

Cigar Insider

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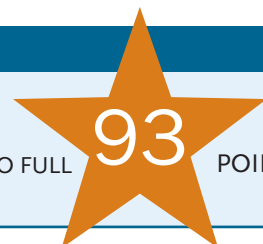
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FEATURED CIGAR

ROOM 101 OSOK CHINGON

HONDURAS ■ PRICE: \$12.00 ■ BODY: MED. TO FULL

For a full tasting, see page two.

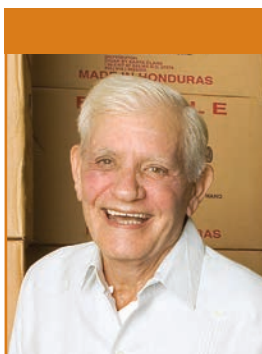


93

POINTS

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ROLANDO REYES SR. DIES THE MAN BEHIND PUROS INDIOS DIED AT THE AGE OF 89

on Sunday. Reyes Sr. was not only a brand owner, but a talented cigar roller as well. He learned the craft as a child in Cuba and created Cuba Aliados in the 1970s. For his life story, see page eight.



ELS FOR AUTISM GOLF CHARITY RAISES \$725,000 SIXTY AMATEUR GOLFERS AND 20 CURRENT AND FORMER PGA TOUR PROFESSIONALS

teed it up last week for the fourth annual Els for Autism Pro-Am Charity golf tournament, held at PGA National Golf Resort and Spa in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. The tourney raised \$725,000 for the foundation, which is dedicated to finding a cause and a cure for the epidemic of autism in young children. Ernie and Liezl Els, whose son is autistic, started the foundation with Marvin R. Shanken, editor and publisher of *Cigar Aficionado* and *Cigar Insider*. For the full story and photos visit www.cigaraficionado.com.

TASTING REPORT

SAN LOTANO OVAL

NEW RELEASE—VERTICAL BRAND TASTING

Country: Nicaragua

Maker: Tabacalera Fernandez

Distributor: A. J. Fernandez Cigars

Filler: Nicaragua, Honduras

Binder: Nicaragua

Wrapper: Ecuador

Release Date: August 2011

CORONA

91 POINTS ■ 5 1/2" x 44 ■ \$7.85 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION
Crafted with a very round head and ovular edges, the flat corona is rich with steady notes of leather, wood and dried cherry. The draw is even and lush throughout.

Body: Medium to Full

PYRAMID

91 POINTS ■ 6 1/2" x 54 ■ \$8.85 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION
Flatly pressed with rounded edges and a dark wrapper. This pyramid draws evenly, delivering bold, toasty, nutty smoke, but it's only for those who love a strong cigar.

Body: Full

TORO

91 POINTS ■ 6" x 54 ■ \$8.65 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION
A flat, thick cigar with contoured sides. Its full, even draw layers coffee flavors and cedar notes on top of some tangy, fruity impressions.

Body: Medium to Full

ROBUSTO

90 POINTS ■ 5 1/2" x 54 ■ \$8.55
The dark, oily wrapper of this rectangular cigar accentuates its curves and rounded edges. The creamy smoke underscores a consistent showing of spice and cedar.

Body: Medium to Full

PETIT ROBUSTO

88 POINTS ■ 4 1/2" x 54 ■ \$8.25

Dark and pressed, this rounded robusto starts tangy and tart, settling down to take on notes of semisweet chocolate and a touch of acidity.

Body: Medium to Full

GORDO

87 POINTS ■ 6 1/2" x 60 ■ \$10.25

Big enough to be a candy bar, this thick cigar is made with a pressed body and rounded edges. It has notes of tangy wood and sourdough, suggesting youth.

Body: Medium

BRAND SUMMARY: Cigar maker A. J. Fernandez has been making third-party brands for quite some time, but eventually branched out on his own and started the San Lotano line in 2010, which he says is named for his family's brand in Cuba before the revolution. His factory is located in Estelí. In 2011, Fernandez brought a unique cigar to market, the San Lotano Oval, named for its ovular head, flat body and dramatically rounded edges. The entire line as a whole performed very well but the Oval Corona, Pyramid and Toro scored 91 points, best of the lot.

Average Rating: 89.7 points

ROOM 101 OSOK

NEW RELEASE—VERTICAL BRAND TASTING

Country: Honduras

Maker: Tabacos Rancho Jamastran

Distributor: Davidoff of Geneva (FL) Inc.

