

LEAF N GRAIN SOCIETY

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

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

*A*s I sit down to pen this letter, I find myself reflecting on how far we've come in just one year. This marks our fourth issue of Leaf n Grain Society, and what a journey it has been. From our initial vision to create a space that celebrates the intricate worlds of cigars, spirits, and culinary delights, to now producing this vibrant publication, it has been a year of challenges, growth, and milestones.

Admittedly, this issue arrives later than we had hoped, a result of personal challenges faced by many of our staff members—myself included. Life has a way of reminding us that we are human, and it's in those moments of vulnerability that the bonds of community and collaboration become even more meaningful. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to our incredible team, whose dedication and passion continue to elevate this magazine, even in the face of adversity. To our readers, your patience and support mean more than words can express. You are the reason we do what we do, and your enthusiasm fuels our commitment to deliver excellence.

The theme of this issue—Grain-to-Glass, Seed-to-Cigar—embodies the artistry, craftsmanship, and tradition that resonate deeply with our mission. These journeys, from the ground to the glass or humidor, reflect not only the meticulous care of their creators but also the shared experiences that unite us as enthusiasts. Within these pages, you'll discover stories that celebrate the dedication behind every pour and every puff, from the distiller's grain to the farmer's field.

Looking ahead, we are excited to share that future issues will be released on a regular schedule every four months. This change will allow us to plan and execute each edition with the care and creativity you've come to expect while giving our team the time to balance their own lives and pursuits. We are committed to growing alongside our readers, exploring new ideas, and continuing to bring you a magazine that inspires and informs.

As we close this year and look to the future, I invite you to join us on this journey. Whether you're savoring a cigar, sipping your favorite spirit, or trying a new recipe, we hope this issue provides a moment of enjoyment and connection in your day.

Here's to a new year filled with exploration, appreciation, and the stories that make life richer. Thank you for being part of the Leaf n Grain Society.



D. Yan

FROM SEED TO SMOKE, THE JOURNEY OF A CIGAR

by Ash Red

Images by stock.adobe.com | Canva

Did you know that one cigar has been touched by over 300 people by the time they are ready to smoke?

The journey of a cigar from the seed to the humidor is a fascinating process that involves meticulous care, expertise, and tradition.

Seed Selection and Planting:

The journey begins before the selection of high-quality tobacco seeds. The premium tobacco we all enjoy, requires specific soils and climate to grow in. The Caribbean, Central America and even the east coast of the United States (Pennsylvania, & the Connecticut River Valley) supply the climate and rich soils needed to raise this seed. The mineral content in the soil provides the nutrients and influences the tobacco's flavor in a variety of ways.

Once the Climate and Soils are located then the seeds are planted into nurseries where they germinate and grow into seedlings. The Germination takes approximately 38 to 45 days. Infant plants are inspected daily to ensure they have no signs of insects or disease, and they are growing strong. If the farmers see any of the unfavorable conditions, then they are disposed of. The farmers prune the plants, trimming $\frac{2}{3}$ of the leaves off to ensure that their roots and stalks are becoming strong and healthy. In the first 45 days the plant will have only grown 4-6 inches



Cultivation:

Once the seedlings are strong enough, they are then cautiously transplanted into the fields. Thus, the process of cultivation has begun. It takes several weeks for the infant plant to adjust to its new home. In the fields the tobacco plants are meticulously tended to. This involves regular watering, fertilizing, removing fungi and controlling pests. The plants and soil are monitored very closely to ensure they are growing healthy and strong. Farmers are selective with the plants, pruning and cutting away any sick or dead stalks to ensure the quality of the product. When tobacco plants have reached 5 to 6 feet, the farmers begin to “top” or remove the flowers from the top of the plant. Topping ensures that the plants’ focus and nutrients flow directly to the leaf. Not all tobacco plants are “topped”. These plants have been selected to produce a future crop or breed a hybrid.



Mother nature also plays a crucial part, too much rain or too little rain can be very destructive to the plants, thus the farmers must adjust to meet the plant's needs. The maturity of the tobacco plant can be anywhere from 45 to 110 days, depending on the country and seed varieties. Tobacco plants can also grow up to 14 feet in height once they have matured.

Harvesting:

When the tobacco plants have finally reached maturity, they are harvested. This is done by hand weekly by skilled workers. They start by picking 2 to 3 leaves at a time, beginning at the bottom of the plant. The reason for this is different leaves on the tobacco plant ripen at different times. This staggered harvesting process that takes several weeks is called Priming. The workers select the finest leaves to become cigars.



Curing:

The primed leaves are on to the next of their journey. The leaves are tied into pairs and hung on lathes. The lathes go into the drying/ curing barns for approximately 50 days.

There are different methods of curing (air, fire, flue, or sun) that affect the flavors and aroma of the tobacco. Air Curing is the most common and uses drying/ curing barns. Drying/ curing barns usually have doors that open on all sides to assist in regulating the humidity and temperature.



Small fires may be found to assist with the air. During this stage, the leaves lose about 85% of their chlorophyll and moisture causing them to become brown in color. The leaves also no longer mature, fixing the sugar content. Cured tobacco leaves are not ready to be smoked just because they have turned brown and no longer contain a high amount of sugar. The leaves contain a lot of ammonia and impurities.

Candelas do not go through the curing stage.

