

LEAF N GRAIN SOCIETY

The Humidor

Wine Cellar

Cigar Pairings

Spirit Talk

Craft Brew

Recipes

Women in the
Industry

Green River Distillery
Valor Cigars

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

SPRING 2025

ISSUE 05



THE RHONDA SERIES

FOR THE DISCERNING LADY WHO KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT SHE LIKES.

CRAFTED BY SEASONED ARTISANS, EACH RHONDA SERIES CIGAR HOLDER BLENDS TIMELESS STYLE WITH HEIRLOOM QUALITY — DESIGNED TO BE ADMIRER, BUILT TO BE USED. WHETHER YOU'RE LIGHTING UP OR WINDING DOWN, THIS IS THE ACCESSORY



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BEVERAGES, & CULINARY DELIGHTS

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

There's a line in one of our features this issue that's stayed with me: "And this time, the names won't be left off the label." That's the heartbeat of this edition.

For decades—centuries, really—the world of whiskey, cigars, wine, and craft culture has too often sidelined the women who helped build it. They were the ones sorting the leaves, rolling the cigars, refining the barrels, shaping the flavors, managing the books, and passing down the know-how. But their names rarely made it into the history. They weren't on the bottle. They weren't in the spotlight. That's changing.

This issue isn't just a celebration. It's a correction. A recognition. A spotlight turned intentionally toward the women who are doing the work, making the art, breaking the mold, and setting the pace for the next generation of makers, smokers, blenders, and brewers.

You'll read about pioneers like Heather Greene and Victoria Eady Butler, who bring depth and vision to the whiskey world. You'll meet Angela Chapman, quietly turning heads in Texas winemaking. You'll hear from women who stepped into cigar lounges once dominated by men and carved out a space—without asking permission. And you'll see, over and over again, what happens when talent meets opportunity.

This isn't a trend. It's a movement. And it's long overdue.

So pour a dram, cut a stick, raise your glass—whatever your ritual looks like. And as you flip through these pages, take a moment to appreciate the women who've helped shape the culture we love. This time, we're putting their names on the label.



D. Yan

WINE CELLAR



ANGELA CHAPMAN OF LOST OAK WINERY

by Terry-Lynn Faught

Images provided by Lost Oak Winery

In the world of wine, there is a great deal of variety. Starting with the grape variety grown, the variation continues with the soil they are grown in, the way they are grown, the way they are harvested and processed, then comes the artistry. The way grapes are turned into wine takes more than just knowledge. It also involves nuance- the way flavors are extracted and highlighted, which varietals are blended (if necessary) and in what proportions, as well as the method and length of time used for aging. Winemakers themselves vary as much as the fruit they work with.

Lost Oak Winery in Burleson, Texas has a solid history of winemaking. Originating in Abilene in the 1950's, Gene Estes spent time living and working in Alsace, France before opening the doors to Lost Oak. In 2000, the next generation stepped into leadership with Roxanne Myers (Gene's step-daughter) taking control. This solid and influential winery is currently woman-owned and woman-operated. Creating many award winning wines, the winery works with major universities to experiment with and develop grape varieties that adapt and perform well in the Texas terroir and climate. Along with their vineyard and tasting room in Burleson, Texas, they have added a tasting room in Boerne, Texas, and are part of The Texas Wine Collective in Fredericksburg, Texas, spreading their wine into Central Texas.

Angela Chapman is their lead winemaker. While some winemakers grow up with their family guiding them into wine, Angela came to winemaking in a round about way. Having grown up in the North Texas area, she originally went to college to study metalwork as it pertains to jewelry. Upon considering her limited options for employment (she jokes she "failed into winemaking"), she stopped short of graduation and pivoted.

*"Texas Tennat...
deep saturated hues"*



First taking a job in a liquor store, she started learning about the liquor industry in general; then followed her curiosity into wine. She completed her WSET III and became a wine educator as she dove into wine, finally ending up at Lost Oak, where she started in the tasting room and worked her way up into winemaking. The shutdown that occurred due to COVID opened an opportunity for her in the production room. Now going into her 6th harvest at Lost Oak she has also earned her Winemaker Certification through Texas Tech.

As in any passion industry, there are things you do because you have to, things you hope to do, and things you wish/hope you'll be able to do. The things you have to do are the less interesting parts that have to be done to get to the final result. In the production room, she talked about how being a little smaller statured as a woman led her to creatively solve problems, particularly when dealing with the production process.

Some of the machinery is large and awkward, even for a taller, stronger person. I asked Angela if she had a favorite varietal (type of grape) to work with, and she cited Petit

Verdot. In her experience, it can be a little challenging at times because it is “feral” (her word), it can be tough and can be handled somewhat roughly- in processing she thinks it emits a ‘wild’ outdoorsy rich smell. It’s a wonderful wine to blend other varietals with, but has its own charms when bottled on its own. She also likes working with Merlot, and feels like it is often overlooked and may have picked up a bit of a “bad rap” for the way it was portrayed in the movie “Sideways”. As with Petit Verdot, it is a solid wine to blend with and has its own personality when it stands alone.

With the vast array of grape varietals out there, I asked if there were any she would like to work with that she hadn’t yet. After a bit of thought, she said the Texas Tennat as a red grape, due to the deep saturated hues it produces, as well as its full body, high tannins and known aging potential. This grape has strong dark berry flavors, occasionally having notes of leather and spice. While the Tennat varietal started in France, it does very well in the Hill Country of Texas, producing wines that can age well as well as being pleasant to drink while the wine is still young.



Another grape she’d like to work with is the Piquepoul Blanc. An ancient French white grape, it produces a fresh, bright wine on the palate with mouthwatering acidity that can include citrus flavors with some minerality, green apple or pear aromas, with some growing regions lending notes of honeydew melon, white flowers or even some salinity. It has the nickname “lip-stinger” due to its high acidity. This grape is grown in Texas in the High Plains AVA producing wine with a drinkable softness, bright citrus and melon notes.





Lost Oaks portfolio of wines is impressive, with many winning awards over the years. While the vast majority are Texas grapes only- there are two sparkling and one red blend that utilize grapes from California. I asked about it, and she explained that the sparkling wines from California are done in partnership and are a Lost Oaks process, but the winery they work with grows amazing grapes and does an excellent job with making sparkling wines, so why not partner with them to make high quality sparkling wine. Not everyone has to be an expert at all things, and this can apply to wines too. Even in the Texas winemaking community, not all grapes are grown by all vineyards, and as a result the grapes grown by any given vineyard may appear in bottles by other wine-makers.

Aside from wine, Angela also has a variety of non-alcohol beverages she enjoys. Everything from sparkling water to coffee, kombucha, and coconut water. With the heat she's often working around in North Texas, it's no wonder she has an entire arsenal of hydrating beverages to turn to!

One of these days she would like to go to Portugal to explore both the wine history and the general history of the country. The variety of wine produced in Portugal makes it an exciting place for her to explore wines, and the country's history in general is interesting to her. Also on her "wish list" for travel is to go to Iceland and see the Northern Lights. We chatted about some of the trips we've heard about for the Northern Lights, and agreed that it would be amazing to be up there drinking local wine and watching the colors above us.

Lost Oak is poised to continue to produce award winning wines for the foreseeable future. Spending time at their winery, looking out over the grapevines is a comfortable feeling- not unlike sitting on your own patio, just with a lot more friends. Angela and the rest of the team at Lost Oak represent the direction wine in Texas is going— knowledgeable, creative, friendly, and tenacious. An afternoon at the winery is truly worth the trip! And if you aren't local, but are interested in trying their wines, they do have ordering to ship (to some states) available on their website.

