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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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Attachments	GCC NOR Ex. 28 -- Cigar Aficionado - August 2019 (Part 01).pdf(5701033 bytes) GCC NOR Ex. 28 -- Cigar Aficionado - August 2019 (Part 02).pdf(5733388 bytes) GCC NOR Ex. 28 -- Cigar Aficionado - August 2019 (Part 03).pdf(5676364 bytes) GCC NOR Ex. 29 -- Cigar Aficionado - October 2019 (Part 01).pdf(5734805 bytes) GCC NOR Ex. 29 -- Cigar Aficionado - October 2019 (Part 02).pdf(5713037 bytes) GCC NOR Ex. 29 -- Cigar Aficionado - October 2019 (Part 03).pdf(5681320 bytes) GCC NOR Ex. 29 -- Cigar Aficionado - October 2019 (Part 04).pdf(915724 bytes)

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 28</u>

<u>TO RESPONDENT GENERAL CIGAR CO., INC.'S NOTICE OF RELIANCE</u>

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SURGEON GENERAL WARNING:
Cigar Smoking Can Cause Lung Cancer And Heart Disease.

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july/august 2019

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Kurt Russell—"Hollywood's best kept secret"—has been delivering spot-on performances in a career that has spanned almost six decades and a variety of acting genres.

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Before Castro, Cuba was a playground for America, where mobsters like Meyer Lanksy partnered with a vice-friendly government to provide gambling and other diversions.

ON THE COVER
Kurt Russell adds to his long list of standout acting credits. *Photographed exclusively for* CIGAR AFICIONADO *by Peter Yang*

CENTER: RALPH MORSE / TIME PICTURE COLLECTION / GETTY IMAGES; ON THE COVER: ISAIA BLAZER / TED BAKER SHIRT / LEVI'S JEANS; COVER INSET: AP PHOTO

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FROM TOP: KEVIN C. COX / GETTY IMAGES; COREY ARNOLD; JEFFERY SALTER

highlights

In a strong tasting that saw 24 scores of 91 points or higher, Nicaragua continued to separate itself as today's preeminent cigar-producing region. The country either captured or tied for the top spot in four of our six tasting categories, while the Dominican Republic and Cuba led (or tied) two sections of their own.

TOP PANETELA
OLIVA SERIE V LANCERO
This all-Nicaraguan blend is centered around strong, ligero tobacco from the Jalapa Valley and a high-priming wrapper.

NICARAGUA 94

TOP CHURCHILL
PADRÓN 1964 ANNIVERSARY SERIES DIPLOMATICO
A proven performer, this box-pressed Padrón has been sold since 1994. It tied for the top spot with A.J. Fernandez's Enclave Broadleaf Churchill, which debuted in 2017.

NICARAGUA 93

TOP CORONA GORDA
COHIBA SIGLO IV
A classic Cohiba led the category along with another Cuban, the Punch Duke Exclusivo México, and the Espinosa Habano No. 4 from Nicaragua.

CUBA 93

TOP DOUBLE CORONA
FUENTE FUENTE OPUSX DOUBLE CORONA
This Dominican puro was crowned Cigar of the Year by this magazine in 2005, and today, it leads all double coronas. That's consistency defined.

DOM. REP. 93

TOP FIGURADO
PLASENCIA ALMA FUERTE GENERACION V
With its distinctive box-pressed Salomon shape, the Plasencia is rolled entirely from Nicaraguan tobaccos grown in the country's four major growing regions: Estelí, Condega, Jalapa and Ometepe.

NICARAGUA 93

TOP ROBUSTO
AGING ROOM SOLERA SUN GROWN FESTIVO
A Dominican puro that features a wrapper grown in direct sunlight, this cigar took top honors alongside Cuba's Romeo y Julieta Wide Churchill (Tubo).

DOM. REP. 92

BEST BUY
LA AROMA DE CUBA DOUBLE CORONA
Made in Nicaragua by the Garcia family for Ashton Distributors Inc. using a Connecticut broadleaf wrapper, this large smoke retails for only $6.95.

NICARAGUA 92

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editors' note

Cigars for the Troops

So many things are wrong with the Food and Drug Administration's regulation of the cigar industry that it's easy to overlook one of the most egregious prohibitions. We're talking about the government's ban on cigar companies giving away samples of cigars, which prohibits manufacturers from donating cigars to American troops.

Prior to 2016, it was common for makers of handmade cigars to donate cigars to American troops, particularly those serving abroad. But that year, a new set of FDA regulations was passed that included a prohibition on free samples, a restriction that made these charitable donations illegal.

Have you ever heard of a more ridiculous government prohibition?

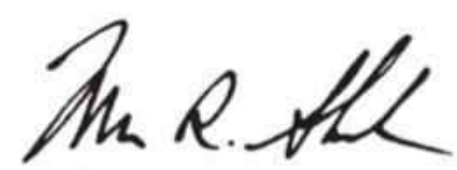
Cigars are an indelible part of the long history of the U.S. military, and were smoked by such famed generals as Ulysses S. Grant, George S. Patton and Tommy Franks. The cigar is no stranger to the military. When a soldier, Marine, airman or sailor is stationed far from home, he or she is sacrificing comforts we all take for granted. For those who serve, is it too much to ask that they be given a good cigar? It is a simple—and deserved—comfort no legislator should deny.

The companies that make handmade cigars are fighting the battle to overturn these ridiculous FDA regulations, but for now the ban on cigar companies donating cigars remains. However, these laws don't apply to individual citizens.

We're sure that all of you reading this letter have a cigar (or a few cigars) that you could spare. We ask that you join us—these prohibitions don't include publishing companies—in making a donation of cigars to members of the U.S. armed forces.

Cigars For Warriors is a charity that has sent out hundreds of thousands of cigars since 2012. It places a special emphasis on troops serving in danger zones. "Any man or woman who has to be quarantined for two weeks deserves a cigar," says Storm Boen, an Army vet who cofounded Cigars for Warriors.

Don't forget our troops. Visit cigarsforwarriors.org and send them some well-earned cigars.



MARVIN R. SHANKEN
EDITOR & PUBLISHER

DAVID SAVONA
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

DAVID YELLEN

Discover PASO DOBLE, a dance of flavors blended in perfect unison.

SERIE SIGNATURAS

PASO DOBLE was born of a collaboration between two world-renowned cigar makers known for their ambitious desires to define, in their own unique way, what it means to be boutique.

Litto Gomez and Boris Wintermans share a similar passion for developing inspiring, one-of-a-kind blends, and each has their own method for getting there. Litto incorporates specially-grown tobaccos from his personal farm in La Canela, Dominican Republic, while Boris relentlessly searches the globe for the most unique premium tobaccos.

PASO DOBLE combines each cigar makers' dearest tobaccos and intertwines them into a distinct dance of flavors that stays true to each cigar maker's signature blending style – the dark, full-bodied opulence of Litto Gomez' La Flor Dominicana and the sophisticated, balanced complexity of Boris Wintermans' Balmoral cigars.

#CuriosityDrivesDiscovery

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Dear Marvin,
Great articles on Paul Giamatti ["Roles of a Lifetime,"] and Pebble Beach ["National Treasure"] from the May/June issue. It's noteworthy to read that all seven cigars on the Highlights page hailed from either Nicaragua or the Dominican Republic. Cuba was not included. Congratulations to those Nicaraguan and Dominican growers.

I'm looking forward to the Las Vegas Big Smoke in November 2019, my sixth attendance.
Frank Kohler
Scottsdale, Arizona

Editors' Response: If there's one thing our blind reviews have proven, it's that cigars from Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Honduras can compete with Cubans, but if you read closely, you'll see that some Cuban cigars tied for top robusto and figurado. See you at the Big Smoke.

Dear Marvin,
Great work guys. Paul is a titan among actors.
Jeremy Piven
Submitted via Instagram

Dear Marvin,
Just read your editors' note from the May/June issue ["The Day Congress Listened to Cigarmakers"] and noted a sentence that displays considerable naïveté. "The intent of all these new rules was to keep tobacco out of the hands of children." That may have been the stated intent but the truth is far different. The Obama administration had no compunction at attempting to destroy entire industries to achieve yet another goal designed to control the American people. Indeed, we are the "children" to which their stated intent refers. Hopefully common sense will prevail on this issue.
Rick Davenport
Harrisburg, Illinois

Dear Marvin,
I have been a subscriber for four years. I read your magazine from cover to cover. In fact, your magazine has inspired me to travel to the Dominican Republic. Your travel articles in the November/December issue ["Dominican Dreams: A Cigar Lover's Guide to the Good

"Great work guys. Paul is a titan among actors."
—Jeremy Piven
Submitted via Instagram

Life in the Dominican Republic"] gave me the "you got to go there" vibe. I have not flown in over 20 years but you can count on me reading your latest edition as I pass the time on my four-hour flight.

Here's to living the good life.
Thomas Ferraro
Brooklyn, Ohio

Editors' Response: We're glad to hear our issue inspired you to get on a plane and fly to the Dominican Republic, which we visit often. Thanks for reading, and enjoy the trip.

Dear Marvin,
I must comment on the review that I read about the Romeo y Julieta Fabuloso in the [May/June] Connoisseur's Corner. The review states, "At more than nine inches

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E-MAIL letters@cigaraficionado.com • **LETTERS** 825 8th Ave., 33rd floor, New York, NY 10019 • **EDITORS' BLOGS** Find out what the editors of CIGAR AFICIONADO are thinking—and smoking—in our editors' blogs. David Savona, Gordon Mott, Jack Bettridge, Gregory Mottola and Andrew Nagy want to hear from you. The conversation is taking place on cigaraficionado.com.

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long, the Fabuloso is easily a two-hour smoke." I'll contradict. A cigar smoker is constantly drawing and tasting to enjoy every instant of the cigar. A puffer draws in short bursts, waits, poses, and wastes the life of the cigar to watch the ash grow and pretend he is a smoker. That could take two hours. But a smoker would enjoy every second of a Fabuloso in 1.25 hours...or less.
T.L. Sheldon
San Diego, California

Editors' Response: Why the rush? We like to enjoy our cigars the way they were made: with patience. Puffing too quickly can cause bitterness. When you puff slowly, the cigar stays cool, maximizing the flavor. Don't be afraid to take it slow.

Dear Marvin,
As I sit here in the courtroom on the day of my divorce, I want to personally thank you for your excellent writing and interesting stories. It has helped this painful process. Particularly captivating was the story of Sir Winston Churchill and his amazing life ["Winston Churchill: Portrait of Power," May/June 2018]. I particularly enjoyed the fact vs. legend portion, and find it fitting that I read this story so intently considering my current location and situation. There are many fact vs. legend moments here!

"As I sit here in the courtroom on the day of my divorce, I want to personally thank you for your excellent writing and interesting stories."
—*Dr. David Yeager, Dixon, Illinois*

As a subscriber to your magazine for several years, I truly enjoy receiving it and get giddy as I walk home from the mailbox. I cannot wait to sit down and read the issue as I sip on Johnnie Walker Blue and enjoy my Partagas. Any size or style will do. I enjoy Rocky Patels as well.

Please do not ever lose the ability to not only entertain but also inform your readers.
Dr. David Yeager
Dixon, Illinois

Editors' Response: After many years of publishing CIGAR AFICIONADO, *we've learned that a fine cigar, a good read and a great sip of whisky make even the darkest days seem brighter. Hang in there.* ❖

Correction The price for the Plasencia Reserva Original Churchill was mislabeled in the tastings section of the May/June issue. Its suggested retail price is $9.50.

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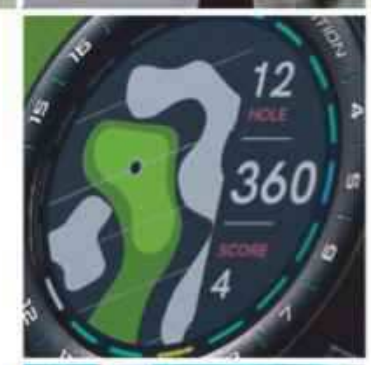
good life guide

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.



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JEFF HARRIS

Paramount Cigar Cutters

First and foremost, Charles Sauer is a bladesmith. The Texan made his name forging superlative cutlery so fine and ornate that his knives are as much showpieces as hunting tools. Eventually, he brought his mastery of Damascus steel to cigar cutters, creating mini guillotines of true heirloom quality.

Sauer does not buy cutters and embellish them. Anyone can cover a mediocre cutter in gold and jewels. Like his knives, his cigar cutters are a culmination of high craft and artistry, made with Damascus steel, created by forging layer after layer of steel and working it to bring out exquisite, wavy patterns. Take, for example, the Mosaic Damascus cutter (top, $37,500). It's a hand-forged unit of abstract patterns contained by two rows of diamonds on both sides—a clever contrast of entropy and order.

Similarly, note the Bamboo cigar cutter (right, $32,500), also made in the mosaic Damascus method. Diamonds recur on both sides as well, this time against a motif of wild bamboo.

For a more baroque presentation, the Multi-Bar Damascus cutter (center, $45,000) integrates rubies, diamonds and gold. The pictured cutters are but a few of the regular-production models that fill out a large catalog. Sauer also excels at custom work and can make cutters in any format, style or ring gauge.

As for its function—cutting—the action is smooth and the blade slices through tobacco fast and clean. But then once you have one of these works of art, you might be afraid to use it.

Visit paramountcutters.com

—Gregory Mottola

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DAVID A. THOMPSON

The Toughest Fish

It's elusive, flattened and silvery, a fish with huge eyes and a forked tail resembling a flying V electric guitar. And for fly fishermen it's one of the ultimate prizes—the permit. "Permit are one of the most exciting fish to catch on a fly," says Toby Brocklehurst of In Cloud 9 tours, who has been fly-fishing in Cuba and Central America for some 30 years. "Among fly fisherman, it's the top of the list," concurs Connecticut resident Jimmy Coale, a former fishing guide who has fished all over the world. "It's an obsession."

Permit can measure more than three feet long and weigh in at well over 20 pounds. Considering their size, the water they swim in is extremely shallow. They are found in the Florida Keys, the Yucatan and Belize. Particularly abundant in Cuba, they feed on crabs. Their name is an alteration of the Spanish for little dove. But more telling is the Latin species nomenclature *falcatus*, meaning armed with scythes, a moniker they got for the way their dorsal fins protrude from the water.

Although abundant, they are easy to scare, and extremely tough to land. The fly fisherman must present a crab-like lure to the fish, but that's only the start of the struggle, according to Coale: "They will spit out your fly in a heartbeat. They know instantly it's fake." He says it takes practice to know how to catch permit, because they have thick, rubbery lips that disguise a bite. A fisherman needs to watch them tip in the water, head down, their sickle-shaped fins emerging from the shallows and set the hook at the precise time. "You can see 50," he says, " and catch one."

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—David Savona

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Eric, Drew, and Bobby Newman are standing on the rooftop of El Reloj, J.C. Newman's 109-year-old cigar factory in the Ybor City National Historic Landmark District in Tampa, Florida.

Tying Up For Summer

While your initial response to summer's heat may be to shed as many layers as possible, the occasional lawn party, country club bash or business meeting mean you can't spend all of July and August in shorts and a tank top. But nothing says you can't stay cool—nor look cool—while wearing a tie.

Banish your dour, woolen neckwear to the back of the closet in favor of lightweight silks that are also bright in color. Remember, you'll likely be pairing with lighter hues, whether the occasion calls for a linen suit, seersuckers or a blazer with khaki trousers. This is also the season for spritely patterns that synch with a world that is in blossom.

A butterfly motif from Petronius 1926 (lower right, available at Neiman Marcus, $175) stays on a flight pattern that is perfect for the season. Because classes have been suspended until fall, Kiton offers a yellow-and-aqua striped number (lower left, Neiman Marcus, $295) that will never be mistaken for an old-school tie. Even while Paul Stuart flirts with a navy-blue hue (upper left, $175), its jazzed up diamond-cloud pattern is anything but somber. Paisley is a class act that works all year, but in the hands of Zegna (upper right, Neiman Marcus, $195) it exemplifies the carefree summer sensibility. And if flowers are in bloom, Paul Stuart (middle right, $165) apparently thought, why not show a bit of foliage around the neck?

—Jack Bettridge

PHOTO: JEFF HARRIS; TIES: PETRONIUS, KITON, ZEGNA/ NEIMAN MARCUS HUDSON YARDS

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Range Rover Evoque

When Jaguar Land Rover introduced the smallest member of its exclusive Range Rover family, the 2012 Evoque, it was an immediate visual standout married to lavish features and a seemingly unstoppable all-wheel-drive system. The 2020 model from the British automaker follows the same formula. And despite the fact that there's not a single, carryover body panel wed to its all-new "architecture," the SUV is instantly recognizable as an Evoque.

For 2020, the two-door version is gone, along with the quirky Evoque convertible that made more sense as a fantasy-in-chrome show car than a production vehicle. Few will notice. It's the four-door Evoque that generated annual sales of more than 100,000 vehicles. And it's here that some welcome improvements have been made. While the new model retains a footprint that makes it as easy to navigate urban streets as off-road trails, the wheelbase has been stretched by nearly an inch. We'll save the technical explanation, but that translates into a roomier interior with additional head and legroom, even for rear-seat passengers.

The well-appointed interior features the currently requisite assortment of high-tech goodies, including a mirror that uses a camera to give you a better rear view. The improved infotainment system can be ordered with the unique "transparent hood." No, it's not made of glass or acrylic. Rather low-mounted cameras display an image on Evoque's big touch-screen of what's directly in front of the wheels. It proves useful while negotiating rocky, off-road courses as well as when parking.

What's actually under the hood is JLR's turbocharged, 2.0-liter Ingenium engine, available in two configurations, the base making a solid 246 horsepower and 269 pound-feet of torque. The upgrade punches that up to 296 hp and 295 lb-ft. That version, known as the P300, is Land Rover's first mild hybrid. It uses a 48-volt battery that adds a bit of off-the-line boost to performance while also smoothing out the STOP/START system designed to save gas by briefly shutting the engine off, rather than idling. Both versions of the Ingenium are mated to a silky new nine-speed automatic.

The 2020 Range Rover Evoque smoothly connects the world of off-road and on-road driving. It is a vehicle that seems comfortable in any environment and we can only imagine that potential buyers will find the new version even more appealing than the original.

Visit landroverusa.com

—Paul A. Eisenstein

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Genuine Gelato

Americans might be excused for thinking that gelato is simply the Italian word for ice cream. After all, in a land with a severe shortage of real, quality gelato, American companies have for decades been using the label on products called gelato that are merely ice cream.

But disabuse yourself of that misconception. True gelato, relying solely on natural flavors, is an elegant frozen expression that is creamier and more intense than commercial ice cream can hope to be.

While gelato has far less butterfat and uses more milk and less cream, the foremost differentials are air and temperature. The real McCoy has about 70 percent less air than ice cream, making it denser. And, served at 10° to 15° F warmer than the hard, frozen stuff you get at the supermarket, gelato has a silky, elastic texture somewhere between soft serve and regular ice cream.

To experience gelato properly, go to its birthplace: Italy. In Milan, make your way to Il Massimo del Gelato, probably the best you'll find in this fashion capital. They serve 10 different types of chocolate gelato alone, and the coffee flavored variety will give you an astounding arabica buzz.

When in Rome, travel off the beaten path to Neve di Latte (meaning milk snow). It's a true standout in a city saturated with gelato. Sample the Straciatella, a simple standard made from *fior di latte* (unflavored cow's milk) and speckled with chocolate fragments and shavings.

In Sicily, pistachios are a matter of pride, and in the city of Palermo, Cappadonia Gelateria has converted the island's regional nuts into a pistachio gelato so absurdly nutty and rich, it eats more like peanut butter than ice cream.

Yet there's hope for America. Grom gelateria, originally of Turin, now has three New York City locations as well as three more in the Los Angeles area. Grom's gelato base is made in Italy, shipped over in liquid form and faithfully churned into a frosty confection with very little lost in translation.

Visit grom.it/en/gelaterie.php

—Gregory Mottola

Summer Mixing With Vodka

Vodka might not be the current darling of the cocktail set, but don't feel sorry for the clear spirit with the Russian name (for little water). It remains the world's No. 1-selling liquor. Chalk that up to amiability. It swims well with every manner of mixer, aperitif or liqueur—even other spirits (e.g., the Vesper). While most sensible cocktails made with other spirits limit themselves to one other modifier and perhaps bitters, easy-going vodka can welcome more. It's the laid-back liquor that The Dude abided in *The Big Lebowski*'s White Russians and perfect for these summer fresheners.

—Jack Bettridge

Harvey Wallbanger

A name is a two-edged sword. When it was invented, it evoked a kooky surfer image. But In today's sophisticated cocktail atmosphere, its silliness undercuts its charms. Essentially a Screwdriver—orange juice and vodka—it becomes more grownup with the addition of Galliano, an Italian liqueur that the drink was invented to market. The otherwise reedy Screwdriver fills out with anise, mint, cinnamon and vanilla notes. Remember to stay off your surfboard.

1 ½ oz. Vodka
½ oz. Galliano L'Autentico
5-6 oz. Fresh-squeezed orange juice
Orange slice for garnish

Pour vodka, Galliano and juice over ice in a highball glass. Stir and garnish. Alternately, float the Galliano on the other ingredients.

Sea Breeze

The Sea Breeze is all about refreshment. Which is why, after crashing through a plate-glass window and being riddled with bullets by a bar full of gangsters, Deadpool, the wisecracking movie superhero with accelerated healing abilities, immediately called for one by its ingredients: cranberry, grapefruit juice and vodka. What began as a Prohibition-era gin drink works much better in its current vodka incarnation, especially if you use fresh-squeezed grapefruit juice.

1 ½ oz. Vodka
4 oz. Cranberry juice
2 oz. Fresh-squeezed grapefruit juice
Lime slice for garnish

Pour vodka, cranberry juice and grapefruit juice over ice in a highball glass. Stir and garnish.

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Scott Dunn Villas, the South of France

In the glittering summer sunlight of Provence, embraced by a lawn chair, a glass of rose in one hand, a Montecristo in the other and the Mediterranean in distant view, life is good.

This level of bucket-list luxury doesn't happen on its own, but Scott Dunn Villas may make it seem that way. The company has been providing seamless vacations for families, couples and buddies for 30 years. Each villa comes in the form of a fully-staffed home, with host, chef, housekeeper and a nanny if necessary.

A recent experience in the south of France makes the point with an exclamation. Villa Constantins is in Opio, a few kilometers to the north of Nice and in the foothills of the Les Alpes-Maritime. Upon arrival, you are greeted by Harry the host and TJ the chef who will give you the grand tour. The large living room windows look out over the lawn, the infinity pool and, on clear days, to the Mediterranean. A covered outdoor dining area and petanque court (a form of boules) await. You have arrived at this villa having already determined much of your experience. A Scott Dunn travel consultant has taken you through the process of finding the right villa in the right locale, explaining all the local activities, the nature of the villages and the region, the transportation options plus your specific staffing requirements. A couple of weeks in advance, you were contacted by the villa host and/or chef to determine dining requirements.

If you want, you can accompany the chef to the local markets, then get involved in meal preparation on the charcoal grill. On a recent stay, a whole tenderloin of beef was grilled while a whole sea bass was roasted in the oven as part of a group cooking exercise.

Activities nearby include golf at such fine courses as Golf Opio Valbonne, Golf de Cannes Mougins and Golf de la Grande Bastide. Bicycling and hiking treks can be arranged. And visits to the local communities must be part of the experience.

But here's the thing. All these fine experiences will emanate from your home for the week, and you can enjoy a cigar on the terrace or by the pool at your leisure. Now that's paradise.

Visit scottdunn.com

—Jeff Williams

The Scott Dunn experience: Villa Constantins (top) has an outdoor fireplace by its pool. The stone exterior of Bastide des Virettes frames its swimming area.

TOP LEFT: BLAISE FIEDLER; BOTTOM: RICH ROBERTS

TAG Heuer Connected Modular 45 Golf Edition

Tech watches that feed you valuable info while you play a round of golf, but look nerdy when you're ordering a round at the 19th hole are one thing. TAG Heuer's new Connected Modular 45 "Golf Edition" ($1,850) is a golf watch that's both brainy and beautiful.

TAG Heuer developed a dedicated golf app that pairs its latest smartwatch with iOS and Android phones and then imbued the watch with TAG styling. The brawny (45 mm) piece has a sandblasted black PVD titanium case fitted with black ceramic lugs and a black ceramic bezel featuring a laser-engraved scale from 1 to 18, representing the number of holes in a round. The package includes a white, synthetic-leather strap with green stitching reminiscent of a golf glove, as well as a subdued black rubber strap.

On the links, the Golf app brings 2-D course mapping for more than 39,000 courses to your wrist. As well as gauging distances to greens and hazards (which it does within one-meter accuracy), the enhanced mapping function uses vector technology to show the course in detail—including bunkers, fairways and roughs. The watch also tracks scores for up to four players and is equipped with multiple sensors including GPS, NFC, an accelerometer, a gyroscope, a tilt detection sensor, a microphone and a vibrations haptics engine. It also stores stats like putting average and driving distance. Off the course, change the watch face and use it for all the usual smartwatch tasks.

The the Intel Atom processor has 512 MB of memory and 4 GB of storage. The touch-screen, (400 × 400 resolution and 287 ppi) is covered with scratch-resistant sapphire crystal.

All of which brings new meaning to the term tee time.

Visit tagheuer.com

—Laurie Kahle

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Icon A5

You're flying low above the water in an Icon A5, one of the relatively new breed of light-sport aircraft, when you spot some action. The wraparound windshield and the rear-mounted engine and propeller leave your sight line clear to spy a school of frolicking fish. You remember that your fishing gear is stored in the rear compartment, so you set the craft down, lift the cockpit enclosure and crawl out on the pontoons that double as a deck for a few hours of angling. With your fresh catch, you decide to beach the plane and grill the fish on a nearby island. Then it's off to your weekend retreat, where you can lower the landing gear and alight on a grass strip.

It's almost the stuff of futuristic hobby magazines, but the new aircraft designation is making the dream of an untethered personal airplane a reality for anybody with the $389,000 to set it aloft. The A5 is a two-seater craft able to land on sea, turf or paved airstrip. And with a cruising radius of almost 500 miles, it's perfect for weekend getaways. A few drawbacks are attendant with the light-sport designation, which limits size and forbids flying by instrument, so when the weather is bad you may be grounded. Even then, you're not stuck. The wings fold up, and a single user can mount the plane to the Amphib Trailer (not included) for towing on roadways to your next destination. Along the way you can gas up with 91-octane fuel.

Not a pilot yet? With a spin-resistant airframe and a low stall speed as well as intuitive instrumentation (fly by joystick), it offers a speedy learning curve. Furthermore, the glide ratio is a comforting 9:1 (if it loses power a mile aloft it will glide for nine miles). And if worse comes to worst, the A5 carries a parachute, which will float the entire craft onto the ground.

The dream is here. Might as well get your head in the clouds. Visit iconaircraft.com

—Jack Bettridge

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THE VETERAN

Kurt Russell has been a star for nearly 60 years, playing heroes, villains and everything in between. He returns to the big screen in July in the most talked about film of 2019

BY MARSHALL FINE
PORTRAITS BY PETER YANG

KURT RUSSELL knows from experience that any film by director Quentin Tarantino is a major cinematic event. So there was no way the veteran actor was going to turn down the invitation to be a part of Tarantino's latest project, *Once Upon a Time..in Hollywood*.

It's an intuition that only comes with six decades of experience in the movie business. A lesser performer might have turned down the part as too small. Russell, who has spent his time as leading man, is now in a position to pick and choose the projects that interest him. And his instincts paid off in a career-punctuating coup. He is now part of the movie that took the Cannes Film Festival by storm.

"I love Quentin's style," Russell says, flashing the trademark smile, blue eyes and powerful jaw that have been watched by movie audiences for decades, in one hit after another. "This film is a love letter to Hollywood. When I was doing it, it reminded me of me and my dad and my friends in the late '60s and early '70s. I grew up in that world."

Once Upon a Time..in Hollywood, which opens July 26, has earned a wave of adulation and Oscar buzz for Tarantino unlike anything since *Pulp Fiction*, which debuted 25 years ago. The film captures a year on the cusp between old Hollywood and new: 1969.

Styling by Jordan Grossman for Celestine
Grooming by Dennis Liddiard
Blazer by Isaia • shirt by Ted Baker • Jeans by Levi's

It was the hottest film at the festival, and one that ignited Academy Award speculation for next year.

Tarantino was hailed at Cannes for showing his softer side in this fantasy about a vanishing world, even while living up to his reputation for bloody violence with his depiction of the Manson family murders. *Once Upon a Time...in Hollywood* focuses on a pair of Hollywood buddies: fading television star Rick Dalton (played by Leonardo DiCaprio), who sees a new Hollywood leaving him behind; and Cliff Booth (Brad Pitt), his stunt double and best friend. When Rick discovers that director Roman Polanski and his new wife, Sharon Tate, have moved in next door to his house in Benedict Canyon, he's convinced he can revive his career by talking his new neighbor into putting him in one of his movies.

Russell, who has plenty of tough-guy roles to his credit, characteristically dove into his part as a stunt coordinator. "I worked with so many stunt coordinators when I was a kid that I had dealer's choice about who to base him on," he says. "He's a real conglomerate, although this guy happens to be a car guy." In one scene, he has to intercede when sparring between Bruce Lee and Cliff gets out of hand.

In two earlier films by Tarantino, *Death Proof* and *The Hateful Eight*, Russell was the star. But in this new movie he took on a smaller role for the chance to work in Tarantino's take on Manson-era Hollywood. He's in good company. The all-star ensemble cast includes Al Pacino, Margot Robbie as Sharon Tate, Damian Lewis as Steve McQueen, and such Tarantino regulars as Tim Roth and Michael Madsen.

"For me it was a quick-hit kind of deal, three days altogether," Russell says, reclining on a couch in a photo-shoot location in L.A.'s Pacific Palisades, not far from the home he shares with longtime partner Goldie Hawn. "But anytime you work with him, it's just fun. Working with him is a prime example of why I love this work. That's what I've spent my life doing."

Russell has appeared in more than 100 roles, and you won't find many shy violets or introverts among the numerous characters he's brought to life. You imagine him charging through burning buildings to save a child as the veteran firefighter in the hit *Backdraft*. Or as the driven coach in *Miracle* who pushes his overmatched hockey team harder and harder in the 1980 Olympics to take down the mighty Soviet team in an upset for the ages. Or as the growling bounty hunter John "The Hangman" Ruth with a mustache the size of fat veal chops, in *The Hateful Eight*, who threatens to put a bullet in anyone who gets in his way. At this point in his career, there isn't much Russell hasn't done onscreen. He's portrayed cowboys, firemen, handymen, helicopter pilots, truck drivers, coaches, cops, crooks, journalists and therapists. In the Marvel hit *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* he even played a living planet (who can take human form). He brings more than a half-century of film history and audience goodwill to any role he takes on.

"It's nice to stop and have a cigar with a drink. When someone offers, I usually say yes."

Russell has been bringing his own brand of confident cool to film for decades, and his fans may have trouble wrapping their heads around the notion that the perpetually youthful actor is 68. He's spent almost 60 of those years in front of a camera, from his days as a childhood star to his modern-day films by Tarantino.

In person, Russell hums with upbeat energy. His smile is charming, and his handsome, square-jawed, leading-man mug remains boyish, though lines now encroach on those notably blue eyes that hide behind a pair of black-rimmed Oakley glasses. His thick mane of hair, more salt now than pepper, reaches down to the collar of his pink, linen shirt.

"I'm probably 15 pounds too heavy now," he says. Despite his self-assessment, he still has the confident physicality of an athlete in repose, a nod to his days as a very talented baseball player.

Russell is a true rarity in the world of acting: he's been a star at every stage of his career, starting as a young boy, and he's worked steadily and constantly, with a nearly uninterrupted body of work that continues to this day. He was the lead in a network TV show at age 13, a star of popular Disney comedies in his teens and 20s, and is still busy in film—appearing in 23 movies over the past 20 years.

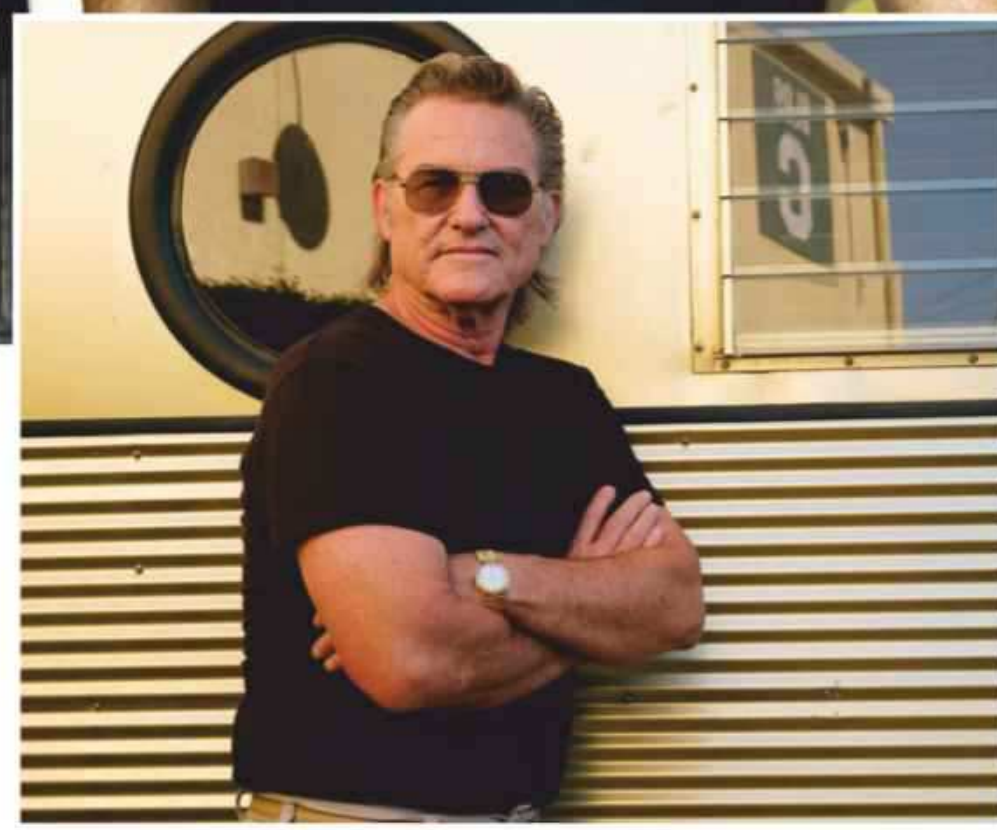
"He's the great underrated American actor," says writer-director Ron Shelton, a longtime friend. "He's doing some of the best work of his life right now," Shelton says. "He doesn't get credit for his sheer range, which is breathtaking. Just getting through the ups and downs of a long career—you look at his filmography and there's nobody with this range of stuff. I mean, he's played Santa Claus." Robert Towne, the legendary writer of *Chinatown*, once dubbed Russell "Hollywood's best-kept secret."

John Carpenter, who launched Russell's leading-man career with a string of films in the early 1980s, adds, "There's a charisma to him. You like him immediately. That's just who he is."

Ron Howard, who directed Russell in *Backdraft*, was himself an actor trying to make the transition from childhood work to more age-appropriate roles, and understands just how difficult it is to create a nearly lifelong career as a star. "There aren't many actors with his longevity; that's not easy for anybody," Howard says. "There aren't many guys who start as kids and become leading men. He's smart; he understands script and story. He's chosen interesting projects and he is very choosy. When he brings his honest self to roles, he's specific, organic and incredibly watchable. Plus he's always been a strikingly good-looking guy."

Russell doesn't take himself so seriously. The number of times his characters have been turned into action figures—nine—is the kind of thing that makes him chuckle with pride. Occasionally, Russell will jump up to act out a story, such as when he mimes the false modesty of a stage actor he once saw take an extended bow, his least-favorite part about working onstage. "It was nearly impossible for me," he says. "I find it horribly embarrassing. Just run the credits, ya know?"

Given the length and breadth of his body of work, Russell shakes his head in bemusement at his own continued enthusiasm for getting in front of a camera. "Actors who have done it a long time—I'm convinced we have some kind of condition," Russell



Russell has worked repeatedly with Quentin Tarantino (above), and in July the two will reunite with *Once Upon a Time...In Hollywood* (right).

says. "After a while, you think: Haven't you done it enough? But there's something you don't get anywhere else, that you keep coming back for, that gets you excited about doing it."

Russell also gets excited about smoking the occasional cigar, in and out of character. His Snake Plissken puffed cigarillos when he couldn't find a cigarette, a running joke in *Escape From L.A.*, the sequel to the 1981 classic *Escape From New York*, in which the entire city of Manhattan has been turned into a prison, and the ever-surly Plissken is sent in to rescue the president of the United States. In *Tombstone*, Russell plays reluctant lawman Wyatt Earp, calmly lighting a stogie while running a card game in the lawless town. In *The Hateful Eight*, his character's smoke of choice is a briar pipe, which he puffs enthusiastically while chained to his prisoner, played by Jennifer Jason Leigh.

Russell's personal enjoyment of fine tobacco tends to take place when cigars come out at celebrations. "I like taking the time," he explains. "It's nice to stop and have a cigar with a drink. When someone offers, I usually say yes."

Despite his camera-loving looks and talent, Russell wasn't ready to say yes to acting from the start. It was baseball that originally called to Russell. His father, who died in 2003, played minor-league ball and coached Kurt in Little League. Young Kurt played shortstop and second base in high school, then moved up through the California Angels' farm system to Class AA. He was leading the Texas League in hitting when a runner collided with him while Russell was turning a double play. He tore his rotator cuff in the shoulder of his throwing arm, an injury that essentially ended his baseball career at 23.

"I was looking forward to a future in baseball," says Russell. "What I love about baseball is that it's black-and-white in the statistics. They tell how everybody is doing every day. I loved that. To change from that daily understanding of yourself to something else was tough. I was a good ballplayer. I was moving up the ladder quickly. The higher I went, the more sense it made. It took a while to adjust to not identifying myself as a ballplayer. I couldn't put 'actor' on my passport for a long time."

Russell made his movie debut at age 12, kicking Elvis Presley in the shins in *It Happened at the World's Fair*. He quickly racked up a string of guest appearances on network TV series and wound up playing the title character in "The Travels of Jaimie

TOP: EVERETT COLLECTION; INSET: ANDREW COOPER / SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT

SURGEON GENERAL WARNING: Cigar Smoking Can Cause Cancers Of The Mouth And Throat, Even If You Do Not Inhale.

Russell has played nearly everything, including firemen (*Backdraft*), a bounty hunter (*Hateful Eight*), a living planet (*Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*), America's hockey coach (*Miracle*) and the inimitable Snake Plissken.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SPORTSPHOTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; EVERETT COLLECTION; AF ARCHIVE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; EVERETT COLLECTION; WEINSTEIN COMPANY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; EVERETT COLLECTION

McPheeters," a network western, at the age of 13.

"Kurt was the star," said Tarantino, speaking before the placement of Russell's star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2017. "It was the only western show where the boy was the star. You had to have a cowboy guy to beat up people from time to time—and who he got as a costar was Charles Bronson!"

Russell kept acting through his high-school years, with guest appearances on everything from "The Man from U.N.C.L.E." to "Gilligan's Island." He also became a regular in Disney family films, including *The One and Only, Genuine, Original Family Band* (where he met Goldie Hawn). After the injury that ended his baseball dream, he became one of the studio's biggest box-office stars of the 1970s.

Disney kept him busy, but it was John Carpenter who made Russell a star in maturity. Carpenter was brought in to direct after Russell had been cast to play Elvis Presley in the TV miniseries "Elvis." Russell needed to portray the rock 'n' roll star from his early teens to his Las Vegas comeback in 1970. "As I watched and directed him, I realized, he can do anything," Carpenter says. "He can play anybody. He's a mimic, and a genius at it."

Russell followed that Emmy-nominated breakout with a complete change: as the gravel-voiced, one-eyed, anti-hero Snake Plissken in *Escape from New York*. The role, with which he is most often identified, lead to *The Thing* and *Big Trouble in Little China*, all by Carpenter. "It was John Carpenter who gave me the chance to play characters in a number of movies, to establish myself," says Russell. "My career would have been completely different without him."

Early in his career, when Russell started bringing home serious paychecks as a preteen, his father told him, "You're being paid a man's salary, so you should do a man's job. Know your lines, be ready to work." To which Russell adds, "Really, that applies to anything in life."

Russell's work ethic, says Shelton, is "old school in all the good ways." Howard says: "He's looking to make the scene fucking great. That is leadership in my opinion."

For all of the major films with which he's been associated, the list of films in which Russell was almost cast (or seriously discussed) is nearly as impressive. In the 1970s, Russell spoke with filmmaker George Lucas about playing either Luke Skywalker or Han Solo in the then-untested *Star Wars*. He was involved with the planning of *Bull Durham* with writer-director Shelton, as the two swapped stories about their days in minor-league ball. But when Shelton pitched the film, he found that financing was contingent on Kevin Costner playing the lead.

"That was close; that was a lot about me," Russell recalls. "But Costner was hot at that point. It's just part of the game. That's the one I think it would have been the most fun to do. It all balances out."

Which is the message he and Goldie Hawn have tried to drill into their children, both from their marriage and her previous one, as the kids have come of age and launched themselves into acting careers. "What were we gonna say? No, don't do this?" Russell says with a laugh. "Because they'd say, 'You guys look like you have a pretty good life.'"

Russell and Hawn have been involved for 36 years—they became reacquainted in 1983 while working on *Swing Shift*, and they appeared together as warring, polar opposites in the 1987 comedy *Overboard*.

"Goldie and I did try to make them understand that you have to do it for the work, because you want to, and not to create great wealth. Does it create fun? Yeah. If you enjoy the work, the process of acting, and you do it for that reason, then you can have a great time. It doesn't get old. It's great work, if you can get it."

So far, that hasn't been a problem. Kate and Oliver Hudson, Hawn's children from her marriage to Bill Hudson, have both had solid launches to their careers. Kate has been a star since she received an Oscar nomination for *Almost Famous*. Oliver has had a string of movie roles and starred in the network sitcom, "Splitting Up Together." Son Wyatt Russell emulated his dad by choosing professional sports (hockey, rather than baseball), until an injury forced him to refocus on acting. He just finished starring in the second season of AMC's "Lodge 49."

When he talks about Hawn, Russell just smiles. "If you're lucky enough to have someone like Goldie Hawn come along and feel the way she feels, you're just lucky," he says. "Thirty-six years have gone by in a flash. I'm still in love. That doesn't mean we don't have to pay attention and work at it."

When it comes to working at it, Russell has plenty of things to keep him busy. There are his grandchildren, his airplanes and his various properties and hobbies, none bigger than GoGi wines, his wine brand from Santa Rita, California. The wine—produced at Ampelos Cellars, and made by winemakers Peter and Rebecca Work—includes a Chardonnay called Goldie, and the GoGi brand pinot noir, an homage to Russell's love of Burgundy, fostered by trips to France.

He has no specific movie plans lined up, but given his body of work you know he'll be appearing on the big screen again soon.

"If you enjoy the work, the process of acting, it doesn't get old. It's great work if you can get it."

Acting still excites him, still calls to him. There's no telling when a tempting script might pop up. "I get excited reading something," he says, that confident smile coming so easily to the face that has looked down from the big screen, again and again and again. "That's what brings me out. It's what always has. When I'm in cahoots with someone, I enjoy it. It gives me a sense of ease. I'm going to have fun today." ❖

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

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WHEN THE MOB RULED HAVANA

The true story of how gangsters sliced up Cuba and created an illicit playground

BY T.J. ENGLISH

In February of 1947, Frank Sinatra arrived in Havana, Cuba, holding a suitcase filled with $2 million in cash. He was flanked by two mobsters from Chicago, the Fischetti brothers, Rocco and Charlie.

The brothers were cousins of Al Capone, with long-standing reputations in the businesses of illegal gambling and killing. As bodyguards they were second to none—tough, loyal and connected at the highest levels of the Mob, which, at the time, was more robust and powerful than it had been since the glory days of Prohibition.

Sinatra knew all this. As a fellow traveler of the Mob since his childhood in Hoboken, where the bent-nose "cafones" and aspiring wiseguys were a vibrant part of the local landscape, the singer had an affection for Mafiosi that bordered on idolatry. They took care of him, and he took care of them. This was why, arriving in Havana with a heavy, undeclared fortune in his possession, Sinatra was not overly concerned.

The Hotel Nacional staff had been alerted, though names were not mentioned. The hotel was one of the city's most prestigious addresses, where celebrities were commonplace. But no one was supposed to know that Sinatra would be staying there (he checked in under a false name), nor did they know the real name of the man to whom Sinatra was delivering his cash-laden suitcase: Charles "Lucky" Luciano.

Charles "Lucky" Luciano, photographed in Italy in 1947, was one of the leaders directing the Mob's dominance of Cuba before the Revolution.

LEFT: APIC/GETTY IMAGES; OPPOSITE: AP PHOTO

Cool, calculating and confident Meyer Lansky ran the American mob in Cuba during the days before Fidel Castro.

Cuba's Hotel Nacional remains a landmark today, although the gambling ended decades ago.

It was one of the most grandiose ventures the American Mob would ever undertake: to establish a base of operations in Cuba that would allow organized crime to function as an international conglomerate.

Sinatra and Luciano went way back. The bond between the legendary organized crime figure and the singer was based partly on their ancestry from the same small town in Sicily. Furthermore, the story goes, Luciano had helped Sinatra out by settling some old debts and, more importantly, helping him out of an onerous contract with a famous bandleader. Frank was forever after indebted to the Honored Society.