Filler: Dom. Rep., Honduras

Binder: Honduras

Wrapper: Ecuador

Release Date: February 2012

CHINGON

93 POINTS ■ 8" x 60 ■ \$12.00 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION

With near-perfect construction, this beautifully crafted figurado draws very well, each puff full of leather, black pepper, cinnamon and earth.

Body: Medium to Full

100 POINT SCALE

95-100: Classic ■ 90-94: Outstanding ■ 80-89: Very good to excellent ■ 70-79: Average to good commercial quality
Below 70: Don't waste your money ■ N/A: Not Available *Note: Prices are manufacturers' suggested retail, before taxes.*

TRUCHA

90 POINTS ■ 6 1/2" x 50 ■ \$10.00

The bit of acidity on the initial puffs of this figurado dissipate to show plenty of coffee bean character, dried red fruit and a cinnamon spiciness.

Body: Medium

FILERO

87 POINTS ■ 4 1/2" x 52 ■ \$8.00

This little perfecto has an uneven draw, which delivers a singularly earthy smoking experience. The smoke could use more complexity.

Body: Medium to Full

BRAND SUMMARY: Matt Booth, founder of the Room 101 brand, intended this new line as a tribute to Los Angeles photographer Edgar Hoill, who shoots many of the images surrounding the Room 101 brand. Hoill's nickname, "One Shot, One Kill," (or OSOK), became the name of this brand, which consists of double-tapered figurados each rolled in a paper sleeve printed with unique artwork. At 93 points, the Chingon fared the best.

Average Rating: 90.0 points

LA FLOR DOMINICANA CAMEROON CABINET

NEW SIZE

Country: Dominican Republic

Maker: Tabacalera La Flor S.A.

Distributor: Premium Imports Inc.

Filler: Dom. Rep., Nicaragua

Binder: Dom. Rep.

Wrapper: Cameroon

Release Date: December 2011

CHISEL

92 POINTS ■ 6" x 54 ■ \$8.50 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION

Crafted with a wedge-shaped head, this cigar has a bit of a coarse wrapper but shows lots of spicy, nutty character as well as leathery flavors and a sweet nougat finish.

Body: Medium

LA FLOR DOMINICANA

NEW SIZE

Country: Dominican Republic

Maker: Tabacalera La Flor S.A.

Distributor: Premium Imports Inc.

Filler: Dom. Rep.

Binder: Ecuador

Wrapper: Mexico

Release Date: November 2011

FACTORY PRESS IV

90 POINTS ■ 6 1/2" x 60 ■ \$13.63

Severely pressed with sharp corners and a dark, oily wrapper. Though a slow starter, it warms up to show rich, woody notes and a dried fruit sweetness.

Body: Medium to Full

DIPLOMATICOS

CURRENT RELEASE

Country: Cuba

Maker: N/A

Distributor: Habanos S.A.

Filler: Cuba

Binder: Cuba

Wrapper: Cuba

Box Date: April 2011

NO. 2

91 POINTS ■ 6 1/8" x 52 ■ £15.66 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION

A slightly box-pressed pyramid whose first puffs impart warm, toasty flavors that become sweet with vanilla and almond notes. A touch of coffee emerges on the finish.

Body: Medium to Full

100 POINT SCALE

95-100: Classic ■ 90-94: Outstanding ■ 80-89: Very good to excellent ■ 70-79: Average to good commercial quality
Below 70: Don't waste your money ■ N/A: Not Available *Note: Prices are manufacturers' suggested retail, before taxes.*

CIGAR NEWS

THE NEW TASTE OF PARTAGAS: 1845 FROM GENERAL CIGAR

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

When *Cigar Insider* toured General Cigar's factory in the Dominican Republic last month, we noticed some unique cigars on the rolling tables. They had gleaming, oily reddish-brown wrappers unlike others on the production line. These cigars were striking but unfamiliar. This is because we were looking at an Ecuadoran Habano-



seed wrapper that General had never used on any Partagas brand before, and it's this same cover leaf that General is using on its soon-to-be-released Partagas 1845, the first new Partagas line to come to market in years.

"Partagas 1845 is uniquely positioned," explained Alan Willner, General's vice president of marketing. "This new collection celebrates Partagas's rich heritage while ushering in a new taste spectrum for the brand."