Lost Oak Winery
www.lostoakwinery.com

LOST OAK SHERRY STYLE VIOGNIER DESSERT WINE

by Terry-Lynn Faught

Images by Terry-Lynn Faught

REVIEW:

Lost Oak-Sherry Style Viognier Dessert Wine-Barrel Aged 13 years

The first time I heard that this existed was in a Facebook post made by Lost Oak late in 2024, and there is a story behind it. The story goes that in 2011, Gene Estes (Lost Oak founder) had a vision for a Sherry style Viognier. That year, the harvest of Viognier grapes at Bingham Family Vineyard was exceptional. After acquiring a New French Oak barrel, he added the Viognier wine along with a bit of white brandy—and then waited. In this course of waiting, the barrel was eventually forgotten, likely due to being moved around the winery as it grew. Over the next 13 years the barrel was exposed to both extreme cold and extreme heat, as it was moved from one place on the property to another. Every few years it would cross Gene's mind, and he'd ask about it, but ultimately as the winery was busy growing, the barrel was left sitting, aging, and waiting. One day in 2024, it made its way into winemaker Angela Chapman's office- to which she said "what's this and why is it in my office?"

“what's this and why is it in my office?”

The resulting product turned out to be exquisite! It's appearance in the glass is a clear, rich amber color. On the nose you get caramel and light vanilla from the barrel, and a touch of ripe pear from the grapes themselves. On first taste you get caramel, a hint of allspice, and soft vanilla. If you've ever had a sweet liquor or traditional mead, this is almost a copycat. There is a honey-like feel on the tongue very reminiscent of a rich traditional mead. A faint touch of oak supports all of the flavors, reminding you that there is a story in the glass.



As it warms from serving temperature, everything softens- aromas become muted, and the flavors on the palate become progressively fainter. This is best served and enjoyed chilled. The impressive 19.3% ABV is very easy to forget, as the alcohol hides behind the rich flavors, and it's 7.5% on the sweetness scale makes this a wonderful wine to complete a meal with. If you have old family crystal, this will be lovely in the smaller dessert wine glasses. I would pair it with low or no sugar desserts, or dark fruits like blueberries, blackberries, or ripe strawberries to allow the sweetness in the wine enhance the flavors on the plate.

Since this was a single barrel and a long time resting, I'll be sad when they are out of it- but the winemaker has assured me that they will be exploring longer barrel aged wines moving forward. Its rarity brings it in at \$75 a bottle, but for a special occasion it is certainly worth the money. It is available (while supplies last) through their site (www.lostoak-winery.com) for shipping to specific states.

CIGAR PAIRINGS



THE NINES BY 262 WITH OLD FORESTER KING'S RANCH

by David Yancey

Images by David Yancey

Brand: 262 Cigars

Vitola: The Nines (Toro)

Filler: Nicaraguan

Wrapper: Nicaraguan Habano

Binder: Nicaraguan

Body: Medium to Full

Flavor: Full Intensity

Price: ~\$9-12

What Makes it Special

The Nines is one of those cigars that shows strength without arrogance. It's got depth, richness, and complexity, but it's accessible enough that it never feels like it's trying too hard. Pairing it with Old Forester King's Ranch, a bourbon with mesquite-charcoal filtration and a rich backbone, seemed like a match that would either make magic — or clash big. Luckily, it made magic.

Visual/Prelight Draw

The cigar was rolled clean, slight oil sheen to the wrapper, firm under the fingers without being over-packed. The cold draw gave up notes of earthy leather and a faint whisper of cocoa, setting the stage for what was coming.

First Third

The cigar opened with cured leather notes laced with hints of blackberry. Solid ash held on well, with a good burn and a solid cone forming early. Hints of cocoa came up from underneath, offering a richness that tied the fruit and leather together without getting muddy.

Cigar-->Drink

Taking a draw and immediately sipping the King's Ranch opened up the bourbon's fruity side. Blackberry became more pronounced, and a cherry note came in soft behind it. The pepper from the cigar wasn't lost — it actually sharpened slightly, riding along with the fruit to give the bourbon a little more bite.

Drink-->Cigar

Taking a sip first, then the cigar, the transition held steady. Fruit notes continued to dominate early on the retrohale, but the pepper from the cigar stepped forward and stood taller than before. No loss of balance — just a little more punch.

Second Third

Moving into the second third, the flavors from the first carried through seamlessly. Earthy notes deepened, giving the cigar a little more grounding and heft. The complexity stayed intact, and the transition to the drink continued to highlight the smoked fruit side of the bourbon.

Cigar-->Drink

The cigar's earthy tones pushed the bourbon into a slightly smokier, richer fruit profile. The drink to cigar transition didn't change much here, it was a strong, steady relationship at this point.

Final Third

The final third rounded out creamy, with dusty trail notes mingling in with the cured leather. The cigar softened without losing complexity, and the smoke took on a smoother, almost buttery mouthfeel while keeping the fruit notes alive.

Cigar Smoked Drink

The bourbon leaned heavily into smoky fruit flavors, darker and more lush. The pairing felt rich without being overwhelming.

Final Thoughts

This was a pairing that worked because of contrast, not just similarity. The cigar was slightly stronger and carried more of the pairing's weight, but the bourbon stayed in the game, never folding. It's a great example of how bold flavors can come together with each other while staying in their own lanes.





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WOMEN IN WHISKEY

LEADING THE NEXT GENERATION OF FLAVOR, VISION, AND LEGACY

by David Yancey

Images by stock.adobe.com



For centuries, women have shaped whiskey from the shadows. They distilled in barns and backwoods stills when laws—or customs—said they shouldn't. They blended behind closed doors, passed down family mashbills, and ran operations while their husbands or fathers took the public credit. They were chemists, tasters, bootleggers, even enforcers—often without titles, rarely with recognition.

In the early 1800s, Helen Cumming ran an illicit still out of her farmhouse in Speyside, Scotland. When excisemen came knocking, she reportedly poured them tea while sending a quiet signal to her neighbors to hide the goods. She would hang laundry as a warning system and walk miles to sell whisky herself. Her efforts laid the foundation for what would eventually become the Cardhu Distillery—later a key part of the Johnnie Walker blend. She wasn't just clever—she was essential.

Women weren't just part of the Scottish whisky story. In Ireland, too, women worked quietly behind the walls of distilleries with names like Jameson and Powers, often as unsung workers or ensuring the books were balanced and the barrels rolled on time. Their roles rarely made headlines, but their fingerprints were on everything.

Across the Atlantic, women played a quieter, but no less crucial, role in early American bourbon. While few were officially credited, women helped run family distilleries and passed down techniques that shaped regional recipes. Their hands were in the mash long before their names ever made a label.

During Prohibition, women were both sides of the coin—bootleggers and enforcers. Some, like Bertie Brown in Montana, became known for producing the finest moonshine in the country. An African American woman operating in a male-dominated, high-risk world, she built her reputation on quality and grit. Locals swore by her homebrew. She ran her still until the day it exploded, ending her life in 1933. Others, like Georgia Hopley, took the opposite path. As the first female agent of the Bureau of Prohibition, she worked to enforce the very laws women like Brown defied.

Even earlier, women like Amanda Way led the temperance charge—persuading saloon owners to close shop and, when persuasion failed, smashing barrels herself. It's a reminder that whiskey's history isn't a straight pour—it's a complex blend of resistance, tradition, and transformation. Before we step into the modern world of whiskey trailblazers, it's worth pausing to honor one of the industry's most underappreciated pioneers: **Rita Taketsuru**.

Born Jessie Roberta Cowan in Scotland, Rita married Masataka Taketsuru, a Japanese chemist who had come to her homeland to learn the craft of whisky-making. Their love was immediate but not uncomplicated—Masataka’s family opposed the marriage, disapproving of his choice to wed a foreign woman, especially one outside of Japan’s strict cultural norms. But they married anyway, defying both distance and disapproval.

Together, they returned to Japan and, against all odds, built what would become Nikka Whisky. It was Rita who supported Masataka’s vision through financial strain, cultural skepticism, and wartime suspicion. Without her, Japanese whisky as we know it today might not exist. She was more than a wife—she was a cornerstone of a legacy. Their love was tested constantly—not just by the public, but by their own kin. Rita faced alienation as a foreigner in a post-war Japan that viewed outsiders with suspicion. Yet she remained, unwavering. Her resilience became part of Nikka’s DNA.

