

LEAF N GRAIN LATITUDE SOCIETY *Cigar*

The Humidor

Wine Cellar

Cigar Pairings

Spirit Talk

Recipes

Kevin Williams

& Tony Rawlings

Midwinter's Night Dram

Diesel Cigars

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

SUMMER 2025

ISSUE 06



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BEVERAGES, & CULINARY DELIGHTS

Summer 2025

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

There's something about the word celebration that feels different when you've lived a little. When you're younger, it's fireworks, noise, a glass raised high before you've even thought about why. But as the years go on, celebration shifts. It becomes quieter. More intentional. It's not just about the big wins anymore—it's about recognizing the small ones, the quiet ones, and even the hard-fought ones that left a scar or two before they became worth raising a glass to.

That's what this issue is about—how we mark the moments that matter. Sometimes that means a toast with friends after a long week. Other times, it's lighting a cigar alone on the porch, reflecting on what it took to get where you are. Celebration isn't always loud, and it doesn't always demand an audience. Often, it's just a reminder that you're still here, still standing, still grateful for the road that brought you.

In these pages, you'll find a little of everything that makes celebration what it is. We explore A Midwinter Night's Dram—a whiskey that feels like poetry poured into glass, both elegant and earned. It's a bottle that reminds us that craft itself is a kind of celebration, the culmination of time, patience, and care. You'll also find reflections on what it means to appreciate cigars beyond the numbers. Our newest contributor, Cooper Gibbs, steps in with a thoughtful take on cigar ratings and what they really mean to someone discovering this world for the first time. His honesty and perspective remind us that appreciation isn't about expertise—it's about experience.

Each article in this issue leans into that spirit—whether it's a story, a pour, or a pairing. The goal isn't to chase the next big thing, but to slow down long enough to appreciate the ones already in front of us. To find that moment between the inhale and the exhale, where everything feels just right.

As always, we invite you to not just read, but to reflect. To find your own reason to celebrate—big or small, loud or quiet—and to raise a glass, light a cigar, and remember why we do this in the first place.



Dylan

THE HURRICANE 5: KEVIN WILLIAMS & TONY RAWLINGS

by David Yancey

Images by David Yancey

Kevin Williams has always been about momentum. From his earliest days in Dallas, the ball in his hands meant possibility—the kind that made whole stadiums lean forward. At Roosevelt High, he averaged a jaw-dropping seventeen yards every time he touched the ball, piling up nearly 2,000 receiving yards, another 1,300 on the ground, and ten return touchdowns in one season alone. It wasn't just numbers. It was the kind of electricity you don't forget once you've seen it.

The University of Miami turned that spark into a spotlight. In 1991, the Hurricanes captured the national championship, and Williams was right in the middle of it—returning punts for touchdowns in three consecutive games, setting a school record with 217 punt return yards against Penn State, and walking off with honors like BIG EAST Special Teams Player of the Year and First-Team All-America. Miami already had a reputation for swagger, and Kevin embodied it—fast, fearless, and just unpredictable enough to keep opponents on edge.

The Cowboys came calling in the '93 draft, and Williams made sure his hometown noticed. As a rookie he was among the NFC's best returners; by '94, he was setting franchise records. He became the first Cowboy to ever score four different ways—punt return, kickoff return, reception, and rush. He finished his pro career with over 9,600 return yards, seven receiving touchdowns, and a highlight reel that still circulates whenever people talk about the most dynamic return men of the 1990s. And of course, he left with two Super Bowl rings to show for it.



But Williams' story doesn't stall when the pads come off. Life after football for him has been about two things: building and giving back.

One path led him into an unlikely friendship—with Tony Rawlings, founder of Steel City Cigars. Tony didn't stumble into the cigar world; he built his way into it. A Pittsburgh kid with blue-collar grit, he carried that determination to the Dominican Republic, working alongside Casa de Sueños to learn the craft from the ground up. Years later, as CEO and Master Blender of Steel City Cigars, Tony brought that same relentless vision to the table when he and Kevin first sat down to talk cigars.



What started as a casual connection grew into a three-year journey of blending, testing, and perfecting what would become the Hurricane 5. Fifteen blends later, they landed on the one that stuck. Built with an Ecuadorian wrapper and a core of Dominican and Nicaraguan fillers, the Hurricane 5 isn't a rushed product. It's balanced, bold, and unapologetically Williams. Tony laughs about how Kevin likes to keep the details close to the chest—"that's all I'll say," Kevin shrugs—but the cigar speaks for itself. What makes the story richer isn't just the blend, but the bond. Williams and Rawlings built more than a cigar; they built trust, respect, and the kind of friendship that lasts long after the smoke clears. The other path has taken Kevin right back home. Through the Kevin Williams Foundation in Dallas, he pours himself into the city that raised him.

His youth football camps aren't publicity plays; they are boots on the ground, cleats in the grass, and kids looking eye-to-eye at someone who walked the same streets and made it to the highest level. For those inner-city kids, the camps are about more than running drills. They're about hearing someone tell them they can, when the world around them too often tells them they can't. Kevin's foundation leans hard into mentorship, teaching accountability, teamwork, and confidence—the same qualities that carried him from Dallas high school fields to the Super Bowl.



So now the legacy of Kevin Williams stretches far beyond return yards or receptions. It's there in the crackle of a lit Hurricane 5, in the laughter of kids at his camps, in the quiet power of a friendship with a cigar maker from Steel City. Williams himself puts it simply: "It's business, not personal." But anyone who's watched his career, smoked his cigar, or seen the kids' run drills at his camps knows better. It's always been personal.

