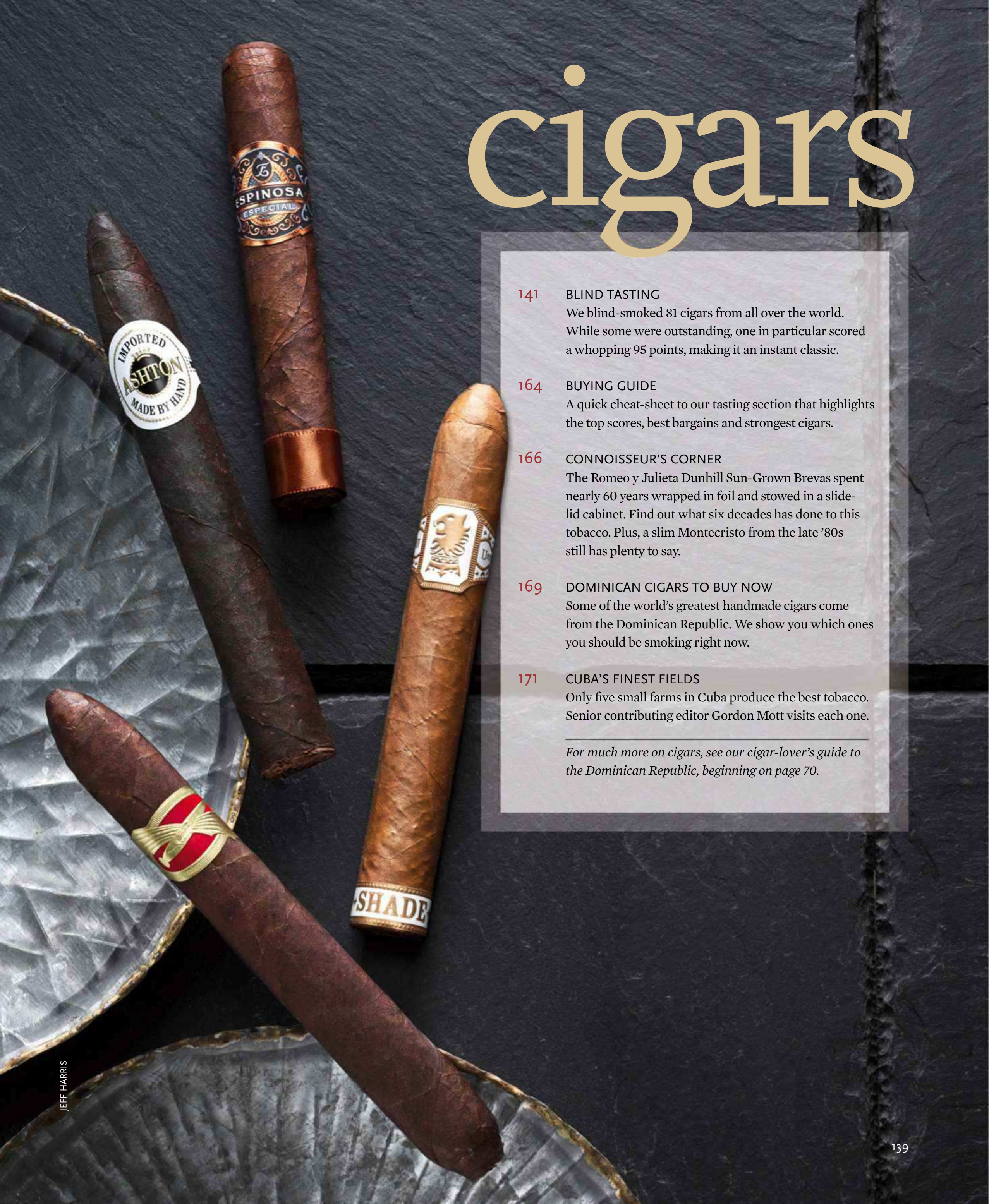

JEFF HARRIS

cigars

141 BLIND TASTING
We blind-smoked 81 cigars from all over the world. While some were outstanding, one in particular scored a whopping 95 points, making it an instant classic.

164 BUYING GUIDE
A quick cheat-sheet to our tasting section that highlights the top scores, best bargains and strongest cigars.

166 CONNOISSEUR'S CORNER
The Romeo y Julieta Dunhill Sun-Grown Brevas spent nearly 60 years wrapped in foil and stowed in a slide-lid cabinet. Find out what six decades has done to this tobacco. Plus, a slim Montecristo from the late '80s still has plenty to say.

169 DOMINICAN CIGARS TO BUY NOW
Some of the world's greatest handmade cigars come from the Dominican Republic. We show you which ones you should be smoking right now.

171 CUBA'S FINEST FIELDS
Only five small farms in Cuba produce the best tobacco. Senior contributing editor Gordon Mott visits each one.

For much more on cigars, see our cigar-lover's guide to the Dominican Republic, beginning on page 70.

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Three cigars—each from a different country, each representing different blending styles—scored 91 points to lead this category. La Aurora is proudly the oldest cigar factory in the Dominican Republic, and its 1903 Cameroon blend has tobacco from four countries. The Nicaraguan Nat Cicco Aniversario 1965 Liga No. 4 was created to commemorate the company's first brand back in 1965, which was quite a different smoke, a factory reject, value cigar. The Punch Sir David, another commemorative smoke, honors the late David Tang, bon vivant and founder of Pacific Cigar Co. Ltd., which distributes Cuban cigars throughout the Asia Pacific region. It had its market debut in August.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

LA AURORA 1903 CAMEROON CHURCHILL
A cedary, earthy Churchill with notes of coffee and fresh tobacco that lead to a tea-and-lemon finish. An interesting smoke.
U.S.: $6.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

91

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

NAT CICCO ANIVERSARIO 1965 LIGA NO. 4 CHURCHILL
There's a sweet caramel and molasses quality to this otherwise leathery, nutty Churchill, which is box-pressed and pigtailed. The draw and burn are lush and even.
U.S.: $7.29 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 7 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2018

PUNCH SIR DAVID EXCLUSIVO HONG KONG
Beautifully made, this Churchill is topped with a three-seam cap. Clear notes of toasted almond, clove and gingersnap are driven by an ever-present oakiness.
U.S.: N/A China: HK$388 STRENGTH: Medium

91

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

ASHTON ESTATE SUN GROWN 20-YEAR SALUTE
This good-looking Churchill has a lush draw and even burn. Its smoke shows notes of cinnamon and almond complemented by touches of baked apple and cloves.
U.S.: $20.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ILLUSIONE HAUT 10 CHURCHILL
A long cigar that burns evenly, showing notes of cedar, graham cracker and baking spices. The finish calls to mind fresh tobacco.
U.S.: $17.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

OLIVA SERIE V CHURCHILL EXTRA
The draw of this richly colored Churchill is notably firm, but leaves sweet impressions of honey, mesquite and BBQ sauce before the nutty, leathery finish.
U.S.: $10.92 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SERINO ROYALE CONNECTICUT CHURCHILL
Tawny colored and reddish, this eye-catching Churchill starts woody, slowly unfolding notes of leather, vanilla and caraway seed, all leading to a lemon-peel finish.
U.S.: $10.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

NAT SHERMAN TIMELESS COLLECTION CHURCHILL
The excellent draw and burn of this long, tawny-looking cigar ushers in notes of butterscotch, nuts and earth around a strong core of hickory wood.
U.S.: $9.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ARCHETYPE DREAMSTATE CHURCHILL
Earthy and herbal, this tall, blond Churchill hints of black tea and honey. The burn is even, and the draw is quite open and consistent.
U.S.: $12.78 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

88

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ESPADA BY MONTECRISTO QUILLON
Large and imposing, this hefty Churchill is covered in a reddish-brown, colorado wrapper. It's a predominantly nutty cigar with notes of leather and earth.
U.S.: $13.08 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

ARTURO FUENTE KING "T" (TUBO)
A tan Churchill with a slightly firm draw, but even burn. The smoke is creamy and woody. There are tangy notes of ginger that precede the sweet and nutty finish, which has a hint of brown sugar.
U.S.: $10.44 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild

87

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PERDOMO HABANO BOURBON BARREL-AGED MADURO CHURCHILL
Near black in appearance, this darkly wrapped Churchill shows hearty notes of coffee, earth and semisweet chocolate, before a sharp, woody finish.
U.S.: $8.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 7/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR, NICARAGUA

JOYA CABINETTA CHURCHILL
A two-toned Churchill that wears both Connecticut and maduro wrappers. First puffs are rather raw and rustic, but the cigar picks up notes of graham cracker and spice.
U.S.: $8.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

85

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: BRAZIL
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LIGA PRIVADA NO. 9 CORONA DOBLE
The dark wrapper of this Churchill seems to exude oil. Its primary notes of earth, sweet dates and chocolate are offset by a persistent waxiness that sticks to the palate.
U.S.: $16.81 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

