

Cigar Insider

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IN THIS ISSUE:

TASTING REPORT:

VERTICAL BRAND TASTINGS:

- Fonseca CXX Anni Rarissimus [page 2]
- Hammer + Sickle Berlin Wall [page 2]
- Pedro Martín Ruby [page 3]
- Viaje Summerfest 2011 [page 3]

CIGAR NEWS

- RETAILER SURVEY: Hottest and Best-Selling Premium Cigar Brands in America [page 4]
- General Launches First C.A.O. Cigar [page 7]
- Innovative Box for New La Flor [page 7]
- Box-Pressed My Father Le Bijou 1922 [page 8]
- A Quesada Cigar Meant for Beer [page 8]
- Smoke Bans Fail in Texas [page 8]
- Smoking Goes on in California Shops [page 9]
- Tax Cap in Connecticut [page 9]
- New Head at Miami Cigar & Co. [page 9]

FEATURED CIGAR

FONSECA CXX ANNI RARISSIMUS CORONA

DOM. REP. ■ PRICE: \$6.95 ■ BODY: MEDIUM

For a full tasting, see page two.

90

POINTS

BEST CIGARS THIS ISSUE

Fonseca CXX Anni Rarissimus Corona	Dom. Rep.	90
Pedro Martín Ruby Torpedo	Nicaragua	90
Pedro Martín Ruby Robusto	Nicaragua	89
Viaje Summerfest 2011 Torpedo	Honduras	89
Fonseca CXX Anni Rarissimus Gordo	Dom. Rep.	88
Pedro Martín Ruby Toro	Nicaragua	88
Viaje Summerfest 2011 Toro	Honduras	88

RARE GOOD NEWS ON BANS

CALIFORNIA AND TEXAS are two of the biggest markets for premium cigars in the entire United States. Recently, both states faced legislation that would have made it harder to enjoy a cigar. California lawmakers tried to ban smoking in the state's cigar shops, while Texas politicians sought to ban smoking in the entire state. Both attempts failed, giving cigar smokers a rare bit of positive legislative news. For details on both of these stories, turn to pages eight and nine.

#1



#2



#3



#3



INSIDER EXCLUSIVE: THE HOTTEST CIGAR BRANDS IN AMERICA

What cigar brands are in most demand by high-end, brick-and-mortar cigar shops? The results of our annual **Cigar Insider** U.S. retailer survey found three familiar names at the top of our hot cigar list, and a very well-known brand that moved up considerably from its showing in 2010. The top rankings are virtually identical to last year, with Padrón taking our No. 1 slot (last year that honor went to the Padrón 1964 Anniversary line) followed by Tatuaje and Arturo Fuente ranking third. Moving up from No. 6 to a tie for No. 3 however is Rocky Patel, who keeps improving in our rankings. For much more on this comprehensive survey, turn to page four.

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TASTING REPORT

FONSECA CXX ANNI RARISSIMUS

NEW RELEASE—VERTICAL BRAND TASTING

Country: Dominican Republic

Maker: MATASA (Manufactura de Tabacos S.A.)

Distributor: S.A.G. Imports Inc.

Filler: Dom. Rep., Nicaragua

Binder: Dom. Rep.

Wrapper: Dom. Rep.

Release Date: June 2011

CORONA

90 POINTS ■ 6 3/8" x 46 ■ \$6.95

A notably sweet, woody smoke balanced by dried fruit notes, a dusting of salt flavor, and some coffee bean intonations.

Body: Medium

GORDO

88 POINTS ■ 4 7/8" x 60 ■ \$7.95

A very thick, oily robusto with a pigtail cap. It burns and draws well for such a hefty cigar. This is a primarily sweet smoke complemented by a bit of leather and nuts.

Body: Medium

ROBUSTO

88 POINTS ■ 5 7/8" x 52 ■ \$7.50

Sweet and woody with salty touches of leather and nuts that precede a burnt sugar finish. The combustion is a bit uneven but the draw is full.