WINE CELLAR



GOLD, SILVER, & BRONZE

WHAT DOES THE METAL MEAN ON MY BOTTLE

by Terry-Lynn Faught

Images by David Yancey

Have you ever walked into your favorite winery/brewery/distillery and seen a display behind the bar or in the entry with bottles that have medals hanging from their neck? Did you ever wonder if the medals really represent something? Let's discuss!

Competition is something we as humans seem to “just do”- we play games with winners and losers from childhood. As we grow older, these competitions grow like trees- first small groups, then schools, then regions, then states, then national, then global. There's something that speaks to humans, whether it's the quieter rooms of chess competition, or the roar of large arenas and the physicality of field sports. The idea of one besting another. Even simply conversing can turn into a volley of one-up-manship. There's validation in victory- and frustration in defeat.

Just like in sports, humans like to be competitive in their beverage creation. An innate desire to craft a combination of flavors that make everyone who tastes it smile in pleasure, nod with approval, praise the final product, and possibly request the knowledge to replicate it. And, as in almost every other creative venture it has led to the creation of competitions. Just like in sports, there are rules and standards to meet. Beverages are compared against others that are like it for bragging rights about which meets the standards best. And, like the Olympics, Gold medals are the winners, Silver is Second, and Bronze is Third.

Each beverage style has a basic set of standards- for example, wine must be made of grapes, beer must be made of grain that is fermented, liquor is primarily made from grains that are fermented then distilled, mead must use honey as its primary fermentable sugar. This is the starting point. Then within each, the variables come in - additional flavors, method of holding the beverage for completion, length of time in process, etc.



Who judges and how? Putting together a knowledgeable panel can be a challenge in and of itself. Many competitions use volunteer judges, so finding people who are available to travel, stay, eat and judge without payment can be daunting. The judges are often a mix of “industry experts”, people who work in that industry intimately - those who craft the beverage, those who promote, and aficionados, all of whom are knowledgeable about the final product. There are also certification programs that provide specific knowledge for judging- what to look for, how to look for it, and how to express the positive and negative aromas and flavors in a glass.

Once a group of judges is assembled, then they get to work critiquing the beverage in front of them. While drinking a bunch of a particular alcohol seems like it would be fun, the fact that it's being done critically in the quest of finding "the best" while also pointing out "flaws" in those that could be better can make the entire situation overwhelming at times. Beverage competition judges rely on their sense of smell and taste predominately so these senses getting "tired" can cause everything to smell/taste the same- which defeats everything. There are tricks to avoiding this fatigue, sips of water, nibbling on bland crackers, and sniffing coffee beans are some of the most common ones used. Because of the variety in individual taste buds and experiences, most companies will have each beverage assessed by multiple people, then use the average to score-this accounts for human perception differences.

For those in the commercial end of production- these awards often help raise the esteem of a maker in the industry, is a bragging point for the maker in their local community, can help with making distribution deals moving forward, and can occasionally lead to price increases as demand rises.

What don't these medals do? They mean nothing when it comes to personal taste. What an individual prefers to have in their glass on a quiet evening or share at a party should NOT be solely based on someone else's opinion. As a consumer, these awards are helpful if you are specifically looking for something new to try. If you want a way to "raise your taste game" these awards can give you some guidance. They can be the source of bragging rights with your buddies at a gathering "This bottle took Gold at the XYZ Competition in 2023", but... do these words actually mean anything to the people you're with? Do they actually mean anything to you?



Just like in physical sport, there are multiple competitions that cover multiple breakdowns of geography (City, State, Region, National, International). And the lower on the scale, the more "Champions" there are. In a lot of kid's sports, a team first competes to be City Champion, so- how many cities are there? So how many City Champs are there? That doesn't mean you should praise a child when they announce they are a City Champ- but you know it has limited meaning in the big picture. The same thing applies to beverage awards- in some circles it's celebrated, in others there isn't much meaning.

So the next time you find yourself looking at a product that's a "medal winner" appreciate that it was judged against others of its kind and found to be among the best in that competition. It isn't any kind of promise that you'll be happy with it- the liquid in that bottle still has to get past your nose and taste buds. Sometimes the people who drink with you regularly can guide you better. Your personal experiences will play a role in how you perceive what's in your glass. But, if you find yourself standing with the maker (or representative for the brand), be sure to congratulate them on the award (even if it isn't your favorite). After all, we all like to be applauded, even if we doubt that the other person knows exactly what it took for the accomplishment.

THE QUIET TOAST: CELEBRATING LIFE'S SMALL VICTORIES

by David Yancey

Images by Adobe Stock

There's a certain kind of silence that follows a small win — not the roar of a crowd or the chaos of champagne spraying across a locker room, but the kind that settles in your chest and reminds you that, for today, you did enough. Maybe it's closing a deal that almost slipped through your fingers. Maybe it's getting through a week that asked more of you than you thought you had to give. Or maybe it's nothing more dramatic than the simple truth that the world felt a little heavier yesterday, and tonight, it doesn't.

That's when the quiet toast happens. No speeches, no cameras, no cork flying across the room — just a bottle opened because it feels right. The glass catches the light, the first sip softens the edges of the day, and for a moment, you remember that celebration isn't always loud. Sometimes it's just acknowledgment — a nod to yourself that you've made it this far, and that's worth something.

