

LEAF N GRAIN SOCIETY

All Walks of Life

Forrest MacCalley
Sherri Sieminski
Apostate Cigars

Whiskey Talk
The Vineyard
Featured Pairing
Cigar Reviews
Recipes
Events

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

SPRING 2024

ISSUE 02

WHISTLEPIG

-WHISKEY-



BOURBON & RYE ARE DIFFERENT.

That's why

YOU NEED BOTH.



Pig Out Responsibly. © Whistlepig Whiskey, Shoreham, Vermont, 2024

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David Yancey
Editor and Co-Publisher
Co-Partner

Ash Red
Co-Partner
Co-Publisher

Matthew Harris
Co-Partner
Co-Publisher

Gabriel Seamen
Associate Editor and Senior Writer

Terry-Lynn Faught
Wine Editor and Senior Writer

David Jefferies
Senior Writer

Steven Day
Senior Writer

Ernest Foy
Events & Brand Ambassador

Contributing Writers
Joe Gulino
Chris Coulter
Sharron O'Neill

Guest Writer
Tim Long



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

So many times when talking with others about whiskeys, wines, or cigars, I get comments about how expensive they are, whether they aren't 'bougie' enough, or if they are only for the 'rich.' I've even had a few tell me it 'must be nice to have six-figure hobbies.'

What is interesting, though, is that these comments come from those who are not part of the culture. Yes, cigars, whiskeys, and wine can be expensive, but they don't have to be, nor is it only for the 'rich & famous.' With that in mind, I welcome you to the second issue of our magazine, where we have decided to focus this issue on the mindset that wines, whiskeys, and cigars are for all walks of life.

The following pages feature interviews with individuals in both blue-collar and white-collar fields, or whatever that is supposed to mean. You will find that a bottle of wine doesn't have to be considered expensive for it to be good. The same applies to cigars and whiskeys. You will also find new cocktails, recipes, reviews, and a feature covering Apostate Cigars based in Utah.

Finally, we have added a new way to cover wines and whiskeys: simple, straight-and-to-the-point tasting notes. Let us know what you think, what you like, and what you dislike. Our goal and mission for this magazine is to always be for the consumer, by the consumer, covering all there is to cigars, wines, spirits, and food. Oh, I can't forget coffee; we must cover coffee.

Email us at media@leafngrainsociety.com



D. Yans

IN MEMORY OF BRADLEY REITH

by Joe Gulino

Images provided by Joe Gulino

Dedicated to Bradley Reith

Bradley was called home to the Lord on March 6, 2024. His trusted partner, Justin Burnett, comforted the cigar community, explaining that Bradley “died exactly the way he wanted to die, with his heart full, smile on his face, with his hair on fire on his motorcycle, and got his biggest wish, which was to meet and be with Jesus.”

Just like Maria Lucia, Bradley left us too soon! Brother Bradley, you are missed, your comforting spirit and legacy, “fruits and labors,” live on within the cigar community and beyond.

Cigar lovers, please put some smoke in the air (PSSITA) for Bradley. Thank you!



90 PROOF

90



©2024 PUNCHER'S CHANCE. 40% ABV / 80 PROOF. DRINK RESPONSIBLY.

**KENTUCKY STRAIGHT
BOURBON WHISKEY.**

750

MT

COVER STORY: ALL WALKS OF LIFE - FORREST MCALLEY

by Dave Yancey

Images Forrest McCalley

“If alcohol is queen, then tobacco is her consort. It’s a fond companion for all occasions, a loyal friend through fair weather and foul. People smoke to celebrate a happy moment or to hide a bitter regret. Whether you’re alone or with friends, it’s a joy for all the senses.” – Luis Bunuel

Forrest, a good friend, agreed to sit down with me and share more about what makes Forrest the “Towman,” his passion for cigars, whiskey, and smoking meat

DY: Tell us all, who is Forrest?

FM: I am a heavy wrecker tow truck driver working in the DFW area. I am married and have three dogs and a cat.

DY: What does a typical day look like for you?

FM: I usually just hang around when I’m on call and wait to get called out. Some days, it’s slow, and I can have a nice morning hanging out with my wife. On other days, I don’t even get to see her since I’m out running all day and all night. On busy days, I may not even get a chance to stop and eat. I have to deal with people being stupid or cursing at me for doing my job. There have also been times when I’ve had a close call with a careless driver and had to call my wife and tell her I was in an accident. It takes a toll on you both physically and mentally.

On my off weekends, I like to smoke various meats and cigars. I try to wind down and take it easy to recharge.



DY: As a First Responder, can you tell us a little bit about what of the ‘hairiest’ calls you’ve had to go on?

FM: I wouldn’t necessarily say I’m a first responder, but I do work with a lot of them. I’m on the Fort Worth Police Department rotation, so if any big accidents happen, they call us in to help out. The hairiest, or I guess in this case biggest, call I’ve been on was in New Mexico. I was still living in Arizona, and it was my night off when my boss called. There was a big dust storm in New Mexico, not far from the Arizona/New Mexico border, and it was bad. There were 28 vehicles involved and eight fatalities. My wife and I drove out, and it was pretty surreal once we were waved through, to the point that the police had the freeway shut down. We drove for about 50 miles of empty freeway without a soul in sight. Once we got there, everything was oddly calm. My boss was lifting up a semi-truck with a vehicle under it that was so badly mangled I couldn’t tell what it was. I’m usually really good at identifying makes and models, but this one was too damaged. The firefighters and EMS swarmed the vehicle as we finished moving the semi. Unbeknownst to me, they were extricating the body of a woman from the remains of the vehicle. Unfortunately, this isn’t the first time I have been to a fatality. It was business as usual after they removed the deceased, moved the vehicles, and cleaned up the freeway. It was definitely a unique experience to be standing in the middle of what is typically a busy freeway.



DY: How did you get into cigars?

FM: Thanks to Nic Sumpter, a great friend from my hometown, and Robert Mayorga, whom I met through a Facebook group who got me into the Leaf Mob. It was all up or downhill from there! However, you want to look at it. Because of them, I got deeply into cigars and learned a lot.

DY: What is your “daily” go-to smoke?

FM: I wouldn’t exactly say I have a “daily”; it really depends on my mood or what kind of day I’m having. Some of my favorite go-to’s are OG Black Label Trading Company, Warfighter Tobacco, OSOK, Espanosa (especially the Knuckle Sandwich)

DY: What is your favorite cigar/food pairing?

FM: A good cowboy cut smoked and seared Texas-sized ribeye with a well-aged Black Label Trading Company or an aged small-batch cigar

DY: What is your favorite cigar/drink pairing?

FM: A well-aged, heavy cigar such as a Devil’s Tongue by PDR, a really good OSOK by Edgar Hoill, or a Warfighter Tobacco Cigar with a smoked Old Fashioned (with a Luxardo cherry, or it’s not a proper Old Fashioned!)

DY: What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the phrase, “You must have lots of money if you smoke cigars?”

FM: What would you consider a lot of money? If you’re a Davidoff, Opus X, or a rare Padron enthusiast, I could see money possibly being an issue when buying cigars. Otherwise, there are plenty of fantastic cigars that compare or exceed those upper brands, in my opinion, for much less.

DY: Let’s talk a bit about the other type of smoking you do; what inspires you when you go to light up the smoker?

FM: Seeing the utter surprise on people’s faces when they taste barbeque from someone who grew up in the deserts of Arizona. A lot of people tell me I was born for Texas, I just showed up a little late.

DY: What is your favorite meat to smoke?

FM: Mostly beef. Brisket, dino ribs, lengua, barbacoa, pretty much anything off of a cow. But I also do enjoy spare/St. Louis pork ribs and some other pork products with the occasional smoked chicken or turkey.





DY: Who is someone, living or dead, that you would love to sit down and have a cigar with?

FM: Guy Fieri: Guy seems to be the most involved celebrity with his cigar blend and takes it seriously. He didn't just want some unknown cigar with his name on it. He wanted it to truly represent himself and his legacy. And boy, is it an excellent line! I would also love to hear his stories and have a genuine conversation with him on a personal level about food and cigars.



“My own experience has been that the tools I need for my trade are paper, tobacco, food, and a little whisky.”

– William Faulkner

THE VINEYARD



DOES A BOTTLE OF WINE HAVE TO BE EXPENSIVE TO BE CONSIDERED GOOD?

by Terry-Lynn Faught

Images stock.adobe.com



Drinking wine is often looked at as a more formal, elite pastime. Images of fancy clothes and elevated conversations about esoteric experiences fill the imagination. In fact, while these types of gatherings have (and still do) exist, there are other truisms that coexist: young couples sharing a date night and enjoying live music in a park, women sharing a “girls night” and discussing everything from cosmetics to politics to their significant others, friends in casual clothing hanging out just shooting the breeze over pizza bites and desserts while watching a movie on television.

Historically, cultures around the world have traditions of lower quality/cost “table wines” that are ingrained in their area’s lifestyle, often predating the development of finer wines. These wines were often made from local, easier-to-grow native grapes and were (and still are) a large part of the “family” traditions. As wine-making knowledge spread around the world, with time, the wine industry expanded and improved. Until now, many parts of the world have been recognized for highly refined wines.

Personally, I grew up getting a small bit of wine (usually a blush) in a “grown up” glass (likely a white wine or desert wine glass) when we all sat at the table for holiday or celebratory meals. These were part of the crystal sets my parents and grandparents were using at the table. The small pour was just enough to take a sip with each of several toasts that were made at the start of the meal. Then, while the adults would refill their wine glasses, my sister and I would get whatever non-alcoholic beverage we were latched on to at that time. This was how we were taught more formal table etiquette (a process that has largely fallen by the wayside in our culture).

A lot of us who have reached a certain age share milestones when it comes to our relationship with wine (truthfully, alcohol in general). We all can usually remember what wines our parents had in the house or purchased for special occasions. These were, for the most part, large-production, lower-quality wines that were mass-produced and very cost-effective. Occasionally, in my childhood, we would have a bottle on the table from a winery that my parents had transported halfway across the country when we moved here when I was very young. Living in Texas, heat and humidity are a constant



battle for a large part of the year. Home wine storage as we know it now (think small wine fridges) was not really a thing, but I did learn early on that stored wine (or any alcohol that was being “held” long term) needed to be kept in a cool, dark, well-ventilated space.

As so many of us did, once I was away at college- my drinking became very driven by my meager wallet or whatever was available at what party. So everything was inexpensive and of questionable quality. Basic beer was common; liquor was chosen for its “punch,” and wine was rarely an option. The memories wrapped up more in the experiences at the event rather than the taste of the beverages. With that being said, what is available on the market at all price points has expanded greatly since my college days.

