

LEAF N GRAIN SOCIETY

ELEVATING THE STANDARDS FOR PAIRING CIGARS,
BEVERAGES, & CULINARY DELIGHTS

Chantel Leavitt
Bella Dama

Al Micallef
Micallef Cigars

Whiskey Talk
Wine Review
Featured Pairing
Cigar Reviews
Recipes
Events

FALL/WINTER 2023

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ISSUE 01

Art of the Spirits

American Whiskey

History

Art of the Spirits Distillery is a Colorado Springs, Colorado based business that is accredited and licensed as well as locally owned and operated. Richard Paul, the Founder of Art of the Spirits Distillery, is a native of Denver, Colorado. Since 2014, Richard has put his knowledge, ingenuity, skill, and passion into creating and developing a unique whiskey brand that does not mass produce each release.

Our primary focus is on cask strength, store picked barrels. Richard's extensive art background stems from 13+ years of working with world renowned artists, Danial James and David Uhl in Golden, Colorado (licensed artists under Uhl Studios by Harley-Davidson since 1993). Richard has discovered the unique elegance of pairing high-quality, limited-edition whiskey and limited-edition fine art. Art of the Spirits Distillery is the only brand in the world that showcases world renowned artists on their whiskey.



Whiskey for Vets

Honoring all who served

Art of the Spirits Distillery was commissioned by 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Navy SEALs, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force veterans along with Colorado Springs Police to create an exclusive line of military commemoratives that are exclusively offered in our single barrel program.

For every barrel selected, we will donate up to \$72 per case to help a nominated Veteran or Veteran's family in need with groceries, gas, or bills. Every military family has various kinds of struggles from serving as single parents while their loved ones are deployed, frequent moves, caring for wounded warriors and honoring the family of our nation's fallen heroes. We're showing gratitude to our defenders by giving back to each one of them with a face-to-face donation, a smile, and a handshake.



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Fall / Winter 2023

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

For as long as I can remember, I've always dreamed of working for a magazine and, to some degree, having my own. From my early years as a photographer, I dreamed of working for National Geographic, to attempting, keyword attempting, to create a local music "zine" in Dallas. I believe we had a working name of "Alive" at the time.

Fast forward to 2020, when three friends got together and decided to build what is now known as Leaf n Grain Society. We had talked about cigar pairings before. Matt Harris and I even attempted to create a Facebook focusing on the craftwork of cigars and spirits but not on the pairings specifically. At that time, however, we had not yet discussed what it would take to start a company focused on cigar pairings, let alone a media company focused on just that. It wasn't until Ash Red and I attempted to do an Instagram Live pairing that we decided to get together and start this adventure. We quickly invited Matt to join us, and thus, the adventure began. We started with a website, www.leafn-grainsociety.com, a podcast which we eventually called "The Twisted Pair" after a naming contest was held, yet the idea of a magazine was still just an infant thought in the back of my mind.



As time passed, the website grew in popularity, and there was a need for writers to assist the three of us with creating content. We soon found ourselves adding content around more than just cigar pairings. Requests came in for written content supporting what we shared and taught on our podcast. Soon, our readers enjoyed articles about the history of cocktails, reviews of more than just cigars and the pairings, but ones around beers, wines, and coffees. The website featured recipes for cocktails, desserts, and entrées, eventually becoming a resource covering all aspects of the cigar, food, and beverages industry and taking on the heart of our mission of "Focus on inspiring awareness and education of cigars, beverages, and food through pairings in our communities."

Our podcast eventually grew into a full-fledged live YouTube and Facebook show with our YouTube channel. I wanted more, even though Red and I were busy co-hosting other shows. I had that itch for wanting to write, edit, and publish my own magazine.

The Leaf n Grain magazine you are reading today is that dream coming to life. One built by a team that I am blessed to have around me, a team of talented yet unknown writers, each with their specialty and expertise. Together, we have built this magazine on the passion of each of our specialties and our love of cigars.

Ash Red has often described this as my baby; it is/was my dream, but it is our baby. This is the next stage of what Leaf n Grain Society is becoming. I hope you enjoy what you read and what you read makes you want to return for more.

Explore the pairings; there is something for everyone.

There is more to come!

No Squares In Our Circle



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WINE REVIEWS

LLANO ESTOCADO WINERY

Cellar Reserve Tempranillo
2020

QUILL DIAMOND MOUNTAIN

Cabernet Sauvignon
2011



LLANO ESTOCADO WINERY

Cellar Reserve Tempranillo

2020

by Terry-Lynn Faught

Photo by Terry-Lynn Faught

Winery-Llano Estacado is the second oldest winery in Texas and the first winery to go into production post-prohibition. The original winery was built outside of Lubbock in 1976 by a group of investors, including a Texas Tech horticulturist who saw potential in the West Texas soils to produce quality wine grapes. Soon after, more vineyards began to dot the High Plains of West Texas. Word spread that the wine being made by Llano was of good quality, so in 1980, they hired the former President of Seagram, Walter Haimann, to start moving into the next chapter. It is currently the second-largest winery in Texas (the largest producer for multiple brand labels).

The Tempranillo grape (“Little early one,” as it tends to ripen earlier than other grapes) is best known as the “Nobel Grape of Spain,” however, it does well in many parts of Texas due to similarities between the climate and soils of Central Spain and those of Texas. This thick-skinned black grape started being used more extensively in Texas winemaking in the early 2000s, with American oak barrels traditionally used for aging. Still, several winemakers use French Oak Barrels or a combination of American and French Oak Barrels to achieve oak-based notes in the flavor profiles.

The Cellar Reserve Tempranillo (2020) is a rich, velvety, deep purple-red, reflecting the deep red berry flavors inside. Dark red berries lead the charge on the nose, followed by notes of leather and oak-driven vanillas trailing quietly behind.

The subtle notes come from Llano, who uses both American and French oak barrels in their aging process. This Medium-bodied wine is smooth on the palate, with the light acid and round tannins producing a pleasant “red wine pucker” in the mouth. As a medium-bodied wine, it’s easier to drink than a Cabernet Sauvignon or a Malbec but not as light as Pinot Noir or Gamay. This Tempranillo is slightly complex, with aromas transitioning to more of a leather lead and flavors opening to a more oak-spice lead as it sits in the glass.

Aside from enjoying this wine solo in front of a roaring fire or on a cool evening, this wine holds its own against well-cooked pork, the smoky notes of barbecue, the spice of paprika dishes, the subtly bite of Mexican Moles, as well as rich desserts involving chocolate, cheesecakes.

If you enjoy a cigar with your wine, you can decide if you want your stick to reinforce and accent or showcase this wine’s flavor. Cigars that use Mexican wrappers or Nicaraguan tobacco (notes of coffee, chocolate, and black pepper enhance the spice in the wine), Mexican San Adres (stalk cut, earthy character can support berry notes in Tempranillo), or Connecticut Shade grown (milder flavors can allow the berry notes in the wine to stand out).



Blend: 75% Tempranillo, 21% Cab Sauv, 4% Petit Verdot

Grapes 100% Texas sourced from contracted vineyards in West Texas Texas High Plains AVA (recognized in 1993)

Received Double Gold Rating at the Lone Star International Wine Competition in both International and Texas categories.

- Color— dark red/purple
- Nose—red berries, leather, vanilla, toasted oak
- Flavors—rich ripe dark berries, a touch of black pepper on the back
- Medium Body
- Slightly acidic
- Long finish, rich tannins
- Best served cool room temp, larger bowl glass
- Pair with pork or beef, paprika dishes, Mexican mole sauced dishes



QUILL DIAMOND MOUNTAIN

Cabernet Sauvignon

2011

by *Dave Yancey*

Photo by Dave Yancey

The Diamond Mountain district in the northwestern part of Napa County is a sub-appellation of the Napa Valley AVA. Rising in elevations of up to 2,200 feet, this region of the mountain district faces less extreme heat than the valley floor itself and typically remains frost-free during the winter months.

The Diamond Creek River flows through the valley, channeling cool air into the hillside and extending the growing season by mitigating late-season heat spikes. These factors all play a significant role, along with the soils, in creating powerful wines that are bright in acidity and rich in tannins.

The Cabernet Sauvignon grape is a hearty grape rich in flavors, color, and tannins, with the latter due to the thick skins commonly found on the grape. Originating in the Bordeaux region of France, specifically the eastern bank. The Cabernet Sauvignon is the dominant grape in the Diamond Mountain District, with soils primarily of volcanic origin, producing very structured, age-worthy wines with rich fruit aromas.

Quill Mountain wines describe themselves as being 100% Mountain, 100% Varietal, and 100% Single Vineyard wine.

Quill features wines such as Cabernet Sauvignon from both the Diamond Mountain District and Howell Mountain, along with Syrah from Bismark Mountain Ranch and Viognier from Stage Coach Vineyard.



Opening the bottle, we were immediately presented with a broken cork showing slight vinegar on the nose that quickly dissipated upon decanting, thus allowing notes of sugar plum that transitioned into rich plums with herbaceous notes and white pepper at the back. A complex wine, high in acidity, yet with soft tannins. Flavors of rich plums are at the front of the palate, and herbaceous white turnips and white pepper are at the very back for a long finish with each sip.

A full-bodied wine, great for sharing with friends or pairing with a hearty meal such as Mexican Barbacoa Chili



Blend: 100% Cabernet Sauvignon

Grapes: 100% grown from a single vinyard in DiamondMountain District

Region: Diamond Mountain District AVA | Napa Valley

Price: \$90 - \$100

- Color— deep plum with garnet edging
- Nose—plums, herbatious, white pepper
- Flavors—rich plums, white turnip, white pepper
- Full Body
- Acidic
- Long finish, soft tannins
- Best served cool room temptemp, larger bowl glass
- Pair with pork or beef, Mexican barbacoa Chili, hearty fish such as Flounder or Hallibut



CHANTEL LEAVITT BELLA DAMA CIGARS

by Ash Red

Images courtesy of Bella Dama Cigars



Growing up watching her father indulge in his passion for smoking cigars, Chantel fell in love with the smell of tobacco, anxiously waiting for when she could take a draw from a cigar herself. Chantel grew up watching her father become a World Champion Poker Player. Her father gave her some of the greatest life advice: “Nothing is unobtainable if you desire it.” and “You must be the best!”. A year before COVID, Chantel did a spokes modeling gig for a big industry name, which brought her passion for cigars back to the forefront. Initially, she thought she would have a hosting business wherein she would hire elite women and thoroughly educate them on everything concerning cigars. Afterward, they would be hired to host public and private events. The cigar line would come down the road. She eventually decided to shelve the idea due to her daughter going to college, and she needed to continue focusing on what she knew. Moving forward with what she was successful in, which was in the e-commerce retail in the fashion sector. A year later Covid hit and pummeled her retail business overnight, disrupting her life and forcing her to shift plans to succeed.

She took the cigar idea off the shelf and decided to go back and pursue her dreams; although there were no events due to the pandemic, Chantel knew what she would need to achieve her dream in the cigar industry in a different way. Knowing she would need to have the product first. Her new goal was to find a factory

and create a brand. Chantel was in unknown territory but recalled her father’s advice. Acquiring assistance from a friend who was a huge cigar aficionado, they made the first three offerings in Bella Dama Cigars. Procuring a factory was her first step. She received the first shipment of her initial blend at the end of November 2020.

Being self-taught in every aspect of the cigar industry- Chantel created the cigars, branding, packaging, social media promotions, and everything else that went into being a cigar brand owner. Chantel and Bella Dama Cigars faced and overcame every obstacle before her over the next two years due to COVID-19. One of those obstacles looming over her was in the name of her cigar company. It was originally going to be called Cigar Aficionada. Remember she was going to create a hosting business first. Chantel felt the name was appropriate because, as a female, it gave the perception that she held an extreme amount of knowledge about cigars soon after filing for her LLC. Business checking, etc., with that name; Chantel, speaking with a friend who happened to be an attorney, it was brought to her attention that the name was too similar to Cigar Aficionado Magazine and, therefore, copyright infringement. The fact that she was creating a cigar business and not a magazine was irrelevant. She wanted the name to be feminine and unique. Bella Dama simply came to her out of the blue. After checking the National Trademark registry Chantel found that it was available.