Body: Medium to Full

BRAND SUMMARY: Loosely translated, the Fonseca CXX Anni Rarissimus means "120th anniversary, rarest." According to the history of Fonseca, it was 100 years ago in 1891 when the Fonseca line was given its name in Cuba. To commemorate the birth of the brand and its growing significance in the market, Rarissimus is made with Cuban-seed tobacco grown in the Dominican Republic, most notably the wrapper, which is Habano seed Vuelta Arriba cultivated in the Navarete region. The standout in this tasting was the Corona.

Average Rating: 88.7 points

HAMMER + SICKLE BERLIN WALL

VERTICAL BRAND TASTING

Country: Honduras

Maker: Tabacos Rancho Jamastran

Distributor: The Cigar Agency LLC

Filler: Dom. Rep., Nicaragua, Honduras

Binder: Honduras

Wrapper: Honduras

Release Date: September 2010

ROBUSTO

87 POINTS ■ 5" x 50 ■ \$8.00

Richly colored with some veins to the wrapper. The cigar burns unevenly, forming a splitting ash. It delivers oaky white wine notes, spice and an ashy aftertaste.

Body: Medium to Full

CHURCHILL

86 POINTS ■ 7" x 52 ■ \$8.60

An easy-drawing smoke that tastes a bit dirty in the beginning, but settles down to show toasty, woody notes and some walnut flavor.

Body: Medium

TORO

86 POINTS ■ 6" x 50 ■ \$8.30

Roughly constructed with a bumpy head and rumpled wrapper. Leather and spice notes come in and out, as do wheaty flavors and touches of licorice.

Body: Medium

BRAND SUMMARY: We rarely begin a discussion about a cigar by speaking about its packaging, but the boxes that contain the new Hammer + Sickle Berlin Wall cigar simply can't be ignored. Quite possibly the heaviest cigar boxes ever released, they are made from Pakistani marble, decorated with a metal crest. The bands are also quite impressive, made of copper and fastened to the cigar by its own tensile strength, rather than some type of adhesive. The cigars themselves are made in Danlí by Tabacos Ranchos Jamastran, better known as the Camacho factory. Brand owner Eric Hanson says his company came out with a cigar showcasing the symbol of communism's fall in part to dissuage any thoughts that Hammer + Sickle brand was pro communism.

Average Rating: 86.3 points

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.*

PEDRO MARTÍN RUBY

NEW RELEASE—VERTICAL BRAND TASTING

Country: Nicaragua**Maker:** TABSA (Tabacos Valle de Jalapa S.A.)**Distributor:** Martín Family of Cigars**Filler:** Nicaragua**Binder:** Nicaragua**Wrapper:** Nicaragua**Release Date:** May 2011

VIAJE SUMMERFEST 2011

NEW RELEASE

Country: Honduras**Maker:** Fabrica de Tabacos Raices Cubanas S. de R.L.**Distributor:** Viaje Cigars**Filler:** Nicaragua**Binder:** Nicaragua**Wrapper:** Nicaragua**Release Date:** June 2011

TORPEDO

90 POINTS ■ 6 1/4" x 52 ■ \$6.90

A leathery, spicy cigar that burns evenly throughout. Pepper and cedar also come through making this torpedo a savory, satisfying smoke.

Body: Medium to Full

ROBUSTO

89 POINTS ■ 5" x 50 ■ \$6.66

Solidly rolled with a perfect draw and even combustion. The smoke is bold with leather and wood, complemented by a touch of raisin sweetness.

Body: Medium to Full

TORO

88 POINTS ■ 6" x 52 ■ \$6.80

Covered in an oily, veiny wrapper, this cigar has a slightly firm draw and is predominantly a cedary-tasting smoke with some subtle earthy and fruity notes.

Body: Medium

CHURCHILL

87 POINTS ■ 7" x 48 ■ \$6.90

A reddish-brown Churchill finished with a veiny wrapper and rough cap. Initial puffs are full of red pepper spice but lose intensity, turning light and herbal.