Rita died in 1961 after years of battling liver disease, her presence still etched into the story Masataka continued to tell. The Nikka Coffey line, distilled through the rare stills Masataka had studied in Scotland, is widely considered his tribute to her. It’s a quiet, lasting toast to the woman who gave him the courage to build something no one else believed possible. Most drinkers today may not know her name—but if they’ve ever savored a pour of Nikka Coffey Grain, they’ve tasted a love story.

Modern Times

The whiskey world looks very different today than it did even a decade ago. What was once considered a man’s drink, made by men, marketed to men, and talked about by men, is being reimagined—and much of that shift is happening because of the women now leading the way. These are not novelty hires or symbolic appointments. These are experts. Innovators. Visionaries. Each woman brings her own story, her own style, and her own impact.

Heather Greene

Heather Greene stands at the crossroads of tradition and modern flair. As CEO and Master Blender of Milam & Greene Whiskey in Texas, she’s one of the few women holding both titles in the business. Greene doesn’t just bring tasting notes to the table—she brings a vision. Her background as an author and educator has helped demystify whiskey for newcomers and elevate the conversation around it. Her book, *Whiskey Distilled*, is as much about accessibility as it is about depth, much like the whiskey she now crafts. Under her leadership, Milam & Greene has garnered critical praise for its blending techniques and innovative use of sourced barrels alongside house-distilled stock. In 2023, Greene was named Master Blender of the Year by the Bourbon Women Foundation at their inaugural Women of Whiskey Awards—recognizing her ingenuity, sensory mastery, and leadership in a category still catching up to her standard. Greene is helping rewrite the rules of American whiskey, one barrel at a time.

Marianne Eaves

Marianne Eaves didn’t just step into history—she barreled through it. Named Kentucky’s first female master distiller since Prohibition, Eaves took the reins at Castle & Key and helped resurrect one of the most storied distilleries in bourbon country. Her palate is sharp, her perspective sharper. Her approach to distilling blends science with creativity, and even after moving on from Castle & Key, she’s continued to push boundaries with Eaves Blind, an experimental whiskey project that brings transparency and sensory discovery to the forefront. Her work is reshaping how bourbon is made—and how it’s talked about.

Dr. Rachel Barrie

Across the Atlantic, **Dr. Rachel Barrie** is making her mark with every drop of Scotch that bears her influence. Known as the "First Lady of Scotch," she's the Master Blender behind BenRiach, GlenDronach, and Glenglassaugh. A chemist by training, Dr. Barrie approaches blending with both scientific rigor and intuitive artistry. Her work has breathed new life into legacy brands—GlenDronach's revival of sherry-cask-aged expressions under her guidance earned global accolades, and her creative vision helped reposition BenRiach as one of the most innovative distilleries in Speyside. Beyond her blending work, she's a passionate mentor, actively guiding the next generation of women entering the whisky world through education and advocacy. In a space long dominated by male voices, Barrie's is one of clarity, confidence, and class.

Victoria Eady Butler

Then there's **Victoria Eady Butler**, a name that carries legacy and reinvention in equal measure. As the great-great-granddaughter of Nearest Green—the formerly enslaved man who taught Jack Daniel how to distill—Butler now serves as Master Blender for Uncle Nearest Premium Whiskey. Her work honors the past while carving a bold new path forward. Since stepping into the role, she has earned widespread acclaim, winning Master Blender of the Year multiple times and helping turn Uncle Nearest into one of the fastest-growing American whiskey brands in history. Beyond the blending room, Butler has emerged as a cultural ambassador for change in the spirits industry, using her platform to highlight untold stories and ensure that African American contributions to whiskey are never again left out of the conversation. With each blend, she not only elevates the spirit but also ensures that her family's story is known and remembered.

The Road Ahead

Still, for all the progress, the industry remains a work in progress.

That's where voices like **Becky Paskin** come in. An award-winning drinks journalist and the founder of the OurWhisky Foundation, Paskin is pushing the conversation beyond token representation. Her advocacy isn't performative—it's systemic. Through reports, mentorship programs, and industry calls to action, she's challenging unconscious bias and building real, lasting change. As she's said, the goal isn't to create space for women in whiskey. It's to make sure they never have to ask for one again.

The future of whiskey is being written by hands once overlooked. And if these women are any indication, the next chapter promises to be richer, bolder, and more inclusive than any that came before. And this time, the names won't be left off the label.

Our Whisky Foundation

www.ourwhiskyfoundation.org

SPIRIT TALK

...her got L. J. ...
...retired badly ...
...died at night ...
...told me he ...
...died — as I ask ...
...remember 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? ...
...So Char ...
...ll soon be up and ...
...appreciate the ...
...& ...

BLUE RUN BARREL PICK-BOURBON THIEVES

by David Yancey

Images by David Yancey

Name: Blue Run Private Barrel Pick

Classification: Straight Bourbon Whiskey

Distillery: Blue Run Spirits (distilled at Castle & Key)

Bottled: Private Barrel Selection

Location: Kentucky

Age: NAS (estimated 4–6 years)

Proof: 123°

Batch: Bourbon Thieves Pick

What Makes It Special

This Blue Run pick, selected by the Bourbon Thieves group, highlights just how much a good private selection can elevate an already well-respected brand. Blue Run is known for richness and complexity, and this barrel didn't disappoint. It's a bourbon built around layers — playful but serious — and crafted for those who appreciate a pour that pulls you in.

Visual / Presentation

The bourbon shines a deep amber in the glass, warm and clear. Swirling it showed long, thin legs working their way down the sides, promising a lighter mouthfeel but hinting at a flavor that would stick around longer than the weight might suggest.

Nose

On the nose, bright green apple jumps out first, immediately followed by a burst of citrus that freshens everything up. Give it a second, and deeper layers come forward, soft cooking spices, and just underneath, a hit of cumin that adds an earthy savory quality, grounding the sweeter notes.



Palate

The first sip confirmed the nose. Green apple leads the way, crisp and lively, but quickly it's joined by a buttery layer of butterscotch that smooths things out. Mid-palate, a crackle of pepper sneaks in, lifting the sweetness and balancing the mouthfeel. The bourbon drinks warm — not hot — with a measured, controlled heat that supports the experience rather than overwhelming it.

Finish

The finish is long and warm, wrapping the tongue in layers of lingering spice and faint sweet notes, leaving the impression of a pour you want to revisit again and again.

GREEN RIVER BARREL PICK TRINITY RIVER WHISKEY CARTEL

by David Yancey

Images by David Yancey

Name: Green River Private Barrel Pick

Classification: Straight Bourbon Whiskey

Distillery: Green River Distilling Co.

Bottled: Private Barrel Selection by Trinity River Whiskey

Cartel

Location: Kentucky

Age: 4 Years

Proof: 124°

Batch: Trinity River Barrel Pick

What Makes It Special

The Trinity River Whiskey Cartel pulled this Green River barrel pick, and it's a heavy hitter that shows why Green River is quickly building a name for itself. It's not trying to be delicate as it leans in, offering a bold yet flavorful punch that stands up proud.

Visual / Presentation

In the glass, it pours a dark amber. The legs, thick and slow-moving, drag themselves down the side, hinting at a bold, weighty sip to come.

Nose

The first nosing filled the senses with cinnamon, deep and warm. As it settled, more cooking spices rounded things out, offering that familiar, comforting scent of a busy kitchen on a fall afternoon. It's rich and spicy without ever turning sharp.



Palate

On the palate, the cinnamon carried through immediately, landing heavy but not clumsy. Thick buttery oils covered the mouth, coating every corner with richness. Mid-palate, a strong black pepper note kicked in, sharpening the edges and adding a vibrant contrast to the sweeter, fatter mouth-feel.

Finish

The finish is long and persistent, the cinnamon holding its ground with the pepper staying bold all the way down. It's a thick, slow fade that lingers without turning bitter.

