

# LEAF N GRAIN SOCIETY



Warfighter  
Tobacco

Art of the Spirits  
The Underground  
Cigars for Warriors

Salute Wine Bar  
Edwina Brown

The Humidor  
Cigar Pairings Wine  
Celar  
Spirit Talk  
Cheese Room  
Brewery





**CATHY M. POTURNY**  
**CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER**

# LEARN HOW TO INCREASE YOUR DIGITAL PRESENCE IN 5 EASY STEPS



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# LEAF N GRAIN SOCIETY

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

Summer 2024

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

At Leaf n Grain Society, we hold a deep respect for our service men and women. Whether they have served in the past, are currently deployed or stationed stateside, or have passed on, they all deserve our utmost respect. This issue is a dedicated tribute to them. Inside this issue, you will find interviews and reviews where the people behind each are veterans, with a cover featuring Scott Jansen of Warfighter Tobacco and a story featuring them to an interview of those behind First Responders Coffee, a feature piece of Storm Boen, and Cigar for Warriors to cigar review of veteran-owned Southern Draw. Almost every story has a veteran, either behind the scenes or part of the story itself.

I am also excited to announce a new section for this issue called the “Cheese Shop,” where Hazel Joyce from New York and Isle of Man will bring a story or review of the wonders of cheese to the website and each issue.

Last but not least, we have two guest writers joining us. First off is Anthony Riccardi, known online as “The Bourbon Whiskey Library,” who joins us as he reviews an American Single Malt, and we also have Rachael Brasonvan, who has written an informative piece on the homebrew community and culture.

While this issue doesn’t include an accessory or event review, we hope you enjoy the features, pairings, and reviews. Please let us know if there is anything you would like to see in our upcoming issues.

Email us at [media@leafngrainsociety.com](mailto:media@leafngrainsociety.com)



*D. Yan*



# CIGARS FOR WARRIORS

by Dave Yancey

Images provided by Cigars for Warriors

In a world that often seems too preoccupied with the mundane, a heartfelt gesture can make all the difference. Enter “Operation Cigar for Warriors,” an initiative that goes beyond the mere act of distributing cigars to military personnel. It’s a movement that embodies respect, camaraderie, and gratitude for the sacrifices made by our brave men and women in uniform. At the helm of this noble mission is Storm Boen, a man whose dedication and passion have turned a simple idea into a life-affirming cause.

Cigar for Warriors began with a straightforward yet profound premise: to provide deployed troops and veterans with premium cigars. What started as a small-scale effort quickly gained momentum, resonating profoundly with the military and civilian communities. Under the leadership of CEO Storm Boen, the organization has distributed over a million cigars, each a token of appreciation for the immense sacrifices made by our service members.

Storm’s journey with Cigar for Warriors is a testament to what can be achieved with vision and tenacity. A veteran himself, Boen understands the hardships and isolation that come with military service. His firsthand experience fuels his passion, driving the organization’s mission to honor those who serve.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Cigar for Warriors is its wide-reaching impact. The organization has successfully distributed over 1.7 million cigars to troops stationed in some of the most challenging environments around the globe, from the scorching deserts of the Middle East to remote outposts in Afghanistan. These cigars provide a much-needed respite, a moment of normalcy amidst the chaos of war.



Moreover, Cigar for Warriors extends its reach beyond active-duty soldiers. The initiative also supports veterans, ensuring they remain connected to a community that values and respects their service. The organization has partnered with numerous veterans’ groups and events, bringing comfort and camaraderie to those who have returned home.

Cigars have long been associated with moments of reflection and celebration. For military personnel, they are more than just a luxury item; they symbolize brotherhood, shared experiences, and a chance to relax and enjoy life. Cigar for Warriors taps into this rich tradition, fostering a sense of unity and mutual support. The organization enhances moments of connection by providing cigars and helping build bonds essential for emotional well-being.

Storm’s leadership has been instrumental in transforming Cigar for Warriors from a grassroots initiative into a nationally recognized organization. His approach is hands-on and deeply personal, reflecting his genuine commitment to the cause. Boen’s ability to mobilize support from cigar manufacturers, retailers, and individual donors has been critical to the organization’s success.





Under Boen's stewardship, Cigar for Warriors has also embraced a holistic approach to supporting military personnel. The organization understands that mental health is a critical aspect of overall well-being. By providing cigars, they offer a simple yet effective way to alleviate stress and foster relaxation, contributing positively to mental health.

Cigar for Warriors has successfully bridged the gap between military and civilian communities. The organization has created a sense of shared responsibility and collective appreciation by involving a diverse network of supporters. This engagement goes beyond financial contributions; it's about fostering a culture of respect and gratitude permeating all levels of society. In a time when the sacrifices of our military personnel can often go unnoticed, Operation Cigar for Warriors stands as a powerful reminder of what it means to honor and appreciate those who serve. Through the simple act of providing cigars, the organization brings comfort, camaraderie, and a sense of normalcy to those who need it most.

Storm's leadership and the team's dedication have been the driving force behind this remarkable initiative, turning Operation Cigar for Warriors into more than just a charitable cause; it is a movement that embodies the highest values of respect, honor, and gratitude. As we continue to enjoy the freedoms safeguarded by our military, let us remember to support and appreciate the warriors who make it all possible, one cigar at a time.



# WINE CELLAR





# SALUTE WINE BAR

by Terry-Lynn Faught

Images by Terry-Lynn Faught

Owners Jill and John Lopez are lovers of wine. Having visited wineries in Napa (California) and Fredericksburg (Texas), they experienced different types of wine service. After moving to Texas, Jill realized that a particular wine bar concept she'd seen in California was something she wanted to share with Fort Worth. When looking for a location, they discovered space in the Foundry District of Fort Worth that had previously been a wine bar. It was a space that was big enough to generate some revenue but small enough that it can feel like you're just hanging out at a friend's house.

Having spent time in marketing for the funeral industry, Jill has a keen mind for working with the public. John is an active supporter and partner in Jill's vision. His background in military service (he serves as an officer in the Air Force Reserves and is employed by Lockheed) keeps him busy, but he still makes time to be present at the shop when he can.



This lovely little lounge is set up with a combination of seating types. A small sofa and a pair of semi-soft chairs surround a coffee table by the door. The side wall of windows is lined with a full-length bench seat and 2-top tables with a chair on the opposite side of each table. The center of the room has several multi-party tables set up that easily accommodate parties of 4 or 6 people. The back corner is fitted with a large padded booth that seats around six adults. This booth faces a small bar that serves as storage for effervescent wines and dessert wines, and it also has a point-of-sale system/register. Immediately inside and to the right of the door is a small conference-type room that can seat around ten people, has glass walls on two sides, and has doors that can be closed to allow for a more intimate gathering away from the noise of the main space. There is also a small patio around the corner from the front door. It is fully outside and seats approximately 12 people at its tables with its current configuration of 3 four-top tables. Sun-shading umbrellas and outdoor light strings create a cozy patio feel.



The concept utilizes a pressurized self-serve system by Wine Emotion. Salute uses this system to hold a variety of 42 wines and operates on a card system that keeps track of the size of pour and style of wine chosen. The owners take an interesting step, and in front of each bottle is a “card” that identifies the wine by name and region it comes from. This allows for the consumer to try a wine with confidence whether they have wine knowledge or not. Being able to select a smaller pour size allows the consumer to try a new wine or varietal, knowing that if it doesn’t suit their pallet, they aren’t committed to an entire glass. If the selections are enjoyed, you can go back and get a larger pour yourself. They also have a selection of “bubbly” and dessert wines available on request from behind the bar.

There is a small menu with a variety of “small bites” conceptualized with Joe Lane Catering in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. The offerings are well thought out and a lovely addition to an evening at the Lounge. The menu has a nice variety, from “meat and cheese” boards to savory bites and sweet desserts. This menu makes it possible to have a small snack with wine and conversation or a light “dinner date.”

For a venue that has only been open a couple of months, they already have interesting programming that is doing well for them. Wine tastings with speakers from specific regions or vineyards filled the room with guests, who were able to sample several offerings presented by the guest speaker. Along with notes about each wine, a larger education about the area the wine comes from is presented, adding to the guests' understanding and appreciation of the wine they are tasting. Solo live music performers have been in (the space does not allow for duos or larger). They have also generally recognized events such as Ladies Night, occasion specials on things like “National (wine type) Day,” and companion events such as Sip and Paint and a mobile golf simulator company popping up on site.

This has quickly become one of my top “GoTo” locations, mostly because of the friendly atmosphere and the exuberance that Jill exudes about her business. She is not afraid to add/remove wines from her lineup, allowing for the possibility of finding a new variety or brand to try, even if you visit them regularly. She loves what she’s doing, and it shows!



Salute Wine Bar  
212 Carroll Street  
Fort Worth, Texas  
Facebook: Salute Wine Bar  
Instagram: Salutewinebartx  
Online: Salutefortworth.com

# MESSINA HOF CHENIN BLANC

**Lepard Vineyards Limited Release 2022**

by Terry-Lynn Faught

Images by Terry-Lynn Faught

100% Chenin Blanc grapes from the High Plains of Texas

**Color:** light straw

**Nose:** lemongrass, hints of citrus

**Palate:** notes of pear, lemongrass, honeysuckle

**Body:** Light

**Acid:** Medium-high

**Finish:** Short

**Notes:** Best Served around 50 degrees Fahrenheit

Pair with delicate meats like lobster, garlic butter sauces, vegetarian dishes

This 100% Chenin Blanc wine is dry. These grapes originated in the Loire Valley of France and can be used to make several varieties of wine, depending on climate and treatment. It is grown in many places beyond the Loire Valley, particularly in the New World regions. In South Africa, it is the most widely planted varietal, believed to date back to somewhere between the 1650s and the 1680s. Here, it is historically known as “Steen”. It was initially misidentified in Australia, so tracing its history here has been difficult. It may have been introduced in 1832, but it is known to have been being grown in South Australia by 1862.

Modern DNA studies of the Chenin Blanc grape place it as an offspring of the Savagnin grape, making it “siblings” with Sauvignon Blanc and Trousseau. It is also related to Cabernet Sauvignon in an “aunt/uncle” way. It has often been confused for other grapes that are NOT closely genetically related since there are other grapes with similar characteristics. Also, it has been used to cross with other grapes to create new varietals such as Balzac Blanc and Weldra.

Its fairly neutral palate provides a good base for winemakers to use varied treatments to express terroir. It is found in several styles, from dry white wine expression to sparkling and dessert wines. This allows for a great deal of versatility on the table with meals. Brightly acidic styles cut through rich, fatty foods, while softer versions stand well with the turkey and stuffing, even sweet potatoes, on a Thanksgiving table. (Cranberry sauce by itself doesn’t usually pair well as the tartness of the wine and the tartness of the berries can be too much).

The climate in a region largely dictates whether a wine will be sweet or dry, while the soil influences the overall style (limestone-based soils encourage sharp acidity, calcareous clay produces wine with both acidity and weight, and schist can lead to early ripening). These factors work with things such as seasonal weather pattern variation and the occurrence of Noble Rot. While they are susceptible to damage from Spring frost, powdery mildew, and fungal disease that affects the vine's wood structures, these can all be managed with integrated pest management and careful rootstock selection.







