CUBA’S EDICIÓN LIMITADAS
THE CIGARS SHIPPED AND WE TESTED THEM ALL. They came to market a little late but now that they’re available, Cigar Insider has rated them. This year marks the first time in five years that Cohiba has an Edición Limitada, and the first time ever that Ramon Allones has been part of the program. See page three.

BIG SMOKE WEEKEND IN LAS VEGAS
THOUSANDS OF CIGAR ENTHUSIASTS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND AROUND THE WORLD descended on Las Vegas October 28–30 during the festive Halloween weekend, transforming the Venetian Hotel and Casino into Cigar City. It was Cigar Aficionado Magazine’s 16th annual Big Smoke Las Vegas Weekend, two nights of Big Smoke evenings and two days of cigar-intensive seminars. Some of the biggest names in the premium cigar industry handed out smokes to the throngs of cigar lovers, who puffed away in peace, sipped spirits and looked over luxury cars, fine watches and cigar accessories. For a complete writeup of the smoky festivities, see our coverage, which begins on page six.
### UNDERCROWN

#### NEW RELEASE—VERTICAL BRAND TASTING

**Country:** Nicaragua  
**Maker:** La Gran Fabrica Drew Estate  
**Distributor:** Drew Estate  
**Filler:** Honduras, Nicaragua  
**Binder:** Brazil  
**Wrapper:** Mexico  
**Release Date:** October 2011

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<tr>
<td>BELICOSO</td>
<td>88</td>
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**BRAND SUMMARY:** According to company co-founder Jonathan Drew, the rollers in Drew Estate’s cigar factory blended the Undercrown for themselves after they were told to stop smoking so many Liga Privadas. Rather than using the limited supply of Connecticut wrappers needed for the Liga Privada blend, the rollers turned to Mexican San Andrés Negro. Undercrown is quite consistent, as three of the four sizes scored 89 points.  
**Average Rating:** 88.8 points

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### SAN CRISTOBAL ELEGANCIA

#### NEW RELEASE—VERTICAL BRAND TASTING

**Country:** Nicaragua  
**Maker:** My Father Cigars S.A.  
**Distributor:** Ashton Distributors Inc.  
**Filler:** Nicaragua  
**Binder:** Nicaragua  
**Wrapper:** Ecuador  
**Release Date:** August 2011

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**BRAND SUMMARY:**

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### TASTING REPORT

#### CORONA DOBLE

89 POINTS • 7” x 54 • $8.95  
Dark and imposing, this oily Churchill is well made with an even draw and burn, offering some leather and earth flavors that turn peppery. It leaves a licorice aftertaste.  
**Body:** Medium

#### GRAN TORO

89 POINTS • 6” x 52 • $7.95  
There’s a distinct cola smell coming from the unlit foot of this cigar. It imparts a lot of smoke per puff, and the cola recurs on the palate along with earth and vanilla.  
**Body:** Medium to Full

#### ROBUSTO

89 POINTS • 5” x 54 • $7.45  
Packed solid with tobacco, this dark cigar draws evenly, showing wheaty, peppery flavors, some zesty notes and a syrupy, cola-like finish.  
**Body:** Medium to Full

#### BELICOSO

88 POINTS • 6” x 52 • $8.45  
A strong aroma of sweet cola emanates from this belicoso before it’s lit. First puffs are muddy with pepper and earth, but come to show some cocoa bean.  
**Body:** Medium to Full

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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.)
CORONA
88 POINTS  ■  5 1/2” x 44  ■  $5.95
An oily, golden-brown corona that is solid to the touch. A surprisingly strong blast of black pepper hits the palate initially, but calms to show nutty, wheaty flavors.
Body: Medium

IMPERIAL
87 POINTS  ■  6” x 52  ■  $6.75
Beautiful in appearance with a perfectly round head and even cap. Though it starts out harshly, the smoke takes on hints of nuts, oats and some sweetness.
Body: Medium