BREAKING THE MOLD A WOMAN'S JOURNEY INTO THE CIGAR WORLD

by Ash Red

Images by stock.adobe.com

For nearly three decades, I have found solace and pleasure in the rich, aromatic embrace of cigars. As a woman in a pre-dominantly male-dominated space, it was not uncommon for me to be the only female in the lounge. When I shared my passion for cigars, the reactions ranged from surprise to disbelief. "I have never met a woman who smoked cigars before," they would say, or they would look at me as if I had three heads.

Traditionally, the cigar industry conjures images of well-dressed men sipping whiskey or martinis, cigars in hand. Icons like the Rat Pack, Winston Churchill, Clint Eastwood, John F. Kennedy, and Michael Jordan often come to mind, reinforcing the notion of a "Boy's Club."

When I first started smoking, I thought I was a mystical being in this male-dominated world. Like many new smokers, I didn't initially consider the intricate process of cigar creation or its rich history. However, as I delved deeper into the culture, I discovered a world that, while traditionally male, has room for anyone who appreciates the art of the leaf.



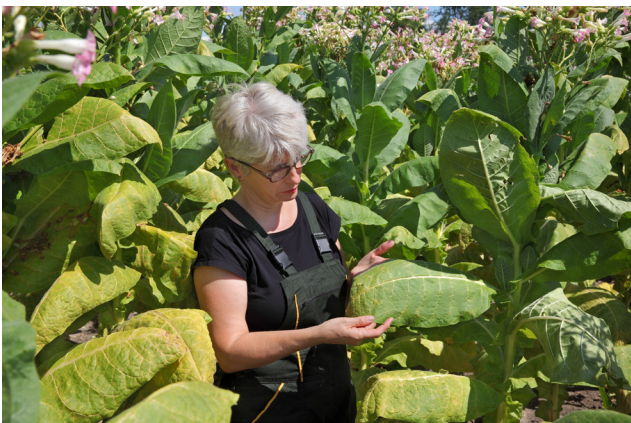
The cigar industry reminds me of James Brown's song, "It's a Man's Man's Man's World." Indeed, it is a man's world, but as the lyrics go, "it would be nothing, nothing without a woman to care." My journey has shown me that there is a place for women in this world, and our presence only enriches the experience for everyone.

Studying the history of cigars revealed a woman's care. In the fourteenth century, Aztec women doctors and midwives used tobacco for medicinal and spiritual purposes. Anthropologists have found illustrations depicting Aztec women smoking pipes. They have also discovered that in ancient Mayan culture, women and men would smoke together. When Christopher Columbus brought the gift of tobacco to Spain from the Native Americans, it was initially thought of as the "Devil's Leaf" because of the smoke emanating from one's mouth, thus introducing the cigar tobacco and cigars to the rest of the world.

As cigars began to be imported and created around the world, they became associated with affluence and luxury. Notably, countesses and duchesses were known for enjoying cigars.

So when did it change? The Victorian era marked a shift in attitudes towards women smoking. Queen Victoria banned cigar smoking in her presence, leading to a shift in public opinion. When King Edward VII ascended to the throne, he broke this ban for men with the words, “Gentlemen, you may smoke.” It became unacceptable for women to smoke, with the habit seen as a taboo and something only prostitutes would engage in. During the 1920s, there was a secret resurgence in female cigar smokers. Women-only cigar clubs emerged, providing a hideaway for ‘progressive’ women—female artists and writers who loved to smoke.

This mindset continued well into the 20th century. History repeated itself in the 1990s when cigars were seen by all as an affluent hobby; this time, when celebrity women were seen smoking, it was sexy and rebellious.



Within the last ten years, data states about 30% of regular cigar smokers are now women. Now when I walk into a cigar lounge, I am no longer the mystical creature that I once was. Women are prominent figures in this industry in many ways—they are brand owners, lounge owners, factory owners, and influencers.

If you truly look back on how women have influenced the industry, women have been unsung heroines for centuries. Women have been involved in the process of making cigars. Due to their meticulous attention to detail, they sort and select the leaves of the highest quality. Women also remove the tobacco leaf from its stem without damaging it, since it is a delicate process. Torcedoras, female cigar rollers, are essential to ensuring that cigars are rolled with exactness and beauty.

Another important job that women perform is color-sorting the cigars before they are boxed or bundled. Every box or bundle of cigars needs to have the exact same color, and since women have keen eyesight, they are able to differentiate the 72 shades. Many factories employ women to adhere the bands onto cigars as well as put the cigars in cellophane. With strong work ethics, many women have earned management positions and even managed factories.



An industry that has been ruled by men for centuries would be nothing without the care of women.

The cigar industry has seen a significant rise in influential women who have made remarkable contributions. Here are some notable women in the cigar industry:

Cynthia Fuente-Suarez: Often called the "First Lady of Cigars," Cynthia Fuente-Suarez is the Vice President of Arturo Fuente Cigars and a board member of the Cigar Family Charitable Foundation. Her leadership has been crucial in expanding the brand's global reach.

Karen Berger: Known as the "Cigar Queen," Karen Berger began her career rolling cigars in Nicaragua at eighteen. She now runs her own brand, Karen Berger Cigars, and has successfully expanded her late husband's brand, Don Kiki Cigars, while launching new lines.

Desiree Sylver: As the founder and CEO of Drunk Chicken Cigars, Desiree Sylver has introduced a unique and playful approach to the industry with her brand's distinctive names and flavors.

Ines Lorenzo-Gomez: Co-founder of La Flor Dominicana, Ines Lorenzo-Gomez oversees operations and ensures the highest standards for their cigars. Her dedication to quality and innovation has earned the brand numerous accolades.

Monika Carota: A master blender at De Los Reyes Cigars, Monika Carota is known for her meticulous approach to blending and her innovative spirit, creating some of the most sought-after cigars on the market.

Raquel and Patricia Quesada Vega: Owners of Quesada Cigars, a family-owned business founded by their grandfather. They have revitalized the brand with their leadership, ensuring its continued success while honoring their family's heritage.

These women have not only broken barriers in a traditionally male-dominated industry but have also enriched the cigar culture with their passion, expertise, and innovation.

No Squares In Our Circle



BlackStarLine.Shop

THE HUMIDOR



HILL DISTRICT TORO STEEL CITY CIGARS

by David Yancey

Images by David Yancey

Cigar: Steel City - Hill District Toro Box

Wrapper: Sumatra

Binder: Connecticut Broadleaf

Filler: Dominican Republic & Nicaragua

Vitola: Toro Box Pressed

Origin: Dominican Republic



What Makes It Special

Tony Rawlings, master blender and owner of Steel City cigars, is an upcoming blender that you will want to check out. I've had my eyes on Tony Rawlings, of Casa de Suenos cigars, for a while now. His blends are nothing short of masterful and now Tony has created his own line of cigars under the band of Steel City, a name that is in honor of his home town of Pittsburgh. Steel City dropped this Hill District Toro Box blend, and it immediately caught my attention. Sumatra wrapper, Connecticut Broadleaf binder, and a Dominican-Nicaraguan filler combo — it's a blend that hints at some real depth.

Visual Appearance

The wrapper, with a slight oiliness and a little bit of texture, creates a nice smooth presentation and an anticipation of what is to come. The cold draw gives off a nice sweet cocoa note, clean and easy through the pull, along with a soft leather nosing, further enhancing the anticipation for the first light.

First Third

The cigar opens with sweet cocoa, backed by nice earth and coffee notes and a hint of minerality midway through the draw that creates a little bit of tang. The earth and coffee notes begin to build after a couple of draws as the core of the burn begins to form, causing that minerality I experienced earlier to start to mellow out.

Construction-wise, the cigar performs well: nice white ash, a good burn line. A small touchup is needed early on to correct a slight overburn, but nothing major; the cigar stays in control with a good burn cone after ashing.

Second Third

The second third is where the cigar starts showing a little more character. New flavors begin to present themselves. While there is a faint hint of acidity, it does not overpower notes of pine nuts or a touch of pepper. The acidity began to dissipate allowing subtle hints of cocoa to come through, keeping everything balanced.