85

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The Casa Cuba Doble Tres from the Fuente family scored 93 points and is emblematic of a different era in cigarmaking—understated, yet full of character without having to be a full-bodied powerhouse. Made in the Dominican Republic, Casa Cuba was created by Carlos Fuente Sr. (who died in 2016) and released in 2013. The size Doble Tres is named after a Cuban domino. La Colmena Amado No. 44 scored 93 points as well and is one of the few Miami-made cigars in this tasting. The medium-bodied brand is part of the Warped portfolio (owned by Kyle Gellis) and rolled at the El Titan de Bronze factory in Miami's Little Havana. Both cigars emphasize balance over strength.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CASA CUBA DOBLE TRES
This solidly rolled corona draws beautifully, showing a spicy, woody smoke that elegantly transitions between notes of cloves and citrus to nutmeg and baking spices. The finish is profoundly redolent of rich, dark chocolate.
U.S.: $9.93 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

93

U.S.A.
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA COLMENA AMADO NO. 44
Rolled with a pigtail cap and uncut foot, this cigar delivers a dense and chewy smoke that takes on the rich qualities of cashews, cedar and German chocolate cake. Balanced and flavorful.
U.S.: $14.72 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

93

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 5 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

GILBERTO OLIVA RESERVA BLANC 5.75X43
A beautifully constructed corona with a superb draw and even combustion. Base notes of cedar and earth are a rich foundation for the cigar's sweeter elements of baking spices and cocoa powder.
U.S.: $5.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

92

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: AUGUST 2015

MONTECRISTO NO. 3
Though firm at first, the draw of this corona eventually opens up, imparting a smoke that begins dry and hoppy but warms to show nutmeg, clove and orange peel. A chocolate note emerges as well.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.21 STRENGTH: Medium

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CAO PILÓN CORONA
A thin corona with an open, even draw. Toasty and nutty, the smoke also leaves a mineral sensation and a rich, chocolate cake finish.
U.S.: $6.69 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MAY 2015

COHIBA SIGLO III
An oaky smoke with nutty underpinnings and floral qualities but a notably firm draw affected the score. The wrapper is a perfect shade of medio claro.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £27.48 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA, PERU
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

H. UPMANN VINTAGE CAMEROON CORONA
The firm draw of this fairly dark, toothy cigar imparts notes of dry cocoa powder, a bit of red-pepper spice and a bold finish of leather and wood.
U.S.: $5.72 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

HENRY CLAY RUSTIC CHEROOT
Rolled with a flag cap and uncut foot, this rustic-looking cigar burns evenly, bringing notes of chocolate and hickory wood with scattered hints of raisin.
U.S.: $4.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN LONDRES MADURO
Rumpled in appearance with a lopsided cap. Initial notes are spicy and piquant with plenty of earthiness leading to hints of chocolate and a dry, woody finish.
U.S.: $5.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2017

PARTAGÁS CORONA SENIOR (TUBO)
A toasty and nutty corona with almond notes and a woody finish. The draw and burn are open and even throughout.
U.S.: N/A Italy: 6.50 euro STRENGTH: Medium

89

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: APRIL 2016

ROMEO Y JULIETA ROMEO NO. 1 (TUBO)
The draw of this reddish-brown corona is open and substantial without being airy. Nutty notes and spice are at the cigar's core, along with cedar and a touch of grass.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.39 STRENGTH: Medium

89

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: INDONESIA
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

COHIBA CRYSTAL CORONA
Made with an exceptionally round head, this corona delivers a dense, chewy smoke, full of almond notes, citrus and fresh tobacco, all building to a very woody finish.
U.S.: $18.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MATILDE RENACER CORONA
Peaty and smoky, this corona also shows an oakiness, notes of black pepper and a charry finish.
U.S.: $7.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA, PERU
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

MONTECRISTO WHITE VINTAGE CONNECTICUT NO. 3
A bit dull in appearance, this corona smokes evenly, exhibiting a vaguely nutty character with a spicy hint of ginger and a finish of bitter hay.
U.S.: $11.55 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild

85

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corona gordas

The Cuban Hoyo de Monterrey Le Hoyo de San Juan scored 92 points and is a perfect example of Habanos S.A.'s shift towards thicker cigars, as it's one of the thickest Hoyos in the entire line. Cigarmaker A.J. Fernandez has become the industry's go-to guy when large companies want to reblend and reboot their classic Cuban cigar brands for the U.S. market (with non-Cuban tobacco). In the case of the Ramon Allones by AJ Fernandez Toro (92 points), he produces and distributes the cigar, but doesn't own the trademark. The San Cristobal Quintessence is made in Nicaragua by My Father Cigars for Ashton. It scored 92 points with a defining core of leather and black pepper.

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: AUGUST 2016

HOYO DE MONTERREY
LE HOYO DE SAN JUAN
A plump, well-made smoke with a veiny wrapper. Its primary notes of almonds and wood take on some earthy, mineral qualities before a sweet, fruity finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £27.94 STRENGTH: Medium

92

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

RAMON ALLONES BY AJ FERNANDEZ TORO
Strong notes of cocoa powder, marshmallow and caramel build around this dark cigar's pleasantly nutty core. A sweet and balanced smoke.
U.S.: $13.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SAN CRISTOBAL QUINTESSENCE
CORONA GORDA
Bold and leathery with spicy notes of black pepper. The strong smoke takes on a gingersnap sweetness fortified by rich underpinnings of chocolate.
U.S.: $8.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ALEC BRADLEY NICA PURO
DIAMOND ROUGH CUT
A box-pressed cigar with an unusual diamond shape. Every puff is leathery and earthy buttressed by touches of baking spices, minerals and white pepper.
U.S.: $9.13 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

LAS CALAVERAS EDICIÓN LIMITADA 2018 LC46
Enrobed in a dark, oily cover leaf, this finely crafted cigar smokes well, offering notes of cedar, wood and cinnamon balanced by hints of coffee bean and vanilla.
U.S.: $9.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

CASA MAGNA JALAPA CLARO ROBUSTO
The wrapper of this cigar has an oily gleam and healthy complexion. Its sweet, woody palate ranges from hickory and mesquite to maple and oak. The finish is herbal.
U.S.: $6.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: COSTA RICA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA PALINA LP NUMBER 1 ROBUSTO
Wrapped in a veiny cover leaf, this robusto has a lush draw and wavy burn. Notes of almond paste and nougat frame a hearty core of wood.
U.S.: $9.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 53 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2018

MONTECRISTO LÍNEA 1935 MALTÉS
Floral at first, this reddish cigar picks up intensity to show notes of earth, coffee and wood with a touch of generic sweetness. The burn is even and clean.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £33.50 STRENGTH: Medium

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

ROCKY PATEL TAVICUSA ROBUSTO
A rustic-looking cigar that smokes well, delivering hearty impressions of earth and coffee intertwined with hints of licorice. The finish is charry.
U.S.: $10.30 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

CASA FERNANDEZ AGANORSA LEAF TORO
A box-pressed cigar that starts with prominent notes of nuts and nougat as well as black cherry, but the flavors fall flat on the finish.
U.S.: $8.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

PARTAGAS LEGEND FABULOSO LEYENDA
Notes of cocoa and earth underscore this cigar's elements of coffee and acidity. It's dark and squarely pressed with a rather firm draw.
U.S.: $12.49 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JANUARY 2015

COHIBA MADURO 5 GENIOS
Splotchy and dark, this cigar is rolled with an unevenly colored wrapper. It's yeasty and bready at first with hints of cloves, caramel and tangy citrus, but the smoke turns bitter on the finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £40.35 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF MILLENNIUM BLEND SERIES TORO
Musty first puffs of this dark cigar become sweeter with notes of milk chocolate, coconut and wood, but the finish is a bit tart.
U.S.: $24.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

MEXICO
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: MEXICO, NICARAGUA
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: MEXICO

CASA TURRENT 1880 SUI GÉNERIS
Big and blocky, this box-pressed toro delivers an oaky, earthy smoke with hints of coconut and maple candy, but the finish is muddled and charry.
U.S.: $17.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