Wine has a way of making those moments linger. It doesn't demand applause; it invites reflection. The pour becomes a pause, the swirl a breath, the taste a memory forming in real time. It's in those unplanned moments — the ones without milestones or medals — that wine returns to what it's always been: a companion to our humanity. A reminder that joy doesn't have to be earned on a grand scale to be real. Sometimes, it's found quietly, in the simple act of raising a glass to no one but yourself.



For centuries, wine has marked our greatest occasions — marriages, victories, births, reunions. But the true beauty of wine isn't limited to grand gestures. It's in the small, private rituals — that glass poured while cooking dinner, the half bottle shared on a porch as the sun drops behind the trees, the one you open because a song brought back a memory you weren't quite ready to let go of. These are the celebrations that don't make it to social media. They live only in the moment, and they're better for it.

Modern winemakers are leaning into that sentiment, too. They're crafting wines meant to be enjoyed now — not after decades in a cellar or behind an expensive label, but at the dinner table, after a long day, among friends, or even alone. Lighter-bodied reds, sparkling rosés, and low-intervention whites are finding their place in these everyday rituals, built for conversation and connection rather than prestige. They remind us that wine isn't about ceremony — it's about presence.

And maybe that's the shift we've needed. In a world that rewards the loudest moments, there's something revolutionary about quiet joy. The quiet toast isn't about waiting for the right time; it's about making this time the right one. It's opening what you have — not because it's your best bottle, but because it's your best moment. It's recognizing that celebration isn't measured in scale; it's measured in sincerity.

So tonight, if the day has left you tired but thankful, pour something that reminds you of who you are. Maybe it's a crisp Sauvignon Blanc that carries the scent of summer grass. Maybe it's a deep Syrah that feels like a velvet evening. Or maybe it's just whatever bottle has been sitting there too long, waiting for "something special." Here's the truth — this is that something.

Because not every victory needs a spotlight. Some deserve a candle and a quiet room. Some deserve the sound of a cork easing free from a bottle, the soft splash of a pour, and that first, grateful sip.



Here's to the small wins — the ones no one sees but you.

Raise your glass. This moment matters too.

CIGAR PAIRINGS



MBOMBAY GAAJA PAIRED WITH WHISKEY LAB'S BRAEVAL 9 YR

by Joe Gulino

Images by Joe Gulino

Brand: MBombay Gaja (Bombay Tobak)

Producer: Tabacos de Costa Rica

Vitola: 6.5x54

Tripa (Filler): Paraguay, Peru, Nicaragua

Capa (Wrapper): Ecuadorian Habano (HVA)

Capote (Binder): Ecuadorian Habano (HVA)

Body: Medium

Age: 30 Plus Years

Price: \$36

The Cigar

It's not often I go for the more expensive cigars, as there are so many excellent expressions in the \$10-\$20 range. For those that know, I'm in Chicago, and luckily near the Premium Cigar Association's 2024 Best In Leaf (Midwest Region Cigar Shop) Award winning Norwood Royal Cigars. NRC shop owners Vick Shah and Asmita Kamdar are like family to any cigar enthusiast that enters the shop. They will guide even beginners to that perfect cigar, for any occasion. Simply put, we can trust their expertise and recommendations. So when Vick personally reached out about this very unfamiliar MBombay cigar, I knew it had to be special. I mean, just look at that multi-cultural and rare blend of tobaccos from Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Nicaragua...aged 30 years, and it's made in Costa Rica! Hell yes!

"At Bombay Tobak, we concentrate on aging, proper fermentation, and the importance of patience. Using prime tobaccos and a process of experimentation, we've discovered creative processes to produce impeccable cigars at a reasonable price point. Our cigars are hand-rolled in Costa Rica by some of the most experienced hands in the industry and feature intricate bands representative of the artistic nature of our craft." ~ blluxuries.com

Yes this is a pricier cigar, but hey, we all deserve to splurge and treat ourselves right every once in a while. Let's see what MBombay Cigars brings to the table, and if Vick nailed it with this rare recommendation.

Learn more about MBombay Cigars at bombaytobak.com.



The Whisky

Jay Roberts, Navy veteran and co-founder of The Whiskey Lab, jokes that he celebrated 11 years of sobriety, until he turned 12 and discovered cask strength whisky. His Whispering Waters label pays tribute to his 'silent service' on the USS Oklahoma City SSN-723 nuclear submarine and to Scottish Selkies. These mythological mermaids, unlike some cultures believed, were a sign of beauty, good luck, and benevolence.

I stumbled upon Jay's Whiskey Lab table at the 2024 WhiskyFest in Chicago. Jay served up the event's most unique whiskies, including this awesome nine-year-old, Pedro Ximenez sherry cask strength expression, from The Braeval Distillery.

I was blown away by it!

This distillery was built by the Chivas Brothers in 1973 to supply malt for blends such as Chivas Regal. So this single malt expression from Braeval is a rarity.

Braeval was built on a mountain ridge at Chapeltown in the heart of Speyside. It is the highest altitude distillery in Scotland at 350 metres above mean sea level.

Tasting Notes From: [TheWhiskeyLab.com](https://www.TheWhiskeyLab.com)

Nose: Dark, jammy fruits intertwine with herbaceous berries, unveiling layers of sherried sweetness complemented by rich cherry chocolate and sun-dried fruits.