Fermentation:

After tobacco leaves are cured, the filler and binder leaves have the stems removed and the leaves are tied into bundles called hands. The hands have 10 to 30 leaves. Then their fermentation journey begins. Fermentation helps develop the flavors and reduces the harshness of the tobacco. During fermentation the tobacco leaves enter a “cooking” process.

The first fermentation, the tobacco leaves are bunched into “gavillas” and placed in short piles, called “pilonas”, to ferment. The weight of the pilones creates pressure, which, along with the moisture from the leaves, generates heat. This heat releases enzymes in the leaves, which in turn release tar, nicotine, and other chemicals that contribute to the cigar’s flavor.

The temperature of the pilones is carefully monitored and maintained between 110°F and 115°F degrees. When the temperature exceeds 95°F, the pilones are unraveled, the gavillas are shaken out and cooled, and new pilones are made. If the pilones are not carefully monitored, they can go into self-combustion and cause fires. Fermentation can approximately take 30 days. During this process the leaves have become more uniformed in color and detoxification occurs.



Next, the leaves are then separated and classified by type, color, and texture. The leaves undergo a “shower” of a very thin mist that contains water with a mixture of stems from tobaccos. After drying for 14 to 18 hours, the second fermentation begins.

Now that the leaves are classified, they are formed into “burros” that are 4 to 6 feet in height. A burro of tobacco can weigh thousands of pounds, sometimes as much as 4,000 pounds. This fermentation can last anywhere from 60 to 90 days.

The second fermentation provides the most dramatic impact on the cigar leaves due to the ammonia being released. This stage also has to be carefully monitored, because temperatures can exceed between 108°F-140°F degrees. When these temperatures occur, the burros have reached a critical point and they are unraveled and distributed into new burros.

Aging:

Aging is essential for enhancing the tobacco's flavor, this process releases tannins and increases sugar levels, which gives the tobacco a mellow, aromatic taste. The leaves are stored in closed buildings, so they are in controlled conditions. Leaves may age for several months or several years, allowing the flavor to mature.

Blending:

Blending is science and art that come together by a master blender. A master blender will carefully select particular leaves based on their region, knowing their flavors, aroma, strength, and combustion properties to create a desired profile for a particular cigar. Master blenders are highly skilled and have a deep understanding of tobacco characteristics.

Rolling:

The blended tobacco leaves are then rolled into cigars. Higher skilled workers meticulously layer the filler, binder, and wrappers crafting the cigar. Rollers, "torcedores", must ensure that the cigar is uniformed in shape and density. Rollers may roll hundreds of cigars each day, making sure that they are crafted perfectly.

Quality Control:

After cigars are rolled the cigars undergo a rigorous quality control inspection to ensure that the cigar is consistent and of high quality. This also includes checking the draw, burn, and overall construction of the cigar.



Aging Room:

Cigars then undergo an aging process, where the cigars absorb and release moisture allowing the flavors and aroma to enhance in the rolled cigar. Some cigars age for months, while others take years.

Packing and Shipping:

After the cigars are aged, they are banded and boxed. The bands are applied by hand, usually by women, and secured with a plant-based glue. Packaging is critical in preserving the quality of the cigars during storage and shipping.

Distribution to Humidors:

Finally, the cigars have reached their destination, a specially designed room to maintain the optimal environment regulating the temperature and humidity. The humidor mimics the condition found in the tobacco growing regions. This ensures that the cigars remain fresh, flavorful and ready to smoke when the consumer purchases them.

As you can see many workers' hands assist in the process of making cigars. It is a labor that requires skill, knowledge and understanding of tobacco plants. The journey from seed to smoke is a labor of love so the cigar smoker can enjoy and savor the flavors and aromas that took years to perfect.

WINE CELLAR



LET'S TALK ABOUT MEAD

by Terry-Lynn Faught

Images by stock.adobe.com

This is a VERY old beverage, most experts believe that mead was being fermented before wine and beer. Basically it is what happens when honey sits with a little water and yeasts. In spite of its base being honey, it isn't automatically super sweet, sweetness happens based on the process itself. Modern meads are often crafted to be as clear and drinkable as wine, carrying similar notes.

To paraphrase an old song: Lets start at the very beginning...

What is honey? Scientifically, honey is made up from the sugary secretions of flowering plants (mostly floral nectar). Bees (and some wasps!) have an enzymatic process that converts the nectar into the monosaccharides fructose and glucose. When this is stored in a hive, water evaporates and the sugars get concentrated, becoming thick and viscous. In nature, bees use the sugars for metabolic activity (especially to fuel their flight muscles for foraging) and food for their larvae. They stockpile the honey to provide nutrients in lean times, such as overwintering.

Over time, humans have figured out how to semi-domesticate several bee species (particularly *Apis mellifera*), and utilize them not just for their honey/ beeswax production, but as pollinators for agricultural crops. By helping new colonies develop and supporting them, the sugary treat that is honey becomes much easier to access for our use. Honey is such a remarkable part of nature that humans have used it for food, beverage, and for its medicinal properties for generations.

Now, to the point of the story. Mead is a beverage that has been found in historic ruins that pre-date written history. Archaeological records have evidence of chemical markers for fermented honey in pottery dating back to 7000 BCE! Religious texts as far back as 1700-1100 BCE make mentions of a beverage that is believed to have been a mead, and



Ancient Greek writers documented mead (this being the preferred drink during ancient Greece's Golden Age. The word itself has deep roots in several old languages, with many of the ancient languages having similarities in the words themselves.