85

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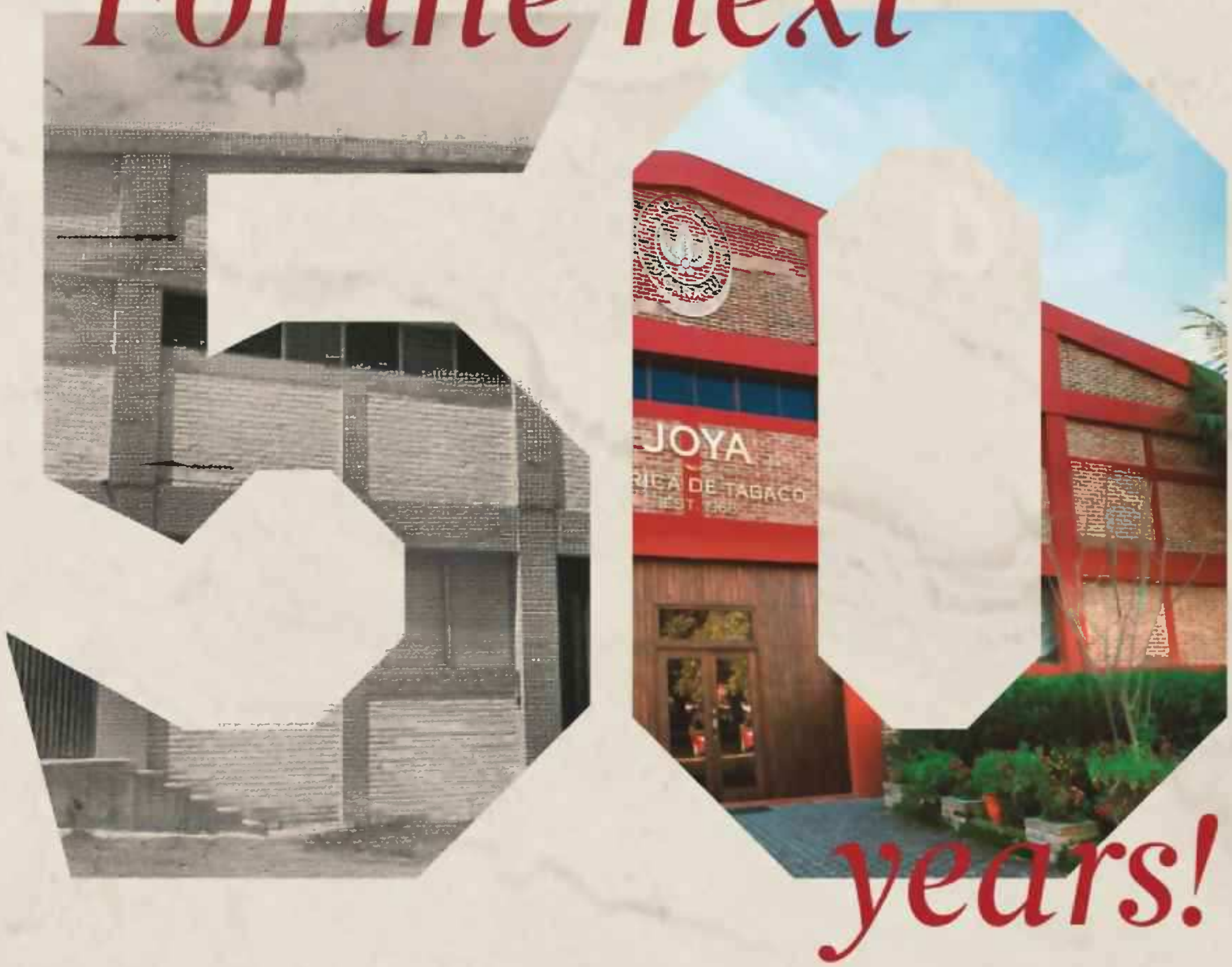

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Dr. Alejandro Martinez Cuenca
CHAIRMAN & MASTER MAKER

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It's difficult to blend a mild cigar with distinctive character. Conversely, it's just as challenging to blend a full-bodied cigar that has balance. But the Flor de Las Antillas Belicoso scored an astonishing 95 points for achieving just that—power and grace. The high score makes the cigar an instant classic on our rating scale, and it's a showcase of the blender's art, as it's both bold and intense, but maintains a steady procession of flavor without ever becoming borish or overpowering. Like a well-paced meal, the cigar builds, starting off more medium bodied and developing in both body and richness. More astonishing than its performance is the price. Cigars that score 95 points are rare in our pages, but to have one that retails for $7.50 is more than a mere bargain. It's a treasure. The Cuban San Cristobal de La Habana La Punta achieved 92 points, and is one of Cuba's smaller, newer brands. It isn't one of the best-known names in the world of Cuban cigars, nor is it available in every market, but if you come across this charming belicoso in your travels, you might want to consider it alongside some of Cuba's bigger brands.

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

FLOR DE LAS ANTILLAS BELICOSO
Sophisticated and rich with a savory, leathery core that complements every sweet note of marzipan and white chocolate without losing its bold character. The finish is toasty and delicious.
U.S.: $7.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

95

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2014

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LA HABANA
LA PUNTA
A softly pressed belicoso that smokes evenly and consistently. It imparts a toasty smoke balanced by notes of nuts, caramel a bit of spice and a floral finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £21.77 STRENGTH: Medium

92

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

E.P. CARRILLO ENCORE VALIENTES
The toasty smoke of this box-pressed torpedo shows pleasing notes of graham cracker, almond and a touch of sweet herbs. The finish is nutty.
U.S.: $12.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA GALERA 1936 BOX PRESSED TORPEDO
There's a pipe-tobacco sweetness to this neatly pressed torpedo, which is balanced by notes of wood and graham cracker, though the finish has a touch of char.
U.S.: $8.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

MICALLEF HERENCIA HABANO TORPEDO
Box-pressed with an unevenly colored wrapper, this torpedo is bready and yeasty at first, warming to show a toastier, nuttier character settling in to sweet notes of marzipan. The finish is a bit flinty.
U.S.: $11.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2015

VEGUEROS MAÑANITA
The slightly airy draw of this mini torpedo imparts a nutty, easygoing smoke enlivened by notes of orange peel, cinnamon and crushed almonds.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £10.73 STRENGTH: Medium

90

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

PLASENCIA COSECHA 146 SAN AGUSTIN
Solid to the touch, this figurado has a firm draw, but still imparts plenty of woody notes that carry touches of minerals, pepper and vanilla.
U.S.: $13.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

TATUAJE AVION 11
A full, lush draw floods the palate with notes of malted chocolate, raisins and coffee, but the smoke becomes a bit tart, leaving a dry finish.
U.S.: $10.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

UNDERCROWN SHADE BELICOSO
Initial puffs of this lightly colored cigar are notably sharp, but the sharpness fades, ushering in creamy sweetness and a nutty, almond-paste finish.
U.S.: $8.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

89

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LA FLOR DOMINICANA DOUBLE LIGERO CHISELITO MADURO
Dark and gleaming, this oily corona has a wedge-shaped head. The draw is a bit firm, and the smoke is bracingly spicy with strong notes of earth and cedar. A powerful blend that could use some sweetness.
U.S.: $8.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LA AURORA 107 MADURO BELICOSO
The draw of this torpedo is slightly airy, and its smoke is a bit muddled, as notes of cocoa and earth combine with notes of minerals and charred wood.
U.S.: $9.24 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2018

CUABA DISTINGUIDOS
An impressive figurado to behold with shapely tapers and a rich-looking wrapper. It's a very earthy smoke with intermittent notes of wood and walnuts.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £25.24 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ASHTON AGED MADURO PYRAMID
A blackish torpedo with a rough texture and uneven burn. Sweet intonations of marshmallow and vanilla are quickly overtaken by vegetal notes that leave a harsh, bitter aftertaste.
U.S.: $12.65 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

83

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The brand name is quirky and the size might have you scratching your head, but the Room101 Farce It Is A Magnum scored 92 points and showed a rather playful balance of spices that ranged from sweet to fiery. The name and the blend are reflections of brand owner Matt Booth, who has always taken a whimsical, yet interesting approach to cigars. The thick, 60 ring gauge allowed for ample blending of tobacco from five countries. Made in the Dominican Republic, this is the first Room101 brand released by Booth since he left Davidoff of Geneva in 2017 and went out on his own. The CLE Connecticut 60x6 scored 91 points and is made in Honduras. The name CLE are the initials of brand owner Christian Luis Eiroa, who frequently uses the Honduran tobacco grown on his family farms.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: U.S.A./PENN. BROADLEAF, DOM. REP., NICARAGUA, ECUADOR
BINDER: INDONESIA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROOM101 FARCE IT IS A MAGNUM
This thick log of a cigar has a lush draw and even burn. Bold notes of cinnamon, nutmeg and vanilla crescendo to a spicy, piquant finish of ground red pepper.
U.S.: $12.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS, PERU, NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CLE CONNECTICUT 60X6
A blond, lightly hued cigar with plenty of spice and mineral notes to segue into a complex palate of leather, orange peel and black pepper.
U.S.: $8.36 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

91

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALEC BRADLEY MEDALIST GORDO
Notes of wood, vanilla and lemon citrus come through this fat smoke. The finish is bright and lasting, showing hints of spice and sweetness.
U.S.: $7.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: CAMEROON
WRAPPER: MEXICO