BRAND SUMMARY: Ashton's original San Cristobal, made with a blend of hearty Nicaraguan tobaccos, is too strong for some smokers, so Ashton asked My Father Cigars to make a lighter version. This San Cristobal Elegancia, which has a light wrapper of Ecuador Connecticut seed, is designed to be medium bodied. For the most part it was, though the Pyramid and Robusto stood out, both scoring an outstanding 91 points.
Average Rating: 89.2 points

RAMON ALLONES
NEW SIZE
Country: Cuba
Maker: N/A
Distributor: Habanos S.A.
Filler: Cuba
Binder: Cuba
Wrapper: Cuba
Box Date: May 2011

ALLONES EXTRA EDICIÓN LIMITADA 2011
91 POINTS  ■  5 5/8” x 44  ■  £14.27  ■  Humidor Selection
Dark and attractive with a slightly firm draw, this corona is a balance of sweet and savory with woody, leathery flavors complemented by caramel and cocoa bean.
Body: Medium

HOYO DE MONTERREY
NEW SIZE
Country: Cuba
Maker: N/A
Distributor: Habanos S.A.
Filler: Cuba
Binder: Cuba
Wrapper: Cuba
Box Date: May 2011

SHORT HOYO PIRÁMIDES EDICIÓN LIMITADA 2011
91 POINTS  ■  5 3/8” x 46  ■  £15.14  ■  Humidor Selection
A mini torpedo with an oily wrapper and uneven burn that corrects itself. The draw is even, imparting spice, earth and mineral flavors that lead to a tannic finish.
Body: Medium to Full

COHIBA
NEW SIZE
Country: Cuba
Maker: N/A
Distributor: Habanos S.A.
Filler: Cuba
Binder: Cuba
Wrapper: Cuba
Box Date: July 2011

1966 EDICIÓN LIMITADA 2011
94 POINTS  ■  6 1/2” x 52  ■  £38.70  ■  Humidor Selection
Dark and gleaming with a pigtail cap, this large cigar starts with a core of earth, spice and coffee bean flavors that take on a profound cocoa and toffee character.
Body: Medium

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.
POWERHOUSE PETIT FROM LA PALINA

BY DAVID SAVONA

The newest cigar from La Palina is known as Kill Bill for one very simple reason. “I wasn’t able to finish smoking the first prototype,” says La Palina brand owner Bill Paley with a chuckle. So he dubbed it “Kill Bill.”

The 4 1/4-inch long, 40 ring gauge cigar is part of the new La Palina El Diario line and will hit the market next month. The smokes will initially only come in four-packs (Paley said he’s considering a future 50-cigar box of Kill Bills), and the name of the cigar appears as La Palina K.B. Only after the smoker opens the pack will he or she notice the words “Kill Bill” written on the inside lid.

The La Palina Kill Bill has a Honduran Corojo wrapper, two binders (both of them Honduran Criollo seed) and a mixture of Nicaraguan Corojo and Criollo tobaccos in the filler blend. The strength level for the small size is unintentional—the cigar is made with the same blend as the rest of the La Palina El Diario line. Age has tempered some of the spiciness from when Paley first smoked a sample, but in those dimensions, Paley says the cigar is still considerably strong. A test smoke exhibited solid spiciness and power.

“It’s a petit corona,” said Paley, “with the heart of a Churchill.”

La Palina El Diario is the second release of the new La Palina. The first five sizes of El Diario—Churchill, Torpedo, Gordo, Toro and Robusto—debuted this summer at the International Premium Cigar & Pipe Retailers trade show. The cigars are made at Fabrica de Tabacos Raices Cubanas and retail for $9.80 to $11.55 per cigar—considerably cheaper than La Palina 1896 and Family Series, which came on the market in June 2010 and retail for up to $23 per cigar. The company has yet to set a price for Kill Bill, but expect it to retail around $10 or less per cigar.