Another challenge Chantel faced was the initial processing company's fees, which were too high, forcing her to find an alternate merchant processor. For a long time, she couldn't even accept payments via credit cards. Being a woman in a male-dominated industry was one of the biggest obstacles. She had no familial lineage to assist in that regard either; she was utterly unknown. Chantel reported, "Being taken credibly has been challenging but also fulfilling at the same time." Her new goal was to see how far she could take it with little knowledge and pray for the best.

Chantel wanted to incorporate femininity into Bella Dama Cigars without discouraging the male audience. Knowing that red lips are sexy and appeal to both men and women, she hired a designer to turn her ideas into reality. After many tweaks with the logo, she finally had a logo she loved. Chantel also wanted to pay homage to her avid cigar-smoker father when she created her brand. The colors represented the old Vegas casino: red, black, and gold, while the names are after poker terms. King, her first cigar, named after her father, is described as a full-bodied cigar. The next cigar to be played in Bella Dama was Queen, described as a mild to medium cigar. Ace, a medium to full cigar, made its way to the table. She also has Royal, Flush, and Jack. Each cigar in Bella Dama line has different wrappers, binders, and fillers to appeal to every smoker's palate.

Chantel advises others interested in starting in this industry "that this is not for the faint of heart; it doesn't simply happen overnight. You must have serious, thick skin to be in the game. You must be able to support yourself for a very long time without any financial gains, as it all goes back into the business to grow. Set your goals high while keeping your initial expectations low. Be prepared to have many doors slammed in your face. But like anything in life, if it were easy, everyone would do it. If you want something bad enough, then nothing is unobtainable."



Even though she has gone through many obstacles, there have been many rewarding accomplishments. The most rewarding accomplishment for Chantel is that she is still in business and gaining daily traction. She has overcome every obstacle before her and is still going strong to this day. Chantel has been on news segments, articles, cigar shows, and podcasts. She knew when Cigar Journal Magazine did a brand feature on Bella Dama Cigars she knew she had finally arrived.

Chantel says that being involved in the Cigar community has rewards every day as it is the most incredible community of people she has ever had the privilege to encounter who do so much for their fellow human beings. It does not matter if they are janitor or CEO; everyone in this community 'breaks bread' together and treats each other with dignity and respect. It is an unspoken code like no other. Chantel describes the cigar community as the most generous community she has "borne witness to in my life." "I have never seen a community with so much outreach. We've had deaths, children with cancer, etc, and so many people pitch in to help. It is simply amazing." She is honored and privileged to sit on the Board of Directors for the Dented Development Project, which assists first responders and their families through trauma. She recently became involved with Stogies For Servicemen and CigarVets. Chantel finds herself giving time to charitable benefits and is always looking to get involved in more. One of her greatest joys in life is to give back.

Chantel's favorite pairing is a bold Nicaraguan with a great bourbon. She also enjoys a Connecticut with a Cappuccino. Being a white wine enthusiast, she can pair a cigar of any strength with her wine.

Finding a balance between business and being a single mother has pressure and responsibilities; however, things are more manageable with her daughter in college. Two hours away, Chantel prioritizes her daughter above all things while understanding that she has to answer when business calls. Chantel models her work ethic for her daughter and believes children learn by example. She knows her examples have carried over into her daughter's life. Observing her mom having to be a boss on many different levels and conquer so many adversities has given her strength that she will need to overcome her own personal/professional obstacles. It is apparent that Chantel's daughter is her biggest fan, and she has developed relationships within the industry that she can take with her for a lifetime. Chantel knows that she and her daughter are very blessed to be a part of such an incredible community.



SETTING SAIL WITH ADVENTURA

by *Ash Red*

Henderson Ventura and Marcel Knobel are the masterminds behind one of the most treasured cigars, ADVENTURA Cigars. ADVENTURA Cigars is a company built on passion, emotion, journeys, and the love of the leaf. Each of their cigars creates a beautiful story of the seafaring explorers sailing the dangerous high seas, searching for buried treasures.

Who are the men behind ADVENTURA Cigar? Marcel Knobel (McKay) is a Swiss businessman, retailer, tobacconist, marketer, and sommelier. Henderson Ventura (ADV) is the youngest master blender in the industry out of the Dominican Republic; he grew up in the industry, learning from his father, William Ventura “El Maestro.” Men who understand the world of cigars. In 2016, they were introduced to one another and founded ADV & McKay Cigar Company; in 2017, they launched their first cigar in the European market and set sail for the United States.

ADV & McKay is known in the industry for their unusual packaging. The packaging offers a glimpse behind the story of the cigar, whether it is a beautiful ship or a talking treasure chest, it makes ADVENTURA Cigars stand out among their competitors. The first cigar that was released by this dynamic duo was The Explorer. They wanted their consumers to experience the full flavors of cigars and explore what they had to offer, and they provided them with a treasure. Next, they provided a map for their consumers, beginning with The Navigator, boasting tobacco from five different origins blended beautifully. ADVENTURA Cigars then set sail with The Conqueror. The Royal Return, Queen’s Pearls, is a tribute to a classic Connecticut, while the King’s Gold is a bolder and stronger Connecticut.



They continued their world domination journey. ADVENTURA presented the Barbarroja Invasion, a smoke you will not forget. With a Mexican San Andres wrapper over Media Tempo fillers paying a worthy homage to a piece of history.

Their most recent cigar, an exclusive cigar, La Llorona, is a story of a vengeful mother ghost who roams the waters mourning the children she killed. ADVENTURA Cigars created their most beautiful cigar, Piece of Heart. This cigar benefits the children of the Dominican Republic whose families live and work in and near the factory producing ADVENTURA Cigars. Each of their facings consists of raw tobacco aged between 4 and 5 years, and their cigars are 4 to 5 months old.

Like any great adventure, tragedy struck them before the sun kissed the morning sky on September 22, 2022. The factory home to ADVENTURA Cigars caught fire, and a tremendous amount of their inventory was lost. However, ADV & McKay Cigar Company was like a great Phoenix and rose out of the ashes; they recently announced they will have a factory dedicated just to ADVENTURA Cigars. Mina del Rey (Mine of the King), the new facility, will be home to more facing and providing more jobs in the Dominican Republic.

I encourage you to set sail on your own journey with ADVENTURA Cigars; you will not regret the journey nor this beautiful treasure of cigars found along the way. They are unlike anything you have had and will want to continue the adventure.

CIGAR PAIRINGS

SP 10-14 & ANGELS ENVY CASK STRENGTH

KAREN BURGER 25TH & CIGAR CITY MADURO MALT



SP 10-14 & ANGELS ENVY CASK STRENGTH

by Joe Gulino

Images by Joe Gulino

The Cigar

Brand: Sanjay Patel (Muga Inc.)

Blended By: Eladio Diaz, Tabacalera Diaz Cabrera

Vitola: 6x54 Toro

Filler: Undisclosed 5 Different Leaves

Wrapper: Dominican Republic

Binder: Barrel Aged Mexican San Andres

Body: Medium Boldness

Price: \$14

The Story

SP1014 is Sanj Patel's initials and birthday. In my opinion, Sanj is one of the most knowledgeable, real, and hilarious cats in the cigar industry. I'm not surprised this m-effer, his favorite term of endearment, made sure everyone remembers his m-effing birthday.

Sanj's Smoke Shop, located at 419 Broad Street in Bloomfield, New Jersey, is one of only fifty retail shops that carry this new follow-up to his original red-labeled SP1014 Love n' Passion cigar. Only 300,000 cigars per vitola: Robusto, Robusto extra, toro, and double corona will be produced annually.

This SP1014 Black incredibly contains seven different tobaccos, blended by Eladio Diaz, the man previously behind many of Davidoff's blends. So, this is undoubtedly a unique and complex cigar, deserving of a special and complex whiskey to pair with it. Angel's Envy Port Finished Cask Strength, at 59.9% ABV, should do the trick. This is one of my favorite Port-finished bourbons, and I'm looking forward to seeing how these special barrel-aged products pair together.

Visual / Pre-light Draw

Nice oily medium brown wrapper with strong toothy veins, a pigtail, and a closed foot. Chocolatey fresh hay on the aromas, along with a dry foot. A simple yellow and black band with Sanj's face superimposed over SP1014. Only Sanj would put his m-effing face on his cigar. No spice on the palate when prepping the head for a nice straight guillotine cut to get the full flavor of this seven-leaf blend.

First Third

Incredibly smooth draw with an explosion of charred vanilla over a hint of basil pesto sauce. This cigar is high in smoke input/output volume. The smoke fills the room—nice soft vanilla notes on the retro-hale with little to no spice. The cigar is incredibly smooth, balancing its char and vanilla notes. Suddenly I was presented with a nice red fruit note, which became even more prominent in the retro-hale. I am very pleased with the smoothness and flavors of this SP1014 Black.



I anticipate the cigar's fruitiness and vanilla notes will pair excellently with the Angels Envy Port Finished Cask Strength. Hopefully, its 59.9% ABV does not overpower the cigar's smoothness.

I typically introduce the whiskey in the second third to allow the cigar's flavors to develop for a more complex pairing of flavors. So far, the cigar's slow and consistent burn is perfect with a nice, firm, blackened gray ash.

Second Third

Entering the second third, there are more vanilla notes, which provide a balance while presenting a hint of cocoa and fresh hay on the finish. The retro-hale is smooth as ever now, with all these delicious vanilla and cocoa flavors lingering on the tip of the nose. This is a great smoke; each puff compels me to take another, and the vanilla and cocoa overlaid with fresh hay notes seem consistent throughout this third.

It is time to introduce the Angel's Envy to this smooth cigar-smoking experience. This is dark chocolate-covered and charred strawberries all day.

I am awestruck!

WOW!

Final Third

I am really enjoying this smooth Cubanesque and high-volume smoke! Everything has smoothed out even more, and that delicious vanilla note dominates the palate. The cigar's slow burn remains perfect, and its lengthy, firm ash eventually requires a rotating tap-off. Some creamy floral and chocolate notes arrive on the palate. I am thoroughly enjoying the smooth medium boldness of the cigar, which is full of nice transitions and keeps me salivating for more!



The Pairing

Cigar to the whisky:

Dark chocolate-covered and charred strawberries or even maraschino cherries.

Whisky to the cigar:

The deep notes and spice from the high ABV Port finishing are settled down by a blanket of the cigar's delicious creamy vanilla notes, with a sweet lingering candylike flavor on the finish. It's absolutely delicious and my favorite aspect of this pairing.

Poor person's cigar-smoked whiskey:

Barbecue smoked brisket with a strawberry glaze. Absolutely delicious!

I love this unique pairing!

Honestly, this has to be the best pairing I've ever experienced!

Cheers!

KAREN BURGER 25TH & CIGAR CITY MADURO MALT

by *Dave Yancey*

Images courtesy of Cigar City, Karen Berger, & Dave Yancey

The Cigar:

Brand: Karen Berger
Blended By: Karen Berger & A.J. Fernandez
Vitola: 6x54 Toro
Filler: Nicaraguan
Wrapper: Connecticut Broad Leaf / Habano 2000 Hybrid
Binder: Mexican San Andres
Body: Medium Boldness
Price: \$16



The Drink:

Brand: Cigar City Brewing
Drink: Craft Beer
Style: Brown Ale
ABV: 5.5%
Price: \$9 - \$11 / 6-pack

The Story:

Karen Berger partnered with A.J Fernandez to create the 25th-anniversary collaboration in honor of her 25th year in cigars. I was initially introduced to this cigar by Bruce Bosch, VP of Sales for Karen Berger cigars, during my visit in late 2022 to Ybor city. Bruce gave me a tour of Ybor and Tampa. Still, before we did, we had the opportunity to sit down and enjoy this cigar with the Maduro Brown Ale from Cigar City Brewing. I immediately knew that this was a pairing that I wanted to visit again, and this time, I sat down and delved further into the pairing and its complexity.