Body: Medium

BRAND SUMMARY: Brand owner Maria Martín, daughter of the late tobacco luminary Pedro Martín, started her own company naming the cigar lines after her father. We tested the Ruby, which features a Corojo wrapper. A 6 x 60 size does not appear in this vertical as it was unavailable at the time of our tasting. The best here, however, was the Torpedo, which scored 90 points.

Average Rating: 88.5 points

TORPEDO

89 POINTS ■ 5 1/4" x 52 ■ \$9.00

A small belicoso with a full, substantial draw that imparts woody, cedary and nutty notes to the palate. A simple, easy-going smoke.

Body: Medium

TORO

88 POINTS ■ 6" x 50 ■ \$9.33

Rolled with an inch of exposed filler tobacco, this cigar starts a bit harshly. Once the shaggy leaves fully take to flame, the smoke delivers hickory and nutty flavors.

Body: Medium to Full

BRAND SUMMARY: Viaje's seasonal blends come twice a year, once for the holidays in December and once for the summer in June. The Summerfest 2011 marks the second year that Viaje has released a summer blend. Like all Viaje cigars, the Summerfest is made at the Fabrica de Tabacos Raices Cubanas S. de R.L. factory in Honduras and uses what brand-owner Andre Farkas calls a café rosado wrapper. The line comes in two sizes, a Torpedo, with a finished foot, and an unorthodox Toro with an unfinished or shaggy foot, whereby an inch of binderless filler tobacco is exposed. This year, Farkas made 100 boxes of each size, at 30 cigars per box, or 600 cigars total. Both cigars scored within a point of each other, which speaks to their consistency.

Average Rating: 88.5 points

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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

CIGAR INSIDER SPECIAL REPORT ON U.S. CIGAR RETAILERS

THE BEST-SELLING CIGAR BRANDS IN AMERICA, MARKET TRENDS AND MUCH MORE

BY DAVID SAVONA

WITH REPORTING BY GREGORY MOTTOLA AND ANDREW NAGY

Things are looking up in the cigar industry. For the first time since 2007, a majority of the retailers polled in our annual *Cigar Insider* survey reported a sales increase. More than 67 percent of the cigar shop owners and managers that we contacted said their sales were up from the previous year, and only 8.5 percent reported a decline in sales. Last year, 25 percent of those surveyed reported decreasing sales and only 48 percent reported an increase. After two years of very tough times there's a hint of optimism returning to walk-in humidors around the country.



This year 71 managers and shop owners representing more than 140 brick-and-mortar cigar shops around the United States answered our survey. We asked them what cigar brands are selling best, what their customers were requesting, the trends in the market and much more.

"The dollars have begun to loosen," said Craig Cass, who owns six Tinderbox cigar stores in North and South Carolina. "Fortunately, consumers are tending to indulge more than they have in the last few years," said Matt Arcella, who runs the Davidoff shops in Las Vegas. His shops are frequented primarily by tourists, so Arcella sees a variety of consumers from around the United States. "We are seeing a higher price per cigar, per purchase," he said.

"There's some resurgence of the super-high-end customer," said David Berkebille, owner of Georgetown Tobacco in Washington, D.C. David Giambelluca, the manager of Mount Vernon Tobacco in Baltimore, said: "The economy seems to be a little better, so our guys have loosened up a little."

A few retailers seemed surprised by how well sales were performing. "I'm flabbergasted," said Manny Busciglio of Edwards Pipe & Tobacco in Tampa, Florida. "The economy is down, but people are still spending money on cigars." Said Bill Stephens, owner of Habana Smoke Shop in Jackson, Mississippi: "I'm surprised our sales have been so strong, considering the economy."

Despite the higher sales reported by many retailers, there were many notes of caution, and plenty of evidence that cigar smokers remain focused on price in most markets. Jorge Armenteros, owner of two A Little Taste of Cuba cigar stores, said customers are "much more price and deal conscious." Pamela, the manager of Edleez Tobacco in Albany, New York, concurred, saying "Guys are looking for deals now. Specials, five-packs, two-for-one." Said Cass, "The days of readily selling \$20 cigars are behind us. The consumer expects more quality at a lower price point."