While the cigar was burning hot through the second third, the burn did correct itself nicely around halfway, evening out without any real intervention. The construction continued to hold strong. Ash stayed firm, no flaking, just a steady performer.

Final Third

Flavor-wise, the final third is all about rawhide leather with a dusty trail vibe to it, rustic, but not rough. Retrohale brings out a nice punch of black pepper, giving the finish a little kick without overwhelming everything. Regular puffs bring a straight pepper note that rides it out to the end.

Final stretch — the cigar stays on point. The band comes off clean with zero damage. Burn holds steady all the way through.



Score

Steel City's Hill District Toro Box delivered a really enjoyable smoke. A few minor touchups at the beginning, but nothing that got in the way. Great construction overall, with complex flavors and good transitions that kept it interesting from start to finish.

BREAKING THE SMOKE CEILING WOMEN SHAPING THE FUTURE OF CIGAR CULTURE

by Gabriel Seamen

Images by Maxim | stock.adobe.com

In the past, the world of cigars has often felt like an exclusive club for men—a hazy room filled with leather chairs, low lighting, and the scent of tobacco lingering in the air. But times are changing. Today, more women are stepping into cigar lounges and events, challenging stereotypes, breaking barriers, and redefining cigar culture as we know it.

The Challenges Women Face in the Cigar Community

Despite growing numbers, women still face several challenges in this male-dominated space:

Inclusivity Issues:

While the cigar industry is evolving, many lounges and events remain predominantly male-oriented. This environment can make women feel out of place or unwelcome. Unsurprisingly, inclusivity ranks high among the concerns voiced by female cigar enthusiasts.

Stereotypes and Assumptions:

Imagine walking into a cigar lounge and being immediately pegged as someone there to accompany a male partner—not a real cigar aficionado. Unfortunately, this scenario plays out all too often. Women frequently face assumptions about their cigar knowledge, with some being dismissed as novices or "tag-along."

Lack of Product:

Variety While progress has been made, some women desire more options tailored to their preferences, like flavored cigars or milder profiles. Catering to these preferences can lead toward a more inclusive market.

Atmosphere Matters:

Let's face it, the traditional cigar lounge vibe doesn't always click with everyone. Many women prefer modern, open, and inclusive spaces rather than steeped in an old-world ambiance that caters primarily to men.

Objectification and Gatekeeping:

On social media and in-person groups, some women report experiences of objectification or dismissive behavior. Over-sexualized marketing campaigns and condescending attitudes are common complaints, highlighting the industry's need for a cultural overhaul.

Building a Better Experience: What Works

So, how can lounges, events, and brands create a more welcoming environment for women? Here's a look at what's working:

Engagement Based on Knowledge and Preferences

Picture this: A woman walks into a cigar lounge, and the staff greets her with genuine warmth. Instead of making assumptions, they ask open-ended questions like, "What flavor profiles or strengths do you enjoy?" This simple shift in approach ensures women are treated as knowledgeable enthusiasts, not outsiders.

Inclusive Events and Atmospheres

Inclusive lounges and events focus on creating spaces where everyone feels welcome. This might involve offering diverse cigar selections, inclusive seating arrangements, and sharing tips or pairing ideas with all customers—regardless of gender.

Moving Away from Assumptions

Avoiding assumptions is critical. Overly gendered treatment, like pushing flavored cigars on women without asking their preferences, can feel patronizing. Treating all customers as equals fosters respect and loyalty within the community.

“The growing presence of women in the cigar community isn’t just good for inclusivity—it’s essential for the industry”

What Needs to Change: Areas for Improvement

While progress has been made, there's still work to do:

- **Marketing Overhaul:** It's time to ditch overly sexualized advertising and focus on campaigns that appeal to a diverse audience. Women want to see themselves reflected authentically in marketing materials—not as props or stereotypes.
- **Respectful Interactions:** Staff at lounges and events must treat women with the same respect and attention they give to male patrons. Simple gestures like directly addressing female customers and valuing their expertise go a long way.
- **Fostering Online Communities:** Social media cigar groups should adopt clear guidelines against gatekeeping and objectification. Building a supportive, respectful online environment is as important as improving real-world interactions.

A Growing Movement of Female Enthusiasts

The tide is turning. According to a 2021 study, women made up 17.3% of cigar smokers in the U.S., a marked increase from 7.7% in 2000 (source). This steady growth signals a shift in consumer demographics and a broader cultural transformation. Women aren't just joining the cigar community—they're shaping it.

Leading the Charge: Women Redefining Cigar Culture

This rise of women in the cigar world has already led to exciting changes, from inclusive events to brands creating products that resonate with female smokers. Female-run cigar lounges, women-led cigar social media groups, and networking events for women enthusiasts pave the way for a more inclusive future.

By listening to women's voices in the community, the cigar industry has an incredible opportunity to shed its outdated stereotypes and build a culture that celebrates and respects all enthusiasts.

As the saying goes, "A rising tide lifts all boats." The growing presence of women in the cigar community isn't just good for inclusivity—it's essential for the industry. So here's to breaking the smoke ceiling and building a cigar culture where everyone is welcome.



VEIL - TORO VALOR CIGARS

by David Yancey

Images by David Yancey

Wrapper: San Andrés

Binder: Ecuadorian

Filler: Nicaraguan

Vitola: Toro

Origin: Nicaraguan



What Makes it Special

Valor Cigars is not just another new brand trying to grab attention. Every cigar sold helps support the families of fallen first responders and military heroes. Each blend carries a name that honors a branch of service, whether it is the military, law enforcement, or firefighters. It speaks directly to anyone who believes in standing up for those who stood for us. Solid blends, a real cause, and a company that actually means something.

Visual Appearance

The Veil Toro presents with a textured San Andrés wrapper that carries a light oil sheen. From the cold draw, I picked up notes of chocolate and earthy pepper, which set the tone nicely. I went with a V-cut, and the roll was accordion-style, giving me an absolutely even draw right out of the gate. No resistance, no overworking it, just smooth from the start.

First Third

A medium body of smoke, the quality construction was present with a solid ash and a well-formed burn cone. Notes of earth and cocoa, with a warm hit of cumin and other cooking spices layered in. On the retrohale, leather stood out with a touch of white pepper rounding things out. Clean, balanced, and no harsh edges.

Second Third

The second third kept that steady burn going, no touch-ups needed. Those cooking spices deepened a bit, and raw leather started to take more of the spotlight. The band came off clean, no damage to the wrapper, which I always appreciate. The retrohale brought in more leather, joined by a welcome touch of cinnamon that added a little sweetness to the mix.

Final Third

Coming into the final third, the burn has remained steady. Notes of raw leather and pepper take the lead, delivering a bolder finish that stays controlled without going off the rails. The retrohale kicks up the intensity with a flash of cinnamon and a pop of black pepper. It never loses its composure, just shifts gears with confidence to close it out.



Score

Great construction all around, with a solid burn throughout the smoke. What stood out most was the consistency in body and flavor. It evolved with subtle shifts, never losing its identity. It knows what it is and leans into it.

BREWERY



© Peter Goskov/ stock.adobe.com

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S COLLABORATION BREW DAY-WITH KERROO BREWING

by Hazel Joyce

Images by Hazel Joyce

Historical evidence confirms that the first brewers in the world, and for a significant part of early history, were women. Take your pick from Yi Di in China to the priestesses of Sumerian goddess Ninkasi to the patron saint Hildegard from Germany in the Middle Ages. It's been theorized that the framework of traditional gender roles played a part as brewing itself would be considered part of daily household duties in addition to meal prep. Since the beer could also be sold at market, this opportunity for income was valuable to the household; notably, for women who were unmarried or widowed, it was an avenue that provided economic independence.

Sadly, a combination of factors would significantly decrease these numbers. This included commercialization leading to automation, the creation of professional guilds barring female members, and even claims that female brewers were actually witches (subjecting them to imprisonment or death sentences).