For the purposes of this piece, I’m going to use my personal price grouping, which is different from a lot of other publications. Personally, I’ll address prices in terms of \$10 and under, \$11-\$30, and \$30+. I am approaching this as a typically budget-concerned consumer. There are a lot of people out there who won’t even look at a bottle unless it has a price tag of over \$40.

\$10 and under

For years, the idea that an inexpensive bottle of wine was automatically “cheap” or of low quality has been firmly entrenched in the conversation. In the past 20 years or so, higher quality wines from all over the world at lower price points have forced that assumption to change. There are multiple labels priced under \$10 a bottle that are solid and enjoyable for casual consumption. These less expensive wines are wonderful to have at home to enjoy over an evening or two as they tend not to be as complex, are easier to drink, and survive being open and held in a fridge for a night or two. They also work very well when you need multiple bottles of a variety of types to share (such as a large gathering for holidays).

Producing wine in any region is not a “cheap” endeavor. The cost of the varietal itself, planting, maintenance while growing, harvesting, processing, and bottling, as well as the cost of manpower, equipment, bottles, storage space, containers, and labels, all add up. These costs are passed on to the consumer, affecting the price per



bottle at the point of sale. While the applied cost of each of these steps is distributed across the entirety of what is produced, variations in the demand for these items will affect the final cost. After the product leaves the winery, there are still more costs that are applied- duty fees if the wine is exported/imported to another country, the retailer’s markup for their profit margin, as well as national and local taxes, are applied before it reaches the consumer. As a result, a visit to a retailer to choose a bottle can be a daunting task, especially taking price into consideration.

Mid-range priced bottles (\$11- \$30)

These are generally slightly more complex than the inexpensive tier. These bottles will have more in most aspects, generally having a greater depth of flavor, and be closer to expected qualities for any given varietal. They can still be very easy to drink but offer more to the palate than the lower tier. Most of these wines are also solidly made, with good consistency from one case to the next, one bottle to the next. This is the price range where you will start to find more wines that have been aged by the winemaker. Occasionally, less commonly used grape varieties will also start appearing, both as supporters in a blend as well as “stand-alone” bottlings. A generally overlooked consideration is that a great many wineries have adapted their processes to create wines that are intended to be consumed within a few years from creation. While some winemakers still use traditional methods to create traditionally “age-worthy” wines, even many older producers have started creating wines that are intended to be good immediately and aren’t intended to be stored long term.



Image by JackF / stock.adobe.com

\$30+ (this can go all the way to \$100+ per bottle)

Here, the winemaker is doing everything and more to ensure each style of wine shows the correct aromas, flavors, tannins, and acids that are expected when a consumer reads the label. Everything from the way the grapes are grown all the way to aging and bottling is tightly controlled for the proper results. Specialized handlings, blends, and styles make strong appearances. Oak barrels that held other spirits or wine styles previously are repurposed to hold current wines to develop special flavor profiles beyond the grape. Older vintages of iconic brands start climbing in price, depending on how rare a specific vintage is becoming.

Older, iconic wines appear at auction, with the price per bottle most often exceeding \$100. These are wines that often are much older, attached to a specific winery or historical person or event, and are nearly impossible to acquire in any way other than auction or private sale.

Simply put, the wine industry has adapted over the last 40 years or so to make wine enjoyment more accessible to the mass public. The rules about storing and waiting to consume certain wines still exist, but they can't be applied to all wines. Not all reds must be stored for years, then decanted and aerated before serving. Today, there are a great number of red wines that can be opened and served immediately from the bottle. The reasons behind presenting a cork before serving a wine no longer serve the exact same purposes as they did 50 years ago. Currently, there are some very good quality wines that not only don't have a cork but come with a screw top or even in cans! As processes have advanced and the demands of wine drinkers have changed, the industry continues to innovate for shipping, storage, and serving to protect the quality of their products.

While the "rules" still apply in some cases, we no longer expect to drink only red wine with red meats or whites with fish and poultry. Science has proven that flavor pairings are much more important than color. The large collection of specific crystals for specific wines and liquors has been pared down greatly for general use. In casual settings, plastic cups and even cans have become more "normal" for consumption. When all is said and done, everyone has different likes/dislikes, and ultimately, there is no "wrong" answer— a good wine is the one you enjoy drinking.

LEWIS WINES HIGH PLAINS ROSE

100% MOURVEDRE

by Terry-Lynn Faught

Images by Terry-Lynn

Color: clear peachy-pink

Nose: Light strawberry with a touch of peach

Palate: notes of stone fruit, strawberry, citrus, slight minerality

Body: Light

Acid: Medium

Finish: Short

Notes: Best Served around 50 degrees Fahrenheit (give or take 5-10 degrees)

Pairing: Pair with light fare, fish, white meats, cheese and fruit plates



This Rosé is made from Mourvèdre (also known as Monastrell) grapes in the High Plains of Texas at the Phillips Vineyard. Mourvèdre is considered to be a fairly difficult variety to grow. It likes “its face in the sun, and its feet in the water”. Meaning, it does well in the Texas High Plains heat, but requires lots of water through proper irrigation to produce ripe fruit. However, this same irrigation can lead to overdevelopment of foliage, which then shades the grapes too much. It can also be vulnerable to powdery and downy mildew, so constant tending to growth and treatment for mildew is necessary. This grape, which has its origins in the hot, arid central and southeastern regions that border the Mediterranean in Spain, does very well in Texas, not only in the High Plains, but also in the Hill Country, central West Texas, and the western Permian basin.

The berries are dark, thick-skinned and small forming in medium sized, compact bunches. They are versatile, being used for a wide range of wines from single varietal reds through GSM blends, rosés and port-styled fortified wines. They are late ripening, and have a tendency to produce grapes that create high alcohol, highly tannic wines. It buds and ripens very late in the season, often being the last harvested, in some regions staying on the vine into November. The harvest period is very short once the grapes reach peak ripeness. Acidity falls rapidly, drying out with flavors skewing toward “pruney”.

Rosés are created by specific process. Limiting the length of time that the juice stays in contact with the skins before pressing is done; another is by pouring off some of the juice that will become a Mourvèdre (this process is called saignée) during fermentation. The process to create the rosé is up to the winemaker, only one of the factors that creates variation between brands.

Lewis Wines is located in the Texas Hill Country, growing several varieties of grapes on site, but also sourcing grapes from the High Plains region as well as other vineyards in the Hill Country. Doug Lewis met Duncan McNabb in 2008 playing soccer. In 2010, while Lewis was working at Perdenales Cellars, he started a small side project with extra fruit from the 2010 harvest. McNabb was working at Perdenales Cellars in 2010 during the harvest, and he and Lewis founded Lewis Cellars that year. While they have planted several varietals on their



own vineyard, they also source some varietals from vineyards located in other areas of Texas that provide better growing conditions for these other varieties of grapes. Being a Texas winery, weather is always a consideration when it comes to specific vintages. When I looked at their website, they do have a small section where they address the specific(weather) challenges they have faced in certain years.

This rosé is a lovely dry rosé, but not the same dry as other rosés. The summery fruit flavors of strawberry and delicate peach make this an easy drinker. It has no notable tannins, and a comfortable acidity that will pair it well with an afternoon at the pool as well as the lighter food fare that is more common in hotter weather. The slight minerality was pleasant, and invoked thoughts of a good margarita with a slight salt rim. When served chilled, this is a beautiful rosé, as it warmed slightly, it stayed enjoyable .

TASTING NOTES: NEWSOM VINEYARDS CABERNET SAUVIGNON

by Terry-Lynn Faught

Images provided by Newsom Vineyards

Wine

Name: Newsom Vineyards

Texas High Plains AVA

Cabernet Sauvignon 2020

Color: Clear, light colored garnet, almost purple to the eye

Low Viscosity

High Tannins

Low acid

Price: \$40

Nose: Graphite and dark stone fruits

Palate: Drier in the mouth than some Cabernets, but very smooth to drink
Very fruit driven to the palate.

Finish: Medium finish

Considered to be the “Standard bearer” for Newsom Vineyards, the grapes come from 35-year-old vines (some of the first vines planted in the vineyard). With the climate being semi-arid and the soil being shallow and considered low-vigor, the grapes must struggle a little but produce better fruit. There is also a lack of disease to contend with, although weather patters can cause challenges during harvest season. The wine is held in neu-tral oak for 34 months before bottling, so oak notes are very soft, almost non-existent. A very solid table wine, it pairs well with most types of food, and stands very nicely with chocolate desserts.



TASTING NOTES: CORINO 2016 BAROLO DEL COMUNE DI LA MORRA

by Dave Yancey

Images provided by Dave Yancey

Wine

Name: 2016 Corino Barolo Del Comune Di La Morra

Grape: 100% Nebbiolo

Region: Barolo

Country: Piedmont, Piedmont

ABV: 15%

Price: \$44

Color: Rich Garnet

Acid: Medium-High

Tannin: High

Pair: Gamy meats, Risotto, Ravioli, Fatty Cheeses, Truffles, and Mushrooms

Nose: cherry, rose, leather

Palate: Notes of cherry, leather, earth

Finish: Long finish with a mouth drying at the end



After relocating to La Morra in the early 1950s, the Corino family built a 37-acre vineyard with 12 acres dedicated to the Nebbiolo grape variety. Producing 50,000 bottles of wine per year, the majority of which are Barolo, with soils that are clayey-calcareous and clay, the vineyard also produces Barbera d'Alba, Dolcetto d'Alba, Langhe Nebbiolo, and Langhe Rosso wines. This particular variety is aged in a combination of new and old French oak for two years, followed by six months in steel vats before being bottled for two years before being made available.

CIGAR PAIRINGS



MARIA LUCIA PAIRED WITH RED SPOT 15 YEAR

by Joe Gulino

Images provided by Joe Gulino, Luciano Cigars, and RedSpot Whiskey

SESSION NOTES

“It’s Time To Cut, Light, & Smoke!”