Weeks before Sinatra's arrival, a who's who of the American Mob had gathered in Havana for a major conference, presided over by Luciano and his closest gangster associate, Meyer Lansky. Sinatra's cash delivery to Luciano constituted operational expenses for the Mob. Some of it would grease the wheels of corruption in the Cuban government; some of it would cover Luciano's living expenses in Havana; and some of it would cover lavish meals for the mobsters as well as choice rooms at the Hotel Nacional, a Moorish/Sevillian/Art Deco palace perched on a bluff overlooking the aquamarine Gulf of Mexico.

The Godfather Part II's Hyman Roth (Lee Strasberg) was modeled after Lansky.

The international star was but a bit player in this saga, the dimensions of which he likely knew little. The cash he had delivered was seed money for one of the most grandiose ventures the American Mob would ever undertake: to establish a base of operations in Cuba that would make it possible for organized crime to function as an international conglomerate. Fulfilling this plan would put the Mob beyond the reach of U.S. law enforcement.

For many years, the story of the Mob in Havana would be relegated to folklore and fictionalization. The most popular version was *The Godfather Part II*. The Francis Ford Coppola film, which won the 1975 Academy Awards for best picture, best director and a host of other categories, devotes about 25 minutes of its three-hour-and-twenty-minute running time to Cuba. But those scenes are indelible for anyone who has seen the movie. Though fictionalized, the movie accurately captures the mood of Havana during the time of the Revolution, and even contains a scene that is based on the Mob conference of 1946. In the movie, a handful of mobsters gather on a sunny hotel rooftop to celebrate the birthday of an aging Hyman Roth, a Jewish mobster from New York who is in the midst of forging a partnership with a corrupt Cuban president. A birthday cake frosted with an image of the island of Cuba is sliced up, and the pieces are distributed among the assembled mobsters.

It was understood even at the time of the film's release that Hyman Roth was based on Lansky. A boyhood friend of Luciano and other seminal early 20th-century Mob bosses, Lansky was a Russian Jew with a good head for numbers. The portrayal of Meyer as the key architect in organized crime's attempted takeover of Cuba was correct, but, in truth, Lansky in Havana was not an old man in ill health. He was in his mid-40s, the prime of life for a Mob boss. His efforts were focused and vigorous, as he sought to realize a dream that began in the days of Prohibition.

The conference lasted for days, and some 23 high-ranking mobsters from around the U.S. took part. Supposedly, the decision to kill, or whack, Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel, a lifelong friend of both Luciano and Lansky, was made then, based on the belief that Siegel had been skimming money from the construction budget of the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas. Among other things, the conference reestablished Luciano—who had spent more than a decade in prison before being freed, then deported to Italy—as the de facto CEO of the Mob. His reemergence wouldn't last long. Within days of the conference, the U.S. government learned that Luciano was

TOP: ARCHIVE PHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM: PARAMOUNT PICTURES/PHOTOFEST

in Havana. The Justice Department pressured the Cuban government to send him back to Sicily, which it did in March 1947.

On the surface, the deportation of Luciano seemed like a blow for the Mob and its plans of a criminal base of operations in Cuba, but the opposite was true. The real brains behind the plan was Lansky. At the Mob conference, Luciano had given Lansky's plan his full approval and made sure each of the gangster bosses signed on. But Lansky knew that Luciano was headstrong. Since the 1920s, Lucky had made much of his fortune from the smuggling of heroin, and Lansky did not want the Mob to have anything to do with narcotics in Cuba. He saw it as a threat to his view of an empire built almost entirely on casino gambling.

With Luciano out of the way, Lansky could begin to formulate the kind of operation he had in mind for Cuba, one that was based on casino gambling, which was his forte. Even so, it would take another five years for all of the pieces to fall into place. The man who made it possible—Lansky's partner in the plundering of Cuba—was none other than the president himself, Fulgencio Batista.

Since the landing of Christopher Columbus in 1492, Cuba has been at the crossroads of many events of international consequence. This history is best personified in the city of Havana, which, to this day, is populated with more spectacular buildings and architectural flourishes than most any city in the Americas. Though much of it has fallen into disrepair, the ancient ruins of Havana still cast a spell, giving the city an air of great import.

In the mid-20th century, few men understood the inner workings of Havana better than Batista. He had been born and raised on the opposite side of the island, in the cane-cutting municipality of Banes, in the province of Holguin. His beginnings were humble. At a time when black people and those of mixed race had little access to social advancement he was *mestizo*, the latter. But Batista had many traits that made him stand out: he was a hard worker in the cane fields; he also worked on the railroads and as a tailor, mechanic, charcoal vendor and fruit peddler. In 1923, when he joined the Cuban Army, he quickly distinguished himself through his personal discipline, his dedication and his leadership abilities. By 1933, through a rebellion within the ranks of the military known as the Sergeant's Revolt, Batista—just 32 years old—emerged as the de facto head of the Cuban military.

Throughout Cuba's history, political turmoil was the norm. Presidents came and went at a stupefying rate. One president lasted five days in office. Others were toppled through military coups and violent uprisings. The military, not elected officials, emerged as the true power in Cuba. Which is why Lansky, as far back as 1933, set his sights on Batista.

According to Joseph "Doc" Stacher, a friend and associate of Lansky's since their childhood together on Manhattan's Lower East Side, he was present on a day in 1933 when Lansky presented Batista with multiple suitcases filled with cash. In later meetings, Batista was given a guarantee of $3 million to $5 million a year, in exchange for a monopoly on casino gambling. Batista was also promised a cut of the profits.

Lansky and Batista shook hands on this deal, but it would be close to two decades before the arrangement could be consummated.

In 1940, Batista was elected president of Cuba. During his term, he played a pivotal role in instituting the country's first constitution. This was a great point of pride for all Cubans. For Batista, though he was still relatively young, it was the crowning achievement of his career. So filled with a sense of accomplishment was Batista that he didn't run for a second term as president. Instead, he retired to Daytona Beach, Florida, where he divorced his first wife and married his longtime mistress.

Within months of the 1946 Mob conference in Havana, Lansky visited Batista in Daytona Beach and once again made a pitch: We need you back in Cuba. Everything is in place for us to achieve what we talked about many years ago.

Batista's return to Cuban politics was not pretty. Initially, he was elected senator in absentia from Las Villas province. In 1951, he ran for president, but just weeks before the election, a poll in the weekly magazine *Bohemia* showed him running a distant third in the race. Batista had clearly lost popularity with the national electorate, but he still held sway over the true ruling authority on the island: the military.

Taking a spin at roulette at the Hotel Nacional in 1957. Havana was America's playground at the time, and the action was run by the mob.

RALPH MORSE/TIME PICTURE COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES

On March 10, 1952, the military seized control of all radio stations and newspapers in Havana. Tanks and other combat vehicles drove through the city to the presidential palace, where then-President Carlos Prío Socarrás was given the option to vacate the office of the presidency. Facing insurmountable odds, Prío fled with little resistance. Batista took over.

One of Batista's first directives as president was to appoint Lansky—one of America's premier gangsters—as his adviser on gambling reform. It wasn't as perverse as it sounds. The reputation of casino gambling in Cuba had hit the skids when Dana Smith, a

ESCAPE TO PARADISE
SAN CRISTOBAL

financial advisor to Sen. Richard Nixon of California, claimed that he'd been scammed at the San Souci, one of Havana's better-known nightclub-casinos. Nixon wrote a letter to the U.S. State Department asking them to look into Smith's claims. The State Department contacted the U.S. embassy in Havana, which launched an investigation into claims that gambling in Cuba was rife with scams and illegalities.

Lansky was brought in to clean up the mess. He fired many of the dealers and brought in new ones from his "carpet joints" (illegal casinos) in South Florida, upstate New York and from his legal casinos in Las Vegas. He enforced rigid gaming regulations. Behind Lansky's reforms was a simple premise: casinos needn't rip people off to turn a huge profit. Especially in Havana, where there was no gaming commission, casino gambling was a license to print money. The Mob was the gaming commission.

The Mob's reign in Havana was relatively brief, lasting from 1952 to 1959. It is now remembered as a storied era, with many legendary anecdotes and a colorful cast of characters, but at the time it was happening, very little of the goings on were reported in the U.S. press. Part of Cuba's allure was that, even though it was just 90 miles off Florida, it was a foreign country outside the focus of American media. If there was a motto, it was: What happens in Havana, stays in Havana.

It had always been the Mob's plan to use entertainment as a draw to bring potential customers to Cuba. But what took place, even the Mob couldn't have predicted. Indigenous Cuban culture—a vibrant, colorful mix of Afro-Cuban music and secret religious societies such as Santería and Lucumí—became the inspiration for an entertainment scene that was, by most accounts, mind-blowing. Nightclubs became known for elaborate floor shows based on expressions of local culture. The showgirls were statuesque and exotic, and their costume changes tended to reveal voluptuous physiques and dreamy skin tones. The dancers—male and female—were magnificent. This style of entertainment would eventually become most commonly associated with Las Vegas, but it started in Havana.

The music was often torrid, aggressively rhythmic and symphonically sophisticated, though the *Havana Post*, the island's only English-language newspaper, often described it as "hot voodoo music" with an emphasis on the primal. At the Tropicana, the house band was led by Bebo Valdes, one of the most renowned composers on the island. Afro-Cuban music and Latin jazz existed at every level of the nightclub scene, from the fancy nightclubs to cocktail lounges, hotel bars and, especially, the late-night clubs where the scene became physical and sweaty, where tourists from Duluth and Akron were known to lose themselves and throw caution to the wind.

Sex, of course, was a big part of the draw: commercial sex, love, lust, extramarital sex, gay sex—you name it. It's hard to know how much of this was planned by the mobsters. Havana had always been a sexual crossroads in the Caribbean, since the time of pirates and smugglers. But in the 1950s, the sheer originality, sexiness and spontaneity of the scene elevated things to a level not experienced since the Belle Époque in Paris.

The best brothels in town were not owned or run by the Mob. A woman known as Doña Marina had a series of upscale bordellos, including Casa Marina, a three-story building in Habana Vieja (Old Havana). El Templo de Marina was located alongside the Prado, one of the city's premier locales for strolling.

All of these establishments were a stone's throw from the Sevilla Biltmore, a classy Spanish-style hotel and casino, built in 1908. It was owned by Amleto Battisti, an Uruguayan of Italian ancestry who was an important associate of Lansky's and other reigning Mob bosses in Havana. Because he was not American, Battisti was immune to Lansky's prohibition on dealing narcotics. If you wanted marijuana or cocaine in Havana, it was sold at Longchamps Restaurant inside the Hotel Sevilla Arcade.

Along with the gamblers and tourists came the celebrities.

A rare photo of Lansky (above, in white) taken in New York City on February 12, 1958, the final year of his run as master of the Cuban underworld.

NICK PETERSEN/NY DAILY NEWS ARCHIVE VIA GETTY IMAGES

By the mid-1950s, rumors abounded around the globe that the city of Havana was the place to be. The Mob's involvement in the casinos and nightlife was not exactly a secret. When television host Steve Allen broadcast "The Steve Allen Show" live from Havana, he opened by saying to his viewers, "Welcome to Havana, Cuba, home of the pineapple and Meyer Lansky."

The presence of the Mob had become part of the attraction. You could maybe rub shoulders with a notorious crime figure at a casino or nightclub in Havana, and no cop or federal agent was ever going to question you about it. The discreetness of it all was appealing to celebrities, who usually came during the winter and made the place feel like the Monte Carlo of the Caribbean.

Given the larcenous nature of organized crime, detailed Mob-authorized ledger books are like the Dead Sea Scrolls, impossibly rare and difficult to interpret. It's hard to know exactly how much was being generated in the way of profits. Some of the money was funneled back into local operations, such as Lansky's dream project, the Riviera, built for $14 million in 1957 (the equivalent today of

Lansky's dream project, the Riviera Hotel & Casino in Havana, built for $14 million in 1957.

$125 million). The hotel was self-financed by the Mob, like the Capri, the Deauville and others.

The biggest benefactor of all may have been Batista. Every Monday at 12 noon, a bagman was allowed into the presidential palace through a side door. He carried with him a satchel filled with cash, part of a monthly payment of $1.28 million that was to be delivered to the president. It was all so glorious that it should have lasted forever. Why would anyone shut this down?

But far outside of Havana, things were not all well. Since Batista had taken over the country in a military coup, many had not accepted him as a legitimate leader. Rumblings of dissent led to revolutionary activities, most notably the 26th of July Movement, led by Fidel Castro. Starting in 1955, that movement had been winning hearts and minds and gaining victories against the Cuban Army, mostly in the eastern part of the island.

When Fidel Castro entered Havana in January 1959, the Mob party was over.

Havana was far removed from these activities, but still, indications were that the Revolution was no joke. The chief of SIM (Servicio de Inteligencia Militar), Batista's notorious military intelligence police, known for torturing and killing political dissidents, was assassinated in the lobby of the popular Montmartre nightclub and casino (owned by Lansky). Two months later, a bomb was set off by a young female revolutionary at The Tropicana nightclub. Many were injured; the bomber herself lost an arm. The violence was instilling fear and terror.

It may have worried Lansky as well. In 1958, in a series of secret meetings, he traveled to the Dominican Republic to meet with Rafael Trujillo, a Caribbean dictator with an even tighter stranglehold on his country than Batista. Lansky was putting out feelers about the possibility of moving the entire Havana operation to the DR. But it was too late.

It all came crashing down on New Year's Eve. Lansky was with his driver at a party at the Plaza Hotel when an underling approached and whispered in his ear. The words caused Lansky to flinch. Batista had fled the country in the dead of night. Castro's revolutionary guard was advancing toward the city.

"Get the money," Lansky ordered. He knew that if the revolutionaries were to flood into the city without resistance, the first thing they would do is go to the counting rooms of the casinos and seize the cash. The mobsters frantically rounded up millions of dollars and took it to a central location, hoping they could safeguard the money until they found a way to get it off the island. They were only partially successful. Their decades-long investment in Cuba as a gangster's paradise was over. What they had created in Havana over the last six years had gone up in smoke. The mobsters scampered.

Batista is believed to have absconded with $300 million, much of it having been transferred to Swiss bank accounts in the week leading up to New Year's Day. In a safe in his office was $3 million in cash, which the revolutionaries found and showed off at a press conference. Apparently, Batista didn't need it. Perhaps he left it behind as a tip.

The casinos were shut down, and then, for a time, reopened. The mobsters negotiated with Castro, but when the new rulers made it clear there would be monitors in the counting rooms of the casinos, the jig was up. Rebels in the counting rooms? You can't have rebels in the counting rooms. That's where the money is stolen.

The Cuban casinos were permanently closed, all assets seized by the provisional Cuban government.

The American Mob took a huge hit—in prestige, pride and, most of all, financially. In Cuba, they made the ultimate gamble—and lost. As Lansky himself put it years later, trying to explain what happened: "I crapped out." ❖

T.J. English is the author of Havana Nocturne: How the Mob Owned Cuba And Then Lost it To the Revolution.

TOP: AP PHOTO; BOTTOM: ROLLS PRESS/POPPERFOTO/GETTY IMAGES

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Tiger IS BACK

Tiger Woods returned to victory at the Masters in April, the site of his first major championship

BY JEFF WILLIAMS

"I'm done," Tiger Woods said. It was April 4, 2017, and he was at the Masters Club Dinner, a revered annual gathering of Masters greats. Nick Faldo, a fellow Masters champion, heard Woods say his golf days were over, that he had no future as a player, and he was sitting out the tournament for the third time in four years. The man who once seemed superhuman, a champion who crushed drives to unspeakable distances with an athletic build that redefined the very look of a pro golfer, had been rendered so feeble that he needed a nerve blocker to dull the pain so he could sit in his chair at the dinner.

A series of back surgeries had failed to correct his failing body. But shortly after the meal, Woods was taking one more shot in the operating room. He underwent spinal fusion surgery in Texas in an attempt to try to live a life without pain.

Now two years later, his game fused and his competitive soul restored, 43-year-old Tiger Woods walked off the 18th green of Augusta National on April 14 to don the winner's green jacket—his green jacket—for the fifth time. As the patrons called his name in celebration, the air filled with electric emotions. For the first time Woods got to hug his children, Sam and Charlie, after a major victory.

"It means the world to me. Their love and their support, I just can't say enough how much that meant to me throughout my struggles when I really just had a hard time moving around," Woods said shortly thereafter. His daughter Sam, age 12, and son Charlie, 10, were so young that they grew up not knowing their dad as the dominant force on the golf course. For them, the game of golf was just something causing their father great pain.

It had been nearly 11 years since Woods had won a major, the 2008 U.S. Open at Torrey Pines, and 14 years since he last won the Masters. In September 2018, he won the Tour Championship, his first victory in five years. It was the mark of an extraordinary comeback from the ravages of injury and fueling the belief that yes, he can still do this. And now, with his 15th major, his chase of Jack Nicklaus' record of 18 is officially back on.

President Donald Trump awarded Woods the Presidential Medal of Freedom in May in celebration of his Masters win and his remarkable career. Woods became only the fourth golfer in history to receive the award, joining Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and Charlie Sifford.

"You've seen the good and the bad, the highs and the lows," said an emotional Woods to his family and friends after he received the medal. "The amazing Masters experience that I just had a few weeks ago certainly is part of the highlight of what I've accomplished so far in my life on the golf course."

The Masters has been central to Woods' achievement, his acclaim and his adoration. From his first historical win in 1997, to back-to-back victories in 2001 and 2002, to his fourth win in 2005, Augusta National always seemed to be the perfect stage. Finally, after 14 years, he was able to make his encore.

KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES

Two years after declaring his golf days were over, Tiger Woods stood victorious at Augusta, winning his 15th major.

In 1997, Tiger Woods became the youngest player to ever win the Masters. He celebrated by hugging his father, Earl.

shooting 30 and posting a 70. Woods shot 66 on Friday to lead by three. On Saturday he shot 65, pushing his lead to nine. "There is no chance humanly possible that Tiger Woods is going to lose this tournament," said his chastened playing partner, Colin Montgomerie.

Woods won by an astounding 12 shots and made history for his youth (he was the youngest to ever win the Masters), his margin of victory and his ethnicity. Not long after Woods had hugged his father, Earl, and mother, Kultida, Lee Elder was spotted under the massive oak in front of the Augusta National clubhouse. Elder was the first black player to play in the Masters, in 1975, after the tournament changed its policy in 1972 to invite any player who won a PGA Tour event. "This day will be one glorious and happy day for all blacks," said Elder. "No one will be turning their heads when a black player goes to the first tee anymore."

1997 The Age of Tiger Begins

There was a mountain of expectation as Woods, at age 21, played his first Masters as a professional in 1997. He played the first round with defending champion Faldo, a six-time major winner who had seen and heard everything, until now. "No player before had ever walked to the first tee with eight policemen around him to lead him to the tee," said Faldo. "It was a whole different aura around him. It was amazing."

It wasn't an amazing start. Woods opened with four bogeys on the front nine, but he ripped apart the back nine,

2001 The Tiger Slam

Woods entered the 2001 Masters playing the best golf of his career, likely the best golf that had ever been played. He won the 2000 U.S. Open by 15 shots, following that with an eight-stroke victory in the British Open and a playoff win at the PGA Championship. That victory put him with Ben Hogan as the only two players to win three majors in a year.

TIGER CHASES THE GOLDEN BEAR

15 Total Majors

Major victories by Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods, who have won more majors than anyone else.

The Masters

Nicklaus	6
Woods	5

PGA Championship

Nicklaus	5
Woods	4

U.S. Open

Nicklaus	4
Woods	3

British Open

Nicklaus	3
Woods	3

Total Majors 18

TOP: AUGUSTA NATIONAL/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM LEFT: JAMIE SQUIRE/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM RIGHT: AUGUSTA NATIONAL/GETTY IMAGES; OPPOSITE: DAVID CANNON/GETTY IMAGES

The pain and injury endured by Tiger Woods during his legendary career

TIGER'S TORMENTS

LEFT WRIST

June 1995
Injures the wrist hitting from heavy rough, withdraws from U.S. Open.

NECK

May 2010
Withdraws from Players Championship with inflamed facet joint.

LEFT KNEE

December 1994
Woods, an 18-year-old amateur, has surgery to remove scar tissue and benign tumors from his knee. The joint will prove troublesome throughout his career.

December 2002
Has fluid drained and cysts removed.

April 2008
Arthroscopic surgery to fix cartilage.

June 2008
Reconstructive ACL surgery.

April 2011
Withdraws from the Wells Fargo Championship with knee injury.

May 2011
Diagnosed with a sprained MCL.

BACK

March 2014
Lower back spasms force him to withdraw from the Honda Classic.

April 2014
Surgery for a pinched nerve in his back, misses the Masters.

September 2015
Second surgery on nerve; doctors remove a disc fragment.

February 2017
A pained and weak-looking Woods leaves the Omega Dubai Desert Classic without finishing, then pulls out of pre-Masters tournaments.

April 2017
"I'm done," Woods tells Nick Faldo at the Masters Champions dinner. His back pain is so severe he needs a nerve blocker just to sit. Two weeks later he has spinal fusion surgery.

LEFT TIBIA

April 2008
Two stress fractures in his left tibia.

LEFT ACHILLES

April & May 2011
Multiple strains to his Achilles.

March 2012
Tendon flares up again.

RIGHT ACHILLES

December 2008
Tears his Achilles, but keeps on playing, and injures it again in early 2009.

He had fallen just short of the Grand Slam, defined as winning all four majors in one year.

Woods opened the 2001 Masters with a 70 and as Sunday morning dawned, he had a one-shot lead. David Duval challenged him on that final day and pulled into a tie for first with a birdie on the 15th. But Duval put his tee shot on 16 into the water and Woods cruised home with a 68 for the win. Woods now was the reigning champion of all four major tournaments. He held the Tiger Slam. Augusta National chairman Hootie Johnson summed it up at the award ceremony: "We have witnessed the greatest golfing feat of our time."

President Donald Trump presents Woods with the Presidential Medal of Freedom on May 6. Woods is only the fourth golfer to receive the award.

2002 Just Too Good

Woods didn't dominate this tournament, or did he? He started with a 70 (do you see a theme developing here?) and was three shots behind the leader, but by the final day he was tied for the lead with Retief Goosen, the No. 4 player in the world. But funny, even eerie things, sometimes happen when Woods' name is on the leaderboard.

On Sunday, Goosen started out poorly and fell back. Ernie Els, who was four back to start the day, tried to make things happen on the par-5 13th, but found the water and made 8. Sergio Garcia, fifth in the world, chopped it around in 75. Singh, who was seventh in the world, dunked two balls in the pond on the 15th to make a 9.

All Woods had to do was cruise through Augusta National cloaked in his intimidating aura, shooting 71 to win by three over Goosen, who wondered if his second-place finish earned him a pair of green pants. "I don't care what any of these guys say about not looking at him or not noticing what he's doing," said Wood's father, Earl. "Tiger intimidates through osmosis. You feel it. It freaks people out."

2005 The Pregnant Pause

There's one thing you probably remember about the 2005 Masters: the chip. Woods had cleared the pond but missed the green left on the 16th hole. He was far from the pin, and facing a delicate shot on the par 3. Commentator Lanny Wadkins speculated that it would be tough for him to get it within 15 feet. Woods sent his ball on a long, 11-second journey. It climbed the slope and then slid down to the cup where, with the Nike swoosh in full view, it took another two seconds to fall in for a birdie. The gallery exploded.

Woods left the hole with a two-shot lead, but he started "throwing up" on the final two holes, making bogeys. He ended up in a sudden death playoff with Chris DiMarco. Replaying the 18th, Woods said he hit two of the best shots he had struck all week, a three-wood and an eight-iron. After DiMarco made par, Woods drained an 18-foot birdie putt to win his first major since the 2002 Masters.

2019 Resurrection

Woods trailed by four after his opening round of 70, was one back after the second round and two back after the third. Leading the pack on the final day was Francesco Molinari, who won the 2018 British Open in a final-round battle with Woods.

Because of threatening weather the players went off early in threesomes, rather than the traditional pairs. Woods was playing with Molinari and Tony Finau, who began the day tied with Woods. On this Sunday, Woods did what he had to do, and the others didn't. Molinari and Finau found the water on the 12th, while Tiger put the ball in the middle of the green and two-putted for par, pushing him into a three-way tie for first. Molinari faded in the final round, shooting a 74, with two double bogeys on the back nine. Finau shot 72. With his two-under-par 70, Woods was a Masters champion again, for the first time coming from behind to win a major. He walked off the 18th at Augusta for a one-shot victory.

"It's an unreal feeling," said Woods. "Just to have it all come together at the right time—this is what we dream about." Given what he had gone through over the last four seasons, and given the respect he has among fellow players, the emotional reaction was mix of awe and reverence. "It's just a monsoon of people," said Brooks Koepka, who finished in a tie for second. "As a fan, I love it. I think it's awesome. I'm glad he's back."

Brodcaster Jim Nantz, who has been a part of Masters coverage since 1986, proclaimed Tiger's victory the greatest event he had ever seen. In the booth as he called the Masters, he was on the air with Nick Faldo, the three-time Masters champion who heard Tiger speaking at the dinner in 2017, saying that his playing days were over, that injury was writing the end to his career. Now the two were watching as a jubilant Woods hugged his young children and pumped his fist in the air as the crowd roared his name, over and over again.

"I never thought we would see anything that could rival the hug with his father in 1997—but we just did," said Nantz. "One of the great comebacks in any sport. All time."

"I said, moons ago, if he can win his 15th that will be his greatest achievement. And after what he's been through, he's come pretty close to that," said Faldo. "That will be the greatest scene in golf forever."

Tiger Woods and the Masters—to be continued. ❖

Jeff Williams is a Cigar Aficionado *contributing editor.*

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Pouring a tempting glass of Gran Patrón, a Tequila made from 100 percent blue agave, at the Patrón distillery in Jalisco, Mexico.

Old-time methods capture the essence of Mexico's national spirit

BY GORDON MOTT

Tequila's Golden Age

LA REPOSADA, a chocolate-brown mule, is pulling a two-ton volcanic stone wheel in a circle around a 20-foot-wide pit brimming with a dark, fibrous mass of agave hearts that gurgles with each pass. Bees are swarming around the 20-foot-high chamber of the Siete Leguas Centenario distillery on a hot May morning in Atotonilco El Alto, beckoned by the sweetness of the cooked agave. Two huge stone ovens sit open on one side of the cream-colored stucco walled room

PHOTO CREDIT TK
COREY ARNOLD

There is a Tequila boom going on, and in the U.S., consumption of the spirit has been experiencing double-digit growth. Nearly every major drinks company has made huge investments in the segment.

where more hearts, known as *piñas*, sit awaiting their fate of being crushed under the weight of the stone. They were steamed for 72 hours, and after a full day of exuding their heat, they have finally cooled, and are ready to be tossed into the pit.

Across on the other side of Atotonilco, at the sprawling rose-colored hacienda-style buildings of the Patrón distillery, much the same process is taking place. There's no four-legged animal pulling the *tahona* here; instead a large motor in a yellow metal housing with two rubber wheels pulls a similar two-ton wheel around a pit brimming with the dark, caramelized agave hearts. Some of Patrón's 30 stone ovens sit along one wall of the clean, industrial room. Patrón cooks its agave hearts for up to 79 hours—longer than most distilleries—before they are loaded into the pits.

Two distilleries. Two brands. One, Siete Leguas, is approaching nearly 75 years in operation and producing around 100,000 cases a year. The other, Patrón, founded in 1989 by Jean Paul DeJoria and Martin Crowley, has raced past 2.4 million cases a year, a fact reflected in the gigantic distillery grounds and buildings. Both rely on a traditional approach to making Tequila.

When examined closely, Tequila is among the most complicated liquors to bring to fruition. Far away from its somewhat sullied reputation in the United States, and other global markets, Tequila—in its finest 100 percent agave form—is an artisanal product that takes up to 10 years to produce. The planting, the care and protection of the fields and the harvesting are still all done by hand. When done properly, it's a transformation of a plant that survives in one of the harshest growing areas in the world, without any irrigation, into a product that in its finest forms tastes of the land from which it has come.

The universe of Tequila production is vast, and highly regulated. To be called Tequila, the liquor must be derived from only one type of plant: agave tequilana var. Weber agave, also known as agave azul, or blue agave, can only be grown in five Mexican states. Blue agave is a spiky, succulent plant. When it reaches maturity at between eight to 10 years, its sweet heart can weigh as much as a man—150 to 200 pounds—although most are 60 to 100 pounds.

There is a Tequila boom going on, and in the United States, consumption of the spirit has been experiencing double-digit growth in recent years, particularly at the high end. In 18 years, the market for 100 percent blue agave Tequila has soared from a mere 8.6 percent of the market to more than 57 percent, according to Impact Databank. Nearly every major drinks company has made huge investments in Tequila. In April 2018, Bacardi completed its acquisition of the massive Patrón brand—the biggest luxury Tequila brand in the U.S.—complementing its 2002 purchase of Cazadores. Brown-Forman imports El Jimador. Constellation

SHUTTERSTOCK

brands has Casa Noble. LVMH bought Volcan de Mi Tierra, and relaunched it in 2018. And in 2017, Diageo put down $750 million for George Clooney's Casamigos brand, with incentives that could push the deal to $1 billion. Casamigos, with 68.9 percent growth in 2018 alone, is the top-growing luxury Tequila brand in the U.S. market, according to Impact.

Diageo had already been a significant player in Tequila with Don Julio, one of the early premium brands originally under the Jose Cuervo umbrella. "We started with small, square brown bottles and everyone copied us. We started making more reposado and they copied us," says Enrique de Colsa, general manager of the Don Julio distillery in Atotonilco. "So I'm not going to tell you all our secrets because soon everyone will copy us." Depletions of Don Julio soared 38 percent in 2018, to 745,000 cases, making it No. 2 in the U.S. behind Patrón, according to Impact.

All this interest in Tequila is putting strains on the industry, starting right in the fields. To keep up with demand, producers are significantly stepping up their plantings.

On a drive to the State of Jalisco, which is to Tequila what Napa and Sonoma are to California wine, an entire field of agave comes into view. In the shadow of the sun, the leaves turn almost evergreen, but as the car passes the field and the sunlight hits them directly, their telltale bluish hue—some might say glacier green—hits the eye.

Making Tequila is a slow process, and it all begins here in the fields. The plants grow from shoots called *hijuelos* that are already at least one to two years old, and then they are replanted into the ground, left to grow for another five and a half to up to eight years, depending on the region. The agave plants are not harvested at the same time. In some fields, the harvest is extended over three seasons, because despite their best efforts to maintain a consistent size, there are inevitable differences in shade, water, even bigger plants that overshadow their smaller neighbors. Empty fields are plowed under, fertilized with compost and other nutrients and planted with corn or beans for one to two seasons in a crop rotation method that naturally restores the nutrient energy of the land.

When agave plants are mature, they are harvested by workers known as *jimadores*, who toil with only the aid of a heavy, long-handled pole with a sharp blade like a rounded spade, known as a *coa*. It's an arduous, labor-intensive process that's not for the meek.

A visitor watches as Memo, the oldest of a group of jimadores in a field that's part of Tequila Tapatio's lands, shows off his skills learned after 40 years in the fields. Memo raises and lowers the blade of his coa with precision, his moves disguising the 20-pound weight of the tool. He slices off the spiky leaves known as *pencas* with swift swipes—there can be 160 leaves on one agave alone—having already cut under the plant to release it from its root system. By the time he is done, the heavy piña is a checkerboard of white and small green strips. After being shaved, most will be hacked in half, then carried to the oven to be steamed.

Massive agave plants are hand-shorn of their leaves in the fields, then brought to the distillery to be steamed and then crushed.

COREY ARNOLD (2)

Tasting pieces of the cooked agave is like sucking on a caramel lollipop. The caramelized juices begin to show the esters associated with better Tequilas...orange, chocolate, even cinnamon. The cooking has transformed the sugary liquid into a substance that can be fermented after the piñas are crushed.

Then, it's off to the fermentation tanks. The ideal is around 30 degrees centigrade, or 86 degrees Farenheit. Much hotter, and you kill the yeast. Much cooler, and the yeast won't work. From there, the juice is pumped into stills. After filtering, it comes out of the still clear at about 55 percent alcohol. It will be diluted down to the standard of 40 percent alcohol (80 proof), depending upon the type of product it is destined to become.

Mexico's Tequila Regulatory Council (CRT) monitors every agave field in the country with a DNA record and a soil registry database, and CRT inspectors visit every one of the 155 certified distilleries that produce Tequila every day to take samples. Random samples are also taken in retail outlets in Mexico and around the world to ensure that the Tequila in the bottle matches the samples. Despite the scrutiny, there is no requirement to use tahonas, or open wooden fermentation tanks or copper stills, the crux of traditional methods. And for makers like Patrón and Siete Leguas, both use the old-fashioned tahona for a portion of their production, and each also has mechanical mills to grind and extract the sugar liquid from the agave. Nearly all of their products are a mix of the two processes. After the crush, each producer relies on an exclusive combination of techniques for fermentation with proprietary yeasts and a specific selection of copper-pot-still distillations to produce a unique flavor profile associated with their respective brands.

Jalisco, Mexico, the epicenter of Tequila production. Tourists (above) sample the spirit during a distillery crawl. At top right, an enthusiast shows his love of Tequila.

Carlos Camarena is the owner of La Alteña distillery in Jalisco's Los Altos region, renowned for high-quality agave. He is pouring shot glasses of three different Tequilas from his distillery. It's about 11 a.m., and the first truckloads of the daily harvest of piñas are arriving in the large concrete courtyard of the brick walled distillery. A CRT car is already parked outside, and the inspector is inside talking with the men who are running the stills. It's the third generation of the same family of distillers, and the fourth generation is in training.

Camarena produces El Tesoro de Don Felipe, a 100 percent tahona-crushed Tequila; Tequila Tapatio, a traditional milled Tequila from wooden fermentation vats and copper stills; as well as Tequila Ocho, made with agave from single fields relying on terroir for some of its character. Each year, agave from one or two of the fields is distilled and bottled, and since it takes at least eight years for agave to mature, consumers won't see the same bottling again for that many years. Each of his Tequilas represent different variations on how the spirit can be produced: tahona, milled, and terroir specific, the latter the most unusual category in the Tequila world.

As we taste the two Tequila Ochos, a 2016 Los Patos and 2016 Potrero Grande, the blancos destroy the myth that distillates cannot taste differently. The Los Patos has a more tropical fruit note while the Portrero Grande smacks of dry raspberry. Both have long finishes. Alongside them, the Tapatio blanco is peppery, with a more restrained aroma. Each one different. Each one unmistakably from agave with that telltale vegetal and earthy character.

Tequila is divided into five different types that reflect the amount of aging. Blanco (also called silver or plata) is bottled within 60 days, although it can remain longer if stored in stainless steel tanks. Reposado is aged in oak for at least 60 days, but not more than a year. Joven is a combination of blancos and resposados. Añejo must be oak-aged for at least one year and not more than three, and Extra Añejo is aged for three years or longer in oak. Some producers blend categories, but any blend must bear the designation of its youngest liquid.

Juan Fernando Gonzalez de Anda, one of seven brothers who oversee Siete Leguas, the home of the mule, La Reposada, has just led a visitor through the Centenario distillery and is sitting at a long wooden table in a room with 20-foot-high, wood-beamed ceilings with his production manager, Arturo Valle. He pours out several Tequilas to taste.

COREY ARNOLD (3)

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All Tequila is mezcal, but not all mezcal is Tequila. Mezcal is any agave-based spirit, but to be called Tequila the spirit must be made from blue agave grown in one of five Mexican states known as the Denominación de Tequila: Jalisco, Guanajuato, Michoacán, Nayarit or Tamaulipas. About 80 percent of blue agave comes from Jalisco.

Older isn't necessarily better. Tequila is classified by age, but don't dismiss blanco, the youngest variety, with no more than 59 days of aging. It's the choice of many Tequila distillers, who can drink anything they wish. "That's what I drink," says Juan Fernando Gonzalez de Anda of Siete Leguas.

"This is what we do every day," he says, sipping on the Tequilas in front of him. "We sample the day's production from our stills and blend each day's output to come up with the exact flavor profile we want in our blancos." The blanco, of course, serves as the base for all the aged Tequilas, which for Siete Leguas means eight months in used oak barrels for the Reposado, 24 months in barrel for the Añejo and five years in wood for the Extra Añejo, although they add some even older Tequilas into the final blend. Each distillery and each brand may establish its own aging periods depending on the taste profile they prefer.

Juan Domingo Beckmann Legorreta, the 50-something scion of Jose Cuervo Tequila, the largest Tequila producer in the world, is holding court with his Maestro Dobel, a brand known in Mexico as Maestro Tequilero. His family has been making Tequila since the 18th century, and the distillery across the street from where he is sitting was founded in 1795. There is a range of Tequilas in front of him, including two prototypes that will become a line extension to the brand. Everyone is sitting at a 60-foot-long bar that replicates an old Cuervo factory store from the 19th century. It is clear Beckmann's pride is on display because the ultra-premium line extension was created under his watch.

One thing that sets the brand apart is the fact that all the agave used in the annual production is harvested during the peak dry season months of late February to May. This is when the agave reaches its peak sugar concentration because the plants have begun to dehydrate from the long stretch of hot, dry weather.

Beckmann talks proudly about his family's stocks of aged Tequila. "No one has the kind of older Tequilas that we have," he says. "It is one of the treasures of our family."

For Beckmann, the family's Tequilas animate him.

"I don't have a lot of romantic words to use," Beckmann says. "But I love that these have a sweetness, of aguamiel [agave syrup], not of bee honey. It's so agreeable. And there's a touch of wood. I just love it."

At lunch in the family hacienda grounds in Tequila, where a plaque traces the family tree back to the year 1758, Beckmann recalls the arc of Tequila's growth over the last 40 years in Mexico. "My dad used to hide his añejo Tequila under the table at his friends' kids' weddings back in the '80s, because it was considered a drink of the people, not of the upper class," Beckmann says. "That certainly isn't true today." ❖

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Some cigar brands have admirers who take their passion to unheard of levels. We look at some of the cigar world's cult brands, and the people behind them.

115 BUILDING A CUBAN COLLECTION
We speak to several Cuban-cigar collectors about building a cigar collection, with practical advice on how to shop, store and savor your smokes. And you don't have to spend a ton of money on your boxes.

The retirement of top-tier tight end Rob Gronkowski, above, leaves a gaping hole for New England to fill, but with Tom Brady returning to lead a corps of playmakers, the Patriots seem destined for another Super Bowl.

The Jets front office added a few new weapons on offense to help quarterback Sam Darnold, but will it be enough to get them into the playoffs?

AFC EAST

WINNER: New England Patriots

After nearly two decades of domination, and 10 consecutive division titles, the Super Bowl champions faced a challenging off-season with the retirement of superstar tight end Rob Gronkowski and the loss of defensive coordinator Brian Flores. While Tom Brady didn't have one of his better seasons last year (4,355 yards, 29 TDs), the 42-year-old returns along with a corps of playmakers: Sony Michel, Julian Edelman, first-round draftee N'Keal Harry and Josh (Flash) Gordon, who signed a one-year contract and returned after being reinstated by the NFL. Bill Belichick won't be happy with the schedule—his Pats play a team coming off its bye week three times, and have five primetime games—but he isn't happy until he's hoisting the Lombardi Trophy anyway. He and Brady are in less jeopardy than James Holzhauer.

New York Jets

Co-owner Christopher Johnson took what he termed a deep dive into the operation, but Michael Phelps, he ain't. New general manager Joe Douglas was a terrific hire, and new coach Adam Gase is an offensive guru who should work wonders with second-year QB Sam Darnold, who will be helped immensely by All-Pro security blanket Le'Veon Bell. Jamison Crowder and four-time Pro Bowler C.J. Mosley also bring new blood, along with DT Quinnen Williams, arguably the best player in the draft, who will create havoc with swaggerlicious safety Jamal Adams. New defensive coordinator Gregg Williams made for a fiery, feisty training camp that had Jets fans at Elio's, Sandro's and Sadelle's buzzing.

Buffalo Bills

The Bills have missed 18 of the last 19 playoffs but second-year QB Josh Allen showed promise with a big arm and a pair of legs that led the club in rushing. Head coach Sean McDermott fielded the second-best defense in the NFL, and first-round draft pick Ed Oliver was a steal who will replace retired Kyle Williams. Adding Cole Beasley and John Brown will help the receiving game, and ageless Frank Gore will contribute from the backfield.

Miami Dolphins

The Dolphins are a Category 3 hurricane—a windblown disaster. They finished 7-9 in 2018, and you should expect more mediocrity this season. Former Pats DC Brian Flores is their tenth head coach since 2004 and he has little talent to work with. GM Chris Grier deserves a free meal at Joe's Stone Crab for working out a deal to get Josh Rosen to duel journeyman QB Ryan Fitzpatrick, and first-rounder Christian Wilkins will provide instant leadership on defense, but opening the season against four consecutive playoff teams should beach these fish. Time to Tank for Tua?

NICK CAMMETT/DIAMOND IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

AFC NORTH

WINNER: Pittsburgh Steelers

The season-long drama between Antonio Brown and Ben Roethlisberger was divisive and the Steelers missed the playoffs for the first time since 2013. Big Ben (5,129 yards, 34 TDs) found another 1,000-yard weapon in JuJu Smith-Schuster, while James Conner picked up the slack left by Le'Veon Bell, who sat out the season in a contract dispute. First-round linebacker Devin Bush will make an immediate impact. Coach Mike Tomlin called the Brown and Bell departures "a cleansing."

Cleveland Browns

Baker Mayfield is the real deal as he established a rookie record of 27 TD passes (in 13 starts) to give hope to a franchise that had gone 1-31 in 2016 and '17. The Browns made the biggest offseason noise by trading for the mercurial Odell Beckham Jr., signing Kareem Hunt and Sheldon Richardson and trading for Olivier Vernon. New Coach Freddie Kitchens needs to reward GM John Dorsey's faith in him. But can he handle all these big personalities? What happens if Beckham doesn't let him drive his new orange Rolls? With Hunt serving an eight-game suspension, Nick Chubb will carry the rock. Myles Garrett (13.5 sacks) leads the defense while draft pick CB Andraez "Greedy" Williams—who didn't allow a TD at LSU—gives Denzel Ward a long, tall bookend. "The Browns are the most talented team in the division," says Baltimore Coach John Harbaugh. And maybe the most combustible. Has President Trump ended the tariffs on winning?

Baltimore Ravens

Coach John Harbaugh has been a model of consistency with only one losing season since 2008. He did perhaps his best job after QB Joe Flacco's midseason hip injury. Flacco helped tutor rookie QB Lamar Jackson to a 10-6 finish and the division title thanks in large part to the league's No. 1 defense. The Ravens let their top four defensive stars walk in free agency and changed offensive coordinators. Drafting speed merchant WR Marquise Brown and WR Miles Boykin gives Jackson better weapons, and RB Mark Ingram Jr. gives him a 1,000-yard runner. It's up to Jackson to make it happen...with his legs and arm.

Cincinnati Bengals

The Bungles made no significant off-season moves except to dismiss Coach Marvin Lewis after 16 years and zero playoff wins. It's up to new head coach Zac Taylor to try to resurrect Andy Dalton. The Bengals can use more help from tight end Tyler Eifert, who has missed 34 games the past three years. Cincy secured its LT of the future in Alabama's Jonah Williams, who will likely miss the season (torn labrum). Incoming DC Lou Anarumo inherits a unit that surrendered a league-worst 413.6 yards per game.

AFC SOUTH

WINNER: Houston Texans

The Texans opened 0-3 last season but went on a nine-game winning streak to finish 11-5 and win the division. They have one of the league's best combinations in quarterback Deshaun Watson and wideout DeAndre Hopkins, and All-World defensive end J.J. Watt made his presence felt with 16 sacks, second best in the league. Lamar Miller's torn ACL means Duke Johnson is the starter at running back.

Jacksonville Jaguars

Two years ago, the Jaguars were Super Bowl favorites, but the team went into a stupor last year, losing 10 of 12. A big part of the regression was QB Blake Bortles, and that was why the Jags released him and broke the bank for former Eagles Super Bowl MVP Nick Foles. The defense added another weapon with first-round pick DE Josh Allen of Kentucky.

Despite some team drama last year, Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger managed to throw for 5,129 yards and 34 touchdowns, but he faces a future without Antonio Brown.

JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

Tennessee Titans

This is a critical season for Marcus Mariota. In his first four years he has not made the Pro Bowl and has struggled to stay healthy. Ole Miss rookie A.J. Brown will help Corey Davis at wideout, as will possession receiver Adam Humphries. Derrick Henry (1,059 yards) is a bull at running back, but it's all on Mariota.

Indianapolis Colts

Andrew Luck's shocking retirement two weeks before the start of the season sent Indy's Super Bowl prospects out the window as Jacoby Brissett is Next Man Up. Eric Ebron was a revelation at tight end, and the offensive line had Luck so well protected he could have read the Mueller Report in the pocket. Parris Campbell takes some heat off explosive wideout T.Y. Hilton.