Jeff Borysiewicz, the owner of the very large and high-end Corona Cigar Co. stores in Orlando, Florida, said "consumers are demanding better quality cigars for their money."

There is some evidence that while cigar shops are generally selling more cigars, they're making a bit less on the sale. While 67.6 percent of shops reported an increase in their unit sales over 2010, only 62 percent reported a dollar sales gain during that time.

People are "spending less money per stick," said Tom Moran, who owns Rich's Cigar Store in Portland, Oregon. "The over \$10 per stick market is really soft."

"The spending habits have changed to less dollars per cigar and spending less per visit," said David Garafalo of Two Guys Smoke Shop in New Hampshire. "But, thankfully, they're coming in more often for small growth."

Once again our two best-selling cigar brands are names that are well known for providing value for the dollar, giving credence to the trend of consumers looking for cigars that combine affordability with consistently high quality. **Padrón**, the core brand made by family-owned Padrón Cigars Inc. in Nicaragua, ranked No. 1, named by 52.1 percent of our surveyed retailers as a best-selling brand. **Arturo Fuente** ranked second, named by 45.1 percent. (The results are very similar to last year's survey, when the brands had an identical rank.) The brands themselves have similarities. Padrón cigars have been made since 1964, and Fuente has been around for 99 years. Each is made by a family-owned company, and each has a super-premium version (or versions) while the main part of each company's line is a reasonably priced cigar brand.

Ranking third for the second year in a row is **Rocky Patel**, which was ranked sixth in 2009 and continues to stay strong. A third of our surveyed retailers named Rocky Patel as a best-selling brand. Our No. four and No. five brands, **Davidoff** and **Romeo y Julieta**, finished in the same position as they did in 2010, while **Ashton** moved up three places to place sixth. **La Flor Dominicana** ranked seventh,

INSIDER REPORT: THE HOTTEST AND BEST-SELLING CIGARS IN AMERICA

HOTTEST BRANDS		BEST-SELLING BRANDS	
1. Padrón	43.7%	1. Padrón	52.1%
2. Tatuaje	31.0%	2. Arturo Fuente	45.1%
3. Arturo Fuente	23.9%	3. Rocky Patel	33.8%
3. Rocky Patel	23.9%	4. Davidoff	25.4%
5. Davidoff	15.5%	5. Romeo y Julieta	21.1%
5. Liga Privada	15.5%	6. Ashton	18.6%
7. Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series	14.1%	7. La Flor Dominicana	9.9%
8. Fuente Fuente OpusX	12.7%	8. Oliva	8.5%
8. My Father	12.7%	8. Perdomo	8.5%
10. Ashton	11.3%	8. Tatuaje	8.5%
Percentage of retailers naming these brands as those their customers most often request.		Percentage of retailers naming these cigars as best sellers.	
BEST-SELLING SIZES		SALES REPORT	
1. Robusto	88.7%	Shops reporting an increase in cigar unit sales	67.6%
1. Toro/Corona Gorda	88.7%	Shops reporting a decrease in cigar unit sales	8.5%
3. Churchill	71.8%	Shops reporting flat sales	12.7%
4. 6 X 60	60.6%	No response	11.2%
5. Torpedo	53.5%	Shops with a smoking lounge	84.5%

Source: **CIGAR INSIDER**

How we conducted the survey: We polled some of the best brick-and-mortar cigar shops across the United States. Seventy-one shop owners/managers answered our poll, representing more than 140 fine cigar stores that sell premium, handmade cigars. The numbers in our polls add up to more than 100% because retailers were asked to name three brands and sizes in each category.

down from sixth in 2010, and there was a three-way tie for eighth place shared by **Oliva**, **Tatuaje** and **Perdomo**. The first two brands also made our list last year, but this is the first time the Perdomo brand has won a spot on our list.

There was little change from last year among our top hottest brands of the year. The hottest cigar brands are the cigars consumers ask for most often in a cigar shop, brands with buzz, brands people talk about. Padrón ranked first, named by 43.7 percent of retailers. (Retailers are asked to name three hot brands.) Last year, Padrón 1964 Anniversary ranked first, and the core Padrón brand ranked sixth. This year, the core brand usurped its pricier cousins, perhaps evidence that retailers see the varieties of Padrón as one brand rather than four separate ones.