Messina Hof Winery was founded in 1977 with the purpose of merging Old World hospitality and New World ambition—focusing on the potential of Texas grapes. Now, it is being helmed by the second generation of Paul Mitchell and Karen Bonarrigo. Paul Mitchell came into leadership after serving as an officer in the Marine Corps. With his experience gained while growing up in the vineyard, he was well prepared for the next steps for Messina Hof. Over the past 40 years, Messina Hof has established itself as a pioneer in the wine industry, a leader in the Texas wine industry.

Messina Hof Chenin Blanc is a bright and crisp wine that is best enjoyed with food. It pairs well with delicate meats like lobster, garlic butter sauces, and vegetarian dishes. However, it's not recommended to pair it with heavily spiced foods, as the high acidity may overpower the flavors.



# WARFIGHTER TOBACCO CO.

by Ash Red

Images provided by Warfighter

Warfighter Tobacco Company, LLC. is owned and operated by combat veterans. These men do not consider themselves heroes; however, they place themselves in hostile fire and imminent danger during their time of service. The men who own Warfighter consider themselves “lucky enough to get to know and serve with a bunch of ass-kickers who are heroes.” If you hear their stories, you will call them heroes, but these humble men want to focus on others. What is a warfighter? “We are Service Members, Veterans, Firefighters, Police Officers, First Responders, and anyone who believes in selflessly protecting others from the cold, hard world. “We are the Sheepdogs who protect the herd from the big bad wolf. We are a fraternity of men and women who are willing to lay it all down for an idea.”

“Warfighting is tough work, and throughout history, at the end of the mission, when one of our members goes down, or it is time to celebrate victory, the warfighter has done so with a cigar in hand. It is in that spirit that the Warfighter Tobacco Company was born.”

You might ask yourself, who are these combat veterans who came up with the idea over a few whiskeys in Las Vegas and later founded Warfighter Tobacco Company in 2016. Let me introduce you.



*Jon Simons*



*Scott Jansen*

**Scott Jansen**, “El Presidente” of the Warfighter Tobacco Company, the man who made the suggestion of becoming involved in a cigar business, began his military career in the NE Army National Guard as an infantryman in 1998. He then went on active duty with the “Screaming Eagles,” 101st Airborne Division, where he served two tours in Iraq. During his stint with the Army, Scott was an M240 gunner, Team Leader, Squad Leader, Sniper, Sniper Team Leader, and SOTIC instructor.

**Jon Simons**, “Vice President”, also served as an infantryman in the United States Army in 101st Airborne Division where he served as an M240 gunner. Jon and Scott served together in Iraq.

**Chris Ferdico**, “Founder,” this Lieutenant Colonel, served in the Army and National Guard for 23 years. Chris also served with the 101st Airborne Division during the invasion of Iraq in the 1st Armored Division and the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade.

**Bryan Bettey**, “Chief Incendiary Officer”, a retired Lieutenant Colonel who currently serves as an intelligence analyst with the Department of Homeland Security. Bryan served nearly 30 years with the U.S. Army, Brayn had two combat deployments in Iraq. He also served in the 4th ID and the 67th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade.





*Jon Simons*

While serving, like many veterans, they all developed a love of cigars. To a person in uniform, smoking a cigar in the field brings a sense of camaraderie, celebration, memories of home, and reflections, and is also a way of honoring the Fallen.

As you can see, these combat veterans have a strong military pedigree; however, when it came to the cigar industry, they had some learning to do. What they lacked in cigar industry experience, they more than made up for with discipline, dedication, determination, and drive to begin their veteran-owned business. Capitalizing on their military training, they utilized the five paragraphs of Operational order: Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration / Logistics/ Command, and Signal. The first couple of months proved to be difficult; they quickly learned there was a lot more to cigars than just smoking them.

They set up headquarters in Nebraska and began their cigar journey as owners by doing a lot of market research. Thousands of cigars were smoked, allowing them the opportunity to learn the leaves, wrappers, tasting notes, and strength. With this information, they created a list of base blends they wanted for their cigars and began the process of developing their first cigars.

The team launched it at a benefit for veterans hosted by Cigarz Lounge In Lincoln, Nebraska.

Early on in the process, the team decided to be strategic about how they launched their brand. They decided to focus on online sales, building a customer base online, which would give them some sales figures to back up their push into brick-and-mortar down the road. Warfighter showed success with their sales online and quickly outgrew the original facility. Gaining some knowledge and building off their blend research, the next step was for them to go straight to the factory and meet with the master blenders. In March 2020, Twenty-four hours before the world shut down for COVID, the warfighters went to visit Tabacaleras Carreras, the factory that now rolls their cigars. Esteban Carrera and Gonzalo Puentes shared their knowledge and skills, and the warfighters learned from the men who were masters at creating and blending cigars. At the factory, they learned the entire process from seed to cigar. They were able to inspect the bales and see the quality of the tobacco they were buying firsthand. The experience was crucial to bringing Warfighter to the next level.

As the world and Brick & Mortar business shut down during the pandemic Warfighter was able to utilize their online business to keep selling cigars.

Another strategic decision that they discussed was to move their headquarters to either Florida or Texas because of the tobacco taxes in those states. Seeking advice from other veteran-owned companies such as Black Rifle Coffee Company. The headquarters moved to San Antonio, Texas, in 2019. This move also enabled them to help their own. San Antonio has four military bases and is the home of many veterans. Every decision, even the wrong ones, has impacted the Warfighter Tobacco Company. However, they have learned from them all and never made the same mistake twice. The biggest learning curve that they experienced was understanding the production timeline of the cigars, boxes, and bands.



One might ask how owning a cigar company and military are the same. One similarity is the attention to detail. Owners must pay attention to quality control, including inspection of the band and boxes. If owners are not paying attention, it can snowball and have a tremendous impact on the company. Another tactic that is used is the Planning Process Operation Order. This is even used when attending their events. In the military some soldiers will learn from the expert and then spread the knowledge that they obtained. This is done when they teach their employees the process of how tobacco is created and even teach the consumers. They know that they are constantly learning and are infants in this business. The Warfighter Warranty is an example of military soldiers. When a soldier makes a mistake, they take responsibility. Producing a handmade product that nature has created can sometimes result in defective products. The Warfighter Warranty states, "If, for any reason other than preference, you do not have a positive experience with any of our sticks, let us know, and we will replace it." They would like for you to take a picture so they can see and correct the issue.

What does the future hold for this veteran-owned company? They are hoping to release two new cigars within the year. Also look for new bands and a makeover on their boxes.



*Jon & Scott*



*Jon Simons*

Warfighter Tobacco Company was created by veterans for veterans. This is why charity is essential to them personally and as a business. They have a cigar called the Heroes Sports Cigars; a dollar from that particular cigar will be donated to a charity like Gold Star Families or directly to a veteran in time of need. They have also taken veterans on hunting or fishing trips. During these weekend trips, they will share their cigars with veterans and have meaningful conversations around the campfire. Through the leaf, these men are able to break down barriers and open themselves up. There are many different activities that these men do to reach out to their community of veterans.

The Warfighters love the cigar industry and are honored to be a small part of this community, especially when reaching out to veterans. Warfighter Tobacco brings veterans together and builds lasting relationships. To them, there is so much more that goes into their company besides smoking cigars with their community; it is about building relationships.

*Story continues on page 19*





# BARMEN

HONORED HERITAGE 1873 INSPIRING LEGACY

## BOURBON

AN EXPERT BLEND OF  
STRAIGHT BOURBON WHISKEYS

SAVOR NOTES OF CARAMEL & VANILLA, *and*  
FLAVORS OF GRILLED PEACH & CHOCOLATE,  
*with* A FINISH OF CINNAMON & GINGER SPICE.



## Warfighter Cigars:

### WARFIGHTER NIGHT SHIFT

“We own the night” has become the motto of those Warfighters, operators, first responders, and the rest of those unsung Americans who work the night shift to keep America running smoothly while the rest of us sleep. Offered in 6x50, this medium-bodied cigar utilizes an Ecuadorian Habano Oscuro wrapper, an Indonesian binder, and Nicaraguan long filler tobaccos. The resulting smoke provides contrasting notes of pepper, leather, citrus, and fruits. A small band of Candela circles the cap as a subtle nod to the glorious green hue that emanates from the advanced infrared night vision optics used so effectively in the War on Terror.

### VICTORY 4TH EDITION CIGARS

This Victory cigar is Warfighter Tobacco’s fourth edition of the Victory Cigar. Each production run is done in a small batch to maximize flavor and feel. The 4th Edition is a closed-foot cigar with a torpedo cap. It has a Brazilian Mata Fina wrapper with Nicaraguan fillers. This cigar changes flavor a couple of times while you smoke it. It is available only in 6x54 closed-foot torpedos and is in very limited production. So, if you have to celebrate a Victory with a premium cigar, the Victory cigar is the best we have to offer.



### 5.56 MM FIELD CONNECTICUT SHADE CIGAR

Starts spicy but finishes smooth. Hints of spice, leather, woodsy. Spice may linger on the tip of the tongue like a good salsa. Pleasant retro-hale with spice.

Handmade in Nicaragua

Wrapper: Connecticut Shade (Honduras)

Binder: Habano (Nicaragua)

Filler: Habano (Ometepe, Nicaragua) Colombia

Habano (Condega, Nicaragua)

### 5.56 MM GARRISON COROJO CIGAR

A creamy beginning which settles into a spice that is more typical of a Nicaraguan Corojo wrapper with a Habano blend. Notes of toasted oak and leather arise while still maintaining a comfortable spice. Towards the end of the cigar, these flavors evolve into a creamy cocoa, which soon becomes the prevalent flavor while the spice and toasted oak take the backseat.

Handmade in Esteli, Nicaragua.

Wrapper: Corojo (Nicaragua)

Binder: Habano (Nicaragua)

Filler: Habano (Jamastran, Honduras)

Habano (Jalapa, Nicaragua)

Ligero Habano (Estelí, Nicaragua)



### 7.62 MM FIELD SUMATRA CIGAR

A very consistent smoke throughout. Floral notes. Some leather and earth tones don't overpower. Hints of burnt marshmallow/sugar give a pleasant sweetness. Very pleasant retro-hale. Good smoke any time of day.

Handmade in Nicaragua

Wrapper: Sumatra (Indonesia)

Binder: Habano (Nicaragua)

Filler: Habano (Estelí, Nicaragua)  
Habano (Condega, Nicaragua)  
Dominican Republic



### 7.62 MM GARRISON ROSADO CIGAR

Hints of spice to start. Smokes stronger than Field with Habano spice, but not overpowering. Woodsy and floral notes. Some coffee hints throughout.

Hand made in Estelí, Nicaragua

Wrapper: Habano Rosado (Nicaragua)

Binder: Habano (Nicaragua)

Filler: Habano (Jalapa, Nicaragua)  
Habano (Ometepe, Nicaragua)  
Habano (Estelí, Nicaragua)



### .50 CAL FIELD MADURO CIGAR

A Traditional Box of 20 Cigars. Every box in the set has a different quote from a famous Warfighter on the bottom--in case you collect stuff like that. Bolder than the rest of the field. Has spice, but also hints of coffee and cocoa. Finishes milder on the palate than it starts, with more leather and wood.

Handmade in Esteli, Nicaragua.