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AFC WEST

WINNER: Kansas City Chiefs

First year sensation Patrick Mahomes had a jaw-dropping MVP season and resembled a modern-day Brett Favre, launching 580 passes that resulted in 5,097 yards and 50 TDs! Tyreek Hill and Travis Kelce were his accomplices in the damage they inflicted on opposing teams, and the electric Hill avoided a suspension for off-the-field conduct issues. Rookie Mecole Hardman is a deep threat. Following the departures of CB Steven Nelson (4 INTs) to the Steelers and Dee Ford to the 49ers, the addition of pass rusher Frank Clark from the Seahawks and S Tyrann "Honey Badger" Mathieu will help new DC Steve Spagnuolo try to fix a defense that even Mahomes could not overcome in the playoffs.

Los Angeles Chargers

Old Man Philip Rivers keeps rolling along. No QB in history has passed for more yards (54,656) or more TDs (374) yet never played on Super Sunday. Last year, his Chargers (12-4) made the playoffs, but couldn't get past the Patriots. At 37, Rivers is still productive thanks to wide receiver Keenan Allen, RB Melvin Gordon (a summer holdout) and red-zone weapons Mike Williams (10 TDs) and Hunter Henry, who returns from a torn ACL. Draft pick Jerry Tillery should fortify the run defense. Safety Derwin James going down with a foot injury is a huge loss.

Oakland Raiders

The (4-12) Raiders made the biggest offseason move with the acquisition of Antonio Brown, who had six straight 1,200 yard seasons with Pittsburgh. He's the dynamic deep threat that Derek Carr desperately needs. With three first-round draft picks, coach Jon Gruden and GM Mike Mayock addressed other needs, drafting Clelin Ferrell to help boost a league-low 13 sacks. Josh Jacobs, the first RB drafted, replaces Marshawn Lynch. Johnathan Abram could be a modern-day Jack Tatum, but signing guard Richie Incognito (no extremely stable genius) means owner Mark Davis better hide the women and children. This isn't a Super Bowl team, but Wayne Newton might like it enough to buy season tickets at Las Vegas Stadium in 2020.

Denver Broncos

The Rocky Mountain Low Broncos suffered back-to-back losing seasons (11-21) for the first time since 1972. John Elway, who curiously has problems drafting QBs, traded for Joe Flacco. Will he be an upgrade over Case Keenum? Vic Fangio takes over as coach, and he will enjoy unleashing Von Miller (14.5 sacks) and Bradley Chubb (12 sacks). Phillip Lindsay (1,037 yards rushing) became the first undrafted rookie free agent to make the Pro Bowl, and rookie tight end Noah Fant should be an inviting weapon, but is wideout Emmanuel Sanders fully back from his Achilles injury? Elway may have finally drafted his future QB in Missouri's Drew Lock, who has a rocket right arm that can be scattershot.

SAM GREENWOOD/GETTY IMAGES

NFC EAST

WINNER: Philadelphia Eagles

Nick Foles did an admirable job of getting back to the playoffs, winning four of the last five games after Carson Wentz went down and now is starting in Jacksonville. Zach Ertz was unstoppable at tight end, and wayfaring wideout DeSean Jackson returns to help Alshon Jeffery and Nelson Agholor. Stanford's J.J. Arcega-Whiteside gives Wentz yet another target. In the backfield, Penn State's Miles Sanders could start ahead of Jordan Howard. To keep those Philly cheesecakes selling, the Eagles need to bolster a third-worst pass defense. GM Howie Roseman, voted No. 1 by *USA Today,* is on the case.

Dallas Cowboys

The Cowboys continue to be an enigma, much to Jerry Jones' chagrin. They won the East (10-6) but have no long-term momentum, and it's been 23 years without a trip to the NFC title game. Dak Prescott (3,885 yds, 22 TDs) is in line for a monster deal, and RB Ezekiel Elliott (a summer contract holdout) is a gamebreaker. But the Cowboys need more out of receiver Amari Cooper. DE Demarcus Lawrence earned his five-year, $105 million extension, but coach Jason Garrett, who is in the last year of his contract, needs to be more creative with his predictable offense, which has put him on the hot seat.

"The 'Skins have failed to win 10 games in a season for six straight years, and they won't get an invite to the White House before Hillary does."

New York Giants

Rookie RB Saquon Barkley quickly established himself as the face of the franchise with 1,307 yards on the ground, 11 TDs and four more receiving TDs. (No truth to the rumor that President Trump predicts he'll lead the league in Russian.) Eli Manning, 38, had one of his better statistical years but another slow start behind a flawed offensive line doomed him. GM Dave Gettleman has tried to build a wall in front of Manning, but no word yet on whether he got Mexico to pay for it. Gettleman has been under fire for exiling star Odell Beckham Jr. to Cleveland and not getting enough of a return after letting safety Landon Collins walk out the free agent door. Drafting controversial Duke QB Daniel Jones with the sixth pick finally sets the stage for a Manning succession plan, but it's a shame Jones can't play against the Giants' overhauled defense, which has more holes than the Democrats have presidential candidates.

Washington Redskins

The Redskins continue on their path of mediocrity. Fan enthusiasm collapsed after Alex Smith (broken leg) went down, as did season ticket sales. Don't expect another 1,042-yard season from 34-year-old RB Adrian Peterson, especially with Derrius Guice back from knee surgery that cost him his rookie season. The front seven is a strength, even after linebacker Reuben Foster wrecked his knee and will miss the season. The 'Skins have failed to win 10 games in a season for six straight years, and they won't get an invite to the White House before Hillary does.

On paper, the Kansas City Chiefs and the Chicago Bears are the preseason favorites to top their respective divisions.

NFC NORTH

WINNER: Chicago Bears

First-year coach Matt Nagy was a welcome change as the Bears clinched their first winning season (12-4) since 2012, and were surprising division champs. Mitch Trubisky broke out at quarterback and the defense allowed the fewest points in the league. Who the Bears lost shouldn't make an impact. Chuck Pagano is the new defensive coach and RB Jordan Howard was traded to the Eagles, but Iowa rookie David Montgomery is a better fit.

Green Bay Packers

The Pack (6-9-1) missed the playoffs for the second straight year in a tension-filled season, then fired head coach Mike McCarthy and hired Matt LaFleur. Aaron Rodgers managed 4,442 yards and 25 TDs despite an ailing leg and the loss of Jordy Nelson. WR Davante Adams is the go-to receiver and Aaron Jones could be a breakout star at RB. The defense will be stronger this year.

Minnesota Vikings

Kirk Cousins, the $84 Million Man, had a disappointing first year at QB (8-7-1) and wasn't much of an improvement over Case Keenum. He has two productive wideouts in Adam Thielen and Stefon Diggs. Draft pick Irv Smith Jr. will help at tight end. The defense is elite, but the Vikings need a better ground game and are hoping that Dalvin Cook can stay healthy.

Detroit Lions

Matt Patricia struggled in his first year at coach, and Matthew Stafford failed to throw for 4,000 yards for the first time in seven years. The only significant off-season signings were WR Danny Amendola and DE Trey Flowers.

NFC SOUTH

WINNER: New Orleans Saints

The Saints are going to enter this season as hungry as diners ordering the Chicken Clemenceau at Galatoire's. They were shafted in the NFC Championship by a glaring pass interference missed call, and Coach Sean Payton took it hard. "For two or three days," he said, "I didn't come out of my room, ate Jeni's ice cream and watched Netflix." QB Drew Brees is the most accurate passer in NFL history (67.3 percent), with a record 74.4 completion percentage in 2018 at age 40. He's the Tom Brady of the NFC. His top weapons, Michael Thomas (the $100 Million Man) and Alvin Kamara, return, and rookie center Erik McCoy is the perfect replacement for retired Max Unger. The weak pass defense is expecting more help from Marcus Davenport and Eli Apple.

Carolina Panthers

Coach Ron Rivera survived one of his most baffling seasons. After a 6-2 start, the Panthers swooned with a seven-game losing streak that destroyed any playoff hopes and had them finish at 7-9. Cam Newton was hampered by shoulder problems, and Christian McCaffrey made the biggest impact with 1,098 total yards and 7 TDs. D.J. Moore can be a Go-To-Guy and tight end Greg Olsen decided to delay a television career. Luke Kuechly, with 130 tackles, remains the rock on defense. Rookie edge rusher Brian Burns will help a floundering pass rush, and Gerald McCoy is the perfect complement. West Virginia QB Will Grier, who has a nice, smooth touch, was drafted as insurance for Newton.

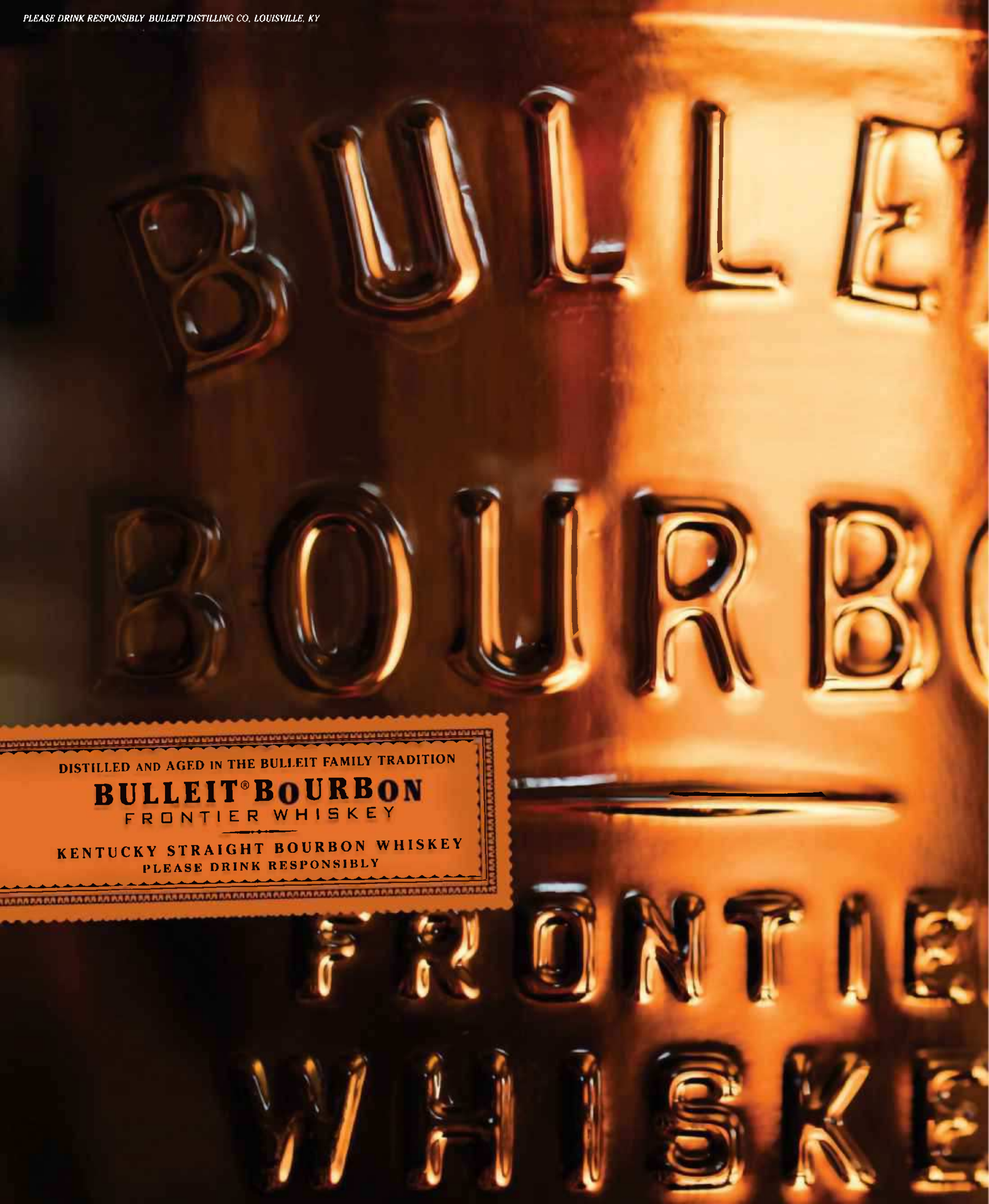
Atlanta Falcons

As long as Atlanta has Matt Ryan and Julio Jones, the Falcons offense will fly high. Ryan threw for 4,925 yards and 35 TDs while Jones added 1,677 yards. Atlanta's triple wideout set got 838 yards from Mohamed Sanu and 821 from Calvin Ridley. Proficient running back Tevin Coleman left for San Francisco, but Devonta Freeman is healthy again. The Falcons went 7-9, their first losing season under Dan Quinn. Before the draft, owner Arthur Blank said he wanted more youth on a blankety-blank offensive line. By using a pair of first-round draft picks on Chris Lindstrom and Kaleb McGary, it seems the message was received loud and clear.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Coach Bruce Arians is back, and despite taking over a 5-11 club that hasn't made the playoffs in 11 years, he isn't the least bit concerned regarding the future. "I'm not rebuilding, I'm reloading," he said. Six of his eight draft picks were designed to fix holes in the defense. His biggest challenge is retooling QB Jameis Winston (2,992 yards and 19 TDs), who started only 9 games (playing in 11) and struggled with his weight. Arians has two solid receivers in Mike Evans and Chris Godwin and a talented TE in O.J. Howard. On defense, Ndamukong Suh comes on board, and Devin White will replace Kwon Alexander, but Jason Pierre-Paul (12.5 sacks) fractured his neck in a car wreck and could miss more than half the season.

ROBIN ALAM/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES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NFC WEST

WINNER: Los Angeles Rams

The well-stocked Rams (13-3) made it to the Super Bowl for the first time in 39 years, but were taken to the woodshed by Bill Belichick and his Patriots. Jared Goff had a banner year at QB with star performers Todd Gurley, Robert Woods and Brandin Cooks before imploding on Super Sunday. Goff will have yet another weapon with the return of Cooper Kupp (ACL). DT Aaron Donald was a one-man wrecking crew with a league-high 20.5 sacks. Ex-Packer LB Clay Matthews and ex-Raven S Eric Weddle will love playing behind him. Darrell Henderson, a third-round bargain, is insurance for Gurley's barking knee.

Seattle Seahawks

Coach Pete Carroll turned a rebuilding year into a playoff run, with a surprising top-ranked running game. Russell Wilson was the catalyst with 3,448 yards, 35 TDs and a 110.9 passer rating. Chris Carson led the ground assault while Tyler Lockett was clutch at wide receiver. Fearful of losing Wilson, Seattle made him the highest-paid player in NFL history with a $140 million, four-year contract and gave him a bonus by drafting body beautiful WR D.K. Metcalf. First-round pick DE L.J. Collier replaces Frank Clark.

San Francisco 49ers

QB Jimmy Garoppolo's season lasted only three games as the 49ers ended up in San Francisco Bay (4-12). There were some bright spots on offense, like TE George Kittle, but unfortunately, the 49ers defense has ranked 24th or lower the last three years and that's why they made Ohio State DE Nick Bosa the second pick of the draft and signed linebacker Kwon Alexander. The Niners helped Jimmy GQ by drafting two wideouts, South Carolina's Deebo Samuel and Baylor's Jalen Hurd. Tony Bennett can start singing that song again.

Arizona Cardinals

The Cardinals made a bold move hiring Kliff Kingsbury as their coach—he went 35-40 at Texas Tech—but it paid off. Kingsbury has known Kyler Murray since his high school years and helped convince him to say 'yes' to playing quarterback for the Cardinals. With his strong arm and accuracy throwing downfield, the rookie could be another Patrick Mahomes in Arizona's Air Raid offense. Dual threat RB David Johnson should have a big year, and the draft gave Murray two more weapons in UMass WR Andy Isabella (4.31 speed) and 6' 5" target Hakeem Butler. The coach isn't worried that Murray is only 5' 10". Don't sell him short, but don't expect a winning season in his first year.

INSET: JIM DAVIS/THE BOSTON GLOBE VIA GETTY IMAGES; BACKGROUND: RICH GRAESSLE/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES

SUPER BOWL LIV PREDICTION

PATRIOTS DEFEAT SAINTS 29-23

Sean Payton calls for an audacious onside kick to open the Super Bowl, the Saints recover and Drew Brees immediately throws a 49-yard bomb for a touchdown. Hard Rock Stadium, packed with pre–Mardi Gras partiers, erupts.

An expected shootout between Brees and Tom Brady fails to unfold, much to the delight of bettors who took the under. (Sheridan Rule: When two offensive juggernauts collide in a Super Bowl, always bet the under.) But Brady answers with two touchdown passes, including one to Rob Gronkowski—who ended his retirement on Halloween.

With Tom Brady at the helm for the Patriots and Drew Brees leading the New Orleans Saints, the powerhouse teams seem destined to meet on Super Bowl Sunday.

The Saints tie the game at 14, but Belichick's modus operandi is taking away the opponent's lethal weapons, and his swarming defense contains running back Alvin Kamara for three quarters. The high-flying teams are now kicking field goals, and soon the game is tied at 20.

And then the football gods, who robbed the Saints in the 2018 NFC Championship game, torment them once again. Coach Payton loses a pass interference challenge with less than two minutes remaining. The teams trade field goals again, going to overtime tied at 23. The Pats win the coin toss, and Brady finds Gronk again for the 50-yard TD that marks seventh heaven for the Pats dynasty—seven Super Bowl championships. The TV cameras show Robert Kraft high-fiving son Jonathan. ❖

Danny Sheridan appears frequently in newspapers and on TV.

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cigars

104 BLIND TASTE TEST
A very strong tasting of 80 cigars with plenty of smokes exceeding the 90-point threshold, and a few exceptional standouts scoring as high as 93 and 94 points.

116 THE CIGAR AFICIONADO BUYING GUIDE
We arrange our tasting section by score, strength and even value. It's a quick way to connect you to your ideal smoke and preferred pricepoint.

119 CONNOISSEUR'S CORNER
Cigars may be one of the few realms where perfection is possible, and we found an old Cuban cigar that attained a perfect 100 points—and a few gems not too far behind.

121 A CANDID Q&A WITH NIRKA REYES
Now in charge of her family's legacy and reputation in the cigar world, Nirka Reyes runs the De Los Reyes factory in the Dominican Republic. She sat down and talked to us about the changes she's not afraid to make.

127 AMERICA'S NEW CUBA TRAVEL POLICY
The rules of U.S.-Cuban engagement seem to change with each administration. Senior contributing editor Gordon Mott gets you up to speed.

JEFF HARRIS

churchills

The Dominican Montecristo Platinum Series may not be the newest Montecristo on the market, but it shouldn't be disregarded. The Churchill scored a very impressive 94 points, showing just how complex tobacco can be when blended in a creative fashion. Fans of the Montecristo Platinum might notice that Altadis U.S.A. has changed the wrapper. It used to be Mexican, but is now Nicaraguan. And it's been a change for the better—this is the first time any size from the Montecristo Platinum line has ever scored so high. Black Label Trading Co. is owned by a husband-and-wife team who has their cigars made at the Oveja Negra factory in Estelí, Nicaragua. The Churchill size from the Lawless line scored 93 points and is a perfect example of how small, boutique companies can do great things. When J.C. Newman introduced its Nicaraguan Brick House line 10 years ago, the country was still in the aftermath of the Great Recession. A good premium cigar at a great price was needed. Now that the economy is doing well, Brick House remains a fine value. The Churchill scored 90 points and retails for a little over $7.

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

MONTECRISTO PLATINUM SERIES CHURCHILL (TUBO)
Every puff of this well-made Churchill imparts the dense, concentrated qualities of dried fruit, smacking of raisin, black cherry and baked plum around a core of earth and hickory. A touch of pepper pops up before the leathery finish.
U.S.: $13.03 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

94

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

BLACK LABEL TRADING CO. LAWLESS CHURCHILL
This Churchill has all the rich, luxurious character of both malted and dark chocolate beautifully contrasted by savory elements of leather and roasted peanuts. A hearty, tasty smoke.
U.S.: $11.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

93

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

BRICK HOUSE CHURCHILL
A large Churchill with subtle nuances of earth, nuts and wood. Hints of chocolate and bread lead to a chewy nougat finish. The draw and burn are clean and even.
U.S.: $7.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALEC BRADLEY PRENSADO CHURCHILL
The wrapper of this box-pressed Churchill has a rusty hue. It's a hearty smoke of mesquite and minerals with a salt-and-pepper quality and a sweet hint of molasses. The solid ash holds very firm.
U.S.: $11.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: MEXICO

HERRERA ESTELI NORTEÑO LIMITADA EDICION CHURCHILL
Long and flatly pressed with a fairly even draw and wavy burn. The sweet, herbal notes call to mind tea and vanilla. Hints of chocolate and oak also come through. The finish is nutty.
U.S.: $14.53 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ILLUSIONE 888 MADURO

89

There's a distinct coffee bean and licorice quality to this Churchill redolent of anise and espresso, along with notes of salted peanuts and wood. The finish tastes a bit charred.

U.S.: $10.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

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

OLIVA CONNECTICUT RESERVE CHURCHILL

89

Covered in a light, Connecticut wrapper, this cigar burns evenly, producing a dark gray ash. Initial puffs are floral with a citrus tang before picking up notes of toasted almond and a touch of black pepper. The finish is powdery and a touch dry.

U.S.: $9.85 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

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

CAMACHO ECUADOR CHURCHILL

88

Strikingly oily with a round head. It's a tangy smoke with notes of dried lemon peel, minerals and ground white pepper. Faint notes of milk chocolate emerge before the tanginess recurs on the finish.

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

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

DANIEL MARSHALL DM2 RED LABEL CHURCHILL

88

A beautifully oily Churchill with a reddish wrapper and three-seam cap. The smoke is earthy with some notes of dried fruit and a floral finish heavy on perfume.

U.S.: $8.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

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

PERDOMO FRESCO CONNECTICUT CHURCHILL

88

Although not too strong, this lightly hued Churchill has plenty of flavor from lemon zest and vanilla nougat to almonds and cinnamon. The finish is herbal and a touch bitter.

U.S.: $4.30 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

AVO XO MAESTOSO

87

The initial mustiness of this tan Churchill dissipates to show a smoke of nutmeg, cinnamon and lemon zest before a chalky finish. The draw and burn is remains perfect throughout.

U.S.: $12.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., MEXICO
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

MACANUDO GOLD LABEL LORD NELSON

86

Light in appearance, this Churchill shows some initial damp notes of earth before warming up to be a nutty, woody cigar with hints of grass and cocoa powder.

U.S.: $9.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PAUL GARMIRIAN GOURMET SERIES CHURCHILL

86

Oils seep through the colorado wrapper of this attractive Churchill. Notes of balsa wood, earth and lemon peel clash with musty hints of mushroom.

U.S.: $14.30 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

corona gordas

If you look at the five cigars that scored 90 points or higher in this category, they all have one thing in common: box pressing. The format has become very popular in the premium segment, and it appears that manufacturers have learned how to box-press properly without over- or under-filling the cigars. The Nat Cicco Aniversario 1965 Liga No. 4 Toro from Nicaragua is a prime example. It scored 93 points and performed superbly with a perfect draw. When you consider the fact that Nat Cicco used to be a budget brand of medium-filler cigars, it makes this high score all the more noteworthy. The brand name is an homage to Nat Cicco's very modest beginnings in the value smoke category. But this isn't the first time that a cigar from the Aniversario 1965 Liga No. 4 line has excelled. The Churchill is the No. 18 cigar of 2018 on Cigar Aficionado's Top 25 list. The Joya Red Cañonazo scored 91 points and comes from Joya de Nicaragua, the oldest operating cigar factory in Nicaragua. However, the Joya series was made with the modern smoker in mind, so the band design skews less traditional and more contemporary.

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

NAT CICCO ANIVERSARIO 1965 LIGA NO. 4 TORO
Box-pressed with a dark, oily wrapper and pigtail cap. The full, open draw delivers rich layers of leather, nuts, caramel and chocolate all harmonizing for a delicious balance of the sweet and savory.
U.S.: $6.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

93

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

JOYA RED CAÑONAZO
There's a fresh woodsy, forest flavor of pine needles and tilled earth to this smoke, along with sweet notes of honey and molasses before the snap of leather on the finish. Draw and burn are consistently even.
U.S.: $7.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

MEXICO
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, MEXICO
BINDER: NICARAGUA, MEXICO
WRAPPER: MEXICO

CASA TURRENT SERIE 1901
GRAN ROBUSTO
Flatly pressed with rounded shoulders, this is a toasty cigar underscored by sweet hints of maple and raisins that build to a woody finish.
U.S.: $9.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

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

DIESEL HAIR OF THE DOG TORO
This box-pressed cigar is draped in an attractive, chocolate-brown wrapper that feels smooth to the touch. Its lush draw delivers soft notes of wood and tea interspersed with sweeter hints of toffee and milk chocolate.
U.S.: $10.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

LA MISSION L'ATELIER 1989
Distinctly pressed and topped with a pigtail cap, this cigar is loaded with smoky notes of dark-roasted Sumatra coffee beans amidst an earthy mélange of black pepper, cocoa and leather.
U.S.: $9.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ASHTON SYMMETRY SUBLIME

89

The wrapper of this cigar is the color of milk chocolate. It draws and burns quite perfectly, offering a tangy smoke full of cedar, spice and chocolate sweetness.

U.S.: $13.45 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

LA PALINA BRONZE LABEL TORO

89

This richly hued cigar burns evenly, delivering notes of charred oak amidst the earthy, straw-and-hay qualities of a barnyard. Touches of licorice and clove spice up the smoke.

U.S.: $9.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2015

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LA HABANA LA FUERZA

89

A bit wrinkled in appearance, this cigar has a slightly firm draw. Light almond notes are accented by zesty touches of candied orange peel before the cigar shows some spice and leather.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £25.00 STRENGTH: Medium

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ARTURO FUENTE FLOR FINA 8-5-8 SUN GROWN

88

Wrapped in a dark cover leaf, this cigar burns perfectly, producing a flaky, gray-and-black ash. Simple notes of dark chocolate and leather are followed by hints of bread, caraway seed and a malted barley finish.

U.S.: $6.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

HEADLEY GRANGE DOBLES

88

Herbal at first, the smoke of this cigar intensifies a bit showing the sweet woody notes of tamarind paste and cedar. It's softly pressed with an even draw and burn.

U.S.: $10.15 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2015

HOYO DE MONTERREY EPICURE NO. 1 (TUBO)

88

Though it burns unevenly, notes of cedar, honey and cinnamon still come through. The long finish is a bit earthy with touches of tannin.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £25.40 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

H. UPMANN CONNECTICUT BY GRUPO DE MAESTROS TORO

87

The firm draw of this oily, blond corona gorda shows a predominantly grassy smoke with touches of balsa wood and creamy sweetness. A maduro leaf caps the cigar.

U.S.: $8.94 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

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

PADILLA VINTAGE RESERVE TORO

86

A dark, blackish cigar with a firm draw. Initial puffs are very earthy with notes of heavily roasted coffee bean and leather. The smoke loses some intensity and becomes herbal and oily.

U.S.: $9.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

figurados

The San Lotano Dominicano is the result of two cigarmakers: José "Jochy" Blanco and A.J. Fernandez. The collaboration proved successful as the Torpedo scored 93 points. The Dominican tobacco in the blend was grown by Blanco while the Nicaraguan tobacco was grown by Fernandez. It was finished with a Cuban-seed Brazilian wrapper grown by neither and made in the Dominican Republic at Blanco's Tabacalera Palma factory. The Nestor Miranda Collection 75th Anniversary Salomon is a gorgeous, tapered cigar that requires a lot of skill to roll. Made by My Father Cigars in Nicaragua, the shapely smoke scored 92 points. It was released to celebrate Miranda's 75th birthday.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

SAN LOTANO DOMINICANO TORPEDO
The toasty, woody smoke of this box-pressed torpedo blossoms with big notes of caramel, black coffee and cocoa powder before the licorice finish. A rich and satisfying cigar.
U.S.: $9.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

93

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 57 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

NESTOR MIRANDA COLLECTION 75TH ANNIVERSARY SALOMON
This large, dark figurado is crafted with supple curves and tapered at both ends. Rich, nutty layers of cashew and walnut are complemented by sweeter touches of cocoa and caramel. A tasty cigar.
U.S.: $19.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

601 BLUE LABEL MADURO TORPEDO
Black and box-pressed, this torpedo shows a strong, earthy core framed by notes of coffee, stout beer and sweet hints of anise.
U.S.: $8.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

90

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

PAPPY VAN WINKLE TRADITION BELICOSO FINO
The perfect draw and burn of this belicoso produces a very solid ash. It's a leathery, nutty smoke with some black pepper and a distinct cinnamon finish.
U.S.: $24.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2016

VEGAS ROBAINA UNICO
A softly box-pressed torpedo with a slightly firm draw and even burn. The cigar shows its sweetness right away, imparting notes of maraschino cherry, graham cracker and toffee. Hints of green pepper and wheat also come through.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £27.00 STRENGTH: Medium

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7 5/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ARTURO FUENTE HEMINGWAY UNTOLD STORY
A long perfecto in a toothy, dark wrapper that forms a bright white ash in stark contrast. Each puff is heavy with vanilla, bright undertones of citrus, almonds and a lemon peel finish.
U.S.: $15.65 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 8"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

EIROA "THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS" DIADEMA
A massive but beautiful diadema with tapered ends and a long nipple foot. It draws and burns evenly, delivering an earthy, woody smoke with hints of nuts and sweet coffee.
U.S.: $18.30 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89

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

PADRÓN DAMASO NO. 34
Surprisingly spicy at first, this tan torpedo shows more up-front power than the light wrapper suggests. The spice calms leaving warmer impressions of hazelnut, cedar and espresso before a woody finish.
U.S.: $14.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

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

ROMEO 505 NICARAGUA BY ROMEO Y JULIETA PIRAMIDE
Large and imposing with a gleaming, oily wrapper. Initial puffs have the light sweetness of cocoa powder but the smoke gains intensity, becoming the leathery, spicy cigar its appearance suggests.
U.S.: $9.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

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

CASA MAGNA OSCURO BELICOSO
An inky torpedo with a very pointy tip. Opening bitterness fades to show earthy coffee notes, some minerals and a sweet licorice finish.
U.S.: $9.93 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

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

LAST CALL BY AJ FERNANDEZ FLAQUITAS
The uncut wrapper leaf of this torpedo folds over the foot. First puffs are notably peppery, but the black pepper subsides for notes of coffee and nuts. Some tasters encountered burn issues.
U.S.: $6.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

87

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

EL TROVADOR PETIT BELICOSO
A box-pressed pyramid with a full, even draw that offers some sweet spice amidst the nuttiness of almonds and walnut skin before a bitter woody finish.
U.S.: $7.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

86

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

KRISTOFF MADURO TORPEDO
An oily torpedo with a dark, uncut wrapper that envelops the foot. Earthy and rustic, the smoke carries notes of licorice and charred wood that ultimately leave a gritty sensation on the palate.
U.S.: $9.53 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LA DUEÑA BELICOSO NO. 2
The draw of this dark belicoso is notably firm, but open enough to deliver a woody smoke with hints of anise and a slightly vegetal finish.
U.S.: $8.85 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

85

grandes

Thick as logs and chunky as chocolate bars, grande cigars continue to have a strong presence in the market. When we polled the country's cigar-shop owners in our annual retailer survey, the grande came in as the No. 3 best-selling size this year, beating out most traditional formats. Three cigars in this category of gargantuan ring gauges scored 90 points, and all were made in Nicaragua. The Casa Fernandez Aganorsa Leaf Habano Titan is produced at the Aganorsa Leaf factory and made of tobacco from Aganorsa, one of the largest growers of premium cigar tobacco in Nicaragua. As if a 66 ring gauge cigar isn't big enough, the Punch Diablo El Diablo was pressed into a blocky form, making it appear even more massive. It's made by A.J. Fernandez for General Cigar, and represents the strongest Punch ever released by General. At those cartoonish proportions, it's probably the thickest as well. The Undercrown was intended to be Drew Estate's less expensive, and more available alternative to the Liga Privada, which is made in small quantities and is often out of stock. Today, the line is less of a surrogate brand and can stand on its own.

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CASA FERNANDEZ AGANORSA LEAF HABANO TITAN
Woody and herbal at first, this fat cigar takes on the nutty sweetness of nougat and pistachio before a bready finish. The draw is even and the burn, clean.
U.S.: $7.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 66 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PUNCH DIABLO EL DIABLO
This massive, box-pressed block of a cigar is enrobed in a near-black cover leaf. Hearty notes of wood and coffee bean are balanced by sweeter touches of raisin and gingerbread before the chocolatey finish.
U.S.: $8.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: BRAZIL, NICARAGUA
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO
WRAPPER: MEXICO

UNDERCROWN GORDITO
A fat and oily cigar that draws and burns quite evenly. Sweet notes of chocolate, anise and cinnamon play off an underlying toastiness and combine for a sweet finish.
U.S.: $11.14 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: BRAZIL, DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

COHIBA CONNECTICUT GIGANTE
Rolled with a tawny-hued wrapper, this large cigar has a lush draw that offers a primarily woody smoke along with notes of wheat and honeyed tea. The finish is sweet.
U.S.: $22.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

89

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

E.P. CARRILLO NEW WAVE CONNECTICUT EL DECANO
First puffs of this fat, blondish cigar have the boozy qualities of rum and amaretto liqueur that settle down to show herbal notes, sweet bread and a cedary finish.
U.S.: $9.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MICALLEF GRANDE BOLD SUMATRA 6X60
Thick and blocky, this pressed cigar resembles a chocolate bar but draws and burns evenly despite the mammoth size. Lighter, herbal notes of wood, juniper and saffron become a bit nutty before the woody finish.
U.S.: $10.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN 7000
Rustic and coarse in appearance, this dark cigar is a bit lumpy but performs well with an even draw and burn. It's woody and sweet with notes of vanilla, cedar and caramel. Tastes better than it looks.
U.S.: $8.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PLASENCIA ALMA FUERTE SIXTO II
Hexagonally pressed, this six-sided cigar draws and burns evenly despite the unusual shape. It shows a strong, earthy, leathery character with sweet vanilla and cocoa notes as well as cedar and charcoal. A powerful smoke.
U.S.: $21.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PSYKO SEVEN CONNECTICUT GORDO
A big, fat cigar that burns slightly crooked but imparts a toasty, nutty smoke with sweet hints of honey and graham cracker. The finish is light and woody.
U.S.: $9.04 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild

88

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: COSTA RICA

ROCKY PATEL OLDE WORLD RESERVE MADURO SIXTY
Fat and blocky, this box-pressed cigar shows a woody, oaky core framed by hints of vanilla, black pepper and dried herbs before the dry, woody finish.
U.S.: $11.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: MEXICO

THE OSCAR MADURO SIXTY
Despite the heft of this dark, fat cigar, it holds a solid ash for quite some time, and offers the earthy notes of coffee and cocoa along with some crushed black pepper on the finish.
U.S.: $13.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALEC BRADLEY MAGIC TOAST GORDO
A fat, near-black cigar whose earthiness and caramel sweetness are overwhelmed by heavy notes of charred wood and burnt coffee.
U.S.: $10.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MATILDE RENACER GRANDE
Tasters encountered draw problems from the cigar being either too firm or too airy. Every puff leaves a gritty earthy sensation along with waxy notes and a rough, bitter aftertaste.
U.S.: $9.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

82

petit coronas

While petit coronas are slowly disappearing from cigar stores, this size category turned in a very respectable performance, with four cigars scoring 91 points or higher. The Cuban Punch Coronation scored 92 points, comes in a quaint little tube and hits a very broad spectrum of flavors. Three cigars scored 91 points. Ashton's Cabinet Selection Trés Petit shows a medium body that belies its light wrapper. It's made in the Dominican Republic at the Fuente factory. Cuba's Partagás Corona Junior also comes in a tube and is a great representation of this often hearty brand. Sold in tins of five cigars, Rocky Patel's Sun Grown Juniors from Honduras work out to a mere $3.30 each.

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2017

PUNCH CORONATION (TUBO)
A solidly rolled corona with a flat head and perfect draw. Floral first puffs usher in a hearty smoke of dark-roasted coffee bean, salt and oak over an underlying nuttiness. The finish is sweet with honey.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £14.00 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

ASHTON CABINET SELECTION
TRÉS PETITE
Solid to the touch, this petit corona is made with a flat head. Bold, leather notes stand out immediately along with plenty of walnut flavor and a warm, oaky finish.
U.S.: $9.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

91

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2017

PARTAGÁS CORONA JUNIOR (TUBO)
Covered in a reddish-brown wrapper, this little cigar draws and burns quite evenly. Its core foundation of leather, earth and wood support sweeter notes of almond-studded nougat and gingersnap.
U.S.: N/A Italy: 6.20 euro STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: HONDURAS, PANAMA
BINDER: COSTA RICA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROCKY PATEL SUN GROWN JUNIORS
Spices mingle wonderfully on the palate here, as notes of salt, cardamom and ground pepper, both black and red, are brought together by underpinnings of earth and leather. A tasty petit corona.
U.S.: $3.30 ($16.50, 5 Cigars) U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

91

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: COSTA RICA, MEXICO, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

GRAN HABANO HABANO NO. 3
LUNCH BREAK
Well-rolled with plenty of tobacco and a pigtail cap. Primary notes of earth and cedar carry nutty hints of leather. The sweet finish smacks of honey and salted caramel.
U.S.: $5.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA FLOR DOMINICANA LIGERO OSCURO NATURAL CABINET L-200
A dark, little cigar with a lot of power as each puff bursts with black, white and red pepper along with leather and earth, and a sweet touch of raisin. The draw is open and even.
U.S.: $7.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ARTURO FUENTE PETIT CORONA MADURO

88

Black and rustic with a rough cap. An initial blast of ground pepper and earth settles down to show anise and licorice before the charry finish. Quite strong for such a little smoke.

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

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 41 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF SIGNATURE PETIT CORONA

88

The tan wrapper of this well-made petit corona gleams with oil. The draw is lush and open, delivering a sweet, toasty smoke with lots of orange peel before a woody, earthy finish.

U.S.: $13.10 U.K.: £14.64 STRENGTH: Medium

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: APRIL 2015

POR LARRAÑAGA PETIT CORONA

88

Gnarly veins run up and down the wrapper of this small corona, which has a slight taper to the head. It's a simple smoke of nuts and wood with a touch of graham cracker sweetness on the finish.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £13.40 STRENGTH: Medium

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

FONSECA 2-2

87

A tan petit corona that draws and burns evenly, showing a woody smoke with sweet touches of cinnamon and vanilla. The finish is herbal.

U.S.: $5.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

TIMELESS STERLING PERLAS

87

A tan, veiny petit corona that draws evenly and holds a sturdy ash. Its light peppermint notes also hint of cedar and walnut before the dry finish.

U.S.: $9.35 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALADINO PETIT CORONA

86

Strong and spicy, this small smoke also shows an earthy character with peppery hints of pencil lead and a touch of acidity.

U.S.: $5.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 3/5"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MAY 2017

H. UPMANN CORONA MINOR (TUBO)

86

The up-front perfume of this heavily floral petit corona subsides to show some nuttiness and a bit of dark chocolate. The finish is earthy and a touch gritty.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £14.20 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

U.S.A.
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

TATUAJE RESERVA PETIT CAZADORES

84

Rolled with an uncut foot, this little cigar has a notably firm draw. Initial puffs are salty and briny but the smoke becomes a bit vegetal, leaving a damp aftertaste.

U.S.: $4.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

robustos

The robustos in this issue were an absolute powerhouse of a category with more high scores than any other size. More than half the robustos here scored 90 points or more, the most impressive being the Juan Lopez Selección No. 2 at 94 points. It's one of Cuba's smaller, lesser-known brands, and not necessarily available in all shops that sell Cuban cigars, but the Selección No. 2 is worth seeking out, especially if it has a box date of March 2015. Also from Cuba (and much better known), the Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2 scored 93 points. This tends to be quite popular among Cuban cigar fans as it's straightforward and tasty enough for a beginner, but nuanced and complex enough for a connoisseur. Two cigars scored 92 points. The Padrón Serie 1926 is made in Nicaragua and one of the strongest brands made by Padrón, but the power is justified and supported by the rich, polished layers of the blend. Vegueros was once a simple, rustic Cuban cigar brand, but the Centrofinos ended up being far more complex than Vegueros of the past. This robusto is the newest addition to the line, and also the most expensive.

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2015

JUAN LOPEZ SELECCIÓN NO. 2
Made with a flat head and three-seam cap, this robusto is bursting with flavor starting with dried fig and raisin notes that bring layers of chestnut and coffee before a salted caramel and toffee finish. Complex and delicious.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £20.80 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

94

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2015

HOYO DE MONTERREY
EPICURE NO. 2 (TUBO)
The opulent draw of this well-made robusto delivers sweet notes of brown sugar, raisin and cocoa all buttressed by a woody core. The finish is long, hinting of coconut and cashew. A delicious cigar.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £24.15 STRENGTH: Medium

93

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN SERIE 1926 NO. 6
Smoking this dark, box-pressed robusto is like chewing on chocolate-covered espresso beans. It also has the sweeter qualities of black cherry and nougat along with some spice. The perfect burn couldn't be more even.
U.S.: $14.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2019

VEGUEROS CENTROFINOS
First puffs of this colorado-hued robusto are toasty and floral, balanced by the richer elements of almond, nougat and gingerbread that follow. Elegant and tasty.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £17.50 STRENGTH: Medium

92

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

MY FATHER LA GRAN OFERTA ROBUSTO
There's a spicy, earthy quality to this dark robusto, which gleams with oil. Notes of black pepper, almonds and chocolate build to a salted-caramel finish.
U.S.: $7.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

OLIVA SERIE V MELANIO PETIT CORONA

A box-pressed mini robusto with a perfect burn and interesting array of spices—white pepper, cardamom, clove—complemented by sweet notes of dried dates, cocoa powder and nuts.

U.S.: $8.61 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

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

VILLIGER LA MERIDIANA ROBUSTO

The toasty smoke of well-made robusto also shows a distinct nutty quality redolent of cashews with underpinnings of earth and dried fruit. The draw is a bit firm, the burn, clean and even.

U.S.: $7.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2017

MONTECRISTO LINEA 1935 DUMAS

There's a strong and prominent nuttiness to this cigar redolent of almond paste and chestnuts. It takes on notes of cedar, dark chocolate and a hint of ground red pepper before the slightly chalky finish. The draw is a bit firm.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £27.60 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

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

LA FLOR DOMINICANA DOUBLE CLARO NO. 50

A strikingly green cigar with plenty of earth, honey and tangy citrus notes, along with some grassiness and a woody, spicy finish. The draw and burn are even throughout.

U.S.: $8.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: MEXICO

AGING ROOM MADURO RONDO

The earthy espresso notes of this dark, robusto take on hints of cocoa powder before a charred woody finish. The draw and burn are consistently even.

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

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

HENRY CLAY STALK CUT ROBUSTO

The excess wrapper leaf on the uncut foot of this box-pressed robusto takes flame well, burning evenly. It's a tangy, earthy smoke with notes of minerals, citrus and salty leather.

U.S.: $9.37 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

E.P. CARRILLO CARDINAL IMPACT NO. 52

Sharp ridges from the cigar mold crease the wrapper of this dark cigar, which is woody and peppery with some intermittent earthiness and a vaguely sweet finish.

U.S.: $7.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

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

GURKHA ROYAL CHALLENGE ROBUSTO

A primarily cedary smoke with vague notes of citrus that lead to a straw-and-hay finish. It's rolled in a light wrapper and draws evenly from first puff to last.

U.S.: $7.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

86

buying guide

TOP SCORES, VALUES AND STRENGTH | BLIND TASTE TEST NO. 152

TOP SCORES

94 **Juan Lopez Selección No. 2**
Cuba • £20.80 • Robusto • Medium-Full

94 **Montecristo Platinum Series Churchill (Tubo)**
Dominican Republic • $13.03 • Churchill • Medium-Full

93 **Black Label Trading Co. Lawless Churchill**
Nicaragua • $11.00 • Churchill • Medium-Full

93 **Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2 (Tubo)**
Cuba • £24.15 • Robusto • Medium

93 **Nat Cicco Aniversario 1965 Liga No. 4 Toro**
Nicaragua • $6.95 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

93 **San Lotano Dominicano Torpedo**
Dominican Republic • $9.50 • Figurado • Medium-Full

92 **Nestor Miranda Collection 75th Anniversary Salomon**
Nicaragua • $19.00 • Figurado • Medium-Full

92 **Padrón Serie 1926 No. 6**
Nicaragua • $14.00 • Robusto • Medium-Full

92 **Punch Coronation (Tubo)**
Cuba • £14.00 • Petit Corona • Medium-Full

92 **Vegueros Centrofinos**
Cuba • £17.50 • Robusto • Medium

TOP VALUES

91 **Rocky Patel Sun Grown Juniors**
Honduras • $3.30 ($16.50, Five Cigars) • Petit Corona • Full

90 **Gran Habano Habano No. 3 Lunch Break**
Honduras • $5.20 • Petit Corona • Medium-Full

88 **Arturo Fuente Flor Fina 8-5-8 Sun Grown**
Dominican Republic • $6.75 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

88 **Perdomo Fresco Connecticut Churchill**
Nicaragua • $4.30 • Churchill • Mild-Medium

87 **Fonseca 2-2**
Dominican Republic • $5.50 • Petit Corona • Mild-Medium

MILDER CIGARS

89 **Cohiba Connecticut Gigante**
Dominican Republic • $22.99 • Grande • Mild-Medium

89 **Oliva Connecticut Reserve Churchill**
Nicaragua • $9.85 • Churchill • Mild-Medium

88 **Headley Grange Dobles**
Dominican Republic • $10.15 • Corona Gorda • Mild-Medium

88 **Psyko Seven Connecticut Gordo**
Dominican Republic • $9.04 • Grande • Mild

87 **H. Upmann Connecticut by Grupo de Maestros Toro**
Dominican Republic • $8.94 • Corona Gorda • Mild-Medium

MEDIUM-BODIED CIGARS

91 **Ashton Cabinet Selection Trés Petite**
Dominican Republic • $9.75 • Petit Corona • Medium

91 **Joya Red Cañonazo**
Nicaragua • $7.60 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

91 **Oliva Serie V Melanio Petit Corona**
Nicaragua • $8.61 • Robusto • Medium-Full

90 **Brick House Churchill**
Nicaragua • $7.20 • Churchill • Medium

90 **Casa Turrent Serie 1901 Gran Robusto**
Mexico • $9.50 • Corona Gorda • Medium

STRONGER SMOKES

91 **My Father La Gran Oferta Robusto**
Nicaragua • $7.80 • Robusto • Medium-Full

90 **601 Blue Label Maduro Torpedo**
Nicaragua • $8.95 • Figurado • Full

90 **La Flor Dominicana Ligero Oscuro Natural Cabinet L-200**
Dominican Republic • $7.20 • Petit Corona • Medium-Full

88 **Arturo Fuente Petit Corona Maduro**
Dominican Republic • $5.75 • Petit Corona • Full

88 **Plasencia Alma Fuerte Sixto II**
Nicaragua • $21.00 • Grande • 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.*

AN ADVENTURE in flavour and flame...