Today, despite an uptick in women working at breweries, with 41.4% of breweries are owned by at least one woman in the US, less than 3% of the same breweries in the report are solely owned by women (Brewers Association, 2021). In the UK, The Gender Pint Gap: Revisited 2024 revealed that less than 3% of brewers are female. The first iteration of this in 2018 was spearheaded by Dea Latis, an independent volunteer association dedicated to improving female representation in the industry from brewers to publicans to beer drinkers. Its name comes from the Celtic goddess of beer and water.



Inspired by this, Elizabeth Townsend, co-founder of Kerroo Brewing, hosted the Isle of Man's first International Women's Collaboration Brew Day event.

For those not familiar with the Isle of Man, it's a self-governing crown dependency smack in the middle of the Irish Sea, between England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Named after the Celtic sea god, Manannán, it boasts the longest running uninterrupted parliament in the world.

Kerroo is the newest entry to the Manx craft beer scene and has established itself as a small business that both supports the local community and collaborates with the global independent beer industry. Founded in 2023 by Elizabeth and her partner, Nick Scarffe, Kerroo went from its life via a home brew kit in their kitchen and officially opened their brewery and tap room in the seaside town of Port Erin in 2024.

At Elizabeth's invitation, I joined thirty or so women on a blustery February afternoon at Kerroo; we were greeted warmly with coffee, tea and biscuits. My tablemates for the day were Hannah, Lucy, and Ali and we kicked off the event with their signature HEYBOY!*, a 4.5% ABV Hazy Pale Ale with Citra, Mosaic & Centennial hops. Kerroo's official tasting notes describe it as a "session-able thirst-quencher, with notes of fresh peach, juicy tropical fruits and lime."

Elizabeth covered highlights from the Dea Latis report followed by Craft Beer 101. Meanwhile, we enjoyed additional expressions of their brews: Manx as the Pils (a 4.9% ABV Pilsner and another play on a common Manx phrase “As Manx as the Hills”), Porter Erin (a 5.5% ABV Oatmeal Porter) and Cask Stout (3.2% ABV). Nick passed around the various malts and the hops themselves then gave us a brewery tour.

Continuing on a collaborative note, Kerroo then shared craft beer cans from UK breweries Vault City, Sinister, Vocation, and Moonwake. And in March, when it launched, a portion of profits were donated to the UK Women in Beer program, of which Elizabeth had been a mentee.

The session ended with us painting artwork to be included on the can label for their International Women’s Day Brew. (My small abstract contribution was inspired by Wagner’s Ride of the Valkyries in homage to the Viking portion of Manx heritage.) A fruit saison aptly named Laa’l Breeshey, the Manx name for St. Bridget’s Day marking the start of spring. Manx folklore declares that she roamed the Island the night before, looking for a place to stay. If you prepared a proper welcome and she accepted, it would bring you good luck and blessings.



The next time you’re in the UK, consider a quick flight or ferry ride to visit Kerroo!

*Author’s note: ‘HEYBOY’ is actually a common greeting from for one male to another on Isle of Man. Its origin comes from Gaelic usage as per A Vocabulary of the Anglo-Manx Dialect, Oxford University Press, 1924, which tracks as the Island’s heritage language is Manx Gaelic. As an American, to state I was a bit thrown when I first heard this phrase is an understatement, but its origin and use on the Island is nowhere near the context it has in the United States.

A photograph of a lush green cigar field with rows of tobacco plants stretching into the distance under a bright sky.

MANY MEMBERS ONE VOICE

ABOUT US

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

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

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

www.boutiquecigarassociation.com



COFFEE



ROOTS COFFEE SHOP

by David Jefferies

Images by David Jefferies

Sometimes, Google blesses you with nuggets of new spots to see. That's what happened when I stumbled into Roots Coffee Co. I learned from my barista that Roots started in North Richland Hills 14 years ago and expanded into Fort Worth. I found out from the Roots website that they started the Southside location in 2017. Trying to discern where it was proved to be a bit of a challenge, but Google came in handy, thank heavens. I walked into the shop and ordered a lavender matcha latte, nitro coffee, and drip coffee. Roots Ft. Worth Southside is by Panther Island BBQ, across from the Volvo building, and in the white building pictured above. Lets talk about the coffee.

The drip coffee smelt like green peas, with a fresh springy nature and grassy notes. It had no tongue weight and no acidity while hot. When it got colder, the acidic notes came forward, but they were not overwhelming. It was served in an old diner-style cup, which was warm and incredible to experience. It could be very nostalgic for some.



The Nitro cold brew was great. It was mellow, fast-paced, and creamy—all things you want in nitro cold brew. Nitro cold brew can be a great alternative to energy drinks this rings especially true for Roots nitro, one edge over energy drinks it has is the creamy texture and a better taste. If you wanted to sit and have some fun, you could compare and contrast the Nitro with the drip coffee, which is what I did, and it was such a treat.

The matcha lavender latte was not made in the traditional way . It doesn't have the traditional grassy notes associated with Matcha, nor does it separate the syrup from the matcha. Which, by the way, is hard to accomplish, so props to them. While I found that it had a weird mouthfeel of chalk and marshmallow, it was quite delicious none-the-less.

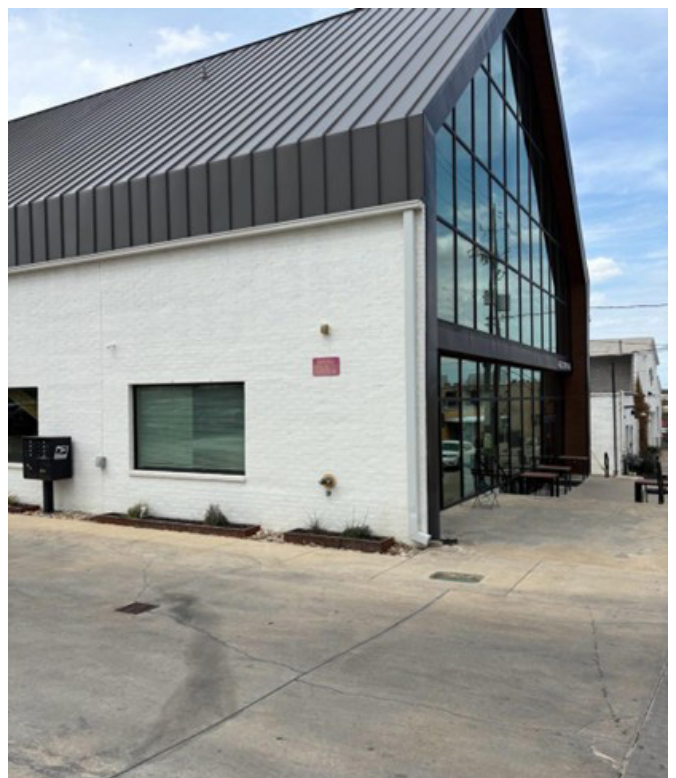
The owners, I found, have several other businesses in the area and thus have an HR department, which makes the interviewing, and the pulse checks more professional. The owners are a husband and wife team. Marcus and Charles C. are the wives part of the team and the ones we want to highlight here. They bought the coffee shop from Janice and Matt Townsend three years ago.

From what I understand, they do everything together, which should be an encouragement that being a women-owned business does not mean you have to do it alone. Traditionally, when we think of women-owned business, we think of a single proprietor business carving, fighting, and clawing in the business setting against all odds. But I think Marcus and Charles challenge us to think that Women-owned businesses can be a team. Let's celebrate the hard work of this couple and drink delicious coffee.

I think Roots is a great way to explore coffee and always find something new. The staff is friendly, and the environment is warm and welcoming. Especially with the guest roasters they use and bring in every 6 months. But do not worry about having a different experience every time if you do not want to. They have a main roaster as well that helps with a consistent experience. How would I recommend you experience Roots? It is a great place to work and to hone in on exploration of coffee or other drinks. The space is likely to struggle socially as it is a physically compact space, and given the professional nature of rented office space across the coffee bar this does discourage social interaction.