The La Palina brand dates back to 1896, when it was made by Paley’s grandfather Samuel at his Congress Cigar Co. in Chicago.

José Seijas Releases New Cigar With Familiar Name

BY G. CLAY WHITTAKER

VegaFina could be starting a major comeback. Altadis U.S.A. Inc. vice president and general manager José Seijas is rebooting the cigar after a four-year lull in U.S. activity with a limited release. The head blender for Altadis U.S.A. is turning the medium-bodied brand into a fuller-bodied blend with a darker wrapper.

It’s been a long time in coming. Though a popular brand in Europe, the VegaFina name has undergone a series of ups and downs over the years in the United States. When VegaFina was first released in the United States in December 1998, it was made by Tabacalera S.A., the Spanish tobacco monopoly that later merged with France’s SEITA to become Altadis S.A., the parent of Altadis U.S.A. Back then it was a Honduran cigar with an Indonesian wrapper that came in four sizes. The cigar did not last long—it was discontinued shortly after the 1999 merger—and it was brought back in 2007 as a medium-bodied cigar that had a bargain price.

Today VegaFina is a popular European line, and one of the top-selling cigars in Spain, according to Altadis. The lighter-bodied smokes have traditionally included some Honduran filler in the blend, along with Connecticut-seed wrappers grown in Ecuador.

But this new cigar, called VegaFina José Seijas 2011, is different. It is rolled in La Romana, Dominican Republic, at Tabacalera de Garcia Ltd., one of the world’s largest cigar factories. The blend consists of Dominican binder and fillers and a Mexican wrapper leaf of San Andrés Criollo with a complexion quite darker than Connecticut. Altadis says the suggested retail price will be about $6.50 per cigar.

For now, this smoke is only available as a thick corona gorda measuring 6 inches long by 56 ring gauge. It’s also a limited release: This Seijas special is making a modest first push at the U.S. market with just 2,500 boxes, each containing ten cigars.

The Seijas 2011 is likely to be the first of more VegaFina editions to come, though Altadis won’t say if it has another one already in the works.
FOUR KICKS SHIPPING THIS WEEK
BY DAVID SAVONA

Four Kicks, the first cigar from boutique cigarmaker Crowned Heads LLC, is heading to limited numbers of cigar stores this week. “The shipment has left Santiago,” said Jon Huber, adding the cigars were due to arrive in Crowned Heads’ Nashville, Tennessee, headquarters today. “We will begin shipping to our retailers as soon as we receive.” Huber said cigar shops will start getting them at the end of the week.

Cigar Insider broke the story on August 4 about Crowned Heads pairing with cigarmaker Ernesto Perez-Carrillo to make Four Kicks, a cigar blended from Nicaraguan binder, Nicaraguan filler and Ecuadoran Habano wrappers. The cigars will be triple capped and rolled entubado style, and will come in four sizes: Corona Gorda (5 5/8 inches by 46 ring gauge), Robusto (5 by 50), Sublime (6 by 54) and Piramide (6 1/8 by 52). The suggested retail prices will range from $6.95 to $8.65 per cigar, and they will come in boxes of 24.

Crowned Heads was formed in February by a team formerly with C.A.O. International Inc.: Huber, Mike Conder, Michael Trebing and Nancy Heathman.

Look for a vertical brand tasting of Four Kicks in an upcoming Cigar Insider.
THE LAS VEGAS BIG SMOKE

It’s the biggest show we do on the grandest stage imaginable—the Big Smoke Las Vegas. On Halloween weekend, some 4,000 cigar lovers came to Sin City to smoke cigars and experience the finest things in life, while meeting many of the cigar stars who make their favorite smokes. The weekend consisted of two Big Smoke evenings (one on Friday night, one on Saturday) and two days of seminars covering cigars and the good life.