On the surface, mead making isn't too complicated, after all, this beverage has existed before science as we know it. However, producing a high quality, enjoyable mead takes more effort and understanding than one would think. It is often called "Honey Wine", but that is not really correct since "wine" is, by definition, made by fermenting grapes. The process is similar, and mead is often bottled (or, more recently, some are canned), but the fact that the primary base is honey, not grapes, is what makes mead NOT a wine.

Like other fermented beverages, mead has multiple "types" under its category. To keep things very simple, I'm basing my descriptions on the MOST BASIC breakdowns. Wine has its "types" broken down based on the grape varietal used: Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, etc. In beer it's mostly by style: Lager, Kolsch, Stout, etc.,

Liquor breaks down based on multiple things- type of grain used in fermenting, location of fermentation, additions to the base. (Scotch comes from Scotland/ whiskey is outside of Scotland/ bourbon is U.S.- but this example is basically the same type of beverage), vodka is a clear distillation of grain or root vegetable, cordials are distillations that then have other flavors added (limoncello has lemon, amaretto in orange flavors, cremes have cream and flavor added).

In mead the subdivisions are mostly by additions- Traditional (honey only), Melomel (fruit added), Pyment (wine grape juice added). Then it has other categories like Metheglin (fruit with spices added) and Braggot (mead with beer ingredients added).

So, you've never tried drinking mead- how do you choose? The simplest step is to locate a local liquor or wine shop. If they have an online portal, put MEAD into the search bar and see what comes up- if the shop doesn't have an online option- ask in the shop. Some stores shelve mead in the same area as Dessert wines because they either don't know where else to put it, or because they carry a very limited selection and mead can share shelf space with dessert wines easily.

Others have it in the coolers. If there isn't a shop near you, there are some online shops that can ship- just be sure they can ship to your state before you get too excited. You can also hit Google to see if there are any meaderies in your state that will ship to you, or that have a taproom nearby so you can "try before you buy". I'd recommend starting with a Traditional sweet mead- these usually aren't overly sweet. I prefer more local meaderies myself, but some brands (such as Chaucers and Redstone) have been distributed on a larger scale for quite some time.

Once you find a Traditional Mead that appeals to you, explore the other offerings in that line- flavors will vary greatly from brand to brand, even if they list the same additions. Like wine, each maker has their own way to present flavors.

Be aware that a lot of meads price out at \$20 a bottle or more. Remember that prices are set based on many variables. A simplistic breakdown is that while wine and beer rely on the soil condition and the climate to grow their fermentable crops, however, not only is honey dependent on the condition of the soil and the crops grown nearby, but also on the health and size of the hives. Then you factor in the man-hours to collect the fermentable, and the cost of the bottling and fermenting machinery, bottles, corks, and labels, shipping and you can see why mead prices are what they are.

As with so many things, don't be afraid to try something new! When it comes to your beverage, give mead a try! Try more than one brand and style. If you aren't afraid of trying a new beer/wine/ whiskey, here is a new category to explore. Even if you don't really like it- at least you will have explored something new to you.





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STILL AUSTIN DISTILLERY: CRAFTING A NEW ERA OF TEXAS WHISKEY

by David Yancey

Images by Still Austin

In the heart of Austin, Texas, where the city's creative pulse flows through its streets, and its spirit of independence lives in every art piece and musical note, there lives a distillery that takes on the city's pulse and beat in every aspect: Still Austin Whiskey Co. Since its inception, this distillery has rapidly captured the attention of whiskey lovers, not just in Texas, but across the nation. Its rise, however, is more than just good marketing and trendy labels. It's a story of dedication to craft, a love for local ingredients, and a commitment to sustainability.

For a city synonymous with innovation and culture, it seems fitting that Still Austin is rewriting the Texas whiskey narrative. But what sets them apart from the many other whiskey makers in the state? It's their approach to craft, quality, and regional pride.

A Grain-to-Glass Philosophy

What makes Still Austin truly stand out is its commitment to being a grain-to-glass distillery. They don't just buy barrels from larger operations or outsource any part of their whiskey-making process. Instead, they carefully control every step, starting with sourcing grains from Texas farmers. By using Texas-grown ingredients, Still Austin keeps a firm connection to the land, offering their patrons an authentic taste of the Lone Star State.



STILL AUSTIN — WHISKEY Co —

This grain-to-glass method isn't just a catchy phrase for them; it's a dedication to transparency. It's about knowing where every component of their whiskey comes from, ensuring quality and building trust with the consumer. You can taste it in every pour—each bottle holds the essence of Texas soil and sun, a reflection of the state's agricultural heritage. For whiskey aficionados, this matters because it ties the product to a place in a way that mass-produced spirits simply can't.

The Art of Distilling: Local and Sustainable

Still, Austin's artful touch is evident not only in its distilling process but also in its attention to environmental impact. Their facility features a 42-foot column still named "Nancy," after Nancy Sinatra, which plays a key role in shaping their whiskey's smooth and distinct character. But it's not just the tech that's impressive; it's their entire approach. They are keen on reducing their environmental footprint by partnering with local farms to use spent grains as animal feed, supporting the local ecosystem.