—Bradley Reith, Zeal Cigars

Drink: Red Spot 15 Year Irish Whiskey

Cigar: Maria Lucia

Brand: Luciano Cigars

Factory: Luciano Cigar Factory

Vitola: 5 ¼ x 54 Robusto Extra

Filler: Dominican Republic, Nicaragua & Peru

Wrapper: U.S.A. (Connecticut Broadleaf)

Binder: Ecuador (Habano 92 & Sumatra)

Body: Medium Boldness

Price: \$13

LUCIANO

What Makes It Special

Luciano Meirelles is one of the most respected cigar producers in the industry. Our very own David Yancey refers to Luciano as “an encyclopedia” in regards to his cigar knowledge and ability to pair cigars with spirits based PH levels, which blows my mind. Luciano’s Maria Lucia box pressed Robusto Extra, represents his deceased mother, Maria Lucia Meirelles, who passed away when Luciano was only twelve years young.

Luciano’s inspiration for this cigar came from his daughter Deborah, who drew a picture of a woman that appeared in one of her dreams. Luciano immediately recognized the unknown woman, whom Deborah never met, to be very similar to old photographs of his mother Lucia. “When I saw the drawing next to old photographs of my mother, I saw the similarity immediately,” said Luciano Meirelles, who added that none of his children had ever met their grandmother or even seen a photograph of her. “It was almost supernatural the way things happened. It’s hard to believe it was only a coincidence...and now years later, when I decided to finally create this cigar, naturally, in a full-circle kind of way, we thought there would be no better idea than to use my daughter’s drawing for the box.”

By majority rule, Luciano’s Maria Lucia cigar was named Cigar of the Year 2023 by the amazing Leaf n’ Grain contributors. Between being the outlier here in Chicago, versus the rest of the crew in Texas, and the unfortunate fact I had never actually smoked this cigar, I decided to give it a go for this quarter’s pairing review article. So let’s see why this cigar was held to such a high degree by L&G!





First Third

After a deserving slow a proper soft flame lighting of the cigar I can immediately tell this flavorful cigar is going to be a journey. Initially, there is an obvious and very delicious balance of leather, vanilla, and slight spice going on here. The horizontal box press sits perfectly on the lips while this vertical V-cut draws the cigar's amazing flavors to palate perfectly. I honestly don't want this cigar to leave my lips, as I can effortlessly keep it there. The foot smoke odor is creamy yellow cake batter all day. A surprising slight saltiness momentarily appears as more delicious creamy cake battered tobacco and soft leather notes hit the palate. The retro-hale is spiceless, as more creamy cake battered leather notes glide through the sinus. This is an easy smoking and slow burning medium bold cigar, one I would recommend for all levels of cigar smokers, even newbies, as it literally checks all the boxes. Now I get it, and we're only in the first third.

Visual / Pre-light Draw

This dark brown box pressed broadleaf wrapper is smooth, oily, and sparkling. The simple white oval band displays the cigar's name, Maria Lucia, over the drawing of the woman Deborah saw in her dream. Such a beautiful back story. The cigar also has a beautiful pure white foot band, furthering the cigar's spiritual element and celebration of Maria Lucia Meierelles' life.

The side siff is bold, with deep darker notes of aged barnyard hay and a hint of cocoa. The dry foot is bold and creamy at the same time, with beautiful notes of deep dark orchard fruits, dark chocolate, and hints of mocha on the finish. I know exactly how to cut this horizontal box press, vertically with a nice Colibri V-cut. Success!



Second Third

Boom! A beautiful transition to cinnamon sugar covered graham crackers and chocolate on the finish. Amazing! The perfect and lengthy gray ash is making me nervous, so a circular tap off the edge of the tray is necessary. The draw has really opened up, and the cigar is even easier to enjoy. More cake battered leather notes come to the forefront, as the foot smoke odor literally smells like we're baking a cake. The still spiceless retro-hale now produces creamy chocolate covered graham cracker notes, overlaid with leather on the finish. I love it!

Final Third

Without a doubt, this cigar is an absolute winner. Leaf n' Grain Society, you fine folks in Texas nailed it! A clear indication of the next level cigar enthusiasts contributing to this amazing magazine. That beautiful band comes right off and now it's time to really experience this slow burning Maria Lucia at her best. She continues to be easy smoking, flavorful, and entirely enjoyable. Those creamy cake battered and leathery tobacco notes have transitioned to beautiful sweet toasted vanillas, which I can't seem to get enough of. The retro-hale has mellowed and become a bit sweeter as well on the finish. Beautiful!

I have become speechless at how amazing this cigar is, and such, I digress to sit back and take it all in.

Cheers LnG!



The Pairing

This incredible cigar represents the delicate spirit of Luciano's mother, Maria Lucia Meirelles, so I chose to pair it with an incredible and delicate Irish spirit. Mitchell & Son's Red Spot, a Single Pot Still Irish Whiskey from Midleton Distillery, is triple cask matured to perfection for fifteen years. This delicious 46% ABV Irish whiskey is wood influenced by American Bourbon, Spanish Sherry, and Marsala wine casks. A deliciously rich, complex, yet delicate dram!

Cigar to the whiskey: The creamy cake battered leather notes of the cigar are soaked with tropical fruits and vanilla extract on the finish. Absolutely delicious!

Whisky to the cigar: Fruity soy sauced Marsala wine notes and slight spice become thick, creamy, and palate coating when followed up with a puff of the cigar. This is obviously the special touch of Maria Lucia, coming to life through the pairing.

Cigar smoked whisky: Exotic tropic fruits all day, with a slight smoky and palate coating spice on the finish. Super delicious and an eye opening spiritual experience, given what and who this cigar represents.



FORTALEZA Y LIBRE INTIMIDADOR CORONA & CALUMET ESTATE 15 YR

by Gabriel Seamen

Images provided by Gabriel Seamen

The Cigar:

Brand: Fortaleza y Libre

Vitola: Corona 5 1/4 x 44

Filler: Dominican Criolo and Nicaraguan

Wrapper: Mexican San Andres

Binder: Dominican

Smoking Time: 1 hour

Body: Full

Flavor: Medium to Full

Price: \$9.99



The Bourbon:

Barreled Date: March 2006

Distilled/Aging Location: Bardstown, Kentucky

Batch Size: 19 Barrels (ea.)

Filtration: Non-Chill Filtered

Potency: 105 Proof (52.5% Alc/Vol)

Mash Bill: 74% Corn, 18% Rye, 8% Malted Barley

Bottled By: Three Springs Bottling Company, Bowling Green, KY

From the Manufacturer: "Calumet Farm Single Rack Black 15-Year-Old Bourbon Whiskey is the pinnacle of the Calumet Farm Bourbon family. It represents the premium quality our brand is known for, as well as the hard-earned badge of patience. Allowing our bourbon to age slowly in Kentucky-only rick houses is a testament to doing things correctly - the way bourbon should be done. All barrels used to craft these rare batches are aged in a single, center-cut rack. This expression of the Calumet Farm Bourbon family is our most aged and highest proof to date. It is Non-Chill Filtered for added depth of character and color."

Known for being on the sweeter side for a Bourbon of this age statement, 15-year-old Single Rack Black can be a good gateway for low-proof and less-aged Bourbon lovers to get into an older oakier dram. Let's see how it pairs with such a strong cigar.

Available for \$135 per bottle locally, this is on the high side of accessible pricing, similar to most Blanton's in price.



The Pairing:

Precut notes wrapper is a matte dark brown smelling of barnyard earth, manure, and hay or dried grasses. The scent at the foot is similar but heavier on hays and dead grass clippings. The pre-light draw is medium firm and tastes like honey wheat bread. On the initial nosing, our Calumet is ethanol-heavy with hints of caramel and baking spices.

Starting with the Intimidador, our first puffs are accented by the barnyard aromas and coffee. Going to the first sip of the Bourbon, it is all the nosing said it would be, though with a bit less ethanol on the palette.

Going from sip to puff accentuates the coffee notes and brings some creaminess to the retro-hales flavor. As the sip dissipates, more puffs bring the grass clippings back in addition to the coffee on the cigar, with the room aroma of baking spices leading you into your next sip perfectly.

Going from puff to sip brings a huge vanilla sweetness from the 15 years of oak aging and reduces the ethanol for this 105-proof bourbon to something more easily enjoyable. As the nicotine strength on the intimidador ramps up quickly at the end of the first third, the bourbon helps to cushion this a bit with its oak-heavy flavors.

The corona is holding its ash well, with a pretty even burn on a fairly blustery evening. At the halfway point, the intimidador is all nicotine with mold to medium flavor strength, now adding a distinct black pepper to the barnyard notes, even more evident on the retrohale. As it has warmed, the Calumet is now going down like water, its oaky spice blown out by the cigar's pepper, leaving only indistinct charred and caramelized flavors.



Nearing the end of the middle third, the pepper gives way to a brownie-like flavor combo. It is composed of bread, cocoa, and nuts, and the bourbon adds a faint caramel, almost like a drizzle atop the brownie square.

As I'm about to repour not bourbon, the last few sips exhibit a light charred cherry note with the baking spices, with a strong nose of stone fruits, caramel, and vanilla. The cigar remains much the same to the end.

The Results:

A strong pairing indeed. It seems to me that even someone who likes lower-proof bourbon could be coaxed into enjoying this Calumet with a similarly strong pairing, which would help ease that first experience if you can hang out with both. With a cigar at the top of the daily price range and a bottle at the top of the accessible enough-to-keep-on-hand range, this pairing is elevated from the every day, every man pairing we did this month, but not so much as to make it unreachable for a good weekend with good friends. I would recommend you try it when you have the chance!

FEATURE ARTICLE: APOSTATE CIGARS

by Ash Red

Photos were taken by Joe Roberts of Abaci Photos.



Owners Brandon Oveson and Kendrick Woolstenhulme decided to produce cigars in 2020 during the pandemic. While most people would not dare create their own cigars, these two rebelled against the norm, and Apostate Cigars was born. A-pos-tate comes from the Greek word “apostasia,” which means departure, revolt, or rebellion. They demonstrated more of this apostasia by creating their company where they grew up and live in Utah. At the time, 64% of the population was Mormon, a religion that forbids smoking in the scriptures. Brandon and Kendrick embraced the imagery of Mormonism and stories from the Book of Mormon; each cigar has some type of reference to the religion they were reared in. The two owners left the Church of Latter-day Saints and found solace in the cigar community.

Apostate’s offerings are produced at the factory Tabacalera Palma Under the supervision of Jochy Blanco. Brandon and Kendrick established a relationship with Jochy when they worked in retail. They were able to travel to the Dominican Republic in 2020 and began creating blends. Their cigars were on shelves by December of 2021. Keeping with their rebellious approach, Brandon and Kendrick sought to define Apostate Cigars with blends that are unconventional, so much so that Jochy was not elated to work with their idea on their fourth cigar, a candela wrapper. Brandon and Kendrick created

a blend that left Jochy speechless for 10 minutes. The Feathered Serpent was born and named after Quetzalcoatl, the Mesoamerican god of antiquity. It is a 6.5x46 Corona Gorda with a Dominican Republic Corojo Candela wrapper, Mexican San Andres binder, and the filler is the Dominican Republic. As a lover of candela, I find this cigar to be an extraordinary experience. I enjoyed it so much that it was in my “Top 5” in 2023.