FRIDAY AND SATURDAY: BIG SMOKE EVENINGS

BY ANDREW NACY

The doors to the Venetian Palazzo Ballroom opened and the throng of eager cigar enthusiasts who had lined up early cheered as they swarmed into the Friday night evening party, kicking off Cigar Aficionado’s 16th annual Big Smoke Las Vegas weekend. For the first time ever, the largest cigar celebration in the world coincided with Halloween, so it was fitting to see thousands of smokers receiving premium cigars from more than 30 cigar brand booths. Call it trick or treating, Big Smoke style.

There were two nights of Big Smokes, Friday and Saturday, held in the Venetian Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. With canvas bags in one hand and cigar booklets in the other, attendees rushed to get their fill of smokes, and in many cases to meet the people behind the brand. Carlos Fuente Jr. led the Fuente crew at the Arturo Fuente booth, which also featured the trumpet of Arturo Sandoval. Rocky Patel, Nish Patel and Nimish Desai were passing out Rocky Patel cigars, and Alan Rubin led the team at Alec Bradley to give out his new Black Market cigar, as well as samples of The Dalmore Cigar Malt whiskey. The Room 101 booth, decorated in the style of a hotel room trashed by an angry rock star, was manned by ambassador Matt Booth. Litto Gomez passed out samples of his La Flor Dominicana Double Ligero Churchill Especial (a 91-point cigar); Manuel Quesada gave out his famed Casa Magna; Pete Johnson handed out La Riqueza smokes; Rafael Nodal oversaw distribution of his Oliveros Swag and Barrel Aged lines; Eduardo Fernandez gave out the new Miami-made Casa Fernandez cigars; Mike Giannini was one of many on hand at the General Cigar booths, which included Macanudo, Partagas, Hoyo de Monterrey and C.A.O. O.S.A Sol cigars; Eric and Bobby Newman handed out Diamond Crowns; Janny Garcia manned the La Reloba booth; A.J. Fernandez was on hand from Nicaragua with his new San Lotano Ovals; representatives from Altadis were passing out VegaFina and H. Upmanns; J.T. Guagliardo manned the Cusano booth; and there were also booths for Ashton, La Aroma de Cuba, Oliva Serie O, Padrón, Studio Tobac, Villiger and Zino cigars.

Master Roller Leo Peraza of Team La Gloria continued his Big Smoke tradition of putting attendees through a cigar rolling crash course at the La Gloria Cubana booth, which also doubled as a place to sit down and relax. The Davidoff lounge provided a seating area as well, and Casa Fuente again offered an impressive smoking lounge setup, complete with a bar serving Gentleman Jack and Old No. 7. One attendee named Dennis Burke, who hails from Minnetonka, Minnesota, was there attending his 13th Las Vegas Big Smoke.

To keep attendees palates’ fresh, more than a dozen adult beverage makers manned booths and poured away. Scotch whisky Glenmorangie was distributing four expressions, as was Canadian whiskey Crown Royal; tequila brand Patrón served, and offered attendees the chance to get their pictures taken with spokesmodels. Appleton, Zacapa, Zaya and Don Q poured rum samples for all who came while vodka distillers Crystal Head (with a bar made of ice) and Ultimat rounded out the spirits being given away. Caymus Vineyards poured its nontraditional Conundrum white wine as well as its new red, while Sledgehammer Wines provided a red as well. Kilkenny Irish Cream Ale provided beer.

Chevrolet showed off its Chevy Volt (and had a charging station for those who needed to recharge their electronic devices) and Cadillac displayed a diamond white CTS and a xenon blue SRX.