Tatuaje, the boutique brand made for Pete Johnson by the Garcia family, ranked No. 2 for the second straight year. Tatuaje, a small brand known for distinctive Nicaraguan flavor, has certainly found a home with cigar smokers.

Arturo Fuente was our third-hottest brand, another strong showing after ranking second last year. It had been fifth in 2009. "Fuente is back," said George Valdes, who owns a quartet of Sabor Havana cigar stores in the Miami area. "Rosado stimulated them," he said, referring to the

December 2009 launch of the bang-for-the-buck **Arturo Fuente Rosado Sungrown Magnum R** line of cigars.

Rocky Patel continues to improve each year in our *Cigar Insider* survey, moving up to a tie for third hottest brand. With No. 3 rankings for both best-selling and hottest cigar brand, this is a banner year for the 15-year-old brand.

Making our hot brand list for the second year running is **Liga Privada**, Drew Estate's dark, bold traditional cigar. It moved up two spots over its placing last year, and was named by 15.5 percent of retailers, tying it with Davidoff for fifth place. This was an improvement for Davidoff, which wasn't named a hot brand in 2010.

My Father, the top brand from My Father Cigars S.A. in Estelí, Nicaragua, made our hot brand list for the first time, ranking eighth. My Father has taken high rating after high rating in *Cigar Aficionado* and *Cigar Insider*. **Fuente Fuente OpusX**, which has long placed at or near the top of our hot brand list, slipped to a tie for eighth this year. Ashton was our No. 10 hot brand.

Ashton is made with Connecticut-shade wrappers, and one of the trends that we noticed from our poll was a new-found demand for such a cigar. "There was a time that everybody wanted a dark, oily wrapper, but Connecticut is back," said Valdes of Sabor Havana. "Oliva Connecticut,

I can't keep it on the shelves. **E.P. Carrillo** [New Wave] Connecticut, **601** Connecticut—the trend is the same.” While many retailers said there was still strong demand for powerhouse smokes, several retailers noticed a trend away from fuller-bodied cigars. “We get requests for good, medium-bodied cigars with nice flavors,” said Matt Krimm of W. Curtis Draper in Washington, D.C. “We’re selling a lot more milder cigars, too, the **Camacho** Connecticut, **C.A.O. Gold**.” Corona’s Borysiewicz said: “Mild to medium-bodied cigars still make up the majority of sales.”

Several retailers who answered our survey mentioned the continuing trend toward fatter smokes. Some theorized that in a down economy the consumers were looking to fat cigars as one that provides more value. “Guys are going bigger, gauge-wise, on cigars,” explained Jeff Yalenezian, manager/owner of Brennan’s Smoke Shop, which has five locations in Brockton and Plymouth, Massachusetts. “If you’re going to spend the money,” he said, “go big.”

On that note, the rise of the 60 ring gauge cigar, specifically the 6 X 60, continues. Retailers aren’t even sure what to call such a smoke, but “gordo” appears to be the most common moniker. Once again it’s the fourth-best selling cigar size on our survey, but this year it was mentioned as a top seller by a resounding 60.6 percent of retailers. Last year, only 30 percent named it as a best-selling size, and before that it had never placed in our top five. The 6 X 60 is clearly in big demand in cigar shops.

Toros (also known as corona gordas) and robustos remain the top selling cigar sizes in America, and the stately Churchill size ranked right behind, followed by the 6 X 60 and torpedos. While people have long theorized that smaller cigars will have a sales boom based on smoking bans, and people having less time to puff, our data just doesn’t bear out that theory. Small cigars consistently get some of the fewest mentions in our survey.

Cigar lounges have become a staple in the industry, even if that lounge is just a few simple chairs. More than 84 percent of our retailers said they have some sort of cigar lounge in their stores. “You have to have a cigar lounge,” said Gary Pesh, who has seven Old Virginia Tobacco Co. stores. “We’re turning into a place to smoke, because there’s no place to go.”