Palate: Silky dark chocolate envelops the taste buds, enriched with stewed blackberries and currants, woven together with honeyed dates. A robust undertone of dense oak, chili, and candied ginger on a velvety finish.

The Whiskey Lab is a new independent bottler (Est. 2024) that homes in on extraordinary and rare whiskies, such as this extremely rare single malt from Braeval:

“Setting out to solve the lack of access to unique, independently-bottled Scotch for the U.S. market. The Whiskey Lab was founded to bridge the gap between bespoke Scotch brands and curious American consumers by offering engaging education and fast, affordable delivery.”

~ [TheWhiskeyLab.Com](https://www.TheWhiskeyLab.Com)



Visual / Pre-light Draw

The smooth medium brown Habano wrapper is very shiny and very oily. The simple white and gold band displays a golden peacock, in honor of brand owner Mel Shah's Indian heritage.

The side has nice creamy vanilla notes over some very fresh hay notes while the dry foot odor has bold notes of sweet berries. After a nice Colibri V-cut, there are more sweet berry notes with nice oats on the finish.

First Third

As I light into this cigar, the air is filled with creamy notes of vanilla and leather char. The first puff is light with subtle wood notes that become sweeter with more puffs. Some sweet creamy vanilla notes start to dominate the first third, while the retro-hale is filled with creamy and leathery vanilla notes, and no spice. Then a burst of floral notes. Whoa! That was cool. Another transition to almonds, yes! That subtle sweetness remains in the background throughout all the tasting note transitions, super nice and very balanced. Nice job Mel.

Cigar to the whisky: Wow! This is a chocolate bomb pairing. I get thick chocolate fudge notes over more fudge. Of course the Sherry from the whisky helps wash everything down with red fruity sweetness, still overlaid with the fudge notes. Superb!



Second Third

Entering the second third, the cigar becomes even more flavorful, with notes of chocolate, leather, and cedar, all balanced still with that subtle sweetness. I love it. This is a medium bold cigar but even mild cigar lovers will appreciate it. There is simply something special going on here with the balance between all the different flavors of the blend and its sweetness. I suspect Mel's goal with this cigar was to emulate those sweet Indian summers. If you know, you know!

Whisky to cigar: The sweet and spicy dark Sherry notes of the whisky are doused and cooled with the milky vanilla notes of the cigar, creating a creamy coconut flavor. This is a very unique coconut flavor, my mind is blown as this was entirely unexpected.

Final Third

The burn remains perfect and that ash had to be tapped off. Now back into the cigar. This cigar is simply silky smooth, creamy, and full of flavor. It seems to be a mild cigar but it really is not, as it is definitely standing up to the higher 60.2% ABV of the whisky. The cigar is playing so many mind games with its sweet complexity and smooth enjoyment. The burn slows in this final third, allowing the smoker time to enjoy their money well spent. Those sweet floral notes return with nice leather on the finish. The retro-hale is creamy as can be with awesome notes of marzipan, a sweet almond paste note I typically get on quality cigars. This cigar however, is beyond quality, it is next level.

Cigar smoked whisky: If an Indian Summer sunrise had a flavor, this is it! This is simply sex on the beach. Tropical paradise. I've completely disconnected from reality. Sweet dreams.

Overall this pairing will take anyone on a trip to India, without having to leave their home. This is truly the perfect escape into a world of sweet and incredible flavors, worth every penny!

PINEAPPLE COROJO PAIRING

by Gabriel Seamen

Images by Gabriel Seamen

The Cigar:

Brand: Aganorsa

Vitola: Toroo 6 x 54

Filler: Nicaragua Long-fillers

Wrapper: Nicaragua Corojo

Binder: Nicaragua

Smoking Time: 1 hour

Body: Medium

Flavor: Medium to Full

Price: Paid \$13.50

The Beer:

Pineapple Pickle Beer

Brand: Martin House Brewing Company

Location: Fort Worth, Texas

Availability: Texas, Florida, and a few others

Size: 12oz can from 4pack

Pineapple Pickle Beer highlights:

- **Brewing concept:** The beer combines the brewery's standard Best Maid pickle beer, a sour gose brewed with pickle juice, with added pineapple juice and flavoring for a salty, sweet, and sour flavor profile.
- **Distribution:** Martin House released the beer in cans for distribution in retail locations and also made it available in its taproom.
- **Flavor profile:** Tasting notes for the sour beer describe a blend of bright pineapple and the tangy, briny notes of the original pickle beer.
- **Part of a tradition:** The brewery often releases a new variation of its pickle beer each year, and the pineapple version continues this tradition of creative, flavor-forward releases.

Experiencing The Pairing:

Prelight draw on the cigar brings notes of cedar, pepper, and hay. Checking on the beer when opened it is giving super salty sour pickle, with a hint of pineapple on the end. The first puff of the cigar confirms the prelight with hay, pepper, actually a lot of pepper, and a retrohale brings in the cedars. First swig of the beer goes straight to pickle, super sour and a mild salt, with pineapple on the drydown, almost like the pineapple washes off the sour.

As I continue to smoke and drink at a natural pace, I notice the beer balances out more, with the sour and sweet of the pineapple becoming more even. I think the pepper from the cigar goes away around the 1st inch, and that also lends to a very refreshing and more balanced combo.

Purposely drinking the beer before the cigar definitely confirms this theory, with the cigar tempering the sweetness of the beer and just lending a smokiness to it that almost reminds me of a charred burger with lots of pickles. Smoke production on the cigar is perfect at this point, and the draw is an easy medium.