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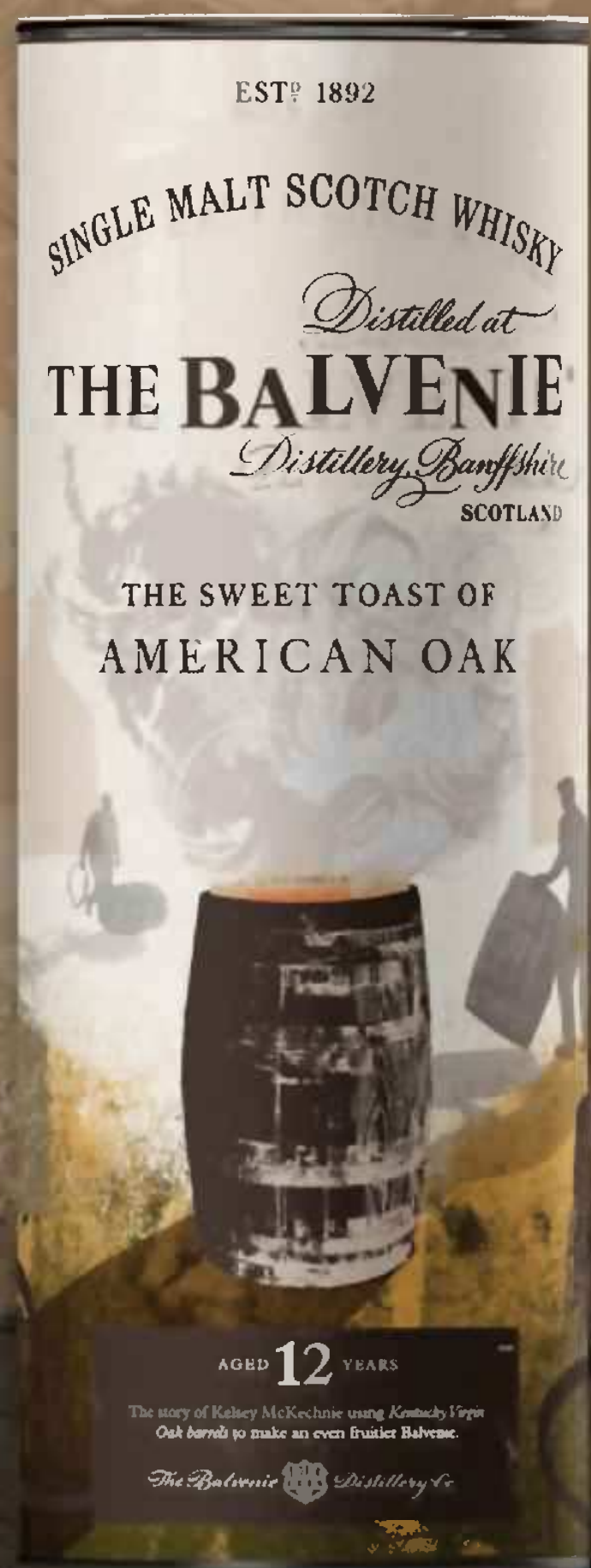

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JEFF HARRIS

100 DON CANDIDO DUNHILL SELECCIÓN NO. 500 (1980)

One of the most delicious cigars I've ever smoked. At 6 1/2 inches by 48 ring, it's nearly a Churchill, and the largest size in the long gone Don Candido brand. The draw remains flawless and the beautiful brown wrapper is still silky after all these years. It's a very creamy smoke, astonishingly rich and alive with a profound nutmeg character that's not only vibrant but resonates on the palate with each puff. Medium bodied and truly perfect. —*Marvin R. Shanken*

98 PARTAGÁS 150 ANIVERSARIO 109 (1995)

This is one of Cuba's greatest special releases, and comes from a limited humidor (only 150 were made). The "109" shape, with a tapered head, seems to bring out the best in Cuba's cigarmakers. It begins with notes of tea and cocoa powder but warms to show touches of white pepper and earth with a slightly sweet finish. It's at its peak, but there are still decades left in this great smoke. —*Gordon Mott*

97 COHIBA ESPLENDIDO (1990)

This Churchill is nearly 30 years old, and it's adorned with an old-style Cohiba band with dots instead of squares. The draw is superb, the cigar burning with a gray ash that's more pepper than salt. A dry start is overtaken by a heavy peanut note, then a graham cracker sweetness dusted in baking spices. It gets stronger—and better—as it burns, but remains more mellow than the typical Cohiba profile. Elegant, balanced and delightful. —*David Savona*

94 TATUAJE LA VÉRITÉ LA VÉRITÉ 2009 (2009)

The fermented tobacco in La Vérité was not aged in bales as is standard practice. Rather, the idea was to age the tobacco after it was rolled into a cigar so it develops in the box the way wine ages in a bottle. Now that it's spent 10 years in a 50-count cab, this Churchill has turned into a sweet, elegant smoke with nuances of chestnut, dried pear, mocha and almonds. Understated and delicious. —*Gregory Mottola*

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Now that Nirka Reyes is in charge of her family's cigar factory, the legacy of De Los Reyes is in her hands.

A CANDID CONVERSATION WITH

Nirka Reyes

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER GARRITANO

She's only 30 years old, but Nirka Reyes is the president and driving force behind De Los Reyes, a cigar factory in the Dominican Republic responsible for the Saga line of cigars, as well as a portfolio of third-party brands. Since she took over the factory once run by her father Augusto, Reyes has created new brands, taken over the majority of tobacco purchasing and embarked on a bold strategy to slash production numbers in order to focus on branding and quality. Reyes sat down with managing editor Greg Mottola in the Cigar Aficionado offices in New York to talk about her business, the painful challenges of downsizing and how she's changing the face of her company.

MOTTOLA: How long has your family been in the tobacco business?
REYES: Six generations over 150 years. My family on the Reyes side comes from Spain, and my family has always been in Navarrete, and today we have fields from there to Mao. They started with a very small field in the middle of the city, and it's still there. At the beginning, we sold the tobacco that we grew. Then my great grandfather Don Julio started crossing varietals.

Reyes inspecting cigars in one of the many aisles of the factory's aging room.

Q: When did your family start making cigars?
A: In 1992.

Q: The family never made cigars before that?
A: No. That's when De Los Reyes was born. My father worked first at the PVC Puros de Villa Gonzalez cigar factory.

Q: Did he open his own factory?
A: Yes in Jacagua. It was called De Los Reyes and he made cigars for Thompson at the time. His first cigar brand was called Rey de Reyes, but someone owned [the trademark] in the U.S. so he had to sell in Europe, in Spain. He was mostly devoted to private labels. He made Indian Tabac for Rocky [Patel].

Q: What was the first Reyes line to come to the U.S.?
A: The Augusto Reyes brand, in 2006.

Q: When did you start working in tobacco?
A: Twelve years ago, when I was 18. I just got back from school in Switzerland and I wanted to work. My dad didn't want me to work in tobacco so I went to human resources and applied for a job at the factory. They shifted me around. The first department I worked in was human resources. Then finance. Then inventory. Then packaging. Then I went to production. That was the toughest.

Q: Why?
A: I'd smoke a cigar and say "I like it." And my father would say "That's not enough. You have to give me more of an answer." I had to relate what I liked and relate it to the tobacco, how the leaves are blended. That all affects how the cigar smokes and how it feels on the palate. It's not as easy as a primary process like packaging.

Q: What were you learning about tobacco?
A: The primings—ligeros, coronas, secos. I learned to look for differences in wrapper and binder, and how to keep them moist. I also learned about drying tobaccos before production. We don't believe in an absolute standard. Tobacco changes. If you're honest and you use just water and [cigar rolling glue]—that's all you're supposed to use—the tobacco is always changing. The same leaves from the same plant might give you the same stimulation, but the flavor profile can be different.

Q: Did you learn about fermentation?
A: Later. For the first four years I was everyone's assistant running errands all the time, from 2007 to 2011. Then, I quit.

Q: What made you decide to leave?
A: I was having health issues, but I also wanted to be outside the family business. I loved it but didn't have the freedom to create. So I applied to Grupo Popular and got a job there. I was in customer service first in the bank area, then on the investment side. I thought I would like finance, so I did that for a year. That's when my dad got involved with Swisher and not as involved in the factory anymore. He needed help and asked if I'd help run the factory for him. I was unhappy at my job. I thought I would like investment. So, in 2012 I came back as a factory manager with my dad.

Q: What did you do when you returned?
A: I asked what we did wrong.

Q: What do you mean?
A: I saw the passion in the factory, and the brand my father made received good ratings, but we were making products for too many people. Too many SKUs. The passion and the love was being lost in translation because of the way mail-order companies handled the Augusto Reyes brand. Dad didn't know he had to price protect the brand with mail order. But once we started doing well we felt we didn't have to do that anymore. He was making 13 million cigars a year, mostly for mail order.

Q: What did you do to address these problems?
A: We decided to cancel a lot of the

mail-order cigars we were making. We gave them a year's notice and continued to make a few brands with Thompson. We stopped making mixed-fill cigars. We also took the Augusto Reyes brand off the market.

Q: Why did you do that?
A: I wanted to make a cigar for long-term success, cigars for brick-and-mortar. It was sad to see how it started and what it became. That's my dad's name. That's my last name. Now, I just make Augusto Reyes Nativo for my dad, but we don't sell it anymore.

Q: What other changes did you make?
A: We also downsized. That was sad too, but it was critical. He was making the Patoro brand since 2001. It was a European line. Patoro was our quality standard. I wanted all my cigars to be like that. That became the production standard for the factory.

Q: How did you raise the standard?
A: In the cigar world, you don't pay by skill. You pay by production quantity. I wanted to change that. I wanted everyone to roll with the same quality. Incentive changes. We don't pay for how many cigars each roller makes.

Q: So the better the roller the more money they make?
A: Yes. They have a baseline on production, but the incentive they used to get for quantity is now for quality.

Q: That sounds like a big change. How did the rollers like it?
A: Some of them left. Most of them stayed. I wasn't doing millions of cigars anymore. Maybe 1.2 or 1.3 million cigars. That was in 2013.

Q: You went from making 13 million cigars a year down to 1.3 million?
A: Yes.

Q: What did your father think about the drop in production?
A: He was very supportive. He agreed. I'm always going to have a cigar factory. We put out the Don Julio brand. Swisher owned the trademark and they gave it to us, so this was named after my great grandfather to honor our past. It was a big deal to honor my past. We had two booths that year [at the trade show] in 2013 to introduce Don Julio.

Q: How many cigars do you produce a year?
A: Last year, 2.2 million, including private brands.

Q: What's the percentage of your own brands verses the contract brands you produce for other people?
A: Thirty percent is ours. Everything else is private.

Q: Are you trying to get back to the old production numbers?
A: It's a long-term plan. We hired engineers to figure out how to improve processes, improving aging techniques for example, and changes in our humidity. My brother had distribution in Miami, but we had to close it because I'm not shipping millions of cigars into the U.S. Now, we ship directly to the retailer from the factory with UPS. And we pay for the shipping.

Q: Is your father completely hands-off?
A: No. Even though I manage De Los Reyes, we're still a family board, so I have to present to my dad and my brother.

Dominican San Vicente binder and original Piloto Cubano seed tobacco in the filler. A lot of people don't use Dominican wrapper. My uncle is very big on using Dominican seeds.

Q: Your uncle as in Leo Reyes, the grower of Dominican tobacco?
A: Yes. He is the most passionate person about tobacco that I know. He inspired me to change everything to improve and to always keep improving. If he didn't continue to grow the Piloto I wouldn't have Golden Age. Working with family is difficult and I had to gain his respect. I am his client now. He'll show me a seed and I know he has other customers, but I want to be first, so I have to negotiate with him.

Q: How many different tobacco types does he grow?
A: In Cuban seeds alone, he grows about 17 different varieties. It's a privilege to use wrappers grown in the same fields that my great grandfather grew tobacco on. It gives me the continuity of six generations and it's an important connection. I never travel during tobacco season and I'm sad when it's over. That connection makes all the difference. I know on what exact field the tobaccos come from and I know how my uncle processes the tobacco. When I buy from other growers, I have to do my own processing of the tobacco.

"It's a privilege to use wrappers grown in the same fields that my great grandfather grew tobacco on. It gives me the continuity of six generations and it's an important connection."

Q: What's your flagship brand?
A: Saga. I wanted something that portrays the stories and the heritage of cigars. That's when Saga came to mind. My dad hated the name [laughs]. In Dominican slang, you call a bad baseball player "saga." It's a short name and people can say it easily in any language.

Q: What year did Saga come out?
A: That was 2014. The Saga Golden Age came out with all Dominican tobacco. It has a Corojo 2006 Dominican wrapper,

Q: You changed the name of your company from Corporación Cigar Export (CCE) back to De Los Reyes. Why?
A: I never liked the name. We're changing what we are as a factory and as a team. I didn't like the logo either. My dad bought the free zone with that name and he just stayed with it. I remember our original factory in Jacagua. It wasn't fancy at all, but it was beautiful. I wanted that feeling so I went back to the first name. That was in 2015. I used the crown for the logo which was taken from my family's crest.

Q: Let's talk about the Saga Short Tales brand.
A: Sagas are big stories. But then there are little stories. We wanted to make something unique, so we decided to make the box look like a book. The first volume of Saga Short Tales is called Tales of the High Primings. It came out in 2016 and we needed a strong cigar to kill the myth that we don't make powerful cigars in the Dominican Republic. I went back to the high primings because of its power. For us, strength means that you feel it in your body, but there is still plenty of stimulation on the palate, so that you still detect the sweetness.

Father and daughter Augusto and Nirka Reyes overlook the final steps in the packaging area.

Q: How did the market respond to the Saga Short Tales?
A: That's been our game changer. They love the book. It sold out fast because people wanted to buy the full box. After they bought the first one, they want the collection. We're trying to have every profile. We haven't done a mild one yet. Not sure if we're going to do that.

Q: How many volumes do you have?
A: We're up to six now. We plan on 10. Each one is a different blend and different size. A different story.

Q: What's the production for each Saga volume?
A: We start with 50,000 cigars. If inventories get down to a certain level, we start production again.

Q: Do you think getting market share in the U.S. is difficult?
A: It is. You look around and there's a new factory opening up every day. You'd think that with the FDA people would be scared, but apparently not. So many lines come out every year. And bigger companies have strategies to take up shelf space.

Q: As a small company, what are your thoughts on the FDA regulations?
A: It feels like a very intentional thing, like they want us to be the generation that ends tobacco smoking. Not all tobacco products are the same. Cigarettes and smokeless tobacco are so different from cigars. They're trying to regulate something that can never have one standard. It's impossible. Are we going to chemically engineer a leaf so that every leaf gives the same amount of nicotine? It's an attack on our culture, and they're not trying to understand it. I accept that businesses have to be regulated, but we should have some air.

Q: What would FDA regulation mean for your company?
A: Some products would be safe because we have predicate brands, but it's going to limit creativity. What can I do to make a substantial equivalent? It will be playing chess with the government.

Q: What's it like being a female in such a male dominated industry?
A: It was a challenge because of my youth more than because I was a female. That was the most challenging part. It took time to get respect from peers and the retailers. Even the consumers. Women can enjoy cigars in the same way that men can enjoy cigars. That is something I wanted to communicate. I don't party. I don't drink at cigar events. Keep the vibe professional.

Q: But not everyone is always professional back.
A: Someone wanted me to do a cigar event, and asked if I could come in a miniskirt. I usually don't wear short dresses. Sometimes I get indecent proposals, but I ignore them.

Q: As a woman, you have to maintain boundaries in a way that men in your position don't have to think about.
A: Yes. One time at the IPCPR trade show, someone told me to sit on his lap. It's getting better. When you go to a cigar event, still most of the women are models in short dresses. Things are changing.

Q: What do you think about the rise of Nicaragua?
A: The world is very competitive, and it's a great motivation. Just like when people ask me what happens if Cubans become legal in the U.S. It's another challenge and it will be fun. I don't like things to be too easy. There's a market for everyone. Not every consumer likes the same thing. It's good for Nicaragua. Estelí was nothing and undeveloped. Now, I see how many factories they have. That's a good thing. It's extraordinary. ❖

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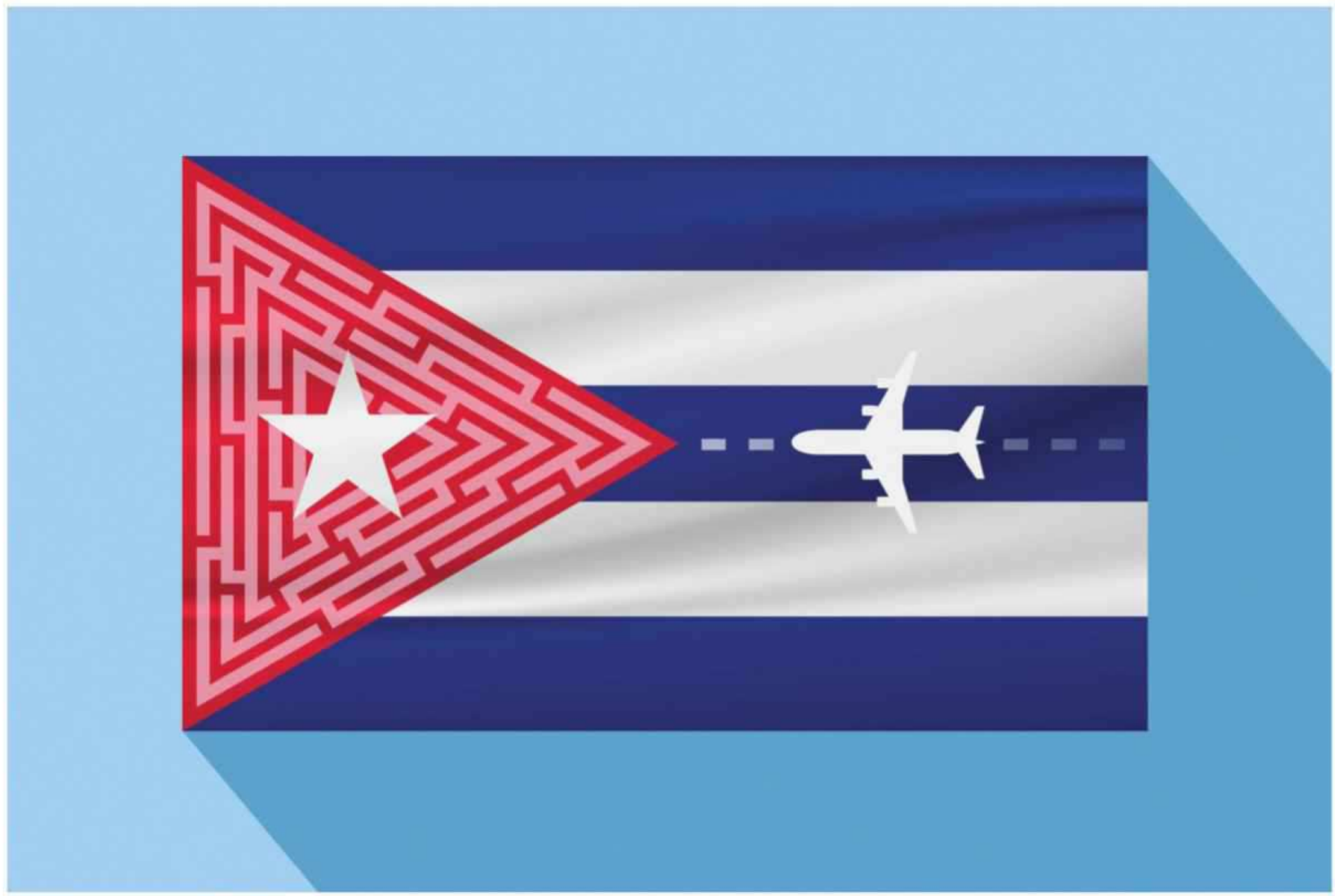
The Cuba Travel Maze

The new rules seem to cast a pall on the prospects for visiting Cuba. But are they as strict as they sound? BY GORDON MOTT



At first, June 5th, 2019 looked like the end of travel to Cuba for Americans. No more cruise ship visits. Elimination of all people-to-people program trips. Tough rhetoric against the Cuban government from the Trump Administration. Every Cuba lover was freaking out, figuring they had either missed their chance to visit the island nation off the southern coast of Florida or they could never visit again.

But the initial headlines were alarmist and in some ways 180 degrees from the reality. Travel to Cuba has become a little more complicated. That is true. You can't jump on a seven-day cruise out of Fort Lauderdale or Miami to the Caribbean with stops in Havana, Cienfuegos and Santiago. You also can't take your private yacht or fly your private jet to Cuba. Similarly, the many tourists who were skirting the intent of the rules by using them to vacation in Cuba, complete with trips to the beaches and sightseeing in Havana, will find those loopholes specifically prohibited under the new regulations.

Despite the changes, any American can still buy a ticket on any one of the five airlines that offer direct flights to Cuba from various points of departure in the United States. Those trips are legal under the Support for the Cuban People program, which has the same 12 categories of permitted reasons to travel to Cuba

"If you were planning on seeing Cuba through ports of call on one of the cruise lines, you have to make other plans. More than 800,000 travelers were scheduled to arrive in Cuba on board ships during the course of the next year, and those stops have been canceled."

as the previous people-to-people program, which had governed travel to Cuba for nearly 20 years.

"The U.S. government basically consolidated the people-to-people program into the Support for the Cuban People," says Tom Popper, the president of insightCuba, the largest tour operator for trips to Cuba. "I'm seeing a lot of interest this summer for trips during the fall and winter."

The bottom line is Americans can still travel to Cuba under those 12 categories of permitted travel in the Support for the Cuban People regulation. Those categories include: family visits; official business for the U.S. government, foreign governments and certain intergovernmental agencies; journalistic activity; professional research and professional meetings; educational activities; religious activities; public performances, clinics, workshops, athletic and other competitions and exhibitions; support for the Cuban people; humanitarian projects; activities of private foundations or research or educational institutes; exportation, importation or transmission of information or information materials; and certain authorized export transactions.

Travelers also can still buy Cuban cigars and Cuban rum in Cuba and in third-party countries during their travels and bring them back to the United States. The limits are the same as before: $800 worth of purchased goods, but the number of cigars imported cannot exceed 100. If you exceed those amounts, and stay within an ambiguous definition "for personal use," you pay only an import duty of four percent on the excess quantities. But based on anecdotes reported to Cigar Aficionado, travelers should be wary of exceeding the limits on cigars, because an individual customs agent can declare on the spot that they are for resale, not personal consumption, and therefore seize the cigars.

So how do the new regulations work? Years ago, a traveler had to solicit a specific license from the U.S. Treasury department to travel to Cuba legally. But those requirements were loosened years ago, and now, even in the wake of the June 5th ruling, each traveler buying an air ticket to Cuba is asked only to self-certify that he or she is visiting Cuba under one of the 12 permitted categories. The traveler is then required under the regulation to comply with the basic rule that all interactions—from daily activities to which hotels they stay in and where they eat—be directly with the Cuban people, and not with Cuban government entities. They also are required to keep a detailed itinerary of their activities and expenses, and for a period of five years be ready to show them to the U.S. government. Those rules are no different than what was on the books when the Obama Administration began a diplomatic thaw in 2014 that led to the opening of an official U.S. Embassy in Havana in 2016. But enforcement was nonexistent.

What does all this mean in practical terms? First of all, if you were planning on seeing Cuba through ports of call on one of the cruise lines, you have to make other plans. More than 800,000 travelers were scheduled to arrive in Cuba on board ships during the course of the next year, and those stops have been canceled. The cruise lines have created new itineraries, in some cases (when the June 5th announcement was made) while the ships were at sea. The cruise lines have offered discounts and incentives to people who had booked cruises with stops in Cuba going forward.

The air travel providers remain committed to their schedules. American Airlines spokesperson Laura Masvidal says that the airline is not only continuing to operate its full schedule to Cuba, but has added two daily flights since the June 5th announcement. One is from Miami to Santiago, Cuba, and the other is an additional flight from Miami to Havana, bringing the total daily round-trip flights on that route to six. She declined to respond to questions about the airline's projection for demand or the percentage of seats occupied on each flight. While airlines are very reluctant to release information on demand for seats, their actions suggest demand remains high on all the Cuba routes.

A Delta Airlines statement says it has not changed its flight schedules to Havana as a result of the Trump Administration action. Delta flies one daily round trip from Atlanta to Havana, and two daily round trips to Havana from Miami. Other airlines flying to Cuba include JetBlue (from New York's JFK and Fort Lauderdale), Southwest (from Tampa and Fort Lauderdale) and United (from Newark). Some airline analysts have speculated that since many of the cruise ship travelers may still have interest in visiting Cuba, once they learn they can still travel by air, flights may actually increase in 2020. The U.S. Department of Transportation estimated that about 893,000 persons flew from the United States to Cuba in 2018, with two-thirds of them having relatives in Cuba. In all, Cuba received nearly four million tourists in 2018.

There has also been confusion over whether Americans traveling under Support for the Cuban People could lodge in hotels. The original SPC regulations said people could only stay in private homes. But the Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) clarified immediately after the June 5th announcement that all travelers could now stay at hotels as long as they were not on the published restricted list, which focuses primarily on hotels owned by the Cuban military. The list includes dozens of hotels on the island, among them the Conde de Villanueva, the Ambos Mundos and the new and opulent Gran Hotel Manzana Kempinski, which opened in 2017. Some analysts believe there is a gray area, allowing a traveler to stay at one of the restricted hotels as long as it was booked through an offshore agency and the traveler doesn't pay the hotels directly.

"My advice to people if they have a question is get in touch with OFAC," says John Kavulich, president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council. "They are not trying to catch people. They want to keep people from doing something wrong." ❖

For more detailed Cuba travel information visit: www.treasury.gov and search under Cuba sanctions.

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Or email them to: momentstoremember@mshanken.com. To order additional copies of Cigar Aficionado, call 1-800-344-0763.

Cigarmaker Rocky Patel and Rich Castiano, owner of The World Famous Cigar Bar in Fort Myers, Florida, do some high-altitude smoking in the Austrian Alps.

Jeff Fishbaugh, Jake Fishbaugh, Diana Vorhees-Fishbaugh, Rick Vorhees and Brad Smith at Jake and Diana's wedding on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.

Shane Fallon, Matt and Alexis Townson, and father of the bride Bruno Fallon at Matt and Alexis' wedding at the Gray Dove in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Tom Pike, Jon Smith, Bob Smith and Mike Beehler celebrate both Father's Day and the wedding of Bob's daughter with golf and cigars in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Friends Larry Lebarre, U.S. Army General Tommy Franks and Dr. Robert Remondino break open a box of Cohiba Behikes in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Around a warm fire in Rahway, New Jersey, Steve Alt and Gates Garcia welcome home Dave Milanes (center) from his deployment in the Middle East.

Jake Lyssy, Drue Cicchetto, Stuart Loop, James Spadafore and Ben Seidenstein puffing away in Havana to celebrate James' 30th birthday.

Enshrinement in the Pro Football Hall of Fame calls for a fine cigar. Ed Reed, former safety for the Baltimore Ravens, poses with his bust in Canton, Ohio.

Old friends Tony Delicandro, Ron Aldom and Dale Walker light up some Cohibas while playing a round of golf at Hidden Valley Resort in Somerset, Pennsylvania.

Jim Bartolotta and Nick King from Southgate, Michigan, show off their team pride and enjoy some cigars before watching the Michigan-Notre Dame football game.

Mary and Bill Immke from Pontiac, Illinois, spend the evening with Jill and Bob Bisswanger from Ethel, Arkansas, in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic.

Kevin Purvis (far right) is joined by his son Michael and daughter-in-law Matteah for cigars on the beach at Coronado Island in California.

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Jim Minnelli and daughter Nicole of Malden, Massachusetts, celebrate Nicole's graduation from Framingham State University.

Andy and Amy Sirotkin came all the way from Sands Point, New York, to enjoy cigars and golf at Waterville Golf Links in County Kerry, Ireland.

Caroline Leonard, Mary Simpson, Olivia Ragio, Kelsey Simmons and Cameryn Cook mark their graduation from Mt. Notre Dame High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, with some smokes.

Up in New York State's far western region, Dado de Sa, Jon Halaby and Art Halaby relax on the deck with refreshing libations and fine cigars in Chautauqua Lake.

Members of the Milwaukee Athletic Club in Wisconsin gather to enjoy one final smoke in their 100-year-old building before it closes for renovation.

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Brian Egan and John Tortorella on their annual walk across the Brooklyn Bridge for a slice of pizza. They rewarded themselves with Oliva Serie V cigars for the walk back to Manhattan.

Retired USAF Colonels Chuck Johnson (far left) and Eric Theisen (far right) and their wives, Ginny and Cathy, at the Cigar, Bourbon and Craft Beer Festival in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Shawn McCarney, Rachel Wojdowski, John Angotti, Adrian Stocker, Jody Castle, Brock Schneider, Jim Balog and Chaz Mattiucci at the wedding of John and Kelly Angotti in Gibsonia, Pennsylvania.

Bobbie Christian and Heather Keverline light up at the wedding of Mollie and Nash Huffman at The Coves in Lenoir, North Carolina.

Chris Criscione and Brian Smith find time for cigars at the going-away party for Chris's daughter and son-in-law in Lake Zurich, Illinois.

Retired Army paratrooper Joe Myrda and retired Marine artilleryman Kenton Bradford smoke Montecristos at The Bad Monkey in Tampa, Florida.

William Gall, father of the bride Bruce Patterson and Brooke Patterson Gall strike a pose at Bruce and Brooke's wedding reception at The Addison in Boca Raton, Florida.

Bob Parsons, Carl Sandstrom and son Steve Sandstrom celebrate all three of them birdying the same hole at the Jamaica Run golf course in Dayton, Ohio.

Jason Casarella and his son, Owen, from Doylestown, Pennsylvania, with some 17-year-old Fuente Fuente OpusX cigars for Owen's high school graduation.

Vietnam veterans Steve Jakala and Mike Nielson honor the 75th anniversary of the Region 4 Smokejumpers in McCall, Idaho, with Fuente cigars.

Proud parents Sam and Michele Sakwa at daughter Ashley's graduation from the Wharton MBA program in San Francisco, California.

Phil Ricardi (far left) and Deno Yiankes (far right) flank their sons Brian and Alex as they all smoke to Brian and Alex's graduation in Bloomington, Indiana.

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 29</u>

<u>TO RESPONDENT GENERAL CIGAR CO., INC.'S NOTICE OF RELIANCE</u>

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TOP 3 CIGARS

- **No. 1: E.P. Carrillo Encore Majestic**, Dominican Republic, Ernesto Perez-Carrillo, EPC Cigar Co.
- **No. 2: La Opulencia Toro, Nicaragua**, the Garcia Family, My Father Cigars
- **No. 3: The Wise Man Maduro Robusto**, Nicaragua, Nick Melillo, Foundation Cigar Co.

POWER TOBACCO

Ligero: the strongest tobacco varietal. Three noteworthy tobacco men discuss growing and blending this powerful leaf.

FIGHTING THE FDA

Cigarmakers and retailers discuss ways to help in the fight against FDA regulations and restrictions of premium cigars. Featuring:

- Rocky Patel of Rocky Patel Premium Cigars
- Glynn Loope of Cigar Rights of America
- Drew Newman of J.C. Newman Cigar Co.

INVESTING IN CUBAN CIGARS

Learn how to build a Cuban cigar collection and invest in cigars that appreciate in value with David Savona and Gordon Mott of *Cigar Aficionado* and Rob Fox of James J. Fox London/Dublin.

WOMEN IN THE CIGAR INDUSTRY

- Cynthia Fuente-Suarez of Arturo Fuente
- Ines Lorenzo-Gomez of La Flor Dominicana
- Lissette Perez-Carrillo of EPC Cigar Co.

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Nick Jonas broke in with his brothers as a teen idol before going solo and starting a movie career. Now, he's back with his siblings and over the past decade he has acquired an aficionado's appreciation for cigars.

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Call him the Crypto King. John Caruso carries millions on a flash drive in his pocket, buys Ferraris on a whim and eats off the children's menu. Plus, a primer on investing in the wild world of cryptocurrency.

ON THE COVER
Nick Jonas: from teen idol to cigar aficionado. *Photographed exclusively for* CIGAR AFICIONADO *by David Needleman*

TOP: MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ARMOR; CENTER: STEPHEN DENTON; ON THE COVER: SUIT BY SSS WORLD CORP / WATCH BY CHOPARD

ESCAPE TO PARADISE
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golf & travel 80 DOWN MEXICO WAY
Cabo's picture book coastline, perfect weather and a wealth of top-flight course designers conspired to create the pinnacle of Mexican golf at the tip of Baja.

sports 90 NFL PREVIEW
Our pigskin prognosticator, Danny Sheridan, picks pro football's winners and losers and forecasts who will hold the Lombardi Trophy come February.

cigars

tasting 104 We rate 80 cigars in six sizes: Churchills (104), corona gordas (106), figurados (108), grandes (110), petit coronas (112), and robustos (114). Use our Buying Guide (116) to find the best sorted by strength and price, and see how well cigars can age in our vintage cigar tasting, Connoisseur's Corner (119).

interview 121 NIRKA REYES
The product of a six-generation tobacco saga, the young president of De Los Reyes returned to lead the family cigar business out of mail-order oblivion with a quality-not-quantity strategy.

cuba report 127 PARSING THE TRAVEL RULES
The Trump Administration may have seemed to nix visiting Cuba, but a closer look shows that not much has changed.

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

140 MADE FOR YOU
A benchmark workbench; genuine Kobe beef; cigar art for the man cave; a sweet retreat at the airport; a club for all seasons; and a really cold Martini.

90

80

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FROM TOP: JAMIE SQUIRE / GETTY IMAGES; BRIAN OAR; PETER GARRITANO

highlights

Another issue full of scores that exceeded 90 points including two exceptional cigars—a puro from Cuba and a multi-country blend from the Dominican Republic—that topped the tastings with 94 points. The robusto category was particularly strong. More than half of its cigars scored an outstanding 90 points or higher.

TOP CHURCHILL

MONTECRISTO PLATINUM SERIES CHURCHILL (TUBO) — DOM. REP. — 94

Brand owner Altadis U.S.A. recently changed the wrapper of this cigar from Mexican to Nicaraguan and the result is astounding.

TOP ROBUSTO

JUAN LOPEZ SELECCIÓN NO. 2 — CUBA — 94

This is one of the lesser-known Cuban cigars but one of the best we've smoked all year and tied for top-score of the issue.

TOP CORONA GORDA

NAT CICCO ANIVERSARIO 1965 LIGA NO. 4 TORO — NICARAGUA — 93

It's hard to believe that Nat Cicco used to only make medium-filler smokes. This cigar is proof that the company is serious about the premium market.

TOP FIGURADO

SAN LOTANO DOMINICANO TORPEDO — DOM. REP. — 93

When cigarmakers Jochy Blanco and A.J. Fernandez decided to combine their Dominican and Nicaraguan tobaccos, the result was this magnificent blend.

TOP PETIT CORONA

PUNCH CORONATION (TUBO) — CUBA — 92

This petit Punch is a textbook example of Cuba's ability to pack a lot of flavor into a traditional, slender size.

TOP GRANDE

CASA FERNANDEZ AGANORSA LEAF HABANO TITAN — NICARAGUA — 90

This hefty smoke tied with two gargantuan cigars for top grande: the Undercrown Gordito from Drew Estate and the monstrously mammoth Punch El Diablo.

BEST BUY

ROCKY PATEL SUN GROWN JUNIOR — HONDURAS — 91

At $16.50 for a tin of five, the Rocky Patel Sun Grown Juniors work out to only $3.30 each, a fantastic price for a cigar with so much to offer.

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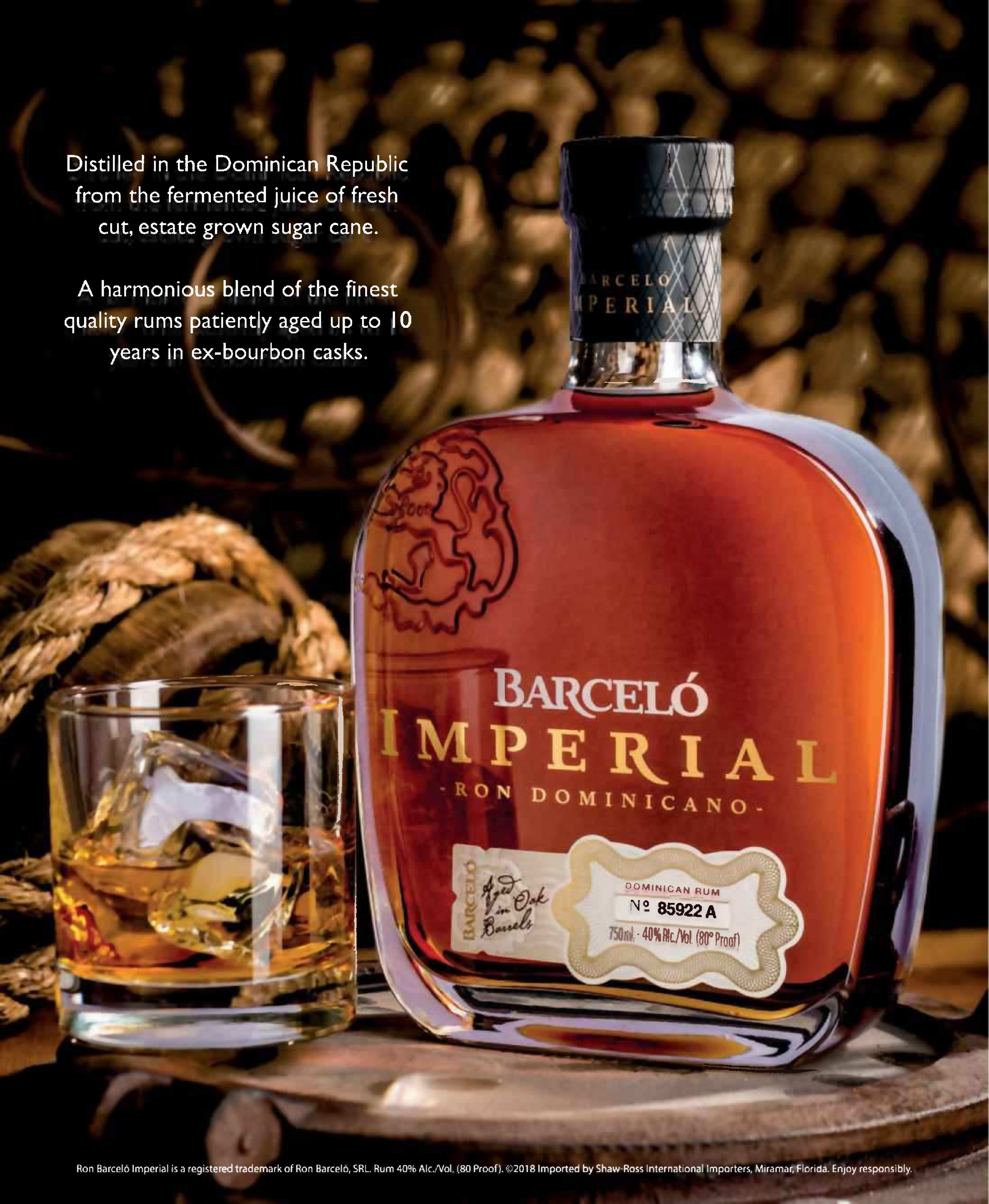

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DAVID YELLEN

editors' note

Smoking in the Great Indoors

Fall is nearly here, and this season of change serves as a reminder that there are fewer days left for us to spend time in the warm outdoors in this part of the world. Early autumn brings the end of beach season in the northeast United States and warns us that it's time to head south if we want to keep playing golf. For many, it also means the end of smoking cigars comfortably outdoors.

We don't cringe at the thought of losing the great outdoors as a place to smoke. In fact, we love smoking cigars inside. In many ways, it's a better experience than smoking them outside.

Sure, you'll see both of us puffing cigars when we're outside, perhaps by the pool, certainly on the porch or deck and almost always when we tee it up. But it's a completely different experience than enjoying a cigar inside.

It's impossible to get a sense of your cigar's aroma if you puff outside—one of the reasons we always conduct our blind tastings for CIGAR AFICIONADO and our newsletter, *Cigar Insider*, indoors. Wind makes lighting difficult and can wreak havoc on your smoke, causing a cigar to burn unevenly or even burn hot, changing the flavor, and not for the better. Furthermore, there are some cigars we would never light up outside, among them vintage cigars that have a certain delicacy and can't be easily replaced.

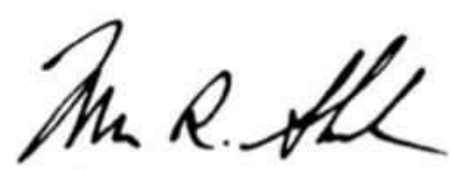
We get it—for many of you, the outdoors is your best option for smoking a cigar. But even if you can't light up in your home, consider finding an indoor spot to savor a cigar the way we do.

Most cigar shops today offer places to smoke, whether it's a simple set of chairs in a quiet corner, a grand lounge with leather couches and a full bar, or something in between. Just another reason to support your local brick-and-mortar cigar shop: no matter how convenient, Internet cigar sites don't have smoking lounges. You can find a cigar-friendly venue near you by searching our database, at wts.cigaraficionado.com.

Our Big Smokes also let you smoke indoors, which is one of its biggest draws. We hold them twice a year, in Las Vegas (which takes place November 15 to 17 this year) and in Florida (April 3 to 5, 2020). Visit TheBigSmokes.com to learn more.

Take it from us—smoking inside makes a big difference. You'll notice flavors you couldn't pick up outdoors, savor the aroma, and get a more even burn than you would on a windy beach or breezy golf course.

So seek out a good spot and light up a cigar indoors. We bet you'll be happy.



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Dear Marvin,
I recently read your editors' note in the July/August 2019 edition ["Cigars for the Troops"] concerning cigars for our military members. I could not agree with you more that the FDA's prohibition of giving away cigars to the troops is ridiculous.

I wanted to let you know, from a current member of the U.S. Army, that I—and my brothers and sisters in arms—appreciate you taking the time to talk about this matter and also to promote Cigars for Warriors. It means an incredible amount to us that people like you think of us. I am a Blackhawk pilot finishing up flight school in October, and my friends and I smoke cigars at every big event we have. It's a huge part of the military culture and some of my best memories in the army and at the United States Military Academy revolve around smoking cigars with my best friends.

Thanks again for taking the time to promote such a good cause.
2nd Lt. Taylor Kelley
Fort Rucker, Alabama

Editors' Response: Thank you—and your fellow soldiers serving in the U.S. Army—for your service.

Dear Marvin,
I just read the July/August 2019 issue and enjoyed it tremendously, especially the article on Kurt Russell ["The Veteran"]. I have always been a fan of your magazine and Kurt, so the issue was a real pleasure. As the article on Kurt recounts, he was a good ball player and, as a Portland, Oregon, native, for years I have heard about all the fun and shenanigans he and his teammates were involved in when they played for my hometown.
Brett Lloyd
Americus, Georgia

Dear Marvin,
Your July/August 2019 edition was hands-down the best edition since I began subscribing. From the Kurt Russell article, to the terrific mob-Cuba article, to the story of Tequila, the content and writing was superior. These were not just excellent Cigar Aficionado feature articles, they were excellent magazine articles all the way 'round. Who is not fascinated by the story of the mob in Cuba? And who did not learn something about Tequila that they did not know before? Even if I were not going to be a lifetime subscriber based on the quality of the magazine issue after issue anyway, editions like this would guarantee it.

Thanks for this great summertime vacation read.
Sean Brearcliffe
Tucson, Arizona

"I am a Blackhawk pilot ... and my friends and I smoke cigars at every big event we have. It's a huge part of the military culture."
—2nd Lt. Taylor Kelley
Fort Rucker, Alabama

Dear Marvin,
I have read the latest Cigar Aficionado (July/August) from cover to cover. The articles on Kurt Russell, hoodlums in Havana, the return of Tiger Woods, a taste of Mexico and finally, the cult cigar phenomenon are both informative and written in an excellent fashion. Your magazine continues to serve as both a guide to many of the

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E-MAIL letters@cigaraficionado.com • **LETTERS** 825 8th Ave., 33rd floor, New York, NY 10019 • **EDITORS' BLOGS** Find out what the editors of Cigar Aficionado are thinking—and smoking—in our editors' blogs. David Savona, Gordon Mott, Jack Bettridge, Gregory Mottola and Andrew Nagy want to hear from you. The conversation is taking place on cigaraficionado.com.

cigar aficionado

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finest cigars available, as well as continuing to be a very informative and pleasurable read.