The Pairing:

Each stage of the pairing consists of getting to know the cigar and how it pairs with the drink from Cigar to Drink and Drink to Cigar. Is the pairing a complimentary pairing where each will enhance a flavor or set of flavors, or is it a contrasting pairing where each will bring forth a note that was hidden? Or could it be the ultimate goal of a balanced pairing where the pairing has both complementary and contrasting aspects, creating the perfect union of flavors?



First Third

Even before the first light, I took the cigar and noticed the perfectly shaped cap and deep brown, smooth wrapper, giving off an aroma of raw leather with a cold draw of leather, mint, and coffee.

With notes of coffee and subtle cocoa, while showing soft hints of white pepper on the retro hail, the smoke made a strong entrance in flavors while maintaining a medium-full body in viscosity and mouth-feel. Keeping an even burn with a silky yet greyish ash and hints of salt created a salivating palate as I prepared for the pairing to start.

Cigar > Drink: Notes of cordial cherries enhance the chocolate notes with a bit of creaminess in the ale.

Drink > Cigar: Notes of portabella mushrooms create an umami experience.

Second Third

The cigar transitions into the second third, maintaining the notes of coffee and cocoa yet introducing a charred pepper near the backend and into the retro. The burn cone is perfect in shape and heat, with the ash turning white and flaky near the cone.

Cigar > Drink: Toffee at the backend, following up the notes of cordial cherries from the first third of the pairing.

Drink > Cigar: Umami experience, more of a Mexican chocolate, cocoa with notes of nightshade pepper.



Final Third

The final third of a cigar will make or break that smoking experience and, in the same accord, will make or break your pairing experience. The notes in the final third come full circle with the coffee, cocoa, and portabella mushroom, all coming together to create an umami experience of a char-grilled mushroom coming off the grill at the moment of perfection. The burn and structure of the ash have been maintained throughout the smoke at the perfect temperature.

Cigar > Drink: Perfectly balancing all flavors with the cigar and beer.

Drink > Cigar: Perfectly balancing all flavors with the beer and cigar.

Final Results

This pairing is one for the books.

AL MICALLEF AND MICALLEF CIGARS

by Terry-Lynn Faught

Images courtesy of Micallef Cigars



Photo by Aimee Hart

Al Micallef has lived a fascinating life. He had already helmed multiple successful businesses, from lemonade stands as a child, door-to-door sales, ranching, silicon manufacture, oil & gas industry businesses, aircraft leasing, and restaurants among his ventures before a chance meeting led him into producing cigars.

In 2016, car trouble led to the meeting of Al Micallef, Joel, and Edel Gomez Sanchez. When the brothers found themselves stuck in downtown Fort Worth, Texas, they stopped in at Silverleaf Cigar Lounge and offered to roll some cigars for the patrons, Al Micallef among them. He enjoyed the cigars they rolled for him there, and a deal was struck for them to roll him 1,000 cigars. When he received them, he shared them with friends- and they were so enthusiastic about the stick that he opened a dialog with the Gomez-Sanchez family to enter the cigar business.

Al's business endeavors all come from a place of thought and calculation on his part, the coincidence of the brother's vehicle troubles in Fort Worth and Al enjoying a cigar at this particular lounge, led to the formation of Micallef Cigars, and a successful partnership in the cigar industry. Between Al's personal views and the Gomez-Sanchez family history, the company he formed strongly supports women, having women holding leadership positions throughout this company.

I've been lucky enough to sit with Al in cigar lounges before, but recently I took advantage of having some one-on-one time to talk at AME Cigar Lounge (Weatherford, Texas) and I asked him some questions that are not the typical ones he's been asked before.

TL - You've been part of a multitude of different businesses before you entered the cigar industry, what inspires you to explore any new business venture?

Al: Interest and curiosity. I have to be interested in the product or process, and curious about learning the process. I've enjoyed cigars for years, so when the opportunity arose, I took advantage of the opportunity to learn from people with experience how cigars are produced.



72: What is your favorite memory about the journey to create Micallef Cigars?

Al: After meeting the brothers (Joel and Eden Gomez-Sanchez) at Silverleaf Cigar Bar (Downtown Fort Worth, Texas), I asked them to create a cigar blend just for me. They sent me 1,000. I enjoy cigars, but that’s a LOT of cigars! So, I started sharing them with friends and associates. The blend was met with a lot of positivity, and I was encouraged to continue discussions with the Gomez-Sanchez family, and Micallef Cigars came into existence.

72 - Some professionals discourage working with family- you work with family in a couple of your ventures. Do you have any advice on how to make working with family as conflict-free as possible?

Al - I never expected family to join me in any of my businesses. In fact, I encouraged my children to strike out on their own and work in industries that they were interested in. My children had careers in other industries, and then two asked to join me in one of my ventures. So when they came to my companies, they knew how to work for someone and how important it was to be a part of a team.

72 - We all have a favorite holiday and traditions that we incorporate into those celebrations. How do cigars fit in your celebrations, and do you have a particular cigar (or cigar profile) that you consider your “celebratory” cigar?

Al - I would have to say Thanksgiving, especially as an adult. We planned to have our big meal at around 2 pm; then, we would turn on the football game and light up a cigar to enjoy while watching the game and visiting. If I were picking a cigar as just a “celebratory” cigar, that would be almost anyone by Atabey. (These cigars are limited production, rested for years before sale, complex, smooth, and several in the line have received an impressive 100 rating from The Cigar Authority)

72 - Everyone has at least one favorite beverage they enjoy with their cigar- what is yours? And is this different from your favorite beverage without a cigar/

Al - Oh, I enjoy chocolate malts, Coke Zero, or Verner’s Ginger Ale. Whether or not I have a cigar doesn’t really influence this. Now, Verner’s Ginger Ale is a favorite because I grew up near a production facility and toured it when I was younger. So, it is a flavor that takes me back to my childhood.



MICALLEF
CIGARS

72 - Besides your cigar brand, what is one thing you want to be remembered for?

Al - Fairness. In my businesses, I have always tried to treat employees with respect, even when I've had to let them go. I have several of my employees that have been with me for more than 20 years, moving with me into other ventures. At this point, they are practically family. A big part of being fair has also been to keep my word. In any business, it's important to follow through when you have committed to something.

A Basic Brand History

The Gomez Sanchez family hails from Cuba originally. The family patriarch, Pedro F. Gomez, became an apprentice at a local factory in San Luis Pinar del Rio (his birthplace) at age 11. At 12, he started working at Becquer in Marianao, working for several companies in the subsequent years. In 1934, the Gomez Sanchez cigars saw the light of day in Cuba. Since then, the Sanchez family took the helm, and the company grew exponentially.



Migdalia Sanchez (born in 1947, daughter-in-law of Pedro F. Gomez) began her studies at the School of Tobacconists in Havana at age 16. Graduating from that program at 17, she started to work at the Partagas Factory- soon standing out as one of the best cigar rollers on site while acquiring the knowledge of manufacturing and planting. Later, she was awarded the Carlos Balinos Medal (for more than 25 years in the tobacco industry) several times for her excellence as a cigar roller. She was chosen to represent Cuba at several international expositions and was recognized in many newspapers and magazines around the world.

In 1998, she joined Pedro and Joel Gomez in the family factory in Mexico. She later moved to Miami, where she continued to contribute her knowledge to their business and the factory in Nicaragua.

Micallef Cigars has honored this partnership in many ways; the naming of certain cigars/blends reflects this. For example, The Migdalia honors Migdalia Sanchez (who also created the blending), and The Reserva is the special blend that started it all. Several of their other blends are named to reflect the history of the companies.

Shortly after the cigars hit the shelves in 2017, Micallef Cigars were getting favorable recognition and high ratings from many cigar reviews- In 2017, the Micallef Reserve Limited Privada (the blend that started it all) was named the “#1 Boutique Cigar of 2017” by Cigar and Spirits Magazine, and Cigar Journal ranked it as #22 in their Top 25 Cigars. In 2020, they introduced the Micallef “A” (Nicaragua Maduro wrapper, Sumatra binder, Nicaragua & Dominican Republic filler) to honor their “Ambassadors” (a title they’ve given brand enthusiasts who have “joined the club”) to high praise, in 2021 the Migdalia Special Edition was released on International Woman’s Day. In 2023, they introduced the Micallef Black (Mexico Maduro San Andres wrapper, Ecuadorian Habano binder, and Nicaragua filler) at a wallet-friendly price point to high praise from the cigar community.



WHISKEY TALK

MILAM & GREENE

Very Small Batch

BLUE RUN SPIRITS

High Rye Bourbon



MILAM & GREENE

Very Small Batch
2023

by Dave Yancey

Images courtesy of Milam & Greene and Dave Yancey

Name: Milam & Greene Very Small Batch

Classification: Straight Bourbon Whiskey
Finished with French Oak Staves

Distillery: Kentucky & Tennessee

Bottled: Milam & Greene

Location: Blanco, TX

Age: 4 years minimum

Proof: 108

Mash-Blend:

Kentucky Straight -
70% corn | 22% malted rye | 8% malted barley
Tennessee Stright -
80% corn | 10% rye | 10 % malted barley

Batch: 1.1

Price: \$60 - \$65

What makes it Special

What happens when three women come together with over 60 years of combined experience in the whiskey industry? Milam & Greene is what happens. Marsha Milam, renowned author and recently awarded Master Blender of 2023 Heather Green, and veteran Master Distiller Marlene Holmes created a fun and charming distillery in the heart of Texas Hill Country in Blanco, TX. With grains from Texas, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming combined with their proprietary yeast, Milam & Greene has embraced many innovative ways to create award-winning spirits for all to enjoy.

Visual / Presentation

Their signature bottle has an exemplary label designed with Milam & Greene's recognizable "bow" shape, golden embossed type, and Heather Greene's signature. The burnt amber spirit is described as a Straight Bourbon Whiskey finished with Charred Oak Staves, aged for a minimum of 4 years at 108 proof. Calling one to experience a pour of what may be a genuinely classic spirit.

MILAM &
GREENE
W H I S K E Y

Nosing:

Heather Greene describes nosing in her book *Whisk(e)y Distilled ...*

“But another guy associated the smells feeling fresh and clean, and he exclaimed, “I love this smell!” The response to aroma is deeply personal.”

Nosing a whiskey is what starts us down memory lane. From these memories, we can then delve into what flavors triggered those memories.

The first aroma of the Very Small Batch was that of a caramel-covered apple that one would get from the carnival. Its candied apple undertones and cooking spices of cinnamon, cloves, and allspice create a memory of a pleasant experience of the past.



Palate:

We come to what is also often described as the “tasting,” known as the palate, or how the whiskey tastes on the front, middle, and sides of your tongue, the roof of your mouth, and finally, the back of your tongue. You will notice the aromas as they escape your palate and enter your nasal passages. How does the spirit feel on your tongue? Is it weighty? Does the spirit have an oily texture, or is it “crisp and clean?”

This expression from Milam & Greene opens with notes of creamy marshmallow and a toasted pine. With a slight weight in the viscosity yet crisp mouthfeel, the complexity of this spirit starts to shine.

Finish:

The finish refers to what you taste and feel after the sip travels down the back of your throat. How long does it last? Do you notice any notes that you didn't while you were savoring the spirit? Does the finish make you want to take another sip? A good finish will make you want more.