CAO ZÓCALO SAN ANDRÉS
Draped in a dark, toothy wrapper, this fat cigar has an open draw and even burn. Notes of hickory and spicy wood meld pleasantly with touches of herbs and spice.
U.S.: $8.49 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CORNELIUS & ANTHONY MERIDIAN GORDO
A massive log with a colorado wrapper and lush, even burn. It's a woody, herbal smoke with enough nuttiness to balance notes of lemon zest and a mineral finish.
U.S.: $11.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN 1964 ANNIVERSARY SERIES NO. 4 MADURO
This immense, box-pressed cigar has the appearance of a chocolate bar—and some chocolate notes, too, along with hints of coffee and black cherry, though the finish is light and herbal.
U.S.: $21.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROCKY PATEL 15TH ANNIVERSARY SIXTY
Dark and gleaming with oil, the wrapper of this cigar is clean and nearly veinless. Initial acidity mellows to show earth, coffee and tangy notes of fresh pine, but a persistently uneven burn hurt the score.
U.S.: $13.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PDR 1878 CAPA SUN GROWN DOUBLE MAGNUM
Made with a knotted pigtail cap and uncut foot, this thick gordo burns unevenly. Notes of crushed black pepper, juniper and herbs lead to a charcoal finish.
U.S.: $7.43 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: BRAZIL, NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: MEXICO

UNDERCROWN GORDITO
A sweet and woody smoke with subtle underlying spice, but the sweetness turns saccharine and a poor burn never corrects itself, despite multiple relights.
U.S.: $10.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 5 7/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

INCH NATURAL BY E.P. CARRILLO NO. 60
A thick cigar with a rustic wrapper and uneven burn. Earthy and herbal, the cigar brings some woodiness and vanilla notes, but the smoke remains heavily earthy throughout.
U.S.: $9.55 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

86

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 5 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA FLOR DOMINICANA LIGERO OSCURO NATURAL CABINET L-500
A strikingly oily cigar with a gleaming wrapper and flat head. Notes of leather and cardamom come in and out, as do hints of minerals and chalk. The finish is bitter.
U.S.: $9.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: MEXICO

KRISTOFF SAN ANDRÉS 660
A black log of a cigar with a coiled pigtail cap and uncut foot. Traces of earth and cocoa are overwhelmed by touches of acidity and a metallic aftertaste.
U.S.: $9.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

84

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robustos

One doesn't normally associate richness and body with cigars wrapped in Connecticut shade, nor does one associate a $5 cigar with very high scores, but the Charter Oak CT Shade Rothschild shatters both preconceived notions. It scored 93 points for its abundance of complex flavors as well as its medium-to-full body. The brand comes to us via the Foundation Cigar Co., owned by Nicholas Melillo, who decided to price this cigar in value-brand territory. It's the highest-rated smoke of the category and one of the best values of the issue. The Cuban Montecristo Edmundo scored 92 points, unfolding the luxurious layers of complexity expected from such a storied Cuban brand.

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: INDONESIA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

CHARTER OAK CT SHADE ROTHSCHILD
Rich woods and complex herbs set the tone for this attractive robusto. Each puff leaves impressions of oaky vanilla, spearmint and caraway seeds along with floral notes and a cashew nuttiness.
U.S.: $5.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

93

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BO X DATE: JANUARY 2017

MONTECRISTO EDMUNDO
Slightly pressed with a wrapper that's silky to the touch. The smoke layers the palate with an ample almond nuttiness met by notes of orange peel, oak and a coffee-like, Sumatra-bean finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £23.65 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

AGING ROOM PURA CEPA RONDO
This well-made robusto has a lush draw and even burn. Its earthy smoke is sweetened by touches of almonds, cocoa and honeyed wood before a black cherry finish.
U.S.: $12.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: APRIL 2017

BOLIVAR ROYAL CORONA (TUBO)
Topped with a notably flat head and four-seam cap, this robusto is a leathery-tasting smoke with floral undertones, hints of nutmeg and an earthy finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £22.13 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2016

H. UPMANN MAGNUM 54
There's a lemony, citrus quality to this fat robusto that frames its core of graham cracker, malted chocolate and floral notes. It exudes a cinnamon aroma as it burns.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £23.72 STRENGTH: Medium

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

LA MISSION L'ATELIER 1959
Dark and trunk pressed with a coarsely-made pigtail. It draws evenly, showing the bold, malty qualities of a coffee-stout brew. Sweet notes of chocolate and marshmallow also emerge before the coffee finish.
U.S.: $8.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LAST CALL BY AJ FERNANDEZ PEQUEÑAS
A short robusto draped in a matte wrapper that extends over the foot. Its sweet, honey aroma recurs on the palate, along with fruity notes of raisin and dried fig that pop with a slight, red-pepper spice.
U.S.: $6.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

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

MY FATHER LE BIJOU 1922
PETIT ROBUSTO
An inky-dark robusto with an earthy core sweetened by notes of dried fruit, toffee and licorice, though the finish was a bit hot and charry.
U.S.: $6.70 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

ESPINOSA ESPECIAL NO. 4
The top of this dark, oily cigar is punctuated by a round head and four-seam cap. First puffs communicate an herbal bouquet of botanicals—juniper, licorice and vanilla—before wood, black pepper and an ashy aftertaste.
U.S.: $8.65 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

VILLIGER SAN'DORO CLARO ROBUSTO
A Connecticut-wrapped cigar with a very even draw and burn. It's a woody smoke with notes of hay, citrus and sweet nougat, but the finish is a bit muted.
U.S.: $8.51 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

DIAMOND CROWN ROBUSTO NO. 5
An airy draw imparts a light smoke redolent of straw, hay and muted woods, but background notes of nutmeg become more prominent.
U.S.: $11.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild

87

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: MEXICO

PADILLA VINTAGE RESERVE ROBUSTO
Packed solid with tobacco, this box-pressed robusto draws evenly. Leathery at first, it takes on notes of vanilla and coffee before a sticky, licorice finish that clings to the palate.
U.S.: $9.15 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

87

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA BARBA PURPLE 50 X 5
Clear, spicy notes of cumin and cardamom come through, along with white pepper and vanilla, but a bitter woody finish hurt the score of this veiny robusto.
U.S.: $9.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

86

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.,
U.S.A./PENN. BROADLEAF
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR,
U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

QUESADA RESERVA PRIVADA BARBER-POLE ROBUSTO
A barber-pole cigar with a very round head.
It's a bright and cedary smoke that hints of lemon zest and cinnamon. The finish is woody and a bit sharp.
U.S.: $14.40 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

86

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TOP SCORES

95 **Flor de Las Antillas Belicoso**
Nicaragua • $7.50 • Figurado • Medium-Full

93 **Casa Cuba Doble Tres**
Dominican Republic • $9.93 • Corona • Medium

93 **Charter Oak CT Shade Rothschild**
Nicaragua • $5.00 • Robusto • Mild-Medium

93 **La Colmena Amado No. 44**
U.S.A. • $14.72 • Corona • Medium

92 **Gilberto Oliva Reserva Blanc 5.75x43**
Nicaragua • $5.75 • Corona • Mild-Medium

92 **Hoyo de Monterrey Le Hoyo de San Juan**
Cuba • £27.94 • Corona Gorda • Medium

92 **Montecristo Edmundo**
Cuba • £23.65 • Robusto • Medium-Full

92 **Ramon Allones by AJ Fernandez Toro**
Nicaragua • $13.00 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

92 **Room101 Farce It is a Magnum**
Dominican Republic • $12.90 • Grande • Medium-Full

92 **San Cristobal de La Habana La Punta**
Cuba • £21.77 • Figurado • Medium

92 **San Cristobal Quintessence Corona Gorda**
Nicaragua • $8.25 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

TOP VALUES

93 **Charter Oak CT Shade Rothschild**
Nicaragua • $5.00 • Robusto • Mild-Medium

92 **Gilberto Oliva Reserva Blanc 5.75x43**
Nicaragua • $5.75 • Corona • Mild-Medium

91 **La Aurora 1903 Cameroon Churchill**
Dominican Republic • $6.00 • Churchill • Medium

90 **Last Call by AJ Fernandez Pequeñas**
Nicaragua • $6.00 • Robusto • Medium-Full

MILDER CIGARS

90 **Illusione Haut 10 Churchill**
Nicaragua • $17.95 • Churchill • Mild-Medium

90 **Serino Royale Connecticut Churchill**
Nicaragua • $10.00 • Churchill • Mild-Medium

89 **Alec Bradley Medalist Gordo**
Honduras • $7.00 • Grande • Mild-Medium

89 **Undercrown Shade Belicoso**
Nicaragua • $8.80 • Figurado • Mild-Medium

88 **Archetype Dreamstate Churchill**
Dominican Republic • $12.78 • Churchill • Mild-Medium

MEDIUM-BODIED CIGARS

91 **CLE Connecticut 60x6**
Honduras • $8.36 • Grande • Medium

91 **La Aurora 1903 Cameroon Churchill**
Dominican Republic • $6.00 • Churchill • Medium

91 **Punch Sir David Exclusivo Hong Kong**
Cuba • China: HK$388 • Churchill • Medium

90 **Vegueros Mañanita**
Cuba • £10.73 • Figurado • Medium

90 **Ashton Estate Sun Grown 20-Year Salute**
Dominican Republic • $20.00 • Churchill • Medium

STRONGER SMOKES

91 **Alec Bradley Nica Puro Diamond Rough Cut**
Nicaragua • $9.13 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

91 **Nat Cicco Aniversario 1965 Liga No. 4 Churchill**
Nicaragua • $7.29 • Churchill • Medium-Full

