

# Cigar Insider

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## FEATURED CIGAR

### OLIVA MASTER BLENDS 3 LIGA MAESTRA ROBUSTO

NICARAGUA ■ PRICE: \$9.00 ■ BODY: MEDIUM

*For a full tasting, see page two.*

92 POINTS

## BEST CIGARS THIS ISSUE

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## A VITAL NOVEMBER FOR CIGARS

### THIS ELECTION DAY WILL BE CLOSELY WATCHED IN THE UNITED STATES,

but for the cigar industry there is even more at stake. Proposition 86 is on the ballot in California, and passage would result in a tremendous increase in tobacco taxes. Two smoking bans, one extreme, the other moderate, are being voted on in Las Vegas. Both regions are key to the industry. Another election, held Sunday in Nicaragua, apparently brought back Sandinista Daniel Ortega. For the cigar industry's reaction, see page four.

## THE PASSING OF A LEGEND: RED AUERBACH

### RED AUERBACH, THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOSTON CELTICS, DIED ON OCTOBER 28 AT THE AGE OF 89.

Auerbach won an astounding nine NBA championships as Celtics coach, including eight in a row, and won six more as general manager and one more as club president. When he passed, it was his 56th season with the Celtics. ■ Few men in history are as linked to cigars as Auerbach, who developed a ritual in which he would light a victory cigar—while the game was still being played. "It all boils down to this," Auerbach told *Cigar Aficionado* in 1994. "I used to hate these college coaches or any coach that was 25 points ahead with three minutes left to go, and they're up there yellin' and coachin' because they're on TV, and they want their picture on, and they get recognition. To me the game was over. The day's work is done... So I would light a cigar and sit on the bench and just watch it."



GREG FOSTER/NBAE VIA GETTY IMAGES

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## TASTING REPORT

### OLIVA MASTER BLENDS 3 LIGA MAESTRA

#### NEW RELEASE—VERTICAL BRAND TASTING

**Country:** Nicaragua

**Maker:** Tabacalera Oliva S.A.

**Distributor:** Oliva Cigars Inc.

**Filler:** Nicaragua

**Binder:** Nicaragua

**Wrapper:** U.S.A./Conn. Broadleaf

**Release Date:** July 2006

#### ROBUSTO

92 POINTS ■ 5" x 50 ■ \$9.00 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION

A pressed cigar with an oily, chocolate brown wrapper. A good draw imparts a good balance of earthy, creamy flavors. The spicy finish hints of brown sugar.

**Body:** Medium

#### DOUBLE ROBUSTO

91 POINTS ■ 5" x 54 ■ \$11.00 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION

Pressed with a smooth wrapper, this cigar has a fine draw. It is sweet and woody with some rich coffee notes and a toasty finish. Well balanced.

**Body:** Medium to Full

#### TORPEDO

91 POINTS ■ 6" x 52 ■ \$12.00 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION

Dark and pressed, this torpedo smokes well with sweet and savory notes framing a spicy core. Nut and leather flavors build to a pleasant saffron finish.

**Body:** Medium to Full

#### CHURCHILL

87 POINTS ■ 7" x 50 ■ \$11.00

Well made with an even draw and burn. It takes awhile to warm up, but eventually shows wood, paper and earth flavor. Some dry notes were noted on the finish.

**Body:** Medium

**BRAND SUMMARY:** Oliva's high-end Master Blends line is a rarity in the cigar world. Rather than being blended for a consistent flavor, each incarnation of the brand changes, and has its own identity. This is the third version of Master Blends, and the previous two have either sold out or are hard to find. The cigars are made in limited quantities in Nicaragua. Another change: this Master Blend has no markings on the wrapper leaf.

**Average Rating:** 90.3 points

### 601

#### NEW RELEASE—VERTICAL BRAND TASTING

**Country:** Nicaragua

**Maker:** El Rey De Los Habanos

**Distributor:** United Tobacco

**Filler:** Nicaragua

**Binder:** Nicaragua

**Wrapper:** Ecuador

**Release Date:** July 2006

#### TORPEDO

89 POINTS ■ 6 1/2" x 52 ■ \$7.90

An oily, evenly-hued wrapper covers this cigar. The creamy smoke delivers sweet cedar and spice flavor. The finish is wispy and sweet. Flavorful and mellow.

**Body:** Mild to Medium

#### CHURCHILL

88 POINTS ■ 7" x 48 ■ \$7.70

This cigar has a pale, oily wrapper and well-made cap. The smoke is creamy and full of primarily woody, cedary notes complemented by a lightly spicy finish.

**Body:** Medium

#### RABITO

88 POINTS ■ 6 1/2" x 46 ■ \$7.40

A well-made cigar with a perfect pig-tail cap. It has a lush draw and rich aroma. It is rich and grassy with notes of almond, cocoa and tea.