A slew of cigar accessory makers were there. Colibri educated folks about its lighters and cutters, Humidipak gave away large bags with its humidification devices inside, Liebherr was displaying its refrigerated cigar humidors, Rabbit Air showed off its Minus A2 air purifier, and Lotus, Black Label and Vertigo shared a booth for cutters and lighters. Humidor maker Daniel Marshall showed off some of his gorgeous cigar humidors, while Diamond Crown had a few of its own humidors on display. Rounding out the booths were good life product makers BIGHORN golf, which featured a putting green, and watchmakers Carl F. Bucherer, Oris, Tutima, Ulysse Nardin and Bulova. Carnevino, Tao, Lavo, Texas de Brazil, Valentino, Morels, Charlie Palmer Steak and other eateries offered samples of food to hungry revelers.
SATURDAY: TOP CIGAR TASTING
BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

The Las Vegas Big Smoke seminars, which are the ideal balance of the academic and the recreational, began at nine o’clock Saturday morning, where each guest was handed a Humidipak bag containing Cigar Aficionado’s top three non-Cuban cigars of 2010: Viaje Oro No. 5 Reserva, Fuente Fuente OpusX XXX Belicoso and Padrón Family Reserve No. 45 (natural). Each had rated 95 points, classic on Cigar Aficionado’s 100-point scale. As the show began, executive editor Gordon Mott introduced the first cigar of the morning.

Andre Farkas, who started Viaje in January 2008, took the microphone to describe the cigar, and his background in the industry. Farkas left a career as a talent agent in Los Angeles to return to the tobacco business. Viaje is made at the tiny Raíces Cubanas factory in Honduras.

“Being a small manufacturer gives me tremendous freedom to be creative, to control quality and to be nimble as a company. I can change directions at a moment’s notice,” explained Farkas. The audience listened as they smoked his cigar, made from a blend of Nicaraguan tobacco. A Corojo ’99 wrapper covers a double binder of Corojo and Criollo, around filler tobacco sourced from the country’s three major growing regions, Jalapa, Condega and Estelí.

The Viaje Oro VOR No. 5 gave smokers something to enjoy during the next seminar, which focused on Cuban cigars. When that seminar concluded, Cigar Aficionado’s senior editor David Savona introduced Carlos “Carlito” Fuente Jr., and his Dominican puro.

Fuente came to the stage and said, “I’d like to light up my cigar because I’m only half a man without it. To us, the most meaningful things are friends and family, and each and every one of you are not only my friends, but an extension of my family.”

He then called his sister Cynthia, his daughter Liana and Wayne Suarez up to the stage for “support.” Approaching the 100th anniversary of his company, Fuente gave an emotional retrospective of his family’s history. Rather than talk about his Dominican-made cigar, he paid tribute to his grandfather, who emigrated from Cuba to Florida, and all his struggles while making cigars, first at the Gato factory in Key West, and then on his own at A. Fuente in 1912 in Tampa Florida.

“This cigar got a 95?” said Fuente holding up his cigar. “If it was three inches longer it would have got at least three more points,” he said jokingly. “One thing I’ve learned is that everything is family. You need their strength and support. You cannot achieve anything alone.”

After a seminar on hybrid tobaccos, it was time for the Padrón Family Reserve No. 45 natural. But due to the unexpected and unrelated deaths of two Padrón employees in Nicaragua, Jorge and José Orlando Padrón, who were scheduled to speak, could not attend, so the audience lit up the smokes while Mott and Savona spoke.

“Of the seven Cigars of The Year that we’ve had since we started that award, they have won three of them and have never finished out of the top four,” said Mott. “To me, it’s just a statement of what they themselves say. They want quality over quantity.”

At one time, the Family Reserve was commercially unavailable, reserved only for events where a family member was present. Then in 2009, the Padróns introduced it to the general public.

“Jorge is very cagey with details,” said Savona. “I ask him what’s in it and he says ‘Oh, you know, I make my cigars, you write your stories and that’s all you really need to know.’ He does tell me that he puts old tobacco in here. Think back to when you were 10 years ago because that’s when some of the seeds for this tobacco were planted. You’re smoking some of the oldest tobacco from the Padróns. These guys love tobacco and take great care to make great cigars like this one. I hope you enjoy it as much as we do.”