See you in November at the Big Smoke.

Frank Kohler
Scottsdale, Arizona

Dear Marvin,
The only thing I found fault with in your excellent August issue was the cut of the suit in the "Made for You" feature. The trousers are too short. The cuffs should break at the instep. To make things worse, the model is wearing turquoise socks that echo the color of his necktie. Matching one's hosiery to one's necktie is the epitome of dorkiness. Had the trousers been the proper length, this style faux pas would have been concealed.
Loren D. Estleman
Whitmore Lake, Michigan

Editors' Response: The good news is that the suit in that photograph is one that can be fully customized to your specifications, so you can make the pants as long as you desire.

Dear Marvin,
I have been an avid reader of your magazine for years, and have collected most issues. Last month, I traveled to London for a holiday, and stayed at the Churchill Hyatt Regency. While there, my small tour group met for one hour with Celia Sandys, the granddaughter of Sir Winston Churchill. She has

"Your magazine continues to serve as a guide to the finest cigars available, as well as a pleasurable read."
—*Frank Kohler, Scottsdale, Arizona*

written five books on the life of her grandfather. She gave us a 45-minute talk on her memories as a child during World War II, and of course memories with her grandfather.

After her lecture, I was able to speak with her for 10 minutes. I told her about your magazine, how Sir Winston was voted the number one cover in your 25 years of publication, and the numerous articles written about him, the last being the cover story about the movie *The Darkest Hour*, with Gary Oldman. ["The Role of a Lifetime," May/June 2018.]

She was not acquainted with the magazine. I then told her I would send her my cherished copies of that issue, as well as the issue with Churchill on the cover in 1993.

I was profoundly touched and honored to have met her.
Michael Barimo
Winter Park, Florida ❖

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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.

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Three-Finger Cigar Cases

Cigar transport is a tricky thing when you're toting more than one. Stuffing a pocket with unprotected puros is liable to get them crushed, but lugging a bulky, hard-sided travel humidor can be ungainly. The gentle medium is the classic and dapper three-finger case that tucks in your breast pocket with no unseemly bulges.

That's the reason so many renowned manufacturers offer the three-slot format. The Triple Cigar Case ($235, above middle) from French luxury brand S.T. Dupont is a two-tone example. The top is made from rich brown calfskin and sits comfortably over a sturdy metal bottom segment. Visually striking and durable, the case is also roomy, holding cigars of up to 60-ring gauge.

Brizard and Co.'s Black Caiman Crocodile 3 Cigar Case ($360, above left) is both eye-catching and innovative. Cloaked in black caiman, this American-made case has a fully lined, Spanish cedar interior that helps cigars maintain proper humidity while traveling. It also includes adjustable cedar dividers that allow a wide range of cigar sizes to fit snugly inside.

Casa del Rio's SR Cigar Case ($450, below) is a crocodilian cigar holder that's sure to snap some heads. Crafted in the United States from wild Florida alligator and lined with soft leather inside, it comes in five color choices. (Jade is our favorite.) This tough, green-armored case is as much a statement piece as it is a practical cigar accessory that fits most cigar sizes.

The French manufacturer Elie Bleu, whose name is synonymous with high-end cigar accessories, makes a sophisticated travel item called the Havana Patina Leather 3 Cigar Case ($490, above right). Made entirely by hand, this stunning case is meticulously oiled and colored to achieve a patina reminiscent of the rich, deep hues of aged leather. The case can hold cigars up to 56-ring gauge.

Visit brizardandco.com, casadelriocollection.com, eliebleu-usa.com, and st-dupont.com.

—David Clough

JEFF HARRIS

Roasted Bone Marrow

Like so many of Europe's culinary traditions, it took quite some time before roasted bone marrow started appearing on mainstream menus in the United States (in the more food-enlightened cities, anyway). The temptation is to point to the farm-to-table movement for bone marrow's rise in popularity. But perhaps, the nose-to-tail ethic, which leaves almost no body part left uneaten, is more appropiate. Whatever the reason, this method of utilizing a meat source right down to the marrow seems more than just a passing foodie fad.

Marrow has been on the menu at Porter House Bar and Grill in Manhattan ever since Chef Michael Lomonaco opened up this high-end steakhouse back in 2006. He serves it in the long—a cow femur split vertically down the middle, roasted and then garnished according to season or whim. So, how do you eat it? The most common way is to spread the marrow over toasted bread as you would a fine foie gras or butter. It conveys the beefy, nutty qualities of an aged steak, with a silky, custard-like consistency.

If you can't find a restaurant near you that serves marrow, home preparation is fairly simple, provided your local butcher will provide you with the bones already split by a bandsaw. After sprinkling with coarse sea salt, place the split bones marrow-side up in an oven preheated to 450 degrees and let them roast until the tops are browned, about 20 minutes or so. It's important to serve them hot while the marrow is still soft. Also, resist the urge to garnish too heavily. The idea is to be a little adventurous and savor the marrow's inherent unctuous qualities, not to obscure them with toppings.

—Gregory Mottola

GREG RANNELLS / STOCKFOOD

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Casa

Carlos Fuente Sr. selected an Ecuadorian-Havana tobacco wrapper and chose a mix of Cuban-seed, Dominican-grown long filler and binder. He blended them in the same manner he used to blend Cuban tobacco many years ago.

Cuba

The Journey...

Arturo Fuente immigrated from Cuba to Key West, Florida before making his way to Tampa, Florida. He sold handmade cigars from his home in Ybor City. Arturo never imagined how successful the company would become.

Using the time-honored traditions Carlos Fuente Sr. learned from his father Arturo, Carlos created the Casa Cuba cigar as a tribute to his father and to the early days of cigarmaking. Carlos Sr. used tradition and experience to capture the taste profile of Cuban cigars. Casa Cuba was the last blend created by Carlos Sr., but his spirit continues to fuel the journey.

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Fifteen-Year-Old Scotch

Quinceañera birthday celebrations (from the Spanish for 15 years) may get their due respect in the Latin community, but in the world of Scotch whisky drinkers it is a coming-of-age that is often overlooked. And that's a shame. In that niche, between entry level and those precious 20-somethings that will break your bank, is a sweet spot of price-approachable, sippable standouts that can still be mixed in a Rob Roy.

Balvenie chose the age for its single-barrel format. The malt master chooses casks of apt age for a basic profile of honey, vanilla and oak, but since they aren't married for consistency, you may get bonus flavors like nuts, anise and fruitcake depending on the cask. Glenfiddich, always the innovator, makes its 15-year-old using the solera method, which ages whisky in a collection of Sherry oak, Bourbon and new casks before marrying it in a huge Sherry tun that is always kept at least half full. The system works, coaxing out honey, orange peel, cinnamon and almond.

Formerly known as Bowmore Darkest, the 15-year-old malt from this seaside Islay distillery is first aged in former Bourbon barrels, then transferred to oloroso Sherry casks for its last three years of maturation. The result is a flavor spectrum that includes cocoa, toffee, mango and the characteristic island peat.

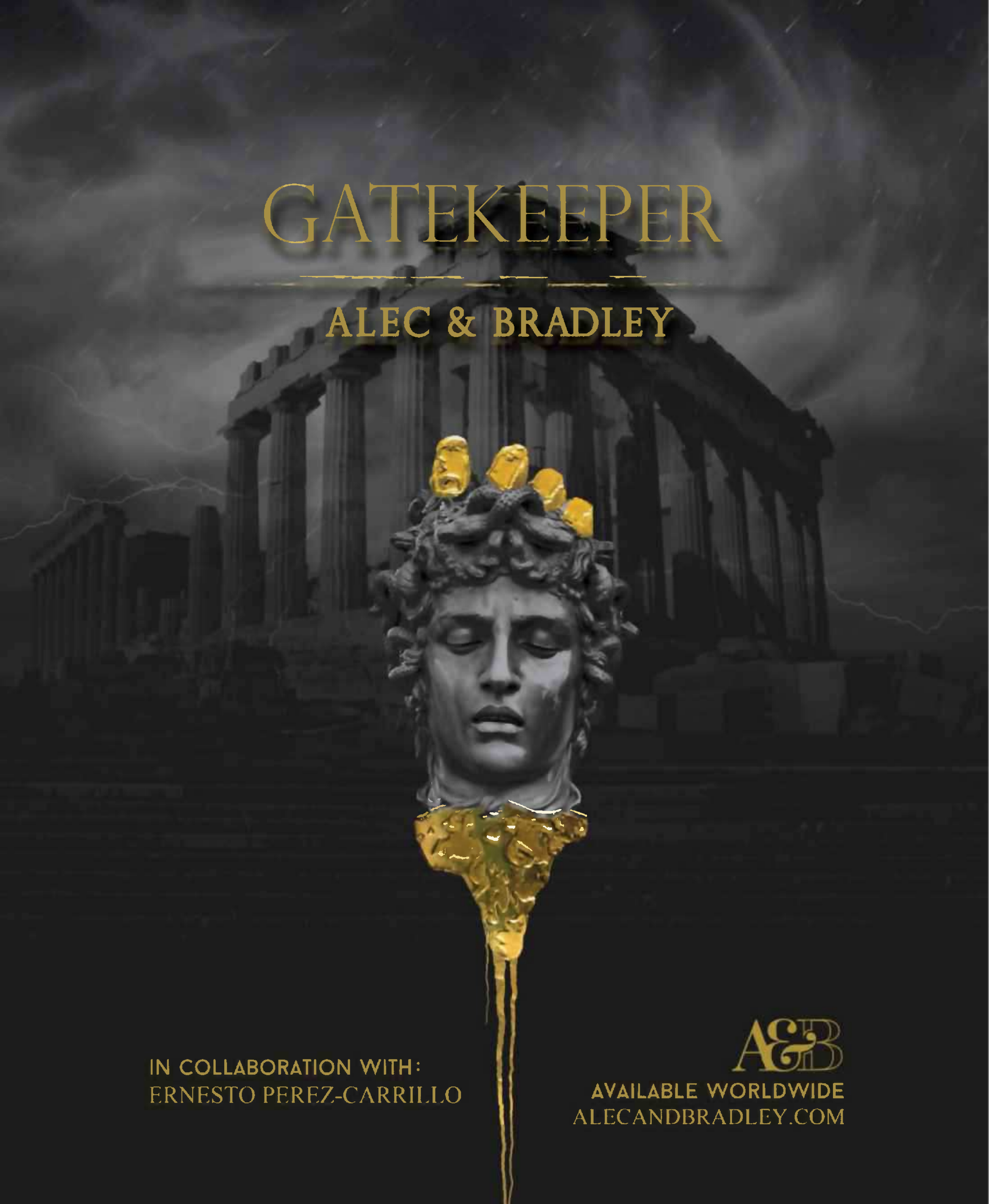
Highland Park 15 was intended to be limited when it was first released, but demand kept the Sherry-aged dram around. Now, it is officially discontinued, but has been replaced by a whisky of the same age called Fire Edition, with 100 percent Port cask maturation. A Norse legend of rebirth inspired the name, and the taste is one of spice paired with vanilla, cocoa, orange peel and tart plums.

Scotland's highest elevation distillery, the Dalwhinnie, makes a 15 that is a soft Highland malt matured mainly in ex-Bourbon casks with some Sherry influence. It smacks of honey, heather, toffee and pear. The Glenlivet 15 is made by folding in a portion of whisky aged in Limousin oak sourced from France. More porous than American wood, it relinquishes cinnamon and almonds into floral and fruity malt.

Happy 15th birthday, Scotland.

—Jack Bettridge

JEFF HARRIS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Black Is Back

When the 36th America's Cup kicks off with World Series races in Sardinia next April, the crew of the Challenger of Record, Luna Rossa AC75, will be outfitted with Panerai's new Luna Rossa Challenger Submersible ($21,600, top right). The watch reflects the high-tech design of the racing yacht with its lightweight, durable Carbotech case. That same composite material (formed by bonding thin sheets of carbon fiber with polyether ether ketone) makes up Luna Rossa's mono-hull. Given the Submersible's innovative construction and contemporary color palette, Panerai proves that black is anything but basic.

After a long period when retro classics were the style, watch designers are looking to the future with sleek, modern blacked-out watches, underscoring lightweight, robust materials that advance the horological dark arts.

The brawny 47-mm Luna Rossa diver (water resistant to 300 meters) is an automatic GMT with heightened antishock features. In another nautical nod to the vessel, the dial is covered in Luna Rossa sailcloth.

Bell & Ross gave its skeleton BR-X1 chronograph the stealth treatment with a black PVD (physical vapor deposition) titanium and matte-black ceramic, 45-mm case with black rubber inserts. Limited to 250 pieces, the BR-X1 Phantom ($19,900, left) even has shade on the sapphire-crystal case back that reveals the calibre BR-CAL.313, an automatic chronograph movement with a signature X-shaped upper bridge. With so many dark layers, you may worry about legibility, but Super-LumiNova on the indices and skeletonized hands illuminate the time at night.

Carl F. Bucherer has expanded its Patravi ScubaTec dive range with a new design benefitting the Manta Trust charity, which protects manta ray habitats. The 44.6-mm Manta Special Edition ($7,200, bottom right) has a case made of black titanium complemented by bronze-colored accents, including a sketch of the animals on the dial and contrast stitching on the strap which is made from recycled PET bottles. Water-resistant down to 500 meters and equipped with a helium escape valve, the COSC-certified diver performs equally well on land or sea.

When it comes to the timeliest watch designs on the market today, black is the new black.

Visit bellross.com, carl-f-bucherer.com, panerai.com

—Laurie Kahle

Introducing Our New Podcast

Heaven Hill Distillery has been distilling and patiently aging American Whiskey for more than eight decades. Now, it's time to share the stories behind those whiskeys and the people who make them on our new podcast, *Tales from the Hill*. From our early days after the end of Prohibition through today's Bourbon boom, our podcast dives deep into the heritage of Heaven Hill Distillery, told by the people who know it best. Grab your favorite whiskey and listen now wherever you get your podcasts.

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Falconry

The first hurdle of falconry is the fear. A full-grown raptor rockets down from the sky to nail a landing by grasping your forearm in its razor-sharp talons. The next is disabusing yourself of the notion that these are extravagant pets for oil sheiks. This millennia-old art is actually a sport—and it's thriving in the United States.

Falconry is working in tandem with a bird of prey—an eagle, hawk, falcon or even an owl. Skilled falconers ramble through nature as their avian partners—don't call them pets, they're wild animals by law—fly alongside. The human's job is relegated to flushing out game (squirrels, jackrabbits and snakes) from the brush, so the bird can swoop down on it.

Getting a falconry license takes several years—typically by apprenticing with a master falconer and passing a written exam. But if you just want to experience the thrill of working with one of these magnificent raptors, a number of companies across the country will show you the basics. You skip the learning curve and the need to stock your freezer with rodents, reptiles or road kill to feed your bird. From the North American Falconers Association list of providers, I tried New England Falconry of Massachusetts.

But California is another popular state for falconry as vineyards owners have found that a few flybys by a hungry hawk will discourage pesky birds from gobbling grapes. One of them, Napa's Bouchaine Vineyards, offers occasional falconry experiences.

Among the most challenging aspects of the sport, after training a bird to trust you, is keeping it in fighting trim. "Weight is everything," explains New England Falconry's Ian Turner, as a handsome Harris Hawk grips his heavily gloved forearm. "Konrad weighed 670 grams this morning. If he was 690 I probably wouldn't have flown him. He'd think, 'I'm full enough, I don't need you guys.'"

Turner stresses that falcons and other birds of prey are never truly domesticated, nor would you want them to be. When it comes to taking down a squirrel—the critters have been known to bite off a careless hawk's toes in the struggle to survive—you want a bird that's all business.

Visit bouchaine.com, n-a-f-a.com and newenglandfalconry.com

—Ralph Gardner Jr.

SKY-BLUE IMAGES/STOCKSY

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Reserve

Agua Caliente, Rancho Mirage California

Not surprisingly, the long drive from Los Angeles to the Coachella Valley and Palm Desert, California, can be something of a thirsty slog during which a man might be forgiven for having visions of a tall drink and a smoke. Fortunately, the Pívat Cigar Lounge at the Agua Caliente casino resort, appearing on the horizon just before arrival is not a mirage, but a cigar and cocktail oasis in the middle of the desert.

Pívat, the brainchild of Agua Caliente COO Saverio R. Scheri III, a longtime cigar fan, can rival many cigar stores with its collection of 5,700 cigars in 44 brands along the wall of its walk-in humidor (private lockers available). Included are impressive selections from such well-known names as Padrón, Fuente, My Father, Illusione and Oliva. In a sense, the smoke esthetic here goes back some 3,000 years as the lounge is named for the term for smoking from the language of the Cahuilla Indians, who own the resort and traditionally consider taking tobacco a sacred rite. Two members of the tribal council are also cigar smokers.

The 700-square-foot room signals asylum for the tired smoker, not just with its towering ceiling, cushy leather seating and flawless ventilation system, but also with its cigar-friendly cocktail menu. Featured are drinks such as the Smokey Mary, an applewood-smoke-infused Bloody Mary, as well as a lineup of cocktails that have cigar-pairing suggestions.

As you make your way through a bar menu that includes filet mignon sliders, turkey jerky, king crab California roll, Wagyu beef and double chocolate cake you may begin to reconsider moving on to your final destination. After all, there's a large casino, a spa and fitness center with world-class services, and a pool with cabanas. Then there's The Steakhouse—deep not only in red meat but seafood. You can also see top entertainment acts in the Show Gallery and have access to golf at Indian Canyons. Why not check into one of the 342 rooms and just stay here?

Visit hotwatercasino.com

—Jack Bettridge

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For decades, Padrón smokers have shared with us the stories of special moments in their lives that have been distinguished by smoking one of our cigars. Striving to create great cigars worthy of such special times is our singular motivation, those moments shared with family and friends. The Padrón Family thanks you for your continued loyalty and trust in the Padrón name.

www.padron.com

The Waxed Jacket

You're canoeing downstream on a crisp fall day, spray splashing on your clothes. Or you're standing patiently in a duck blind at dawn, sipping at a flask as a persistent drizzle comes down. Or maybe you're just braving the wind on a train platform, awaiting the 6:32 express on your way to work. Whatever your predicament, a waxed-cotton jacket is the redoubtable, yet stylish protection against autumnal weather.

The classic is Barbour, born of the famously dank climate of northeast England where the maker has operated for 125 years. Originally made for such outdoor laborers as stevedores and fishermen, the water-resistant jackets soon caught on with sportsmen—hunters and the like as well as motorcyclists. (There's even a model called the Steve McQueen.)

Weather protection goes beyond the wax coating on the cotton fabric to include moleskin-lined, hand-warmer pockets, (some pockets are bellowed), a corduroy collar, throat flaps with closure and storm cuffs. The classic models (the Bedale, Beaufort, Border and Northumbria) have tartan linings. The fittings are all durable metal and the zipper works in both directions. The jackets are built to be part of your wardrobe for years, and when the wax coating inevitability wears, you can have it refinished.

The differences between most models revolve around length, intended use and pocket configurations (the Beaufort has a game pocket at the rear), but the Border has one important configuration for the guy who wears his Barbour to work. It's cut slightly larger to accommodate a business suit.

Visit barbour.com/us/

—Jack Bettridge

18+

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temi—Your Personal Robot

It's your usual work day: You comb your hair, drink your morning coffee, brush your teeth and bustle about the house. But in this scenario, you have a temi personal robot that follows you from room to room, reading the morning news or the day's weather forecast. Walking out the door, you leave your coffee cup with the temi, which returns it to the kitchen. When you get home, your faithful robot welcomes you and prompts you to make video calls to gather some friends. Once the guests are situated, whiskey in hand, temi makes the rounds, offering cigars from the box that rests on its shelf.

Designed to be an AI assistant, smart home hub and more, temi makes quite an impression, with its compact and streamlined design. The personal robot stands a little over three feet tall, topped with a 10-inch HD LCD screen. Temi boasts an impressive 20-watt sound system featuring two tweeters, two mid-range speakers and a built-in subwoofer with a rechargeable eight-hour battery life, allowing it to keep the party going for quite some time.

The robot uses the Alexa platform, which includes Amazon Music. But whereas most Alexa devices can only stay put, temi offers user tracking via two independent motors that allow it to move with you around the house, on both carpet or hardwood floors. Say "Hi, temi" and it recognizes your voice and finds you, using a facial recognition app. With a 360-degree laser system called LIDAR and 3-D mapping capabilities, temi can not only navigate through a busy floor plan, but can also learn and adapt to changes such as that new coffee table or couch. Because it saves locations, you can send it anywhere on the floor.

What is the price for realizing the childhood dream of commanding your own domestic droid a la "The Jetsons" or *Star Wars*? $1,999.

Visit robotemi.com

—Thomas Pappalardo

JEFF HARRIS

Audi e-tron

You don't expect snow in California in late May, but on the way to Lake Tahoe, the flakes keep falling larger and faster. And a few years ago, you wouldn't have expected an SUV to be powered by electricity. But our new 2019 Audi e-tron—one of a wave of battery-electric utes—feels pleasantly sure-footed as it winds through the twisty mountain pass.

A few aspects give the e-tron an advantage over gas vehicles in the snow. With its heavy batteries mounted under the floor, the battery-electric vehicle (BEV) has a lower center of gravity than the company's gas-powered Q8. That translates into the ability to slalom through the snowy corners like a professional skier. The battery pack also powers two motors, one on each axle, creating an all-wheel-drive system that further improves handling. And, with a combined output of 402 horsepower, Audi's first long-range BEV launches from 0 to 60 in a reasonably brisk 5.5 seconds. With a single-gear transmission, acceleration is immediate and incredibly smooth.

Unlike earlier battery-electric vehicles, Audi hasn't gone for weird head and taillights and jellybean curves to announce, "something's different." If anything, the e-tron reminds you of the Q8. The front-mounted charging port and the single-frame grille—largely closed off because BEVs don't demand as much air—are among the subtle differences. But the e-tron makes good use of the space that is normally used for the engine with the addition of a "frunk," (front trunk) and a surprisingly roomy interior. There's also no drivetrain tunnel running down the middle of the cabin.

If we have a complaint it's that e-tron's range (EPA-rated 204 miles per charge) doesn't quite measure up to the Jaguar I-Pace (235 miles) and Tesla's Model X (around 250). Still, e-tron offers more than what most Americans will normally use. And as more high-speed public chargers pop up, range becomes less relevant because it can regain 80 percent of its battery capacity in 30 minutes.

Another plus: the 2019 Audi e-tron starts at $75,795, but when you factor in the $7,500 federal tax credit it's actually a bit cheaper than the gas-powered Q8, and that could win over potential buyers who've been wondering whether it's time to plug in.

Visit audiusa.com

—Paul A. Eisenstein

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The Armor Experience

I pull on my helmet, snap the buttons of my olive-drab shirt and follow my squad leader's instructions as my fellow troopers and I march out of the hangar in single file to a waiting personnel carrier. As we pull out of the parking lot, closely followed by a Sherman tank and an M18 Hellcat tank destroyer, my first thought is "I can't believe I'm just a few miles from the Long Island Expressway."

I'm part of the Armor Experience, a military reenactment presented by the Museum of American Armor that makes you part of the action. As the armored vehicles roll through the countryside, it's easy to forget 2019 suburbia and place yourself in the imagined setting: 1944 Normandy, a few miles from the beaches about a week after D-Day. The coast is secure, but now it's time for Allied forces to push inland and drive the Nazis out of Fortress Europe. We see members of our platoon gathering intelligence from the French Resistance. All the tourists—like my son and I—watch from vehicles, taking part as costumed participants, even though our helmets are there for protection from wayward branches, rather than flying shrapnel. An army of volunteers is suited up for the more serious roles of tromping through the brush, with rifles in hand, and driving these amazing armored vehicles.

We pull into the open, and there's a German pillbox. Our guys open fire. The enemy fires back. After the pop-pop-pop report of small arms ammo (blanks, of course) there's a puff of smoke as an enemy mortar takes out the Sherman. The Hellcat opens up its 76-mm cannon in response, shooting a few rounds with a boom that makes me happy that I've put in my earplugs. (Spoiler alert: the Americans win.) We move on, triumphant and exuberant.

The Armor Experience lasts about two hours—from suiting up to rolling back into the compound—and requiress a mere $100 donation. If you've dreamed of seeing WWII vehicles on the prowl, this is for you. Afterward, you can tour the museum proper and eye these vehicles (and many more) up close, and query the knowledgeable staff about their details.

Visit museumofamericanarmor.com

—David Savona

MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ARMOR

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The Jonas Effect

Cigar lover Nick Jonas is in the midst of a very busy year, with several films, a hit album and a long-awaited reunion tour with his brothers

BY DAVID SAVONA

PORTRAITS BY DAVID NEEDLEMAN

Styling: Avo Yermagyan for Forward Artists

Grooming: Amy Komorowski for Forward Artists

SUIT: SSS WORLD CORP
WATCH: CHOPARD

PHOTO CREDIT: TK

It's late afternoon on a quiet block in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood. A man walks down the street, lifting a Cuban Cohiba to his mouth. This isn't a 50-something executive enjoying a puff on a warm afternoon, but a much younger man, with a thick head of black hair, an athletic build and a pair of narrowed, brown eyes that just can't be disguised by the unexpected presence of a cigar.

Two girls, who look to be about 20 years old, are walking by. They can't believe whom they've seen. "That's not him," says one, holding on tight to her friend, as if she might fall. "That's not him." She hides her head in her shoulder, a huge grin on her face.

Yeah, it's him.

Nick Jonas is only 26 years old (he'll turn 27 in September) but he's had this kind of effect on fans since he was a teenager, first as a member of the Jonas Brothers band, then as an acclaimed solo artist. He's also becoming a familiar sight on television and onscreen, with a prominent role in a film that was one of the biggest hits of 2017, grossing nearly $1 billion at the global box office. He's in the middle of a very busy year, featuring a reunion with his brothers that has already delivered a No. 1 hit, one of the year's best-selling albums and a world tour that will keep him on the road for half a year. He also has a pair of big-budget films coming out in November and December, including the World War II epic *Midway*, directed by Roland Emmerich. If that's not enough to keep him busy, he's also launching a Tequila brand, which debuts this fall.

There's a lot going on for Jonas, who has just left a photo shoot. But now it's time to smoke a cigar and have a drink. He moves upstairs from the street to a rooftop deck. The heat of the day has ebbed a bit, and he puts flame to the foot of that Cohiba, a Siglo VI. He takes a puff of the cigar, which despite his teen idol background, is a familiar move for him, for he's been smoking cigars for nearly nine years.

The aroma of a good cigar appealed to him long before he ever smoked one. During his first star turn with the Jonas Brothers, the boy band that sold millions of records and made him famous, some of the people working behind the scenes were cigar smokers, including Sean "Casper" Johnson, the brother of Tatuaje brand owner Pete Johnson. "I loved the smell," he says. When he was 18, he was in Louisiana, watching playoff football with a group of friends who were cigar smokers, and he decided it was finally time to give one a try. He didn't dip his toe in with a mild cigar either. He jumped right into the deep end of the cigar pool with a robust Ashton VSG from the Dominican Republic.

"A pretty aggressive first smoke," he admits, flashing the easy smile that has driven fans crazy for years. "I really enjoyed it. I just loved the taste." His appreciation went beyond the flavor—he also enjoyed hearing from the cigar smokers around him about the craftsmanship that went into hand-rolled cigars. And he soaked up that information. "I loved how passionate they were explaining it to me—that it's really an art and not just something to smoke," he says. "It's something I've become a real fan of." Jonas considers himself a student of cigars, absorbing information and trying new brands. He enjoys Fuentes, L'Ateliers, Aroma de Cubas and My Fathers, Camacho Corojos and a host of Cubans, with a preference for fatter ring gauges. When he's looking over a selection of smokes, he spies an Oliva Serie V Melanio. "It's one of my favorites to smoke with a cup of coffee," he says. For him, cigars are a preferred way to relax. "Sit down, let the world slow down a little bit," he says, "and enjoy a delicious cigar."

With his enduring image as a childhood star—especially known for piety—Jonas is hardly what many think of as a cigar smoker. "One of the things a lot of people say to me is: 'You're so young to like cigars.' It's a narrative that I'm aware of, and actually something that I love being able to speak to," he says, after taking another puff. "I think that cigars as a whole should be something that you share with friends, and there shouldn't be any barriers around who can enjoy them. I've been taught by some people who really know what they're talking about. They all say the same thing—it's up to you, how you want to enjoy your cigars. But by all means, just know what you're smoking, know when to smoke it, take a minute to let life slow down. No matter where you are, what you are doing, it's the thing that can help you take a breather. And no matter your age—you should be able to enjoy the process."

THIS PAGE: ZIP POLO BY REISS LONDON / SUIT AND COAT BY TODD SNYDER / SHOES BY GIUSEPPE ZANOTTI; OPPOSITE: NICHOLAS HUNT/GETTY IMAGES FOR TIDAL

Jonas in his comfort zone, on stage at the Barclays Center in October 2018. Jonas has been performing since his early teens.

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Reunited, and it feels so good. Nick, Joe and Kevin Jonas—the Jonas Brothers—performing in Carson, California, on June 1.

JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC FOR IHEARTMEDIA

Raised in Wykcoff, New Jersey, in a modest red house that was "full of music," Jonas grew up two doors down from the Wykcoff Assembly of God, the non-denominational church where his father Kevin Sr. served as pastor. Young Nick sang in church—and just about everywhere else. His first break came at age six when he launched into song at a hair salon while waiting for his mother Denise to get her hair done. "The perfect moment," he says. "Someone heard me sing and said 'You should go see this manager.'" Soon, Jonas was performing in such musicals as *Les Miserables*. "I had to grow up pretty fast in general because I was working in New York City," says Jonas, who was homeschooled. "My parents would drop me off at the stage door, you go off, and for the three hours at the show, you're treated as an adult."

His commute between Manhattan and Wykcoff was nearly an hour, without traffic, and it was on one of those long car rides that Nick's dad told him to try writing music. Eventually, with his father's help, he cut a CD, which ended up in the hands of David Massey, a recording executive who was then with Sony.

"He was the most brilliant, amazing little person," Massey told *Billboard* in 2016. "I went down [to the church] when we first met, and there was this tiny boy leading the entire congregation like it was a rock concert. I remember thinking he's a complete and utter star on every level, and we've been connected ever since."

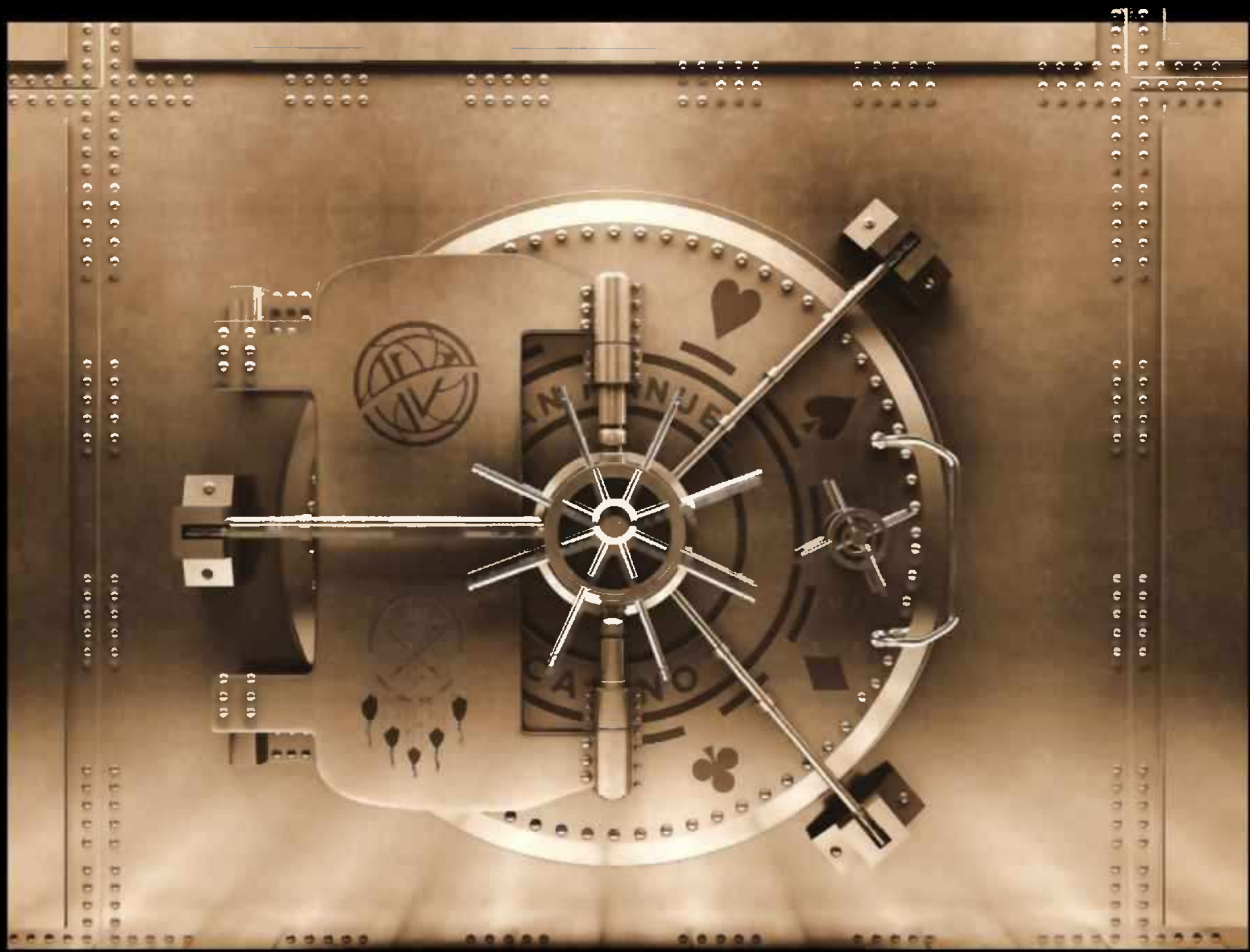
Massey signed Nick Jonas—age 11—without hesitation.

Back home in Wykcoff, Nick's older brothers Joe (who was 14 at the time) and Kevin (then 15) were interested in joining their little brother in the limelight. They began rehearsing music together, and eventually wrote a song called "Please Be Mine." They all met with Massey. "It quickly became a group project," says Nick, "and suddenly these three pastor's kids from New Jersey were a band." It was 2005, and the Jonas Brothers was born.

The early days were lean, with the band playing to modest crowds at high schools and malls, with long stretches in a van on the road between gigs. Nick developed an unquenchable thirst. At first, his brothers found Nick's frequent demands to stop for giant Diet Cokes (and the subsequent bathroom breaks) simply annoying. Then one day while he changed for a show, they were stunned at how skinny he looked. Something was wrong.

Such thirst and sudden weight loss are signs of diabetes, a condition in which the normal breakdown of sugars in the bloodstream by insulin is compromised. Prompted by the symptoms, doctors tested his blood sugar level, something that normally hovers around 100. A reading of 300 is considered very high, 400 is dangerous. Jonas' blood sugar was 917. "I was very close to a coma," he says. "Like a day away, if I hadn't gone to the hospital."

Nick was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes (once called juvenile onset), a condition in which the pancreas no longer supplies



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insulin. He was 13 years old, and it meant a lifetime of insulin dependence, either by injection or insulin pump. "I kept asking my parents—am I going to be ok? I was just so concerned that it was going to limit my ability to do all the things I wanted to do. I was scared—it's a big life change. But I found out very quickly it's a very manageable disease. As long as you're really diligent." (Today, Jonas is on a pump, giving him steady deliveries of insulin to mimic the human pancreas, and he speaks out about being a type 1 diabetic to help others deal with the disease.)

The Jonas Brothers went back on the road, and in 2006 released their debut album, *It's About Time*, which sold a disappointing 67,000 copies. Their label dropped them. Around the same time, the Jonas Brothers were getting the wrong kind of attention from their church.

While the Jonas Brothers certainly gave off an aura of innocence—they famously wore purity rings, symbols of virginity—they weren't a Christian band. Their father found himself at odds with the church, and had to resign from the ministry, which meant leaving their home, a parsonage owned by the church. "That was a strange time," says Jonas, his hand moving through his hair, a hint at the pain of the memory. "I think the idea of a church as a whole is a place where you feel welcome, you feel like you can feel safe. God should be synonymous with love, in my opinion, and in some cases the church can be synonymous with judgment," says Jonas. The entire family moved into a two-bedroom home, including all four children (Nick has a younger brother Frankie, 18, who is not a member of the band), Nick's parents and even his uncle.

The new house was tiny, with a basement cluttered with boxes from the move. "My escape during that time was just to write music," says Jonas. The band soon signed with Disney's Hollywood label, and the brothers found themselves aligned with a company expert at promoting younger acts and with a cable television outlet aimed at the youth culture. "The first time that Disney played our videos, we had never had that kind of exposure." The Jonas Brothers quickly became hot, with crowds going from the hundreds to the thousands, then a 2007 show in Texas with an audience so thick they needed helicopters to get around the traffic jam. "We couldn't really believe how rapidly it was changing," he says.

SUIT BY LANVIN / WATCH BY GIRARD-PERREGAUX

The Jonas Brothers became a phenomenon. They moved to Los Angeles, and soon found their pop music embraced by a young crowd, with young girls swooning over their look. Their 2007 album, *Jonas Brothers*, was a hit, as was the 2008 follow up, *A Little Bit Longer*. In an early appearance on MTV, each brother speaks a line or maybe two before the (nearly) all-female audience shrieks in delight. "We're all single," says Kevin, before getting drowned out by more howls. But the Jonas Brothers' star was showing some signs of cooling with their 2009 album, which didn't sell as well as the others, and Nick wasn't seeing eye-to-eye with his brothers. "Unless you push yourself to grow creatively and artistically, and expand to other age groups and demographics, it can be really tough to evolve. But that has to start with the music. We became stifled creatively, because we all wanted to prioritize different things." Kevin got married in 2009, which also caused a strain on the band. "We were all just in different places. Joe and I were not emotionally mature enough

Jonas and his wife Priyanka Chopra at the 2019 *Vanity Fair* Oscar Party.

to understand that when you find your person, and you begin your life with that person, that takes priority over everything. It has to. It should.

"We started operating in fear a little bit. We were so afraid that—much like the church experience, this gift that we were given—this life that was sort of ours now was going to be taken from us in some way...I think that was the beginning of the end."

The shows started to get smaller. "The end of the Jonas Brothers, in its first iteration, we put up a tour for venues that were about 400 or 500 seats," says Jonas. "They weren't all sold out. So it didn't end on a high."

Nick initiated the breakup. "I kind of ripped [off] that Band-Aid. At the time, I thought that would have been the best way to do it—which I now know it wasn't." After several days of mediated conversations, the brothers Jonas went their separate ways. The band had broken up. "It nearly complicated our relationship as family to an irreversible point. Thankfully, it didn't."

Jonas had already been testing the waters as a solo act. He stayed busy with his music, recording two solo albums and having his share of hits, among them "Jealous." He also moved ahead with his budding acting career, appearing in several seasons of the 2013 reboot of "Hawaii Five-0," along with four seasons of "Kingdom," where he played an MMA fighter. In 2017, he joined The Rock, Kevin Hart and Jack Black on the big screen in *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*, which did $962 million worldwide, ensuring a sequel, which comes out in December. The film *Midway*, about the seminal naval battle of 1942, has a $100 million budget, and sees Jonas as part of an ensemble cast that includes Woody Harrelson and Dennis Quaid. "I love acting because it's something that I feel keeps me on my toes. I'm never in a spot where I'm totally comfortable, which I like. I get on a set, and there's so many moving parts. You have to be on your game, but you have to be willing to adapt. I feel like I'm continuing to grow in that world."

But despite his undeniable solo star power, Jonas began to yearn for a return to the days on stage with his brothers. The trio saw one another at family functions, and Joe and Nick lived together in L.A. for a time, but the three had not really healed as brothers since their breakup. "I was starting to see some people commenting online on how eager they were to see the brothers play again," Jonas says. "And I still felt like I'm not feeling that magic we had as brothers." Nick first floated the idea of a reunion with Kevin, who readily agreed. "Joe," says Nick, "took some convincing."

Convincing Joe—who had formed a band called DNCE—happened in the perfect place for a cigar aficionado: Cuba. The brothers took a two-night trip to Havana in sultry July 2018, and that's where the comeback deal was cinched. "We went on an artist's visa to go and hear music, speak with some other musicians. Obviously I've wanted to go for a long time, being a lover of cigars," says Jonas. "I didn't anticipate how inspiring it would be. And not just from the aspect of drinking great rum and smoking great cigars, but the culture, the music the history."

Cuba is a sauna in the summer, but Jonas didn't care. For him, it was a dream trip. He and his brothers puffed away on cigars—Joe is an avid cigar smoker, and Kevin likes to smoke on occasion, says Nick—and at the La Casa del Habano at Club Habana, the trio got a lesson in cigarmaking. "I was terrible," Jonas says. "I'm

Jonas enjoys Tequila, and he recently joined with John Varvatos (left) to create the Villa One brand.

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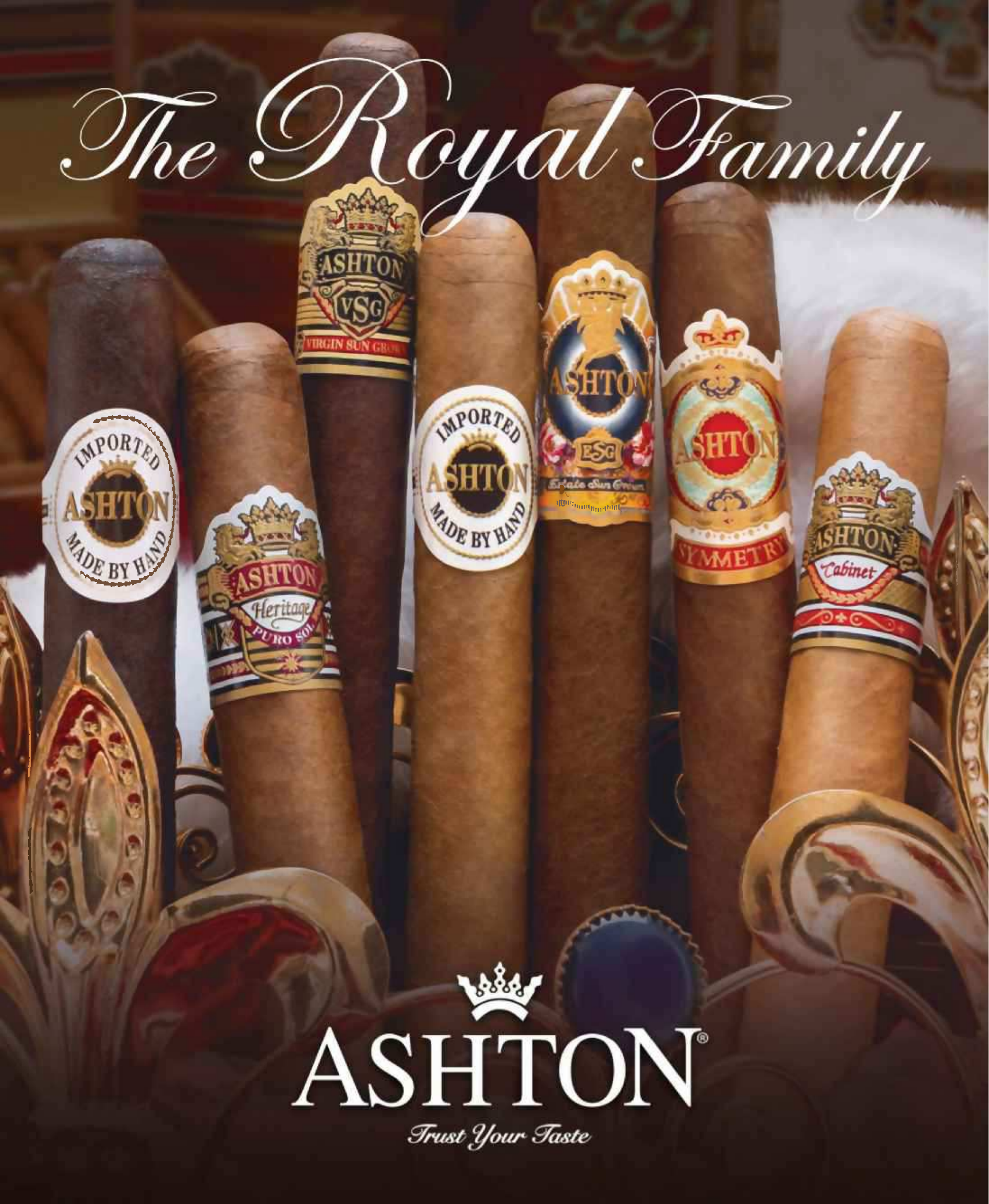
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going to stick to smoking them." They dined at La Guarida, stayed at a private home and smoked cigars everywhere. "Nothing beats smoking a Cuban cigar in Cuba," he says. "Everywhere we went, they would just bring out a tray of incredible cigars. It was special."