Along with the Habano-seed wrapper, Partagas 1845 consists of a proprietary Habano-seed binder grown in Connecticut. Dubbed Connecticut Habano, it took nine years to develop and has been blended with Dominican Piloto Cubano as well as Nicaraguan tobacco from three regions. Some of the fillers were aged in rum barrels.

The blend was conceived by Jhonys Diaz, vice president of operations at General Cigar Dominicana; Francisco Rodriguez, general manager of operations; and Yuri Guillen, production manager. Tobacco veteran and senior vice president Benjamin Menendez served as an adviser.

The cigar's wrapper is striking, and its adorning band—a gilded, embossed eagle cast in relief against a black and gold background—is equally eye catching and was inspired by a vintage Partagas label minted during the early 1900s. The design is a departure from the traditional heraldic composition found on most of General's Partagas bands.

Partagas 1845 will come in four sizes: Corona Extra, 4 1/2 by 46; Robusto, 5 1/2 by 49; Double Corona, 7 1/4 by 54 and Gigante, 6 by 60. Prices will range from \$5.99 to \$7.49, with the cigars reaching shops on April 9. ■

DAVIDOFF LOUNGES COMING TO UNITED STATES

BY G. CLAY WHITTAKER

Davidoff of Geneva will open its first Davidoff Lounge in the United States on May 17 in Chicago in a partnership with retailer Humidor of Westmont, which is owned by Sam Karam.

Davidoff Lounges—there are presently two dozen worldwide—are branded cigar havens put in shops not owned by Davidoff itself. Official lounges get the marketing services of the company as well as the name recognition of the Davidoff brand. Furthermore, all official locations receive new products up to one month before Davidoff appointed merchants, and receive larger volumes of popular and limited-release products. (Davidoff also has lounges in its New York City stores, each of which are owned by the company itself.)

The May 17 opening celebration with Humidor of Westmont will involve special products as well as VIPs from Davidoff corporate.

In an exclusive with *Cigar Insider*, Richard Krutick, head of marketing for the Davidoff, Avo and Zino Platinum brands, said there will be more to come. "We want to make it an experience. We want you to know it's 100 percent Davidoff."

"We're partnering with this retailer because he is one of the best Davidoff merchants in the country," said Krutick, who explained that Davidoff is helping the shop to brand itself, but the investment actually comes from the retailers himself. "We come in with a design team, but the materials are all on the retailer."

Krutick said there are other possible lounge locations being considered, adding that the locations and the business



both have to be quite special. "I need someone that has our philosophy, knows our values and upholds them." He said that of more than 200 appointed Davidoff merchants in the U.S., there are "six or seven real possibilities." He did share that the next potential lounge is somewhere in Texas. "When Davidoff comes to town," he said, "it's going to be quite the experience." ■

GURKHA CIGARS: NEW NAME, NEW STRATEGY

BY G. CLAY WHITTAKER AND DAVID SAVONA

Beach Cigar Group, the company behind **Gurkha** and **Wicked Indie** cigars, has a new name, a new company strategy and will soon be moving its corporate headquarters.

The company was renamed Gurkha Cigar Group Inc. last week, a move Gurkha said was part of re-branding itself to better emphasize its link to its key cigar brand.

“The new name is also appropriate to further signal the positive direction the company is taking and will be a tremendous help as we position the Gurkha brand internationally,” said Gary Hyams, president and chief executive officer of the company. Hyams, the former chairman of C.A.O. International Inc., joined Gurkha in June to work alongside company founder Kaizad (Kaiser) Hansotia, chairman of Gurkha.

Gurkha has a reputation for selling very expensive cigars housed in some of the cigar industry’s most elaborate and creative packaging. The **Gurkha Triad Platinum** sells for more than \$100 per cigar, and the **Gurkha HMR**—a box of which is made with an entire bottle of Cognac—is \$825 for one cigar. Hyams has expanded the Gurkha cigar portfolio while emphasizing brands that can be made in larger quantities and pricing them more in the cigar industry mainstream.

Three of Gurkha’s newest releases—**Gurkha Cellar Reserve**, **Royal Challenge** and **Seduction**—have become the company’s best sellers. The Royal Challenge has a suggested retail price of \$6 to \$8 per cigar, Seduction is \$7 to \$9, and Cellar Reserve is \$8 to \$12.