90 **Bolivar Royal Corona (Tubo)**
Cuba • £22.13 • Robusto • Medium-Full

89 **Tatuaje Avion 11**
Nicaragua • $10.00 • Figurado • Full

89 **Henry Clay Rustic Cheroot**
Honduras • $4.25 • Corona • Full

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A TASTING OF VINTAGE CIGARS

94 **ROMEO Y JULIETA DUNHILL SUN-GROWN** BREVA (1959)

This cabinet of 50 pre-Castro cigars has unusual packaging, and the smaller cigars inside come packed in foil. The smokes are dark brown, and roughish in texture, a nod to the sun-grown wrappers with which they are made, and they measure a little more than five inches in length, with a ring gauge of around 44. It's a well-made cigar, and it gives off a chocolaty aroma as it burns. It doesn't have a typical taste or finish of a pre-Castro cigar. There are tones of black pepper and some charred, burnt qualities. Stronger than most with this type of age. —*Marvin R. Shanken*

96 **MONTECRISTO** NO. 1 (1989)

This 29-year-old lonsdale is drop-dead gorgeous, with a silky wrapper and superb construction. The burn is even, the draw somewhat firm. It's quite woody, with hints of almond paste, graham crackers and earth, and deep into the smoke it takes on a light note of cocoa powder. There's plenty of strength and character in these old leaves. —*David Savona*

94 **ROMEO Y JULIETA** BELICOSO (2001)

Even after 17 years in the humidor, this belicoso remains supple and silky. An interesting contrast of dried flowers and exotic incense prefaced the steady core of nutmeg, walnuts and cinnamon. Woodiness was notably absent, as the paper-lined dress box allowed the tobacco to age neutrally. The cigar is superbly crafted, and smoked in three solid ashes. —*Gregory Mottola*

89 **PAUL GARMIRIAN P.G. NO 1** LANCERO (1991)

This nicely rolled panetela was made in the Dominican Republic 27 years ago. It has a coil cap, and wears a golden-brown wrapper devoid of oils. The draw is firm, but it still delivers plenty of smoke, which imparts notes of soft wood with some toasted vanilla. A bit of toffee and light espresso come through on the finish. —*Andrew Nagy*

JEFF HARRIS

9 T52 U 10 H99

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Top Dominican Cigars to Buy Now

BY DAVID CLOUGH

It's no secret some of the best cigars in the world are made in the Dominican Republic. They vary in terms of flavor and strength, from the mild to the more muscle-bound. Here are 11 of the top-scoring Dominican cigars of 2018, and the three that have been given our highest accolade. They're smoking beautifully right now.

Casa Cuba Doble Tres

This slim cigar (it measures 5 1/2 inches by 44 ring) is the thinnest in the Casa Cuba line, a brand blended by the great Carlos Fuente Sr., who passed in 2016. Elegant and refined, this corona is a must for any Fuente fan.
93 points • $9.93 • Medium

E.P. Carrillo Encore Majestic

Rolled in Santiago under the watchful eye of Ernesto Perez-Carrillo, this all-Nicaraguan Encore isn't the powerhouse you might expect. At 5 3/8 inches by 52 ring gauge, it shows notes of English breakfast tea and caramel around a pleasantly woody core.
93 points • $11.50 • Medium

Arturo Fuente Hemingway Classic

Draped in an African Cameroon cover leaf, this perfecto measures 7 inches by 46 ring. The Hemingway line is composed entirely of shapely figurados, but this relatively skinny size is particularly striking.
92 points • $9.55 • Medium

Ashton Virgin Sun Grown Robusto

Donning a dark, Ecuadoran sun-grown wrapper and measuring 5 1/2 inches by 50 ring gauge, the Ashton VSG Robusto (as it's commonly abbreviated) is a full-bodied blend that smacks of oak wood, cocoa and nuts. Bold, yet balanced.
92 points • $11.25 • Full

Ashton Aged Maduro No. 60

For maduro fans, this big cigar (7 1/2 inches by 52 ring) has a Connecticut broadleaf wrapper. It's a perfect after-dinner cigar that will last all night. Smoke it when you have a couple of hours to unwind.
92 points • $12.40 • Medium

Romeo y Julieta 1875 Cedro Deluxe No. 2

A relative bargain from Altadis that comes with a cedar sleeve. Underneath is an Indonesian cover leaf, and with a sub-$7 price tag (before taxes), this 5 1/2-by-44 smoke is a budget-friendly performer.
92 points • $6.72 • Medium

Trinidad Santiago Belicoso

Trinidad Santiago is rolled by cigarmaker Jochy Blanco, and it contains 100 percent Dominican tobacco. The 6-by-52 Belicoso has an earthy profile.
92 points • $9.90 • Medium

Villiger La Flor de Ynclan Torpedo

La Flor de Ynclan is Villiger's fresh take on a long-discontinued Cuban brand. Don't let the light Ecuadoran wrapper fool you—the Torpedo (6 by 52) has plenty of character and strength. Unlike most Dominican cigars, it's made in Santo Domingo.
92 points • $12.00 • Medium to Full

La Aurora 1903 Cameroon Churchill

Six bucks for a Churchill? Count us in. At 7 inches by 47 ring gauge, this high-scoring smoke—made by the oldest producer of cigars in the Dominican Republic—is one of the best values you'll find on the market.
91 points • $6.00 • Medium

La Flor Dominicana Double Ligero Chisel

Dark and gleaming with oils, this is an eye-catching figurado shaped like a stonemason's chisel. And like the tool for which it is named, it has strength. Measuring 6 inches by 54 ring, it's a big, bold cigar packed with powerful tobacco.
91 points • $9.70 • Full

Project 805 Petite Corona

If you're short on time, but big on powerful cigars, look no further than the Project 805 Petite Corona. This 4-by-40 firecracker sells for less than $5 and is blended solely from Dominican leaves, including a tobacco called andullo that's uncommon in most cigars.
91 points • $4.99 • Full

3 D.R. Classics

Fuente Fuente OpusX Double Corona

Exceptionally crafted, complex, full-bodied, this is a triumph of cigarmaking. The Dominican puro measures 7 5/8 inches by 49 ring. Despite its official price of about $17, don't be surprised to see it command much higher prices at retail due to its prestige and scarcity.
95 points • $17.34 • Full
2005 Cigar of the Year

La Flor Dominicana Andalusian Bull

La Flor Dominicana's Litto Gomez has an affinity for cigars with interesting shapes. First there was the Chisel, a wedge-shaped cigar, and now there's the Andalusian Bull (above), a curvy Salomon born from an old cigar mold that he found in Belgium. At 6 1/2 inches by 64 ring, the Bull showcases a powerful marriage of strength and spice while remaining balanced.
96 points • $15.80 • Full
2016 Cigar of the Year

Arturo Fuente Don Carlos Eye of the Shark

Eye of the Shark is a modified Arturo Fuente Don Carlos cigar, rolled with a special blend and presented in a unique shape measuring 5 3/4 inches by 52 ring. The cigar is box-pressed at the bottom and tapers into a rounded belicoso. As the full-bodied cigar burns, new layers of complexity unfold with every puff. A must-try cigar.
97 points • $12.75 • Full
2017 Cigar of the Year

LEFT AND CENTER: JOHN CURRY; RIGHT: JEFF HARRIS

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Five small farms in Western Cuba grow some of the finest cigar tobacco leaves in the entire world BY GORDON MOTT

A gorgeous crop of shade-grown, Cuban-seed tobacco in mid harvest at Quemado de Rubi, a farm in Pinar del Río run by Hector Luís Prieto.

BRIAN SOKOL

The Chinese-made sedan lurched down a one-lane dirt road, skirting puddles of water and seeking high ground between the deep ruts. The small town of San Luís is a few miles away, as the crow flies, but unlike the trip on the wings of a bird this journey by earth is long and slow. There had already been three stops, each of them to ask someone walking if anyone knew the whereabouts of Sergio Paz's farm.

Then it appeared, a wooden slat tobacco barn nearly jutting out into the reddish clay road, with a vintage tractor idling in front of an open door. The visitors stepped inside the dank, hot interior, with tobacco leaves hanging on horizontal poles all the way to the ceiling. The question was asked again: "Is Sergio Paz here?" From deep inside the barn, a small man in stained grey cotton pants, a white polo shirt and a black baseball cap walked out of the darkness and said, "I'm Sergio."

He was asked about his work. "I don't really have time to talk," he said. "I'm the only one who can drive the tractor, and I have to get leaves from a nearby field." When asked again, he agreed to a short chat. Fifteen minutes, no more. "We are having a great year. Never seen one like this one in recent years," he said. At the time it was February, and the tobacco harvest was almost done. More questions, more answers, but the farmer began shifting from foot to foot, eager to get back on his tractor, eager to get back to the business of bringing in his crop from the field.