The three ended up in the home of Cuban musician Roberto Carlos, where they listened to music, and joined in. "One of the most amazing jazz musicians I had ever seen," says Jonas. "We went to his home, through one of those tiny, narrow streets. He has this keyboard set up, and this guy playing bass with him, and a couple of congas. He let us get on the congas and play with him. It was an incredible experience." After, in a courtyard, the brothers began playing some of their old songs in the open air, and that was the moment they all agreed to get back together. They began recording a new album: *Happiness Begins*, which went on sale in June and debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200.

The comeback showcased a different Jonas Brothers: older, more mature, and definitely un-single. The onetime teenagers are now in their 20s and 30s, their purity rings replaced by wedding rings. Nick married Priyanka Chopra in 2018; the 37-year-old actress and singer is one of the biggest celebrities in her native India, and she has even more followers on Instagram than her husband (43 million vs. his 26 million, the most of any Jonas Brother). Joe married "Game of Thrones" star Sophie Turner in May, in a Las Vegas ceremony officiated by an Elvis impersonator, and Kevin has been married to his wife Danielle for nearly a decade.

"I love to sit down with friends, talk about life and light up a beautiful cigar."

The wives are now a part of the Jonas story, and they feature heavily in the video for "Sucker," the breakout hit of the new Jonas Brothers album. The video, with over-the-top costumes and performances by all three couples, syncs perfectly with the catchy tune. "We knew that context needed to be given about where we are now. And I think the biggest piece of that puzzle is those three incredible women who stand by our side," says Jonas. "And they stole the show in our video." It has been nominated for MTV's Video of the Year. "We've been saying if we win the video of the year, the ladies have to go up and accept it on our behalf, because they absolutely stole the show."

He takes a sip of Tequila from a rocks glass with a slice of orange, sparking conversation of yet another passion that's keeping him busy. While he eagerly enjoyed the rums of Cuba when he was in Havana, Jonas is an avowed Tequila drinker, and he's making that passion his business. He's partnered with clothing designer John Varvatos to create Villa One Tequila, which is coming out this fall from the Stoli Group.

He and Varvatos had met at a dinner party. "We connected immediately. We talked for a couple of hours that first night, then I was working in a studio about four blocks from here, and I called him in to hear some music." The two started drinking Tequila together, then designed a cologne John Varvatos JVxNJ. A member of Jonas' management team connected with Stoli, and from the discussions the idea for a Tequila emerged. After a trip to Mexico, where Jonas harvested agave and saw the distillery, he was all in. "I always want to be a sponge, whether it's Tequila, or cigars, I want to be a student and learn as much as I can. We started to build a blend we liked....John and I speaking two or three times a week to get it right."

With all these projects, it's hard to imagine Jonas has time for anything else. But aside from playing golf and smoking cigars, he's not one to indulge in downtime. "Even now, I have to force myself to take time off and take a deep breath. I really enjoy what I do. I feel very fortunate. I think there are really a lot of very talented people in the world who haven't been given the same opportunity that I've been given. So I think if I'm sitting at home watching Netflix, I'm not doing my best." He's even started to write his own plays and screenplays.

No matter what's keeping him busy, the cigars are there to help him relax. "When I'm working [I smoke them] maybe twice a week," he says. "If I'm on a holiday, on vacation, I'll smoke pretty often. And I enjoy taking that time to smoke. And luckily my voice doesn't get affected in any way."

Jonas has cigars that he saves for special occasions, and the ones he knows that work for the golf course. He doesn't expect everybody to appreciate them the way he does—but he celebrates his right to enjoy them as he pleases. "I know it's not for everybody," he says.

The sun begins to slip behind the buildings along the west side of Manhattan. The Cohiba, once big, has shrunk to nearly the nub, slowly, ash by ash. "I'm passionate about it," Jonas says after another puff, savoring the last of the smoke. "I love to sit down with friends, talk about life, light up a beautiful cigar and kind of have this as a constant among us. And luckily I've found a lot of friends who are also passionate about it." ❖

SUIT BY LANVIN / WATCH BY GIRARD-PERREGAUX

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The Crypto King

John Caruso is only 28, but he has made hundreds of millions of dollars trading Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies

BY MICHAEL KAPLAN
PORTRAITS BY STEPHEN DENTON

JOHN CARUSO is slightly disappointed. After 13 hours of playing blackjack for $5,000 to $10,000 per hand at Aria Las Vegas, he is ahead by $140,000. "Not the $800,000 I was hoping for," he says. "But I can't complain."

Exiting the casino, he and his crew pile into limos for the two-mile-drive to Signature LAS, a private section of McCarran International Airport. Then it's a short flight to Scottsdale, Arizona, where Caruso's company is headquartered. They step aboard an Embraer Legacy 500, a $20 million jet that seats 12 and can exceed speeds of 500 miles per hour.

As always, a pair of bodyguards accompany Caruso, a fair-skinned and slender 28-year-old. Skylar and Scott, former Marines, are well-trained in all sorts of lethal arts. Dressed in black, they exude a degree of menace that automatically keeps most bad actors at bay. Their presence seems like overkill.

Then, as the plane ascends, Caruso reaches into his pocket for a metallic USB flashdrive. At first glance, the two-inch-long device looks like what you would find at any workplace in America. It usually holds photographs or documents. But this one is different. It has a little screen containing a string of numbers.

"This is about $20 million," he says as he slides it across the table. "It's actually a modified USB, known as a cold storage wallet, specifically designed for holding crypto."

Welcome to the high-flying world of cryptocurrency, the digital form of money through which an elite cadre of traders like Caruso have become incredibly wealthy in less time than it takes to get an MBA. Caruso deals in high valuations of a commodity that is anonymous and notoriously vulnerable to heists. (Vigilant about security, Caruso has managed to keep his stash unmolested.) His friends call him Crypto King, in recognition of his managing some $379 million in cryptocurrency, including Bitcoin, the best-known version. More than half the money is his.

Most nights, between 11 P.M. and 3 A.M., Caruso is in his element. He works out of a stone quiet, dimly lit home office in Scottsdale. It has a single window and a balcony. He calmly toggles his attention between three monitors. Behind him, covered by a painting, is a trapdoor built into the wall. "In case of a break-in," he says, adding that it came with the house. A more obvious door leads from this room into his bedroom.

He trades 15 different forms of crypto, hopping in and out of 30 some-odd trades per session. His office is his favorite spot to operate, but he also works on the road. In June, during a trading day that began on a laptop in a Manhattan hotel room and ended over lunch at Nello, he had his largest return ever. "I wanted to make a big trade and push the envelope," says the Long Island native. He executed five trades to buy $100 million in Bitcoin. "That day, Bitcoin went from 12,000 to over 13,000. I made $45.7 million. It was a special day," he says. "But, to be honest, I could have lost $10 million."

He's finished in the red before, saying his biggest per-session loss was $4 million. Nevertheless, he handled that day with the same equanimity that characterized his $45 million gain. "Everybody else was going crazy and it was almost awkward to watch," he says of the win. "But I retired early like I always do. It was a long day. I just watched TV and fell asleep."

Two years from turning 30, Caruso has already become a private-jet connoisseur. One day earlier, following a session of blackjack at Aria, he leaves the casino's high-limit room with a leather bag containing some $200,000 in cash slung over his shoulder, ready to look over a potential new plane. Coming along is the team from Zima Digital Assets—the name stands for Zero Is My Algorithm—his hedge fund that specializes in cryptocurrency. There's business partner and CEO Zach Salter; Michael Giordano, the chairman of the company; his security detail and his fiancée Ana. Salter and Ana are also in their 20s. Giordano is the elder statesman of the group, at 40.

The aircraft can seat eight, with a small door that would require

John Caruso, known as the Crypto King, always travels with a flash drive—typically one loaded with millions of dollars worth of cryptocurrency.

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Success for Zima Digital Assets has allowed its leaders (left to right) CEO Zach Salter, Caruso and chairman Michael Giordano to indulge in exotic cars.

most people to crouch when they enter. "You can stand in here without ducking," Caruso says to Ana. "That's cute, baby." Then he finds out that it can't fly from Los Angeles to New York without refueling. That's a deal-breaker. "Right now," he says, "we need a second plane that can go coast-to-coast. That's where things are at."

"A USB is always with Crypto King," says Giordano, who comes from a background in private jet management and trading on Wall Street. "At all times, he is either in a position or moving out of a position or possibly looking to get into a position. That's why he has security. He can't just walk around with that kind of money on his body. I once told a couple people at NASDAQ to get out of the elevator because I didn't want them in there with him."

Cryptocurrency values can swing wildly, which necessitates a need to be nimble. Unlike traditional stocks, they lack decades of history and intrinsic value. (To read all about the nuts and bolts of cryptocurrency, see the story on page 74.) Caruso trades in a rapid-fire style that is a challenge for most others in the space. "I look for micro opportunities," he says, adding that he eschews long-term positions, which are the norm. "I make a point or two quickly, arbitraging when possible, and get out. . . . I'm usually in a position for two hours max and I have a stop loss of four percent. There have been years in which I've had triple-digit gains."

Favoring giant Fendi sunglasses, torn designer jeans, cashmere hoodies and high-fashion sneakers, the Crypto King looks like a real-life, less-cocky, unfailingly polite version of Bobby Axelrod from "Billions." An Axe for the virtual-cash age, he has a $50,000 Rolex on his wrist.

Back at Aria, Salter goads Caruso into playing a game of pool for $10,000. They are in the casino's sleek, duplex Sky Villa suite, which has a gorgeous billiards table on the second floor. They played last night for the same sum, and Caruso won. The two each drop a $10,000 banded stack of hundreds onto the rail of the table.

Caruso wasn't always a high roller, gambling for sums that make others weak. Early on, despite his wealth, he stayed low-key, living in his parents' home on Long Island. "I was completely introverted," he says. " But introversion is the key to my success. And I knew that if I went broke I could start over again. Besides, I didn't need to make $50,000 a month so I could go out every night."

Salter breaks, and manages to win back his $10,000. He celebrates by spreading hundred-dollar bills on the table and posing for selfies. Caruso shrugs it off, munching on a leftover chicken finger, the remnants of a room-service feast that most kids would kill for: spaghetti, fries, chicken fingers, steak and a couple of big desserts. "I eat like an eight-year-old," he says with pride. "Bring me the children's menu every time and I am really happy."

Caruso was only 17 when he started his money-making ascent, skipping college and going right into finance. He began with a five-figure sum that he deployed for day trading. On top of that, he picked up small chunks of equity in exchange for making business introductions via family connections. "My parents both worked in finance. I went to La Salle Military Academy, was in every advanced math class and saw numbers in my head from an early age. I never had to do math on paper," he says. "To me, it wasn't about having a [diploma] showing that I could learn an advanced concept. It was what my bank account looked like."

That account grew fat quickly. He claims he had accrued nearly $1 million by the time he was 19. He began to trade traditional currencies on the foreign exchange (Forex) market, while slipping in and out of positions with high-risk pink-sheet and penny stocks. One year later, he says his bankroll had swollen to $4 million.

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In 2011, he took his first dive into cryptocurrency. "A friend told me about it. My original investment was buying $96,000 worth of Bitcoin," he says. One Bitcoin sold for 30 cents at the start of 2011. It climbed to a high of $31.91 before closing 2011 at $4 and change. Over the next few years, he put in an additional $2 million. "I thought I would get a round-trip ticket of up and down," he says. "But the ride turned out to be vertical." Albeit, with serious turbulence.

For the burgeoning currency, a $96,000 purchase in 2011 was huge, and not particularly easy to negotiate. "I bought it from the private side of the market. It came from a miner," Caruso says, referring to so-called Bitcoin miners who create the coins by solving increasingly complex algorithms on the blockchain, which logs all of the coin creations. "He was serious enough to have more coin than he knew what to do with but no cash. He sold it for six- or seven- or eight-percent off the value."

Caruso's high-risk background in pink sheets and Forex eased the transition into trading crypto. But early sales, particularly those in the six-figure range, still had to be made hand to hand. The process was clunky, usually executed in a lawyer's office (to maximize the legitimacy of dealing in a currency that was murky at best and favored by criminals at worst) and lacking the lightning-fast opportunities he desired.

In 2016, things changed. "It became a real market," Caruso says. "Speed and safety and methods for trading large sums improved. Exchanges expanded. Opportunities came up to short crypto and to quickly move in and out of positions. It got safer and more people got involved. That was when I realized I could truly trade the market. There may have been 20 or 30 people around the world with the same idea. I figured that I would really be able to crush. And that's what I did."

"I'm usually in a position for two hours max...there have been years in which I've had triple-digit gains."

Between 2009 and 2017, Caruso says his wealth spiked to more than $100 million. (During that time, the value of Bitcoin soared. What could be had for 30 cents a coin in 2011 rose above $19,000 in late 2017, then came back down to a few thousand per coin. At press time, one coin was worth roughly $10,000.) He went from living with his parents to a $17,000-per-month pad on Central Park South in Manhattan to a ritzy condo in the Sunny Isles section of Miami to a 30,000-square-foot house in the affluent Paradise Valley neighborhood of Scottsdale. (He relocated there full-time in 2017 to be close to a relative who was dealing with health issues.)

For all the money and moving, though, his lifestyle is downright ascetic. He avoids drugs and drink—he's been keeping his friends sober by putting up $100,000 no-alcohol bets with each of them—and finds entertainment in traveling to auto-racing schools. On the side, he buys and sells super-cars. Early on, he plunked down $160,000 for a Lamborghini. His last car buy was a $1 million Ferrari F12tdf. "I drove it six miles, got the speed up to 120 and held onto it for three days," he says. For fun, he takes luxe vacations and relaxes while gambling.

Caruso met Salter—who had been in the business of marketing luxury real estate—soon after checking out Scottsdale in 2016. A bit of a social butterfly around town, Salter introduced Caruso to his stylishly affluent crowd and convinced him to take on local investors. Suddenly, almost by accident, the two fast-friends were running a cryptocurrency hedge fund. They came up with the name Zima and focused on the newly vibrant market.

"He's all IQ and I am all EQ," says Salter. "Most of the individual investors have come from my group. I work on retention, relationship management and diverting people who are going to be a distraction. Our motto right now is 'no new friends.'"

After a night in Arizona, members of the Zima crew fly to New York for a series of meetings, hoping to convince institutional investors to kick in the kind of money that will allow Caruso to leverage his strategies and push around the market. After two days of successful meetings, the guys convene for a celebratory dinner at Daniel, one of the finest restaurants in America. Chef Daniel Boulud rolls out the red carpet for Zima. But Caruso is absent—on the way over, he took one look at the menu before realizing that foie gras and langoustines were not for him. He scored a slice of pizza and promised to swing by for dessert.

Then he is rebuffed at the door. Daniel maintains a strict jacket policy. He shakes his head at the offer of a loaner jacket and gets back into the Escalade that brought him there. Concerned, Giordano has a chat with Boulud. It is agreed that an exception will be made. The Crypto King saunters to a center table, jacket-free, pride intact, and is brought a dessert slathered in chocolate.

He's happy, and willing to talk about future goals. But there's only one: He wants to hit his number. "There've been a lot of times when I could have cashed out and never had to worry about money again," he says. "But I've always had a number in my head, the number I want to reach, and that number is a billion dollars."

It's vast, but like all numbers that go through Caruso's head, this one doesn't give him pause. "I am going to make it and I think I am going to make it soon. I'd like to do it by 30." He smiles, and shrugs his shoulders. "I think I have a shot." ❖

Michael Kaplan is a Cigar Aficionado *contributing editor.*

BY BRIAN J. O'CONNOR

Crypto 101

Deciphering the world of virtual currency

The first workable cryptocurrency emerged in 2009 when Bitcoin hit the market. Since then, the development of virtual currencies has exploded, and today, there are nearly 2,700 different cryptocurrencies being traded around the world, with nearly $49 billion worth changing hands in a single day. With a total value of more than $276 billion, the global cryptocurrency market is worth more than the gross domestic product of Greece, Egypt or Finland.

Even Facebook wants to get in on the act. In June, the social media giant announced a plan to create its own cryptocurrency, Libra, for purchasing goods and services through a restricted network that could reach millions of "unbanked" people in developing countries. The concept is something like the next generation of PayPal. So far, regulators and lawmakers are skeptical, given Facebook's past behavior and security issues.

The granddaddy of all cryptocurrencies, Bitcoin, traded at more than $10,000 in late August. Five years ago, it sold for as little as $750. If you had invested $75,000 for 100 Bitcoin then you would have a $1 million profit at the time of this writing. But making money in cryptocurrencies isn't so easy.

"REAL MONEY" OR INVESTMENT?

Even though there are thousands of cryptocurrencies, they're all still a long way from functioning like actual money. Right now, cryptocurrency is a speculative asset, like buying the stock of one company that makes one product and hoping that it finds a permanent market. And not every cryptocurrency is going to be a winner. In early August, XRP, the third-largest cryptocurrency, was changing hands at $0.31. The last time Bitcoin traded at that level was January 2011.

There's also been a crypto mania in the past few years, with everyone jumping on the bandwagon, offering cryptocurrency exchanges, trading cryptocurrency options and hedge funds that trade cryptocurrencies. All of that has traditional investors sniffing that this is nothing more than a bubble, much like the Internet boom of the late 1990s.

That's led to a lot of volatility in cryptocurrency prices. Bitcoin's price ranged from $350 to $1,242 in a single month during 2013. It crashed to $200 in early 2015. The bubble blew up in 2017, with prices starting the year around $800 and climbing to an all-time high of $19,783.06 in mid-December. Less than a week later, Bitcoin lost a third of its value in 24 hours and, by February 2018, was down to $6,200.

This extreme volatility makes it tough to treat cryptocurrency like real cash. It's hard to justify spending $100 in Bitcoin today for something from Overstock.com—one of the few places that actually takes Bitcoin payments—when that currency might be worth $300 a month from now, leaving you stuck with one highly overpriced blender. At the same time, it's hard to leave Bitcoin in your digital wallet when it doesn't pay interest or dividends and could very well lose half its value in a matter of days.

Think about it: Do you want to end up like Laszlo Hanyecz? He made the first real purchase with Bitcoin when it was valued at less than one-tenth of a cent in 2010, paying 10,000 Bitcoin for two pizzas in Jacksonville, Florida.

A year later, the Bitcoin Laszlo shelled out for those pizzas was worth $58,000.

HOW IT WORKS

Unlike other currencies, cryptocurrency isn't backed by the taxing ability of an entity such as the federal government, or any kind of commodity, such as gold, oil or bushels of wheat. Instead, it's based on supply and demand regulated by blockchain, the technology underlying cryptocurrencies.

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Blockchain is the latest buzzword in technology that promises to do everything from eliminate fiat currencies and central banks to control the settings on your Internet-connected toaster. The central element of blockchain is that it eliminates middlemen—no more bankers charging transaction fees, no more clerks making typos, no scammers creating fraudulent transactions, no records lost in fires, no censors or gatekeepers locking you in or blocking you out and charging a hefty fee for access. To do so, blockchain eliminates gigantic, elaborate paper trails and the administrators who control the records.

The idea behind blockchain is a simple one that predates computers and the Internet: A widely distributed network of shared ledgers that allows everyone in that network to permanently retain, review and verify all transactions. This "distributed ledger technology" concept is perfect but in reality, cryptographers and scholars have struggled with how to protect and verify chains of data going back to the Roman Empire.

The quandary was finally solved when the concept that would become blockchain popped into the mind of physicist Scott Stornetta one day in 1990, as he stood in line at a Friendly's ice cream store in Morristown, New Jersey. Stornetta's lightbulb moment was the notion that instead of relying on a central source of protected data, a secure system would consist of an interconnected system of ledgers that would create a daunting hurdle of linked records far too big for anyone to overwrite, alter or insert fraudulent information.

Working at the Bellcore research center spun off from Bell Labs, Stornetta and cryptographer Stuart Haber outlined a system of data blocks where each block includes a code called a "hash" that sums up its data. The hash of each blockchain is included in the next data block, creating an unending historical chain where every single piece of data would need to be altered to create a fraudulent entry. This domino effect would serve as the security guarantee for all transactions.

Researchers continued to struggle with creating digital blockchains until 2008, when an individual or group of developers working under the pseudonym "Satoshi Nakamoto" used shared ledger technology to introduce Bitcoin, a peer-to-peer electronic cash system. Distributed over a worldwide network of computers, this decentralized cryptocurrency added digital technology and computer-generated consensus protocols to make each block in the chain dependent on the contents of the previous block, all the way back to the original block of data.

The first Bitcoin transaction took place January 12, 2009. Since then, Bitcoin transactions surged to more than 300,000 per day.

INVESTING IN CRYPTOCURRENCY

If you want to try to make money on those transactions, there are two approaches: trading and mining. Mining Bitcoin is the process of adding new blocks of data to the chain by solving complex math problems that are rewarded with new Bitcoin. Ethereum, Litecoin or Zcash also are mined. Miners use specialized, powerful computers to guess the answer, which helps make the chain more secure and, as of today, earns them 12.5 Bitcoin. Recently, the odds of successfully solving such problems was 1 in 6 trillion, making this a highly specialized undertaking.

For something easier, you can trade Bitcoin or other cryptocurrencies, much like trading a stock, though not something like a Dow Jones mainstay, but more like a penny stock. Your first step is to buy your currency, usually through a currency exchange, such as Coinbase, although there are several others. These connect to your bank account. Charges for trading typically involve a fee plus a percentage of your transaction, ranging from 0.5 percent to 5.9 percent. If you're buying Bitcoin, you can buy fractional shares, down to .001 Bitcoin.

You also can get cryptocurrencies on the Robinhood.com investing platform, which offers commission-free trades. Another source is one of the 5,300 ATMs offering crypto, which are listed at CoinATMRadar.com, or through peer-to-peer exchanges such at Bitquick.co, Bisq.network, LocalBitcoins.com and others.

You'll also need to set up a crypto wallet to store your currency. There are virtual, cloud-based wallets offered through exchanges, and as apps for smartphones. Because they are software-based operations, wallets have been hacked, and some companies offering wallets have gone belly-up, resulting in losses. In March, a Japanese exchange lost $32 million in one hack to a virtual wallet. For more security, some investors turn to a hardware-based crypto-wallet that functions like a thumb drive, such as Trezor, SecuX, Ledger Nano and others, which you need to have on hand to make any transactions.

There are nearly 2,700 cryptocurrencies, with a total value of nearly $49 billion changing hands every day.

From there, trading Bitcoin, Ethereum, Litecoin, XRP or any other cryptocurrency is like trading individual stocks. Based on the volatility factor, a short-term strategy that takes advantage of the daily ups and downs in values would be less risky than a long-term buy-and-hold strategy, such as you'd take with an indexed mutual fund.

If you're hoping to trade Bitcoin and other currencies through a broker, you're out of luck. So far, the Securities and Exchange Commission has vetoed the idea of allowing Exchange Traded Funds that track crypto currency to be created. Grayscale Investments has created two investment trusts that trade Bitcoin and Ethereum that can be traded through brokers. Besides fees, both trusts tend to trade at a premium, meaning that shares of the trusts often are more expensive than the underlying currency.

Whether Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies are the future or a fad, the fact is that people are making—and losing—money trading in them right now. If you decide to ride the cryptocurrency wave, hold on. It's bound to be a bumpy trip. ❖

Brian J. O'Connor is an author and financial journalist based in the Metro Detroit area.

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Mexico's GOLF MECCA

Surrounded by stunning ocean waters and blessed with near-perfect weather, Los Cabos is the ideal spot for a luxury golf vacation

BY JEFF WILLIAMS

The long cart ride up the mountain, an ascent of several hundred feet that's more like trekking than golf, brings you to one of the most spectacular summits in the game, the fifth tee at Quivira Golf Club. This spot is the very pinnacle of golf in Los Cabos, Mexico. The short par 4 is cut into the side of the mountain, like a balcony on a cruise ship. As you stand on the tee with the Pacific Ocean below you and the wind rustling your hair, you can be excused for thinking that you are playing golf in the kingdom.

In this case, it's Jack Nicklaus' kingdom, for it was the Golden Bear who was at the center of the golf movement in Los Cabos in the early 1990s. Nicklaus has six courses in the area, and he remains central to this region, which has emerged as one of the world's hot spots for golf development. Quivira is his latest Cabo masterpiece.

Sitting at the southernmost end of the 760-mile-long Baja Peninsula, Mexico's Los Cabos region has grown from a sleepy fishing spot into a high-end golf destination with an impressive array of courses and luxury resorts. Many of the tracks have been created by

BRIAN OAR

The picturesque but well-guarded sixth at Quivira Golf Club in Los Cabos, Mexico. Danger has never looked so beautiful.

QUIVIRA

Palmilla has three nine-hole courses by Jack Nicklaus, including Ocean Course (top) and Arroyo (above, left). Today, the Golden Bear has six courses in the area, more than any other designer.

some of the biggest names in golf design. Tom Fazio, Robert Trent Jones Jr. and Greg Norman have all opened courses here, along with big-name players such as Davis Love III and Fred Couples. It's also the home of the first course designed by Tiger Woods. Today, there are 14 golf courses in Los Cabos, with two more in the works and one under renovation. Cabo is in the midst of a major golf boom.

Golf in Los Cabos is all about the grandeur of the desert landscape surrounded by the Pacific Ocean on the west and the Sea of Cortez to the east, with the Sierra de la Laguna mountain chain running through the middle. The air here is warm, but comfortably dry most of the year, so breaking a sweat here is a rarity. You'll find yourself reaching for the cell phone to snap shots of the spectacular vistas and there is an aesthetic here that carries from course to course, hole to hole. The courses are tough, and you might struggle to break par, but you won't care.

You could start where it began, at the 27 holes at Nicklaus' Palmilla, which he opened in 1992. At Palmilla, you will get a complete schooling on what golf in Cabo means as you play through the desert, across the sand washes and along craggy outcroppings as you move down to the sea. Or look upon the fifth hole of the Mountain Nine at Palmilla. The par 4 is defined by the arroyo that snakes across the hole, carved through the landscape. You need to carry your tee shot across the arroyo, then play your approach shot across the very same obstacle. Hitting two safe balls here, even if you don't make par, is a memory-making experience.

"I love this place," Nicklaus said about Cabo, standing on the grounds of Quivira when it opened in 2016. Quivira is over the mountain to the west of the city of San Lucas, located practically on the very southernmost point of the Baja Peninsula. "I used to come down here and fish and now I come down here and work. We introduced the game of golf to Cabo, and it exploded."

The rise of golf has changed things considerably in Cabo. "I'm known by most of my friends as the guy who ruined Cabo," Nicklaus said. "I showed up at the airport in the '60s with 20 bucks, a pair of sandals and a T-shirt and you could spend a week. Now, you can't get out of the airport for that. My friends said when you added golf, it changed the whole economic structure of Cabo."

Golf pro Brad Wheatley has been a part of the Los Cabos scene since the early '90s. "When I came down here, I think we had two or three flights from the U.S. that came in two or three times a week. Maybe a total of five international flights a week. Now, we have something like 47 international flights a day. The place has just taken off."

Wheatley was the pro who opened Nicklaus' Palmilla facility, and now will open Norman's Rancho San Lucas course. He's fallen in love with the Cabo lifestyle. "Some of the best weather in the world," he says. "Great golf, great fishing, great accommodations, great food scene. You are talking about an ideal combination of things."

The Dunes, designed by Love III, sits on a substantial amount of oceanfront property. "You're either playing toward the ocean, along the ocean or away from the ocean," says Love III. "True links land." The course, which undulates around the many sand dunes found near this part of the Pacific, demands forced carries over hazards to undulating landing areas. Even the practice facility here is grand, spread across 14 acres, with shaded seating areas flanked by picturesque walls of stone. (Like many of the finer Cabo courses, The Dunes is part of a private resort, so playing requires either membership or a hotel stay.)

Not all the golf in Cabo is on the ocean's edge. Diamante's El Cardonal, the first course designed by Tiger Woods, is a bit inland, carefully sculpted through arroyo country. It's more than 7,300

BOTTOM LEFT: LARRY LAMBRECHT; BOTTOM RIGHT: CARLOS TIRADO

CABO GOLF 101

GET THE BALL IN THE AIR

You won't find the fairways stretching right up to the tees on many holes in Los Cabos. You might think that you are in the land of the forced carry. You need to get your ball airborne here. With that in mind, it's important to play the correct tees. Try to be a hero and you might have to do the walk of shame and buy another dozen balls at the turn—at resort prices.

STAY TO PLAY

Most of the newer courses in Los Cabos are part of residential resort developments and are not open to the general public. Access to these courses can be gained by staying at specific hotels: figure on four figures a night in the higher season for very plush accommodations. (See story on hotels in Los Cabos, page 86.) Investing in a property is another way to gain access. Los Cabos has become a second-home destination for many Californians and Texans.

IT'S A DRY HEAT

It can get warm in Cabo, but it's rarely humid. That means you'll be comfortable when you play. Cabo is marvelous December through April, and the May and June shoulder season combines good weather with better deals. July and August are the hottest months, with the highest chances of rain.

CREATURE COMFORTS

Cabo courses are known for wonderful comfort stations serving food and drink. The Dunes course has a slider bar, built among the boulders like something out of "The Flintstones." Quivira has three, including one with a full bar serving freshly prepared tacos and enchiladas. And the best thing about all these comfort stations? They are gratis.

TOP RIGHT: MICHAEL O'BRYON

Greg Norman, who already has one course in Los Cabos, is working on the new Rancho San Lucas. "I had just perfect terrain to work with," he says.

yards from the tips, but five tee boxes—and choosing the correct tees to play from—opens it up to all types of players. "It would be nice to have all of us, dad, mom, kids, all play the same lines—different tee boxes but the same lines," said Woods at Cardonal before it opened in 2014. Woods' Oasis Short Course, which is also on the property, is an ideal place for children, one of few options in Cabo for kids. It also makes a great practice facility for adults looking to hone their short games.

First-time visitors will likely smile at the look of the generous fairways found on so many of Cabos' courses. Having big fairways in here is essential, given that the wind can get pretty sporty, especially in the spring.

"It gets extremely windy off the Pacific three or four months out of the year," says Greg Norman, who has more than 100 courses to his name. He designed the nine-hole Mission Course at Puerto Los Cabos, and is now finishing up work on a piece of land at Rancho San Lucas, from beachfront to dunescape to the mountains' edge. The Shark knows the importance of a big landing area here. "Our fairways have to be a lot broader," he says. "Holes into the wind you can't make too long, holes downwind you can't make too short."

> "I love this place. I used to come down here and fish, and now I come down here and work. We introduced the game of golf to Cabo, and it exploded." ***—Jack Nicklaus***

Norman hopes the first nine at Rancho San Lucas will be open by October, with the second nine opening some time after. "We have 13 holes that have a view of the Pacific Ocean," he says. "The long views are spectacular. I had just perfect terrain to work with."

The Dunes, designed by Davis Love III, is one of many superb and stunningly beautiful golf courses in Los Cabos. It has a 14-acre practice area, as well as a stately clubhouse (above).

On the other side of the Cabo cape, near the Sea of Cortez, is Costa Palmas, scheduled to open this fall, when the new Four Seasons is operational. The project also includes a substantial marina. "We're having a tremendous amount of fun with it," says Bruce Charlton, partner and lead designer for Robert Trent Jones Jr. "We send you out on a kind of dunes experience through the first six, seven holes. We get you out looking at the ocean. From there we go inland and upland, more of a desert landscape, and we finish down by the marina." He promises the course will have plenty of room to maneuver the ball.

Nicklaus' Cabo gem, Quivira, has received a host of accolades. Playing the first four holes are a delightful warmup as to what's to come. Then you get to the fifth, the short par 4 above the Pacific, and you have a decision to make. Accomplished players might try to drive the green. If you can hit your drive around 230 from the men's tees, there is a slope that can carry the ball all the way down to the green, a feature that Nicklaus insisted on.

After hitting your drive, stop at the first of the course's comfort stations, located at the back of the tee complex, a perfect place to grab a taco and a *cerveza*. (The men's room has a cactus in it. Be careful.) As you make your way to the seventh hole you will pass the region's original lighthouse at Kilometer Zero, the point where the Sea of Cortez and the Pacific meet. On the back nine, take note when you complete the fun, double dogleg 12th, a par 5. You'll notice some spiked fence uprights paralleling the green, leftover props from the 2004 Brad Pitt film *Troy*, which was filmed on the beach long before the golf course was built.

Back in the 1990s, Nicklaus designed the Ocean Course at Cabo del Sol. It closed for a renovation in May and is slated to reopen at the end of the year, with the two closing holes being removed and new ones being added. The 16th will become the 18th, finishing on a cliff above the water. If you visit before the work is complete, don't overlook the property's Desert Course. It's a well-conceived tract by Tom Weiskopf with some daunting sand washes, but a lot of fairway space.

Chileno Bay, by Tom Fazio, and Twin Dolphin, by Fred Couples, play on the inland side of the road off the Corridor highway and offer sweeping views of the Sea of Cortez and mesmerizing desert golf experiences. Both have exceedingly generous fairways and desert-sized sand features. Chileno Bay is part of Discovery Land Co., famous for its comfort stations. Here you'll find endless supplies of candy as well as free-flowing Casamigos. (Discovery's Mike Meldman was a partner with George Clooney and Rande Gerber in the Tequila brand.) The two Red Door comfort stations at Twin Dolphin Golf Club are sleek, open-air cafes with big televisions. There's no rush to continue play. A chef will dish out the Mexican specialties.

No rush is what it's all about in Cabo, where the expanding golf experience is an abiding one with unfailingly friendly staff and exceptional amenities. With a smile, Nicklaus says he ruined Cabo. But the Golden Bear tracks he put down have set the standard for one of the world's finest golf destinations, one that ought to be on every player's bucket list. ❖

Jeff Williams is a CIGAR AFICIONADO *contributing editor.*

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The Best HOTELS & RESORTS IN LOS CABOS

BY LARRY OLMSTED

Los Cabos is often called "Mexico's Hawaii," a dream vacation destination far removed from the mainland, with great weather, cuisine and outdoor activities. But "Mexico's Bali" might be more accurate when it comes to where to stay, since the region has arguably the densest concentration of top-shelf luxury resorts this side of the South Pacific, with even more under construction. Most are stunning and cigar friendly. These are the very best.

ONE&ONLY PALMILLA

Before the night clubs and golf courses, Cabo was a sleepy, escapist fishing village, and Palmilla started it all. The area's first upscale hotel, it opened in 1956 with 15 rooms and instantly became a favorite getaway for adventurous celebrities, including John Wayne, Bing Crosby and Ernest Hemingway. After top-to-bottom upgrades in 2004 and 2015, Palmilla is better than ever, with 174 luxury oceanfront rooms and suites—all with butler service—plus two new, over-the-top, four-bedroom villas, the epitome of luxury. The resort occupies its own private 55-acre peninsula with one of the few safely swimmable beaches in the rough and rocky region, has its own marina, a fleet of boats, golf (see story, page 80) and a 22,000-square-foot spa and fitness center. Michelin-starred celebrity chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten oversees the restaurants, and it boasts several of the region's top choices, including Seared, which features a modern take on steak and seafood, the Japanese-inspired Suviche and Agua, a Mexican-Mediterranean mashup. Palmilla has a name-brand slate of Cuban cigars, and pairing events with Havana Club rum are held several times each year.

LAS VENTANAS AL PARAÍSO

This legendary luxury resort is a resumé maker for any hotel executive who passes through, and has long been regarded as one of the world's finest, living up to its name, "The Windows to Paradise." Think of a decadent hotel gimmick, from poolside Evian misters to loaner portable electronics to the complimentary welcome craft Tequila now ubiquitous in luxury Cabo hotels, and it was likely invented here. (The latest is the world's first touchless full-body sunscreen-applying "shower.") The resort specializes in privacy, with a mere 71 oversized luxury suites and villas, many with full-sized private pools and extras such as patios, telescopes, wood fireplaces and hot tubs. Cuban cigars are everywhere, even on the luxury butler bath menu. Las Ventanas attracts a nonstop stream of Hollywood and music industry A-listers, and remains the place to stay and not be seen.

AUBERGE RESORTS ESPERANZA

Napa-born Auberge Resorts is famed for boutique, luxury lodging with an emphasis on food and beverage, and when Esperanza opened in 2002 it was one of the first to attract waves of non-resident dinner guests. The property has 96 spacious villas (from one to four bedrooms) and just 59 "regular" luxury hotel rooms, but its biggest asset is a stunning clifftop setting on Baja's Sea of Cortez. All rooms feature large terraces and ocean views, and the resort's acclaimed signature restaurant—one of Cabo's best—is also dramatically oceanfront. Culinary director Guillermo Gomez has been at the helm of the six dining venues here for the past several years. In 2018, Esperanza reimagined its flagship Cocina del Mar, celebrating the sea it overlooks with an intense focus on Baja flavors via fresh seafood and local produce. Cigars are rolled on site every Wednesday and there's a humidor in the bar.

AUBERGE RESORTS CHILENO BAY

Esperanza has been so successful for so long that Auberge double dipped and opened a second resort in 2017, this one on a private Tom Fazio golf course (which is open to hotel guests). It has 99 rooms, each with large terraces and outdoor showers, as well as 60 villas. Chileno Bay also has a wellness focus with a state-of-the-art destination spa, oversized guest rooms with amenities such as steam showers, private treatment rooms and workout machines. The H2O Cave is a unique, full-service watersports facility in a cave carved out of the cliff base. The signature COMAL restaurant has quickly become a local hot spot with contemporary Latin-American cuisine, a flashy ceviche bar, and a curated selection of local Tequilas and other spirits. Both COMAL and the golf club have well-stocked humidors.

FOUR SEASONS RESORT LOS CABOS

Set to open this fall, the Four Seasons will have 141 rooms and suites, part of the new 1,000-acre Costa Palmas community, along with a Robert Trent Jones Jr. course and boutique Aman luxury resort under construction. This will be the first Four Seasons with a private marina, making it easy to access Cabo's world-class offshore sportfishing, and sits on one of the region's few swimmable beaches. In addition to golf and water sports, food is a big focus here, with five restaurants, most of them with a Mexican/Latin influence. The exception is the flagship Greek and Mediterranean stunner Estiatorio Milos, the latest outpost of the famed deluxe seafood specialist. Eighteen acres of on-site organic farms supply the resort eateries.

ESPERANZA

CHILENO BAY

ALSO... There are two brand-new hotels at Diamante, the golf community with courses by Davis Love III and Tiger Woods. The Nobu Hotel is a 200-room architectural fusion of Mexican materials and Japanese design, featuring a Nobu eatery as well as an outpost of Southern California's beloved organic Malibu Farm. Cabo has relatively few all-inclusive resorts, but the new 600-plus-room Hard Rock in Diamante is one of the most notable, with nearly 20 bars and restaurants and five pool complexes. The new, architecturally stunning, islands-in-water themed Viceroy has a hip rooftop bar/restaurant, with weekly cigar and mezcal events. The Cape has drop-dead views of Cabo's famed El Arco rock formation. Zadún will open at the end of the year, becoming the fifth in Ritz-Carlton's higher-end luxury Reserve brand. ❖

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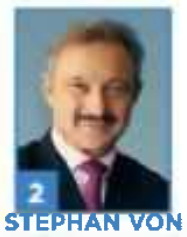
THE TOP 10 WINES OF 2018

Taste the most exciting wines released in 2018, as selected by Wine Spectator's editors.

1 **PRISCILLA INCISA DELLA ROCCHETTA**
Tenuta San Guido Bolgheri-Sassicaia Sassicaia 2015 (97)



2 **STEPHAN VON NEIPPERG**
Château Canon-La Gaffelière St.-Emilion 2015 (96)

3 **FEDERICA MASCHERONI STIANTI**
Castello di Volpaia Chianti Classico Riserva 2015 (96)

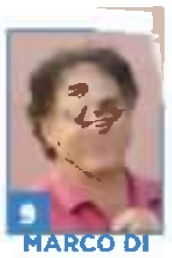
4 **GUILLERMO DE ARANZABAL**
La Rioja Alta Rioja 890 Gran Reserva Selección Especial 2005 (95)

5 **VINCENT CHAPERON**
Moët & Chandon Brut Champagne Dom Pérignon Legacy Edition 2008 (96)

6 **MARK AUBERT**
Aubert Chardonnay Carneros Larry Hyde & Sons 2016 (96)

7 **JOE STARK**
Colene Clemens Pinot Noir Chehalem Mountains Dopp Creek 2015 (95)

8 **FRANÇOIS MICHEL**
Le Vieux Donjon Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2016 (95)



9 **MARCO DI GRAZIA**
Tenuta delle Terre Nere Etna San Lorenzo 2016 (95)

10 **MORGAN TWAIN-PETERSON**
Bedrock The Bedrock Heritage Sonoma Valley 2016 (95)

NAPA MOUNTAIN CABS

Explore the special characteristics and differences of Napa's "mountain" AVA's with wines from Mayacamas, Diamond Creek, Dunn and Lokoya.

PHIL ROSS
of Diamond Creek

BRAIDEN ALBRECHT
of Mayacamas

RANDY DUNN
of Dunn

CHRIS CARPENTER
of Lokoya

- Diamond Creek Cabernet Sauvignon Volcanic Hill 2014 (92)
- Mayacamas Cabernet Sauvignon Mount Veeder 2004 (NR)
- Dunn Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon Howell Mountain 2005 (NR)
- Lokoya Cabernet Sauvignon Spring Mountain District 2013 (NR)

EXPLORE THE CÔTE D'OR & CHABLIS

A selection of *grand cru* Burgundy wines from the Côte d'Or and Chablis.

ALBÉRIC BICHOT
of Maison Albert Bichot

DIMITRI BAZAS
of Champy

GRÉGORY VIENNOIS
of Domaine Laroche

- Albert Bichot Chablis Moutonne Domaine Long-Dépaquit 2017 (93)
- Champy Corton Rognet 2016 (94)
- Domaine Laroche Chablis Les Blanchots 2014 (93)
- Albert Bichot Charmes-Chambertin 2015 (94)

BOLGHERI

A tasting of wines from Bolgheri, a rising star region on the coast of Tuscany.

CINZIA MERLI
Le Macchiole Toscana Messorio 2015 (97)

STANISLAUS TURNAUER
Argentiera Bolgheri Superiore 2015 (95)

AXEL HEINZ
Ornellaia Bolgheri Superiore 2015 (97)

ALBIERA ANTINORI
Antinori Bolgheri Superiore Guado al Tasso 2015 (95)

CHILE

Icon wines from top producers in Chile — a country that has proven its wines rival the best in the world.

CHARLES DE BOURNET
Clos Apalta Colchagua Valley 2015 (95)

MICHEL FROU
Viña Almaviva Puente Alto 2016 (95)

AURELIO MONTES
Viña Montes Alpha M Colchagua Valley 2015 (95)

SEBASTIÁN LABBÉ
Viña Santa Rita Cabernet Sauvignon Maipo Valley Casa Real 2014 (94)

WINE STARS

Individual presentations of great wines by renowned vintners from around the globe, each a star in the wine world.

CHRISTIAN MOUEIX
Dominus Estate Napa Valley 2010 (92)

OSCAR FARINETTI
Giacomo Borgogno & Figli Barolo Riserva 1999 (95)

TIM MONDAVI

CARISSA MONDAVI

Continuum Napa Valley 2013 (94)

JOSÉ LUIS MUGUIRO
Marqués de Riscal Rioja Frank Gehry Selection Reserva 2001 (NR)

ADRIAN BRIDGE
Taylor Fladgate Vintage Port 1994 (100)
Fonseca Vintage Port 1994 (100)

CHATEAU PICHON LONGUEVILLE LALANDE

A six-vintage vertical of Château Pichon Longueville Lalande, a leading second-growth from Pauillac in Bordeaux.

FRÉDÉRIC ROUZAUD

NICOLAS GLUMINEAU

- Château Pichon Longueville Lalande Pauillac 2016 (97)
- Château Pichon Longueville Lalande Pauillac 2010 (95)
- Château Pichon Longueville Lalande Pauillac 2005 (94)
- Château Pichon Longueville Lalande Pauillac 2000 (95)
- Château Pichon Longueville Lalande Pauillac 1995 (94)
- Château Pichon Longueville Lalande Pauillac 1982 (98)

CHEFS' CHALLENGE

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Think Food Group

MARIO CARBONE
Major Food Group

EMERIL LAGASSE
Emeril's

TI MARTIN
Commander's Palace

CHÂTEAU DE BEAUCASTEL

A vertical tasting from the leading estate in France's Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

MARC PERRIN

- Château de Beaucastel Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2016 (97)
- Château de Beaucastel Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2010 (96)
- Château de Beaucastel Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2007 (96)
- Château de Beaucastel Châteauneuf-du-Pape 1989 (97)

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2019

NFL PREVIEW

BY DANNY SHERIDAN

Can Tom Brady defy Father Time and lead his Patriots to victory yet again? Will the Browns or Giants turn their boats of misery around? We predict this season's winners and losers and tell you who will raise the Lombardi Trophy in February

ABOVE: JAMIE SQUIRE/GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT: SIMON BRUTY /SPORTS ILLUSTRATED VIA GETTY IMAGES

The retirement of top-tier tight end Rob Gronkowski, above, leaves a gaping hole for New England to fill, but with Tom Brady returning to lead a corps of playmakers, the Patriots seem destined for another Super Bowl.

The Jets front office added a few new weapons on offense to help quarterback Sam Darnold, but will it be enough to get them into the playoffs?