If we instead go from beer to cigar now that the pepper is nearly gone, it is bringing out the hay and sweet cedar notes. Very refreshing and enjoyable. Approaching the second third of the cigar, I'm obviously going to need another beer as this cigar is burning well and slow.

As I approach the midpoint on the cigar, it is giving no pepper even on retro, with hay and cedar forward. This is bringing out the sweetness of the pineapple in the beer in a good way. This pairing is surprisingly effective, and for those who can't get this beer, I think you would have similar luck with a whiskey sour made from Jim Beam's pineapple beer.



Opening my second beer now and it does bring back the sour forward nature the first couple swigs, but after that the experience is back to normal. Now I'm back to just enjoying this pairing and the fact that it is 90 degrees during breakfast time in Texas. As much as one can enjoy such musings.

Conclusion:

This is a refreshing and surprisingly straightforward pairing. Pineapple and pickles individually present a challenging pairing, and together, they are definitely doubly so. However, if you can, I would try this combo. I hope you'll enjoy it as much as I did. As I said, I think you could emulate the experience with a pineapple whiskey sour, or other pineapple Gose' beers. Something with a good sour and salty or maybe even spicy characteristic could be very fun!

Don't take my word for it, go forth and smoke!



SPIRIT TALK

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

A MID WINTER NIGHTS DRAM

by David Yancey

Images by David Yancey & High West Distillery



Victory may deserve champagne, but winter evenings call for something darker, richer—something that invites you to linger. Enter A Midwinter Night’s Dram, Act 9 Scene 3 from High West, a rye whiskey finished in French oak port barrels that has earned its reputation as both poetry and performance in liquid form.

This limited-release whiskey debuted in 2013 as High West’s homage to Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream—a play on words that became a play in flavor. Each annual “Act” and “Scene” represents a distinct batch, with subtle variations that reflect the art of blending rather than rigid consistency. It’s built from a foundation of straight ryes, primarily sourced from MGP and High West’s own stocks, aged between five and nineteen years before finding their encore in ruby and tawny port barrels.

What makes A Midwinter Night’s Dram truly special is that finish—where rye spice meets port sweetness in a dance that feels both deliberate and effortless. It’s High West at its most theatrical, and yet, never overacted.

Color: Deep mahogany, with long, graceful legs that hint at the richness within. Just swirling it feels indulgent, like watching a slow curtain fall before the first act of a play you already know you’ll remember.

Nose: Dried fruit and apricots lead the way, chased by soft cinnamon and the faintest whisper of oak. There’s warmth here—like the inside of an old library or the scent of baked fruit cooling on a windowsill. It’s inviting, balanced, and sets the stage perfectly for what follows.



Palate: The first sip delivers exactly what the nose promised: cinnamon spice and oak tannins weave together with dried fruit and apricot sweetness. Midway through, a note of lemon zest breaks through, adding brightness to what could otherwise be an overly rich ensemble. It's a clever move—lifting the port influence just enough to keep the whiskey lively. Every sip feels like the transition between autumn and winter—where spice and sweetness find a fragile balance before the cold truly settles in.

Finish: Long, warm, and lingering with fruit that refuses to fade. The port finish leaves a soft echo of sweetness that dances with rye spice, the kind that stays with you long after the glass is empty.



Act 9 Scene 3 isn't just another iteration—it's a reminder that High West's limited series continues to hit its stride. There's craftsmanship here, but also restraint. It never shouts for attention, yet it commands it all the same. Best enjoyed neat by the fire, or shared with someone who appreciates that not all drams are meant for noise—some are made for reflection.

by Cooper Gibbs

Images by David Yancey

THE HUMIDOR



HAIR OF THE DOG BY DIESEL CIGARS

by David Yancey

Images by Diesel Cigars

Brand: Diesel

Vitola: Toro Box Press

Wrapper: Ecuadorian Habano

Binder: Ecuadorian Sumatra

Filler: Nicaraguan

Body: Medium-Full

Flavor: Full

Price: \$10.00

diesel

Visual / Pre-Light Draw:

This one looks as good as it smokes. The box press feels solid in the hand, firm but not over-packed, with a nice sheen on the wrapper that catches the light. Cold draw gives off that oiled, cured leather note — always a good sign that you're in for something classic and earthy.



First Third:

Right out of the gate you get charred nuttiness backed by that same leather and some earth. Draw is right where it should be, burn line is clean, and a nice little cone starts to form. It just feels like a well-made cigar doing its job.

Second Third:

This is where it wakes up a bit. White pepper edges in, and there's a touch of saltiness that livens things up. Burn and construction stay rock solid — no touch-ups, no fuss, just sit back and enjoy.

Final Third:

The flavor stays consistent as you head into the finish. Woodsy tannins make an appearance, drying things out a bit in a good way. Burn starts to flake here and there, but it never gets out of hand.



Final Thoughts:

This cigar is all about consistency. No wild transitions, no surprises — just a steady, satisfying smoke from start to finish. If you like a cigar that stays true all the way through, this one's worth your time.

Score: 90/100

BREWERY



© Peter Goskov/ stock.adobe.com

CHEERS TO THE MOMENT: THE COMMUNAL SPIRIT OF BEER

by David Yancey

Images by stock.adobe.com

Some celebrations don't need speeches or fanfare. They start with the crack of a can, the hiss of carbonation, and the quiet clink of glasses between friends. Beer has always been that kind of drink — the one that meets you where you are. It doesn't ask for formality or occasion. It simply says, "You're here, I'm here, let's share this."