Wrapper: Habano Maduro (Nicaragua)

Binder: Habano (Nicaragua)

Filler: Habano (Ometepe, Nicaragua)  
Habana (Jalapa, Nicaragua) Colombia

### .50 CAL GARRISON OSCURO MADURO CIGAR

A dark and bold "double" or "black" Maduro. Strong leather and earth tones are complimented by spice and pepper. Can pick up some sweetness, but subtler than field. Despite its strength, it has a buttery note.

Handmade in Esteli, Nicaragua

Wrapper: Habano Oscuro Maduro (Honduras)

Binder: Connecticut (Honduras)

Filler: Habano (Ometepe, Nicaragua)  
Habano (Estelí, Nicaragua)  
Habano Ligero (Condega, Nicaragua)

## MINUTEMEN 4X44 5 - PACK

The Minutemen is the name of the cigar's size. The Minutemen is 4" in length and has a 44-ring gauge. They come in a five-pack only. Select the blend you would like.

The Mega Bundle is a 5-pack of each blend, 30 cigars in total.

In the American tradition, the Minuteman was a civilian member of the colonial militia—prepared to defend Freedom and Liberty on a moment's notice. During the Cold War, a new "Minuteman"—a three-stage intercontinental ballistic missile—became America's new and significantly more effective deterrent of tyranny. Ready when you are, but with the knowledge that you may only have a moment to enjoy a quality cigar. Don't go without—instead, be ready for that glorious moment.

Handmade in Esteli, Nicaragua



## WARFIGHTER DUMPSTER FIRE CIGAR

The Warfighter Dumpster Fire Cigar is our version of a mixed filler cigar. We use the trimmings from our core line of cigars and add a few long filler leaves into the cigar to improve construction and burn. This cigar is a medium-bodied cigar with an array of flavors. Because of the robust mixture of tobaccos, the exact flavor profile will vary slightly. Made to be a more cost-effective smoke, the Dumpster Fire is a good choice for an EDS (everyday smoke). Designed and developed during 2020, we wanted to capture the essence of that year. In true 2020 fashion, production, shipping, and importing of these were delayed, and we did not receive them until 2021.

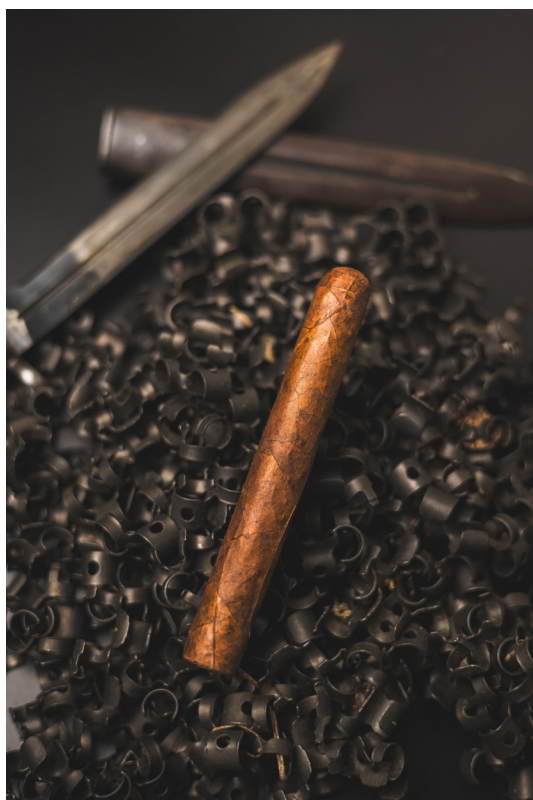
Overview

6X50

Habano wrapper

Mixed filler with long-leaf tobacco

Hand Made in Esteli, Nicaragua







## Did you know Warfighter Addition:

Their Logo is not a portrait of Jon! It is the typical post 9-11 soldier look. The soldiers had gnarly beards, wore oakleys and the “bump” helmet.

The cigars can be found in Spec’s, which was one of their first accounts. The boys had a background in retail. Specs loved their story and the fact that they put UPC codes on their cigars.

These men believed in their business so much that they did not take a paycheck for two years. Jon even lived in an RV behind the shop for that time. He did love the commute to work, 15 steps.

Scott owned a gun store in Nebraska and sold it to focus on the cigar business. Jon worked at the store.

All of their employees have been veterans.

Freedom Fighters is a weekly podcast that Scott and Jon produce weekly.

They have the coolest swag and merchandise available on their website!

<https://www.warfightertobacco.com/>

IG: warfighertobacco



*Thank you so much to Jon Simons for allowing us to take the time to sit down with Leaf n Grain Society for this interview. As the daughter of a man who served his country for over 20 years, I thank all of you for your service. I also appreciate the amazing work that you do for our veterans and their families.*

# CIGAR PAIRINGS





# WEST TAMPA ATTIC & KILKERRAN 8

by Joe Gulino

Images provided by Joe Gulino

**Brand:** West Tampa Tobacco

**Factory:** Germendia Cigar Company in Estelí, Nicaragua

**Vitola:** 6x54 Toro

**Filler:** Condega Viso, Estelí Viso, Estelí Ligero

**Wrapper:** Mexican San Andres Maduro

**Binder:** Nicaraguan Condega

**Body:** Medium to Full Boldness

**Flavor:** Medium to Full Intensity

**Price:** \$16

## The Cigar

My job here is neither to sell you on a cigar or a whisk(e)y; rather, my goal as an enthusiast writer is to bring attention to some great smokes and drams when I find them. I'm a hard-working blue-collar worker, just like you, deserving of a special treat or escape from the stresses of work and life challenges we all face daily. Recently, for Father's Day, I decided to pick up the new release of West Tampa's Attic Series called 'Attic,' and I was blown away by how slow-burning and full-flavored the cigar is.

Blended by West Tampa Tobacco owner Rick Rodriguez, the "Attic Series will be an ongoing project that will allow Rick to take you on a journey through his life by delivering blends that he has kept locked away in his 'Attic' for nearly 30 years." Between the Red, Black, and White label West Tampa Cigars, meeting and learning from Rick Rodriguez at a Norwood Royal Cigars event here in Chicago, and now this 'Attic' cigar, I must say I have become a huge fan of Rick's blends. Of course, not everyone's palate is the same, but in my humble opinion, these blends will check many boxes for many different types of cigar lovers. Read on to learn why.

## The Whisky

Do not mistake that Campbeltown funkiness for Islay smokiness. Glengyle Distillery's Kilkerran 8 Cask Strength Sherry Cask expression is a banger, just like the 'Attic' cigar. This bottle, in my and many other's humble opinion, due to its limited availability on the shelves, is a diamond in the rough. At 57.4% ABV, this beautiful and complex whisky is the ultimate Campbeltown expression.

**Nose:** Big musty and rusty metallic Campbeltown funk, brown sugar glazed plums, over sharp cantaloupe, and roasted cinnamon glazed almonds on the finish.

**Palate:** Big Campbeltown funk spice over dark chocolate-covered sherry-infused plums.

**Finish:** Dark and funky raspberry spice that lingers and lingers on the palate.



## Visual / Pre-light Draw

The nice dark brown Maduro wrapper is toothy and rough to the touch, with very minimal oiliness to it. The cigar literally looks old, as if you found it in a dusty attic. The gray and gold trim band is simple, displaying Attic Series in gold over Attic in white. It has a cool secondary foot band displaying a traditional cigar roller's chaveta knife leaning against a cigar roller chair. The band also has a QR code to scan "for an all-access pass into the crazy life and times of Rick Rodriguez."

There are notes of light chocolate shavings over hay on the side sniff, with bold and moist eucalyptus hay notes over light cocoa on the dry foot odor. There is no spice on the palate when prepping the head for a nice Colibri V-cut. Then, there is a very bold chocolate note over some subtle floral notes on the dry draw.

## First Third

After a deserving slow soft flame lighting of the cigar, we get a bold, moist, and sweet chocolate cake note on the foot smoke odor. Immediately, we get full-on toasted baseball mitt leatheriness on the first cocoa puff of the cigar. A nice transition to peanut butter creaminess on the foot smoke odor. Then, a nice transition to bold oats and mocha on the palate. This is a very slow, even-burning, high-volume, and full-flavored cigar. Its smoke input coats the entire palate with an extremely smooth delivery on its perfectly tightened draw. We get a nice Italian coffee roast flavor on the retro-hale, with the perfect and quick little leathery kiss of baking spice on the finish. I absolutely love this retro-hale; my favorite part of this first third, without a doubt.

**Cigar to whiskey:** We get sweet candylike strawberry cream over spicy chocolate covered strawberry notes on the finish. This part of the pairing is like being at a strawberry festival, and I love it.

Very delicious, elegant, fruity, and sweet at the same time.



## Second Third

As that perfect and lengthy ash falls off with dignity, the cigar is noticeably creamier, and the draw opens up a bit, delivering its complex leathery and chocolatey tobacco notes beautifully to the palate. The retro-hale is a bit spicier with bolder leatheriness and now nuttiness. This second third reminds me of my favorite Dunkaccino all day: half hot chocolate, half coffee, blended to perfection, and super enjoyable. We get creamy, delicious dark chocolate notes on the foot smoke odor now, still with a very slow, even burn and perfect ash.

This cigar is easily one of my favorites by far!

**Whisky to cigar:** The sweet and musty sherry notes of the whisky turn to dark Italian roasted coffee by the cigar's awesome tobaccos, absolutely delectable, and worth repeating, over and over, with a nice spicy and complex marzipan infused finish.



## Final Third

Time to tap off that lengthy perfect ash and continue this trip to the chocolate factory smoke. The foot smoke odor has become creamier with lighter hints of milk chocolate. The retro-hale has nice spice over that roasted dark Italian coffee note on the finish. Those nutty and leathery tobacco notes start to dominate the experience, with nice hints of coffee beans on the finish. This is truly a cigar for chocolate and coffee lovers alike. I nubbed it and absolutely love it!

**Cigar smoked whisky:** Smoked creamy vanilla, candylke, and spicy notes explode on the palate, with that sherried Campbelton funk on the finish. This is the most complex cigar smoked whisky I have experienced to date! This part of the pairing is definitely an unexpected but perfect twist of fate.

Treat yourself right and get on this perfectly balanced, diamond in the rough pairing.

Cheers Leaf n' Grain!



# EDWINA BROWN

by Ash Red

Images courtesy of Facebook

Edwina Brown is a former professional basketball player who made significant contributions to the WNBA. Born on September 1, 1978, in Dallas, Texas, she had an illustrious college career at the University of Texas, where she was a standout player and earned numerous accolades, including being named an All-American.

In 2000, the Detroit Shock selected Edwina as the third overall pick in the WNBA Draft. She played for several teams throughout her career, showcasing her versatility and leadership on the court. After retiring from professional basketball, Edwina transitioned into coaching, where she continued to influence the sport by mentoring and developing young talent.

In addition to her basketball achievements, Edwina has ventured into entrepreneurship. She is the owner of a cigar lounge, combining her passion for cigars with her business acumen. Her diverse career path highlights her determination, adaptability, and ability to excel in various fields.

**Red:** When did you begin your cigar journey?

**EB:** In 2017, I took what I thought would be a year off away from coaching to travel, spend time with family, and to try “new things”. One of those “new things” consisted of smoking my first cigar. I was invited out to a cigar lounge to meet and hang with an old colleague, that one time meeting turned into weekly meetings at various cigar shops. My first cigar was a Java Red recommended as a good “beginner cigar”.