AFC EAST

WINNER: New England Patriots

After nearly two decades of domination, and 10 consecutive division titles, the Super Bowl champions faced a challenging off-season with the retirement of superstar tight end Rob Gronkowski and the loss of defensive coordinator Brian Flores. While Tom Brady didn't have one of his better seasons last year (4,355 yards, 29 TDs), the 42-year-old returns along with a corps of playmakers: Sony Michel, Julian Edelman, first-round draftee N'Keal Harry and Josh (Flash) Gordon, who signed a one-year contract and returned after being reinstated by the NFL. Bill Belichick won't be happy with the schedule—his Pats play a team coming off its bye week three times, and have five primetime games—but he isn't happy until he's hoisting the Lombardi Trophy anyway. He and Brady are in less jeopardy than James Holzhauer.

New York Jets

Co-owner Christopher Johnson took what he termed a deep dive into the operation, but Michael Phelps, he ain't. New general manager Joe Douglas was a terrific hire, and new coach Adam Gase is an offensive guru who should work wonders with second-year QB Sam Darnold, who will be helped immensely by All-Pro security blanket Le'Veon Bell. Jamison Crowder and four-time Pro Bowler C.J. Mosley also bring new blood, along with DT Quinnen Williams, arguably the best player in the draft, who will create havoc with swaggerlicious safety Jamal Adams. New defensive coordinator Gregg Williams made for a fiery, feisty training camp that had Jets fans at Elio's, Sandro's and Sadelle's buzzing.

Buffalo Bills

The Bills have missed 18 of the last 19 playoffs but second-year QB Josh Allen showed promise with a big arm and a pair of legs that led the club in rushing. Head coach Sean McDermott fielded the second-best defense in the NFL, and first-round draft pick Ed Oliver was a steal who will replace retired Kyle Williams. Adding Cole Beasley and John Brown will help the receiving game, and ageless Frank Gore will contribute from the backfield.

Miami Dolphins

The Dolphins are a Category 3 hurricane—a windblown disaster. They finished 7-9 in 2018, and you should expect more mediocrity this season. Former Pats DC Brian Flores is their tenth head coach since 2004 and he has little talent to work with. GM Chris Grier deserves a free meal at Joe's Stone Crab for working out a deal to get Josh Rosen to duel journeyman QB Ryan Fitzpatrick, and first-rounder Christian Wilkins will provide instant leadership on defense, but opening the season against four consecutive playoff teams should beach these fish. Time to Tank for Tua?

NICK CAMMETT/DIAMOND IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

AFC NORTH

WINNER: Pittsburgh Steelers

The season-long drama between Antonio Brown and Ben Roethlisberger was divisive and the Steelers missed the playoffs for the first time since 2013. Big Ben (5,129 yards, 34 TDs) found another 1,000-yard weapon in JuJu Smith-Schuster, while James Conner picked up the slack left by Le'Veon Bell, who sat out the season in a contract dispute. First-round linebacker Devin Bush will make an immediate impact. Coach Mike Tomlin called the Brown and Bell departures "a cleansing."

Cleveland Browns

Baker Mayfield is the real deal as he established a rookie record of 27 TD passes (in 13 starts) to give hope to a franchise that had gone 1-31 in 2016 and '17. The Browns made the biggest offseason noise by trading for the mercurial Odell Beckham Jr., signing Kareem Hunt and Sheldon Richardson and trading for Olivier Vernon. New Coach Freddie Kitchens needs to reward GM John Dorsey's faith in him. But can he handle all these big personalities? What happens if Beckham doesn't let him drive his new orange Rolls? With Hunt serving an eight-game suspension, Nick Chubb will carry the rock. Myles Garrett (13.5 sacks) leads the defense while draft pick CB Andraez "Greedy" Williams—who didn't allow a TD at LSU—gives Denzel Ward a long, tall bookend. "The Browns are the most talented team in the division," says Baltimore Coach John Harbaugh. And maybe the most combustible. Has President Trump ended the tariffs on winning?

Baltimore Ravens

Coach John Harbaugh has been a model of consistency with only one losing season since 2008. He did perhaps his best job after QB Joe Flacco's midseason hip injury. Flacco helped tutor rookie QB Lamar Jackson to a 10-6 finish and the division title thanks in large part to the league's No. 1 defense. The Ravens let their top four defensive stars walk in free agency and changed offensive coordinators. Drafting speed merchant WR Marquise Brown and WR Miles Boykin gives Jackson better weapons, and RB Mark Ingram Jr. gives him a 1,000-yard runner. It's up to Jackson to make it happen...with his legs and arm.

Cincinnati Bengals

The Bungles made no significant off-season moves except to dismiss Coach Marvin Lewis after 16 years and zero playoff wins. It's up to new head coach Zac Taylor to try to resurrect Andy Dalton. The Bengals can use more help from tight end Tyler Eifert, who has missed 34 games the past three years. Cincy secured its LT of the future in Alabama's Jonah Williams, who will likely miss the season (torn labrum). Incoming DC Lou Anarumo inherits a unit that surrendered a league-worst 413.6 yards per game.

AFC SOUTH

WINNER: Houston Texans

The Texans opened 0-3 last season but went on a nine-game winning streak to finish 11-5 and win the division. They have one of the league's best combinations in quarterback Deshaun Watson and wideout DeAndre Hopkins, and All-World defensive end J.J. Watt made his presence felt with 16 sacks, second best in the league. Lamar Miller's torn ACL means Duke Johnson is the starter at running back.

Jacksonville Jaguars

Two years ago, the Jaguars were Super Bowl favorites, but the team went into a stupor last year, losing 10 of 12. A big part of the regression was QB Blake Bortles, and that was why the Jags released him and broke the bank for former Eagles Super Bowl MVP Nick Foles. The defense added another weapon with first-round pick DE Josh Allen of Kentucky.

Despite some team drama last year, Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger managed to throw for 5,129 yards and 34 touchdowns, but he faces a future without Antonio Brown.

Tennessee Titans

This is a critical season for Marcus Mariota. In his first four years he has not made the Pro Bowl and has struggled to stay healthy. Ole Miss rookie A.J. Brown will help Corey Davis at wideout, as will possession receiver Adam Humphries. Derrick Henry (1,059 yards) is a bull at running back, but it's all on Mariota.

Indianapolis Colts

Andrew Luck's shocking retirement two weeks before the start of the season sent Indy's Super Bowl prospects out the window as Jacoby Brissett is Next Man Up. Eric Ebron was a revelation at tight end, and the offensive line had Luck so well protected he could have read the Mueller Report in the pocket. Parris Campbell takes some heat off explosive wideout T.Y. Hilton.

JOE ROBBINS/GETTY IMAGES

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF PERFECTION

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AFC WEST

WINNER: Kansas City Chiefs

First year sensation Patrick Mahomes had a jaw-dropping MVP season and resembled a modern-day Brett Favre, launching 580 passes that resulted in 5,097 yards and 50 TDs! Tyreek Hill and Travis Kelce were his accomplices in the damage they inflicted on opposing teams, and the electric Hill avoided a suspension for off-the-field conduct issues. Rookie Mecole Hardman is a deep threat. Following the departures of CB Steven Nelson (4 INTs) to the Steelers and Dee Ford to the 49ers, the addition of pass rusher Frank Clark from the Seahawks and S Tyrann "Honey Badger" Mathieu will help new DC Steve Spagnuolo try to fix a defense that even Mahomes could not overcome in the playoffs.

Los Angeles Chargers

Old Man Philip Rivers keeps rolling along. No QB in history has passed for more yards (54,656) or more TDs (374) yet never played on Super Sunday. Last year, his Chargers (12-4) made the playoffs, but couldn't get past the Patriots. At 37, Rivers is still productive thanks to wide receiver Keenan Allen, RB Melvin Gordon (a summer holdout) and red-zone weapons Mike Williams (10 TDs) and Hunter Henry, who returns from a torn ACL. Draft pick Jerry Tillery should fortify the run defense. Safety Derwin James going down with a foot injury is a huge loss.

Oakland Raiders

The (4-12) Raiders made the biggest offseason move with the acquisition of Antonio Brown, who had six straight 1,200 yard seasons with Pittsburgh. He's the dynamic deep threat that Derek Carr desperately needs. With three first-round draft picks, coach Jon Gruden and GM Mike Mayock addressed other needs, drafting Clelin Ferrell to help boost a league-low 13 sacks. Josh Jacobs, the first RB drafted, replaces Marshawn Lynch. Johnathan Abram could be a modern-day Jack Tatum, but signing guard Richie Incognito (no extremely stable genius) means owner Mark Davis better hide the women and children. This isn't a Super Bowl team, but Wayne Newton might like it enough to buy season tickets at Las Vegas Stadium in 2020.

Denver Broncos

The Rocky Mountain Low Broncos suffered back-to-back losing seasons (11-21) for the first time since 1972. John Elway, who curiously has problems drafting QBs, traded for Joe Flacco. Will he be an upgrade over Case Keenum? Vic Fangio takes over as coach, and he will enjoy unleashing Von Miller (14.5 sacks) and Bradley Chubb (12 sacks). Phillip Lindsay (1,037 yards rushing) became the first undrafted rookie free agent to make the Pro Bowl, and rookie tight end Noah Fant should be an inviting weapon, but is wideout Emmanuel Sanders fully back from his Achilles injury? Elway may have finally drafted his future QB in Missouri's Drew Lock, who has a rocket right arm that can be scattershot.

"The 'Skins have failed to win 10 games in a season for six straight years, and they won't get an invite to the White House before Hillary does."

NFC EAST

WINNER: Philadelphia Eagles

Nick Foles did an admirable job of getting back to the playoffs, winning four of the last five games after Carson Wentz went down and now is starting in Jacksonville. Zach Ertz was unstoppable at tight end, and wayfaring wideout DeSean Jackson returns to help Alshon Jeffery and Nelson Agholor. Stanford's J.J. Arcega-Whiteside gives Wentz yet another target. In the backfield, Penn State's Miles Sanders could start ahead of Jordan Howard. To keep those Philly cheesecakes selling, the Eagles need to bolster a third-worst pass defense. GM Howie Roseman, voted No. 1 by *USA Today,* is on the case.

Dallas Cowboys

The Cowboys continue to be an enigma, much to Jerry Jones' chagrin. They won the East (10-6) but have no long-term momentum, and it's been 23 years without a trip to the NFC title game. Dak Prescott (3,885 yds, 22 TDs) is in line for a monster deal, and RB Ezekiel Elliott (a summer contract holdout) is a gamebreaker. But the Cowboys need more out of receiver Amari Cooper. DE Demarcus Lawrence earned his five-year, $105 million extension, but coach Jason Garrett, who is in the last year of his contract, needs to be more creative with his predictable offense, which has put him on the hot seat.

New York Giants

Rookie RB Saquon Barkley quickly established himself as the face of the franchise with 1,307 yards on the ground, 11 TDs and four more receiving TDs. (No truth to the rumor that President Trump predicts he'll lead the league in Russian.) Eli Manning, 38, had one of his better statistical years but another slow start behind a flawed offensive line doomed him. GM Dave Gettleman has tried to build a wall in front of Manning, but no word yet on whether he got Mexico to pay for it. Gettleman has been under fire for exiling star Odell Beckham Jr. to Cleveland and not getting enough of a return after letting safety Landon Collins walk out the free agent door. Drafting controversial Duke QB Daniel Jones with the sixth pick finally sets the stage for a Manning succession plan, but it's a shame Jones can't play against the Giants' overhauled defense, which has more holes than the Democrats have presidential candidates.

Washington Redskins

The Redskins continue on their path of mediocrity. Fan enthusiasm collapsed after Alex Smith (broken leg) went down, as did season ticket sales. Don't expect another 1,042-yard season from 34-year-old RB Adrian Peterson, especially with Derrius Guice back from knee surgery that cost him his rookie season. The front seven is a strength, even after linebacker Reuben Foster wrecked his knee and will miss the season. The 'Skins have failed to win 10 games in a season for six straight years, and they won't get an invite to the White House before Hillary does.

SAM GREENWOOD/GETTY IMAGES

On paper, the Kansas City Chiefs and the Chicago Bears are the preseason favorites to top their respective divisions.

NFC NORTH

WINNER: Chicago Bears

First-year coach Matt Nagy was a welcome change as the Bears clinched their first winning season (12-4) since 2012, and were surprising division champs. Mitch Trubisky broke out at quarterback and the defense allowed the fewest points in the league. Who the Bears lost shouldn't make an impact. Chuck Pagano is the new defensive coach and RB Jordan Howard was traded to the Eagles, but Iowa rookie David Montgomery is a better fit.

Green Bay Packers

The Pack (6-9-1) missed the playoffs for the second straight year in a tension-filled season, then fired head coach Mike McCarthy and hired Matt LaFleur. Aaron Rodgers managed 4,442 yards and 25 TDs despite an ailing leg and the loss of Jordy Nelson. WR Davante Adams is the go-to receiver and Aaron Jones could be a breakout star at RB. The defense will be stronger this year.

Minnesota Vikings

Kirk Cousins, the $84 Million Man, had a disappointing first year at QB (8-7-1) and wasn't much of an improvement over Case Keenum. He has two productive wideouts in Adam Thielen and Stefon Diggs. Draft pick Irv Smith Jr. will help at tight end. The defense is elite, but the Vikings need a better ground game and are hoping that Dalvin Cook can stay healthy.

Detroit Lions

Matt Patricia struggled in his first year at coach, and Matthew Stafford failed to throw for 4,000 yards for the first time in seven years. The only significant off-season signings were WR Danny Amendola and DE Trey Flowers.

NFC SOUTH

WINNER: New Orleans Saints

The Saints are going to enter this season as hungry as diners ordering the Chicken Clemenceau at Galatoire's. They were shafted in the NFC Championship by a glaring pass interference missed call, and Coach Sean Payton took it hard. "For two or three days," he said, "I didn't come out of my room, ate Jeni's ice cream and watched Netflix." QB Drew Brees is the most accurate passer in NFL history (67.3 percent), with a record 74.4 completion percentage in 2018 at age 40. He's the Tom Brady of the NFC. His top weapons, Michael Thomas (the $100 Million Man) and Alvin Kamara, return, and rookie center Erik McCoy is the perfect replacement for retired Max Unger. The weak pass defense is expecting more help from Marcus Davenport and Eli Apple.

Carolina Panthers

Coach Ron Rivera survived one of his most baffling seasons. After a 6-2 start, the Panthers swooned with a seven-game losing streak that destroyed any playoff hopes and had them finish at 7-9. Cam Newton was hampered by shoulder problems, and Christian McCaffrey made the biggest impact with 1,098 total yards and 7 TDs. D.J. Moore can be a Go-To-Guy and tight end Greg Olsen decided to delay a television career. Luke Kuechly, with 130 tackles, remains the rock on defense. Rookie edge rusher Brian Burns will help a floundering pass rush, and Gerald McCoy is the perfect complement. West Virginia QB Will Grier, who has a nice, smooth touch, was drafted as insurance for Newton.

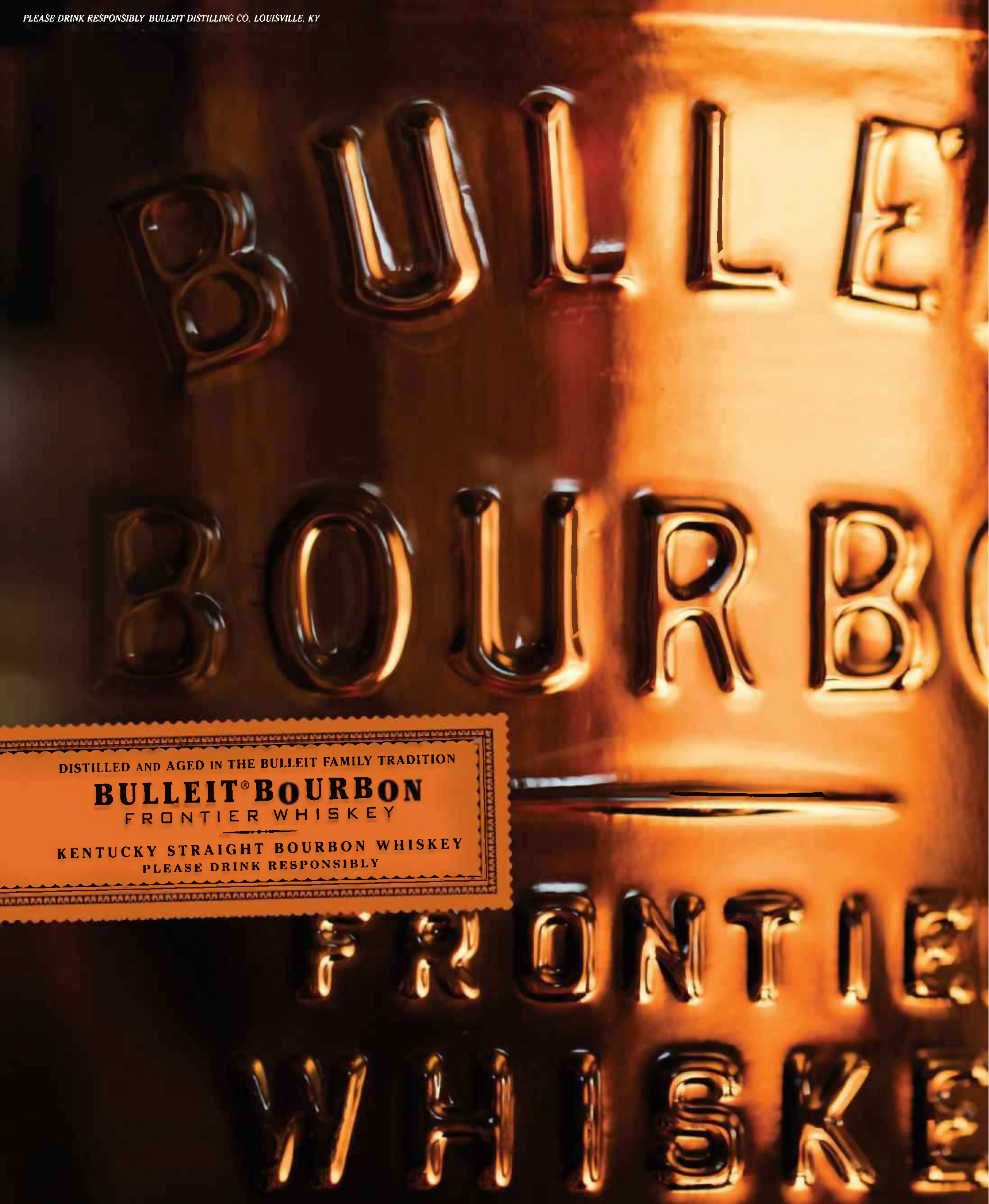
Atlanta Falcons

As long as Atlanta has Matt Ryan and Julio Jones, the Falcons offense will fly high. Ryan threw for 4,925 yards and 35 TDs while Jones added 1,677 yards. Atlanta's triple wideout set got 838 yards from Mohamed Sanu and 821 from Calvin Ridley. Proficient running back Tevin Coleman left for San Francisco, but Devonta Freeman is healthy again. The Falcons went 7-9, their first losing season under Dan Quinn. Before the draft, owner Arthur Blank said he wanted more youth on a blankety-blank offensive line. By using a pair of first-round draft picks on Chris Lindstrom and Kaleb McGary, it seems the message was received loud and clear.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Coach Bruce Arians is back, and despite taking over a 5-11 club that hasn't made the playoffs in 11 years, he isn't the least bit concerned regarding the future. "I'm not rebuilding, I'm reloading," he said. Six of his eight draft picks were designed to fix holes in the defense. His biggest challenge is retooling QB Jameis Winston (2,992 yards and 19 TDs), who started only 9 games (playing in 11) and struggled with his weight. Arians has two solid receivers in Mike Evans and Chris Godwin and a talented TE in O.J. Howard. On defense, Ndamukong Suh comes on board, and Devin White will replace Kwon Alexander, but Jason Pierre-Paul (12.5 sacks) fractured his neck in a car wreck and could miss more than half the season.

ROBIN ALAM/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES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NFC WEST

WINNER: Los Angeles Rams

The well-stocked Rams (13-3) made it to the Super Bowl for the first time in 39 years, but were taken to the woodshed by Bill Belichick and his Patriots. Jared Goff had a banner year at QB with star performers Todd Gurley, Robert Woods and Brandin Cooks before imploding on Super Sunday. Goff will have yet another weapon with the return of Cooper Kupp (ACL). DT Aaron Donald was a one-man wrecking crew with a league-high 20.5 sacks. Ex-Packer LB Clay Matthews and ex-Raven S Eric Weddle will love playing behind him. Darrell Henderson, a third-round bargain, is insurance for Gurley's barking knee.

Seattle Seahawks

Coach Pete Carroll turned a rebuilding year into a playoff run, with a surprising top-ranked running game. Russell Wilson was the catalyst with 3,448 yards, 35 TDs and a 110.9 passer rating. Chris Carson led the ground assault while Tyler Lockett was clutch at wide receiver. Fearful of losing Wilson, Seattle made him the highest-paid player in NFL history with a $140 million, four-year contract and gave him a bonus by drafting body beautiful WR D.K. Metcalf. First-round pick DE L.J. Collier replaces Frank Clark.

San Francisco 49ers

QB Jimmy Garoppolo's season lasted only three games as the 49ers ended up in San Francisco Bay (4-12). There were some bright spots on offense, like TE George Kittle, but unfortunately, the 49ers defense has ranked 24th or lower the last three years and that's why they made Ohio State DE Nick Bosa the second pick of the draft and signed linebacker Kwon Alexander. The Niners helped Jimmy GQ by drafting two wideouts, South Carolina's Deebo Samuel and Baylor's Jalen Hurd. Tony Bennett can start singing that song again.

Arizona Cardinals

The Cardinals made a bold move hiring Kliff Kingsbury as their coach—he went 35-40 at Texas Tech—but it paid off. Kingsbury has known Kyler Murray since his high school years and helped convince him to say 'yes' to playing quarterback for the Cardinals. With his strong arm and accuracy throwing downfield, the rookie could be another Patrick Mahomes in Arizona's Air Raid offense. Dual threat RB David Johnson should have a big year, and the draft gave Murray two more weapons in UMass WR Andy Isabella (4.31 speed) and 6' 5" target Hakeem Butler. The coach isn't worried that Murray is only 5' 10". Don't sell him short, but don't expect a winning season in his first year.

INSET: JIM DAVIS/THE BOSTON GLOBE VIA GETTY IMAGES; BACKGROUND: RICH GRAESSLE/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES

SUPER BOWL LIV PREDICTION

PATRIOTS DEFEAT SAINTS 29-23

Sean Payton calls for an audacious onside kick to open the Super Bowl, the Saints recover and Drew Brees immediately throws a 49-yard bomb for a touchdown. Hard Rock Stadium, packed with pre–Mardi Gras partiers, erupts.

An expected shootout between Brees and Tom Brady fails to unfold, much to the delight of bettors who took the under. (Sheridan Rule: When two offensive juggernauts collide in a Super Bowl, always bet the under.) But Brady answers with two touchdown passes, including one to Rob Gronkowski—who ended his retirement on Halloween.

With Tom Brady at the helm for the Patriots and Drew Brees leading the New Orleans Saints, the powerhouse teams seem destined to meet on Super Bowl Sunday.

The Saints tie the game at 14, but Belichick's modus operandi is taking away the opponent's lethal weapons, and his swarming defense contains running back Alvin Kamara for three quarters. The high-flying teams are now kicking field goals, and soon the game is tied at 20.

And then the football gods, who robbed the Saints in the 2018 NFC Championship game, torment them once again. Coach Payton loses a pass interference challenge with less than two minutes remaining. The teams trade field goals again, going to overtime tied at 23. The Pats win the coin toss, and Brady finds Gronk again for the 50-yard TD that marks seventh heaven for the Pats dynasty—seven Super Bowl championships. The TV cameras show Robert Kraft high-fiving son Jonathan. ❖

Danny Sheridan appears frequently in newspapers and on TV.

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cigars

104 BLIND TASTE TEST
A very strong tasting of 80 cigars with plenty of smokes exceeding the 90-point threshold, and a few exceptional standouts scoring as high as 93 and 94 points.

116 THE CIGAR AFICIONADO BUYING GUIDE
We arrange our tasting section by score, strength and even value. It's a quick way to connect you to your ideal smoke and preferred pricepoint.

119 CONNOISSEUR'S CORNER
Cigars may be one of the few realms where perfection is possible, and we found an old Cuban cigar that attained a perfect 100 points—and a few gems not too far behind.

121 A CANDID Q&A WITH NIRKA REYES
Now in charge of her family's legacy and reputation in the cigar world, Nirka Reyes runs the De Los Reyes factory in the Dominican Republic. She sat down and talked to us about the changes she's not afraid to make.

127 AMERICA'S NEW CUBA TRAVEL POLICY
The rules of U.S.-Cuban engagement seem to change with each administration. Senior contributing editor Gordon Mott gets you up to speed.

JEFF HARRIS

churchills

The Dominican Montecristo Platinum Series may not be the newest Montecristo on the market, but it shouldn't be disregarded. The Churchill scored a very impressive 94 points, showing just how complex tobacco can be when blended in a creative fashion. Fans of the Montecristo Platinum might notice that Altadis U.S.A. has changed the wrapper. It used to be Mexican, but is now Nicaraguan. And it's been a change for the better—this is the first time any size from the Montecristo Platinum line has ever scored so high. Black Label Trading Co. is owned by a husband-and-wife team who has their cigars made at the Oveja Negra factory in Estelí, Nicaragua. The Churchill size from the Lawless line scored 93 points and is a perfect example of how small, boutique companies can do great things. When J.C. Newman introduced its Nicaraguan Brick House line 10 years ago, the country was still in the aftermath of the Great Recession. A good premium cigar at a great price was needed. Now that the economy is doing well, Brick House remains a fine value. The Churchill scored 90 points and retails for a little over $7.

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

MONTECRISTO PLATINUM SERIES CHURCHILL (TUBO)
Every puff of this well-made Churchill imparts the dense, concentrated qualities of dried fruit, smacking of raisin, black cherry and baked plum around a core of earth and hickory. A touch of pepper pops up before the leathery finish.
U.S.: $13.03 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

94

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

BLACK LABEL TRADING CO. LAWLESS CHURCHILL
This Churchill has all the rich, luxurious character of both malted and dark chocolate beautifully contrasted by savory elements of leather and roasted peanuts. A hearty, tasty smoke.
U.S.: $11.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

93

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

BRICK HOUSE CHURCHILL
A large Churchill with subtle nuances of earth, nuts and wood. Hints of chocolate and bread lead to a chewy nougat finish. The draw and burn are clean and even.
U.S.: $7.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALEC BRADLEY PRENSADO CHURCHILL
The wrapper of this box-pressed Churchill has a rusty hue. It's a hearty smoke of mesquite and minerals with a salt-and-pepper quality and a sweet hint of molasses. The solid ash holds very firm.
U.S.: $11.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: MEXICO

HERRERA ESTELI NORTEÑO LIMITADA EDICION CHURCHILL
Long and flatly pressed with a fairly even draw and wavy burn. The sweet, herbal notes call to mind tea and vanilla. Hints of chocolate and oak also come through. The finish is nutty.
U.S.: $14.53 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ILLUSIONE 888 MADURO — 89

There's a distinct coffee bean and licorice quality to this Churchill redolent of anise and espresso, along with notes of salted peanuts and wood. The finish tastes a bit charred.

U.S.: $10.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

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

OLIVA CONNECTICUT RESERVE CHURCHILL — 89

Covered in a light, Connecticut wrapper, this cigar burns evenly, producing a dark gray ash. Initial puffs are floral with a citrus tang before picking up notes of toasted almond and a touch of black pepper. The finish is powdery and a touch dry.

U.S.: $9.85 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

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

CAMACHO ECUADOR CHURCHILL — 88

Strikingly oily with a round head. It's a tangy smoke with notes of dried lemon peel, minerals and ground white pepper. Faint notes of milk chocolate emerge before the tanginess recurs on the finish.

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

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

DANIEL MARSHALL DM2 RED LABEL CHURCHILL — 88

A beautifully oily Churchill with a reddish wrapper and three-seam cap. The smoke is earthy with some notes of dried fruit and a floral finish heavy on perfume.

U.S.: $8.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

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

PERDOMO FRESCO CONNECTICUT CHURCHILL — 88

Although not too strong, this lightly hued Churchill has plenty of flavor from lemon zest and vanilla nougat to almonds and cinnamon. The finish is herbal and a touch bitter.

U.S.: $4.30 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

AVO XO MAESTOSO — 87

The initial mustiness of this tan Churchill dissipates to show a smoke of nutmeg, cinnamon and lemon zest before a chalky finish. The draw and burn is remains perfect throughout.

U.S.: $12.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., MEXICO
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

MACANUDO GOLD LABEL LORD NELSON — 86

Light in appearance, this Churchill shows some initial damp notes of earth before warming up to be a nutty, woody cigar with hints of grass and cocoa powder.

U.S.: $9.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PAUL GARMIRIAN GOURMET SERIES CHURCHILL — 86

Oils seep through the colorado wrapper of this attractive Churchill. Notes of balsa wood, earth and lemon peel clash with musty hints of mushroom.

U.S.: $14.30 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

corona gordas

If you look at the five cigars that scored 90 points or higher in this category, they all have one thing in common: box pressing. The format has become very popular in the premium segment, and it appears that manufacturers have learned how to box-press properly without over- or under-filling the cigars. The Nat Cicco Aniversario 1965 Liga No. 4 Toro from Nicaragua is a prime example. It scored 93 points and performed superbly with a perfect draw. When you consider the fact that Nat Cicco used to be a budget brand of medium-filler cigars, it makes this high score all the more noteworthy. The brand name is an homage to Nat Cicco's very modest beginnings in the value smoke category. But this isn't the first time that a cigar from the Aniversario 1965 Liga No. 4 line has excelled. The Churchill is the No. 18 cigar of 2018 on Cigar Aficionado's Top 25 list. The Joya Red Cañonazo scored 91 points and comes from Joya de Nicaragua, the oldest operating cigar factory in Nicaragua. However, the Joya series was made with the modern smoker in mind, so the band design skews less traditional and more contemporary.

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

NAT CICCO ANIVERSARIO 1965 LIGA NO. 4 TORO
Box-pressed with a dark, oily wrapper and pigtail cap. The full, open draw delivers rich layers of leather, nuts, caramel and chocolate all harmonizing for a delicious balance of the sweet and savory.
U.S.: $6.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

93

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

JOYA RED CAÑONAZO
There's a fresh woodsy, forest flavor of pine needles and tilled earth to this smoke, along with sweet notes of honey and molasses before the snap of leather on the finish. Draw and burn are consistently even.
U.S.: $7.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

MEXICO
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, MEXICO
BINDER: NICARAGUA, MEXICO
WRAPPER: MEXICO

CASA TURRENT SERIE 1901
GRAN ROBUSTO
Flatly pressed with rounded shoulders, this is a toasty cigar underscored by sweet hints of maple and raisins that build to a woody finish.
U.S.: $9.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

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

DIESEL HAIR OF THE DOG TORO
This box-pressed cigar is draped in an attractive, chocolate-brown wrapper that feels smooth to the touch. Its lush draw delivers soft notes of wood and tea interspersed with sweeter hints of toffee and milk chocolate.
U.S.: $10.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

LA MISSION L'ATELIER 1989
Distinctly pressed and topped with a pigtail cap, this cigar is loaded with smoky notes of dark-roasted Sumatra coffee beans amidst an earthy mélange of black pepper, cocoa and leather.
U.S.: $9.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ASHTON SYMMETRY SUBLIME

89

The wrapper of this cigar is the color of milk chocolate. It draws and burns quite perfectly, offering a tangy smoke full of cedar, spice and chocolate sweetness.

U.S.: $13.45 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

LA PALINA BRONZE LABEL TORO

89

This richly hued cigar burns evenly, delivering notes of charred oak amidst the earthy, straw-and-hay qualities of a barnyard. Touches of licorice and clove spice up the smoke.

U.S.: $9.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2015

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LA HABANA LA FUERZA

89

A bit wrinkled in appearance, this cigar has a slightly firm draw. Light almond notes are accented by zesty touches of candied orange peel before the cigar shows some spice and leather.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £25.00 STRENGTH: Medium

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ARTURO FUENTE FLOR FINA 8-5-8 SUN GROWN

88

Wrapped in a dark cover leaf, this cigar burns perfectly, producing a flaky, gray-and-black ash. Simple notes of dark chocolate and leather are followed by hints of bread, caraway seed and a malted barley finish.

U.S.: $6.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

HEADLEY GRANGE DOBLES

88

Herbal at first, the smoke of this cigar intensifies a bit showing the sweet woody notes of tamarind paste and cedar. It's softly pressed with an even draw and burn.

U.S.: $10.15 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2015

HOYO DE MONTERREY EPICURE NO. 1 (TUBO)

88

Though it burns unevenly, notes of cedar, honey and cinnamon still come through. The long finish is a bit earthy with touches of tannin.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £25.40 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

H. UPMANN CONNECTICUT BY GRUPO DE MAESTROS TORO

87

The firm draw of this oily, blond corona gorda shows a predominantly grassy smoke with touches of balsa wood and creamy sweetness. A maduro leaf caps the cigar.

U.S.: $8.94 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

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

PADILLA VINTAGE RESERVE TORO

86

A dark, blackish cigar with a firm draw. Initial puffs are very earthy with notes of heavily roasted coffee bean and leather. The smoke loses some intensity and becomes herbal and oily.

U.S.: $9.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

figurados

The San Lotano Dominicano is the result of two cigarmakers: José "Jochy" Blanco and A.J. Fernandez. The collaboration proved successful as the Torpedo scored 93 points. The Dominican tobacco in the blend was grown by Blanco while the Nicaraguan tobacco was grown by Fernandez. It was finished with a Cuban-seed Brazilian wrapper grown by neither and made in the Dominican Republic at Blanco's Tabacalera Palma factory. The Nestor Miranda Collection 75th Anniversary Salomon is a gorgeous, tapered cigar that requires a lot of skill to roll. Made by My Father Cigars in Nicaragua, the shapely smoke scored 92 points. It was released to celebrate Miranda's 75th birthday.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

SAN LOTANO DOMINICANO TORPEDO
The toasty, woody smoke of this box-pressed torpedo blossoms with big notes of caramel, black coffee and cocoa powder before the licorice finish. A rich and satisfying cigar.
U.S.: $9.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

93

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 57 LENGTH: 7 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

NESTOR MIRANDA COLLECTION 75TH ANNIVERSARY SALOMON
This large, dark figurado is crafted with supple curves and tapered at both ends. Rich, nutty layers of cashew and walnut are complemented by sweeter touches of cocoa and caramel. A tasty cigar.
U.S.: $19.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

601 BLUE LABEL MADURO TORPEDO
Black and box-pressed, this torpedo shows a strong, earthy core framed by notes of coffee, stout beer and sweet hints of anise.
U.S.: $8.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

90

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

PAPPY VAN WINKLE TRADITION BELICOSO FINO
The perfect draw and burn of this belicoso produces a very solid ash. It's a leathery, nutty smoke with some black pepper and a distinct cinnamon finish.
U.S.: $24.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2016

VEGAS ROBAINA UNICO
A softly box-pressed torpedo with a slightly firm draw and even burn. The cigar shows its sweetness right away, imparting notes of maraschino cherry, graham cracker and toffee. Hints of green pepper and wheat also come through.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £27.00 STRENGTH: Medium

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7 5/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ARTURO FUENTE HEMINGWAY UNTOLD STORY
A long perfecto in a toothy, dark wrapper that forms a bright white ash in stark contrast. Each puff is heavy with vanilla, bright undertones of citrus, almonds and a lemon peel finish.
U.S.: $15.65 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 8"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

EIROA "THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS" DIADEMA
A massive but beautiful diadema with tapered ends and a long nipple foot. It draws and burns evenly, delivering an earthy, woody smoke with hints of nuts and sweet coffee.
U.S.: $18.30 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89

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

PADRÓN DAMASO NO. 34
Surprisingly spicy at first, this tan torpedo shows more up-front power than the light wrapper suggests. The spice calms leaving warmer impressions of hazelnut, cedar and espresso before a woody finish.
U.S.: $14.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

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

ROMEO 505 NICARAGUA BY ROMEO Y JULIETA PIRAMIDE
Large and imposing with a gleaming, oily wrapper. Initial puffs have the light sweetness of cocoa powder but the smoke gains intensity, becoming the leathery, spicy cigar its appearance suggests.
U.S.: $9.95 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

89

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

CASA MAGNA OSCURO BELICOSO
An inky torpedo with a very pointy tip. Opening bitterness fades to show earthy coffee notes, some minerals and a sweet licorice finish.
U.S.: $9.93 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

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

LAST CALL BY AJ FERNANDEZ FLAQUITAS
The uncut wrapper leaf of this torpedo folds over the foot. First puffs are notably peppery, but the black pepper subsides for notes of coffee and nuts. Some tasters encountered burn issues.
U.S.: $6.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

87

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

EL TROVADOR PETIT BELICOSO
A box-pressed pyramid with a full, even draw that offers some sweet spice amidst the nuttiness of almonds and walnut skin before a bitter woody finish.
U.S.: $7.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

86

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

KRISTOFF MADURO TORPEDO
An oily torpedo with a dark, uncut wrapper that envelops the foot. Earthy and rustic, the smoke carries notes of licorice and charred wood that ultimately leave a gritty sensation on the palate.
U.S.: $9.53 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LA DUEÑA BELICOSO NO. 2
The draw of this dark belicoso is notably firm, but open enough to deliver a woody smoke with hints of anise and a slightly vegetal finish.
U.S.: $8.85 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

85

grandes

Thick as logs and chunky as chocolate bars, grande cigars continue to have a strong presence in the market. When we polled the country's cigar-shop owners in our annual retailer survey, the grande came in as the No. 3 best-selling size this year, beating out most traditional formats. Three cigars in this category of gargantuan ring gauges scored 90 points, and all were made in Nicaragua. The Casa Fernandez Aganorsa Leaf Habano Titan is produced at the Aganorsa Leaf factory and made of tobacco from Aganorsa, one of the largest growers of premium cigar tobacco in Nicaragua. As if a 66 ring gauge cigar isn't big enough, the Punch Diablo El Diablo was pressed into a blocky form, making it appear even more massive. It's made by A.J. Fernandez for General Cigar, and represents the strongest Punch ever released by General. At those cartoonish proportions, it's probably the thickest as well. The Undercrown was intended to be Drew Estate's less expensive, and more available alternative to the Liga Privada, which is made in small quantities and is often out of stock. Today, the line is less of a surrogate brand and can stand on its own.

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CASA FERNANDEZ AGANORSA LEAF HABANO TITAN
Woody and herbal at first, this fat cigar takes on the nutty sweetness of nougat and pistachio before a bready finish. The draw is even and the burn, clean.
U.S.: $7.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 66 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PUNCH DIABLO EL DIABLO
This massive, box-pressed block of a cigar is enrobed in a near-black cover leaf. Hearty notes of wood and coffee bean are balanced by sweeter touches of raisin and gingerbread before the chocolatey finish.
U.S.: $8.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: BRAZIL, NICARAGUA
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO
WRAPPER: MEXICO

UNDERCROWN GORDITO
A fat and oily cigar that draws and burns quite evenly. Sweet notes of chocolate, anise and cinnamon play off an underlying toastiness and combine for a sweet finish.
U.S.: $11.14 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: BRAZIL, DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

COHIBA CONNECTICUT GIGANTE
Rolled with a tawny-hued wrapper, this large cigar has a lush draw that offers a primarily woody smoke along with notes of wheat and honeyed tea. The finish is sweet.
U.S.: $22.99 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

89

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

E.P. CARRILLO NEW WAVE CONNECTICUT EL DECANO
First puffs of this fat, blondish cigar have the boozy qualities of rum and amaretto liqueur that settle down to show herbal notes, sweet bread and a cedary finish.
U.S.: $9.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

88

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MICALLEF GRANDE BOLD SUMATRA 6X60

88

Thick and blocky, this pressed cigar resembles a chocolate bar but draws and burns evenly despite the mammoth size. Lighter, herbal notes of wood, juniper and saffron become a bit nutty before the woody finish.

U.S.: $10.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN 7000

88

Rustic and coarse in appearance, this dark cigar is a bit lumpy but performs well with an even draw and burn. It's woody and sweet with notes of vanilla, cedar and caramel. Tastes better than it looks.

U.S.: $8.90 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PLASENCIA ALMA FUERTE SIXTO II

88

Hexagonally pressed, this six-sided cigar draws and burns evenly despite the unusual shape. It shows a strong, earthy, leathery character with sweet vanilla and cocoa notes as well as cedar and charcoal. A powerful smoke.

U.S.: $21.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PSYKO SEVEN CONNECTICUT GORDO

88

A big, fat cigar that burns slightly crooked but imparts a toasty, nutty smoke with sweet hints of honey and graham cracker. The finish is light and woody.

U.S.: $9.04 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: COSTA RICA

ROCKY PATEL OLDE WORLD RESERVE MADURO SIXTY

88

Fat and blocky, this box-pressed cigar shows a woody, oaky core framed by hints of vanilla, black pepper and dried herbs before the dry, woody finish.

U.S.: $11.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: MEXICO

THE OSCAR MADURO SIXTY

88

Despite the heft of this dark, fat cigar, it holds a solid ash for quite some time, and offers the earthy notes of coffee and cocoa along with some crushed black pepper on the finish.

U.S.: $13.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALEC BRADLEY MAGIC TOAST GORDO

86

A fat, near-black cigar whose earthiness and caramel sweetness are overwhelmed by heavy notes of charred wood and burnt coffee.

U.S.: $10.25 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MATILDE RENACER GRANDE

82

Tasters encountered draw problems from the cigar being either too firm or too airy. Every puff leaves a gritty earthy sensation along with waxy notes and a rough, bitter aftertaste.

U.S.: $9.60 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

petit coronas

While petit coronas are slowly disappearing from cigar stores, this size category turned in a very respectable performance, with four cigars scoring 91 points or higher. The Cuban Punch Coronation scored 92 points, comes in a quaint little tube and hits a very broad spectrum of flavors. Three cigars scored 91 points. Ashton's Cabinet Selection Trés Petit shows a medium body that belies its light wrapper. It's made in the Dominican Republic at the Fuente factory. Cuba's Partagás Corona Junior also comes in a tube and is a great representation of this often hearty brand. Sold in tins of five cigars, Rocky Patel's Sun Grown Juniors from Honduras work out to a mere $3.30 each.

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2017

PUNCH CORONATION (TUBO)
A solidly rolled corona with a flat head and perfect draw. Floral first puffs usher in a hearty smoke of dark-roasted coffee bean, salt and oak over an underlying nuttiness. The finish is sweet with honey.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £14.00 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

ASHTON CABINET SELECTION
TRÉS PETITE
Solid to the touch, this petit corona is made with a flat head. Bold, leather notes stand out immediately along with plenty of walnut flavor and a warm, oaky finish.
U.S.: $9.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

91

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: FEBRUARY 2017

PARTAGÁS CORONA JUNIOR (TUBO)
Covered in a reddish-brown wrapper, this little cigar draws and burns quite evenly. Its core foundation of leather, earth and wood support sweeter notes of almond-studded nougat and gingersnap.
U.S.: N/A Italy: 6.20 euro STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: HONDURAS, PANAMA
BINDER: COSTA RICA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROCKY PATEL SUN GROWN JUNIORS
Spices mingle wonderfully on the palate here, as notes of salt, cardamom and ground pepper, both black and red, are brought together by underpinnings of earth and leather. A tasty petit corona.
U.S.: $3.30 ($16.50, 5 Cigars) U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

91

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: COSTA RICA, MEXICO, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

GRAN HABANO HABANO NO. 3
LUNCH BREAK
Well-rolled with plenty of tobacco and a pigtail cap. Primary notes of earth and cedar carry nutty hints of leather. The sweet finish smacks of honey and salted caramel.
U.S.: $5.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA FLOR DOMINICANA LIGERO OSCURO NATURAL CABINET L-200
A dark, little cigar with a lot of power as each puff bursts with black, white and red pepper along with leather and earth, and a sweet touch of raisin. The draw is open and even.
U.S.: $7.20 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ARTURO FUENTE
PETIT CORONA MADURO
Black and rustic with a rough cap. An initial blast of ground pepper and earth settles down to show anise and licorice before the charry finish. Quite strong for such a little smoke.
U.S.: $5.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 41 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF SIGNATURE PETIT CORONA
The tan wrapper of this well-made petit corona gleams with oil. The draw is lush and open, delivering a sweet, toasty smoke with lots of orange peel before a woody, earthy finish.
U.S.: $13.10 U.K.: £14.64 STRENGTH: Medium

88

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: APRIL 2015

POR LARRAÑAGA PETIT CORONA
Gnarly veins run up and down the wrapper of this small corona, which has a slight taper to the head. It's a simple smoke of nuts and wood with a touch of graham cracker sweetness on the finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £13.40 STRENGTH: Medium

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: MEXICO
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

FONSECA 2-2
A tan petit corona that draws and burns evenly, showing a woody smoke with sweet touches of cinnamon and vanilla. The finish is herbal.
U.S.: $5.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

87

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

TIMELESS STERLING PERLAS
A tan, veiny petit corona that draws evenly and holds a sturdy ash. Its light peppermint notes also hint of cedar and walnut before the dry finish.
U.S.: $9.35 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

87

HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALADINO PETIT CORONA
Strong and spicy, this small smoke also shows an earthy character with peppery hints of pencil lead and a touch of acidity.
U.S.: $5.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4 3/5"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MAY 2017

H. UPMANN CORONA MINOR (TUBO)
The up-front perfume of this heavily floral petit corona subsides to show some nuttiness and a bit of dark chocolate. The finish is earthy and a touch gritty.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £14.20 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

U.S.A.
RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

TATUAJE RESERVA PETIT CAZADORES
Rolled with an uncut foot, this little cigar has a notably firm draw. Initial puffs are salty and briny but the smoke becomes a bit vegetal, leaving a damp aftertaste.
U.S.: $4.75 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

84

robustos

The robustos in this issue were an absolute powerhouse of a category with more high scores than any other size. More than half the robustos here scored 90 points or more, the most impressive being the Juan Lopez Selección No. 2 at 94 points. It's one of Cuba's smaller, lesser-known brands, and not necessarily available in all shops that sell Cuban cigars, but the Selección No. 2 is worth seeking out, especially if it has a box date of March 2015. Also from Cuba (and much better known), the Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2 scored 93 points. This tends to be quite popular among Cuban cigar fans as it's straightforward and tasty enough for a beginner, but nuanced and complex enough for a connoisseur. Two cigars scored 92 points. The Padrón Serie 1926 is made in Nicaragua and one of the strongest brands made by Padrón, but the power is justified and supported by the rich, polished layers of the blend. Vegueros was once a simple, rustic Cuban cigar brand, but the Centrofinos ended up being far more complex than Vegueros of the past. This robusto is the newest addition to the line, and also the most expensive.