The first Apostate Cigar was The Initiatory. Named after the first Mormon temple ceremony, the Initiatory was crafted to be the perfect introduction to their cigar lineup. It comes in a 6 x 52 Toro. The wrapper is an Ecuadorian Sumatra wrapper, Mexican San Andres binder, and filler from the Dominican Republic. It’s definitely an amazing experience to begin with.



Apostate's second cigar is The Deseret. The name derives from a scriptural term meaning "honeybee," paying homage to the state they grew up in and Beehive Cigars, the cigar shop that Kendrick founded and Brandon managed. This cigar is packed with a complex dessert flavor. It comes in a 5.25 x 54 Robusto. With a Mexican San Andres wrapper, Dominican Olor binder, and Nicaragua and Dominican fillers.

The third offering in the Apostate line is The Liahona. This memorable torpedo 6x45 has filler from Paraguay and the Dominican Republic, a Mexican San Andres binder, and an Ecuadorian Connecticut wrapper. The Liahona refers to a compass of divine origin that helped guide God's people to the promised land.



Brandon and Kendrick created an unforgettable Churchill (7.25x47) for their fifth cigar. The Sword of Laban was a weapon that belonged to and was used to execute its namesake. A Corojo Ecuadorian wrapper combined with a Mexican San Andres binder and fillers from the Dominican Republic.

The Zarahemla, Apostate's sixth cigar, pays tribute to a mighty ancient city that now lies in ruin. The box press toro's wrapper is an American Pennsylvania Broadleaf, an African Cameroon binder, and fillers from the Dominican Republic and Mexico.

This year, Apostate has two more offerings to carry out the series that was recently released at PCA. The sixth and seventh cigars are Moroni's Trumpet and The Endowment. Moroni's trumpet symbolizes "the spreading of the gospel and the Second Coming of the Savior." It comes in a 6.25 x56 Torpedo, with



Connecticut Broadleaf and Dominican fillers, a Dominican Republic binder, and the wrapper is a San Andres Oscuro. The endowment is a religious ceremony administered in temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The endowment provides instruction, covenants, and promised blessings that offer power, purpose, and protection in daily life. The 6 x 52 Toro has a beautiful Connecticut Desflorado, with a Connecticut Broadleaf, fillers from Dominican, San Andres, and a Pennsylvania Broadleaf.

Apostate Cigars Founders Brandon and Kendrick created their cigar labels to feature the English and phonetic alphabet that Brigham Young, an early church leader, urged members of the LDS to adopt, known as the Desert Alphabet. The Sword of Laban represents the first letter "T" in APOSTATE. Each cigar that Apostate Cigars offers comes only in one vitola, which may seem unorthodox to many; however, it was perfectly planned to provide the best flavors to the consumers.

You do not want to miss out on these beautifully crafted cigars. For more information, visit www.apostatecigars.com. Be sure to check out their YouTube channel as well to learn more about these amazing cigars.



ANCIENT AGE BOURBON & NICA LIBRE

by Gabriel Seamen

Images provided by Gabriel Seamen

The Cigar:

Brand: NicaLibre

Vitola: Box Pressed Toro 6.5 x 52

Filler: Nicaragua Long-fillers

Wrapper: Sun Grown Habano

Binder: Habano

Smoking Time: 1.5 hours

Body: Mild to Medium

Flavor: Medium to Full

Price: \$9.50



The Bourbon:

Basic Ancient Age is a young straight bourbon bottled at 80 proof, and although there is no aging statement the contents are roughly three years old but must average 4 years old in total to be called a bourbon. That youth is plain to the eye since the coloring is pale amber, something like a transparent rose gold.

Keeping all that in mind, the nose is surprisingly smooth, thick with corn sweetness and orange zest, and plenty of vanilla added in for good measure. From a sniffing point of view, this is genuinely quite a good bourbon.

Ancient Age has a bit of a cult following, as it has the same mash-bill as the sought-after Blanton's, albeit with no age statement. To me, it is simply a less-concentrated version of Blanton's and as such sometimes even easier to drink!

Available for \$12 per 750ml locally this is an extremely approachable bourbon for both the pallet and the wallet.

The Pairing:

Strong earth and leather aromas are present pre-light, with light milk chocolate on the cold draw. The first puffs are leather and coffee notes predominantly. From the whiskey's first pour first sip is smoother than many 80-proof whiskeys, with vanilla up front and caramel in the finish.

Going from sip to puff in the first inch brings the chocolate from the cigar and vanilla from the whiskey forward. Going from puff to sip engaged the baking spices present in the whiskey, quite enjoyable.

Man, I've forgotten how good this combo is, the effortless of the ancient age with the chocolate bar that is the nica libre sun grown. Moving into the second third of the cigar Going from sip to puff brings it an almost spiced chocolate bundt cake-like flavor as they combine on the pallet.

At halfway this sun-grown starts to add in some savory spice of its own. Now having been poured for almost 45 minutes, the nose is almost entirely of caramel, with a good mouth coating sip bringing the caramel first then baking spices and a hint of minerals on the finish.

Entering the final third the cigar flavors reverse a bit, bringing first the baking spices, then creamy leather, and finally a light chocolate. The whiskey is now almost presenting the opposite of that bringing vanilla forward, then caramel, then a hint of spice, turning the pairing almost from complimentary to contrasting in a beautiful back-and-forth symphony of flavor.



The Verdict:

This is a very relaxing and simple pairing that I recommend for anyone. Most of the NicaLibre will be similar in this pairing except for the Connecticut wrapper. This is not to say that pairing is bad just that it will highlight many more different things in each item. I hope this shows that you don't have to spend a fortune to have a wonderful pairing experience, with Ancient Age showcasing the same mash bill as Blanton's at a \$12 price point and a five-pack of the Nica Libre Sungrown starting at \$25 online you can bring this experience to even a few friends without breaking the bank, or just enjoy it after work each day of the week! Enjoy, and explore the pairings!

WHISKEY TALK



ART OF THE SPIRITS: THE ORIGINALS

by Dave Yancey

Images by Dave Yancey and Art of the Spirits

Name: The Originals
Classification: Bourbon
Distillery: Art of the Spirits
Location: Colorado
Age: 7 years
Proof: 104.6
Price: \$109

What makes it Special

Each bottle from Art of the Spirits distillery and Owner/Master Distiller Richard Paul is a special release cask strength expression with one-of-a-kind artwork as the label and pays homage to our armed forces and first responders. The Originals displays and pays tribute to the 10th Special Forces group and features artwork from David Uhl.

Visual / Presentation

The 7-year cask strength spirit, a Golden Amber, is beautifully displayed in the signature bottle with artwork representing a soldier in white camo, tracking through the snow, searching for his target through his scope. A proof of 104, the long, thick legs slowly moving down the glass, creating anticipation of what was yet to come.

Nosing

Any tasting, review, or exploration of a new pour is a journey. A journey that begins with the visual and is immediately followed by the nosing. The nosing is a journey in and of itself, starting with the top of the glass, allowing your senses to take in all the aromas while moving to the bottom and then to each side individually. Presenting orange zest, brown sugar, some minerality, and subtle hints of cinnamon spices, I got a glimpse of the complexity of this expression.



Palate

Imagine, if you will, a sweet apricot cobbler cooked over a campfire with hints of charcoal and oak filling the space. Now, when you take a slice of that cobbler and top it with melted butter, allowing that butter to drip into the body of the slice, integrating all the flavors that explode on your palate with the first bite. The first sip of the spirit presents sweet apricots while slowly transforming into warm buttery oils as the juice moves to the middle of the palate and finishes off with hits of oak and a charr pepper.

Finish

The finish of this exploration will make or break a review. One with a soothing mouth feel from the butter oils, a hint of drying of the palate from the oak tannins, and a lingering finish, making you want to take another sip and begin the journey again.

Score

The complexity of The Originals from Art of the Spirits is what makes this expression special. With the transitions of flavors from the beginning of the palate to the end, I, along with my friends who enjoyed this journey, longed for more and enjoyed every last drop. While the subtle mouth-drying feeling from the oak tannins and drinking a little warmer than would be preferred for its age may turn some off from this expression. This expression has me looking forward to more of what Art of the Spirits has to offer, and I encourage you to do so as well.





TASTING NOTES: FEW COLD CUT BOURBON WHISKEY

by Dave Yancey

Images provided by FEW Spirits

Bourbon:

Name: Cold Cut Bourbon Whiskey

Distillery: FEW Spirits

Proof: 46.5 % ABV

Aged: Unstated

Color: Amber

Nose: Citrus leaning towards Orange Zest with notes of toffee and coffee

Palate: Opening with cinnamon, caramel, and espresso notes, finishing with a touch of mocha coffee

Finish: Buttery finishes with notes of cocoa and coffee at the very end.

MSRP: \$35-\$45

A unique whiskey that starts off as a Straight bourbon but then is finished in a Cold Brew coffee barrel to bring a nice coffee finish. Coming home with both the American and the World's best-flavored whiskey in 2020, this expression is a good one to add to your collection.



TASTING NOTES: EARLY TIMES BOTTLED-IN-BOND

by Dave Yancey

Images provided by Early Times Distillery

Bourbon:

Name: Early Times Bottled-In-Bond

Distillery: Early Times Distillery

Proof: 50 % ABV

Aged: 4 years

Mash: 79% Corn, 11% Rye, 10% Malted Barley

Color: Rustic Orange

Nose: Caramel, shortbread, vanilla, hints of cinnamon

Palate: Touches of oak that transition to a soft white pepper. Sweet corn with a caramel backing, finishing with a warm cinnamon spice.

Finish: Subtle butter with hints of pepper, cinnamon, and oak, filling a short but enjoyable finish.

MSRP: \$20-\$30

Dating back to the 1860s, Early Times is now one of the longest continuously running distilleries under the same ownership. With practices dating back over 150 years, Early Times' signature bottle, their Bottle-In-Bond, pays homage to the history of the 1800s and 1940s when they introduced this expression. This Bottle-in-Bond from Early Times would make a good budget-friendly addition to your bar.