Each is a retail exclusive, not available via the Internet, which has built Gurkha’s reputation with brick-and-mortar retailers, according to Hyams.

Gurkha doesn’t make its own cigars, but rather has them made under contract. There are now five factories making various Gurkha products in Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. The move has helped Gurkha get more product. “We were severely back ordered,” said Hyams. “We’ve had a very steep increase in sales.”

This expansion has come with increased staff, which means the company needs more room in which to operate. Gurkha is moving its corporate headquarters from Miami to Ft. Lauderdale in May. “We are pretty cramped where we are,” said Hyams, explaining that Gurkha was expanding from 5,000 square feet to 30,000 square feet of space.

Hyams is also

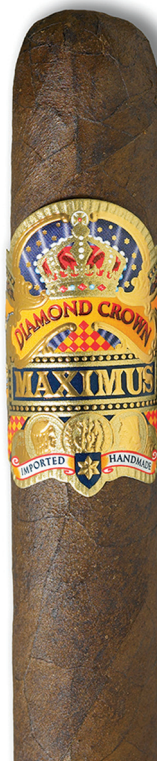
working on expanding Gurkha’s sales abroad—looking at the Far East and Europe, in particular.

“A lot has happened in a very short space of time,” said Hyams.

All of these moves also coincide with the Gurkha brand’s 125th anniversary. According to the company, Gurkha cigars were first made from local Indian tobacco in 1887, during the height of British imperialism. The name Gurkha refers to the legendary Nepalese fighters for whom this brand was originally named. ■

NEW SIZES FOR DIAMOND CROWN AND MAXIMUS

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA



J. C. Newman Cigar Co., owner of the **Diamond Crown** and **Diamond Crown Maximus** brands, has added a new size to each line—the Diamond Crown Torpedo No. 8 and the Diamond Crown Maximus Double Robusto No. 6.

The Torpedo No. 8, a 5 inch by 58 ring belicoso, brings Diamond Crown to eight sizes, all of which are made with an Ecuadoran Connecticut wrapper and a Dominican binder and filler. Most of the Diamond Crown series, which was created in 1995, consists of cigars rolled in a 54 ring gauge, a size that the company believes allows for greater blending options, but the No. 8 is one of the thickest cigars in the line at 58 ring and retails for \$11.60.

Six years later, in 2001, the Diamond Crown Maximus line was born. It is a more full-bodied brand than the core line and features a dark, sun-grown wrapper from Ecuador grown by Oliva Tobacco Co. All seven sizes in the Maximus line

have a 50 ring gauge, save one—the new Double Robusto No. 6, which measures 5 by 56 and retails for \$12.00.

Currently, these two sizes can only be found exclusively at Diamond Crown branded lounges (of which there are 55), but are scheduled to be available at select tobacconists come Father’s Day, June 17.

Diamond Crown and Diamond Crown Maximus cigars are made by Tabacalera A. Fuente y Cia in the Dominican Republic. ■



VIAJE DROPS MOTHER OF ALL BOMBS ON RETAILERS

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

Last week, tobacconists around the country were hit with two new sizes in the **Viaje Skull & Bones** series, a high-octane line conceived by brand owner Andre Farkas. The two sizes have ominous names, which he says are references to their strength: MOAB (Mother of All Bombs) and FOAB (Father of All Bombs). Both measure 4 1/2 inches long, and the Mother and Father have thicknesses of 52 and 56 ring gauge, respectively.

“In 2009, I started receiving requests for a stronger cigar,” said Farkas. “Up until that point, the strongest cigar in my line-up was **Viaje Oro**. My response to the request was the Skull & Bones White Label, which was released in one size in 2010 called the Daisy Cutter.”

MOAB and FOAB are also part of the Skull & Bones White Label line (a Red Label also exists) and are Nicaraguan purros covered with Criollo wrappers. According to Farkas, all sizes in the White Label are named after non-nuclear weapons, whereas the stronger Red Label cigars are named for nuclear ballistics.

“I use a fair amount of viso and ligero in these blends, which give the cigars their strength,” added Farkas.

The smokes come packaged in boxes of 20 and are adorned with simple black bands bearing a standard skull & crossbones logo. MOAB retails for \$8.80, while FOAB retails \$9.20. Only 300 boxes of each size were produced. They are made in Honduras at the Raices Cubanas factory. ■



ROCKY PATEL DEBUTS NEW LIMITED-RELEASE CIGAR

BY G. CLAY WHITTAKER

Rocky Patel's newest cigar will hit humidors by the end of this month, but it will only be available in select locations.