SATURDAY: AN INSIDER’S VIEW OF CUBA
BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

Take a room full of 500 cigar enthusiasts. Now open up a fresh box of Cohiba 1966 Edición Limitada 2011 Cuban cigars. The oohs and ahhs will rise up from the crowd. Then open up another box of Por Larrañaga Regalias de Londres, and hear the catcalls and whistles. Then a vintage box of Dunhill Selection Montecristo No. 2s and the room is on the brink of turning into a mob. This is what Ajay Patel did.

Patel, who shared the stage with Gordon Mott and David Savona on the Insider’s View of Cuba seminar, is the proprietor of the United Kingdom’s only Casa del Habano, Habanos S.A.’s official franchise for Cuban cigars. As Mott said, “Speaking with Ajay about vintage Cubans is like discussing a sheet of music with a philharmonic musician. He sees all the nuances and his knowledge of the vintage cigar market is truly extraordinary.” But even he seemed a bit distracted by the piles of vintage cigars presented at the seminar. “So, as I recall,” Mott suggested, “the script says

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November 8, 2011
‘Ajay gives Gordon and Dave all of his cigars.’”

The room laughed along, having already been put in a Cuban state of mind after a video played showing Savona and Mott in Cuba on their recent trips to Havana to produce the December cover story for Cigar Aficionado.

“When we first started the magazine, the boxes were coded and consumers didn’t know the dates or the factories where the cigars were produced,” said Savona. “Cuba’s abandoned that and now the codes are very clear with the year and month of production on the box of cigars.”

“We all know that Cuba had a problem after the boom. Production was like a conveyor belt,” said Patel. “But they learned their lesson. Altadis injected $500 million into Habanos to help obtain more fertilizer and draw testers. New blood also came in to manage the factories. In 2004, quality got noticeably better.”

Mott spoke of draw-testing machines, designed to gauge the airflow through a cigar before it is boxed and shipped. He recalls: “The draw-testing machines that we’ve seen in Havana, I saw for the first time in 1992 in the Dominican Republic at Tabacalera de Garcia. Marvin [Shanken] took a picture of the machine and he was almost tackled, told ‘You can not take a picture of that machine, its top secret.’ Well, today many factories around the world use that same machine and the Cubans say that every factory they have has a draw tester. Now, they’re not draw-testing every single cigar, but they sample cigars coming off the benches.”

That notion has been reflected in ratings.

“Over the past year we’ve rated 71 Cuban cigars with scores of 90 points or higher,” said Savona. “Many of them with box dates from ‘08, ’09 and ’10. Current year production has exceptional quality these days.”

This is also corroborated by the consistent increasing sales of Cuban cigars in the U.K. “We’ve been increasing 4 to 5 percent every year and the U.K. receives about four to six million sticks each year,” said Patel. “It’s a small number when compared to other parts of the world like, say, Spain, who gets between 45 to 50 million sticks per year, so there’s a big difference between them and us, but we do get good quality Cuban cigars.”

Patel mentioned how United Kingdom importer Hunters & Frankau opens and inspects every single box of cigars that comes in from Cuba. “Some people ask me for sealed boxes. You’re not going to get them,” said Patel. “Not in the U.K. market.”

Other highlights of the seminar included insights on Cuba’s Regional Editions and Edición Limitadas.

When Christian Eiroa looked into the crowd of cigar enthusiasts gathered at the Big Smoke Las Vegas and confessed “My father is a degenerate gambler,” he wasn’t revealing a family secret about a weakness for the town’s gaming tables. The former Camacho Cigars president was describing his father’s passion for creating the new tobacco hybrids that are improving the cigars we smoke.

Manuel Quesada, maker of Fonseca, and Nestor Andres Plasencia, of Plasencia Tobacco, joined the younger Eiroa on the panel of the Saturday seminar Today’s Hybrids: The Tobacco Used in Your Cigars. The focus was the wave of new hybrid tobaccos that have improved yields.