TASTING NOTES: ANDALUSIA STRYKER

by Dave Yancey

Images provided by Andalusia

Single Malt:

Name: Stryker

Distillery: Andalusia Whiskey Co.

Proof: 50 % ABV

Aged: 4 years

Mash: Malted Barley smoked with Oak, Mesquite, and Apple woods

Color: Rustic Orange

Nose: Smoked apples, subtle medicinal, oak, and caramel

Palate: Sweet apples, Cocoa, Bread notes with hints of smoke

Finish: Long, warm, buttery finish with warming hints of medicinal notes at the very back

MSRP: \$20-\$30

Andalusia Whiskey Co. brings the Stryker to the Single Market as a signature expression for its grain-to-glass distillery. Stryker utilizes a unique process for their Texas Single Malt, where the barley is smoked with oak, mesquite, and apple woods, paying homage to the long history of smoking meats in Texas and the woods used. Being recognized by Whisky Advocate to 20 for 2023, this is a bottle you will want to check out.



SHERRI SIEMINSKI CEO CASA DE MONTECRISTO

by Gabriel Seamen

Images provided by Casa de Montecristo



Sherri Sieminski brings a wealth of experience as a seasoned retail executive. She is driven by a zeal for crafting exceptional guest experiences across diverse luxury brands and consultative selling environments.

As a collaborative member of senior leadership teams, Sherri has consistently orchestrated successful transformations for struggling or nascent businesses. Her track record includes driving positive sales trends and revenue growth through strategic vision, meticulous planning, and precise execution.

She is currently serving as CEO of Casa de Montecristo, the luxury retail cigar bar and lounge brand under the larger umbrella of Tabacalera USA, after having spent many years as the VP of Retail Sales over all the stores, which is the role I first worked with her in. Through this role, she has brought such concepts as store classification, right-sizing staffing to meet store needs, introducing a successful loyalty program, as well as the general idea to build a luxury experience that is bar none in each of the cities they currently inhabit.

Having worked with Sherri as her direct report, I knew she could bring a unique perspective on the culture of cigars to this month's issue, and I am thankful she was able to participate in the following interview. Enjoy!

GS - Outside of cigars and retail, who is Sherri Sieminski?

SS - All my life, I've been someone who colors outside the lines. I've never taken the traditional or easy path in my personal or professional life. I prefer looking at my journey as a series of adventures. With a degree in fine arts, I tend to look at things in a creative way. I consider myself pretty adaptable and love to interact with all kinds of people in different environments.

GS - What is one of your greatest memories from your career?

SS - Very early in my career, I was chosen by the CEO of a major beauty brand to start a new division for the company. The opportunity exposed me to all aspects of creating something from scratch, and our success earned my team a major industry award for best new business. As a result, I've been able to draw on so many of these experiences in growing Casa de Montecristo.

GS - What or who got you into smoking cigars/the cigar industry?

SS - Interestingly, my family's history has some connection to the industry, and I've always enjoyed smoking cigars at family gatherings and celebrations. But it was not until a recruiter called me that I ever considered working for a cigar company. Fortunately, my expertise has always been in a luxury, relationship-based retail space – so it really has been a perfect fit. And it's been the most fun I've ever had!

GS - What is your greatest memory in the cigar business?

SS - My favorite memories are the times I've spent in a lounge, enjoying a cigar, sitting with other like-minded adult consumers who all share a passion for cigars. It's like nothing else – sharing common ground with other people from all walks of life. It's what made me fall in love with this business!

GS - What is your favorite cigar/food pairing?

SS - My after-dinner go-to is a very dark chocolate (90%+ cacao) with a Fuente Short Story Maduro. But I also enjoy pairing cigars with very spicy foods.

GS - What is your favorite cigar/drink pairing?

SS - I'm a big wine drinker, so my favorite pairing would be an Espada by Montecristo with a woody red like a Tempranillo, particularly if it's been aged in oak barrels. I love champagne and honestly can enjoy most cigars with a glass of Moet Imperial Brut.

GS - What has been the greatest challenge when it came to defining the brand for Casa de Montecristo?

SS - It's taken some time and effort to integrate the organization's legacy stores with our new builds and the stores we've acquired along the way. But our vision to share cigars through experience-driven retail has never wavered. Our store teams are bringing that vision to life every day at Casa de Montecristo.

GS - Has being a leader in one of the largest cigar lounge chains in the country affected your personal brand?

SS - It's only served to strengthen it! I am so fortunate to be able to share this great adventure with the most remarkable people in the industry. The relationships I've enjoyed, and the experiences I've had are a luxury like no other. It has been both humbling and energizing.

GS - When you're not just smoking for business reasons such as purchasing decisions, who do you enjoy smoking with?

SS - My friends ... and I make a lot more when people find out I have cigars. It's funny how that works!

GS - Who is someone, living or dead, that you would love to sit down and have a cigar and a drink with?

SS - I'm a big jazz fan and many of the greats enjoyed cigars. The perfect evening for me would be to see Charles Mingus or John Coltrane play and to hear their stories over bourbon and cigars.



LARCENY BARREL PROOF

by Dave Yancey

Images by Dave Yancey and Larceny

Name: Larceny Barrel Proof

Classification: Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey

Distillery: Old Fitzgerald

Bottled: 2021

Location: Kentucky

Age: 8 years

Proof: 121

Mash/Blend: 68% Corn, 20% Wheat, 12% Malted Barley

Batch: B521

Price: \$60 - \$70

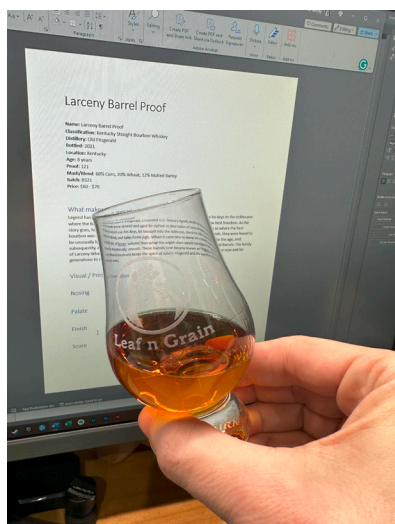
What makes it Special

Legend has it that John E Fitzgerald, a bonded U.S. Treasury Agent, would use his keys to the rickhouses where the barrels were stored and aged to siphon or steal tastes of some of the best bourbon. As the story goes, he would use his keys, let himself into the rickhouse, climb the stairs to where the best bourbon was stored, and take-home jugs. When it came time to dump these barrels, they were found to be unusually light, of lesser volume than what the angels share would have been for the age, and, subsequently, exceptionally smooth. These barrels soon became known as 'Fitzgerald Barrels'. The family of Larceny Wheated Bourbons keeps the spirit of John E. Fitzgerald and his legend alive now and for generations to come.



Visual / Presentation

The polished mahogany spirit in the classic Larceny bottle with its iconic keyhole label stands true to what is expected from an eight-year-old expression. Every bourbon hunter knows that when you look for a Larceny Barrel Proof, you first look for the batch number and the 'A,' 'B,' or 'C' classification. This particular batch is 'B521,' which indicates that it was the second batch, bottled in the fifth month of 2021. The long legs slowly moving down the glass indicate the higher proof and greater viscosity of the spirit, enhancing the anticipation of what would come next.



Nosing

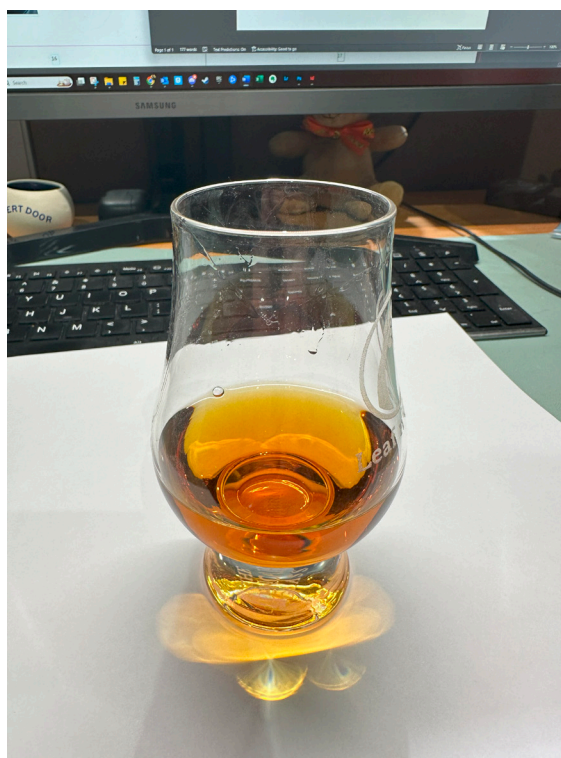
With the deep, dark cherry, bread, and butterscotch notes coming in at the end, I am reminded of my mother's cherry pie. No, my mother didn't put butterscotch in her cherry pie, but I think you get the picture.

Palate

Buttery notes with sweet yet tart cherries carry through, with bread notes coming in as the spirit crosses the middle of the palate. The oils and viscosity coat the entirety of your mouth, creating a soothing mouthfeel that hides the higher proof of the bourbon.

Finish

The finish is the deciding factor of a bourbon; is it one that warms you and grows the desire for another pour, or is it one that disappears with the spirit as the sip completes? With batch 'B521', the finish is long, sweet, and savory, while the warmth of the spirit enhances the soothing feeling between sips.



Score

I have long been a fan of Wheated Bourbons and of Larceny. Whenever I purchase a Wheated Bourbon, it comes with great expectations. Will it have the sweet breaded and cherry notes that Wheated bourbons are known for? Will the sweet honey notes marry up with the breaded notes, or will the caramel overpower the cherry notes? The fruit-forward of this expression from Larceny stood up to my expectations; however, it was missing some of the complexity and transitions as the spirit moved across my palate. Nonetheless, this expression from Larceny is a good one and one that will keep me coming back.

CIGAR REVIEWS



AGANORSA LEAF SUPREME LEAF ROTHSCHILD

by Gabriel Seamen

Images provided by Aganorsa

Brand: Aganorsa
Vitola: Rothschild 4.5 x 50
Wrapper: Nicaragua Corojo '99
Binder: Nicaragua
Filler: Nicaragua
Body: Mild to Medium
Flavor Intensity: Medium
Smoke Time: 40 min
Price: \$9.99

What Makes it Special:

The Aganorsa Leaf Supreme Leaf Rothschild is the 8th release in the line since its debut at the Tobacco Plus Expo in 2020. This cigar is produced in 20-count boxes and is the shortest format to date. “The vast majority of the vitolas released in Supreme Leaf have been between five and six inches long and 52-54 ring,” quoth Terence Reilly, “This latest vitola is a bit shorter and a bit thinner. A Rothschild is a classic size, and the blend gains a more robust flavor without a loss of balance in this format.” The 8th release is also the largest release, with 2,800 boxes of 20 being made. Now, let’s smoke!