Sustainability isn't a buzzword here; it's a philosophy that runs deep in their business model. In an industry known for its significant water and energy usage, Still Austin's efforts to minimize waste and focus on eco-friendly practices make them a leader, not just in whiskey but in responsible business practices. For environmentally conscious consumers, this makes a glass of Still Austin whiskey even more enjoyable, knowing that what they're sipping is part of a larger, thoughtful process.

A Whiskey for Every Palate

Another aspect of Still Austin's appeal is its versatility. Their flagship product, the Straight Bourbon Whiskey, is a well-balanced, full-bodied spirit with a rich amber color, boasting notes of toasted caramel, cinnamon, and a hint of dark fruit. It's approachable for the casual whiskey drinker but complex enough to please the seasoned connoisseur. At 98.4 proof, it packs a punch while maintaining smoothness, making it a delightful sip on its own or the perfect base for a bold Old Fashioned.

But that's not all. Still Austin doesn't shy away from experimentation. Their limited-edition series and The Musician line allow them to play with different mash bills and aging techniques, offering unique expressions that keep consumers intrigued. Their use of smaller barrels for aging means they can accelerate the process and experiment more freely, allowing whiskey fans to experience variations that might take decades in other distilleries.

Their approach to creativity feels distinctly Austin—where music, art, and food scenes constantly blur the lines between genres. Still Austin embodies this spirit by constantly pushing the boundaries of what Texas whiskey can be, while maintaining respect for the traditions that came before them.



Austin's Influence on the Brand

Austin itself is inseparable from Still Austin's DNA. The city's rebellious, eclectic spirit permeates everything the distillery does. From its bold branding to its community-driven ethos, it's clear that this whiskey is a product of its environment. It fits right in with the city's ethos of "keeping Austin weird" while also embracing its roots. The distillery's public tasting room and tours have become a gathering spot for locals and tourists alike, contributing to the city's thriving craft scene. In many ways, Still Austin is to whiskey what Austin is to Texas—a place that celebrates its heritage while forging its own path. In an industry that can often feel overly commercialized or stuck in the past, Still Austin is refreshingly different. They don't just make whiskey; they make a statement about what it means to be Texan, to be independent, and to push the boundaries of craft.

Final Pour

Still Austin Distillery may be a relative newcomer in the grand tradition of whiskey-making, but its impact is already being felt. From its grain-to-glass approach to its commitment to sustainability and its deep connection to the Austin community, this distillery is setting a new standard for what craft whiskey can and should be. As more whiskey lovers discover the unique flavors and story behind Still Austin, it seems inevitable that this distillery will continue to grow, all while staying true to its Texan roots.

For those who seek not just a great whiskey, but a product with heart, soul, and a story to tell, Still Austin Whiskey Co. is well worth a visit—and a pour.

CIGAR PAIRINGS



TATUAJE & JIM BEAM

by Joe Gulino

Images by Joe Gulino

"Explore The Endless Flavor In A Single Grain"

—Jim Beam Distillery

10th Anniversary Tattoo

Brand: Tatuaje

Factory: My Father Cigars S.A. (Estelí, Nicaragua)

Vitola: The Belle Encre Perfecto 5.375x48

Filler: Nicaraguan

Wrapper: Ecuadorian Habano

Binder: Nicaraguan

Body: Medium Plus Boldness

Price: \$12 MSRP



The Cigar

This cigar's Ecuadorian Habano wrapper should provide some sweetness over its spicier Nicaraguan fillers and binder. It was blended by the Jose 'Pepin' Garcia family, for Tatuaje brand founder Pete Johnson, in celebration of the brand's 10 year anniversary. Yes, the brand name Tatuaje translates to "tattoo," in honor of Pete's tattoos. The cigar was originally released in 2014, the year on my box is 2019.



The Whisky

Here we have a unique American Single Malt, from Kentucky's famous Jim Beam Distillery. "We put our mash bill of 100% American Malted Barley through our centuries-old process. The result? An American single malt whiskey that brings an entirely different flavor profile in American Whiskey." Since the cigar is a medium plus cigar, I felt the 47% ABV and unique style of this whiskey would pair excellently with it.

Nose: Blood oranges over apricot balanced by soft buttery oak.

Palate: Orange infused oak over soft cinnamon spice.

Finish: That soft cinnamon spice melts away to a subtle cherry note.

Visual / Pre-light Draw

Light hay and dark chocolate on side sniff, with tough looking oily veins on the Ecuadorian Habano wrapper. Visually we have strong construction on the cigar, with melted dark chocolate on dry foot odor, and no spice when prepping the head for a Colibri V-cut. There are bold oats and slight floral notes on the dry draw. Do not let the word Miami on the oval brown band fool you, as the cigar was produced in Nicaragua.

First Third

Immediately I get toasted marshmallows on the first puff. The retro hale is very nutty and full bodied with a slight sweet woody spiciness on the tip of the nose. I went in blind, not knowing the blend, but can tell this is definitely a medium plus cigar. I get cake battered chocolate on the high volume foot smoke odor. A quick touch up, due to this Chicago summer breeze, and we're back in business. Some sweet slightly charred vanilla notes start to coat the palate. Now we have a nice even burn and strong dark gray and black ash. The cigar has become buttery and drawing perfectly, this is the perfect moment to introduce the whiskey.

Cigar to whiskey: Charred and bold orange over strawberry hard candy, with a nice mellowed spice and subtle creamy vanilla note on the finish.