The farm of Sergio Paz is considered one of the greatest tobacco producing farms in Cuba. For a cigar smoker, Pinar del Río and the Vuelta Abajo may conjure up images of vast fields of tobacco with bright green leaves moving gently in an afternoon breeze. But in reality, the lands where Cuba's finest tobacco is grown are quite small. Within about 100 square miles, the areas around two Cuban towns—San Luís and San Juan y Martínez—occupy the heart of the broader tobacco-growing region. Many consider them the finest tobacco lands in the entire world. It is where growers like Paz weave their agronomic magic.

The passage of time in Cuba has obscured the names of the great vegas, or farms, where the best tobacco has been grown for more than 150 years. Legendary names like Hoyo de Monterrey, near San Juan y Martínez, and El Corojo, near San Luís aren't

"We use some new varieties of tobacco, but the tradition, the way we plant, the way we harvest are all the same." —Hector Luís Prieto

mentioned often today in the same hushed and reverent tones as they were before. It's even whispered that El Corojo, the birthplace of the Corojo seed long prized by connoisseurs, is unproductive today. Furthermore, no single farm is associated with a cigar brand, as they often used to be before the Cuban Revolution in 1959. The Cuban government reportedly maintains a list of the vegas *finas*, or Cuba's best tobacco farms, although they are reluctant to make public that information.

But the farmers know which farms are the best, and who is producing the finest tobacco in Cuba. Based on visits during the last five years to the Vuelta Abajo, Cigar Aficionado has come up with a short list of the five top growers and their farms in the region. In some cases, such as Sergio Paz, they are only known by the grower's name. Others have names akin to, perhaps, a famous dude ranch such as Cuchillas de Barbacoa of Alejandro Robaina fame, or Quemado de Rubi, run by Hector Luís Prieto.

There are no scientific criteria for the selection. Two of the farms are well-known worldwide, one has been promoted recently by Habanos S.A. and the other two farms were identified by fellow tobacco growers, off the beaten track and certainly off the usual stops for tourists wanting to experience an authentic Cuban tobacco farm.

This report reflects more about the tradition of tobacco in Cuba's Vuelta Abajo, and not so much about the cigars in which that tobacco ends up. In the old days, factories producing specific brands had formulas for the blends that included place names, or farms which supplied the factory directly with tobacco. But no longer. Today, cigar tobacco, after it has been cured on the farms, is processed and sorted in regional warehouses and then shipped around the country to factories where it is needed. Cohiba, according to some reports, still receives tobacco from a select group of farms; many speculate about which farms supply the bulk of tobacco for Cohiba but there is no officially sanctioned public list. If you are lucky enough to get inside a loading dock or receiving area in a Cuban cigar factory, you may see tobacco bales with codes and even some place names but there's no guarantee that the factory will get the same mix of tobacco next year or the year after.

Farmer Hector Luís Prieto, with his ever-present cigar.

The farms are not listed in any order of excellence but by location. An intrepid cigar lover could travel this way and see Cuba's most talented growers, and—in many cases—smoke a cigar rolled from the local leaves, right on the premises.

Cuchillas de Barbacoa/Hirochi Robaina

The Robaina family has operated this tobacco farm since 1845, and a fifth generation descendent, Hirochi Robaina, is running it today. The farm is located near the town of San Luís, and is approached through a rutted, red clay road best traveled in a four-wheel SUV. The Cuchillas de Barbacoa emblazoned on one of the curing barn roofs can be seen from the road as you approach.

Entry means passing through a rusting green iron gate, under an arch with the name Alejandro Robaina, the former patriarch who passed away in 2010. The road ends in a dusty courtyard. There is a stand of palm trees surrounded by tobacco curing barns, two small houses, one with a museum to Alejandro Robaina, and a large thatched roof pavilion where guests are entertained and fed. Cuchillas de Barbacoa consists of 17 hectares (about 42 acres), and 7.5 hectares (about 18 acres) are dedicated to growing tobacco with an average annual production of 20,000 pounds of tobacco. Half of the production is shade tobacco for wrappers, and half is filler tobacco. The rest of the land is used for growing vegetables and fruits. "We use the same farming techniques that my ancestors did," Hirochi Robaina says, sitting in a cane-backed wooden chair and smoking a cigar rolled on the premises with tobacco from the farm. The cigars are full-bodied with a wonderful earthy flavor.

Hirochi follows in his late grandfather's footsteps, including a tradition he maintains every September. That's when Hirochi says his grandfather used to sit on the front porch and wait for a north wind that heralded the end of the hurricane season; if it came, it was time to get ready to plant.

Ivan Maximo Perez

The highway to San Juan y Martínez makes a slow curve to the left, and a dirt lane cuts up to the left between two rows of royal palm trees. Ivan Maximo Perez, known simply as "Maximo," is the third generation running the six hectare (15 acre) farm, five of shade tobacco and one of sun-grown. Between 10 and 12 workers share the workload with him. "My grandfather and my father passed on the knowledge about the climate and the farm here," Maximo says, "and now that is linked with science for the changing climate." Maximo has shifted almost entirely to organic fertilizers, without the use of fungicides and only 30 percent of insecticides he used to apply to the fields. "We had to find alternatives in the early '90s when we didn't have chemicals or even gasoline," Maximo says.

Maximo says that he has improved the soil every year over the last 10 years; one method of improvement is by planting a type of bean in the off-season to put more organic material in the soil. Maximo has been using seeds recommended by the Tobacco Institute, and his field has been a testing ground for new hybrids. "I really like Criollo 2010," he says, partly because it retains the flavor profile of Cuba's black tobacco. He also uses Corojo 2012 in both his shade- and sun-grown areas.

This farm usually yields about 15 tons of tobacco every year, which is then processed in three curing barns on the property.

BRIAN SOKOL

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Dennis McBain, Coppersmith at The Balvenie for 55 years.

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This location has also become one of the official stops on the cigar tourism tours. There is a new pavilion about the size of a basketball court, with chairs and tables and a wooden bar. "Would you like a cigar?" Maximo asks, as he opens up a wooden box on the table in front of us. "This one has a filler tobacco from 2014 and wrapper from the 2016-2017 crop. I rolled it myself." It was a beautiful smoke.

Quemado de Rubi/Hector Luís Prieto

The next stop, about two miles from the main highway, near a bend in the Río Feo, is the farm of Hector Luís Prieto, arguably the most famous Cuban tobacco grower today after Robaina. His family has tilled the farm for 100 years. "We had always maintained the same traditions," says Prieto. "We use some new varieties of tobacco, but the tradition, the way we plant, the way we harvest are all the same." The farm's planting was expanded in 2017-2018 to 10 hectares (24 acres), with 300,000 plants in the ground; the previous year he had planted only about 200,000—60 percent of them under shade and the rest sun-grown. Prieto has a full-time roller who prepares cigars for his visitors, in a two-story thatched roof pavilion with an attached guest room. The cigars are full-bodied, with beautiful reddish-brown or colorado wrappers.

Prieto believes the new hybrids they are using are every bit as good as the older varieties, and "they have a great flavor." He planted Corojo 2012 last year, which is a cross with Habano '92, one of the original hybrids created in the early '90s.

On this farm, the plantings are differentiated by geography. Prieto plants his shade tobacco on higher ground, about 100 yards above the river that rolls slowly through his land, and sun-grown next to the river. "It is soil that is perfect for shade tobacco," Prieto, a former Habanos Man of the Year for production, says as he looks upon his fields.

Gerardo Medina Relova

The farm sits up on a rise with a view of the buildings in San Juan y Martínez, located only two miles away. This is the land tilled by Gerardo Medina Relova, and he has 12 hectares (30 acres) of tobacco growing here. Half of it is sun-grown, planted around his homestead and the other half is shade, grown at a nearby location. Like the other top farms in Cuba, Medina's sits at the end of a tiny dirt road that passes small one-room huts and small non-tobacco fields.

There are 25 workers on the vega, which stretches around three tobacco barns that sit up on top of a rise. Medina, who says he was born "under a tobacco leaf," took a break from farming for a bit, and spent some time as a chemical engineer in Havana until 1996, when his father fell into ill health and he moved back to the farm where he absorbed all his father's experience. When his father died in 2016, he took over the entire tobacco operation; he had been running it on his own for nearly a decade. "We have a gift from God here," Medina says, sitting in his small living room taking a break from the blistering noon-day sun. "It's up to us to use it well and keep making it better."

The Robaina farm (left), known as Cuchillas de Barbacoa, is Cuba's most famous field. Gerardo Medina Relova (right) standing by one of his curing barns.

Sergio Paz Cordoves

This farm is the smallest of the big five, with only 4.5 hectares of shade under cultivation and less than a hectare of sun-grown. "I have 140,000 plants under shade, and 30,000 in the sun," says Sergio Paz Cordoves. Fifteen to 20 people work here.

Paz says his 2017-2018 crop was great, better than the previous harvest, which was affected by green spots on the wrapper leaves. "I've never seen a year like this one," he says. Paz has planted the hybrids Corojo 2010 and 2012 in recent years, but he doesn't like the results. He loves Criollo '98 and Corojo '99, which is what he planted in 2017-2018. "I took a chance this year because both can be affected by black shank," Paz says, "but it was a perfect year so I had no disease."