The Smoke:

Upon first examination, the initial draw of the Aganorsa Leaf Supreme Leaf Rothschild cigar reveals a mix of leather, tannins, and subtle graham cracker hints. The scent from both the end and outer wrapping carries a gentle cocoa aroma, hinting at an interesting smoking adventure.

Once lit, the cigar presents a noticeable spiciness, especially noticeable as we progress through the covered portion at the end.

First Third:

Moving into the first third, this spiciness holds its strength, characterized by red and black pepper, with faint traces of cashews lingering in the background. Towards the end of this phase, the pepper subsides, making space for nuanced flavors of cashews, cloves, and a touch of cinnamon, amplified by a retro-hale that brings out white pepper and cinnamon, stimulating the sinuses.

Second Third:

As we move into the second third, nutty flavors become more prominent, occasionally accompanied by fleeting hints of caramel before fading away. Approaching the midpoint, the spice returns, marked by hints of birch, cinnamon, and a resurgence of red pepper.



Final Third:

In the final third, the pepper fades once again, allowing the nutty and woody aspects to take the spotlight, with leather emerging as a dominant flavor towards the end. The retro-hale provides a salty and leathery sensation, enhancing the leather taste on the palate and leading to a satisfying conclusion.

The Score:

For me, the Aganorsa Leaf Supreme Leaf Rothschild cigar offers a complex flavor journey, blending spice, nuttiness, and leather harmoniously, making it a noteworthy choice for any cigar enthusiast's collection. If this is all in your wheelhouse as it was mine, and you're looking for a shorter smoke that is still steeped in special experiences, I think you'll agree. Final Score: 95

LA PALINA WHITE LABEL FIGURADO TAA 2023

by Gabriel Seamen

Images provided by Aganorsa

Brand: La Palina

Vitola: Figurado 5.25x52

Wrapper: Ecuadorian Connecticut Seed

Binder: Nicaraguan

Filler: Nicaraguan Piloto

Smoke Time: 21 minutes

Price: \$12.50

What Makes it Special:

Released solely to shops grace with membership in the TAA, this cigar measures 5 1/4 x 52 and has a tapered foot. As for the blend, it uses an Ecuadorian Connecticut wrapper over a Nicaraguan binder and filler. La Palina is producing 1,000 boxes of 20 cigars, a total run of 20,000 sticks, each of which comes with an MSRP of \$10.50. I paid a bit more than that locally, but such is cigar pricing in 2024!



The Smoke:

My prelight aroma is hay and cedar, with a cold draw of medium to light firmness, with anise and citrus along with green grasses in the mix. There appears to be some pulling up of leaf around the nubbin, possibly shipping damage. Lighting is easy with the little nubbin provided in this vitola.



First Third:

The first puffs are of that cedar with a hint of the anise in the retro-hale. What may have appeared to be damage on the tip did not affect the draw, and all visually loose portions of the leaf disappeared after a few puffs with no detriment to the experience. I did, however, remove all the bands as the bottom-most interferes with lighting, the top with getting a good purchase for the draw, and the middle just being, well, superfluous at that point. Once you get over the hump, the first third opens up both in a very light draw and bold flavors of the anise and cedar with charred leather on the retro-hale.

Second Third:

Approaching the middle third, it's like someone turned the sound down on Flavor Town almost to muted levels. There is still the sensation of indistinct spice and greens or hay in the retro, but they are slight. Its room aroma is unintrusive, just like a cedar spill was lit a few minutes ago, but there's no smoke now, just the lingering aroma.

Final Third:

The final third burns well and produces good smoke like the rest had, but it's just a nothing-fest. Some wafting hints of cedar or old hay every once in a while, neither interesting nor particularly pronounced. Some might say it's just a Connecticut, or it's like smoking air through a straw that's not lit. This is why there aren't many Connecticut-wrapped cigars in my rotation.



The Score:

With a flashy, showy start, this TAA exclusive shows there's some brilliance to be had from the blend. However, by the midpoint, it falls as flat as the typical vitolas in the La Palina white line, which are just muted, lower-cost versions of its coveted "Goldie" blend masquerading as a daily smokeable version. As such, this one doesn't rise much above the daily level, especially with the possibility of visually appearing damaged when it isn't.

SEGOVIAS DE ESTELI MADURO TORO PB

by Chris Coulter

Images provided by Chris Coulter

Brand: Segovias De Esteli
Vitola: Toro 6x56 Box Press
Wrapper: Mexican San Adres
Binder: Nicaraguan & Mexican
Filler: Nicaraguan
Smoke Time: 21 minutes
Body: Medium
Flavor Medium - Full
Price: \$14

First Impressions

Estelí is often referred to as “El Diamante de Las Segovias,” or The Diamond of the Segovias” which is why you’ll see the diamond on the beautiful band. A golden foot band adds a bit to the visually stunning wrapper. The foot shows a well packed filler and even box press. The foot yields aromas of chocolate chips and light earthy notes.

After a straight cut of the cap, the cold draw is a very pleasant mix of cocoa, baking spices and light oak. Very pleased at this point with the cold draw, my mouth is watering.



First Third:

Toasted for approx 20 seconds, wrapper edges sealed nicely and an even light was easy to achieve. First draw was light pepper, earthy oak and leather. Dark cocoa and espresso notes came in during the 1st third and with a subtle dark cherry sweetness. Retrohale was superb, light pepper and woody; very smooth. The oily wrapper burns evenly and has an extreme toothless. The oily “tooth” stands out amongst the light grey ash that is holding up well.

Second Third:

Baking spice comes in and pepper notes intensify slightly. What's standing out most during this third is how well balanced this blend is. Nothing over powers and distinct notes are not difficult to detect. Balance and complexity like this is usually what I expect of a cigar in the 18+ range. Espresso, cocoa and leather still balancing out the smoking experience. Ashed a few draws into this third, the burn cone was symmetrical and construction has been flawless thus far.

Final Third:

Espresso with cream, leather and oak are most prevalent, with the subtle dark cherry/dried apricot notes popping in to say hello. Ash and draw have continued to be perfect, just one very minor touch-up which may be attributed to the winds picking up. Retrohale thru 2nd and final third was highly enjoyable; a little spice, espresso bean and woody notes. Smoked down to the nub and just avoiding blistering.



Score:

This cigar was a symphony of flavors, all balanced by the Maestro Garcia. The fermentation, aging process, quality of the leaf and care from every hand that touched these cigars is evident. Had I not known the price point, I would have put it in the 17-18 range easily. Find some space in your humidor for a box, they're worth it!

CRAFT BREW

IRN BRU SOUR



VAULT CITY IRON BREW SOUR

by Steven Day

Images provided by Steven Day, Vault City

Did I think I wanted an Iron Bru sour beer in January? No I absolutely did not. However lots of people did.

Firstly, I'm a Scots guy writing from just outside the UK, so I will explain. Iron Bru is, well, unexplainable. It's a 'soda', as you like to call it on that continent, so a carbonated soft drink. Its taste is very hard to explain. Think unicorn tears, haggis mist, English mens sorrow! I'm of course joking here, but it's very hard to describe. It's been said to me to be somewhere between bubble gum and cream soda, but it has an orange appearance. That's the best I can do, or dare to, before I come over all Braveheart!



Why am I telling you this? Well one of my favourite breweries, Vault City, released their Iron Brew sour (changing the official version name for copyright purposes) in January.

It's a beer that's been asked about by my customers ever since we opened the bar in August.

Firstly, Vault City are a brewery who generally make weird and wonderful beers. Think the Willy Wonkas of craft beer, but Scottish, and with no purple helpers with green hair or latex suits. Well maybe the odd one, but that's fashion these days, I'm told.

Based in Edinburgh, they started life in Dundee. As often happens in craft beer, they started with a vague idea of what they wanted to do. Sour beer seemed to be their rough idea. They did some varying styles. The issue with traditional sour beers is fermentation generally takes a number of months, if not years, to produce and even

harder to perfect. So they started to develop a style they called modern sour beer. The yeasts and bacteria in these tend to ferment much faster and predictably. That was obviously after much experimentation. In a typical vault city bottle or can, typically as much as 1/4 of that is fruit. So you're usually talking hundreds of kilos of fruit in each brew.

This process has made for some fascinating concoctions since their inception in 2018. That time has seen the original trio split with only the founding couple left, the other has since gone on to form his own brewery, Holy Goat, who typically specialise in traditional sours.



A cursory glance at Vault's top beers in this style reveals such things as a Marshmallow Smoothie Sour: Blueberry, Raspberry, Blackcurrant, the very recent Stoopid (which ended up all over my counter - I should have known if Vault called it that it would be very much along those lines). That was a strawberry, banana, coconut cream that surged when I opened the initial early cans!

But they don't stop there. They have also had a Deep Fried Mars Bar Stout. Their highest ever rated beer. A Mars bar is what a US Milky Way is known as in most parts of the world. In Scotland, someone came up with the bright idea to deep fry it in batter in one of our fish and chip shops. The idea caught fire (sadly the product didn't) and now 90% of people ask me if I lived off of them when I lived in Scotland. They seem disappointed when I tell them I've never had it! It wasn't common, just reported in the news at the time, when news came in paper form!

So why have I only been able to get this beer in January? Traditionally when most people don't have any money? It's because it's a 'hype beer'. So regardless if you don't have any money in January, if you're really into craft beer, you will find the money for it. If you don't, like all craft hype beers, it will sell out and, here's the kicker, once it's gone, it's gone. Even if they make it again, like the 4 different variations we've had of the Iron Brew, then it will be different from the last one. Truthfully, the first one, was the best of them, in my opinion. The three, yes three different ones, they released this year were good, but not as good as the original. Yeah, I know I sound like that old guy.



Why do these guys release these beers at this time of year? Well, if they didn't, then they would struggle to sell any beer. So why not sell your most demanded ones at the quietest time of year? Makes total sense.

Then there are other ones from UK breweries, such as Putty from Verdant. It was a beer that was ground breaking when first released. A NEIPA (New England IPA) that was highly hop forward. It usually gets released a bit 'green' for me, i.e before it's quite ready. It's then, as a result, to taste, a bit vegetal, reminiscent of onion and cabbage. That's not really how I want to drink my beers these days, so although I do usually buy the Putty, I don't fall over myself or worry if I miss out on it. Now a number of other UK breweries have at least caught up with this level of beer, if not surpassed it completely. So, again sounding old, it's like a lot of things, not quite as good as it used to be.