A few retailers noted the increase in younger cigar smokers, as well as more women coming to their shops. “I’ve had a number of female cigar smokers,” said Chris Tsangarides, owner of Outman Cigars in Greenville, South Carolina. “And I don’t mean flavors, I mean serious cigars. Diggers and Air Benders,” he said, referring to two powerful (and in the former case, considerably large) cigars from La Flor Dominicana. “More couples seem to hang out in the lounge after dinner,” said Kendall Culbertson of Outlaw Cigar in Kansas City. “We see a ton of new cigar smokers coming into the store and at our parties.”

The lack of smoking venues—and the lack of a cigar lounge—directly affected one retailer. “There’s no place to

smoke,” said David Andrea, owner of Andrea’s in Kenosha, Wisconsin, a cigar shop celebrating 100 years in business. His sales are down this year, hurt by a statewide smoking ban that went into effect July 2010. “We are weather dependent, and we had a cold spring. This ban has people smoking less.” Weather can hurt even the hardest of cigar retailers. Said Cass, “Cold months mean slower sales, even with a dynamic lounge.”

We asked a new question this year, a simple one: If you could change one thing about the cigar industry, what would that be? Some lamented the daunting number of new sizes in cigar company portfolios. “Too many cigar lines,” said Scott Regina, owner of five Emerson Cigars stores in Virginia. “I get concerned when I see all these new companies pop up, but I’ve never heard of them. I want to make sure the guy I’m partnering with will still be there in a couple of years.” More than one retailer hoped for the dropping of the U.S. embargo on Cuba. “End the Cuban embargo,” said Jeffrey Stone, from Houston. “This would give us a great deal of positive publicity, and allow us to gain sales now being lost to retailers outside of the U.S.”

Industry consolidation has left a bad taste in some retailers’ mouths. “Industry consolidation is inevitable, but there are few winners. I would greatly prefer more viable, independently run cigar companies,” said Cass of Tinderbox. “I wish that there was less consolidation with the brands,” said Linda Squires, of Squire Cigars in Santa Rosa, California. “I liked it better before, with less consolidation.”

The word government came up most often. Our retailers resoundingly feel that the government plays far too large a role in the premium cigar industry. Sathya Levin of Holt’s in Philadelphia wished that “the government would just leave us alone. We are already a highly-regulated, heavily taxed industry. It’s getting to the point that enough is enough.” Said Joe Cole, of Tobacco Lane in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, “Keep the government out of the cigar business.”

Despite the challenges that still remain, the threat of additional government meddling, the taxes, the smoking bans, there was definitely an optimistic note about this year’s survey. And again, the persistence and passion of cigar smokers impressed the retailers who sell them the cigars they love.

“People still want to relax with a cigar,” said Mitchell Hirsh, owner of Cigar King in Phoenix, Arizona. “They have not lost their enthusiasm.” ■

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FIRST C.A.O. BRAND FROM GENERAL

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

When the news broke that General Cigar Co. would be incorporating C.A.O. International Inc., everyone had the same questions: Would General change existing blends? Cancel certain lines? Make its own new version of C.A.O.? Last week *Cigar Aficionado* got to taste the first C.A.O. brand completely conceptualized by General Cigar—the C.A.O. OSA Sol, a project spearheaded by General's Rick Rodriguez (formerly of Team La Gloria) and senior brand manager Ed McKenna.



The OSA stands for Olancho, San Agustín, which is the region in Honduras where the cigar's sun grown wrapper was cultivated and the inspiration for both the packaging and the blend.

"We wanted something in the same innovative genre of C.A.O.'s past, but at the same time, we wanted OSA Sol to be able to stand on its own as a brand," said McKenna.

The cigar's Habano-seed Honduran wrapper is a *seco*, or mid-priming leaf, from an exemplary 2008 crop and has been dubbed "OSA Sun grown" by Rodriguez. It is also the focal point of the blend. To complement the wrapper's flavor profile, Rodriguez used a Connecticut Broadleaf binder and a filler combination of both Nicaraguan and Honduran tobacco.