Paz's family has worked this land since the 1940s. He took over after his father, Antonio María Paz Valladares, died in 2016. Lin Paz, as he was known, was considered by his peers to be a tobacco magician on the same level as the much more famous Alejandro Robaina. Paz began working here 23 years ago, when his father couldn't work anymore. "I studied at his feet and learned everything he had to teach me," Paz says. He learned many secrets from his father, from preparation of the land, to managing a tobacco barn in dry or humid conditions, and when the tobacco was ready to be picked. "It was like getting a master's degree in tobacco from my father," he says. ❖

LEFT: ELIANA APONTE/BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

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Or email them to: momentstoremember@mshanken.com. To order additional copies of Cigar Aficionado, call 1-800-344-0763.

Al Romas and Al Ducharme celebrate the completion of their web series in Tampa, Florida. To honor the special occasion, they lit up a pair of Liga Privada Único Serie Velvet Rat cigars, a limited-edition release from Drew Estate.

Tilman Firestone and his son Josh sip Scotch whisky and indulge in the pleasures of a fine handmade cigar with good friends Jeff Huisman and Zack Tenhaeff at the Montecristo Cigar Bar at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, Nevada.

On the day of his daughter Kristin's wedding, Peter Herrschaft of Holbrook, New York, enjoys handmade cigars with his new son-in-law Kris Tierney, right, and friend Michael Becker, center, at their reception in Bali, Indonesia.

Fed up with local smoking bans, Justin O'Brien of Ontario, Canada, decided to open his home as a "cigar-friendly establishment." On this occasion, Justin and friends open a box of Alec Bradley cigars to pair with Four Roses Bourbon.

Anthony Rondinelli puffs on a C.A.O. Italia Robusto, while his uncle Pasquale Rondinelli savors an A.J. Fernandez Ave Maria cigar at the 92nd Annual Italian Festival at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel church in Enfield, Connecticut.

There's no better way to spend a beautiful day than puffing on a handmade cigar with a good friend. Smoking buddies Frank Pipitone and Jim Browski gather in Washington, New Jersey, to light up a couple of Aging Room cigars.

Chris Short and Steve Griswold relax with an excellent pairing of Cuban Montecristo No. 2 cigars and Irish Carlsberg beers after hitting the links at Tralee Golf Club in Tralee, Ireland.

Newlywed Brandon Charriere lights up on his wedding day in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, with family members Heath Webb, Phill Torchio Jr., Barry Charriere, Phil Torchio Sr. and Brent Charriere.

At his 50th birthday party—aptly named "Smoke on the Water"—Drew Hawkins celebrates with good drinks, good smokes and great company on a fine night in Pasadena, Maryland.

MARCH 6 – 10, 2019

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John, Cindy, Jack and DawnAnn Wilmot savor handmade cigars from Rocky Patel while taking in the spectacular views of The Links At Spanish Bay on a sunny day in Pebble Beach, California.

Walter Menaged, Brent Sembler and Gary Lieberman enjoy golfing in the great outdoors while puffing on a few La Gran Ofertas from My Father Cigars in Aspen, Colorado.

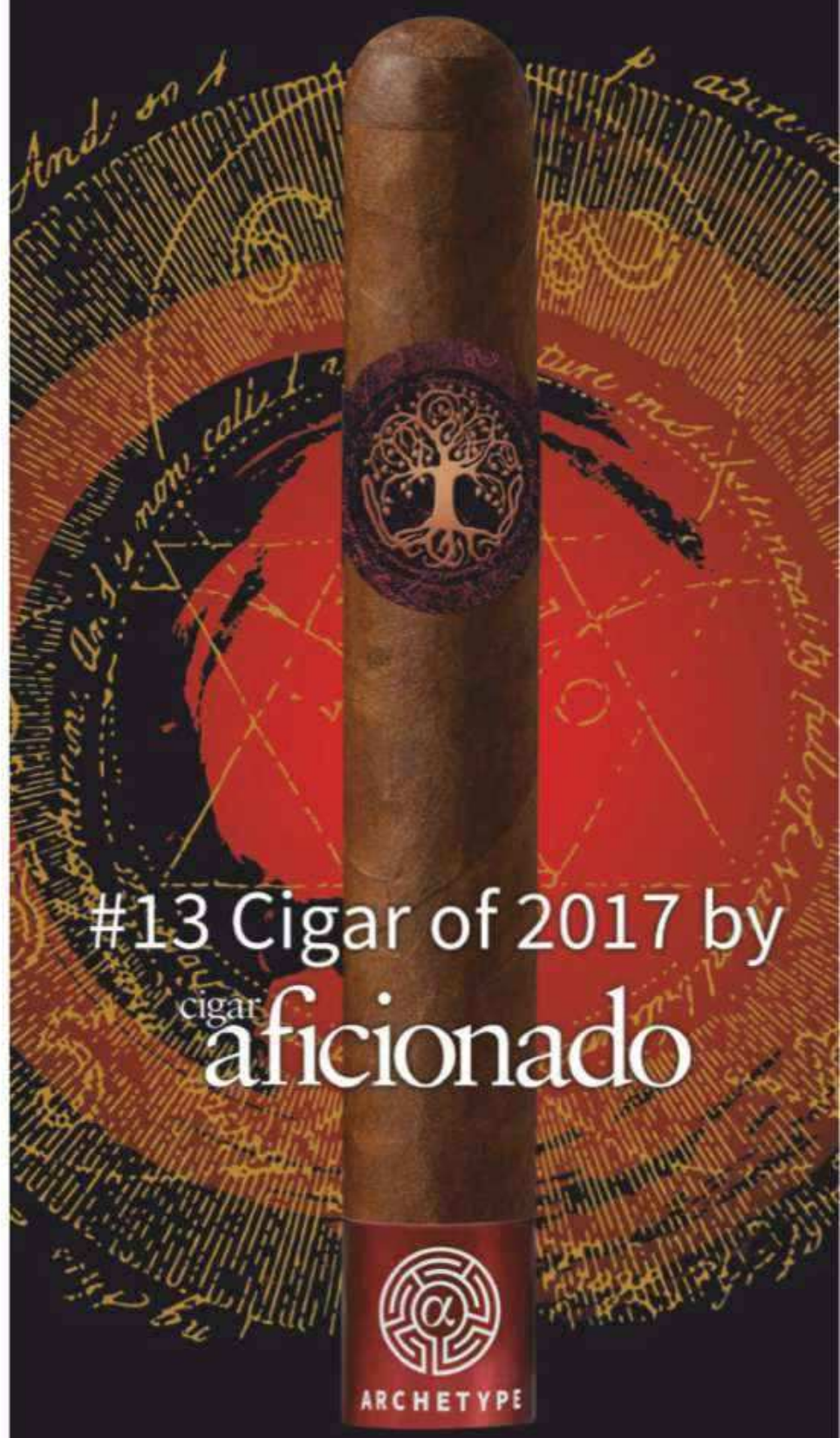
Joe Ferry Jr. shares a special bonding moment with his son Christopher as they celebrate his first job offer and mark the occasion with Fuente Fuente OpusX cigars in Waterbury, Connecticut.

Cousins Michael Cucarese, Krista Cucarese, Stephen Cucarese, John Viterito and Paul Cucarese enjoy premium handmade cigars during a family Fourth of July barbecue in Brooklyn, New York.

Jeff Koung, Chopin Chen, Rand Sluder, Ernie Jones, Natasha Vasandi, Nick Madole, Anjana Raman and Jeremie Craisse attend a cigar dinner at Longfellow's Wayside Inn in Sudbury, Massachusetts.

After a day spent playing golf at The Dunes Golf and Beach Club, Paul Anfinson and his son Joe bond over a pair of Arturo Fuente cigars while on vacation in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