Notes of toasted pine with a gentle warming as the liquid travels downwards, creating a longing for more.



Score:

Reviewing and scoring a spirit is a subjective experience, one where everything described in the previous paragraphs comes into. How did the experience meet your expectations? Did the spirit drink “hot,” meaning did it have that “ethanol burn” that gives the impression that it is a higher proof than stated?

Having previously won the Gold Award at the 2023 San Francisco's World Spirit Competition, the Very Small Batch from Milam & Greene is a rotation and collection-worthy spirit. It's a great addition to the “Blender's Reserve” collection.

I found the experience of the spirit to be one that I wanted to share with my friends, one that I come to as I wind down my day and enjoy with a cigar. At 108 proof, I would have preferred a little more viscosity in the mouthfeel with a touch more of the oils to carry the notes into a longer finish.



BLUE RUN SPIRITS

High Rye Bourbon
2023

by Dave Yancey

Images courtesy of Blue Run

Name: Blue Run Spirits High Rye Bourbon
Classification: Kentucky Straight
Distillery: Undisclosed
Bottled: Blue Run Spirits
Location: Bardstown, KY
Age: No Age Statement
Proof: 111 / 55.5% ABV
Mash: 65% Corn | 30% Rye | 5% Malted Barley
Bottle: #1862 - 1/20/2023
Batch: Winter
Price: \$99



What makes it Special

With a name that pays homage to the foundation of Bourbon, coming from cofounder Jesse McKnight in what he called Kentucky's Royal Spring, found in Georgetown, Ky. Blue Run is a metamorphosis of both luxury and spirits, bringing quality creations from Shaylyn Gammon and Bourbon legend and Jim Rutledge to enthusiasts and connoisseurs alike.

Visual / Presentation

The golden amber accentuates the High Rye Bourbon, the flagship expression for Blue Run. Presented in their recognized bottle with their iconic Golden Blue embossed butterfly on the bottle. Information is printed in a golden font directly onto the bottle rather than on printed paper, thus setting the presentation apart from other distilleries.

Nosing:

Upon the often-celebrated popping of the bottle, the room filled with the aroma of apricots and honey. With the notes of apricots carrying onto the nose, the honey turned into a warmed-up honey with hints of butter and a slight end-of-summer barnyard musk.

Palate:

A complex bourbon will tease and then hit all areas of your palate, from the opening with a sweet vanilla to the back with a tingling cinnamon and a hint of pepper. This expression from Blue Run does not skip a beat on the palate. Opening with a buttered apricot that carries through the middle of your palate before transitioning to cloves and hitting you with a sweet peppercorn.

Finish:

The spirit is more than just the visual, nose, or how it tastes and feels on the palate; it is also how it finishes. It is within the finish of the pour that the memories are created. What conversations are held while you are savoring what you just sipped? The finish for this expression would be considered medium to long, reminiscent of musky cloves with hints of pepper. A finish that will bring you back many times over as you focus on the flavors, creating memories with each sip.



Score:

A pour that created lifelong memories with each sip deserving praise. The musky cloves may take a bit to get used to, but the memories of the late nights around the dimming campfire these notes brought to mind were ones of joy and relaxation. I found this year's High Rye Bourbon to be enjoyed and shared with friends.

CIGAR REVIEWS

VIAJE

15th Anniversary Gold Edition
2023

FERIO TEGO

TAA Limited Edition
2023

ROJAS

Unfinished Business
2023

PLACENCIA

Alma Fuerte - Generacion V
2023

CROWNED HEADS

Mil Dias
2023



VIAJE 15TH ANNIVERSARY GOLD EDITION

by Gabriel Seamen

Images by Gabriel Seamen

Brand: Viaje
Vitola: 6x54 Double Perfecto
Filler: Nicaraguan
Wrapper: Nicaraguan Criollo '98
Binder: Nicaraguan
Smoking Time:
Body: Medium
Flavor: Mid-Full
Price: \$19.99

Visual/Prelight Draw:

Wrapped in cello with a striking Gold leaf on white label this cigar screams premium. The darkest wrapper in the appearance of the three, this has a sheen just barely above matte to it, a deep brown with visible veins and a triple cap, smooth and well finished seams that looks like it should smoke nicely. The cold draw is a perfect medium weight, belying graham, pepper, and espresso with cream.

What Makes it Special:

For Viaje's 15th Anniversary they released three blends in August 2023, per the release: "The three versions—Silver, Gold and Black—all feature a Criollo '98 wrapper from Nicaragua's Jalapa region, and are all composed of only Nicaraguan tobacco grown by Aganorsa Leaf, which produces the cigars for Viaje as well. Farkas says that the three blends are distinctly different, but they're on the fuller side of the strength scale. Each cigar is identical in size, a perfecto measuring 6 inches long by 54 ring gauge. Each 6 x 54 Perfecto blend features a Criollo98 wrapper from Jalapa. All cigars were allowed to age eight months after rolling was completed."

Today I have the Gold Edition up for review. I invite you to smoke one along with my as I experience it!





First Third:

In the initial third, the cigar opens with a delightful blend of creamy cinnamon and hints of graham. As you progress onto the straightaway, the cigar introduces a prominent black pepper note initially in the retrohale, which then gradually takes center stage, delivering a robust, mid-to-full flavor profile. The draw also lightens up to a perfect amount here, no need for a draw tool today! A relight was needed at this point, probably due to today's weather being foggy and humid, but worth noting.

Second Third:

Moving into the second third, a touch-up for an even burn was necessary. However, the flavors of espresso and cream have now emerged, effectively harmonizing and counterbalancing the earlier prominent black pepper notes.

Final Third:

Approaching the final third, I haven't felt the need for a drink to accompany this cigar. It continues to keep the palate both moist and intrigued. In this last phase, a delicate creaminess reminiscent of graham crackers unfolds, accompanied by a subtle presence of espresso in the retrohale.

Score:

The flavors and transitions here are top notch as I've come to expect from Viaje's most special releases. The Gold Edition of their 15th anniversary offering gives you just that in flavor. Unfortunately both samples I smoked had issues with burn requiring 1-2 touchups and even a relight in one case. Hopefully this is just my sample but it is where this cigar loses most of its points. The final score from me is 90 out of 100. If you like Viaje's fuller flavored offerings this one is a must try. Easily box worthy.



FERIO TEGO TIMELESS TAA LE 2023

by Dave Yancey

Images courtesy of Ferio Tego

Brand: Ferio Tego Timeless
Vitola: Toro
Filler: Nicaragua Jalapa
Wrapper: Nicaragua Estelí
Binder: Nicaragua Estelí
Smoking Time: 1.5 Hours
Body: Medium
Flavor: Full Intensity
Price: \$16

What Makes it Special:

The Tobacconists Association of America (TAA) each year presents the TAA Exclusive Series. Michael Herklots, founder of Ferio Tego Cigars, began with his first TAA Exclusive from the Timeless brand in 2020. This year, 2023, is the third offering of the exclusive series. It features the same blend as the previous offerings, with fillers from the Jalapa region, better known for wrappers. Michael describes this as a “bit of an inside-out blend,” further stating that the “Jalapa filler provides fortitude but with grace.” The cigar is made entirely from Plasencia tobaccos and rolled in their Nicaraguan factory.

Visual/Pre-light Draw:

The dark Maduro wrapper, with black and gold bands, shows the cigar’s elegance and exclusiveness, synonymous with the letters TAA. With a smooth texture, the wrapper reveals only a few veins and a slight glistening of oils. The cigar showed an even distribution of tobacco in the foot and firmness along the body. Finally, the pre-light aroma was filled with cocoa and deep forest notes, whereas the cold draw was creamy chocolate, building the anticipation of what was yet to come.



First Third:

Upon first light, the area was filled with aromas of cocoa and cooking spices, and the experience was pleasant and enticing. The initial draw presented rich gamy mushrooms and hints of toasted nuts and finished with a sweet peppercorn that transitioned from the tail end into the retro-hale.



Second Third:

Into the second third, a small canoe started forming that required touching-up. The aroma started filling with more intense cooking spices, that of cardamon and rosemary. The notes on the palate carried on from the first third with a cream sauce opening, which strengthened the gammy mushrooms, reminiscent of a creamy portabella mushroom dinner.

Final Third:

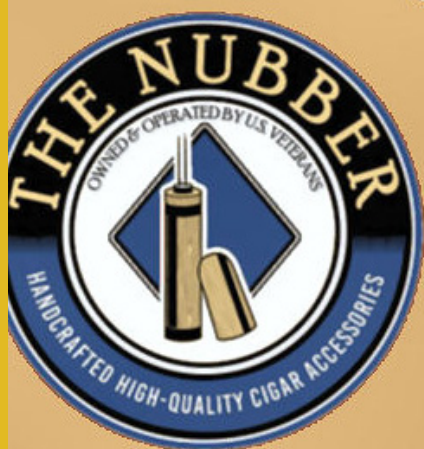
The notes continued into the final third, which created consistency throughout the smoke, with only the peppercorn increasing in intensity. Finishing up, I never felt the need for a drink to moisten my palate; the smoke was pleasing salivating, and made me long for more as it came to an end.

Score:

Outside of the canoeing and needing to touch it up to correct the burn, this cigar from Ferio Tego performed top-notch at every level. Michael continues to create excellence with his blends and desire to push the envelope with those blends. When you have the opportunity to experience a TAA exclusive, you expect excellence, and the offering from Timeless by Michael Herklots does not disappoint. Good construction, consistent burn, complex notes, and great presentation are all that you come to expect from a cigar of this caliber.



Designed and Crafted For Distinguished Cigar Enthusiasts
By Cigar Enthusiasts



ROJAS UNFINISHED BUSINESS 2023

by Dave Yancey

Images courtesy of Rojas Cigars

Brand: Rojas Unfinished Business
Vitola: Corona Gordo Box Press
Filler: Ecuadorian Sumatra
Wrapper: Nicaragua Estelí
Binder: Nicaragua Estelí
Smoking Time: 1.5 Hours
Body: Medium
Flavor: Medium Intensity
Price: \$10

What Makes it Special:

“Unfinished Business was made to let people know that we are not done,” Albert Cisneros, VP of Sales for Rojas Cigars, explains with pride when asked about the story behind the cigar. Noel Rojas has long been a favorite amongst boutique cigar lovers. Having coined the phrase “King of Small Gauge,” Rojas has also mastered the art of creating small gauge cigars. The Unfinished Business is the newest entry to an already robust line of small gauge cigars, and based on the name, they are not done yet.

Visual/Pre-light Draw:

The Ecuadorian Sumatra wrapper, a favorite of many cigar lovers, glistened with oils and subtle veins, displaying sublime craftsmanship. The cigar is medium firm, with Roja’s signature closed foot presenting a slight earthy forest aroma on the nose. A V-Cut with the box press opens to coffee, chocolate, and dusky hay on the cold draw.



First Third:

The first light is always the most crucial light of a cigar. It sets the tone and mood for how the cigar will perform. A gentle toasting of the edge and then the foot, warming up the oils to allow the flavors to expand as the tobacco begins its burn. With the Sumatra wrapper, the Unfinished Business opens up with woody notes, raw leather, and hints of cocoa. These notes bring a soothing feeling to the smoke and then pick up with subtle notes of white pepper on the retro-hale.



Second Third:

The cocoa notes strengthen as we transition into the second third of the cigar, reminiscent of coming in from hiking to the aroma and flavor of heating hot cocoa over the flames of the campfire. The quality construction and even burn to allow the flavors to come through throughout this phase of the smoke, firm ash giving away a glowing ember of the burn cone.

Final Third:

As we enter the final phase of this experience, the smoke begins to heat up in the burn and through the pepper notes emerging from the back and transitioning to the middle of the palate. Still lingering around are the notes of raw leather, deep woods, and cocoa, just now finding their way as they melt with the black pepper, bringing a roundness to the experience.