**Red:** What made you want to open your own cigar lounge?

**EB:** It sort of fell in my lap. I attended a local cigar event where my old colleague was scheduled to emcee the event, and at that event, a conversation was had with the then-owner regarding their current struggles with the cigar lounge. That conversation turned into an opportunity for me to mentor the business owner on the situation, and then it turned into a business opportunity that I did not see coming. My passion for cigars was growing at that time and when the opportunity presented itself, I grabbed ahold of it and never looked back.



**Red:** When you opened Blowin' Smoke Cigar Lounge, what were your goals for the lounge?

**EB:** One of the goals of Blowin' Smoke was to create a culture that was inviting to everyone in the community from all demographics and backgrounds. We wanted to create a lounge that felt like home away from home. We wanted to have great cigar options, a variety of events that would keep the community engaged, and to increase the marketing footprint on social media. Another goal was in keeping the humidor stocked with a wide variety of cigars, not only with some of your flagship companies but also introducing our community to new boutique companies that were also trying to find their footing in this industry.

**Red:** How would you describe your lounge?

**EB:** I would describe Blowin' Smoke as a cigar lounge that leans heavily on boutique offerings and is a BYOB establishment. We have a wide lineup of events ranging from cigar Cut & Lights with our manufacturing partners to live Performances, Educational Seminars, and Cigar Festivals. One of our staple events that we do every single Tuesday is our Karaoke Tuesday. We have been doing this event consistently for more than three years. This event was a shot in the dark on one of our slowest days following the pandemic, and it has now turned into a highlight for our community.

**Red:** What challenges have you faced in the cigar industry?

**EB:** One of the hardest challenges I think every small business faced was surviving The Pandemic. I don't think anyone was prepared, but it revealed the importance of having an e-commerce platform for our business. We also moved locations a year after the height of The Pandemic. We inherited a location that wasn't particularly set up for a cigar shop; one of the biggest problems was the community air space above the ceiling tile that would travel throughout several businesses. And quite frankly, we grew out of that location within the first three years. We performed a complete renovation at our current location in Lancaster, TX, and that move took a lot out of us, cutting into our working capital. We spent way more than we budgeted for, and the build-out took twice as long as expected.

**Red:** What has been your most rewarding accomplishment?

**EB:** My most rewarding accomplishment is survival. Surviving a pandemic that took many long-standing businesses to its end. Surviving a move from one city to another, not knowing if we would retain any of our loyal customers. Surviving a complete "build-out" and a humidor upgrade would measure to be risky at 3 times the size, especially at such a young age in business.

**Red:** What advice would you give others wanting to open their own lounge?

**EB:** Do proper research prior to signing your lease agreement. Schedule meetings with current lounge owners and ask the hard questions even if they may return information that may be discouraging. Stay connected to other lounge owners because you will need to lean on them at some point down the road. Find an Owner's Alliance that you can trust that will not look at your company as competition and who's willing to share inside information regarding direct accounts and possible deals. Lastly, stay connected to the community. Find out what they like to smoke and what they like to do, and create engagement opportunities for them every month.

**Red:** The Cigar community is very generous; what organizations do you support?

**EB:** We have focused most of our efforts on building the relationship with our manufacturing partners. I have put a great deal of effort into attending their events in our area and outside of our area. 9. What do you enjoy about smoking cigars? What I love most about smoking cigars is the relaxation and conversations. I feel that I think better and dream freely over a good cigar. And the conversations are priceless. The people you meet inside a cigar shop are some of the most diverse groups of individuals who have all gathered over a commonality: A Cigar, the great equalizer!!!





**Red:** What are some of your favorite pairings?

**EB:** Honestly, I could pair anything except vodka with a cigar. Vodka is not really my thing, if I'm going to drink clear it would be tequila silver, but I prefer reposado. A good Old Fashion or a pinch of Bourbon are my preferences, something that will bring out the sweetness of the tobacco inside that particular cigar.

**Red:** How do you find the balance between your business and being a mother?

**EB:** Well, I'm not a mother; although I feel as if I have mothered hundreds of kids, I don't have any kids of my own. The toughest balance for me at this point is trying to carve out time to give to other endeavors outside of the cigar lounge. Most of my other businesses and non-profits have taken a backseat, but in 2024, my goal is for all of this to change. I must pay attention to these other irons in the fire to keep them just as relevant and life-changing to those that they are meant to bless!



# HEMINGWAY SIGNATURE & MANHATTAN

by Dave Yancey

Images by David Yancey

**Brand:** Fuente Hemingway Signature

**Vitola:** Grand Corona Perfecto 6x47

**Filler:** Dominican

**Wrapper:** Cameroon

**Binder:** Dominican

**Body:** Medium

**Flavor:** Medium

**Price:** \$11

## What Makes it Special:

The Hemingway cigar line has long been one of my favorites from Arturo Fuente, with the Hemingway Signature having that perfect combination of ring gauge and size. The Hemingway line itself is steeped in history and tradition. Its origins trace back to the early 1980s when Carlos Fuente Sr. sought to revive the nearly forgotten art of crafting Perfecto-shaped cigars, a shape that was popular in the early 20th century but had faded to almost forgotten primarily because of the skill required to roll this vitola. Named after the legendary author and known cigar aficionado Ernest Hemingway, the Hemingway series evokes a sense of timeless elegance and cultural heritage, much like Hemingway's literary works.

Ernest Hemingway is considered one of the great authors known for his distinctive writing style, characterized by economy and understatement, which has influenced countless writers and established a new direction for modern prose. His experiences as an ambulance driver in World War I and a correspondent during the Spanish Civil War and World War II deeply influenced his work, imbuing it with themes of courage, stoicism, and the human condition. Hemingway's adventurous life, including his time in Paris among the "Lost Generation," safaris in Africa, and fishing expeditions in the Caribbean, enriched his narratives with authentic, vivid detail and an unparalleled sense of realism.

## Visual/Prelight Draw:

The subtle oils of the wrapper and pail veins of the Signature are a testament to the quality on which Fuente has built its reputation. The aroma of rawhide leather and old forest musk combined with a cold draw presenting cocoa and white pepper creates anticipation for the initial light and draw.



## First Third:

Choosing a v-cut for this experience gave me the right amount of smoke for a medium-bodied experience in terms of viscosity and mouthfeel. The tapered tip lit easily, bringing a nice white cone of ash. Notes of rawhide leather, cocoa, and a dusty trail with hints of musk presented themselves as the smoke progressed through the first third.

## Cigar to Whiskey:

The earthy notes from the Vermouth's wormwood are slightly elevated, creating a perfect balance with the cigar.

## Second Third:

In the second third, a slight touchup on the canoeing was required; however, this was due to a user error. The cone remained well-formed throughout the second third, with a solid, consistent burn at the perfect temperature. The medium to full boldness of the flavors remained consistent into and through the second third.

## Whiskey to Cigar:

The Manhattan subdued the musk when transitioning from the drink to the cigar while maintaining the perfect balance of a pairing.

## Final Third:

The final third and finish of the pairing remained as strong as what preceded this point. With consistent notes, burn, ash, and cone, the pairing from cigar to drink and drink to cigar was perfectly balanced, creating a pleasant experience.

## Final Thoughts:

While I tend to prefer stronger transitions between each third of a boutique cigar, there is something to be said for cigars that maintain their intense flavors throughout the entire smoke.

When it comes to pairings, you will typically experience a complimentary or contrasting pairing. On rare occasions, you'll find the perfect marriage of flavors between the cigar and the drink, creating a perfectly balanced pairing. I chose a Manhattan for this pairing, hoping for the perfect balance between the cocktail's vermouth and the Dominican tobacco. The Rye provides a nice balance with the Cameroon wrapper, allowing the Vermouth and Dominican tobacco to come together, displaying their respective earthy notes, creating a perfectly balanced pairing.





# SPIRIT TALK

...her got L. J. ...  
...retired badly ...  
...died at night ...  
...told me he ...  
...died — as I ask ...  
...member me to you when ...  
...warlet died. Have you ...  
...of the German soldiers who ...  
...off and asked the Irish ...  
...to the rear. On the ...  
...off the German's head but ...  
...ignorant of the fact. On ...  
...ad, "What's the good of ...  
...with his head shot ...  
...head, is it?" says "Nunk". He ...  
...his feet? ...  
...L. J. ...  
...soon be up and ...  
...appreciate the ...  
...& ...



# 10TH MOUNTAIN

## American Single Malt Whiskey

by Anthony Riccardi

Images by Anthony Riccardi

**Mash Bill:** 100% Malted Barley

**Age:** 2 Years in New American Oak

**Batch:** 02

**Proof:** 90

**Char:** Level 4

**Location:** Vail, Colorado

**Price:** \$79.99

“The patriotic men of the 10th brought diversity, courage, and hope to the Rocky Mountains when they arrived in the 1940s to train just a few miles south of what is now Vail. They were part of the greatest generation of men, wanting to make each day count and each day better than the last. The mentality they had was strong after being shaped from the rigors of mountain warfare, their egos humble.” – 10th Mountain website.



Colorado's altitude, climate, and barometric pressure play a huge part in aging whiskey. Due to these natural conditions, whiskey expands and contracts in and out of each stave in a barrel at a slightly more rapid pace. This ultimately affects the color and the flavor. Even after only two years in New American oak with a #4 char level, this Single Malt is quite complex and what I can only describe as 'refreshing.'

The Nose presents bright fruits, vanilla beans, and lighter floral notes. The Palate compliments the nose quite nicely, with some extra emphasis on those bright fruits, which turn to a darker tone with a touch of cocoa notes. The medium viscosity coats the mouth and brings some white pepper and baking spices to the Finish while still remaining refreshing.

I decided to pair this easy sipper with something a little bolder to accent the flavors. I went with the Cohiba Nicaragua. Peppery and earthy tones from the cigar bring forth more of the underlying fruit and cocoa while balancing the entire experience.

10th Mountain American Single Malt is decorated with a few awards including the Winner of the Key West Spirits Competition where they won Best in Show. Also, a high honor and recipient of Double Platinum in the Ascot Awards.

# ART OF THE SPIRITS

## RICHARD PAUL

by Dave Yancey

Images by Art of the Spirits

In the picturesque landscape of Colorado, Art of the Spirits Distillery stands as a beacon of excellence and community spirit. Under the leadership of Richard Paul, this boutique distillery has carved out a unique niche, blending exceptional craftsmanship with a deep-seated commitment to supporting veterans, first responders, artists, and the art of small-batch production.

Richard Paul's vision for Art of the Spirits was never about just making whiskey. It was about creating a unique space where the art of distilling and community engagement converge. With a background that diverges from the traditional distiller's lineage, Paul brought a fresh perspective to the industry, honing in on the intricate details that elevate a distillery from good to extraordinary. His meticulous method ensures that every batch produced is a testament to quality and passion.

Its unwavering commitment to veterans and first responders is at the core of Art of the Spirits. Recognizing the sacrifices made by these courageous individuals, Paul has instilled a culture of gratitude and honor within his distillery. Special events, fundraisers, and dedicated product lines raise awareness and funds for veteran and first responder organizations. This commitment extends beyond financial contributions; it is about fostering a supportive community where these heroes are celebrated and given the recognition they deserve.