Overall, the coffee shop side of things is friendly and warm. It just leans more into a to go coffee than sit and sip coffee.

When you get home and want to light up a cigar when you get there, what do you choose? If I was having this at home, a Habano or shade cigar would be phenomenal for these.



RECIPES



BEYOND THE CIGAR: A TEXAS WOMEN'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH SMOKED BRISKET

by Ash Red

Images by Ash Red - stock.adobe.com

While I love a fine cigar, my passion extends to another form of 'smoking' – the art of Texas barbecue. Growing up in the heart of BBQ country, Fort Worth instilled in me a deep respect for the craft, particularly the legendary brisket. Initially, the sheer expertise of the local pitmasters was a tad intimidating, but I was determined to learn. After all, here in Texas, brisket isn't just food; it's a way of life. So, let's dive into the core of how to transform a humble cut of beef into a smoky masterpiece.

First, you'll need the right arsenal:

- An offset smoker
- The heart of true Texas BBQ; your chosen wood – I lean towards hickory, with a touch of cherry for sweetness, though oak and mesquite are classics
- a whole brisket; the flat and point working in harmony
- A simple yet powerful rub of salt, pepper, and garlic powder, bound with a drizzle of olive oil
- Pink butcher paper for the crucial wrapping stage
- A reliable meat thermometer, your guide to perfection
- Paper towels, just get an entire roll, you will thank me later
- Nitrile gloves, for heat protection, hygiene/ cross contamination and food safety
- Small bowl and spoon
- Shovel and metal ash bucket
- Spray bottle
- Apple Cider Vinegar and water
- Large cooler
- You, a sharp brisket or carving knife, and a cutting board for the grand finale.





Now, the preparation – arguably the most meticulous part. Trimming the fat, while not my favorite task, is non-negotiable for even cooking and depth of flavor. Make sure you have your nitrile gloves on. Begin with the fat cap down, and carefully remove the tough, thick fat, especially where the flat and point meet. Then, flip the brisket. On the top side, eliminate the hard wedge of fat near the point, and consider trimming the 'mohawk' – that thin, protruding piece that tends to overcook. Next, square off the edges, remove any oxidized (gray/ dark parts) meat and thin areas for consistent cooking.

Finally, address the fat cap itself. On the point muscle, trim it down to expose the meat, leaving about a quarter-inch for moisture and richness. And for the final touch, flip the brisket back over, ensuring any remaining hard fat chunks on the bottom are gone. Thank goodness that painstaking part is completed. Start patting your brisket dry with paper towels. Apply a thin layer of olive oil to the entire surface of the brisket. This acts as a binder for your spices and helps them adhere evenly. In a small bowl combine your salt, pepper, and garlic powder. To ensure an even distribution, stir the spices with your spoon. Generously sprinkle the spice mix over the brisket using your hands and massage it into the brisket. It is crucial that you also have sides and edges covered in spices. Every section of this brisket needs flavor!

Then, let it rest while you start the smoker. This careful preparation sets the stage for a truly remarkable smoked brisket, a testament to Texas tradition.

Load the firebox with your chosen wood and ignite it. You will need to allow the smoker to reach a consistent temperature of 225-250 degrees Fahrenheit. You may need to adjust the vents so it maintains this temperature. While you are doing this you will fill your spray bottle with equal parts of Apple Cider Vinegar and water. Now it is time to place the brisket on the smoker, make sure you position the brisket fat side up on the smoker's grates in the main chamber away from the direct heat. Now my favorite part of the process, monitoring the temperature and being patient. Plan for 1 to 1 ½ hours of smoking per pound of meat. For a large brisket, it can take up to 10 to 12 hours.

This is when I pursue my other pleasures: Smoking cigars, enjoying a gluten free beer, and listening to music while I make sure that temperature is being maintained at 225-250. While enjoying your tranquility, make sure you are maintaining the firebox. Once the bark has started to form, you will spritz it ever so lightly so you will not wash away the bark. You will spritz every 30 to 45 minutes. When the brisket's internal temperature reaches 160-165 degrees Fahrenheit, you will tightly wrap it in pink butcher paper. (Please do not do this process while it is still on the smoker) This step helps lock in the moisture and speeds up the cooling process.

Place that beautiful brisket back on the smoker so it can continue to smoke until it reaches an internal temperature of 203-215 degrees Fahrenheit. Remove the brisket from the smoker and let it rest (still wrapped) in the cooler for 1-2 hours. This allows all the juices to redistribute and enhance the tenderness. During this time, make sure you clean out your firebox, taking the shovel and removing the ash into the metal bucket.

Smoking brisket is a labor of love and patience. That is why the last step is so important, you don't want to ruin what you have worked so hard for by slicing it wrong. After you have unwrapped the brisket and that amazing smell takes over your entire house it is time to slice this beauty.

Place it on a spacious cutting board with the pointed end positioned toward your non-dominant hand. Separate the Point and the Flat Use your hand to locate the thin layer of fat that divides the flat and the point. Gently move your hand in small circular motions to feel the separation. Once found, make your initial cut along this layer to separate the two sections. Since brisket requires slicing against the grain, having the flat and point cut apart ensures precision.



Start with the flat portion. When you slice the brisket, for the love of Texas, go against the grain. Slice it against the grain into 1/4-inch thick slices. Aim for uniformity to guarantee that every piece serves up the perfect bite. Slice the Point Next, take the point and cut it in half, moving opposite to your first cut. Rotate one of the halves 90 degrees, and then slice against the grain in 1/4-inch slices, just as you did with the flat. Repeat the process for the other half of the point to create consistent slices. Now is the time that everyone has been longing for after being teased for what feels like a lifetime: being served and eating the best meat they've ever had!



FIGHTING FOR CIGAR RIGHTS



PCA
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Boutique Cigar Association

CHEESE SHOP



BEYOND THE RIND ON TOUR: THE CHEESE BAR QUEUE THE BRITISH CHEESE!

by Hazel Joyce

Images by Hazel Joyce

London's West End has always been celebrated for its theatre scene, but in recent years it's the foodie scene that has taken center stage.

Cue the queue at Pick & Cheese, the world's first cheese conveyor belt restaurant. Located on the second floor of the Seven Dials Market in London's West End, it offers a rotating menu of local British cheese sourced from throughout the UK. A fellow foodie told me about its existence and of course, I decided that I needed this in my life. If the idea of a front row seat at a "cheese parade" doesn't draw you in (though it should), then the "Bottomless Plates" that allow you to enjoy as many plates of cheese and charcuterie that your turophile heart desires in 75 minutes for a mere 29.50 GBP (or approximately 38 USD).

Cheese Bar BackStory:

This is one of five locations under The Cheese Bar restaurant group. It started as a Cheese Truck launched in 2014 by grilled cheese lover Mathew Carver that has served half a million sandwiches to cheese lovers from the fields of Glastonbury to Istanbul and Dubai. Three years later they took the leap to a brick-and-mortar location in Camden Market and in 2019, opened Pick & Cheese in the iconic Seven Dials Market, an independent food traders hall. Their mission is to "shake up the traditional cheese and wine bar format", encouraging guests to "get out of their comfort zone" and "be part of [our] British cheese revolution"!

Reservations are a must, but being a party of one and opting for the innocuous hour between 4 and 5pm allowed me to snag a bar seat through their online booking system. (And yes, it did require a credit card to be entered and a small deposit of 10 GBP or ~13 USD that would be applied towards the bill.)



It was a short tube ride from my West Hampstead stay via a change at Bond Street from the Jubilee line to the Central Line; I popped out at Tottenham Court Road for a leisurely walk (under 10 minutes) to the Seven Dials Market.

"Adventures in Food and Drink This Way" promised an outdoor billboard as I walked up to one of the entrances, admiring the historic architecture and its spacious, bright interior. Up a flight of stairs, I spied the bar itself featuring both The Cheese Bar sign and a neon Pick & Cheese sign. I was greeted enthusiastically by the hostess, who checked me in and sat me at the bar, even though I was a few minutes early.