Score:

Noel Rojas has made a name for himself in quality, mastering the small ring gauge and exploring the blends. The Unfinished Business lives up to the reputation that has become a staple of Noel's repertoire. The flavors were consistent with just past subtle transitions through each third of the smoke, creating a pleasant and soothing experience. While the cigar did begin to burn hot in the final third, requiring a couple of purges to cool the smoke down, the burn was consistent and never needed a touch-up. The pleasure of this smoke excites me to see what else Rojas has come out in the future.

PLACENCIA ALMA FUERTE GENERACION V

by Dave Yancey

Images courtesy of Placencia

Brand: Placencia Alma Fuerte Generacion V

Vitola: Salomon

Filler: Nicaragua

Wrapper: Nicaragua

Binder: Nicaragua

Smoking Time: 2 Hours

Body: Medium

Flavor: Medium Intensity

Price: \$22

What Makes it Special:

The Placencia family has been around cigars since the mid-1800s. Originating in what the family calls Generation 1, Don Eduardo Placencia left the Canary Islands to start growing tobacco in Vuelta Abajo, Cuba. This heritage extends to the current and fifth generations. Now, more than one hundred and fifty years later, Placencia is one of the largest tobacco producers. Their brands have garnered much praise, including the Alma Fuerte Generacion V. The Generacion V, as you may guess, pays homage to the five generations of the Placencia family. The Alma Fuerte comes in six different vitolas, two of them paying tribute to Sixto and his great-grandson Nestor Placencia.

Visual/Pre-light Draw:

It's a beautiful cigar in all presentation areas, with a black and gold dual band, including the signature footband. This Salomon cigar has a subtle glistening of oils on its smooth, dark brown Maduro wrapper. The cold draw, foot, and room aroma featured white pepper with hints of sweet cocoa and nuts.



First Third:

The cigar opens with a medium body of smoke, filling the room with sweet leather, coffee, and cocoa. Lighting a salomon requires patience, paying attention to the embers as they grow and glow, creating a tip, extending into the body, and taking draws more frequently than usual. The semi-firm body leads into a slight canoeing, which eventually corrects itself—canoeing often found with this vitola.

ALMA FUERTE

Second Third:

The transition presents itself in the second third of the cigar, with cream, toffee, earthy notes, and a dash of white pepper in the retro-hale. With the canoeing having corrected itself, the burn remains even with an ash that has gone from grey to white, indicating that the burn is heating up nicely. The burn and construction stay consistent; however, a slight crack in the wrapper has appeared.

Final Third:

The final third maintains the cigar's complex notes, with the pepper picking up on the back of the palate and retro-hale. Meanwhile, the leather notes have tapered off to no longer be present. The burn has remained consistent, allowing for the pleasant increasing strength of the pepper as the burn moves towards the nub.



Score:

A fine creation from Placencia, paying homage to five generations of a family-owned business. The consistency of the complex flavors with their subtle yet present transitions is a mark of craftsmanship. While the crack in the wrapper and the slight canoeing did correct themselves through the smoke, I did have to take points off for this occurrence. With this score, I find that this cigar, at this price point is one worth experiencing.

CROWNED HEADS MIL DIAS

by Gabriel Seamen

Images by Gabriel Seamen

Brand: Crowned Heads

Vitola: Double Robusto 6 3/8 x 50

Filler: Peru, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua

Wrapper: Ecuadorian Habano

Binder: Nicaraguan

Smoking Time: 52 minutes

Body: Medium

Flavor: Bold

Price: \$10.75

What Makes it Special:

Since its inception in 2020, Mil Días has featured four regular production vitolas. According to a press release, the brand embodies a fusion of modern luxury and ancient traditions, creating a space where heritage meets the future and the boundaries between history and the contemporary, as well as between Cuba and Central America, become blurred.



Visual/Prelight Draw:

It has a great matte light brown wrapper; I love the foot-band, as always, with Crowned Heads. It's not too oily, but I wouldn't say dry or toothy. The scent is that of a well-groomed lawn, topsoil, and a light hint of grass clippings. Something else sweet is there on the draw as well. Let's get to smoking!



MIL DÍAS

First Third:

Immediately on the light you get the classic coffee and earth notes from the Habano. There's a richness here that I enjoy. The fillers are also at play on the light, the Nicaraguan bringing a creaminess, a saccharine sweetness I've come to expect from Peru, and the solid earthiness of the Costa Rican filler is available on the retro a bit further in. Also, I'm noting some of the spicy notes from the Habano as well. The burn is not razor sharp but also doesn't require a touch-up.

Second Third:

Coffee. Definitely Coffee and cream, as you are entering into the second third. The spice of the Habano is also a bit more forward, with the earthiness moving into the retro. An outstanding balance, and the burn is correcting itself as well. Great quality from Crowned Heads and their partner at the Pichardo factory is on display as expected from this staple brand. Ash holds well into an inch, and a gentle roll on the ashtray releases it to show a perfect ligero cone.

Final Third:

Smoke production is great throughout but really of note as my burn starts closing in on the band here. The Habano's black pepper is upfront and in your face now, with the creamy coffee and rich topsoil coming right on its heels. These flavors are objectively bold while the body is staying an enjoyable medium. This is a great smoke to wrap up a great weekend with!



Score:

While not sporting a great complexity, there are transitions and bold flavors to be had in the Mil Dias. Losing only a couple of points for less-than-perfect burn lines and ash also has nothing stopping you from smoking this in the genteel company either. It's definitely a great stick from a consistent company and its great partners.

CRAFT BREW

THE THREE STOUTS



This Christmas I was visited by the three ~~spirits~~ stouts.

by Steven Day

photos by Steven Day

This time of year it's stout season in craft beer. When I say stout, I don't mean Guinness, despite it being a decent pint (as long as the lines are kept clean - more about that in a future article if Dave allows me back!). I mean Imperial Stout.

What do I mean by imperial stout? Well.....*drumroll*.... Not a lot! You see, it's a term that means very little. When people ask me, I generally say it means strong. I'm sure you can see what I mean regarding the strengths referred to for beer.

So what we've done is agreed to share three imperial stouts, all from the USA, with an Isle of Man audience. That said, it's not any Isle of Man audience. We have an experienced cigar smoker with a garage of hundreds of expensive cigars, a lady who loves her stouts, an employee of a spirits distributor, and an experienced craft beer drinker.

First up we have Bottle Logic Brewing and their Voltaic Stack. Hailing from Anaheim California, this beer is one of myth and legend on this side of the Atlantic. A Yeti is often discussed but rarely seen. Yet here it is. In my front room (well bar - but you get the drift).

Described as a banana walnut stout. Or, to be more precise, Vermont maple syrup, roasted California walnuts, sliced bananas, and a dash of cinnamon. It's barrel-aged (not defined how) and is the 2023 release, batch 002.

So what do I get? Bananas followed by the thickest mouthfeel. Having drunk a LOT of imperial stout in my time, this is generally how you get quality and strength. It's got bite, of that there's no doubt. The most robust mouthfeel, lingering into a gentle sweetness, that's just about perfect. My score (always out of 100) is a healthy 80.

After that, it was time to hit the road and head to the house of a friend to taste number 2. We live on a small little island but seem to have found our crowd, with them even inviting us into their home for the tasting of Cycle Brewing's Wednesday. It's amazing how a good beer will literally open doors for you!

We did start up with some other stuff that was shared, such as a honeyberry mead, but we were all anxiously waiting for the main event.

Wednesday is a stout that's been aged for three years in different barrels. There isn't a hell of a lot of information out there about it. It's described as a double-barrel vanilla stout.

Cycle Brewing is much vaunted, but I've never had the opportunity to try anything of theirs. Therefore, it was great to get this into the tasting.

They are based in St Petersburg, Florida, and have a cult following, having made their name mainly for their imperial stouts.



All 6 of us took our time and savored the first mouthful. Very delicate hints of vanilla on the front, followed by the thickest mouthful ever. Not in a chewy way, but full-bodied and velvety on the tongue. A very satisfying, long, lingering finish indeed.

This was a bigger bottle than the Bottle Logic, at 650 ml V 500 ml. Despite how luscious this was, it is very much a drink to share. At that size, it would be a very long time to drink. That said if you want something to accompany a few cigars or to drink all day on Christmas Day. Following that, we shared a few unicorns of their own and then made our way to the bus home. My beer rating for this one was a healthy 92/100.

On day 3, we had two early casualties drop out. They were part of the tasting last night and remained when we left, so perhaps a bit of overindulgence. Perhaps the weather. They stayed around a half-hour drive and would have had to have gotten the bus. We'll forgive them this time!

This bottle is the one I've been looking forward to the most. It's a blended stout that has all been barrel-aged—a blend of 24, 18, 12, and 8-month stout in 7-12-year old Kentucky bourbon barrels. There are also winter spices and oats.

It's from Fremont Brewing. Their barrel-aged series is highly acclaimed and one of the highlights of their family-owned brewery in Seattle.





To add to the dropouts, we then had someone forget, it appears. He'll kick himself when he remembers. We later found out he'd fallen asleep. Quite literally, don't sleep on it, or you will miss out! We called Jenny back in for reinforcements and settled down for the event.

Firstly, if any brewers are reading this, please stop waxing your bottles. It's really annoying! Looks great but takes forever to open.

When we finally did get it open, there was a beautiful plume of smoke rising from it. It was fairly carbonated. Some stouts are, and some aren't. You have to be careful with the ones that are not to lose any of the beer to the carbonation! I made that mistake with an absolute classic last week. I won't do it again!

Onto the tasting, and it's just pure chocolate malt on the front. Another with a thick mouthfeel, the oats would definitely have contributed to that—another long, luxurious

finish before the spices kick in. Cinnamon is definitely the most noticeable, but there is also some nutmeg. Looking at the bottle, they also have allspice, vanilla, ginger, and clove.

The final score on this is 85.

So, what have we learned from our tastings?

- 1 Like all the good things in life, price isn't always an indicator of quality. All three beers were expensive, but they were USA imports, to be fair. Some of the ones I get from The Netherlands have been equally as good, arguably better. That said, the Dutch beers are expensive here but apparently as cheap as \$5 in their local places over in Alkmaar!
- 2 Like everything, craft beers are often better when they're shared. There may be that one bottle that you really don't want to part with. What if it's a 650ml bottle at 14.1%? Not so much. We had a great time sharing these with our customers—chats aplenty, and maybe even some brewing in the future. Two of them work for one of the local breweries on the Isle of Man.

Stout drinkers in the USA are blessed with some of the ones that are knocked out over there. There will be something outstanding that you can get your hands on. Goose Island Bourbon County Stout was always a massive one. It's good and was the original, but honestly, I think all three of the beers I tried were better than any of the series I've tried.

For us, well, we're off now to celebrate the finish of our beers with a unicorn Hazelbank Oloroso cask and Springbank Palo Cortado cask we've managed to secure!

Final Scores:

80 Bottle Logic Brewing Voltaic Stack

92 Cycle Brewing's Wednesday

85 Fremont Brewing

COFFEE

CAFE LA CASONA LOVE LETTER & AMANECER



CAFE LA CASONA LOVE LETTER & AMANECER

by David Jeffries

Images courtesy of Cafe La Casona and Ash Red



It is always a pleasure to receive coffee to give feedback on. It is more of a challenge to do as a reviewer because it is a wild card, so I lose some control over the parameter of target choice. However, this is fun, too, as it provides an adventure and a fresh space to explore. I received two samples of coffee from Cafe La Casona. One was Amanecer and Love letter to El Salvador. They are both from El Salvador. This drink that we enjoy readily here in the U.S. is a significant historical shaping factor in El Salvador and an economic resource for the country. We see that especially in the life of Roberto Salverria, the man behind Cafe La Casona. Let us take a look at the history of coffee in El Salvador.