So given all of the above, I'm not quite sure why I'm still surprised to see some crazy beers in January and February. At the top of my list already for the year, we have a 13% imperial stout from Azvex of Liverpool. It was described as a peanut butter brownie stout. Lots of cinnamon, which I'm not normally a fan of, so I wasn't sure how it was going to sit with me. It started off with a big hit of cinnamon, but it was so well done and the malt so deep, that took over and it was a fantastically complex beer.

We've had similar stouts, such as the Second Breakfast, a 12% hazelnut mocha stout from Turning Point. Or the Mana, a 6% fruit sour from Azvex, described as a passionfruit, mango, guava and coconut smoothie.

So to come back to the question posed, it's ultimately to keep the lights on. With so many doing 'Dry January', those who don't have much money after Christmas and, let's not forget, the current cost of living crisis, which I still believe is continuing to bit harder than ever, they not only keep their lights on, but those of everyone else in the industry, such as bars.

So here's to those January Jewels, long may they continue.

COFFEE



GROUNDS & GOLD COFFEE SHOP

by David Jefferies

Images provided by David Jefferies

Grounds and Gold is a coffee shop off Pioneer Parkway, behind QuickTrip, in the same mall as the Fossil Creek Liquors. This interior is one of the best designs I have seen. The venue can support small private parties or is cozy enough to meet a friend for a bite and coffee. The passion behind this place was a bakery that expanded into a café. The Owner, Michael Ahern, also honors his son Micah, who lost his battle with cancer in 2016 here, keeping Micah's warrior spirit alive. You can even order a Micah's mocha. Let us go back for a moment to the atmosphere.

On the inside, it is like stepping through Narnia's closet into a new world, with raw wood raptors, comfy seating, and some secluded areas where you can have more privacy to work or have conversations. But be forewarned that this place is never empty. My favorite spot to sit is by the table by the door. But there are leather chairs by the fireplace if you need more cushion. And some elevated seating options, too; the opportunities are endless. But no matter where you sit, it truly feels warm and inviting no matter where you sit. It is like getting a warm hug every time.

Now, on to the coffee; the latte is buttery and creamy, with finishing notes of milk chocolate. It is simple and balanced. The drip coffee is also a great option. It is noticeable on the tongue, with notes of orange and no acidity; it is a great cup of coffee. This is one of a few places I will grab just a shot of espresso because I trust them that much. Even for me, getting straight espresso is a scary proposition because, most of the time, you are getting a cup of pain that would make the toughest men cry. If you are curious, they are pulling shots out of a Slayer espresso machine. And if you stay, they will put your drink in a cup and saucer. This made me feel like I was attending a formal event.

Look, this is where I'm a horrible reviewer; yes, this is a bakery as well; yes, they do more than this one thing, yes, they do cakes and all sorts of delicious pastries, but I'm a sucker for the orange cranberry scone, every time. It has me in a trance I cannot break, and I'm ok with this. The cranberry adds a liveliness to the orange, and they bounce off each other on the tongue. The bread taste it presents is like beer bread, and then you get the sweet icing on top coming in the end. With the drip coffee, the scone enhances the orange notes and mellows out the coffee.



Why should you come here? The story supports people who want to give back to their community; we love supporting local coffee shops because they have personalities that the big coffee chains lack. This place is unique in its atmosphere and in how well they do both food and coffee. Last, you should come because the experience is unlike any coffee shop we have reviewed. I may be biased, but it is one of my favorite shops. If I were to pair it with a cigar, I would have a Valkyrie, Oliva G, a Habano cigar, or something mild and easygoing, just like the coffee.

APRIL TURNER: BARISTA

by David Jefferies

Images provided by David Jefferies

April Turner, a friend, oh, and my former boss, but who's keeping track? Anyway, I truly wish from the bottom of my heart to share all the good times and fond memories of working with her, but this will have to do. April is the reason I worked for Black Rifle, where she worked from 2021 to 2023, eventually rising to be General Manager.

She was responsible for dealing with crazy people like me and those who were crazier than me, and she was in charge of giving her team a vision for the store and what it was to be. She also was responsible to the district manager for keeping everything afloat. Before Black Rifle, she worked at Starbucks on and off for four years, from 2013-2017. Coffee for April is something she loves and loves to build people around. As you will see, she is currently a wife and mom and does some humanitarian work. April is fun, shy, caring, and willing to stand up for what is right. She might be a bit of a control freak, but no one is perfect. She is a leader and a lover of all things Taylor Swift. She has helped me share my love of coffee with the public. She hopes to eventually open her own coffee shop with her Friend in Florida.



DJ: How do you usually prefer your coffee brewed?

AT: If ordering out, my preference is a black coffee from a shop's slow bar; that could be a pour-over or whatever method they use to brew.

DJ: What does your home coffee station look like?

AT: Quite sad, actually. I have a normal drip coffee maker.

DJ: What is your favorite meal?

AT: Bread and carbs....and bread.

DJ: Favorite Taylor Swift song?

AT: This is an impossible question. You will not find a single Swifty with the ability to answer this.

DJ: If you had to work outside of coffee, what would you do?

AT: Exactly what I am currently doing. I am employed by an anti-trafficking organization that helps women build healthy and sustainable lives. My dream is to combine the two passions into a sustainable social enterprise.

DJ: Would this remain a non-profit?

AT: Oh yeah, for sure, it remains a non-profit

DJ: Tell us a bit about your time at Starbucks.

AT: That was where my passion for coffee ignited. Learning about the origin and how far we've taken it. It was the warmth, both literally and figuratively, you get from gathering together in a coffee shop that sparked my desire to make it my vocation.

DJ: You have worked for several coffee shops; what stands out to you from those experiences?

AT: The importance of making each customer experience special through the excellence of service and drink making.

Not to put the cart before the horse. I learned the value of leading with integrity even when it isn't popular or the valued form of leadership.

DJ: Any lessons or words of wisdom??

AT:

- There are times when it is more important to put your team above the business and the business above the team.
- As a manager, you are likely to be the villain in someone's story. People will always have their truths and perceptions, and you may never be able to redeem that.
- Hard work doesn't always lead to being valued by your superiors. It is important to prioritize your personal needs and have a healthy work/life balance.
- Sometimes, moving up the ladder isn't worth the compromises you must make.
- Poor leadership will result in a dysfunctional business from the top down.

DJ: How is it different being a Female entrepreneur?

AT: I'm not sure I've quite entered the space to be able to answer this fully. I plan on opening one or more coffee shops of my own, and it would be interesting to see if there are more hurdles as a female. I actually expect it to be the opposite. There have been enough feminists who have paved the way in society to support women in business.

DJ: What is your favorite coffee pairing?

AT: A citrus baked good with a Kenyan roast.

DJ: Anything else you would like to share with us?

AT: I fully believe there are more dormant entrepreneurs, especially women, out there who have yet to take off due to their lack of belief in their abilities. It took me 35 years to become a mother before I began to walk with purpose in my life due to messages I absorbed as my identity. Pursuing one's dream is frightening, even paralyzing. I think we all have that in common. I remind myself that it is only failure if you don't try.



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RECIPES



SAVORY QUICHE WITH CRISPY BACON

by Ash Red

Images by Ash Red

Dive into the comforting embrace of a classic dish with a twist - Quiche with Bacon. This hearty meal combines the creamy texture of traditional Quiche with the smoky richness of bacon, creating a symphony of flavors that's sure to delight your taste buds.

Ingredients:

For the Quiche:

- 3 cups diced potatoes
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/4 cup chopped green onions
- Salt and pepper, to taste

For the Bacon:

- 6 slices of thick-cut bacon
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- A pinch of cayenne pepper (adjust to taste)



Instructions:

- 1 Preparation of Quiche: - Boil the diced potatoes until tender. Drain and mash them with heavy cream, adding salt and pepper to taste.
- 2 Mixing in the Goodness: - Fold in the shredded cheddar cheese and green onions until well combined.
- 3 Bacon Time: - Lay the bacon slices on a baking sheet. Sprinkle with brown sugar, smoked paprika, and cayenne pepper.
- 4 Crisping the Bacon: - Bake in a preheated oven at 400°F (204°C) for 15-20 minutes or until crispy.
- 5 Combining the Elements: - Crumble the crispy bacon into bits and mix into the Quiche.
- 6 Final Touches: - Transfer the Quiche to a baking dish and bake for an additional 10 minutes to meld the flavors together.
- 7 Serving: - Serve hot, garnished with extra green onions and a side of your favorite vegetables.

Enjoy your Savory Quiche with Crispy Bacon, a dish where every bite offers the creamy comfort of Quiche with a satisfying crunch of bacon, making it the perfect meal for any occasion.

PIQUANCY COCKTAIL

by Gabriel Seamen

Images provided by Gabriel Seamen

Based on a famous cocktail from a Michelin-starred Korean restaurant in Chicago, my Piquancy Cocktail brings out the citrus in the whiskey due to the powered orange drink (think of the astronauts' favorite one). The Miami, spice of the gochujang and combined smokiness will almost make you think you're drinking a smokey, mildly spicy bloody mary, but oddly without any tomato fruit added.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 oz powered orange drink
1/2oz gochujang sauce
2oz Bourbon
Lemon-lime soda



Crushed Ice

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Combine a flat tablespoon of orange-powered drink and a 1/2 oz gochujang sauce with the bourbon in the bottom of your glass and mix until combined.
- 2 Add that to the crushed ice to just under the rim
- 3 Fill to the brim with lemon lime soda.

EARTHEN FRENCH MULE

by Sharron O'Neill

Images by Sharron O'Neill



As the story goes, John Martin and Jack Morgan, both in the spirits and food industry in the 40s, struggled to sell their products - vodka and ginger beer. In a stroke of marketing genius, they decided to combine the two, thus creating the Moscow Mule. It was called Moscow Mule due to the usage of Vodka, specifically Smirnoff, provided by Rudolph Kunett, an immigrant from Russia who owned the distillery. Served in a distinctive copper mug, gaining popularity throughout the 50's and 60's, a move that not only added to the drink's allure but also helped distinguish it from other cocktails of the time.

Fast-forward a number of years, and we have now seen several variations on the mule, such as the Texas Mule, the Mexican Mule, and the Kentucky Mule. Each of these variations may simply replace the Vodka with Tequila, Rum, or Bourbon, and some may even add another liquor for flavor.