Equally noteworthy is Richard's commitment to work with world-renowned artists Danial James and David Uhl, both of Golden, Colorado. In a unique and mutually beneficial relationship, Paul integrated their art into every aspect of his business. Each bottle of whiskey is a canvas adorned with original artwork from these local talents. Providing another platform to showcase their work, it is a brilliant fusion of visual and liquid art, transforming each bottle into a collector's item and a conversation starter.



However, the essence of Art of the Spirits lies in its unwavering commitment to small-batch production. In an era where mass production often dilutes quality, Paul has remained steadfast in his dedication to the craft of distilling. Each batch is carefully crafted, ensuring every bottle that leaves the distillery is a masterpiece of flavor and complexity. This dedication to small-batch production ensures that the unique characteristics of each batch are preserved and celebrated, a fact that is sure to appeal to whiskey enthusiasts.





Richard Paul's leadership goes beyond creating a successful distillery; it's about fostering a culture of respect, support, and excellence. His vision has created a space where high-quality spirits and strong community values coexist harmoniously. Regular events at the distillery bring together veterans, first responders, artists, and whiskey enthusiasts, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.

In a competitive market, Art of the Spirits distinguishes itself through the quality of its products and the integrity and values it upholds. Richard Paul has demonstrated that a successful business can and should give back to the community. His distillery is a testament to what can be achieved when you combine a passion for craftsmanship with a dedication to supporting those who serve, protect, and inspire.

As the craft spirit industry continues to evolve, Art of the Spirits stands as a model for how businesses can thrive while positively impacting their community. Richard Paul's vision has created something extraordinary—an establishment where every sip of whiskey is a toast to quality, creativity, and the extraordinary individuals who make our world a better place.

# RY3 CIGAR SERIES

## Rye Whiskey

by Dave Yancey

Images by RY3

**Type:** Rye Whiskey

**Blend:** 3 Rye Whiskeys aged in Madeira, Rum, and

Naranja casks

**Age:** Unstated

**Batch:** 02

**Proof:** 124.2

**Price:** \$125.00



## What Makes it Special

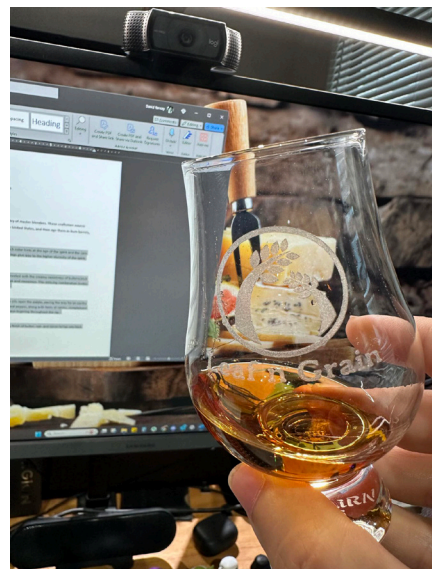
RY3 coming from Virginia is a whiskey that brings together the best of rye whiskeys from different regions, showcasing a rich history and heritage. Crafted by master blenders who source aged rye whiskeys from North America, including Canada and the United States, and then aged in Rum barrels to create a unique and balanced profile.

## Nose:

A sensory journey begins with its complex aromas. The nose is greeted with the creamy sweetness of butterscotch and the fruity notes of pear, complemented by subtle hints of oak and cinnamon. This enticing combination invites further exploration, promising a rich and rewarding experience.

## Visual

With its golden amber hue that glows warmly in the light. This rich color hints at the age of the spirit and the care the blenders put into creating this expression. The long, slender legs give way to the higher viscosity of the spirit, indicating rich oils and full, bold flavors.





## Palate:

The palate experience of flavors and textures. Light butter-cream oils open the palate, paving the way for an earthy musk that adds depth and complexity. The spices of cinnamon and pepper, along with hints of raisins, complement the palate, with subtle notes of toffee, honey, oak, and orange zest lingering throughout the sip.



## Finish

While drinking hot, at 124 proof for a younger whiskey, the long finish of butter, oak, and spices brings you back for another sip.

# THE HUMIDOR





# MICALLEF BLUE

by Dave Yancey

Images by Micallef

**Brand:** Micallef

**Vitola:** Toro 6x52

**Wrapper:** San Andrés Sumatra

**Binder:** Ecuadorian Habano

**Filler:** Nicaragua & Dominican Republic

**Body:** Medium

**Flavor Intensity:** Medium

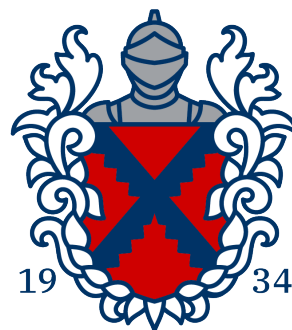
**Retail Price:** Robusto (5x52) \$7.00/cigar, Toro (6x52) \$8.00/cigar

## What makes it special

Micallef cigars are not new to us here at Leaf n Grain Society, the team, or the magazine. Having worked closely with Amanda and her team in putting together the cover story for our first issue back in December of 2023, the team considered and voted the Micallef Black as the number two cigar for Leaf n Grain for 2023. With the Micallef Black being reviewed by David Skelton of the Texas Cigar Roadshow and myself on his show and being awarded the ‘Cigar of the Year’ by the Cigar Authority, it is no surprise that Micallef would follow up with that success with their newest addition to their already strong offerings of the Micallef Blue.

## Visual /Pre-Draw

The visual aspect of a cigar draws us to it, with the ornate blue band that follows the same artistry of the black band, to the smooth texture of the Sumatra wrapper, and not forget the construction of the cap and uniformity of the footer. The Blue’s construction is one to be expected from Micallef, one of quality and uniformity in firmness throughout the cigar’s body, and presents aromas of leather, cream, and earth. The cold draw gave flavors of cocoa and leather with a nice pull on the draw, further exemplifying the quality of the cigar’s construction.



**MICALLEF**  
CIGARS

## First Third

With this vitola, I usually choose a perfect cut or a v-cut. For this smoke, I chose a v-cut to experience the difference between that and the perfect cut, which I used on previous smokes of this cigar. The gentle toasting of the foot of the cigar immediately gave off room aromas of cocoa and raw-hide leather that continued to present themselves as I took the first couple of draws. Throughout the smoke, the flavors continued, introducing a creaminess that was present but not overpowering the dusty trail notes.

The burn was even, with dusty grey ash, maintaining its structure well into the first third. This allowed for a solid burn line and burn code when ashing at just over an inch.

## Second Third

Transitioning into the second third, the flavor profile really started to present itself, with hints of raisins on the retro. At the same time, the earth and creamy notes maintained their boldness throughout the smoke. The burn stayed consistent, and the construction maintained itself, as displayed by the burn line, burn cone, and heat presented when holding the cigar near the burn line.

## Final Third

This is where a cigar will make or break itself, where you'll find that lower-quality cigars will start burning hot, generally due to a tighter construction or not burning at all due to over-humidification or a loose construction, while better cigars perform as expected. Here, we find that the Blue's construction has maintained itself into the final third, allowing subtle white pepper to present itself, while the cocoa, cream, and earth notes have persisted throughout the life of the smoke.



## Final Thoughts

The Micallef Blue belongs in every cigar lover's rotation. When paired with a Rob Roy or a Vodka Martini, it presents an experience that I consider one for the books. However, given how beautiful and complex the flavors are, I would have liked to see this cigar have a stronger flavor intensity.



# SOUTHERN DRAW QUICKDRAW PANTELLA

by Gabe Seamen

Images Gabe Seamen

**Brand:** Southern Draw

**Vitola:** Corona Gorda 5 x 56

**Filler:** Nicaraguan and Honduran

**Wrapper:** Pennsylvania Broadleaf Natural

**Binder:** Nicaraguan

**Smoking Time:** 21 minutes

**Body:** Medium

**Flavor:** Medium

**Price:** \$5.99

## Visual/Prelight Draw:

A small cigar in my hand with a handsome and porous and rough looking dark chocolate color wrapper, perfectly cut foot, and a cute pigtail on top that came off without doing any damage. A great start to be sure. Smells of cocoa and leather prelight, cold draw is also sporting some spicy notes.

## What Makes it Special:

From their website: “Owned and Operated by a family of Veterans. Southern Draw Cigars remains dedicated to producing unique blends of premium cigars, and providing the most consistent and sustainable products possible. Together with our incredible partners, we endeavor to be socially responsible and charitable to those in need in the United States and in tobacco growing and cigar producing countries alike, with a particular focus on Nicaragua where our cigars are hand made.”

Robert and Sharon Holt are some salt of the earth type of people, and so I wanted to showcase this veteran owned brand in a different light, lots of us know of their high end exclusives and major core releases but I feel a lot of their daily and value oriented cigars are executed with the same quality and explosive flavor profiles, at a price that builds extreme value. So today I’m looking at their QuickDraw line which while designed for that quick/daily dog walker type smoke session contains those wonderful Southern Draw flavors any connoisseur can enjoy in the Pennsylvania Broadleaf form. Smoke along with me:



## First Half:

While lighting I notice a tighter draw than most. Not so much as to become an issue later on, but certainly it requires some effort, and thus forces me to pay attention to it while smoking. I’m getting a full on black pepper spice, along with rich leather notes and a charred oak on the retrohale. The burn is good and smoke production is as expected for this vitola, nothing either worthy of note nor detriment here. Towards the end of the half that cocoa is starting to creep in but more as a coffee note at the moment.

## Second Half:

The keen eyed among you will notice I've done halves instead of thirds for this review, in this size there's not really much happening as far as transition, as much as the volume fader just continues its steady ramp up throughout the smoke. That said I'm still getting black pepper, leather, charred oak, coffee, and cocoa notes, exactly as I want from a Pennsylvania Broadleaf. Despite not having transitions there are more than enough notes to call this little cigar complex and more importantly, all are balanced in a way to become very enjoyable.



## Score:

There is almost nothing to score down on this cigar, nor is there anything unexpected or ground breaking here. It is what it is, much like a Padron thousand series. You get a quality cigar from a reputable manufacturer, and accomplished blender, a Veteran and his family, at a value loaded price. The only things bringing its score down is that Broadleaf is not for everyone, so while the wrapper appearance is as expected for a broadleaf, it is not the prettiest. The draw at the beginning was a bit tougher than some will enjoy, though not enough to put me off nor give you a headache. The price point is adequate for explaining the value but almost obscures how good it truly is. I will rank this as a daily smoke, in a strong and therefore less popular form of the Pennsylvania Broadleaf Wrapper, and one that you should try if you like all the above and need it in a quicker format or a price you won't mind missing if you think you'll be interrupted before completing your enjoyment of this great daily smoke for broadleaf lovers everywhere.





# THE UNDERGROUND

by Dave Yancey

Images acquired from Underground Facebook group

Nestled in the heart of Fort Worth, Texas, Underground Cigar Shop offers a unique and inviting experience for cigar aficionados and newcomers alike. From the moment you step inside, it's clear that this isn't just any ordinary cigar shop. Here's a closer look at what makes Underground Cigar Shop a standout destination.

The ambiance at the Underground Cigar Shop is nothing short of exceptional. The interior boasts a rustic yet sophisticated decor, featuring leather chairs, dark wood furnishings, and warm, ambient lighting that creates a welcoming and relaxed environment. The layout encourages conversation and camaraderie, making it an ideal spot for the lone smoker or a herd with friends.