Second Third

After a cleanse of the palate with water, the soft vanilla and buttery tobacco notes coat the palate. A delicious charred pistachio note on the smoothed out retro-hale now, and slight spice on the finish again. This ash is crazy long and makes me nervous, so a circular tap off around the ashtray, and back into the cigar. This cigar, even though a bit bolder, remains creamy and buttery on its delivery to the palate. Time to reintroduce the whiskey.

Whiskey to cigar: Earthy and malty spiciness of this American single malt mellows to creamy yellow cake batter notes. I love this direction of the pairing.

Final Third

We get a nice transition to chocolate cake batter notes on the palate and foot smoke odor. This was a pretty epic transition. The band was tricky to take off, but was able to get it off from the top front. Now back into the cigar. That now creamy pistachio note seems to be dominating the final third. We get more creamy cake batter on the foot smoke odor. The retro-hale has completely smoothed out with a slight charred vanilla note that glides softly off the tip of the nose, with no spice at all. I became relaxed and fully enjoyed the cigar's smaller ring gauge, as well as its creamy delivery to the palate.

The entire experience of the cigar has peaked and I am fully enjoying each and every creamy easy going, medium bold puff. Its foot smoke aroma is absolutely delectable and soft as it hits me square in the face. The burn has been slow throughout the smoke, but even slower now in the final third. This cigar simply does not want to quit on me. So let's take advantage and smoke out the whiskey.

Cigar smoked whiskey: Big charred and moist fresh fruitiness over vanilla notes hits the palate, with the softest note of creamy cantaloupe on the finish.

We definitely matched the boldness of the drink to the cigar with this pairing, producing some awesome charred fruity and creamy vanilla notes. This is an easy going and relaxing pairing, one I would recommend even for beginners, malt lovers, and fruit lovers alike.



THE TRIFECTA OF COLORS: A JOURNEY THROUGH MICALLEF BLACK, BLUE, AND RED CIGARS

by David Yancey

Images by Micallef

Micallef Cigars has been a notable name in the cigar industry, known for their dedication to craftsmanship, quality, and creating cigars that tell a story with every puff. Among their wide array of offerings, three standout lines—the Micallef Black, Micallef Blue, and Micallef Red—form a remarkable trifecta that highlights the brand's ability to cater to different palates while maintaining an impeccable standard of excellence. Each cigar is crafted with its own unique blend and profile, yet they collectively represent the rich tapestry of what Micallef Cigars offers.



Micallef Black: The Bold Foundation

Starting with the Micallef Black, this cigar sets the stage for a bold, complex smoking experience. Known for its dark, rich wrapper, the Black is as visually appealing as it is flavorful. The cigar features a San Andrés wrapper from Mexico, well-known for delivering a rich, earthy character and subtle sweetness. Beneath this, you'll find a blend of Nicaraguan and Dominican fillers, creating a symphony of flavors that strike a balance between intensity and sophistication.

When lit, the Micallef Black introduces robust notes of dark chocolate, espresso, and a hint of black pepper, making it ideal for those who enjoy a fuller intensity in their smoke. The depth of the San Andrés wrapper truly shines in this cigar, offering a balanced bitterness that enhances the bold flavors, while the Nicaraguan filler adds a layer of spicy complexity that keeps you engaged from start to finish.

Pairing suggestion:

Knob Creek 10 yr Rye

Micallef Blue: The Balanced Elegance

If the Micallef Black is the bold, commanding presence, the Micallef Blue represents balance and refinement. With its Ecuadorian Sumatra wrapper and a combination of Nicaraguan and Honduran fillers, the Blue line offers a medium-bodied smoke that appeals to both novice and seasoned smokers alike.

From the first puff, the Micallef Blue delivers a smooth and creamy smoke, with notes of cedar, almonds, and a touch of cinnamon spice. As the cigar progresses, the complexity deepens, revealing layers of leather, cocoa, and a mild earthiness. This cigar is all about balance—nothing overwhelms, yet every puff is satisfying and complex in its own right.

The Blue is often a favorite for those who appreciate subtlety and craftsmanship. It's a versatile cigar that can be enjoyed at any time of day, and its approachable profile makes it an excellent introduction for those new to Micallef Cigars.

Pairing suggestion:

Classic Manhattan or a Rob Roy



Micallef Red: The Bright Spark

Rounding out this colorful trio is the Micallef Red, a cigar that brings vibrancy and energy to the lineup. The Red series boasts an Ecuadorian Habano wrapper, which gives it a distinctive, slightly oily sheen. Inside, a blend of Nicaraguan fillers creates a bright and dynamic smoking experience, rich in flavor but medium in strength.

The Micallef Red opens with notes of fresh red pepper, citrus zest, and leather, giving it an invigorating start. As the cigar develops, you'll pick up hints of toasted bread, sweet spices, and even some floral notes. The complexity of this cigar makes it exciting to smoke, as each puff offers something new and interesting.

What sets the Micallef Red apart is its ability to combine brightness with depth. It has enough spice to satisfy those who enjoy a livelier smoke, but it's not overwhelming. This makes the Red ideal for pairing with lighter beverages like sparkling wines or craft cocktails, adding a layer of elegance to any occasion.