Nearby chalkboard signs gave "Cheese Tasting Tips" recommendations, that included a recommendation to "start mild and finish strong" and encouraged me to "enjoy it with all [my] senses".

I perused the 3 menus of Wine & Drinks, Plates, and “Off-Belt Dishes” and decided on the following plan to maximize my tasting experience:

1. Limit the alcohol to a glass of red wine and a low ABV beer, creating the perfect opportunity to explore each category side by side. I chose the Cantina Frentano Montepulciano d'Abruzzo and The Kernel Brewery Table Beer, a light 3% pale ale inspired by cask tradition and full bodied due to an elevated mash temperature and oats in the grist.
2. Hydrate as much as possible.
3. Take a bite of each cheese and accompaniment both alone and with the complimentary crackers.
3. Make certain to pick up charcuterie only plates. As much as I love cheese, I knew thought had gone into those choices as well.
4. Order off the conveyor menu aka “Don’t Forget Dessert!”

While I was asked about allergies, the plates menu itself is thoughtfully denoted with

All our dishes contain milk! Along with the key as follows for both the milk – (C) Cows, (G) Goats, (S) Sheep and other items - GF (Gluten Free); P (Pasteurised), UP (Unpasteurised), T (Thermised), and VR (Vegetarian Rennet).

In my 75 minutes, I managed to get through about a dozen plates and a cheesecake dessert.

A few highlights included:



A classic blue Stilton from Cropwell Bishop Creamery in Nottinghamshire from the Skailes family (who have been in the cheese industry since 1847) accompanied by a chocolate and hazelnut brownie.

A Cenarth Brie from the Adam's Family in Carmarthenshire accompanied by a tomato and chili jam.

A Baron Bigod with Truffle from Jonny Crickmore and his family at Fen Farm Dairy in Suffolk. It is a British Brie de Meaux style cheese featuring a layer of their milk mascarpone infused with the finest black truffles.

Cured ham charcuterie from Mark & Paul at Dingley Dell in Suffolk with cornichons.

And for dessert, a Yogurt, Lemon & Honey cheesecake.

Keep an eye out on our Leaf n Grain Society site for a related piece on one of their suppliers in Belfast, Mike's Fancy Cheese.

ACCESSORIES



KINGPIN CLOCK CIGAR TORCH

THE AFFORDABLE LUXURY CIGAR LIGHTER

by David Yancey

Images by David Yancey

The Kingpin Clock Cigar Torch Lighter is a sleek single-flame butane lighter designed for both style and function. While it can certainly light a cigar from the start, it shines brightest as a precision touch-up tool — ideal for fixing uneven burns or relighting with control.

The built-in clock isn't just decorative. It's functional, and the face lights up when the flame is active, adding a bit of flair without feeling like a gimmick. It's a smart design detail that gets noticed.



At \$29, the price point hits that perfect sweet spot: affordable, giftable, and impressive enough to be a conversation starter. It comes with solid presentation, making it a great pick for anyone who wants something unique in their kit without breaking the bank.

Final Take: A compact, stylish lighter with a practical flame and a bold personality — well worth the price.

There's luxury — and then there's intentionality. King Pin Luxury brings both to the world of cigar accessories, curating a collection built around one core belief: enjoying a cigar isn't just a pastime, it's a lifestyle.

Whether it's a polished cutter, a clean-burning torch, or a humidor designed to anchor a space, every piece King Pin offers is chosen for those who appreciate craftsmanship with purpose. Their lineup balances elegance with performance and nothing proves that better than their pocket-sized Clock Torch Lighter, a stylish nod to tradition with just enough flair to start a conversation.

But King Pin isn't just about gear. Their membership offerings connect cigar lovers around the country, offering access to a community that shares the same passion for the leaf, the moment, and the ritual. It's a brand that understands the full picture — the accessory, the experience, and the people who make it matter.

Explore more at www.kingpinluxury.com

CIGARS AND SISTERHOOD: UK LADIES AFICIONADAS LIGHT UP THE CIGAR COMMUNITY

by Hazel Joyce

Summer 2024, Whittlebury Park.

“Hello, I’m Rosalie. It’s great to meet you! Is this your first time at IGNITE?” said the smiling woman in front of me as she extended her hand.

It was, in fact, my first time at this conference for UK independent tobacco retailers. The only person I knew there was John Strange (Head of Hospitality for Tor Imports, a New World cigar distributor). He greeted me upon arrival and sensing my nervousness, steered me to Rosalie for connection.

Rosalie Barber told me that she was “relatively new” to the cigar industry and wasn’t as well versed as others. But I discovered that she is, in fact, a powerhouse force of cigar knowledge combined with natural hospitality. As the Sales Manager for James Barber, the oldest family run tobacconist in the UK, Rosalie had no prior experience (professional or personal) with cigars but immersed herself into the cigar culture within 5 years. While originally from the Philippines, today she is based out of Harrogate, England.

(For those not familiar with Harrogate, it is in North Yorkshire, a few hours train ride from London, and known for its historic Victorian architecture and beautiful gardens.)

She’s visited several different cigar factories with travels spanning Ybor City in Florida, Cuba, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic. While sincerely modest about her expertise, she is vocal about her passion for cigars and nurturing its community. When Rosalie found out I worked at a bar on the Isle of Man, she promised to “send a friend” to support the business. Shortly thereafter, a friend of hers from England turned up with one of his friends in tow.

Rosalie continued to check in and alert me about events. Then came the invite for a herf celebrating International Women’s Day in London at Boisdale Canary Wharf in London.

I was added to both an overall UK group chat of 50+ members as well as one for the event. For the next three months, I was engrossed on active threads covering events, DIY cigar related projects and general inquiries. The event chat included swag bag contributions and a request for photos and information from the 20 attendees; we were all profiled in the Women of Fire edition of Humo Latino Global, a cigar magazine published in both Spanish and English.

The night before the official event, I met Rosalie at the Boisdale Belgravia cigar terrace where I met her “Harrogate crowd” and enjoyed an Aging Room Rare Collection Scherzo with a rye Old Fashioned. We finished early and the next day I was on the Tube en route to Canary Wharf (albeit with a slight delay due to a ‘Met line track fire’ that was resolved fairly quickly).

Upon entering the Boisdale Canary Wharf, I paused to admire its décor and walked past dozens of tables filled with women laughing, clinking glasses, occasionally dancing for what was apparently a milestone birthday brunch.

Then past the bar to the Terrace where I was greeted with Prosecco and met the other attendees including the ladies from the night before. Here I enjoyed a Zino Nicaragua Half Corona and the gorgeous city views. Before long, we were summoned inside for a delicious meal starting that included bread with olive tapenade, Scottish smoked salmon, and beef stew and flowing glasses of wine.

I couldn’t resist a quick humidor stroll of their Cuban cigar library before we regrouped to the terrace where Marzia Sileno of Ian Macleod Distillers led us through a tasting of the Smokehead Terminado Islay Single Malt Scotch finished in Tequila casks as we each puffed on a Camacho Nicaragua Robusto.

Then Sarah Saunders, founder of Women’s International Cigar Club (WiCC), led a discussion about the state of the industry, UK legislation, and what we could do to help develop and promote the cigar culture. It was an engaging and thought provoking conversation as attendees were a mix of cigar enthusiasts and those who worked in the industry. It was agreed that those who wanted to be involved in helping to address proposed legislation that would negatively impact the industry could join a subgroup that would include attendee Tatiana Camacho, Secretary-General of the Imported Tobacco Products Advisory Council (ITPAC).

While the official event ended with smiles, hugs, and claiming our swag bags, a dozen of us continued the camaraderie at another nearby swanky spot – FUMAR cigar shop and sampling lounge before breaking for the evening.

More than a one-time event, this was the official launch event of the UK Ladies Cigar Aficionadas and I was honored to be included. Since then, the chats continue to be active as we progress in both building this specific community as well as partnering with other cigar focused communities and platforms.

Interested in learning more about this group?
Send an email to craftcouple@leafngrainsociety.com



Leaf n Grain Society