If wine is reflection, beer is connection. It's the sound of laughter cutting through a summer evening. It's a long table at a local brewery where strangers become teammates in a trivia game. It's the easy rhythm of a backyard barbecue, someone manning the grill, someone else telling a story they've told a hundred times but still gets a laugh. Beer doesn't wait for a big reason to celebrate — it becomes the reason.

That's the quiet brilliance of it. For centuries, beer has been the drink of community. Monks brewed it to sustain their brothers through fasting. Farmers made it to mark the end of harvest. Dockworkers and soldiers raised pints not to boast, but to breathe — to remind themselves they'd made it through another day. Even now, in an age of taprooms and tasting flights, the heart of beer hasn't changed. It's still about people finding common ground over a common pour.

What's fascinating about beer is how personal it is, even in its simplicity. You can hand ten people the same lager, and each one will taste a different story — childhood ballgames, college nights, tailgates, holidays, heartbreaks, homecomings. Beer doesn't demand we analyze it. It just asks that we show up for it — and for each other.



Craft brewers have embraced that philosophy with both hands. They've built communities around flavor, yes, but also around purpose. Local breweries have become neighborhood gathering spots — part café, part confessional, part celebration hall. Whether it's a wedding rehearsal in the taproom or a fundraiser pint night for a good cause, the beer is never the main character. The people are. The stories are. The shared laughter is.

And maybe that's what makes beer the most honest drink of all. It doesn't try to elevate you; it meets you. It doesn't require ceremony or status. It belongs to everyone — the craftsman and the accountant, the musician and the mechanic, the friend who just showed up after a rough week and needed to sit in familiar company.



So the next time you raise a pint, don't rush it. Take in the sound of conversation around you — the unfiltered music of life being lived. Think about how many hands it took to make that moment possible: the brewer, the farmer, the friend who handed you the glass. That's the real toast. Not to success or status, but to togetherness.

Beer reminds us that celebration isn't something we wait for — it's something we create. One pour, one laugh, one shared moment at a time.

So here's to the impromptu cheers, the friends who never need a reason to gather, and the stories that always seem better with a pint in hand.

Because in the end, beer has never just been about the drink. It's been about what happens around it.

COFFEE



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THRONE SPORT COFFEE

by David Jefferies

Images by David Jefferies

How do athletes prepare for life after sports? It is an important question given that professional sport careers which can be shorter than traditional careers. Given the rising salary in professional sports it also gives the players more money to fund new business with. The first example of this I can think of is Shaq and Papa Johns. Throne Sport Coffee was a team effort between beverage industry veteran Michael Fedele and Patrick Mahomes, according to Sportico.com. The goal for this ready-to-drink coffee was simple: a do-it-all drink for athletes. With such a fantastic powerhouse, what is there not to be excited about? We should applaud Mahomes for teaming up with industry insider Fedele, who has worked at Body Armor and Coca-Cola. This partnership presents Throne Sport Coffee with an exciting prospect.

Mahomes brings expertise as an athlete and, according to ESPN, a whole market research team in the form of his teammates. Whereas Fedele brings relationships and expertise in creating ready-to-drink products and understanding the market for these products. According to Entrepreneur.com, he spent 9 years at body armor, and an indeterminate amount of time at Coca-Cola, so he brings a lot of knowledge about ready to drink products and the competition to the team. Mahomes stays involved with the brand getting weekly updates and, I'm sure, helping with other areas of the business. So, what about the coffee?

The coffee is made from the standard Central and South American Arabica beans, It is coming to us in a cold-brew form which makes perfect sense because they are after a ready to drink product. Some ingredients include BCAA, cane sugar and electrolytes. Potassium and sodium are used as electrolytes here not to target hydration but to help with muscle contraction and some other things. How long the supplements stay in the system and are useful is up to you. Now that we have established some of the science behind the coffee let's see how it tastes.

I opted for French Vanilla because it is an easy flavor to nail. From the first sip you can tell the coffee was built to provide athletes with a familiar taste and the best possible nutrition benefits. In other words, it is not built for coffee nerds like me. It is not intended to be drunk just because it is tasty. It is there to give a boost of energy and some added vitamins in a familiar taste. Some of the notes I tasted on the front were synthetic, and I attribute that to the added supplements in the coffee. What I could taste of the cold brew was a good base with chocolate notes. I genuinely wish I could try the cold brew by itself. As a total package, it could benefit from a slight increase in sugar, not a whole bag of sugar, but rather a slight increase from 8 grams to 12 grams. Another option would be to add more creamer to round out the chemical and shallow notes.



Once I paired the coffee with a Micallef NFG cigar, it became worlds better. The notes in the coffee rounded out, and I got more of the chocolate and oaky notes from the coffee. The cigar was cedar, pepper, some marshmallow fluff from the coffee, and some cinnamon spice. It was a delightful experience. This is one of the rare instances where a pairing is superior to the product on its own.

Keeping in mind that I'm not an athlete and that this drink is not made for pure enjoyment, it is fair to say a focused product is better than a scattered approach. Let's look at Ghost energy drinks for a moment. They use caffeine extracted from coffee to build their drinks and I love the red sour patch kid drinks. They also have products that support post-workout recovery, which is a great example of how they occupy both spaces in athleticism and the broader public. Mahomes and team could build a phenomenal pre-workout drink with caffeine derived from coffee. Then build a recovery drink in the existent cold brew format and this split up would better serve the athletes and give a broader market appeal. But for right now with everything as is we could reduce the number of additives and let the cold brew shine through and this would be a great improvement on the drink.