Pairing suggestion:

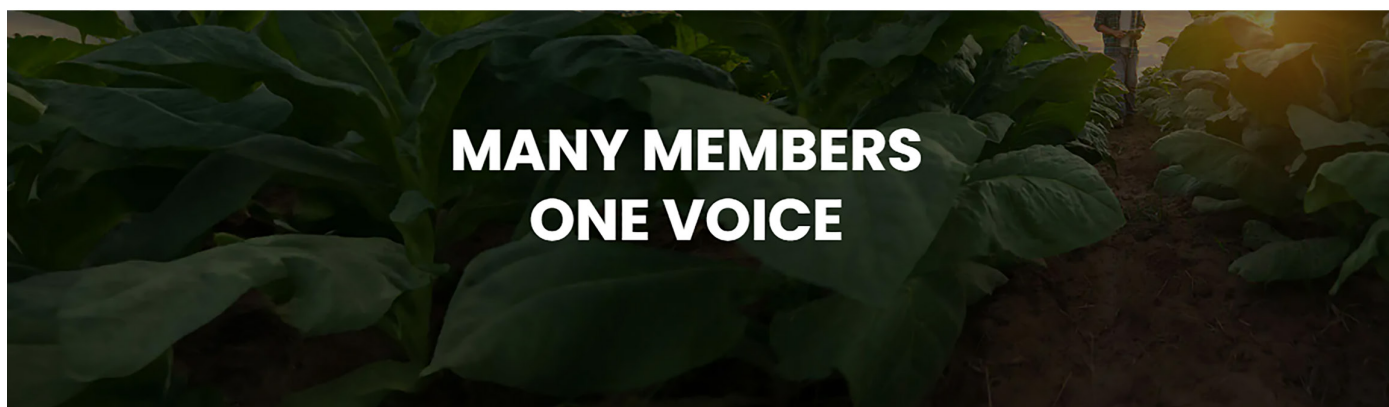
Still Ausstin Artist-Cask Strength Rye

A Cohesive Palette of Excellence

The Micallef Black, Blue, and Red lines together form a comprehensive palette of flavors and experiences. Whether you seek the bold richness of the Black, the balanced elegance of the Blue, or the bright vibrancy of the Red, Micallef Cigars has crafted a collection that speaks to the diversity of the cigar-smoking community.

Each cigar stands on its own as a masterclass in blending and construction, but when enjoyed as part of the broader Micallef collection, they represent a trifecta of color, taste, and quality. Micallef Cigars has once again proven that their commitment to craftsmanship is second to none, offering something for everyone while never compromising on their core principles of excellence.

For cigar aficionados or those new to the world of premium cigars, the Micallef Black, Blue, and Red are a must-try—each color tells its own story, and together, they form a narrative of passion, precision, and the pursuit of perfection.



SPIRIT TALK

...ber got L...
...retired badly
...led at angles
...told me he
...ed as I ask
...member me to you when
...warlet did. Have you
...of the German soldiers who
...off and asked the Irish
...to the rear. On the
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HEAVEN'S DOOR

by David Yancey

Images by David Yancey

Whiskey: Heaven's Door Distillery Series

Color: Golden Amber

Proof: 123.3

Blend: 80% Corn, 10% Rye, 10% Malted Barley, crafted from a blend of Heaven's Door distilled barrels and sourced barrels from partnering makers.

What Makes It Special

Heaven's Door Distillery is the brainchild of legendary musician Bob Dylan, blending his artistry with the craftsmanship of fine whiskey. Established in partnership with Master Distiller Ryan Perry, the brand takes its name from Dylan's iconic song Knockin' on Heaven's Door and reflects the same poetic and soulful qualities. The distillery is housed in a repurposed church in Nashville, Tennessee, a fitting location for a brand that marries tradition with innovation. Known for its creative blends and high-quality sourced barrels, Heaven's Door often incorporates artistic touches, such as custom gates designed by Dylan himself, which adorn their bottles. This Distillery Series release aims to showcase a unique blend of their in-house distilled barrels and contributions from trusted partners, promising a dynamic expression of flavors and craftsmanship.



Nose

The initial aroma is inviting, with a delicate sweetness of honey and vanilla complemented by subtle hints of lemongrass and butterscotch. The nose suggests a complexity that, unfortunately, the rest of the experience struggles to deliver.



Palate

The first sip introduces a spicy kick of pepper that transitions into a mild butterscotch sweetness at the center. However, the overall flavor profile feels unbalanced, with a flat, lackluster body that leaves much to be desired.

Finish

Disappointingly short to the point of being nearly nonexistent, the finish fails to leave any lasting impression. It abruptly disappears, leaving the drinker searching for a more fulfilling conclusion.



Final Thoughts

At a hefty proof of 123.3, Heaven's Door Distillery Series Whiskey holds promise but ultimately falls short of expectations. While the nose hints at a nuanced and rich experience, the flat palate and brief finish make it difficult to enjoy this whiskey neat. Its saving grace lies in its potential as a mixer, where its subtle sweetness and spice might shine in the right cocktail.

WESTWARD TRUE NORTHWEST

by David Yancey

Images by David Yancey

Whiskey: True Northwest by Westward – American Single Malt Single Barrel Selection

Color: Mahogany

Proof: 133.15

What Makes It Special

Westward Distillery, based in Portland, Oregon, is renowned for its innovative approach to American Single Malt whiskey. Established in 2004, the distillery combines the spirit of the Pacific Northwest with traditional whiskey-making techniques, creating products that are both distinctive and rooted in craftsmanship.