"The flavor of the wrapper was unique and I wanted to create a blend around it," said Rodriguez, who spent about three months creating the cigar. "You can destroy the best wrapper in the world with a bad blend." The line is made in Cofradia, Honduras, at the Honduras American Tabaco S.A. (HATSA) factory, the same facility that produces other General Cigar brands such as **Punch** and **Hoyo de Monterrey**. Rodriguez insists that the C.A.O. OSA Sol is very unique among General's coterie of brands. "We didn't just make another Punch blend and call it C.A.O.," he says.

As for the strength of the cigar, Rodriguez was reluctant to comment. "The body will be up to the smoker," he said. We found the cigars that we puffed to be medium in body.

Part of C.A.O.'s brand image, however, has always been dictated by its eye-catching, cutting-edge, packaging, a tradition which Rodriguez and McKenna tried to maintain.

"C.A.O. always operated outside the box in terms of packaging," said McKenna, "and the C.A.O. smoker is a young guy in his 20s to early 40s. He's looking for something unique."

The sleek packaging makes both subtle and direct allusions to the growing valleys of Olancho, from the white-washed curing barns to the meandering Guayape river, also paying homage to both the crop and the farm itself. The theme recurs in the streamlined design of both the box and the band.

C.A.O. OSA Sol will come in three sizes: Lot 50, 5 inches by 50 ring; Lot 54, 5 1/2 by 54; and Lot 58, 6 by 58. Making its debut at next week's International Premium Cigar and Pipe Retailers trade show, the new line will retail from \$5.75 to \$6.75 and start hitting the market in early September. McKenna and Rodriguez said General has no plans to cut or alter any of the existing C.A.O. brands that were on the market to make room for C.A.O. OSA Sol.

For a vertical tasting of C.A.O. OSA Sol see an upcoming issue of *Cigar Insider*. ■

OVER-THE-TOP CIGAR BOX FROM LA FLOR DOMINICANA

BY DAVID SAVONA

Casa de Tabacos, the structures that protect cigar tobacco after harvest during the crucial curing process, can be gorgeous things. But cigar smokers rarely see the immense structures, save for when they're reading a magazine. But the newest from **La Flor Dominicana** creator Litto Gomez can let you bring that look to your humidor.



Gomez, one of the more creative minds in the cigar industry, has packaged his new La Flor Dominicana Air Bender cigar in a box/humidor that is made in the shape and style of a true Dominican curing barn. La Flor Dominicana Casa de Tabaco, a striking box made of rattan and carefully trimmed plantain leaves, looks like it was plucked from a field in Santiago.

"It's such a different thing that I don't know what the reaction will be," said Gomez. "I love it."

The structure comes with 24 Air Bender Maduros that measure 6 1/2 inches long by 54 ring gauge. The interior blend is the same as the traditional Air Bender, combining Dominican and Nicaraguan tobaccos, but the wrapper is Brazilian Habano, something new for Gomez.

The cigar box can be humidified (there's a tray that Gomez says will accept Humidipak devices) and there's a second tray meant to hold a cigar cutter and a lighter. The box will be on display next week in Las Vegas, and it will reach cigar stores with a suggested retail price of \$350.

Gomez says the size of the production run will depend on the reaction at IPCPR. ■

QUESADA OKTOBERFEST

BY DAVID SAVONA

Not long after launching the *Quesada España* brand, the Quesada clan has created a new cigar inspired by a second European country. *Quesada Oktoberfest*, coming in late August, is a Dominican puro intended to be paired with heavy-style German brews.

The brand will come in two sizes. The Bavarian measures 5 1/2 by 52, and will have a suggested retail price of \$7.95, and the Über (one of the few cigars with an umlaut in its name) is a considerable six inches long by 65 ring. It will retail for \$8.95. The cigars will come in boxes of 20.