Most reports say that coffee in El Salvador was introduced in the late 1700s by way of Guatemala. It soon took over as a significant export, surpassing the once-dominant Indigo. El Salvador was the fourth largest exporter of coffee in the world. The most common varieties are bourbon Paca and Pacamara. The last two are variations of bourbon from El Salvador. They are shorter and more wind-resistant and drought-resistant. Politically, the landed elite switched from Indigo to coffee. In the wake of the American Revolution and the emergence of coffee as a main drink in Europe, Coffee became a significant source of revenue for El Salvador. The already-landed elite worked to outlaw being unemployed and forced their workers to live and work like slaves. The elite had such tight control of politics we call several decades of presidents Coffee Barons. But in the 1970s and 80s, we got social turmoil, ultimately leading to civil war and reforms.

Salverria split his childhood between the U.S. and El Salvador due to the instability of the 1970s in El Salvador. He would go on to join his siblings here. He would work odd jobs in school and start several ventures here in the U.S. But eventually, he made his way back to his childhood job, which his father trained him in. Let me tell you how grateful I am he has done so. His craftsmanship is world-class. Let us take a moment to talk about the goals of this company, take care of people and the earth, and deliver great coffee. They even extend this effort by opening cafes and doing regular tastings

with baristas.

The Love Letter coffee is mellow and chocolatey. It is a medium roast. No acidity was present, and no substantial oils were present, which is to be expected out of a Pour-over. It would be a great daily sipper. I would love to try it in a French press to see if any natural oils are present in the coffee and how this changes the experience. It left me wanting more in the best possible way.

The Amanecer was different from the Love Letter. It was still great, but perhaps better for conversation or meetings, something that will flex with milk and sugar or would stand up just fine if taken black. I remember this being a standard, well-done coffee; nothing was polarizing. It will please a wide swath of the public. The taste of the coffee did not leave a memorable impression on me.

Overall, I would love to drink more of these coffees; they deserve so much more than what I have done here. Salverria's passion is evident, and his goals are admirable. His social media presence is masterful. I hope he opens some cafes here in the U.S. and brings more awareness to El Salvador's coffee. Given a choice, I prefer the Love Letter blend to Amanecer. My pairings would be a Cameroon cigar from AJ Fernandez, an Undercrown Shade, or a Connecticut cigar. For food, I would do a coffee cake or a cinnamon roll, and a more distant option would be French toast.

Also available from Don Roberto, premier El Salvador puro Cigar!

www.cafelacasonashop.com



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SONS OF LIBERTY

Shop Review

by David Jefferies

Images by David Jefferies



Located in downtown Ft. Worth, TX, right off of Lancaster St.. This place delivers amazing in-house baked goods and fresh roasted coffee. The drinks range from nitro cold brew to chai tea on tap to drip coffee. The atmosphere is minimalist industrial with a casual professional atmosphere. Sons of Liberty Coffee House can serve as a venue for interviews, a place to hang out and enjoy, or as a casual date.

The space is an open-concept design incorporating a small retail space, large bar tables, some couches, and a roasting area. The workspace for the baristas is well-organized, efficient, and compact, with the pour-over station and a slayer espresso machine prominently featured. Most of the color palette is grey and beige. The roaster is incorporated into the sitting area and surrounded by green coffee beans, which is impressive for a local coffee shop to roast in-house coffee and conduct such work within the customer's purview.

This is a point of personal tension: what makes a coffee house unique? Do they have to roast their own coffee? Do they have to source high-quality or hard-to-find tasty coffee beans? Or can they partner with a national brand and offer good coffee and drinks? Well, any of them is a good option, and all produce high-caliber coffees. The main goal is to have passionate people behind the bar and drive the business, which the Sons of Liberty does.

The few things you must navigate, which can be a bummer, are parking either in the garage, which is hard to find, or on the street. The Ft. Worth location can be packed, and it

is small but personally, this isn't too big a deal. Finally, the merch line is condensed and pricey for a coffee shop.

The service is always pleasant. The staff behind the bar is knowledgeable, friendly, and willing to answer any questions you may have, and typically, they get food and drinks out quickly. I have never had any problems with any of my drinks, and the food has been amazing. I did have a chocolate empanada that wasn't as great as other products I've had here. As I write this review, I am sipping on the drip coffee which tastes of chocolate and fruity notes with a slightly oily feel to it. It walks the perfect line of bougie coffee appealing to a select few, and blue-collar men drink well. It has a medium tongue presence but is not overwhelming; it would be a great bridge to enjoying more fruity acidic coffees. I would smoke a Drew Estate swamp thang, Punch Fu Man cho, or anything with funk. I have asked about what if people want green coffee beans, and as of now, they do not sell green coffee, but that may change in the future. They do offer a cupping for people interested.

The brand claims it is a down-to-earth American aiming to bring people together. Now, this requires some breaking interpretation. What is meant here is that the American is the fire and gritty bear, knuckle-fighting American who will use shady tactics to do the right thing. The kind of person you tell them how much this experience will suck they roll up their sleeves and get to work. Down to earth means people who care about community, family, and those moments that bond you to others, which covers bringing people together. It just happens. This company does it through coffee.

My experience has been peppered in with the rest of this article, but let me take a moment to say that this place, for me, is something that should be a destination. Initially, I wasn't



enthusiastic about trying this place, but after the continual recommendation of a friend, I tried it and have occasionally come back through it. I am reminded how great and knowledgeable everyone is about coffee.

Overall, I would recommend this place, especially for people who want to nerd out about coffee or want a less formal professional setting. I would rate this as an 8/10. The things that keep it from being a ten are a hard-to-find location and parking. It makes it hard to direct people here and for their first impression to be good if they have to fight hard to get to the register. I genuinely hope this Texas business will continue to grow and provide the same caliber of experience and product. I think it needs a bigger space that is more easily accessible and with more parking.

We would love to hear your opinion if you have tried this coffee house.



NORWOOD ROYAL CIGARS

by Joe Gulino

Images by Joe Gulino

Chicago is now home to the J.C. Newman Cigar Company's 38th Diamond Crown Cigar Lounge at Chicago's best cigar one-stop shop: Norwood Royal Cigars.

Located at 6046 N. Northwest Hwy, in the heart of Chicago's Norwood Park Neighborhood, cigar enthusiasts will walk through the Midwest's largest 1,800 square foot humidor, containing over 7,000 faces of cigars, and Chicago's Don of Cigars, Mr. Vick Shah.



“When smoking bans started to spread two decades ago, our family decided to partner with family-owned cigar retailers like the Shaha to create first-class lounges for consumers to enjoy fine cigars like Diamond Crown,” said J.C Newman, third-generation owner, Bobby Newman. “It is a privilege for our family to help support a network of destinations for cigar connoisseurs.”



Vick is simply the best when it comes to finding the right cigar for you. When you walk in, he'll be there, anxious to meet you, learn about you, and meet the unique needs of your palate's cigar journey. So, it is no surprise he has teamed up with our nation's historical and best cigar company, the J.C. Newman Cigar Company, and Bobby Newman, to provide his customers with an even better cigar lounge smoking experience.



Be sure to visit NRCIGARS.COM to learn more, and order Vick's personally blended Don V Corojo or Maduro Cigars, produced by Oscar Valladares in Honduras.

RECIPES

THAI SMOKED RIBS

SENTIMENTAL OLD FASHIONED COCKTAIL

CHICKEN CUTLETS WITH SUN-DRIED TOMATO
CREAM SAUSE

ROASTED LAMB CHOPS WITH BROWN SUGAR-RUM
GLAZE

SPICED BILLIONAIRE COCKTAIL



THAI SMOKED RIBS

by Ash Red

Images by Ash Red



Ingredients

For the Ribs

2 racks of pork ribs (baby back or spare ribs)
2 tablespoons olive oil - Salt and pepper, to taste

For the Thai Spice Rub

2 tablespoons brown sugar
1 tablespoon paprika
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground coriander
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon onion powder
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper (adjust to taste)
1/2 teaspoon black pepper

For the Spicy Thai Glaze

1/2 cup sweet chili sauce
1/4 cup honey
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon fish sauce
Juice of 1 lime
1 tablespoon grated ginger
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon sesame oil
1-2 red chilies, finely chopped (adjust to taste)

For the Smoker: - Wood chips and/or chunks (hickory or mesquite for a stronger smoke flavor)

Instructions

- 1 Preparation of Ribs** - Remove the membrane from the back of the ribs. - Coat the ribs with olive oil, and season with salt and pepper.
- 2 Making the Spice Rub** - In a small bowl, mix together brown sugar, paprika, cumin, coriander, garlic powder, onion powder, ground ginger, cayenne pepper, and black pepper.
- 3 Applying the Rub** - Generously apply the spice rub to both sides of the ribs, pressing it into the meat.
- 4 Preparing the Smoker** - Preheat your smoker to 225°F (107°C). - Add your choice of wood chips or chunks.
- 5 Smoking the Ribs** - Place the ribs on the smoker. - Smoke for about 4-5 hours for baby back ribs or 5-6 hours for spare ribs.
- 6 Making the Spicy Thai Glaze** - While the ribs are smoking, prepare the glaze by combining sweet chili sauce, honey, soy sauce, fish sauce, lime juice, grated ginger, minced garlic, sesame oil, and chopped red chilies in a saucepan. - Simmer over low heat for 10 minutes, then set aside.
- 7 Glazing the Ribs** - In the last 30-45 minutes of smoking, start applying the spicy Thai glaze to the ribs. Reapply several times to build up a sticky, flavorful coating.
- 8 Resting and Serving** - Once done, remove the ribs from the smoker and let them rest for about 10-15 minutes. - Cut the ribs and serve with extra glaze on the side.

Enjoy your spicy and sweet Thai-inspired smoked ribs with a side of steamed rice, stir-fried vegetables, or a fresh Thai salad. The combination of the spicy rub and the sweet and tangy glaze will offer a delightful balance of flavors.

CROWNED & HEADS

“La Vereda is a blend I’m truly proud of and would have loved to have had as a brand in our EPC Cigar portfolio, but I’m happy that Crowned Heads has it as they are part of our extended family.”

- E.P. Carrillo





SENTIMENTAL OLD FASHIONED

by Sharron O'Neill

Images by Sharron O'Neill

INGREDIENTS

1 Oz Champagne Syrup

4 Oz Winchester Kentucky Straight Bourbon

2 dashes Angostura Bitters

1 Orange juice Ice Ball

2 Amarena Faabbri Cherries

INSTRUCTIONS

Champagne Simple Syrup

- 1 Combine equal amounts of dissolved sugar with any flat or over aged Champagne

Sentimental Old Fashioned

- 1 Add Champagne Syrup and bourbon to shaker with ice cubes
- 2 Add bitters
- 3 Stir
- 4 Strain over Ice ball into cocktail glass
- 5 Garnish with Cherries

The Old Fashioned Cocktail is one that has a history dating back to the 1800's and reigns even today as a drink for all walks of life to enjoy. The Sentimental Old Fashioned Cocktail is one that brings two worlds together, a world of history, and one of a time that has passed us by. The champagne syrup that is used in place of the simple syrup is made from champagne that has either gone flat or overaged. This can occur when it is improperly stored in boxes, deep in closets, or just forgotten about. The sentimental aspect reveals itself when the champagne brings back memories of a time long past. The combination of the orange juice ice ball, bitters, and cherries brings a balance between the Champagne syrup and the boldness of the bourbon.

CHICKEN CUTLETS WITH SUN-DRIED TOMATO CREAM SAUCE

by Matt Harris / Carolyn Malcount

Images by Carolyn Malcount

Though this simple recipe may look simple, it is far from simple in taste.

From the table of Carolyn Malcount, I give you a quick and easy dish that is delicious and fast.