The shop lives up to its name with an extensive and diverse selection of cigars. Whether you're a seasoned smoker or just starting your cigar journey, there's always a new discovery waiting for you. The knowledgeable staff is always on hand to offer recommendations and insights, ensuring you find the perfect cigar to suit your taste. They carry well-known brands as well as boutique and hard-to-find selections, providing a range of options that cater to all preferences and budgets.



The customer service at the Underground Cigar Shop is not just top-notch; it's personal. The staff is friendly and welcoming and incredibly knowledgeable about cigars and related accessories. They take the time to get to know their customers, offering personalized recommendations and sharing their passion for cigars. Filling orders from their website and phone in orders where most orders go out the same day, delivering to locations all over the world. This level of service from the website alone played a big part in helping the shop stay open during COVID-19. This level of attentiveness and expertise significantly enhances the overall experience, making you feel like a valued part of the cigar community.

The Underground Cigar Shop is more than just a retail space; it's a community hub, with over 3 thousand members on Facebook alone, that welcomes you with open arms. The shop regularly hosts events, including cigar tastings, launch parties for new products, and educational sessions. These events foster a strong sense of belonging and provide a great opportunity to meet fellow cigar lovers. The shop's commitment to building a vibrant community is evident in the strong bonds among its patrons, making you feel like you're a part of something special.

One of the standout features of Underground Cigar Shop is its lounge area. Equipped with comfortable seating, flat-screen TVs, and a well-stocked bar, the lounge provides the perfect setting to unwind and enjoy a cigar. The shop also offers private lockers for regular customers, adding a touch of exclusivity and convenience.

Knowing this, I knew I wanted to meet with Don Wiggins, one of the Underground's owners.

**DY:** How did the Underground start?

**DW:** It began as an offshoot of the Cigar Dojo app. We decided to go “Underground” because we were a little raucous at the beginning and needed a place to be free. So, text messages and my backyard were the UG at the start.

**DY:** Which NFG Festival was the most memorable?

**DW:** The first one was the most memorable to me because it was truly a first in North Texas event-wise, and we wanted to make a splash. The wrestling ring and everyone’s response were amazing, and it still gives me goosebumps thinking about it. Plus, it was our first cease-and-desist from our great friends at CI.



**DY:** What’s the story behind UG’s support for our military and first responders?

**DW:** I came from a Navy family and was DQ ed from MEPS at 18. I see firsthand how our veterans are treated on a daily basis by our own country and people with no respect for the military. First responders and veterans are the backbone of the world and deserve high praise.

**DY:** What legacy do you want the UG to be known for?

**DW:** Legacy? Maybe it is simply that we marched to our own drum in the industry and did it without compromising our principles. We are a home to the downtrodden and the Outcast of the world. NO FUCKS GIVEN.

The Underground Cigar Shop in Fort Worth is a must-visit for anyone interested in cigars. Its impressive selection, knowledgeable staff, inviting atmosphere, and a strong sense of community make it a standout destination. Whether you’re looking to discover new cigars, relax in a comfortable setting, or connect with fellow enthusiasts, Underground Cigar Shop delivers on all fronts. It is highly recommended for both locals and visitors to the Fort Worth area.

# PDR CVR DOUBLE PERFETO

## SHOP EXCLUSIVE FOR MICHAEL'S TOBACCO

by Gabe Seamen

Images Gabe Seamen

**Brand:** PDR

**Vitola:** Double Perfecto 6 x 60

**Filler:** Nicaragua Corojo'98, Dominican Corojo

**Wrapper:** Connecticut Broadleaf Maduro

**Binder:** Ecuadorian Corojo, Nicaraguan Habano

**Smoking Time:** 1 hour

**Body:** Medium

**Flavor:** Medium to Full

**Price:** \$16.99

### What Makes it Special:

A cigar born because a Shop owner asked if it could be done his rep followed through, and upon trying it the master blender himself decided it should be made. The Connecticut Valley Reserve when it came out was an immaculate vision, the maduro just a bit better but still packing a great punch for any connoisseur in huge striking piano black boxes, it took shelves captive and consumers by storm. Let's see how this one-off vitola from 2018 extended that lineage.

### Visual/Prelight Draw:

Prelight aromas of floral and leather notes. Wrapper is a dark brown with good oils except where the lighter shade appears on the ends.

### First Third

Lighting it up starts with floral and grass/hay flavor, until the wrapper changes and it becomes more of a farm soil earth and rawhide leather.



### Second Third

Transitioning into the second third a good amount of black pepper coming into the mix with the earth and leather, and a slight graham flavor on the retro hale.





## Final Third

As we head into the final third the leather and black pepper remains at the forefront, followed by raisin and graham on the finish.



## Score

No special care was needed to maintain a burn, no issues when cutting, ash holds for about an inch easily. Nothing to note of construction except quality.

Is it as good as the original vitolas? I honestly can't decide. But given that it is a shop exclusive and considering the price point is well below other cigars in this line up this is still one you should pick up, if it is in your wheelhouse.



# CHEESE SHOP





# BEHIND THE RIND: THE JOURNEY OF AN ASPIRING TUROPHILE

by Hazel Joyce

Images by Hazel Joyce

*Sweet dreams are made of cheese  
Who am I to dis a Brie  
I cheddar the world and a Feta cheese  
Everybody's looking for Stilton*  
~Author Unknown

As a child of immigrant parents growing up in the '80s, my first introduction to cheese came in the form of a blue and white box fondly known as Kraft Mac n' Cheese.

Patented by James L. Kraft in 1916, who was inspired by meeting a fellow cheese salesman that was selling people an easy dinner package of pasta with an add-on of grated cheese. In 1937, he started selling his version of boxes with packets of processed cheese inside. His largest customer was the US Army who bought 6 million pounds worth during World War I. (They could also probably be credited towards inspiring the 50 million boxes sold nationwide during World War II.)

Fast forward to the '80s where the slim blue box took its place in pantries across America amongst quick comfort foods such as Hamburger Helper and Rice-O-Roni. My other cheese experience would be grilled cheese sandwiches at the school cafeteria.

But it would be my Godmother's favorite baked dessert that would inadvertently open the world of cheese for me. She would make French cheesecake and as a child I would help her pat down the graham cracker crust. My reward was getting to lick the excess filling from the spatula—which, of course, had Philadelphia Cream Cheese.



A few fun facts about Philadelphia Cream Cheese:

- It is legally included in FDA regulations as a soft, uncured cheese.
- It's not actually from Philadelphia; it was created in New York.
- Dairy farmer William Lawrence created cream cheese when experimenting in the creation of the American version of Neufchâtel, one of the oldest French cheeses that allegedly dates back to the 6th century

My 10-year-old self then embarked on a brief Francophile stint that included French lessons, a French pen pal, a subscription to 'Depeche Mode' and of course, a tentative foray into French cheeses with a taste of Brie. But sadly, my tween palate still had a strong sweet tooth whose only other interest in "cheese" was that of ricotta combined with a lot of sugary sweetness aka cannoli cream.



However, cheese would continue to be a supporting player in my culinary journey (pizza, subs, Philly cheesesteaks, lasagna, etc.) until I entered the world of Corporate America and suddenly it took center stage via cheese plates at networking events and office gatherings. There were the usual suspects of cheddar, brie and blue cheese. On occasion, “exotic cheeses” like Manchego would make an appearance.

At work I was promoted to a position that came with a corporate card and marching orders to take out clients; as my culinary experiences began to rack up, so did my exposure to different cheeses.

A notable favorite introduced to me was Murcia al Vino (“drunken goat cheese”). This semi-firm cheese, made from the milk of Murcian goats, is high in fat and protein and imparts a creamy light taste and a fruity finish. The “drunken” part of its name is a reference to the part of its production where the rind is bathed in local red wine during maturation while the cheese itself remains light colored. Foodie tip: while stunning on its own, it’s



also perfect shaved over pasta in a truffle cream sauce.

Then after a professional turn into hospitality, I was fortunate enough to be stationed at an event where I was on the other side of the tasting table. But it wasn’t just any event open to the general public. It was an industry event where buyers from restaurants, shops, catering firms and the like carefully chose the products that they, in turn, would serve to their guests.

After arriving at the event, I was told that my assignment was “the French cheese table”. Walking up to my station and seeing over 50 cheeses laid out was a bit intimidating but was nothing compared to the first questions I got from an attendee.

A very determined looking woman strode up to the table, pointed to a specific cheese for me to serve and then promptly asked me how the goat was doing..by name. Yes, the goat that made the cheese because apparently she had previously been sick.

Cue blank stare and uncomfortable silence from my side of the table.

Luckily the person working the table next to me was a chef and knew the answer to this and many other questions that got lobbed at me all day. I have “worked the table” at many events in different industries (finance, tech, whiskey to name a few) and the detailed, direct questions I received that day were the hardest I’ve ever had to answer.

However, I ended up having an amazing time, learning a lot and coming home with two overflowing shopping bags of cheese and accompanying foodstuffs, so score!

It’s been a while since that day and while my favorite cheeses tend to originate from Spain or Italy, I still return to my original love for French cheeses.

On that note, join us next month where we’ll go more in depth in the world of French cheeses in honor of Bastille Day!



# BREWERY





# MORE THAN JUST A BEER

by Rachael Brasovan

Images by Amanda Long and Rachael Brasovan

The smell of hops and the buzz of excitement circulate the room at the biggest homebrew competition awards in Texas. Cheers are said, glasses are tapped, and new friends are made. A room full of strangers from all walks of life gather around to talk (and drink!) about a hobby done on patios, garages, kitchens, and more: homebrewing.

Homebrewing is the art and science of making alcohol by combining yeast with a liquid containing varying levels of sugar. Basically, you brew things at home. Whether that be beer, wine, mead, or concoctions so nasty that you serve them to your just as nasty in-laws, many homebrewers are part of a club, and some are independent homebrewers who are there for the first time and seeing how big the homebrewing community is - which can be surprising and even a bit overwhelming. Many people think it is a very niche and rare hobby, but it is a vibrant community where you find friendships that last a lifetime and are built on a foundation of shared passion and mutual respect.

Homebrewing is rich with history and can be as simple or as complex as you would like. It isn't contained by where you live or how much equipment you have. Got a big pot? Or maybe a sealed container? You, too, could make a beer. Winemaking, cider, and mead are also common and delicious avenues in the brewing world. Some are much easier than you might think to make and require even less equipment than beer brewing! This accessibility attracts people from all walks of life, ages, and careers to pick up the hobby to create an extremely diverse community surrounding the love of brewing. Conversely, the intricacies of the chemistry in homebrewing allow you to dive down a deep rabbit hole into endless experimentation. It's fascinating to see how different grains, hops, and yeasts interact, transforming water into a complex, flavorful beverage. This scientific curiosity often leads to endless experimentation, pushing brewers to continually refine their techniques and recipes - or have fun and make a taco beer! True story!

The variety of people also brings in a variety of beer styles, flavors, and preferences. Some people might specialize in very intricate and difficult-to-brew styles like a Roggenbier, and this exchange of knowledge fosters a welcoming environment where everyone, regardless of experience level, feels valued and encouraged.