The Earthen French Mule takes the creative freedom a step further with the bold move of replacing the ginger beer with a French Sparkling Lemonade and adding the ginger notes through the muddling of the ginger and simple syrup along with the subtle notes of ginger in the turmeric.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Slice of Ginger
- 2 oz Vodka
- 2 dashes or 1/4 tsp of Turmeric
- 2 tbs of Simple Syrup
- Sparkling French Lemonade

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 In collins glass muddle ginger and syrup
- 2 Add Vodka and Turmeric
- 3 Stir
- 4 Strain over ice into a Collins Glass
- 5 Top off with Lemonade
- 6 Garnish with Dried Lemon

ORANGE BOURBON CHILI

by Dave Yancey

Images provided by Dave Yancey

INGREDIENTS

- 2 lbs of Ground Beef
- 1 White Onion
- 1 Red Bell Pepper
- 2 Orange Bell Peppers
- 5 Jalapenos
- 2 Serrano Peppers
- 1 32ounce can of diced tomatoes
- 1 32ounce can of stewed tomatoes
- 1 32ounce can of tomato sauce
- 1 cup of Orange Juice with Pulp
- 1 cup of Bourbon 80 – 90 proof
- Salt
- Black Pepper
- Chili Powder
- Cumin
- Coriander



INSTRUCTIONS

- Dice onion and Bell Peppers
- Sautee onion and bell peppers until onion is translucent
- Dice jalapeno and serrano peppers, seed if needed to reduce heat
- Brown ground beef
- Add diced tomatoes, stewed tomatoes, and tomato sauce to a 6qt min pot and bring to a simmer
- Stir in onions, bell peppers, jalapeno, and serrano peppers to pot
- Stir in ground beef
- Stir in orange juice
- Stir in bourbon
- Bring to a boil for 5 minutes
- Reduce heat and season with Salt, Black Pepper, Chili Powder, Cumin, and Coriander to taste
- Transfer to crock pot, set to high, let sit for 4 hours



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EVENTS



PREMIUM CIGAR ASSOCIATION (PCA) TRADESHOW 2024

by Tim Long (Cigar Show Tim)

Images by Tim Long (Cigar Show Tim), Tobacco Talk Media

The annual PCA (Premium Cigar Association) Tradeshow took place March 22-25, 2024, in Las Vegas, Nevada, at the Las Vegas Convention Center's North Hall. This year seemed different than the previous two years I had attended in a few key areas, however. It was nice seeing General Cigars and Altadis back exhibiting again at this year's show, but they were very much needed as well. The biggest difference in this year's tradeshow was the new venue, however. For multiple years previous to this year, the tradeshow took place at the Sands Expo Center in Las Vegas, but with construction taking place, the show was forced to find a location to carry it through this year until it relocates to New Orleans, Louisiana, in 2025.

This venue change left many media and brands/manufacturers feeling a little out of sorts. The usual PCA "vibe" was there, and the excitement of seeing each other was palpable, but the almost electric energy during the tradeshow seemed less evident. In my conversations with many brands/manufacturers, from Steve Saka of Dunbarton Tobacco & Trust to Brandon Marsh and Jess Coleman of Big Sky Cigar Company, it seemed as though the undertone of the tradeshow was an obvious transitional year. Knowing that the tradeshow was moving yet again next year, I asked a few brands if it seemed like this show was TPE (Total Product Expo) 2.0. With TPE just 7.5 weeks prior to PCA, many of the brands agreed.



The opening night party Co-sponsored by E.P. Carrillo Cigars and Crowned Heads Cigars was a great kick-off the event and many of the usual seminars and educational components of the tradeshow were well attended. From the release of the newest addition to the "Hand-Rolled" documentary spotlighting Tatuaje and the Garcia family, to a cigar pairing seminar presented and hosted by La Aurora Cigars, there was no lack of programming to attend.

This year, per usual, there were many newly released or soon-to-be-released cigars from a wide number of brands and manufacturers like Artesano Del Tobacco with their 5-year anniversary releases to Aganorsa Leaf's limited edition "Arsenio" (pictured below) release honoring Arsenio Ramos, and many more.





One area I was glad to see back this year was the BCA (Boutique Cigar Association) Pavilion, headed up by Dr. Gaby Kafie of Kafie 1901 Cigars. This pavilion featured roughly a dozen brands in the smaller and newer segment of the boutique category, like Founders Cigar Company, Kafie 1901 Cigars, Segovias de Esteli, and more. Angelo Fraboni of Founders Cigar Company commented to me that he was “...unsure of how our location was going to get much foot traffic, but as day one ends, we have nothing to complain about and have been pleasantly surprised.”

Media at this year’s tradeshow did seem to be as prevalent as in years past, but there were some clear breakdowns in communication between PCA and the security at the Convention Center regarding early access leaving many media, myself included, frustrated daily.

As the tradeshow wound down, there was an overwhelming reduction in attendance on Monday, which was a historically busy day, but there was no denying that Monday had become what half-day Tuesday was in years prior. I look forward to what next year’s tradeshow will be like in New Orleans and hope that the industry, retailers, the media, and most of all, the brands and manufacturers embrace it well.

-Tim Long (Cigar Show Tim), Tobacco Talk Media

NFG CIGAR FESTIVAL 2024

by Dave Yancey

Images by Gabe Seamen, Dave Yancey, Beagleone Photography

The NFG, “No ef’s Given,” now in its 10th year, is held each March and put on by the Underground Cigar Shop in Fort Worth, Texas. Each year, the owners, Don, Mark, and Chef, work tirelessly, bringing together 20+ cigar brands and other vendors to put on the best boutique cigar festival this country has seen. With 350+ attendees traveling from as far away as Alaska, New York, and Florida, they can meet with their favorite cigar brands and obtain cigars created for this festival only, where it is often said that once they are gone, they are gone.

The Event:

The event is a three-day event with a Chili Cook-off on Friday, a Festival along with Comedic Roast on Saturday, and then Breakfast and goodbyes on Sunday. This year, however, things did not quite go as planned. Mother Nature decided to have a say in how things would take place by bringing in a storm the Wednesday before the show and her powerful winds, powerful enough to take the large event tent down and bend the frame. That did not deter the attendees or the team. The chili cook-off took place as planned, even with the colder weather and mist. All the chefs, myself included, served our chili to the judges and awaited the results. Bryan McGee took overall, and Joeseeph Hammonds took first place for the non-traditional chili.



The Main Event:

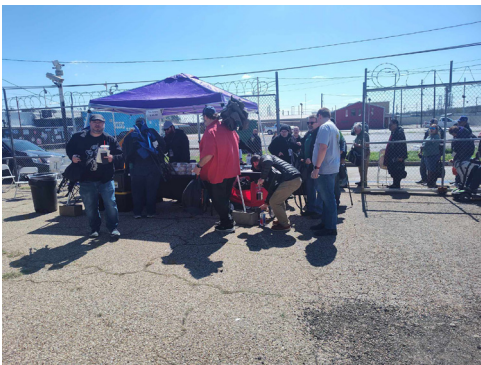
The challenges continued on the big day, the event day, where people will start lining up at the gate as early as 8 am, even though the gates generally don't open until noon. The tent vendors, scheduled to start the new tent at 6:30 am, showed up after 9:30 am, just 30 minutes before the event vendors set up our tables. The team was determined. Garnering support from the crowd to pitch in and assist the tent crew in setting the poles in place, lifting the tent, and securing it. Vendors started setting up shortly after 12, with the gates opening 30 minutes later, and the event was underway.

Cigars for Warriors had a table taking donations for all our service men and women. Luciano Cigars debuted a cigar made just for the event along with Cavalier Cigars, Rojas Cigars, Aganorsa, Rock-A-Feller, and OSOK's Edgar Hoill. Other brands such as RomaCraft, Crowned Head, Espinosa, Ezra Zion, and Warfighter brought back their best for cigar lovers to acquire. Other vendors, such as The Nubber, EZAash, and your own Leaf n Grain Society, set up tables for the cigar and drink accessories to complete the package for all the attendees.

Wrap Up:

Following the main event, Fred Rewey was inducted into the Underground/NFG Hall of Fame and immediately roasted by his colleagues. Food was provided, raffles were won, and despite all the challenges, the 2024 NFG Festival is one to remember and for the books.





ACCESSORIES



EZASH PORTABLE ASHTRAY

by Chris Coulter

Images by Chris Coulter

Super lightweight and compact design can fit and store almost anywhere.

I was first introduced to EazyAsh products in early 2023; since one came free in an event grab bag, it was a no-brainer to try it. I often travel for work, and the first trip proved its value immediately. Hotels rarely have ashtrays suitable for cigars, and being able to fold the EazyAsh into shape and set my cigar down on something that was sanitary and secure was satisfying.

Folding is a simple process, and the subsequent cigar origami is stable and of decent heft for its purpose. In windy conditions, you'll need to find a rocky or suitable weight to secure it in position, but that's a simple process. A heavier lighter will also suffice.

With a retail price of 3/\$10, it's an economical solution to an issue nearly all cigars smoked will encounter at some point. Often, retailers at a local B&M can sell below that price point due to volume sales, so ask your local shop to get some in. EazyAsh can be reached online at EazyAsh.com.

They can be custom printed with nearly any design, and since they're a small business, you'll get hands-on service and customer care.

I have found most needs for the EazyAsh have been on business trips and vacations. They're simple to toss into a suitcase, glovebox, or gear case without adding weight or volume. Disposal is easy, too; add a bit of water to ensure all embers are extinguished, and then toss them in the waste can.

Everyone can use a 3-pack!



10/10



MANY MEMBERS ONE VOICE

ABOUT US

We at Boutique Cigar Association (BCA) are proud to be a part of the cigar industry and to be able to contribute to its growth by helping small businesses develop into successful brands.

At BCA, we believe in the power of partnerships and working together. Our goal is to help you, the cigar manufacturer, achieve success and reach your goals through a collaborative effort built on dedication, expertise and a passion for your brand.

Our team has been working with premium cigar manufacturers since 2020 and we unite for the cause to fully support the people in the cigar industry and to protect the livelihoods of family-owned cigar businesses and small cigar manufacturers. Together, with unified collaboration with the Premium Cigar Association (PCA), Cigar Rights of America (CRA), and Cigar Association of America, we pledge to defend the cigar industry's freedoms and livelihood against overreaching government regulations.

www.boutiquecigarassociation.com



Twisted Pair



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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