Total Time

Active Time:
20 mins

Total Time:
20 mins

INGREDIENTS

1 pound chicken cutlets (a chicken cutlet may be a chicken breast cut in half)
¼ teaspoon salt to taste
¼ teaspoon ground pepper to taste
½ cup slivered oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, plus 1 tablespoon oil from the jar
½ cup finely chopped shallots
½ cup dry white wine
½ cup heavy cream
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley



Instructions

- 1 Sprinkle chicken with 1/8 teaspoon each salt and pepper—heat sun-dried tomato oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the chicken and cook, turning once, until browned, and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part registers 165°F, about 6 minutes in total. Transfer to a plate.
- 2 Add sun-dried tomatoes and shallots to the pan. Cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Increase heat to high and add wine. Cook, scraping up any browned bits, until the liquid mostly evaporates, about 2 minutes. Reduce heat to medium and stir in cream, any accumulated juices from the chicken, and the remaining 1/8 teaspoon each salt and pepper; simmer for 2 minutes. Return the chicken to the pan and turn to coat with the sauce. Serve the chicken topped with the sauce and parsley.

ROASTED LAMB CHOPS WITH BROWN SUGAR-RUM GLAZE

by Matt Harris / Chef Alexander Smalls

Images by Chef Alexander Smalls

From the Table of Chef and cookbook author Alexander Smalls these lamb chops are epic for dinner parties and Holiday gatherings. If you haven't heard of Chef Alexander, I would encourage you to look him up. This recipe is a personal favorite and holiday special in my home.

Total Time

Prep Time:

35 mins

Cooking Time:

50 mins

Total Time:

1 hr 25 mins

Yield:

4 to 6

INGREDIENTS

LAMB

2 heads garlic, peeled.

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons fresh rosemary leaves

2 tablespoons rubbed sage.

2 (2-pound) racks of lamb, frenched

1 tablespoon kosher salt

1 1/2 teaspoons black pepper

Flake sea salt, to taste

GLAZE

3/4 cup packed light brown sugar.

3/4 cup unsalted vegetable stock

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 1/2 tablespoons soy sauce

1 1/2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg

1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 thyme sprig

1 rosemary sprig

2 tablespoons (1 ounce) gold rum



Instructions

Make the lamb.

- 1 Combine garlic cloves, olive oil, rosemary, and sage in a food processor. Process until mixture is finely chopped, about 30 seconds, stopping to scrape sides of bowl as needed. Sprinkle lamb all over with kosher salt and pepper. Rub evenly with garlic mixture. Place lamb, fat side up, on an aluminum foil-lined rimmed baking sheet. Let stand at room temperature for 45 minutes.
- 2 and roast until lamb reaches desired degree of doneness, 5 to 8 minutes with an internal temperature of 125°F for medium-rare. Transfer lamb to a cutting board and let rest for 10 minutes.
- 3 Cut lamb between rib bones to separate into chops and arrange on a serving platter. Sprinkle with flaky sea salt to taste. Drizzle with about 2 tablespoons of glaze and serve the remaining glaze on the side.

Meanwhile, make the glaze.

- 1 Preheat oven to 450°F with oven rack in upper third of oven. Stir together brown sugar, vegetable stock, butter, soy sauce, Dijon, salt, nutmeg, cinnamon, thyme, and rosemary in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium-high, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until mixture is syrupy and has reduced to about 2/3 cup, 25 to 30 minutes. Remove from heat. Remove and discard herb sprigs. Let cool for 5 minutes and stir in rum. Set it aside.
- 2 Roast lamb in preheated oven until browned, 16 to 18 minutes. Remove from oven, and quickly brush tops and sides of lamb with about 1/4 cup glaze. Return to oven,

Suggested Pairing

Full-bodied, fruit-forward red blend.

If the glaze begins to set before serving, you can gently warm it over low heat.

SPICED BILLIONAIRE COCKTAIL

by Gabriel Seamen

Images by Gabriel Seamen

Ingredients

- ▶ 1oz Rye Whiskey
- ▶ 1oz Bourbon (107 proof or higher)
- ▶ 1/2oz Absinthe
- ▶ 1oz Lemon Juice
- ▶ 1/3oz Grenadine or Pomegranate Syrup
- ▶ 1/4oz Mint Simple Syrup
- ▶ 3 Dashes of your favorite bitters

INGREDIENTS

First, add your bitters and simple syrup, then the lemon juice and grenadine, and finally, add your liquors to a highball glass, stir thoroughly, add a whiskey ice globe or whiskey stones, garnish with mint leaves and/or an optional lemon wheel.

For the bitters, you could use two dashes of Peychaud's, one of Angostura, to be traditional. But I say try any mix of your favorite bitters, especially if you have, like myself, too many options.

I won't specify which liquors and absinthe to use other than to warn it best to use a bourbon over 107 proof for best results to stand up to most Absinthes, which tend to be higher proof; a lower proof sweeter bourbon can get lost in the mix.



Notes

The reason for everything measured in fluid ounces above is so you can also convert this to a punch bowl-sized batch if desired, adding some dry ice to keep it chilled will make for an awe-some spectacle at a party and the high-end flavors will definitely be a talking point.

Finally, if you feel it's too much Absinthe, you can cut that amount in half, as many do. Most importantly just like I say about enjoying cigars, do it your way, to your taste! No one else can taste it for you, so who cares about their opinions?



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EVENTS

CHEFS FOR FARMERS

DREW ESTATE BARN SMOKERS

WHISKY FEST LAS VEGAS

CHEFS FOR FARMERS

The Event:

Chefs for Farmers is an organization that focuses on creating connections between the farmers, the chefs, the spirits, and the rest of us. Each year, beginning in 2010, Chefs for Farmers has held an event in Houston and Dallas. Bringing farmers, chefs, wineries, and spirits together, creating dishes, pairing wines and spirits, and showcasing farmers to create an experience like no other. By partnering restaurants and chefs with local farmers, the chef will use that farm's ingredients to create a feature dish specifically for the festival.

“At our core, our mission is to bring our local community together in efforts to create a strong, local food ecosystem.”

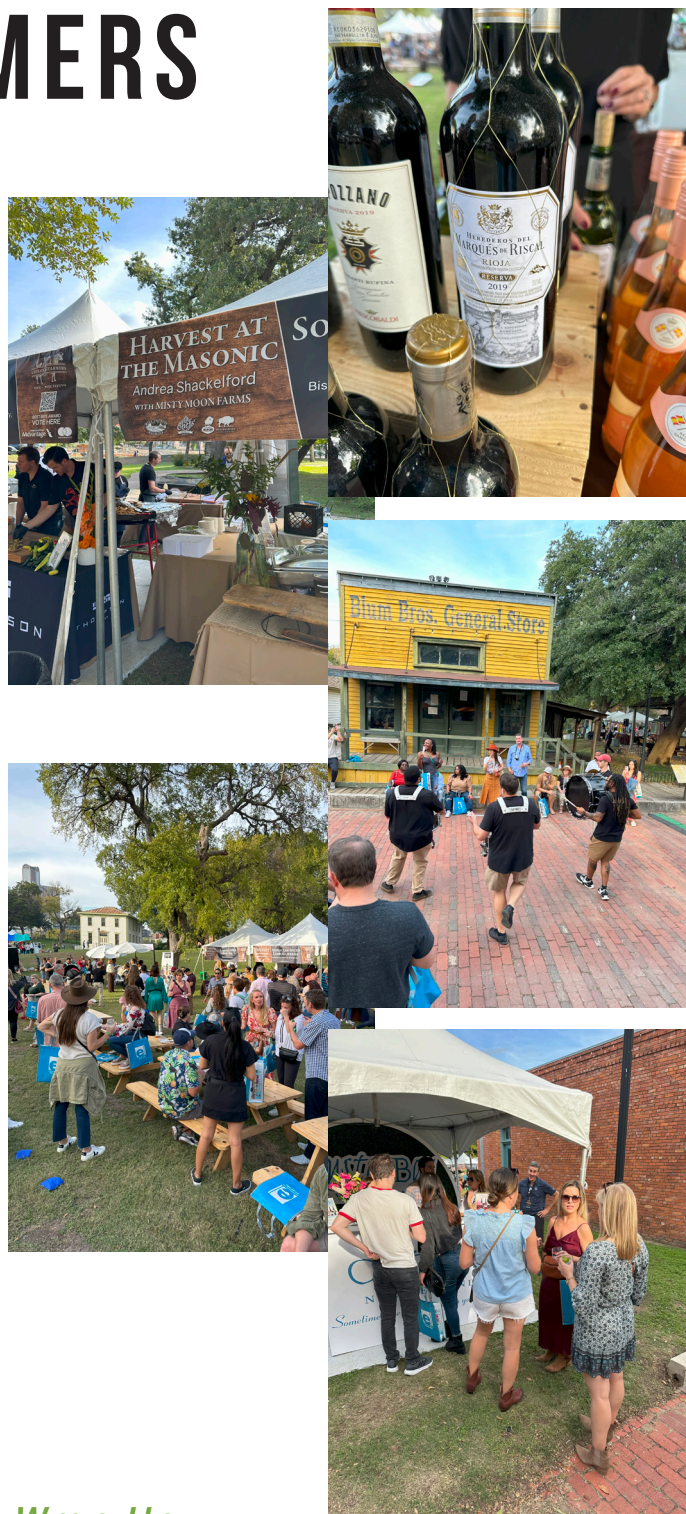
Quote from chefsforfarmers.com

Check-in Experience:

While parking for the event was sparse, upon walking up to the gates for the festival, there were two separate lines, one for the VIP's and the other for general admission. A good number of staff were also available if there were any questions.

The Main Event:

The event itself held up to its name. There were a large number of restaurants, and each featured unique dishes ranging from vegetarian to specialty street tacos to Kobe beef-inspired dishes. Upon passing through the main gates and receiving your wine glass in a leather lanyard, you had a choice of directions to begin your journey, with each direction circling to the main square in the center where, by chance, you may be treated by a percussion band for entertainment. If you were thirsty along the way, you had many options; whether your pleasure is a nice craft beer, a variety of wines, whiskey, or even non-alcoholic cocktails, whatever your choosing may be, there was something for everyone.



Wrap-Up:

As the evening wrapped up, the two that stood out to me were the wine offerings from New Zealand Oyster Bay, specifically the Pino Noir and the Wagyu Beef from Rosewood Ranch; whatever your choice of the many offerings, all were of exceptional quality, and the event goes down in the books as one that I will attend in the years to come.

DREW ESTATE BARN SMOKER

by Zach Goudy

Photo by Zach Goudy

The Event(s):

I attended three of Drew Estates Barn Smoker experiences that were available this year. There was one in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Florida. There are two other locations I have not had the chance to visit yet: Louisiana and Kentucky.

In a typical year, there are 4 to 5 Barn smokers across the United States. When signing up for Barn Smoker, you have two options: the general Admission or the VIP experience. When purchasing the VIP experience, you get early entry, an extra meal, swag, and cigars. Conversely, a General Admission ticket gets you a hat, backpack, cigar cutter lighter, and some best cigars Drew Estate has to offer.

Check-in Experience:

I purchased the VIP level. After checking in through the VIP lines and entering early, I took full advantage of the few patrons. For example, during my VIP experience, I got the autographs of Willy, Jonathan Drew, and Pedro Gomez.

The Main Event:

When you enter the main area, there is a sitting area for dining, lounging, visiting, etc. Separate experiential areas are set up for each of the cigar lines that Drew Estate offers. As part of your swag pack, you have a coupon book, so you can pick up each cigar and get some swag or a picture or experience a display such as live cigar rolling.

The day is filled with Music, primarily by DJ Eli Drew Estates. The DJ plays various music until live music takes over for the last two hours.



There are raffles all day long. One of the main sponsors is Cigars for Warriors, and if you want the chance to get more prizes, entering additional raffles for donating with them is an option.

There are also multiple haircut booths if you want to get a trim.