Rocky Patel has blended the **Burn Special Reserve** for the company's official branded lounges. The cigar is not a limited production, but will be distributed exclusively to official Rocky Patel Lounge sites across the country. There are currently 35 official lounges in 20 states.



Rocky Patel Premium Cigars Inc. said that the Burn Special Reserve is a full-bodied blend, made of Nicaraguan tobaccos finished with an Ecuador Sumatra wrapper. It comes in three sizes: Robusto (5 inches by 50 ring), Toro (6 by 52) and Titan (8 1/2 by 60). They will be sold in boxes of 20, and will range in price from \$7.60 to \$9.30.

Shipping starts at the end of this week, and the cigars should reach shelves by the end of the month. ■

AGANORSA REBUILDING BARNs

BY DAVID SAVONA

One of the biggest growers of tobacco in Nicaragua is rebuilding barns after a windstorm took down several old casas de tabaco in Jalapa, and destroyed picked leaves being stored in the barns.

“We lost about 200 bales,” said Eduardo Fernandez, owner of Aganorsa S.A. The loss amounts to about 1.3 percent of the company's annual production: as Aganorsa grows 1,200 acres of tobacco annually in Nicaragua, enough for some 15,000 bales of tobacco.

Damage of this nature is relatively uncommon. Nicaragua's curing barns are among the more stable in the tobacco world, built of sturdy wood and meant to handle the rough weather that can be found in a Central American storm season. Each of the barns have stood for some fifty years, and were previously owned by former Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza.

Aganorsa (which stands for Agricola Gandra Norsteña S.A.) was founded by Fernandez in the summer of 1997, and today counts myriad cigar companies as its customers. Aganorsa grows in Jalapa, Condega and Estelí, the three major growing areas of Nicaragua.

Fernandez said his company would be able to rebuild the structures.

For the full story of Aganorsa, see the most recent *Cigar Aficionado* magazine. ■

CHOOSE THE NEXT C.A.O. BLEND

BY DAVID SAVONA

A new C.A.O. promotion that begins in 12 days will allow cigar smokers to choose the next C.A.O. blend. Starting April 1, three-pack tins called Last Stick Standing will be available, free, with the purchase of any six C.A.O. cigars. There are three cigars in each tin, each measuring 5 1/2 by 54, named C, A and O. Each is made with a different blend. Cigar lovers are encouraged to light them up and decide on their favorites. Rating a cigar gives you the chance to win a box of the final blend before it goes on sale to the general public. One winner will receive a trip for two to the C.A.O. factory in Nicaragua.

Votes can be cast at www.caocigars.com/lss, where participants will be led on a virtual cigar tour by Rick Rodriguez, who leads new blend development for C.A.O. ■

LA AURORA ADDS SALOMON TO 107 LINE

BY G. CLAY WHITTAKER



La Aurora S.A., which has been making cigars for more than 100 years in the Dominican Republic, is adding a new but familiar size to its Aurora 107 line that will be hitting limited shelves early this summer.

Miami Cigar & Co., the U.S. distributor for La

Aurora, told *Cigar Insider* that the new size will be a limited-edition Salomon measuring 7 1/4 inches long by 52 ring gauge, the same dimensions as the Aurora Puro Vintage 2003.

The 107 line was released two years ago to celebrate the 107th anniversary of the La Aurora brand. 107 consists of Dominican and Nicaraguan filler tobaccos, a Dominican binder and an Ecuadoran wrapper. The line currently features six sizes.

But the Salomon is being released to only 25 retailers. Miami Cigar says the company has opted for the limited release as a way of thanking retailers who have carried the line since the beginning. Only 1,000 boxes are being produced.

The Salomon will come in boxes of eight cigars, and will retail for approximately \$12 each. The first boxes are slated to ship mid-June. ■

VILLIGER-STOKKEBYE RENAMES, REFOCUSSES

BY G. CLAY WHITTAKER

Pipe tobacco and cigar producer Villiger-Stokkebye International Corp. will be refocusing its efforts toward the cigar market, said new president Roy MacLaren. He said the company, which is in the process of changing its name to Villiger North America, plans to rebrand itself as a cigar company.