What sets Westward apart is its commitment to showcasing the region's terroir. Using locally sourced malted barley and water from the Cascade Range, the distillery employs brewing techniques inspired by the craft beer movement, including fermentation with ale yeast to create a rich, robust base spirit. This dedication to quality and creativity has made Westward a trailblazer in the American Single Malt category, earning accolades for its bold and flavor-forward whiskies.

True Northwest is a single-barrel selection that exemplifies this ethos. The high-proof whiskey reflects Westward's philosophy of crafting spirits that balance intensity with complexity, capturing the rugged yet refined essence of the Pacific Northwest.

Nose

The aroma opens with an intriguing combination of turmeric and orange zest, lending a savory and citrusy brightness. Layers of cocoa powder follow, adding a subtle sweetness and a comforting richness that invites further exploration. The nose is both inviting and complex, hinting at a whiskey that is anything but ordinary.



Palate

On the palate, the whiskey delivers a zesty smokiness that is immediately captivating. The texture is buttery and full-bodied, with oils coating the tongue and enhancing the flavors. The spices come to life with the turmeric cooking spices weaving through the buttery richness, creating a dynamic interplay of savory and sweet. It's a bold and adventurous flavor profile that keeps you intrigued with every sip.

Finish

The finish is long and luxurious, with the buttery texture lingering as the cooking spices subtly fade. The final moments leave a warm, satisfying impression, making this whiskey a memorable experience from start to finish.

Score:

This American Single Malt from Westward is an exceptional example of craftsmanship. The unique flavor profile, bold proof, and seamless integration of complex notes earn it a well-deserved high score. Whether you're a seasoned whiskey enthusiast or new to the category, True Northwest offers a journey worth savoring. It's a whiskey that celebrates innovation while honoring the depth and richness of its roots.





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THE HUMIDOR



TOASTED MARSHMALLOWS

by Gabriel Seaman

Images by Gabriel Seaman

Brand: Ohana

Vitola: Petit Corona - 4 x 44

Filler: Nicaragua

Wrapper: Ecuador Habano Maduro

Binder: Nicaragua

Smoking Time: 54 minutes

Body: Strong

Flavor: Medium

Price: \$7.99 (Only sold as 5-pack for \$39.99)

What Makes it Special:

Ohana Cigars will release the fourth installment of its Toasted Marshmallows limited edition, and this year, the company is releasing two blends.

The additional new blend uses an Ecuadorian grown Habano maduro wrapper, while the other uses an Ecuadorian Connecticut wrapper. Both blends get a Nicaraguan binder and filler, with a focus on tobacco from the Condega and Jalapa regions, according to Owner and Blender Ryan Rodriguez of Ohana Cigars. Ryan and his wife Holly have made great inroads throughout the country, so let's dive into the new Maduro for this limited annual release!



Visual/Prelight Draw:

The maduro comes clothed in a matte rich dark brown chocolate colored wrapper. The wrapper texture and veins are moderately smooth, with some oil but not enough to be shiny. The flavors prelight are of leather and milk chocolate.

First Third:

It cuts and lights easily and evenly. There is good smoke production from the start, more than you would expect for the size. My first puffs are like weak coffee. Soon it adds a hint of spice on the tongue and sweet cream on the pallet, with a hint of leather on the retro. Room aroma is pleasant with my lady mentioning it smells like seasonal sweet breads and fall baking.



Second Third:

Actually not much change until almost exactly the halfway point. Around the halfway point, the coffee does tone down while the sweet cream amps up, resulting in the namesake toasted marshmallow flavor coming out.

Final Third:

As expected there is not much change through the end being a fairly small vitola. A slight ligero cone is more visible in the final third, owing I'm sure to Ryan's background as an enthusiast of ligero backloading in blends. In the case of the Maduro this is more of the like when you roast your marshmallow to a perfect golden brown then set it on fire.



Scoring:

The Toasted Marshmallow can be a polarizing blend, with some mistakenly believing it to be a flavored cigar. It is not, these sensations are wholly achieved through cheeky blending and a bit of marketing suggestion. So if you are one of us who likes your toasted camp marshmallows somewhere between charred and damned, this one is for us!

Final score: Even though it may already be too late to find these at your local shop, I have to suggest you get one. With no burn issues across 4 samples I've smoked, and the whole of the experience above, it's a 98 from me and a shoe in for my top ten this year.

FLOR DE SAN ANDRES

by Gabriel Seaman

Images by Gabriel Seaman

Brand: Rocky Patel

Vitola: Torpedo

Filler: Nicaragua

Wrapper: San Andres

Binder: Nicaragua

Smoking Time: 1 hour 5 minutes

Body: Strong

Flavor: Medium

Price: \$9.99

What Makes it Special:

San-An-Dray-Ss, say it with me, San Andres. The San Andreas is a fault line in California...

Now that we have the pronunciation out of the way, today we're looking at the Flor de San Andres by Rocky Patel. An unusually dark San Andres adorns this limited Rocky Patel, which is no longer shown on their website. I have been a fan of the original 2006 San Andres Blend for a long time, so join me as we delve in.

This Mexican wrapper is in another resurgence, so it was unsurprising when Rocky released this blend along with the Flor de San Andres Black in 2023. So let's see how it has aged.



Visual/Prelight Draw:

Dark and oily wrapper much more like the original San Andres by Rocky Patel. Prelight draw is medium firm, marked by toasted cacao and cedar along with a rich leafy scent at the foot. On the tongue there is a hint of generic but savory spice.