The catered food is some of the best I have ever had. Barbeque pork, chicken, and beef are usually the main options, with various sides to go with them.

Wrap-Up

These barn smokers are available to any Drew Estates fan. Tickets are for sale on their website and app and can sell out very quickly!

Anyone who loves Drew Estates will enjoy any of them, but if you can only pick one they do have themes: If you like FSG Florida Sun Grown you go to Florida; Prefer the Connecticut Wrapper? Then you might go to the Connecticut one, and so and so forth.

Generally, these are in warmer climates, so I recommend bringing your sunscreen and drinking plenty of water. I recommend getting there a day early and leaving a day later, as there are typically hangouts with other barn smokers before and after the main event. There are also usually pre-events at nearby lounges where most of the Drew Estate reps will be and they are available to get a picture and say hello and you can ask questions.



WHISKY FEST VEGAS 2023

by Dave Yancey

Photos by Dave Yancey

What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas right? Or at least that is how the statement goes. Well, when you are in Vegas for the annual Whisky Fest put on by Whisky Advocate magazine. The event starts when you arrive in Vegas, and this time, what happened in Vegas is what we are here to talk about.

The weekend started with a visit to Wally's Wine and Restaurant, where we had a nice wine and pizza while marveling over the immense wine menu. We finished up the evening with a cocktail at The Gatsby's. The next day was the day of the festival, however, we decided to visit the Mob Museum and Underground Speakeasy and finally to The Eight Cigar Lounge and bar for a cigar and drink before heading to the event.

The Event:

Whisky Fest is the premier whisky event of the year, put on by Whisky Advocate magazine each year. It is held five times a year, with Las Vegas being the last stop for the year. The event was held at Resort World again this year, a location with lots of great restaurants, bars, and, of course, gambling.

The Main Event:

The event opened for VIP and Media at 5:30 pm. My team and I found ourselves rushing to check in on time after finishing the last of our drinks at The Eight Cigar Lounge. While the line for the regular admission, opening 30 minutes later, was lining up, we were able to go right to the media check-in with no wait. With 35 vendors and an average of 4 pours per vendor, we each decided to divide and concur for the greater coverage of the event. As for myself, I headed straight for Blackened Whiskey.



After tasting the Wes Henderson and Cask Strength Vol 3 from Blackened, I made my way around the venue, stopping by Bulleit for a taste of the 10 yr, George Dickel for the Dickel & Leopold Rye, Glen Moray 18yr, and finally stopping in at Glendalough for the 7 yr Mizunara. All expressions stand out on their own and are recommended for follow-up sometime down the road.

Any good event, especially one filled with Whisky, will provide a food buffet. For our pleasure, this evening was a very tasty Prime Rib Roast along with garlic mashed potatoes; after making sure that I had some "carbs" in me, the process of experiencing the offerings pressed forward. Next, I visited Window Jane, followed by Uncle Nearest, and then finally finished the evening with Waterford Irish Whisky and Charles Goodnight.

Wrap-Up

The highlight of the event for me was Waterford Irish Whisky, with their process of focusing on what the spirit brings through the terroir, while the rest of the process, from distillation to aging, remains the same for all their expressions. While I was initially disappointed not to find the aged expressions at this year's Whisky Fest as we have in the prior years. I was quite pleased to see a greater variety of expressions and the number of expressions finished in Mizunara barrels.

Ultimately, this event was a success and one I will attend in the years to come. Hope to see you there.

ACCESSORIES

THE TRAVELER

THE NUBBER



THE TRAVELER

by Dave Yancey

Photos by Dave Yancey



The Traveler

Every whiskey drinker has their choice glass they always turn to, whether it be a rocks glass or the classic Glencairn. If you are like me, then you have a collection of each and other styles of glasses to choose from. The challenge is when you are on the go and want a glass for your favorite pour, but carrying a single glass with you is not exactly convenient.

Here comes the Neat Traveler by Aged & Ore to save the day. The Neat Traveler features their customized Neat Glass, 3oz Flight bottle, and custom EVA travel case.

The Glass:

Made from a lead-free crystal, the glass is the perfect size for a two- or three-ounce pour, a flared lip to nose the spirit, and a wide enough bottom to allow ample room to swirl the spirit and open.

The Flight Bottle:

A TSA Travel Compliant bottle with a maximum capacity of 3 ounces, with measurement indicators on the side. The Flight bottle is the perfect companion to the glass. Fitting neatly inside the glass for travel purposes, the flight bottle also features a silicone sleeve, a labeling window, and a wide mouth for easy filling and pouring.

The Case:

We finally have the EVA travel case to bring the Neat Traveler package together. The tiered inner lid secures the bottle and the glass together inside the hard case with the zipper-pull / carry loop lid, making it easy to carry while out on the course and small enough to fit inside your carry-on while traveling.

Final View:

Coming in at \$38 the Neat Traveler is a “must-have” for all whiskey and spirit lovers.

THE NUBBER

by Chris Coulter

Photo by Chris Coulter



The Nubber draw tool is a tool that I've used for two years and found to elevate my cigar experience. The dual prongs grip any size cigar firmly and allow the smoker to enjoy every last draw. I don't use this tool on every cigar, just the ones worth taking to the tiniest nubs. Holds securely, even upside down. There was no rolling of the cigar or fear of it coming off; I shook and spun the Nubber around to test its holding power.

The Draw tool combo (Lancero model) did an excellent job opening the draw on a tightly rolled cigar. It removed just enough leaf with each twist without taking out too much. This saved a \$14 cigar from an early trip to the ashcan, proving its value quickly.

- The wood body is finished nicely and feels good on the hand.
- The bodies line up well and have a good fit; there is a little loss of concentricity while screwing on the cap, but once tight, the final look is great.

- Ash can be added as an option, either short or long.
- The Bat design is great for any MLB fan, and the proportions are well done.

Custom options: Almost endless, the owner Bill Wade promptly replied to emails and design questions.

The Nubber has proven to pay for itself within a short time.



Even the occasional cigar smoke can benefit from this handy tool in your cigar case. Prices start at only \$35 and vary with customizations—an excellent value for a hand-crafted product.

Overall results: 4.5/5 A must-have tool that won't cost a fortune and will look great too.



TheNubber.com

THE INTERVIEW

by Dave Yancey

I recently had the opportunity to sit down with Bill Wade, founder and inventor of The Nubber, for a brief chat.

DY: Hey there, Bill. Thanks for joining me today; what do you say? Let's jump right into this.

BW: Sounds like fun to me.

DY: Perfect, so to start us off, tell our readers, who is Bill Wade?

BW: I'm a strong believer in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I have been married to my loving wife and high school sweetheart for 39 years. We have four amazing children and five beautiful grandchildren. I put my pants on one leg at a time, just like everyone else. I work hard and try to go to bed without regret; after work, I try to relax with a good cigar and drink. But really, I'm just a hard-working schmuck with strong streaks of responsibility and loyalty.

DY: Haha, that is awesome! I've heard you tell this story many times. Would you share with us the story about how you got into cigars?

BW: Cigars and cigar environments have always provided me with fond memories. From my early years as a "military brat" following my father in his U.S. Navy career, I remember the smell of his cigars and always found them relaxing and pleasant. When I passed into my so-called "mid-life" years, coming upon my wedding anniversary. I happened to ask my high school sweetheart if she would think less of me if I were to try cigars. After some discussion on the health concerns, she said she wouldn't mind, and from that point, it took off and became a serious part of my personal self-care. She did tell me later that I was the "oldest late bloomer" she knew. My family has mentioned to me several times that I am a stressed, anxious, and sometimes aggravated person before a cigar and have "requested" me to go take a cigar break when I get that way.

DY: I don't think I will ever tire of hearing that story. However, I am curious about what inspired you to create The Nubber.

BW: I've always been an avid woodworker, specifically woodturning on a lathe. This was my way of relaxing long before finding my way to cigars. Anyway, when I wanted to enjoy a cigar in my shop, I realized it might not be the safest idea to have a live ember from a cigar close to the wood shavings everywhere. Having seen cigar holders elsewhere, I thought I would try and make something for myself.

DY: So, the possibility of a fire inspired you! Haha, I can see that; how did you come up with the design for The Nubber?

BW: Well, as you might expect, the very first designs of The Nubber were crude and quite rudimentary. Most models of nubbers use a single pin to hold the cigar, which I quickly learned wasn't going to work, as the cigar could spin on the single pin, resulting in a "Russian Roulette," with the cigar ember ending up being what you drew from. As time progressed, adding the cap to protect the user and others from the pins seemed to fall under the auspices of common sense. Shaping the product to look like an actual cigar was to make it easier to carry in my cigar case or travel humidor and opened up doors to creating a business. I soon found others approaching me, waiting to have a Nubber customized with their logo, favorite team, or to their liking. Finally, the idea of the integrated magnet in the base was a result of customer feedback. With the magnet, it is now possible to have your cigar held stable and safe on a metallic surface when you need both hands. "Works great on the golf course or at the grill when you need both hands for your club or your grill."

DY: Do you have a favorite kind of wood to work with?

BW: I have worked with dozens of materials over the years and enjoyed each. However, I would have to say my favorites to date have been a small batch of Torrifed Maple, which we use for our Artisan Series, and Corian countertop surface material, which we use for our Prestige Series.

DY: Okay, you have multiple series of The Nubber; how many lines do you have?

BW: All our models are built with the dual pins we discussed. What sets these pins off from others is that they are thinner and sharper for minimal damage to that expensive cigar wrapper. Most models can be customized with text and graphics to the customer's request. Additionally, most models can be decorated with highly realistic ash that is textured and painted to create a realistic appearance. With that being said, we have eight primary models:

- The Nub - The Nub Is Just That - Our Smallest Model
At 4" in length, it is perfect to slip into your pocket or your favorite travel case for that upcoming herf.
- The Rhonda - The Rhonda Series: Created specifically for those lovely Sisters Of The Leaf.
At 3" in length, this fashionably classy lipstick will catch the eye of admirers, and it still fits easily in your pocket, purse, clutch, or travel humidor.
- The Shotgun Shell - Designed to Look Like a Shotgun Shell for Convenience
At 3-1/2", It's Perfect for the campfire or Cabin After a Long Day In The Deer Or Duck Blind.
- The Nubber - The Nubber: Our best-selling model to date.
At 5" in length, it is perfect for any occasion, whether it be a quiet time in your man cave or with friends at that upcoming herf.
- The King - The King Model Is Designed for those fun-loving baseball fans in your life.
At 6" in length, this baseball bat shape can be customized to your desire & is a perfect fit for your travel humidor.
- The Chief - The Chief Model Was Designed as A Salute of Respect To Our Founder's Naval Service And Heritage.
At 6" long, our torpedo-shaped model perfectly fits your travel humidor and discerning style.
- The Lancero - The Lancero Model Is One of Our Deluxe Models That Includes Our Patented Nubber and A Draw Tool.
At 7" in length, this multi-tool will securely hold your cigar when needed and clear the occasional stubborn plug to improve your draw. It still fits easily in your travel humidor.

DY: Now that is quite an offering, okay, so final question. You were nominated for "Accessory of the Year" in 2020. Tell us about how that felt when you found out.

BW: It was a shock and honor. I was shocked after having been an official business for less than two years and making it to the 2020 Final Nominee for Cigar Accessory of the Year by Tobacco Business Magazine. We had worked very hard that year, and to be nominated alongside Boveda and Butler, I had zero complaints even though we did not win. Just to be nominated with those industry leaders was an amazing experience.

DY: Bill, thank you for your time and insight into who you are and who The Nubber is.

BW: Thank you for the honor of being in your first issue.



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Wednesday Nights at 7pm CST






You never know what to expect, either through twisted pairings, or interviewing guests, each show is packed with fun, information, and cigars!

Explore the Pairings, there's something for everyone

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