Overall, as a celebrity product, it is one of the better ones available. Throne Sport Coffee is an excellent example of professional athletes transitioning from a narrow skill set to a more diverse one, which will allow them to be successful in sports and beyond. This appears to be a broader trend among professional athletes, and it should be supported, provided the product is of high quality. Mahome's and Fedele are targeting a very niche portion of the population which I can appreciate. Know your people, know their needs and meet them. If you have thoughts on this drink, let us know. Until next time, explore the pairings.

RECIPES



LOVER'S SALAD

by Gabriel Seiman

Images by Gabriel Seiman

When the evening calls for a refined pairing of whiskey and cigars with dinner on the patio, the Lover's Salad offers a sophisticated yet simple starter. This dish, with its vibrant interplay of grapefruit and avocado, accented by a luxurious fig balsamic drizzle and a pinch of finishing salt, is designed to be shared intimately between two. Served on a long platter in elegant rows, it's a visual and culinary prelude to an evening of rich conversation, fine spirits, and smoldering cigars. The bright citrus cuts through the smoke, while the creamy avocado harmonizes with the whiskey's warmth, creating a sensory experience as layered as your favorite single malt.

Lover's Salad Recipe

Ingredients

- 2 large ruby red grapefruits, peeled and segmented into wedges
- 2 ripe avocados, pitted, peeled, and cut into wedges
- 2 tablespoons fig balsamic vinegar
- Pinch of high-quality finishing salt (e.g., Maldon or fleur de sel)
- Optional: A few microgreens for garnish (e.g., arugula or watercress, for a peppery bite)
- Equipment
- Long serving platter (preferably rectangular, to emphasize the shared aesthetic)
- Sharp paring knife
- Small spoon or drizzle bottle for balsamic

Instructions

1. Prepare the Grapefruits: Using a sharp paring knife, carefully peel the grapefruits, removing all pith. Segment the fruit into clean wedges, ensuring no membrane remains. Set aside.
2. Prepare the Avocados: Halve the avocados, remove the pits, and gently peel away the skin. Slice each half into even wedges, roughly matching the size of the grapefruit segments.
3. Arrange the Salad: On a long serving platter, create two parallel rows, one for each diner. Alternate grapefruit and avocado wedges in each row, placing them snugly to form a visually striking pattern. The vibrant pinkish-orange of the grapefruit contrasts beautifully with the avocado's lush green.
4. Drizzle the Fig Balsamic: Using a small spoon or drizzle bottle, lightly drizzle the fig balsamic vinegar over both rows. Aim for a delicate touch—too much will overpower the natural flavors.
5. Finish with Salt: Sprinkle a pinch of finishing salt across the salad, ensuring each wedge gets a subtle crystalline crunch. The salt enhances the fruit's sweetness and the avocado's richness.
6. Optional Garnish: For an extra flourish, scatter a few microgreens along the center of the platter, adding a peppery note that pairs well with a smoky cigar.
7. Chill or Serve Immediately: If preparing ahead, place in your fridge up to an hour ahead of time to be brought out before the main course. If you are ready to serve: Place the platter between you and your companion, each taking a row to enjoy.

Serving Notes

Yield: Serves 2

Prep Time: 10 minutes



Pair with a peaty Scotch or a bold rye whiskey, and savor alongside a medium- to full-bodied cigar, such as a Montecristo No. 2 or an Arturo Fuente Opus X.

Pairing Suggestions: The citrusy brightness of the grapefruit cleanses the palate, making it an ideal match for a smoky Islay whisky like Laphroaig or a spicy rye like WhistlePig. For cigars, choose one with earthy or leathery notes to complement the fig balsamic's sweetness, such as the BLTC Last Rites, or Macanudo Reserve Maduro.

Why This Salad Suits the Whiskey and Cigar Pairing

The Lover's Salad is more than a dish—it's an experience tailored for those who appreciate the finer things. The grapefruit's tart vibrancy cuts through the lingering smoke of a well-chosen cigar, refreshing the palate for the next puff. The avocado's creamy texture mirrors the smooth finish of a quality whiskey, while the fig balsamic adds a touch of decadence, reminiscent of the complex notes in an aged spirit. The finishing salt? It's the equivalent of that perfect cigar draw—subtle but essential, elevating every bite. This dish is designed for intimacy, encouraging you and your companion to linger over shared flavors, much like you'd savor a slow-burning cigar or a carefully sipped dram. Whether you're hosting a quiet evening or setting the stage for deep conversation, the Lover's Salad is a refined addition to your whiskey and cigar ritual. Enjoy, and may your evening be as rich as the flavors on your plate!





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PROUD MEMBER



THE RITUALS OF VICTORY

by David Yancey

Images by David Yancey & stock.adobe.com

Victory has always deserved its rituals. The buzzer sounds just as the ball goes through the net shot from half court. A walk-off home run clears the fence in the bottom of the 11th. The clock winds down to zero, and in that instant you realize you've just won the Super Bowl. Everything changes. Months of grind, years of sacrifice, and a lifetime of belief suddenly condense into one undeniable truth: we won.