Homebrew clubs are one area where this kind of community can be found. After I made my first beer, I went to the homebrew store in the area to get my next extract kit. The owner of the store mentioned a local homebrew club and recommended that I check out one of their meetings. I didn't even know there were such clubs and was a bit nervous since I had only brewed one beer, but I decided to make the jump and go to their next meeting anyway. Immediately, they included me in conversations even with my lack of experience, answered any and all questions (even the really dumb ones I asked, looking back on it), and made me feel like a friend they have known for years. It was the type of community I was looking for, and still, to this day; it is the commu-





nity I am proud to be a part of.

Brewing something fantastic that you love to drink is fun, but brewing is more than just a beer. It's sitting with your friends around a fire, sharing stories, reminiscing, and being there for each other with a glass of something special. It's a conversation starter to connect with someone new. It's for cheer when your friend got that promotion or graduated from grad school. In the end, it's the people and the shared journey that make homebrewing truly worth it, far more than the beer itself.







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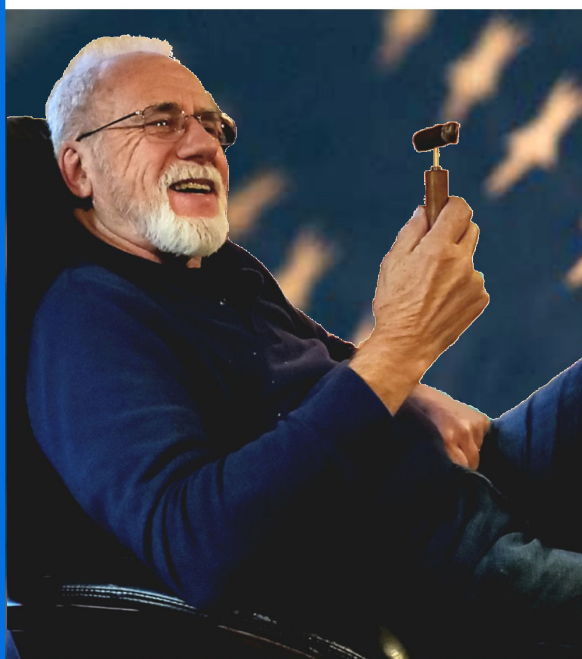
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# ‘ISLE OF MAN TT’

## WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THESE WORDS THESE WORDS?

by Steven Day

Images by Steven Day

I’d imagine it would be the most high-tech of racing motorcycles, the best riders in the world, pushing themselves to the limit around one of the toughest tracks they’ll ever encounter. 37.33 miles of narrow streets, brick walls, climbing to a height of 422 metres (passing a mountain), over 200 corners and through the infamous parts of the Ballaugh Bridge, Ramsey Hairpin and Creg Ny Baa with many jumps and a 200-mile an hour plus straight (Sulby).

It’s a breathtaking spectacle with people coming from the USA to Australia, with many countries in between. The Isle of Man last recorded population was in the region of 85,000, dependent on what figures you go by, that increases by around 75 to 100% during TT. The whole place comes much more to life and it’s a fantastic place to be.

This was my first experience running our place during the event. I wasn’t sure how craft beer, whisky, and rum would go down amongst the biker community. I was less worried about cigars, as they are quite often associated with that community historically. I needn’t have worried. When not racing, we had no shortage of bikers in, along with others associated with the event. Very few nights were we overwhelmed, but we were busy most nights. Never has so much craft beer been sold by us in such a short period of time and I’m only glad we were ahead of it most of the time, except when one keg didn’t arrive.

Historically, the Isle of Man TT has had some links to the military along with the island itself.

During both world wars, the island was used as an internment camp/



World War 1 enemy ‘aliens’ were housed at Knockaloe (near the town of Peel) who were considered a security risk. These included civilians and prisoners of war. Knockaloe was the largest internment camp in the British Isles, accommodating up to 23,000 internees. The internees were mostly civilians, artists, musicians, and intellectuals.

During World War 2, internment policy was expanded, and several camps were established on the Isle of Man, including camps in Douglas, Ramsey, and other locations. The Hutchinson Camp in the main town, now city, of Douglas, was notable for detaining many prominent German and Austrian refugees, again including artists, musicians, scientists and intellectuals.

Some of the sites of the former internment camps have been preserved or marked with plaques, serving as historical reminders of this period. There is ongoing research into the experiences of the internees, and memorials have been established to honour their lives and contributions.





During World War II, the Isle of Man was home to 4 military airfields; RAF Jurby came first in 1939, followed by RAF Andreas and RAF Hall Caine in 1941. The current civilian airport also served as RAF Ballasalla. These airfields were constructed (other than Ballasalla) and maintained by military engineers and served as bases for training and operations. The racing itself was well set and fascinating with Michael Dunlop, the most successful rider of the last decade with 25 overall wins, had the opportunity to equal or better the previous record of 26 wins. The fact that record was held by his uncle, the legendary Joey Dunlop, probably only made that more of an achievement he would like to claim.

The Dunlop family is one of the most iconic and successful dynasties in motorcycle racing history. Their contributions to the sport, especially at the Isle of Man TT, have left an indelible mark. Joey Dunlop dominated the event for over two decades and was a beloved figure. His younger brother Robert also had 5 wins of own at the event and still holds the record for the most wins at the North West 200. Both Michael and William were children of Robert and were well-known names on the Isle of Man circuit.

Only Michael of the four remains, with the rest having sadly lost their lives whilst competing. It didn't take long for Michael to equal the record when the racing began with a win in the first of the week, the Supersport TT

1 which he won a total of 8.5 seconds in front of 2nd placed Davey Todd. Dean Harrison was 22 seconds behind. That meant he equaled Joey's previous record of 26 wins.

Next up was the Superbike TT and Michael was well on his way to a win with an over 20 second lead and looking like setting the record himself. However, disaster struck during a pit stop when he had an issue with his helmet visor, which cost him a significant amount of time. He ended up finishing 4th, 15 seconds behind winner Peter Hickman.

The Supertwin TT was next up and approaching in ominous conditions, with the Isle of Man being blustery, cold and windy beforehand. Michael set off at break-neck speed though, as he usually does, and seemed determine to claim the record after the disappointment of the last race. This time nothing stopped the Northern Irishman and he finished 20 second in front of 2nd placed Peter Hickman.



Michael then finished the overall event claiming one of the remaining two and the biggest race of them all, the Supersport TT 2 on Senior Race Day, to finish off a remarkable TT for him.

The Isle of Man is a nice place to come at the best of times. Although it's expensive, like every big event these days, it's absolutely something else during the TT, especially if you're into racing. Even if not, it's great just to soak up the atmosphere and visit the infamous Bushy's Beer Tent, see live music, and be in the type of environment that only an event of this magnitude can give for a whole two weeks! The weather wasn't the greatest this year, but all of the racing was still run, and there's still lots to do, even when the weather doesn't play ball.

We had great fun at our bar meeting people from all over the world even though we personally didn't get to see any of the racing other than on our screens.

The event was rounded off by the appearance of the Royal Air Force Aerobatic Team, more commonly known as The Red Arrows. 9 of the T1 Hawks captivated Douglas Bay with their Diamond 9, Phoenix and Tornado formations for 20 minutes on the closing Saturday night and they are a sight to see. A very fitting way to close the event.





COFFEE



# BLACK RIFLE COFFEE CO.

by David Jefferies

Images by David Jefferies

Black Rifle Coffee Company is the premier veteran company in the U.S.A. They took this spot from clothing brands like Grunt Style, Ranger Up, etc. But they make coffee and sell branded gear—correct, which is what makes them, in my opinion, so likable. It is easy to support a veteran business because coffee is relatively inexpensive, so the customer buy-in is low. This is good for the brand because more people can enjoy it.

The brand was forged by three military veterans, Matt Best, Evan Hafer, and Jared Taylor, affectionately known as JT. It's worth noting that Evan, fresh from his government service, was giving away this coffee at a shot show when he crossed paths with JT and Matt in El Paso, who were then running Article 15 clothing. They joined forces, and thus, the Black Rifle Coffee Company was born in 2014. At the outset, Evan openly admitted to selling many things and accumulating significant debt, a sacrifice echoed by his partners, to make BRCC a reality.

Their unwavering determination and sacrifices have undeniably paid off. Today, the company is publicly owned but remains service-oriented, inspiring veterans to carve their own paths and serve their fellow veterans. To underscore this, Evan now sits on the board of directors.

Another important person in the story who isn't one of the founders is Tom Davin. Tom was a Marine officer and formerly the CEO of Panda Express and Taco Bell. He was a co-CEO with Evan to provide invaluable business experience and guide the company. Today, he also sits on the board of directors. We should stop and take a moment to discuss some controversy surrounding the company.



Even though the brand is successful, it still has some troubles; they have been sued by the manufacturers of their Ready-to-Drink products. They were in the middle of a media firestorm for Kyle Rittenhouse's shooting and Evan Hafer's donation to the Democratic Party. As for the Rittenhouse situation, it is pretty confusing. Hafer's comments that we don't wish to profit off of tragedy is a wise move and shows Hafer as someone who considered the betterment of people above his profits. As for the democratic party donation, this isn't our place to tell you how to politic, but it has affected the brand negatively due to the solid conservative audience they have. What we wish to convey is not that these are fatal or even bad mistakes by the company, but we want to show how far the company has come to be where it is today.





I joined the BRCC team in 2023 and left in the spring of 2024. I had exhilarating times here, met wonderful people, and worked alongside them. As an insider, I can testify that the inside looks the same as you would expect. There is a high expectation of care surrounding the product. There is genuine care around team members and plenty of opportunities to grow. Sometimes, it can be chaotic, but the team and the leaders usually come together to overcome it. There was never a time when I felt like a team member when I was asked to push a bad product. There was stuff I didn't care for, but I highlighted what I was passionate about, like the Woobie jackets.

Overall, the brand deserves the support it gets. It does plenty of charitable work to give back, especially at the café level, fueling first responders and the military. The coffee is a solid and often overlooked part of the brand; the coffee is a solid middle-of-the-road coffee that is readily available and delicious; my top three are MAC-V Sog, Black Beards over Ice, and Outrider. Do they deserve some pushback? Yes, but give them grace to grow as well. Thank you for taking the time to explore a brand that is near and dear to me.



# FIRST RESPONDERS COFFEE

by David Jefferies

Images by David Jefferies

**B**rent Tucker from First Responder Coffee and First Responder Cigar Companies. Brent was a Unit guy and is now an entrepreneur, but you would be mistaken if you think that is all there is to him. His most important aspects are his Christian faith and status as a dad and a giver; he gives generously of his time and talents to all sorts of people. He is the son of a business owner, and he is training his kids to be entrepreneurs and members of their community. I cannot express how much I have benefited and enjoyed from my interactions with Brent and his team. Let us dive into the interview.

**DJ:** How do you brew?

**BT:** I'm in Florida and it's usually unbearably hot here, so cold brew is my go-to.

**DJ:** What cut do you prefer on a cigar?

**BT:** That's easy, V-cut.



**DJ:** Which cigar do you pair with coffee?

**BT:** Our Bravo cigar, which is a maduro, box-pressed cigar in a San Andres wrapper.

**DJ:** What was your best hooch setup?

**BT:** In Jalabad we had a great team house, had my own large room, we had a big gym just for our team, a rooftop tiki bar where we only had soft drinks lol and smoked cigars, and had a pool. It was right across the street from the airfield so we didn't have to go far to get on our helicopters.... Just the ideal setup! I wish all my 13 deployments had that set up.