**Body:** Medium to Full

CONTINUED

100 POINT SCALE

95-100: Classic ■ 90-94: Outstanding ■ 80-89: Very good to excellent ■ 70-79: Average to good commercial quality  
BELOW 70: Don't waste your money ■ N/A: Not Available *Note: Prices are manufacturers' suggested retail, before taxes.*

## ROBUSTO

88 POINTS ■ 5" x 50 ■ \$6.50

Well constructed and oily, this cigar burns with a toasty, pleasant aroma. Profound cedar flavor dominates the cigar. Spice and cedar notes lead to a woody finish.

**Body:** Mild to Medium

## TORO

88 POINTS ■ 6" x 50 ■ \$7.10

A good-looking cigar with a great cap. It has a lemony and woody taste then takes on a wheaty, bready character before a dry finish.

**Body:** Medium

**BRAND SUMMARY:** Solid rolls, oily wrappers, perfect caps and excellent construction have become the trademarks of master roller Pepin Garcia, who makes the 601 series for United Tobacco at the El Rey de Los Habanos factory in Nicaragua.

**Average Rating:** 88.2 points

## NO. 10

86 POINTS ■ 6 1/2" x 44 ■ \$6.50

A coarse-looking cigar with an even draw but uneven burn. It is leathery and earthy, loading the palate with lots of dry wood flavor. A simple smoke with some bite.

**Body:** Medium to Full

## NO. 20

84 POINTS ■ 5 1/2" x 44 ■ \$5.50

A rough wrapper and cap covers this rustic cigar. Charry wood is the prominent note along with some earth notes. The finish is rough.

**Body:** Medium to Full

**BRAND SUMMARY:** The Alonso Menendez line is a Brazilian puro—uncommon in the cigar world. One of the cigar's defining characteristics is its dark, rustic Mata Fina wrapper. The brand is named after famed Cuban cigar man Alonso Menendez.

**Average Rating:** 86.3 points

## ALONSO MENENDEZ

### VERTICAL BRAND TASTING

**Country:** Brazil

**Maker:** Menendez Amerino Co.

**Distributor:** Brazil Cigars & Tobacco LLC

**Filler:** Brazil

**Binder:** Brazil

**Wrapper:** Brazil

**Purchase Date:** August 2006

## PUNCH

### CURRENT RELEASE

**Country:** Cuba

**Maker:** N/A

**Distributor:** Habanos S.A.

**Filler:** Cuba

**Binder:** Cuba

**Wrapper:** Cuba

**Box Date:** N/A

## ROBUSTO

89 POINTS ■ 5" x 52 ■ \$7.00

Veiny and rustic with a dark wrapper. The cigar has an even draw, delivering solid notes of milk chocolate, cream and coffee with some gritty undercurrents.

**Body:** Medium

## ESPECIALES NO. 1

86 POINTS ■ 7 1/2" x 50 ■ \$10.00

A dark, veiny cigar that gives off a rich, appealing aroma as it burns. Flavors are dry and chewy with some earth and coffee notes. The finish is dry and slightly sweet.

**Body:** Medium to Full

## PUNCH

88 POINTS ■ 5 5/8" x 46 ■ £12.00

Well constructed with a mounted head and oily wrapper. It's a cedary smoke carrying hints of earth, pepper and hickory. There's slight tang on the finish.

**Body:** Medium

**Cigar Insider** subscribers have access to our entire cigar ratings database. View it at [www.cigaraficionado.com](http://www.cigaraficionado.com).



## CIGAR NEWS

### NICARAGUA ELECTS ORTEGA— CIGARMAKERS REACT

BY DAVID SAVONA

Sandinista Daniel Ortega, whose previous Nicaraguan presidency was roiled by a U.S. embargo and civil war, was being hailed as the likely victor in Sunday's Nicaraguan presidential election. *The New York Times* reported on its Web site today that Ortega had 38.6 percent of the vote with 61 percent tallied, putting him eight points ahead of the nearest contender. Under new Nicaraguan law, Ortega needs only 35 percent of the vote to win, so long as no other candidate is within five points.

The potential for leftist Ortega to rise from the ashes is something that has concerned many of the cigarmakers who work in Nicaragua. Under his earlier reign, Ortega and his Sandinistas nationalized the cigar industry, seizing the lands where tobacco is grown. Many of the victims were Cuban expatriates, so for them it marked the second time they had lost their lands to a Communist ruler. Also of concern, the United States has threatened a withdrawal of aid to the country if Ortega, an ally of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Cuba's Fidel Castro, returns to power.

Nicaragua is the third largest exporter of premium cigars to the American market, accounting for approximately 16 percent of the handmade cigars smoked every year by Americans. Its reach as a tobacco producer is far greater. As the palate of cigar consumers increasingly yearns for stronger, richer tobaccos, the full-flavored leaf grown in Nicaragua is becoming far more common in blends produced around the world. An interruption in that supply would have a major impact on the cigar market.