For generations, champagne has been the exclamation point on that truth. The moment the game is over, bottles appear. Corks pop with a crack that echoes the crowd outside. Champagne sprays across the room, drenching uniforms, stinging eyes, soaking into floors that will be sticky for days. It's chaos, it's joy, it's laughter so loud it drowns out thought. It's the rush of adrenaline turned liquid, the victory so explosive it has to be sprayed in every direction at once.

That ritual has been around for decades, and it still makes sense. Champagne is about uncontainable energy. It belongs in the hands of champions who can't hold back, who don't want to. In the moment, you aren't supposed to be composed or reflective. You're supposed to lose yourself in the sheer noise of it all, to let the world see what winning feels like. Champagne is victory breaking loose.

But in the past several years, another ritual has emerged alongside it, and it carries a very different weight. The cigar. Where champagne explodes, cigars smolder. Where champagne races, cigars linger. To light a cigar after a championship isn't about frenzy; it's about presence. The cut of the cap, the spark of the flame, the first slow draw—all of it forces you to pause. Instead of throwing energy outward, you turn it inward. The air thickens, the room slows down, and victory takes on a new shape.



There's an image burned into my mind of a player sitting in a quiet hallway just outside the locker room. His knees pulled up, a cigar hanging from his lips, smoke curling in front of tear-streaked cheeks. In that solitude, you see it—the weight of the journey, the exhaustion, the reality of what he and his team just accomplished. The cigar doesn't steal from the champagne moment in the locker room. It deepens it, extends it. It creates a space where the chaos of winning transforms into reflection.

And that, to me, is why cigars fit so naturally into today's sports celebrations. They aren't replacements. They are companions. Champagne is the spark of fire; cigars are the glow that follows. Together, they form the full arc of triumph.

Cigars also have something champagne never could: permanence. You'll never see a team pass them around after a midseason win. They aren't casual, they aren't props, and they certainly aren't routine. They only come out when history is made. A title. A trophy. A dynasty cemented. When the boxes are opened and cigars are lit, it's not just about joy—it's about reverence. Players understand they're taking part in a tradition that stretches beyond them, a marker of legacy.

And it doesn't stop in the locker room. Fans have embraced the cigar as their own ritual of victory. Step into a cigar lounge on a Sunday afternoon and you'll see it: men and women gathered around televisions, cheering for their team, a cigar in one hand and a pour of whiskey, rum, or bourbon in the other. When their team wins, smoke rises across the room like a communal salute. It's not just the players who mark history with cigars. The fans do too, making every playoff run feel bigger, every championship feel shared.

What fascinates me most is how champagne and cigars together tell the whole story of winning. Champagne is the splash, the roar, the laughter that bursts out and disappears almost as quickly as it began. Cigars are the permanence, the pause, the taste of victory that lingers long after the lights go out. One celebrates the instant; the other honors the endurance.

And it's not about one being better than the other. It's about understanding their roles. Champagne belongs to the world outside—the cameras, the highlight reels, the social media clips. It is victory as performance, meant to be witnessed, meant to be remembered in flashes. Cigars belong to the inside—the team, the bond, the unspoken acknowledgment that we did this together. They are victory as communion, meant to be savored slowly, meant to live in memory as much as in smoke.

The truth is, both matter. Winning at the highest level is rare, and it deserves both kinds of ritual. The chaos and the calm. The spray and the draw. The spectacle and the ceremony. You need the champagne to erupt, to release everything at once. But you need the cigar to let it sink in, to stretch the moment into something you can carry forward.



Champagne washes over you; cigars settle into you. Champagne is the shout; cigars are the echo. And when you put the two together, you don't just celebrate—you mark victory in a way that feels whole.

So yes, pop the corks, let the bottles fly, let the floors get sticky. That's part of the joy, and it always will be. But don't forget to light the cigar when the noise fades. That's when victory becomes more than a headline. That's when it transforms into a legacy you can see, taste, and remember.



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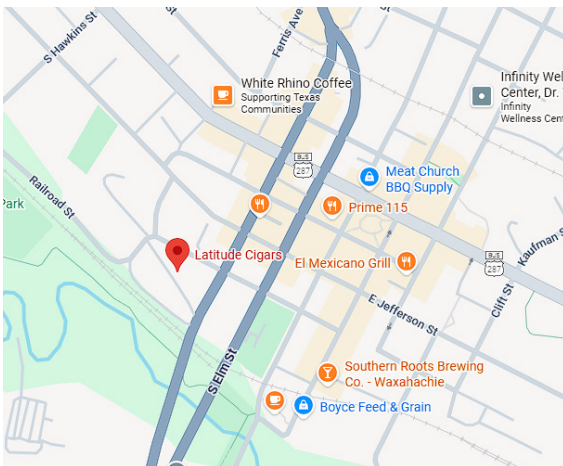


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Inspired by the laid-back philosophy of Jimmy Buffett's song "Changes In Latitudes, Changes In Attitudes" one's perspective can change depending on vertical location on the globe. These lyrics, along with a blended passion of blue water sailing and enjoying a premium cigar with friends, have allowed the birth of veteran-owned Latitude Cigars right here in Ellis County (or more precisely 32°23'04.9" N 96°51'05.7" W).



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Originally, just an idea of making quality cigars more accessible to people, we quickly realized there are a lot of misconceptions and bad advice out there in regard to cigars. Having personally enjoyed cigars for several years with friends and family, it was time to "ReFresh our Cigar Attitude" and create a destination location for people to learn more and discover the cigar community.



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