**DJ:** Why start a company? Why not write a book, star in movies, or do a training company?

**BT:** Because apparently I'm a gluten for punishment. I knew it would be hard, everyone told me it was going to be but I like the challenge of business. A training company is closely aligned to my old job and wanted something different. I have a face for radio so movies would be tough, and I was homeschooled so writing a book isn't an option.



**DJ:** Who are you outside of your military service?

**BT:** Besides a business owner and the son of a business owner? I'm a father and a husband, I have an amazing wife who supported me through a dangerous job that took me away constantly and sometimes brought me back to a hospital and she never complained. I also have four amazing kids who are the most respectful little people you'll ever meet, and they are my greatest sense of pride in my life. Again, mainly thanks to my wife.

**DJ:** What side of the business are you most drawn to? Roasting, packaging, or the public relations side?

**BT:** I truly love all aspects of business. The war gaming a product, designing the packaging, having a launch strategy, seeing if it does well or not and if not then how fast can you properly identify the failure points and readjust, the finance part of it, watching the numbers for the month and again making a plan off those numbers and moving forward better than the prior month. I could go on and on, it really is a challenge in so many ways and I love a challenge.

**DJ:** What is the end goal of FRCC?

**BT:** To be a household name that is synonymous with high-quality coffee/cigars AND a company that does amazing things for our first responder community, whenever they need help.

**DJ:** Do you find both cigars and coffee spaces full of friends or competition?

**BT:** Both, but more friends than competition. Most people realize this is a huge space for both products and plenty of room for everyone. Plus, we are very specific with who we cater to so we're not always looked at as direct competition because of our focus.

**DJ:** In the Human Relations department, what is of vital importance for your employees to have?

**BT:** A good attitude. Seems small or generic but a good attitude can overcome a lot of the ups and downs of a new company that is hustling in every way to make it. We have a great work environment of working hard and having fun so a good attitude will make the experience that much better.



# FRCC

FIRST RESPONDER'S COFFEE COMPANY  
COFFEE WITH A PURPOSE

**DJ:** Do you plan on offering other kinds of coffee besides Brazilian arabica?

**BT:** No, we only plan on carrying the best coffee at a price that you would want to pay. That is Brazilian coffee all day long. Anything else would be a step-down and our customer base is expecting high-quality coffee with every bag.

**DJ:** Where do we see bits and pieces of Brent in the company, and where do we see Drew or someone else's personal touches in the company?

**BT:** I'm the idea guy and have almost full responsibility for what the brand looks like and where it's going (with input from Drew of course but the final decision is with me) so if you like the bag design, the cigar labels, the cigar box, the logo, the social media etc. then you see my creativity on display. But if the product got to you on time, clean, appropriately protected in the box or the fact that we had the product in stock to sell you, well that's Drew all day long. He really is the workhorse that keeps this machine running day to day or even when I'm gone training law enforcement or giving them a grant in person, Drew makes that happen so I can do or focus on other things, and I'll be eternally grateful for my brothers' long days of hard work at a pay that doesn't fully compensate him. He's gone all in on this company as I have and hope to repay him one day for that.

For those of you who do not know, Drew is part of the family and a Christian minister like me; he is passionate about the company and the Christian Gospel. He is a sincere and professional man. Again, I want to drive home to you, the reader, what a pleasure it is to interact with Brent and Drew from the company but also what a pleasure it is to do business with I bought a bag of coffee that ended up in the raffle at this year's NFG tour that was won by one of our own. This company, for me, is all about the truth and giving back. They embody service, which is one thing that touches my heart personally. Brent Tucker and Drew are genuine, honest, and sincere men. I am beyond honored they took the time to do the interview, and I hope to have opened your eyes to a new coffee company. Until next time, explore the pairings.



# RECIPES





# SUNDAY AFTERNOON MEAT-BALL SUBS FROM SCRATCH

by Gabe Seamen

Images by Gabe Seamen

Here's one of my latest recipes with some adaptations offered along the way, including an option if you want to skip the baking portion and cheat a bit there, which does cut the prep time by almost  $\frac{2}{3}$ !

## Ingredients for No Knead Italian Bread:

- 3.25 cups 00 italian flour (plus another cup or so for dusting)
- 1 tsp sea salt
- 1.5 cups warm water
- 2 tsp instant yeast (or active dry yeast)
- 2 tablespoon italian seasoning
- Optional egg (if you don't have italian flour you can add the egg and use regular AP or bread flour)
- Optional olive oil during proofing (helps create a darker crust)
- Everything Bagel Topping
- Shaker type Parmesan

## Ingredients for Lighter Meatballs:

- 1lb ground beef (I used 73/27 because I like flavor and it helps the balls be more cohesive)
- 1lb ground turkey (if you have turkey sausage or pork sausage instead that works too, more flavor is always better, but if you use pork skip the optional fats)
- $\frac{2}{3}$  cup breadcrumbs (could go up to a cup if using finer/premade crumbs that aren't as absorbant as making your own)
- 2 tsp sea salt
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 2 tblsp italian seasoning
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp garlic powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp paprika
- 1 tblsp freeze dried minced onion
- 2 tblsp buttermilk (or use heavy cream and a dash or two of vinegar)



## Ingredients for Marinara style Sauce:

- 1 large can crushed tomatoes (28oz, Cento or Tuturoso are my fave)
- 3 tblsp Tomato Paste (best comes from tube, I used Cento)
- 2 tblsp freeze dried minced onion
- 2 tblsp italian seasoning
- 2 bay leaves (remove before serving)
- Olive oil for drizzle
- 2 tblsp minced garlic
- 1 tblsp red pepper flakes
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup wine or dry vermouth

## Misc ingredients for assembly:

- Gloves for forming meatballs if you desire
- Thinly sliced or shredded provolone
- Thinly sliced or Shredded Mozzarella
- Optional Garlic Bread (skip the baking!)
- Parsley
- Dried Parmesan (shaker type)



## Bread Instructions:

1. Heat water to luke warm (80 - 100 degrees Farenheight, no more than 50C) and add yeast and mix vigorously, set to the side to bloom at least 10 minutes
2. Sift Flour into a large dry mixing bowl
3. Mix all remaining dry ingredients, creating a well in the middle
4. If not using high protein 00 italian/pizza flour add the optional two egg yolk and buttermilk to well now
5. Add ½ of the water/yeast combo and begin to combine. As you get a pebble like mixture start drizzling remaining water in until a dough ball forms
6. Cover with cling wrap and a towel and set aside for 2 hours for initial proofing
7. After 2 hours should be nearly or more than doubled in size
8. Divide into two for smaller baguette loaves unless you have a baking sheet large enough for a 21 inch loaf
9. Put out onto floured surface and roll into a rectangle, with the long end being as long as your desired loaf and the short side almost ⅔ of that length
10. Roll bread along the short side maintaining length, tuck in ends when done for presentation
11. Place on greased baking sheet prepped with a very light dusting of flour
12. If you want more flavor add shaker parmesan (mine was parmesan with Truffle oil, yum) and/or everything bagel topping before baking (I did both because, more is more).
13. Place into fully preheated oven at 350 until crust reaches desired color and a toothpick inserted in the thickest part comes out clean (took me about 25 minutes, your time may vary with humidity and elevation)
14. Place on a rack to cool for best crust



## Meatball instructions:

1. Allow meats to reach room temperature
2. Add all ingredients to bowl of a stand mixer for fastest mixing, if none then mix with hands, gloves optional
3. If your mixture seem too loose you can add the optional fats, or if too tight/homogenous add some additional bread crumbs ¼ cup at a time
4. You can stop here and refrigerate if making ahead, the longer ahead you mix the more combined the flavors will get!
5. Use your hands to form into the size of the meatball you want (best suggestion I have would be to bake your bread first and don't exceed 80% the diameter of the shortest width of your bread) Why use your hands? Because the heat helps emulsify the ingredients and make balls that won't fall apart, especially important if you refrigerated after mixing!
6. Sear with your favorite method, I prefer cast iron or for time you can use the air fryer
7. Let rest at least 5 minutes before use, 10 if possible



## Sauce Instructions:

1. Open your tomatoes first
2. In the bottom of a heated heavy pot over mid-high heat drizzle some olive oil
3. Add minced/crushed garlic cloves until fragrant (half a minute maybe)
4. Add tomato paste
5. Add Freeze dried minced onion flakes
6. Quickly add crushed tomatoes! (the flakes don't take long to fry/burn, we just want them warmed to begin releasing oils, you could use half a white onion if you like)
7. Add wine/vermouth now, I used vermouth since its shelf stable and I didn't want to crack a wine just for such a small amount, but its up to you, if not using vermouth though I caution you to only use a wine you would enjoy drinking!
8. Stir, cover, and let come up to an active simmer/ gentle boil
9. Add italian seasoning
10. Add red pepper flakes
11. Add sea salt to taste if you want, however if using a bag of pre shredded low moisture mozzarella you might try skipping it as that cheese option has a tad more salt than the others
12. Stir and reduce to a gentle simmer until reduced, we are looking for evidence of about a 1/2 inch or 1 cm of reduction on the side of the pan before ready for use, but get it to the consistency you prefer for your sammich. Sammich, assemble!



## Assembly

Now the second best part, assembly! If you bake your own bread then here you can slice it in your preferred method, I went for half horizontally for standard hoagie style, but you can go hot dog bun style as well if yours came out taller enough. Whatever floats your boat. Next add your meatballs to the sauce and gently stir until they are fully coated.

For my preference I went sliced provolone as a base layer, then my saucy balls, then mozzarella. If making ahead you could put the mozz on the top bun as well and broil or hit it with a kitchen torch until it gets a little brown, then wrap in parchment paper, if you want.

For serving to others I would definitely go with the youtuber's favorite cut, slicing it at an angle and loosely stack for presentation, garnishing with parsley is an option at this point.

For an alternate preparation with a different but still very fun flavor you can skip the baking and use some fresh baked italian bread with garlic toast style butter added first, then assemble as above. Sooooo good and drops the prep time to something more approachable for a lunch/weekday!

Finally the best part, get you some pickle spears and chips of choice along with a TALL frosty beverage and enjoy. I'd go with a sparkling limeade, a lighter colored or even sour beer, or a crisp fruit forward dry wine. Just remember cooking for yourself is about preference and finding what works best for you, if you don't have a listed ingredient exactly but something that will work as a substitute, or even better something with more flavor SUB THAT IN! You might make an even better version than mine. Most importantly have fun and invite some friends/family to join you!



# FRENCH 75

by Sharron O'Neill

Images by Sharron O'Neill



## Ingredients

3-Ounces Gin - Recommended--Empress 1908 Elderflower  
Rose or Indigo Gin  
1-Ounce Lemon Juice  
1-Ounce Sugar Free Symple Syrup

## Simple Syrup

Bring 3/4 C water to a simmer, add 1/2 C Monkfruit Sweetener stir until dissolved, let cool to room temperature.

## Steps

In a shaker with ice combine 3 oz. of Gin , 1 oz lemon juice, 1 oz sugar free simple syrup.

Shake and strain into large Martini or Champagne Flute and top with the dry sparkling wine of choice.  
Garnish with fresh edible flavors.





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