Every legend has a beginning



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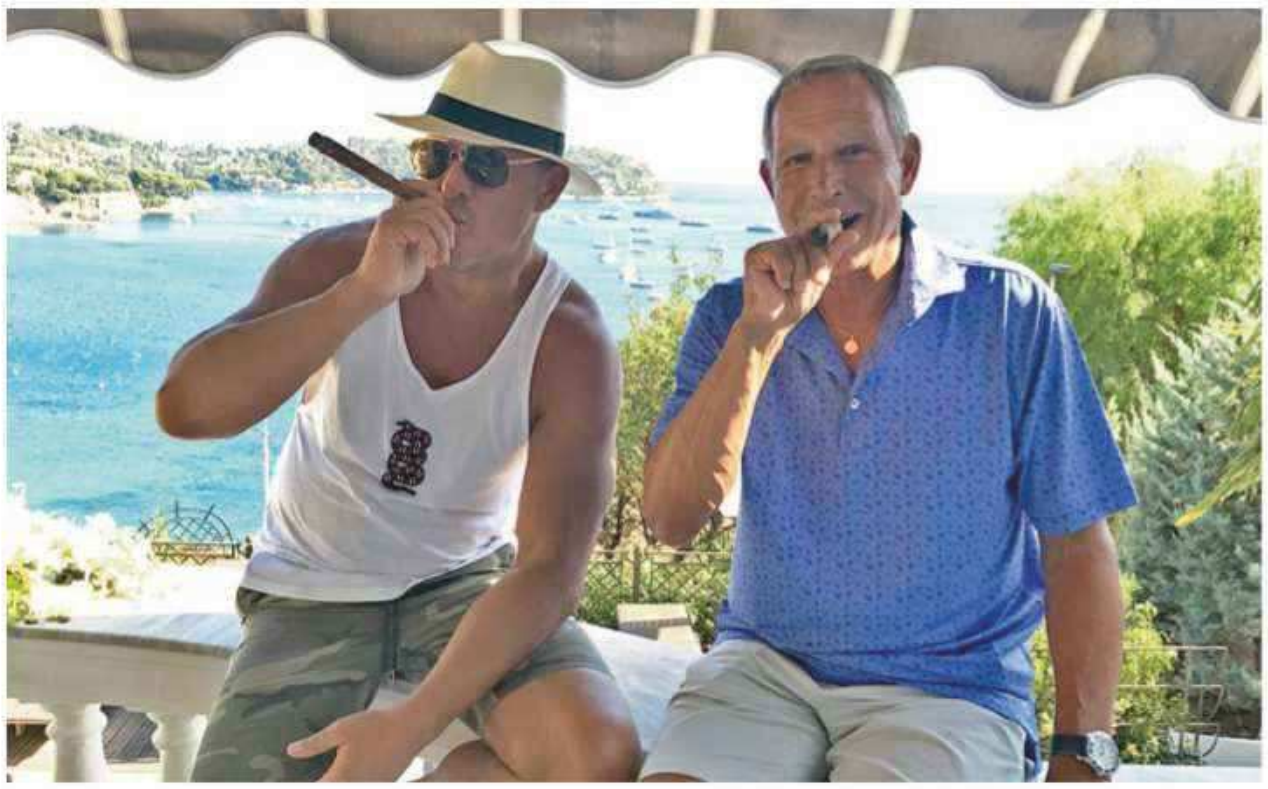
Steve Walker, Wendy and Siafa Tolbert, John Beiswanger, Rick Walker and Dave Walker sample the local fare aboard the *MS Empress of the Seas* while the ship is docked in Havana, Cuba.

Former fighters Marlon Starling, Sal Cenicola, Ray Mercer and Bobby Czyz watch the Mayweather v. McGregor fight with friend John Sheddan on Saint Simons Island, Georgia.

Dr. Lou Kareha, Dr. Tim Page, Dave Holcombe and Jonathan Jackowski of the Watkins Glen Cigar Club at Race Medical enjoy cigars at their annual NASCAR weekend in Watkins Glen, New York.



Patrick Harris lights up a Cuban Montecristo 'A' while Bill Nardiello savors a Fuente Fuente OpusX on the morning after Patrick's wedding at Villa Soleia in Villefranche-sur-Mer, France.

Pat McCauley puffs on a cigar with her sons Tim, Tom, Dan and Mike McCauley while enjoying the excellent view atop Cunningham Gulch during a family vacation in Silverton, Colorado.

Friends Walter Pluas, Vinnie Rodriguez, Norge Coronel and Hernan Mujica savor the last days of summer on the Jersey Shore by indulging themselves with sunshine and handmade cigars.

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Father and son, Jeff and Sam Castell celebrate with cigars after Sam's graduation from the Farmer Business School at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

Golf partners Aaron Bieszczad and Mike Bogdan puff on cigars before playing in the annual Stone Oak Invitational golf tournament in Toledo, Ohio.

Bridesmaids Lauren Mitzel and Meghan Holmes celebrate Kristin Batchik's wedding to Joseph Batchik with hand-rolled cigars at Zuccaro's Banquet Hall in Chesterfield, Michigan.

Jeff Westbrook and his son Ian share a memorable cigar and Scotch on Father's Day at Jeff's home in Dana Point, California.

Mike Cook, McGregor Agan and Grant Hanson savor Montecristo No. 2 cigars as they sail around Washington's San Juan Islands for Mike's 60th birthday.

Captain Will Pederson of the Rockford Fire Department and firefighter Richard Mercado of the Fire Department of New York stroll with smokes in New York City.

Francis Ferrara and John Iannitto enjoy cigars at the wedding reception of Frank's daughter, Catherine, and John's son, Peter, in Haverhill, Massachusetts.

Brothers-in-law Mark Palmer and Brent Wilkins enjoy a pair of Padrón Serie 1926 80 Years while vacationing with their wives in Las Vegas, Nevada.

John Maxwell, Dave Maxwell, Billy Trego, Steve Maxwell, Nolan Maxwell, Joe Maxwell, Craig Maxwell and Elliot Joses gather at Mattei's Tavern in Los Olivos, California, to drink an assortment of fine Scotch alongside Romeo y Julieta cigars from Cuba in celebration of Nolan's marriage to his fiancée Autumn.

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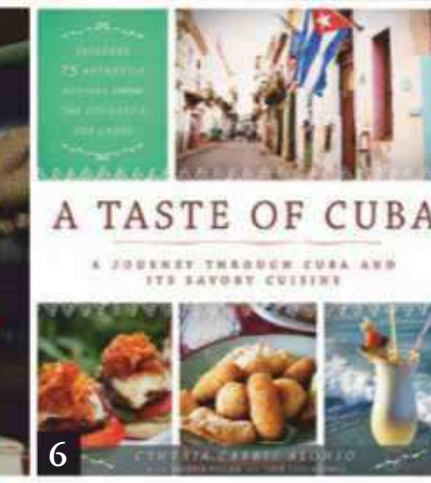

In a world of fast food and one-size-fits-all sensibilities, how often does something feel made especially for you? The "Made for You" section celebrates those items that are created with such high quality of hand workmanship and degree of customization that they become individual to you. In each issue, our editors will endeavor to bring you special things from anywhere on the globe, choosing them solely on the basis of outstanding quality. Our goal is to give you guidance on the best of everything.

1 GRAND TOURING—AIRSTREAM

We love Airstream trailers for their deco-like bullet design, but for serious touring the company's Interstate Class-B motorhome lineup fits the bill. The latest in the series is the Interstate EXT Slate edition. It comes on the familiar Mercedes-Benz platform and includes both Grand Tour and Lounge platforms as well as Benz safety features such as collision prevention, lane keeping assistant and side- and rear-view cameras, as well as many luxe amenities. Limited to only 75. *airstream.com*

2 WOODN'T IT BE NICE—TOAST

Just because your smartphone, tablet, laptop, gaming console, home assistant, etc. is a soulless piece of electronics bent on controlling your life, it doesn't mean you can't dress it up in warming wood tones and, perhaps, an image that evokes your personality. The accessory company Toast makes tech covers in walnut, ash, bamboo and reclaimed ebony that fit snugly to your devices and allow you to customize with a laser-engraved image (movie character, cultural touchstone, symbol) with personal meaning. The Dude Abides. *toastmade.com*

3 DUCKING OUT—FRANK SHATTUCK

You may know Frank Shattuck for his benchmade suits featured on Anthony Bourdain's "Raw Craft," but the custom tailor's interests go beyond just working with needle and thread. As a sideline to bespoke menswear ordered by Skype from his upstate New York studio, Shattuck carves birds out of a range of woods that include cherry, apple and maple. His works of art (around $300 each) are fashioned to feature the natural wood grains. "I let the wood be the wood," says Shattuck. 315-882-4724

4 STRIKING OIL—HOLY SMOKE

Naturally, we're fans of nearly everything that is smoky, so we embrace the products from Holy Smoke, a line of smoke flavored gourmet items created by Charleston, South Carolina, residents Kyle Payne and Max Blackman. The duo first smoked olive oil, then added other products such as smoked honey (superb), Bloody Mary Mix (a natural for smoke) and black pepper, which adds a delightful touch of barbecue essence to eggs, meats and other items. *holysmokeoliveoil.com*

5 FINGERPRINT ACCESS—TAPPLOCK ONE

The same of-the-moment technology that allows you to use your fingerprint to unlock your cellphone has been applied to a bit of technology that's been with us for far longer: the padlock. Not only does the fingerprint sensor on Tapplock One ($100) dispense with the frustration of remembering combinations and inputting them correctly, but the durable lock saves up to 500 fingerprints, so you can share access with several users. And a handy phone app lets you load fingerprints remotely. *tapplock.com*

6 HAUTE HAVANA—TASTE OF CUBA

Havana is a city that teems with *paladares*, private restaurants at which the innovative chefs prepare superb dishes, often while making heroic efforts to obtain ingredients in a country where the pickings are slim. The journalist Cynthia Carris Alonso, who has been traveling to Cuba for 25 years, sought out these chefs and recorded their recipes in the tome *A Taste of Cuba*, new from Apollo Publishers ($35). "I went to all my favorite paladares," she says. "A lot of the recipes are from the chef's heads." The book also serves as a tour guide to Havana, with wonderful photographs.

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