First Third:

My first puffs after lighting slowly with my double torch are of rich leaves and savory spice. The toasted cacao is available on the retro, if only just. It is well balanced, producing a medium amount of smoke that smells like baking bread, and is not drying out my mouth. In fact I found no need to drink during the entire session even in the midday Texas heat.

Second Third:

Actually not much change until almost exactly the halfway point, which is when I also removed the bands due to the large sub band. The savory spice and a slight floral note have taken the fore, with the cedar and toasted cacao rounding out the lingering tastes. This thing has some legs on the palette, in a good way.

Final Third:

The toasted flavor turns from cacao to nutty cedar here. The rear is brought in with the savory spice becoming almost discernable as a flavor and not just an experience, but then it just doesn't quite get there. This cigar remains medium bold in flavor, but with high nicotine strength

and a pleasant room smell with medium smoke output. Nothing that should be off putting to even the least agreeable mates.



Score:

While I enjoy Rocky Patel from time to time knowing this one won't be around forever is probably the only truly disappointing part. This cigar does a great job of showing the very best traits of San Andres and why it is so often used, despite being so frequently misspoken. The burn was great, the ligero cone slight but ever present, and the ash easily controlled, almost always needing to be knocked at about an inch as it would not fall on its own. Great construction and a masterful blend? This will do you well.

Final Score:

All this considered and with the excellent construction and balance I score th Flor de San Andres at a 91! You should get some if you can

COFFEE



FARA COFFEE

by David Jefferies

Images by David Jefferies

Dedicated to My wife and The fallen soldiers of 1st ID 1-6 (2003-2006)

To my wife may we travel the world and may you treasure the places I treasure. To the Fallen soldiers of 1-6 ID I was too young to remember your numerous faces on my T.V screen. But from all of us here at Leaf n Grain Society Thank you.

Welcome back to the coffee section, this will be as much a storytime as it is a review. The task at hand was to find a farm-to-table coffee. As luck would have it or Divine providence, which ever the reader is more comfortable with. My wife and I found this coffee on our first Sam's Club trip. Fara coffee represents to me the best value in this whole magazine issue, it is 2lbs of coffee that is Farm-to-table and it comes in at 15 dollars. Better yet, they are down the road in Austin, Texas, and I love supporting local businesses. They own multiple farms in Nicaragua and other Latin American countries. They roast and blend in Austin and seek to improve the lives of the people who bring us this fine bean.

The specific offering today is the breakfast blend, which has accompanied me for two weeks now. It has been a faithful companion on most mornings, especially when I have 8:00 a.m. classes. Out of a Pour over on the nose, you can expect notes of chocolate and hazelnut, which reminded me of cold German winters. The coffee here tasted like apples and milk chocolate, which were pretty standard notes. When done in a French Press preparation, the top had so much oil that it could have run my car. On the nose was a pumpkin pie and nutmeg with a sweet note. The Press variation tasted pretty watery and had whispers of acidity, which told me it could be something the Onyx Geometry if it wanted to, but it doesn't. It was a pretty normal background coffee to be honest. It was much like the self-made millionaires of generations past. It could work the Farm or dress formally and go to a charity Gala and be just as comfortable in either situation. I paired it with an Ave Maria Knights Templar. I chose this because of the light wrapper, and I was not disappointed.



I tried both the Press coffee and a pour-over with this cigar. The notes are from both samplings. It tasted like piney woods and sap, followed by maple syrup and some whispers of vanilla. It had some background of bitterness, which balanced out all the other flavors. When the cigar was about to finish, it started to taste like lemons, a weird turn from the woody molasses, syrupy taste the Ave Maria Knights Templar had before. I would recommend this pairing to anyone. While this does not sound like a sublime experience, it was interesting, and it was different from most other coffee and cigar pairings I have done. What makes this pairing for me is that both the cigar and the coffee have a humble spirit, and this quality complements the other in a beautiful experience. The other side of the story is that it transported me back in time to both Warren Barracks, Germany, and Ft. Jackson, SC.



It took me to Germany, where I played battle with the neighborhood kids as our fathers and mothers were off-waging war against the Adversary of the United States. It reminded me of the memorials of young service members from units at our base who paid the ultimate sacrifice. While we had wooden swords and shields, they fought with antiquated gear. But still, they adapted and overcame because we had asked them to. A true testament to American ingenuity, bravery, and the indomitable spirit within every American today. It then brought me to the piney woods of South Carolina, where I played on the playground equipment at Fort Jackson. It reminded me of the story I have told so many times about the State flag, and what many confuse for a crescent moon is actually a neck guard to protect officers from a calvary saber. The Palmetto tree on the flag was used by soldiers to fortify positions they fought from.. It brings me to tears and hurts to think about the loss and suffering of men at war.



While I'm giving this one a score of 85, I think the value here is twofold. One inviting the consumer in to make others' lives better at a price everyone can justify.

Two, you get a coffee that cannot go wrong with. Comparatively, to get the same quality and caliber of coffee elsewhere you would pay the same price as you would here and get considerably less coffee. What I think my story and this coffee have in common is both the soldier and Fara are looking to help others in a life-changing way. What you should do is buy this coffee and hug your loved ones tight. Be the kind of American that future generations will want to look up to.



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