Villiger-Stokkebye announced former president Erik Stokkebye's resignation in a letter on February 27, which was quickly followed by the announcement of Roy MacLaren taking his place.

MacLaren told *Cigar Insider* that he plans to bring renewed focus to the company's cigar interests. "My objective is to bring the best product to the U.S. market that I can, and I'll be working in the blending process going forward."

MacLaren said the company wants to be recognized as more than just a pipe tobacco producer. "We're now a cigar company that sells pipe tobacco," he said, adding that they sold 1.2 billion cigars worldwide in 2011, most of which were made by machine.

MacLaren has been in the tobacco business for 30 years, 17 of which were spent specifically in the cigar industry. He was a vice president at Beach Cigar Group (now Gurkha Cigar Group Inc.) for eight years.

"This is a great opportunity with wonderful fourth-generation tobacconists," MacLaren said, "and I couldn't be more excited."

Villiger-Stokkebye International's North American arm is headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina. The corporation is in the process of renaming this branch Villiger North America. The company's handmade cigars, which include Villiger 1888 and La Libertad, are made in the Dominican Republic at the ABAM Cigars S.A. factory in Santo Domingo, the capital city.

There is currently no word on what Erik Stokkebye, who has been with the company since 2000, plans to do in the future. Stokkebye started as president of Peter Stokkebye International in 2000, which at the time was owned by Orlik Tobacco of Denmark. In 2005, they joined with Villiger to make Villiger-Stokkebye. Villiger brought the addition of handmade and machine-made cigars to the new company's product portfolio, which still included pipe and roll-your-own tobaccos. ■



ROLANDO REYES SR., MAKER OF CUBA ALIADOS, DIES AT 89



ROLANDO REYES SR.

Rolando Reyes Sr., the founder of Puros Indios cigars and the man behind Cuba Aliados and many other brands died on Sunday in Miami. He was 89.

Reyes Sr. began working around cigars in Zulueta, Cuba, 80 years ago, when he was nine years old.

“I worked in a small factory, where I wasn’t only being taught

how to roll cigars, but how to handle everything you had to do. They taught me everything, so I could learn how to start rolling,” he told *Cigar Aficionado* in a 2006 interview. “From there I went to a factory in Remedios called Aguilar and then I went to Havana to work in José Piedra. And from there, I went to H. Upmann.”

In the 1970s Reyes emigrated to the United States, and opened a small cigar factory in the Cuban enclave of Union City, New Jersey. He called his cigars Cuba Aliados, taking the name from a Cuban bus line. He moved his factory several times, first to Miami, then the Dominican Republic, before settling in Honduras in 1990. His company’s cigars are still made there to this day.

“He was a one of a kind,” said his grandson, Carlos Diez, the president of Puros Indios Cigars. “Rolando was an inspiration to many in his industry, with a tireless work ethic and an extreme dedication to his craft. My grandfather has been around this industry so long that many of the great manufacturers of today have come to him at one time or another for help and guidance, but left our factory with an incredible life-long friendship.”

Ernesto Perez-Carrillo on Twitter called Reyes Sr. “one of my mentors,” and a “giant in the industry.” Christian Eiroa, who made cigars at Camacho, said “I loved him.”

Reyes Sr. did things his own way. He would sleep during the day, preferring to do his work in the evening. “I start at 10 at night, and I’m done at 4 or 5 o’clock in the morning,” he said in the *Cigar Aficionado* interview. “I am quality control. I like to work at night, because there’s no one to bother me, and I can concentrate better in detail on what’s wrong with a cigar... You have to concentrate. I like to inspect every cigar.”

Reyes Sr. took great pride in raising farm animals (many of which could be found walking around his old factory) and growing vegetables. His last project was starting a farm with his family in Honduras, and growing his own tobacco. The company had recently begun using the tobacco inside cigars called Cuba Aliados Cabinet, which went on sale a few months ago. ■

CIGAR AFICIONADO’S “BIG SMOKE” 2012 SCHEDULE

November 9-11

LAS VEGAS • THE MIRAGE

Big Smoke evenings scheduled on Friday and Saturday, as well as cigar and lifestyle educational seminars on Saturday and Sunday, respectively.

TICKETS GO ON SALE MARCH 15

November 29

NEW YORK CITY • PIER 92

TICKETS GO ON SALE APRIL 15

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