Eiroa said that rewards of finding the next-greatest strain are alluring enough that his father endures years of time-intensive, painstaking and often frustrating work, betting that his efforts will pan out. However, “If you grow something that has white veins, you’ve just wasted two years of your life.”

Plasencia, who holds a degree in agricultural engineering, explained that it might take seven to eight years to go from idea to successful harvest with a new hybrid, which is a marriage of two tobacco strains in hopes of reproducing the best characteristics of each. The panelists said that the variables include such things as flavor and durability.

Plasencia said that the hybrid Habana 2000 combined cigar tobacco with cigarette seed. “It would grow anywhere,” said Eiroa. “You could throw that stuff on the driveway and it would grow.”

While Eiroa’s family grows tobacco in the Jamastran region of Honduras and the Plasencias are the largest growers of tobacco in Central America, with operations in Honduras and Nicaragua, Quesada was the only panelist focusing on manufacturing rather than farming. Thus, he said, “I have a lot to learn from these young men.” He described how their advances had affected his job as a
cigar manufacturer. “There’s never been such a wide variety of tobacco.” His choices today include different tastes, aromas and strengths of body. Such variety, however, also creates challenges. Quesada told of having to create new blends to accommodate the new tobaccos. “When you put leaves together, you don’t know what will happen. It could be successful,” he said. “It could be the dumbest thing you ever did in your life.”

SATURDAY: SIZE MATTERS
BY JACK BETTRIDGE

Saturday’s final cigar seminar was a discussion of shapes and sizes, dubbed Size Matters. Panelists Litto Gomez of La Flor Dominicana, Mike Giannini from La Gloria Cubana, and Rocky Patel of Rocky Patel Premium cigars joined Mott and Savona on the stage.

Patel pointed out that the relative size and shape of a cigar is often driven by the kind of leaf that goes into it. Quite logically, broader, larger leaves lend themselves to large cigars, he said, while smaller leaves are best used on a smaller cigar. Gomez said that while his massive La Flor Dominicana Digger is only an inch or so longer than other cigars, it required a long development period for rollers to perfect the size. A trend toward such larger cigars, especially those with fat ring gauges, has been alive for the last four years or so, said Patel, with six by 60 cigars being the trendy size. “I can spot who’s going to smoke a 6 by 60 when they walk through the cigar shop door,” he added.

When the question was asked if special shapes and sizes go to the best rollers in a factory to make, Giannini pointed out that rollers may be the most skilled at making a certain type of cigar, but not necessarily every shape or size made.

The panelists agreed that the size and shape of the cigars we smoke often depends on the retailers and their preference for what to sell. For instance, there seems to be resistance from the stores for the long lancero shape. All agreed as well that presentation inside cellophane wrappers was an affectation done for the benefit of the retailer, who is trying to protect his stock from those who handle cigars while choosing them.

Giannini said that to a great extent, the impetus to forever push the envelope in regard to unusual shapes and sizes comes from the consumer. And, he added, the push from the market for new formats is one that he enjoys catering to. “We just want to have fun.”

SATURDAY: LUNCH WITH ROCKY PATEL
BY ANDREW NAGY

Lunch with Rocky Patel not only refueled the bodies of the seminar attendees, but it let them add to their cigar bounties. Each event-goer was greeted with an elegantly designed sampler pack of cigars: a Rocky Patel 15th Anniversary, Rocky Patel Fifty, Xen and a Thunder.

The guests dined on baby iceberg lettuce with hickory-smoked bacon lardons, bleu cheese and pickled red onion, Angus filet mignon dusted with porcini mushroom powder and wrapped in bacon, chocolate pavé cake and Rodney Strong Symmetry Meritage Alexander Valley 2008 while Patel spoke about the state of the cigar industry.