"The wrapper is something new we are calling Dominican Cibao," said Terence Reilly of SAG Imports. "The binder is Dominican and the fillers are Dominican Cuban-seed Criollo and Olor visos and ligeros." ■

TWO ATTEMPTS AT TEXAS SMOKE BAN FAIL TO PASS

BY ANDREW NAGY

Lawmakers in Texas twice attempted to ban smoking in the state—one of the largest cigar markets in the nation—and twice they failed.

Senate Bill 28 and its counterpart, House Bill 46, sought to prohibit lighting up in most public indoor venues. While both bills included exemptions for cigar shops, cigar bars, cigar manufacturers and convention centers, each would have banned smoking in Texas bars and restaurants.

For several years, lawmakers who oppose smoking have tried to create a smoking ban in the Lone Star State, but with little success. (Local bans do exist, including some of the larger municipalities such as Austin and Dallas.)

This legislative session, the dogged determination of antismoking lawmakers rose to a new level when bill sponsor Rep. Myra Crowover (R-Dist. 64, Denton) successfully attached HB 46 to the House version of the state budget bill in May—and then tried to do it again in June during a special extended legislative session.

In May, the Texas Senate promptly tossed out the smoking ban that had been attached to the House version of the budget. Lawmakers were able to pass a budget before the Legislature adjourned, but a special session was called in order to hash out specific fiscal matters. During the session, Crowover asked several times that the smoking ban bill again be attached to the budget, but was unsuccessful in her attempts. In the end, both versions died before either measure could be voted on. ■

MY FATHER'S BOX-PRESSED BIJOU

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

For the first time in the brand's young history, *My Father Le Bijou 1922* (a 2009 offshoot of the original *My Father* line) will add a box-pressed torpedo to its portfolio. Simply called the Box-Pressed Torpedo, it measures 6 1/8 inches by 52 ring.

"Customers have been asking us for a box-pressed cigar and we couldn't think of a more fitting brand or blend than the *My Father Le Bijou 1922*," said José Ortega, vice president of sales for My Father Cigars Inc. "We did not have a box-pressed cigar nor a torpedo in this line."

The all-Nicaraguan blend features a dark Habano seed wrapper that Ortega calls "Oscuro Oscuro." It will retail for \$11.75 per stick when it hits the market after its debut at next week's trade show. The Box Pressed

Torpedo is made in Nicaragua at the My Father Cigars S.A. factory and comes packaged in boxes of 23, bringing the *My Father Bijou 1922* line to five sizes. ■



CALIFORNIA ENDS ATTEMPT TO EXPAND SMOKING BAN

BY ANDREW NAGY

It's official—smoking in California tobacco shops will remain legal for another year. Last Wednesday, the California Assembly Committee on Governmental Organization, which oversees tobacco product legislation, opted to hold Senate Bill 575. As originally written, SB 575 eliminated the existing exemptions in the current statewide smoking ban that allows patrons in tobacco shops and cigar bars to smoke legally.

A strong lobbying effort last month helped persuade the Senators members to amend the bill and carve out an exemption for tobacconists. ■

TAX CAP FOR CONNECTICUT

There is a tax cap for cigars in the northeastern United States, but it's not in New York. On July 1, a 50 cent tax cap on cigars went into effect in Connecticut, New York's neighbor to the north and east. Retailer Sam Desai, of M&M Cigars in South Norwalk, Connecticut, hailed the tax break and hoped it would help business. He said customers this year had been very cost conscious. "People are trying to find bargains," he said. "They don't want to spend more than \$10." New York retailers have long lobbied for a \$1 tax cap on cigars, but the issue has been shelved until January. ■

CHANGE AT MIAMI CIGAR & CO.

BY DAVID SAVONA

In what the company is calling a "changing of the guard," cigar distributor Miami Cigar & Co. today promoted Jason Wood to the position of vice president. The company said Wood will be "overseeing all aspects of the company." Wood is taking over for Rene Castaneda, who moved from New York to Miami and assumed a top role with Miami Cigar after the tragic 2008 death of Danny Miranda, son of company owners Nestor and Mariana Miranda.

Castaneda, executive director for national accounts at the Miami-based company, will remain on the Miami Cigar board. ■

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