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2015

JUAN LOPEZ SELECCIÓN NO. 2
Made with a flat head and three-seam cap, this robusto is bursting with flavor starting with dried fig and raisin notes that bring layers of chestnut and coffee before a salted caramel and toffee finish. Complex and delicious.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £20.80 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

94

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2015

HOYO DE MONTERREY
EPICURE NO. 2 (TUBO)
The opulent draw of this well-made robusto delivers sweet notes of brown sugar, raisin and cocoa all buttressed by a woody core. The finish is long, hinting of coconut and cashew. A delicious cigar.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £24.15 STRENGTH: Medium

93

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN SERIE 1926 NO. 6
Smoking this dark, box-pressed robusto is like chewing on chocolate-covered espresso beans. It also has the sweeter qualities of black cherry and nougat along with some spice. The perfect burn couldn't be more even.
U.S.: $14.00 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

92

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2019

VEGUEROS CENTROFINOS
First puffs of this colorado-hued robusto are toasty and floral, balanced by the richer elements of almond, nougat and gingerbread that follow. Elegant and tasty.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £17.50 STRENGTH: Medium

92

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

MY FATHER LA GRAN OFERTA ROBUSTO
There's a spicy, earthy quality to this dark robusto, which gleams with oil. Notes of black pepper, almonds and chocolate build to a salted-caramel finish.
U.S.: $7.80 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

NICARAGUA
RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 4 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

OLIVA SERIE V MELANIO PETIT CORONA

A box-pressed mini robusto with a perfect burn and interesting array of spices—white pepper, cardamom, clove—complemented by sweet notes of dried dates, cocoa powder and nuts.

U.S.: $8.61 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

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

VILLIGER LA MERIDIANA ROBUSTO

The toasty smoke of well-made robusto also shows a distinct nutty quality redolent of cashews with underpinnings of earth and dried fruit. The draw is a bit firm, the burn, clean and even.

U.S.: $7.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

91

CUBA
RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2017

MONTECRISTO LINEA 1935 DUMAS

There's a strong and prominent nuttiness to this cigar redolent of almond paste and chestnuts. It takes on notes of cedar, dark chocolate and a hint of ground red pepper before the slightly chalky finish. The draw is a bit firm.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £27.60 STRENGTH: Medium-Full

90

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

LA FLOR DOMINICANA DOUBLE CLARO NO. 50

A strikingly green cigar with plenty of earth, honey and tangy citrus notes, along with some grassiness and a woody, spicy finish. The draw and burn are even throughout.

U.S.: $8.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium

89

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: MEXICO

AGING ROOM MADURO RONDO

The earthy espresso notes of this dark, robusto take on hints of cocoa powder before a charred woody finish. The draw and burn are consistently even.

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

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

HENRY CLAY STALK CUT ROBUSTO

The excess wrapper leaf on the uncut foot of this box-pressed robusto takes flame well, burning evenly. It's a tangy, earthy smoke with notes of minerals, citrus and salty leather.

U.S.: $9.37 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

88

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

E.P. CARRILLO CARDINAL IMPACT NO. 52

Sharp ridges from the cigar mold crease the wrapper of this dark cigar, which is woody and peppery with some intermittent earthiness and a vaguely sweet finish.

U.S.: $7.10 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Medium-Full

86

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

GURKHA ROYAL CHALLENGE ROBUSTO

A primarily cedary smoke with vague notes of citrus that lead to a straw-and-hay finish. It's rolled in a light wrapper and draws evenly from first puff to last.

U.S.: $7.50 U.K.: N/A STRENGTH: Mild-Medium

86

buying guide

TOP SCORES, VALUES AND STRENGTH | BLIND TASTE TEST NO. 152

TOP SCORES

94 **Juan Lopez Selección No. 2**
Cuba • £20.80 • Robusto • Medium-Full

94 **Montecristo Platinum Series Churchill (Tubo)**
Dominican Republic • $13.03 • Churchill • Medium-Full

93 **Black Label Trading Co. Lawless Churchill**
Nicaragua • $11.00 • Churchill • Medium-Full

93 **Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2 (Tubo)**
Cuba • £24.15 • Robusto • Medium

93 **Nat Cicco Aniversario 1965 Liga No. 4 Toro**
Nicaragua • $6.95 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

93 **San Lotano Dominicano Torpedo**
Dominican Republic • $9.50 • Figurado • Medium-Full

92 **Nestor Miranda Collection 75th Anniversary Salomon**
Nicaragua • $19.00 • Figurado • Medium-Full

92 **Padrón Serie 1926 No. 6**
Nicaragua • $14.00 • Robusto • Medium-Full

92 **Punch Coronation (Tubo)**
Cuba • £14.00 • Petit Corona • Medium-Full

92 **Vegueros Centrofinos**
Cuba • £17.50 • Robusto • Medium

TOP VALUES

91 **Rocky Patel Sun Grown Juniors**
Honduras • $3.30 ($16.50, Five Cigars) • Petit Corona • Full

90 **Gran Habano Habano No. 3 Lunch Break**
Honduras • $5.20 • Petit Corona • Medium-Full

88 **Arturo Fuente Flor Fina 8-5-8 Sun Grown**
Dominican Republic • $6.75 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

88 **Perdomo Fresco Connecticut Churchill**
Nicaragua • $4.30 • Churchill • Mild-Medium

87 **Fonseca 2-2**
Dominican Republic • $5.50 • Petit Corona • Mild-Medium

MILDER CIGARS

89 **Cohiba Connecticut Gigante**
Dominican Republic • $22.99 • Grande • Mild-Medium

89 **Oliva Connecticut Reserve Churchill**
Nicaragua • $9.85 • Churchill • Mild-Medium

88 **Headley Grange Dobles**
Dominican Republic • $10.15 • Corona Gorda • Mild-Medium

88 **Psyko Seven Connecticut Gordo**
Dominican Republic • $9.04 • Grande • Mild

87 **H. Upmann Connecticut by Grupo de Maestros Toro**
Dominican Republic • $8.94 • Corona Gorda • Mild-Medium

MEDIUM-BODIED CIGARS

91 **Ashton Cabinet Selection Trés Petite**
Dominican Republic • $9.75 • Petit Corona • Medium

91 **Joya Red Cañonazo**
Nicaragua • $7.60 • Corona Gorda • Medium-Full

91 **Oliva Serie V Melanio Petit Corona**
Nicaragua • $8.61 • Robusto • Medium-Full

90 **Brick House Churchill**
Nicaragua • $7.20 • Churchill • Medium

90 **Casa Turrent Serie 1901 Gran Robusto**
Mexico • $9.50 • Corona Gorda • Medium

STRONGER SMOKES

91 **My Father La Gran Oferta Robusto**
Nicaragua • $7.80 • Robusto • Medium-Full

90 **601 Blue Label Maduro Torpedo**
Nicaragua • $8.95 • Figurado • Full

90 **La Flor Dominicana Ligero Oscuro Natural Cabinet L-200**
Dominican Republic • $7.20 • Petit Corona • Medium-Full

88 **Arturo Fuente Petit Corona Maduro**
Dominican Republic • $5.75 • Petit Corona • Full

88 **Plasencia Alma Fuerte Sixto II**
Nicaragua • $21.00 • Grande • Full

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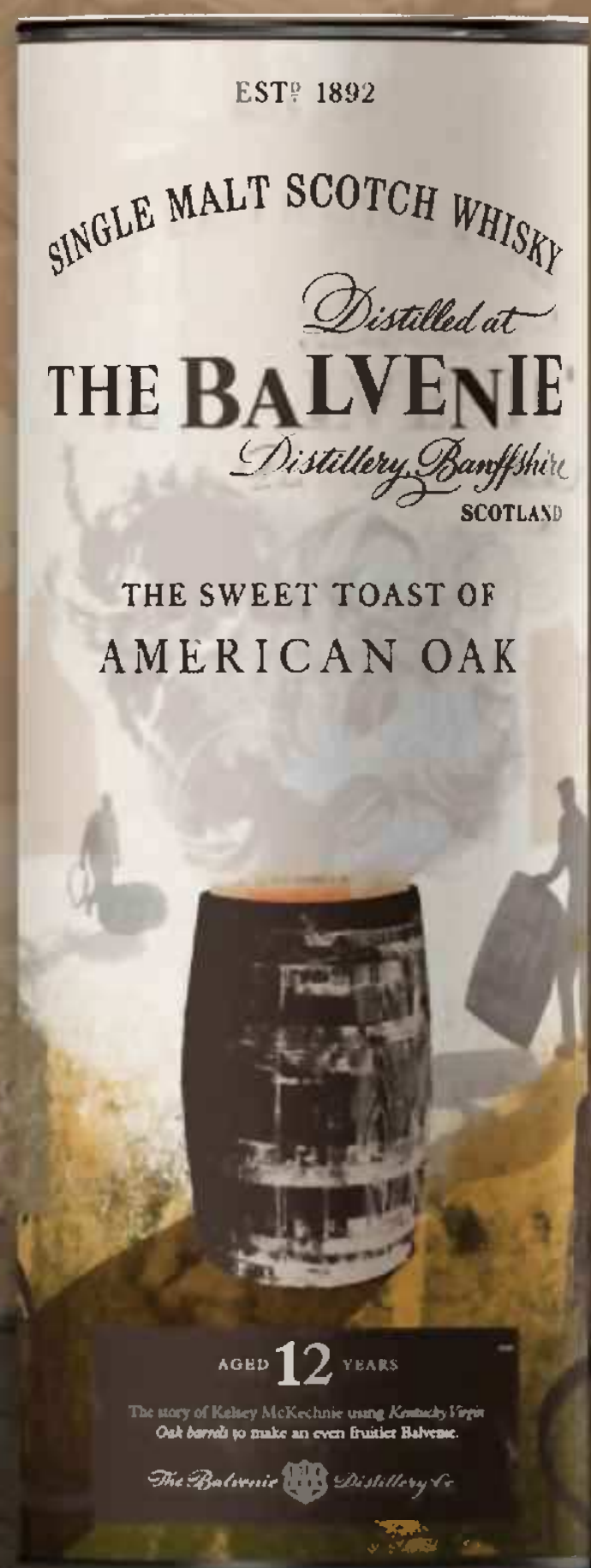

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JEFF HARRIS

100 DON CANDIDO DUNHILL SELECCIÓN NO. 500 (1980)

One of the most delicious cigars I've ever smoked. At 6 1/2 inches by 48 ring, it's nearly a Churchill, and the largest size in the long gone Don Candido brand. The draw remains flawless and the beautiful brown wrapper is still silky after all these years. It's a very creamy smoke, astonishingly rich and alive with a profound nutmeg character that's not only vibrant but resonates on the palate with each puff. Medium bodied and truly perfect. —*Marvin R. Shanken*

98 PARTAGÁS 150 ANIVERSARIO 109 (1995)

This is one of Cuba's greatest special releases, and comes from a limited humidor (only 150 were made). The "109" shape, with a tapered head, seems to bring out the best in Cuba's cigarmakers. It begins with notes of tea and cocoa powder but warms to show touches of white pepper and earth with a slightly sweet finish. It's at its peak, but there are still decades left in this great smoke. —*Gordon Mott*

97 COHIBA ESPLENDIDO (1990)

This Churchill is nearly 30 years old, and it's adorned with an old-style Cohiba band with dots instead of squares. The draw is superb, the cigar burning with a gray ash that's more pepper than salt. A dry start is overtaken by a heavy peanut note, then a graham cracker sweetness dusted in baking spices. It gets stronger—and better—as it burns, but remains more mellow than the typical Cohiba profile. Elegant, balanced and delightful. —*David Savona*

94 TATUAJE LA VÉRITÉ LA VÉRITÉ 2009 (2009)

The fermented tobacco in La Vérité was not aged in bales as is standard practice. Rather, the idea was to age the tobacco after it was rolled into a cigar so it develops in the box the way wine ages in a bottle. Now that it's spent 10 years in a 50-count cab, this Churchill has turned into a sweet, elegant smoke with nuances of chestnut, dried pear, mocha and almonds. Understated and delicious. —*Gregory Mottola*

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Now that Nirka Reyes is in charge of her family's cigar factory, the legacy of De Los Reyes is in her hands.

A CANDID CONVERSATION WITH

Nirka Reyes

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER GARRITANO

She's only 30 years old, but Nirka Reyes is the president and driving force behind De Los Reyes, a cigar factory in the Dominican Republic responsible for the Saga line of cigars, as well as a portfolio of third-party brands. Since she took over the factory once run by her father Augusto, Reyes has created new brands, taken over the majority of tobacco purchasing and embarked on a bold strategy to slash production numbers in order to focus on branding and quality. Reyes sat down with managing editor Greg Mottola in the Cigar Aficionado offices in New York to talk about her business, the painful challenges of downsizing and how she's changing the face of her company.

MOTTOLA: How long has your family been in the tobacco business?
REYES: Six generations over 150 years. My family on the Reyes side comes from Spain, and my family has always been in Navarrete, and today we have fields from there to Mao. They started with a very small field in the middle of the city, and it's still there. At the beginning, we sold the tobacco that we grew. Then my great grandfather Don Julio started crossing varietals.

Reyes inspecting cigars in one of the many aisles of the factory's aging room.

Q: When did your family start making cigars?
A: In 1992.

Q: The family never made cigars before that?
A: No. That's when De Los Reyes was born. My father worked first at the PVC Puros de Villa Gonzalez cigar factory.

Q: Did he open his own factory?
A: Yes in Jacagua. It was called De Los Reyes and he made cigars for Thompson at the time. His first cigar brand was called Rey de Reyes, but someone owned [the trademark] in the U.S. so he had to sell in Europe, in Spain. He was mostly devoted to private labels. He made Indian Tabac for Rocky [Patel].

Q: What was the first Reyes line to come to the U.S.?
A: The Augusto Reyes brand, in 2006.

Q: When did you start working in tobacco?
A: Twelve years ago, when I was 18. I just got back from school in Switzerland and I wanted to work. My dad didn't want me to work in tobacco so I went to human resources and applied for a job at the factory. They shifted me around. The first department I worked in was human resources. Then finance. Then inventory. Then packaging. Then I went to production. That was the toughest.

Q: Why?
A: I'd smoke a cigar and say "I like it." And my father would say "That's not enough. You have to give me more of an answer." I had to relate what I liked and relate it to the tobacco, how the leaves are blended. That all affects how the cigar smokes and how it feels on the palate. It's not as easy as a primary process like packaging.

Q: What were you learning about tobacco?
A: The primings—ligeros, coronas, secos. I learned to look for differences in wrapper and binder, and how to keep them moist. I also learned about drying tobaccos before production. We don't believe in an absolute standard. Tobacco changes. If you're honest and you use just water and [cigar rolling glue]—that's all you're supposed to use—the tobacco is always changing. The same leaves from the same plant might give you the same stimulation, but the flavor profile can be different.

Q: Did you learn about fermentation?
A: Later. For the first four years I was everyone's assistant running errands all the time, from 2007 to 2011. Then, I quit.

Q: What made you decide to leave?
A: I was having health issues, but I also wanted to be outside the family business. I loved it but didn't have the freedom to create. So I applied to Grupo Popular and got a job there. I was in customer service first in the bank area, then on the investment side. I thought I would like finance, so I did that for a year. That's when my dad got involved with Swisher and not as involved in the factory anymore. He needed help and asked if I'd help run the factory for him. I was unhappy at my job. I thought I would like investment. So, in 2012 I came back as a factory manager with my dad.

Q: What did you do when you returned?
A: I asked what we did wrong.

Q: What do you mean?
A: I saw the passion in the factory, and the brand my father made received good ratings, but we were making products for too many people. Too many SKUs. The passion and the love was being lost in translation because of the way mail-order companies handled the Augusto Reyes brand. Dad didn't know he had to price protect the brand with mail order. But once we started doing well we felt we didn't have to do that anymore. He was making 13 million cigars a year, mostly for mail order.

Q: What did you do to address these problems?
A: We decided to cancel a lot of the

mail-order cigars we were making. We gave them a year's notice and continued to make a few brands with Thompson. We stopped making mixed-fill cigars. We also took the Augusto Reyes brand off the market.

Q: Why did you do that?
A: I wanted to make a cigar for long-term success, cigars for brick-and-mortar. It was sad to see how it started and what it became. That's my dad's name. That's my last name. Now, I just make Augusto Reyes Nativo for my dad, but we don't sell it anymore.

Q: What other changes did you make?
A: We also downsized. That was sad too, but it was critical. He was making the Patoro brand since 2001. It was a European line. Patoro was our quality standard. I wanted all my cigars to be like that. That became the production standard for the factory.

Q: How did you raise the standard?
A: In the cigar world, you don't pay by skill. You pay by production quantity. I wanted to change that. I wanted everyone to roll with the same quality. Incentive changes. We don't pay for how many cigars each roller makes.

Q: So the better the roller the more money they make?
A: Yes. They have a baseline on production, but the incentive they used to get for quantity is now for quality.

Q: That sounds like a big change. How did the rollers like it?
A: Some of them left. Most of them stayed. I wasn't doing millions of cigars anymore. Maybe 1.2 or 1.3 million cigars. That was in 2013.

Q: You went from making 13 million cigars a year down to 1.3 million?
A: Yes.

Q: What did your father think about the drop in production?
A: He was very supportive. He agreed. I'm always going to have a cigar factory. We put out the Don Julio brand. Swisher owned the trademark and they gave it to us, so this was named after my great grandfather to honor our past. It was a big deal to honor my past. We had two booths that year [at the trade show] in 2013 to introduce Don Julio.

Q: How many cigars do you produce a year?
A: Last year, 2.2 million, including private brands.

Q: What's the percentage of your own brands verses the contract brands you produce for other people?
A: Thirty percent is ours. Everything else is private.

Q: Are you trying to get back to the old production numbers?
A: It's a long-term plan. We hired engineers to figure out how to improve processes, improving aging techniques for example, and changes in our humidity. My brother had distribution in Miami, but we had to close it because I'm not shipping millions of cigars into the U.S. Now, we ship directly to the retailer from the factory with UPS. And we pay for the shipping.

Q: Is your father completely hands-off?
A: No. Even though I manage De Los Reyes, we're still a family board, so I have to present to my dad and my brother.

Dominican San Vicente binder and original Piloto Cubano seed tobacco in the filler. A lot of people don't use Dominican wrapper. My uncle is very big on using Dominican seeds.

Q: Your uncle as in Leo Reyes, the grower of Dominican tobacco?
A: Yes. He is the most passionate person about tobacco that I know. He inspired me to change everything to improve and to always keep improving. If he didn't continue to grow the Piloto I wouldn't have Golden Age. Working with family is difficult and I had to gain his respect. I am his client now. He'll show me a seed and I know he has other customers, but I want to be first, so I have to negotiate with him.

Q: How many different tobacco types does he grow?
A: In Cuban seeds alone, he grows about 17 different varieties. It's a privilege to use wrappers grown in the same fields that my great grandfather grew tobacco on. It gives me the continuity of six generations and it's an important connection. I never travel during tobacco season and I'm sad when it's over. That connection makes all the difference. I know on what exact field the tobaccos come from and I know how my uncle processes the tobacco. When I buy from other growers, I have to do my own processing of the tobacco.

"It's a privilege to use wrappers grown in the same fields that my great grandfather grew tobacco on. It gives me the continuity of six generations and it's an important connection."

Q: What's your flagship brand?
A: Saga. I wanted something that portrays the stories and the heritage of cigars. That's when Saga came to mind. My dad hated the name [laughs]. In Dominican slang, you call a bad baseball player "saga." It's a short name and people can say it easily in any language.

Q: What year did Saga come out?
A: That was 2014. The Saga Golden Age came out with all Dominican tobacco. It has a Corojo 2006 Dominican wrapper,

Q: You changed the name of your company from Corporación Cigar Export (CCE) back to De Los Reyes. Why?
A: I never liked the name. We're changing what we are as a factory and as a team. I didn't like the logo either. My dad bought the free zone with that name and he just stayed with it. I remember our original factory in Jacagua. It wasn't fancy at all, but it was beautiful. I wanted that feeling so I went back to the first name. That was in 2015. I used the crown for the logo which was taken from my family's crest.

Q: Let's talk about the Saga Short Tales brand.
A: Sagas are big stories. But then there are little stories. We wanted to make something unique, so we decided to make the box look like a book. The first volume of Saga Short Tales is called Tales of the High Primings. It came out in 2016 and we needed a strong cigar to kill the myth that we don't make powerful cigars in the Dominican Republic. I went back to the high primings because of its power. For us, strength means that you feel it in your body, but there is still plenty of stimulation on the palate, so that you still detect the sweetness.

Father and daughter Augusto and Nirka Reyes overlook the final steps in the packaging area.

Q: How did the market respond to the Saga Short Tales?
A: That's been our game changer. They love the book. It sold out fast because people wanted to buy the full box. After they bought the first one, they want the collection. We're trying to have every profile. We haven't done a mild one yet. Not sure if we're going to do that.

Q: How many volumes do you have?
A: We're up to six now. We plan on 10. Each one is a different blend and different size. A different story.

Q: What's the production for each Saga volume?
A: We start with 50,000 cigars. If inventories get down to a certain level, we start production again.

Q: Do you think getting market share in the U.S. is difficult?
A: It is. You look around and there's a new factory opening up every day. You'd think that with the FDA people would be scared, but apparently not. So many lines come out every year. And bigger companies have strategies to take up shelf space.

Q: As a small company, what are your thoughts on the FDA regulations?
A: It feels like a very intentional thing, like they want us to be the generation that ends tobacco smoking. Not all tobacco products are the same. Cigarettes and smokeless tobacco are so different from cigars. They're trying to regulate something that can never have one standard. It's impossible. Are we going to chemically engineer a leaf so that every leaf gives the same amount of nicotine? It's an attack on our culture, and they're not trying to understand it. I accept that businesses have to be regulated, but we should have some air.

Q: What would FDA regulation mean for your company?
A: Some products would be safe because we have predicate brands, but it's going to limit creativity. What can I do to make a substantial equivalent? It will be playing chess with the government.

Q: What's it like being a female in such a male dominated industry?
A: It was a challenge because of my youth more than because I was a female. That was the most challenging part. It took time to get respect from peers and the retailers. Even the consumers. Women can enjoy cigars in the same way that men can enjoy cigars. That is something I wanted to communicate. I don't party. I don't drink at cigar events. Keep the vibe professional.

Q: But not everyone is always professional back.
A: Someone wanted me to do a cigar event, and asked if I could come in a miniskirt. I usually don't wear short dresses. Sometimes I get indecent proposals, but I ignore them.

Q: As a woman, you have to maintain boundaries in a way that men in your position don't have to think about.
A: Yes. One time at the IPCPR trade show, someone told me to sit on his lap. It's getting better. When you go to a cigar event, still most of the women are models in short dresses. Things are changing.

Q: What do you think about the rise of Nicaragua?
A: The world is very competitive, and it's a great motivation. Just like when people ask me what happens if Cubans become legal in the U.S. It's another challenge and it will be fun. I don't like things to be too easy. There's a market for everyone. Not every consumer likes the same thing. It's good for Nicaragua. Estelí was nothing and undeveloped. Now, I see how many factories they have. That's a good thing. It's extraordinary. ❖

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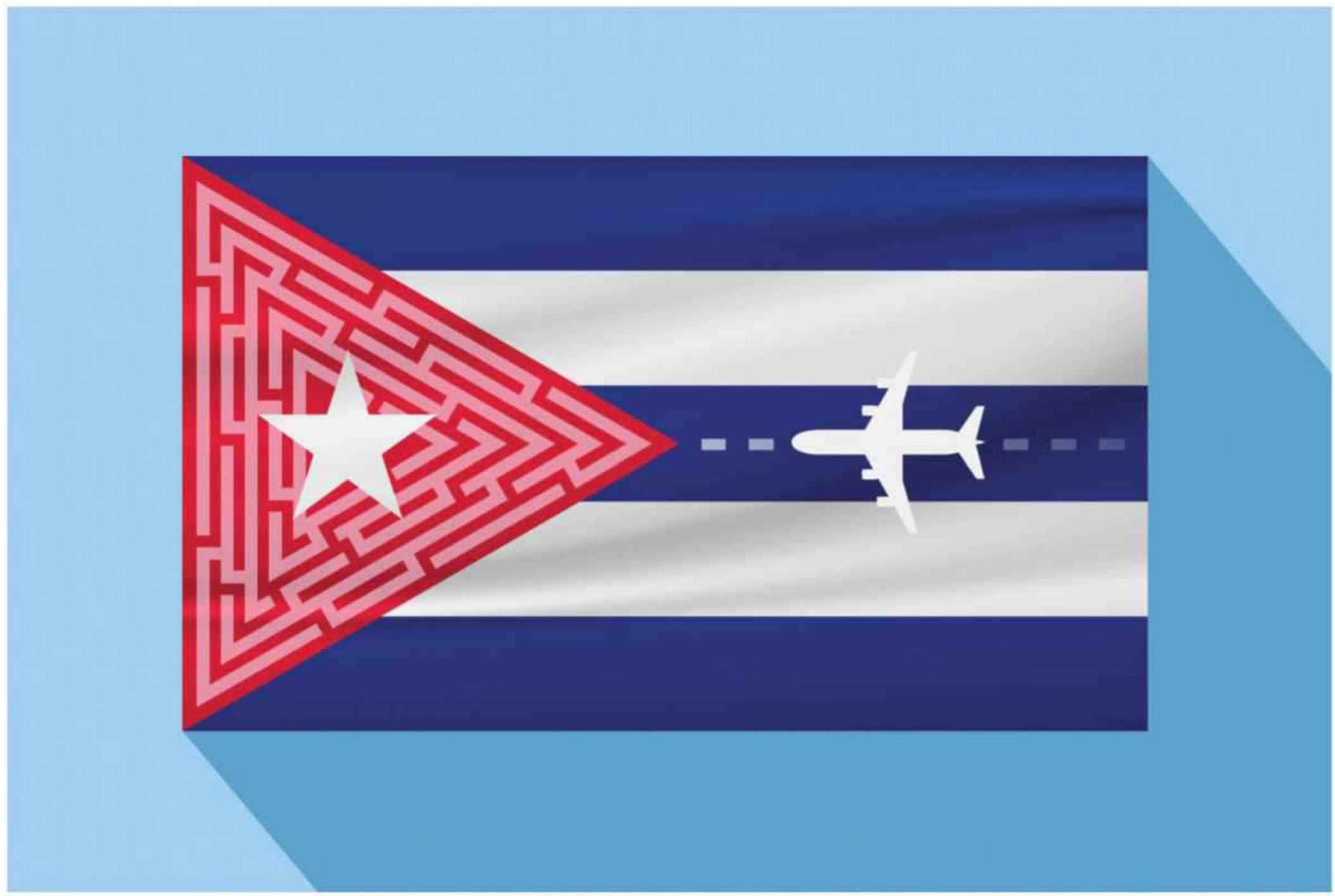
The Cuba Travel Maze

The new rules seem to cast a pall on the prospects for visiting Cuba. But are they as strict as they sound? BY GORDON MOTT



At first, June 5th, 2019 looked like the end of travel to Cuba for Americans. No more cruise ship visits. Elimination of all people-to-people program trips. Tough rhetoric against the Cuban government from the Trump Administration. Every Cuba lover was freaking out, figuring they had either missed their chance to visit the island nation off the southern coast of Florida or they could never visit again.

But the initial headlines were alarmist and in some ways 180 degrees from the reality. Travel to Cuba has become a little more complicated. That is true. You can't jump on a seven-day cruise out of Fort Lauderdale or Miami to the Caribbean with stops in Havana, Cienfuegos and Santiago. You also can't take your private yacht or fly your private jet to Cuba. Similarly, the many tourists who were skirting the intent of the rules by using them to vacation in Cuba, complete with trips to the beaches and sightseeing in Havana, will find those loopholes specifically prohibited under the new regulations.

Despite the changes, any American can still buy a ticket on any one of the five airlines that offer direct flights to Cuba from various points of departure in the United States. Those trips are legal under the Support for the Cuban People program, which has the same 12 categories of permitted reasons to travel to Cuba

"If you were planning on seeing Cuba through ports of call on one of the cruise lines, you have to make other plans. More than 800,000 travelers were scheduled to arrive in Cuba on board ships during the course of the next year, and those stops have been canceled."

as the previous people-to-people program, which had governed travel to Cuba for nearly 20 years.

"The U.S. government basically consolidated the people-to-people program into the Support for the Cuban People," says Tom Popper, the president of insightCuba, the largest tour operator for trips to Cuba. "I'm seeing a lot of interest this summer for trips during the fall and winter."

The bottom line is Americans can still travel to Cuba under those 12 categories of permitted travel in the Support for the Cuban People regulation. Those categories include: family visits; official business for the U.S. government, foreign governments and certain intergovernmental agencies; journalistic activity; professional research and professional meetings; educational activities; religious activities; public performances, clinics, workshops, athletic and other competitions and exhibitions; support for the Cuban people; humanitarian projects; activities of private foundations or research or educational institutes; exportation, importation or transmission of information or information materials; and certain authorized export transactions.

Travelers also can still buy Cuban cigars and Cuban rum in Cuba and in third-party countries during their travels and bring them back to the United States. The limits are the same as before: $800 worth of purchased goods, but the number of cigars imported cannot exceed 100. If you exceed those amounts, and stay within an ambiguous definition "for personal use," you pay only an import duty of four percent on the excess quantities. But based on anecdotes reported to Cigar Aficionado, travelers should be wary of exceeding the limits on cigars, because an individual customs agent can declare on the spot that they are for resale, not personal consumption, and therefore seize the cigars.

So how do the new regulations work? Years ago, a traveler had to solicit a specific license from the U.S. Treasury department to travel to Cuba legally. But those requirements were loosened years ago, and now, even in the wake of the June 5th ruling, each traveler buying an air ticket to Cuba is asked only to self-certify that he or she is visiting Cuba under one of the 12 permitted categories. The traveler is then required under the regulation to comply with the basic rule that all interactions—from daily activities to which hotels they stay in and where they eat—be directly with the Cuban people, and not with Cuban government entities. They also are required to keep a detailed itinerary of their activities and expenses, and for a period of five years be ready to show them to the U.S. government. Those rules are no different than what was on the books when the Obama Administration began a diplomatic thaw in 2014 that led to the opening of an official U.S. Embassy in Havana in 2016. But enforcement was nonexistent.

What does all this mean in practical terms? First of all, if you were planning on seeing Cuba through ports of call on one of the cruise lines, you have to make other plans. More than 800,000 travelers were scheduled to arrive in Cuba on board ships during the course of the next year, and those stops have been canceled. The cruise lines have created new itineraries, in some cases (when the June 5th announcement was made) while the ships were at sea. The cruise lines have offered discounts and incentives to people who had booked cruises with stops in Cuba going forward.

The air travel providers remain committed to their schedules. American Airlines spokesperson Laura Masvidal says that the airline is not only continuing to operate its full schedule to Cuba, but has added two daily flights since the June 5th announcement. One is from Miami to Santiago, Cuba, and the other is an additional flight from Miami to Havana, bringing the total daily round-trip flights on that route to six. She declined to respond to questions about the airline's projection for demand or the percentage of seats occupied on each flight. While airlines are very reluctant to release information on demand for seats, their actions suggest demand remains high on all the Cuba routes.

A Delta Airlines statement says it has not changed its flight schedules to Havana as a result of the Trump Administration action. Delta flies one daily round trip from Atlanta to Havana, and two daily round trips to Havana from Miami. Other airlines flying to Cuba include JetBlue (from New York's JFK and Fort Lauderdale), Southwest (from Tampa and Fort Lauderdale) and United (from Newark). Some airline analysts have speculated that since many of the cruise ship travelers may still have interest in visiting Cuba, once they learn they can still travel by air, flights may actually increase in 2020. The U.S. Department of Transportation estimated that about 893,000 persons flew from the United States to Cuba in 2018, with two-thirds of them having relatives in Cuba. In all, Cuba received nearly four million tourists in 2018.

There has also been confusion over whether Americans traveling under Support for the Cuban People could lodge in hotels. The original SPC regulations said people could only stay in private homes. But the Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) clarified immediately after the June 5th announcement that all travelers could now stay at hotels as long as they were not on the published restricted list, which focuses primarily on hotels owned by the Cuban military. The list includes dozens of hotels on the island, among them the Conde de Villanueva, the Ambos Mundos and the new and opulent Gran Hotel Manzana Kempinski, which opened in 2017. Some analysts believe there is a gray area, allowing a traveler to stay at one of the restricted hotels as long as it was booked through an offshore agency and the traveler doesn't pay the hotels directly.

"My advice to people if they have a question is get in touch with OFAC," says John Kavulich, president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council. "They are not trying to catch people. They want to keep people from doing something wrong." ❖

For more detailed Cuba travel information visit: www.treasury.gov and search under Cuba sanctions.

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Cigarmaker Rocky Patel and Rich Castiano, owner of The World Famous Cigar Bar in Fort Myers, Florida, do some high-altitude smoking in the Austrian Alps.

Jeff Fishbaugh, Jake Fishbaugh, Diana Vorhees-Fishbaugh, Rick Vorhees and Brad Smith at Jake and Diana's wedding on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.

Shane Fallon, Matt and Alexis Townson, and father of the bride Bruno Fallon at Matt and Alexis' wedding at the Gray Dove in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Tom Pike, Jon Smith, Bob Smith and Mike Beehler celebrate both Father's Day and the wedding of Bob's daughter with golf and cigars in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Friends Larry Lebarre, U.S. Army General Tommy Franks and Dr. Robert Remondino break open a box of Cohiba Behikes in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Around a warm fire in Rahway, New Jersey, Steve Alt and Gates Garcia welcome home Dave Milanes (center) from his deployment in the Middle East.

Jake Lyssy, Drue Cicchetto, Stuart Loop, James Spadafore and Ben Seidenstein puffing away in Havana to celebrate James' 30th birthday.

Enshrinement in the Pro Football Hall of Fame calls for a fine cigar. Ed Reed, former safety for the Baltimore Ravens, poses with his bust in Canton, Ohio.

Old friends Tony Delicandro, Ron Aldom and Dale Walker light up some Cohibas while playing a round of golf at Hidden Valley Resort in Somerset, Pennsylvania.

Jim Bartolotta and Nick King from Southgate, Michigan, show off their team pride and enjoy some cigars before watching the Michigan-Notre Dame football game.

Mary and Bill Immke from Pontiac, Illinois, spend the evening with Jill and Bob Bisswanger from Ethel, Arkansas, in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic.

Kevin Purvis (far right) is joined by his son Michael and daughter-in-law Matteah for cigars on the beach at Coronado Island in California.

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Jim Minnelli and daughter Nicole of Malden, Massachusetts, celebrate Nicole's graduation from Framingham State University.

Andy and Amy Sirotkin came all the way from Sands Point, New York, to enjoy cigars and golf at Waterville Golf Links in County Kerry, Ireland.

Caroline Leonard, Mary Simpson, Olivia Ragio, Kelsey Simmons and Cameryn Cook mark their graduation from Mt. Notre Dame High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, with some smokes.

Up in New York State's far western region, Dado de Sa, Jon Halaby and Art Halaby relax on the deck with refreshing libations and fine cigars in Chautauqua Lake.

Members of the Milwaukee Athletic Club in Wisconsin gather to enjoy one final smoke in their 100-year-old building before it closes for renovation.

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Brian Egan and John Tortorella on their annual walk across the Brooklyn Bridge for a slice of pizza. They rewarded themselves with Oliva Serie V cigars for the walk back to Manhattan.

Retired USAF Colonels Chuck Johnson (far left) and Eric Theisen (far right) and their wives, Ginny and Cathy, at the Cigar, Bourbon and Craft Beer Festival in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Shawn McCarney, Rachel Wojdowski, John Angotti, Adrian Stocker, Jody Castle, Brock Schneider, Jim Balog and Chaz Mattiucci at the wedding of John and Kelly Angotti in Gibsonia, Pennsylvania.

Bobbie Christian and Heather Keverline light up at the wedding of Mollie and Nash Huffman at The Coves in Lenoir, North Carolina.

Chris Criscione and Brian Smith find time for cigars at the going-away party for Chris's daughter and son-in-law in Lake Zurich, Illinois.

Retired Army paratrooper Joe Myrda and retired Marine artilleryman Kenton Bradford smoke Montecristos at The Bad Monkey in Tampa, Florida.

William Gall, father of the bride Bruce Patterson and Brooke Patterson Gall strike a pose at Bruce and Brooke's wedding reception at The Addison in Boca Raton, Florida.

Bob Parsons, Carl Sandstrom and son Steve Sandstrom celebrate all three of them birdying the same hole at the Jamaica Run golf course in Dayton, Ohio.

Jason Casarella and his son, Owen, from Doylestown, Pennsylvania, with some 17-year-old Fuente Fuente OpusX cigars for Owen's high school graduation.

Vietnam veterans Steve Jakala and Mike Nielson honor the 75th anniversary of the Region 4 Smokejumpers in McCall, Idaho, with Fuente cigars.

Proud parents Sam and Michele Sakwa at daughter Ashley's graduation from the Wharton MBA program in San Francisco, California.

Phil Ricardi (far left) and Deno Yiankes (far right) flank their sons Brian and Alex as they all smoke to Brian and Alex's graduation in Bloomington, Indiana.

Harrison Welch and father of the bride Scott Van Zanten celebrate with the groomsmen during Harrison and Carly's wedding at the Brown Mountain Beach Resort in Lenoir, North Carolina.

Kentucky natives Jacob Nord, Evan Nord, Glenn Nord, Adam Nord and Daryl Kelly spend a day at the races at Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky.

Nick Shidlovsky, Mark Von Cappeln, Corey Blankenship, Aaron Mathys, Scott Rathburn and Jon Zimmerman celebrate their graduation from Ranger School at Fort Benning, Georgia.

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The McIntyres, Taylor, Mark II, Mason and Mark I, from Colombus, Ohio, at Mason's graduation from Howard University in Washington, D.C.

Alejandro Matta, Celestino Matta V, Viviana Matta and Celestino Matta VI enjoy a day on the beaches of Isla Verde, Puerto Rico.

Good friends J.J. Daniels and Tad Deriso pregame with Cohiba Siglo II cigars before watching Georgia Tech play Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia.

Susan Picarillo from New Paltz, New York, and Lisa Boyea from Walden, New York, bring a serious cigar game to MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

Bryan and Lisa Wallace from Cumbria, England, celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary in Havana by renewing their vows and smoking cigars.

Joseph Savino on his last night with his partner Thor, before retiring from a 30-year career in the NYPD, 15 years serving in the Elite Mounted Unit.

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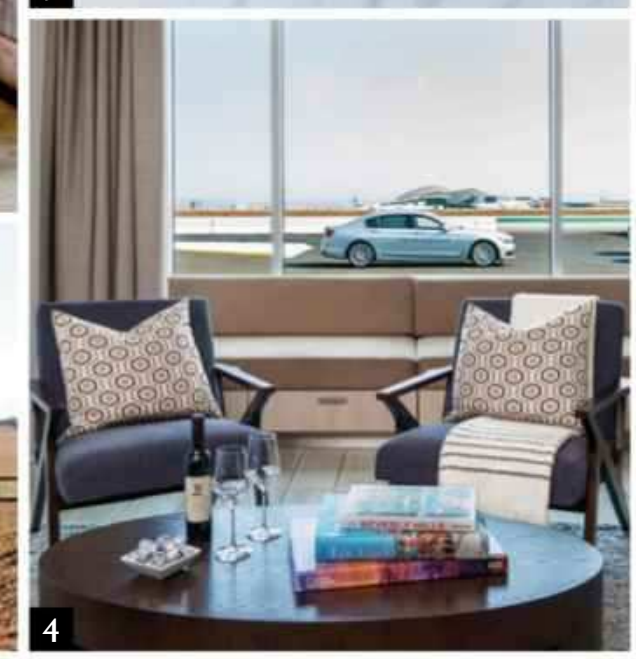

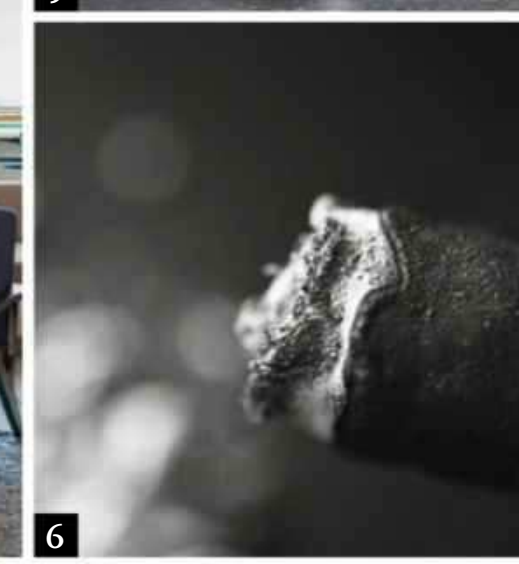

In a world of fast food and one-size-fits-all sensibilities, how often does something feel made especially for you? The "Made for You" section celebrates those items that are created with such high quality of hand workmanship and degree of customization that they become individual to you. In each issue, 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 THE BENCHMARK—AMERICAN WORKBENCH

The Catch-22 of starting a woodworking hobby is that it helps to have a wooden workbench to start with. When the former hotelier John Zirpola ran into that frustration, a lightbulb turned on and he started making benches for woodworkers and hobbyists who otherwise made due with "bricks and an old door for a bench." Now, he offers sturdy, easy-to-assemble benches, like the Paul Revere and the Minuteman, with custom engraving and lettering available. *americanworkbench.com*

2 SMOKING BARRELS—WING & BARREL RANCH

The mark of an outstanding club is that it can bring your favorite pursuits together in one place. And if you're a certain type of guy—someone who appreciates great cigars, fine wine, gourmet food and sporting clays, Wing & Barrel Ranch in Sonoma, California, is that place. The amenities include an exclusive cigar program, wine events, a menu designed by the chef Charlie Palmer and a world-class clay-shooting course outfitted by shotgun makers Beretta and Purdey. But it doesn't end there: the club provides dog training and boarding. *wingandbarrelranch.com*

3 REAL DEAL KOBE—HOLY GRAIL

Forget the Kobe sliders at your local brewhouse: Kobe beef is dearly priced, exceptionally rare and nearly as counterfeited as Cohibas. To find the real product, look to Holy Grail Steak Co., which sells all manner of high-end steaks, including grade A5 Kobe beef from Japan. The beef is more white than red, its signature fat a spider web of flavor. The meat melts in the pan and has the richness of foie gras, quite unlike traditional beef. Expect to pay $300 for 15 ounces. *holygrailsteak.com*

4 HAVE A SUITE FLIGHT—PRIVATE SUITE

Today's equivalent of the hurry-up-and-wait drill is the typical airport experience. You arrive early and stand in line before walking half a mile to a gate, only to sit and watch the news on mute because the plane's delayed. But Los Angeles passengers can bypass that agony with Private Suite, a service that puts up fliers in a private room in a private terminal at LAX with its own TSA screening. The suites have a daybed, seating area, food service pantry and private bathroom and television. When takeoff is imminent, a BMW takes you to your plane. *theprivatesuite.com/the-experience*

5 STEEL GLASSES—CORK POPS

The shaken or stirred Martini debate is sure to go on as long as gin meets vermouth in a cocktail glass. But one dig against the classic stirred version (it doesn't tend to chill as well in a pitcher as it does in a shaker) is rendered moot by the Stainless Steel Martini Glass from Cork Pops. You freeze the double-walled vessel and a gel sandwiched between the metal surfaces keeps your Martini cold even as you clutch it in your hot little hands. The food-grade metal comes in a choice of steel or copper finish. *corkpops.com*

6 MAN CAVE GALLERY—JBM FINE ART

When does a man cave become more than just a place to smoke? When you put art on the walls. For that, look to JBM Fine Art and its moody, black-and-white photographs of smoking scenes. The artist, Jillian Biehl Morrison, says, "My series is meant to illuminate and showcase the beauty of cigars as the luxury art form they are." She does this through an interplay of light and shadow as well as provocative titles like "First Kiss" (a match to cigar) and "Phoenix" (smoke rising from the ashes). *jillianbiehlmorrison.com*

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