SUNDAY: CHARLIE PALMER BREAKFAST
BY DAVID SAVONA

Charlie Palmer, the owner of Aureole, Charlie Palmer Steak, and many other restaurants, has cooked breakfast at the Las Vegas Big Smoke for many years. He greeted the hungry audience on Sunday morning and began setting up his cooking station and commenced a tutorial on making sausage. Watching someone cook fine food can be cruel if you’re not supping along, and the waitstaff of the Venetian soon brought out a warm, succulent breakfast for everyone: brioche stuffed with kielbasa sausage and a ramekin of rich, coddled egg with spinach. Pastries and croissants were in full supply as well.

Palmer explained the role of fat in sausage making as he began making kielbasa, combining ground pork with fat and spices. He stuffed the meat into casings, advising not to push too hard or go too fast, and pricked the sausage before cooking. The rich aroma of fennel seed and cooking pork began to fill the room as Palmer fielded questions. Each diner was given a La Flor Dominicana Double Ligero Churchill Especial to smoke at another time.

SUNDAY: ROLL YOUR OWN LA GLORIA CUBANA
BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

Most cigar enthusiasts smoke their cigars much better than they can roll them. And they’re perfectly satisfied with this arrangement. But some smokers want total immersion and participation in their beloved hobby, so they try their hands at actually rolling a cigar. A Big Smoke
Las Vegas tradition, the Roll Your Own seminar gives attendees a chance to try to assemble a cigar as though they were in a factory. It is hosted by Mike Giannini, General Cigar Co.’s director of Team La Gloria.

When some 500 cigar enthusiasts entered the seminar, they found the room had been transformed into a cigar rolling gallery: Each seat had a plastic mat, a razor blade, a wrapperless cigar, and a small cup of vegetable glue. They were handed a wrapper leaf and began to watch a demonstration of how to roll a cigar.

“Every year people ask me, ‘What’s the key to rolling a good cigar?’” said Giannini, “and every year I tell them, ‘Pay attention to Leo.’” Giannini was referring to master roller Leo “The Pope” Peraza, an inveterate cigarmaker who constructs his cigars up on stage. The crowd was shown how to stretch, cut and roll the wrapper leaf onto a cigar. Peraza effortlessly cut, stretched and rolled in nearly one motion. Then he did it again, and then again, slowing his fluid pace for the audience to observe and follow.

There were prizes for ugliest and most creative cigars, with hearty laughter, then the judges began to seriously evaluate all the submitted cigars and held up a near perfect smoke rolled by John “Bones” Malone. He was presented with two La Gloria Serie R Limitada Humidors (filled with cigars) made of Ebony Macassar wood.

**SUNDAY: CIGARS AND COGNAC**

**BY GREGORY MOTTOLA**

The final Big Smoke seminar was a pairing of Cognac and cigars. “I learned about Cognac the hard way—through books,” said *Cigar Aficionado* senior features editor Jack Bettridge. “I thought I knew about the spirit until I finally went this year to visit the region.” The four Cognacs at the seminar represented different growing regions in France and four blending styles: Hennessy XO, Pierre Ferrand Selection Des Anges, Remy Martin XO and Courvoisier 21. Bettridge was joined on the panel by Alan Rubin, owner of Alec Bradley Cigar Co., and the audience smoked Alec Bradley Black Market and Alec Bradley Tempus cigars.

The audience lit up their cigars and began to sip the Cognacs, comparing each. “Usually we like to arrange the Cognacs from lightest body to fullest, but this was hard to do because they are all full bodied, elegant Cognacs,” said Bettridge, who explained how Cognac is a brandy, which is distilled wine, and that it is only officially designated as Cognac if it’s produced in the Cognac region of France.

The seminar went over its scheduled time, but it’s understandable. Even the editors like to prolong the pairing of spirits and cigars, the culmination of a Big Smoke weekend that goes by all too quickly.

For more on the Las Vegas Big Smoke, including an extensive photo gallery, visit www.cigaraficionado.com.