"The operative word is we're all very concerned and very worried about the history of Ortega and the party," said Charlie Toraño, president of Toraño Cigars, which makes some of its cigars in Nicaragua. "The truth is they're saying all the right things, but at this point it's a wait-and-see approach."

"Of course we are concerned," said Nick Perdomo, president of Tabacalera Perdomo S.A., which makes its cigars in Estelí, a town that still has buildings sporting bullet holes from the war during the Ortega years. "Hopefully they will

do the complete turnaround that they promised the cigar manufacturers here in Nicaragua two weeks ago. We have a staff of over 1,000 people here in Nicaragua whose livelihood depends on the premium cigar industry."

"The biggest concern is whether or not there will be tension, or the relation between Nicaragua and the United States will change," said Jorge Padrón, president of Padrón Cigars Inc., which makes most of its cigars in Nicaragua. "I think Ortega realizes the importance of the amount of jobs that are provided by the cigar industry in Nicaragua. It's thousands of families," he said, noting that it's far more than simply cigar rollers and bunchers whose jobs are directly related to the industry, but also farmers, box makers and even people who sell the materials for farming tobacco and crafting cigars. "It's everything that feeds off the cigar industry," he said.



DANIEL ORTEGA WITH SUPPORTERS IN MANAGUA ON NOVEMBER 1.

Many cigarmakers, including Toraño and Padrón, have cigar factories across the border in Honduras. The Padróns have a smaller factory in Danlí, Honduras, which they opened in 1979. Company founder Jose Orlando Padrón moved his entire production there after President Ronald Reagan embargoed Nicaraguan goods from the U.S. market in 1985. The Plasencias, who grow massive amounts of tobacco in Central America and also make cigars, have operations on both sides of the border. So does C.A.O. International Inc., which partners with the Toraños.

A number of cigarmakers maintain this somewhat inefficient two-country system of production in case of problems. "There's no question that what's held us back from consolidating all in one place is potential political instability," said Toraño.

Some cigarmakers have factories only in Nicaragua, including Perdomo, Oliva Cigar Co., Nicaraguan American

Tabacos S.A., Drew Estates and Tabacos Puros de Nicaragua S.A., where Joya de Nicaraguas are made.

Tabacos Puros is owned by Alejandro Martinez Cuenca, a politician and businessman who vied unsuccessfully for the Sandinista party nomination. Martinez-Cuenca was confident that the cigar industry would continue to thrive.

“You know that I did not think that Ortega was the adequate candidate for Nicaragua today. However, the wish of the people is that he be the one chosen,” wrote Martinez-Cuenca in an email. “Once the election is over, the fact that Ortega has won with a minority vote of less than 38 percent of the voting, that the composition of parliament is much more plural than it has been in the past 10 years, are both guarantees that Ortega has little political leverage to put our business at risk. Therefore, you can assure your readers that business will continue as before, and that there is not reason for fears. Furthermore, I, as owner of the oldest premium cigar company in Nicaragua, with our brand **Joya de Nicaragua, Antaño** and **Celebración**, will be, as I have been in the past, [a] strong defender of the enormous contribution that cigar businesses produce for this country. Therefore, in spite of the election results, there is no objective reason for fears. I will continue to struggle in favor of maintaining and promoting the growth of this industry in Nicaragua. And we have not only the determination and willingness to defend the stability of this business, but you can be sure that we would not allow the new government to betray or interfere with our desire to continue growing and producing the best cigars for the American market.”

The Sandinistas have taken the time to meet with many in the industry, hoping to appease their concerns that the problems of the past might happen again. Still, some cigar-makers remain apprehensive. “The fact that it’s Ortega, that’s the clincher,” said Toraño. “When you see Chavez and some of the Castro supporters celebrating in Nicaragua, we’re all going to take a deep breath.”

Said Perdomo: “We are praying for the very best not only for our company but for the people of Nicaragua.” ■

Have a comment about **Cigar Insider**?  
We’d like to know what you think.  
Email us at [insidermail@mshanken.com](mailto:insidermail@mshanken.com).



## CIGAR INDUSTRY GIANTS POST STRONG SALES

The cigar industry’s leading players are posting strong financial results. On October 25, Swedish Match AB of Stockholm, Sweden, the parent company of General Cigar Co. and El Credito Cigars, reported an 18 percent increase in operating income for the first nine months of the year. The results were powered largely by the company’s cigar division.

“It was a good quarter for cigars, with high levels of activity in the operations, but it does not seem to have been an exceptional quarter, and can be repeated,” said chief financial officer Lars Dahlgren in a news brief on Forbes.com.

In its own statement released on its Web site, Swedish Match reported sales of 9,454 MSEK (\$1.3 billion) for the first nine months of the year.

In addition to cigars, Swedish Match makes chewing tobacco, pipe tobacco, snuff (also known as snus), lighters and the matches that give the company its name. Cigars are its largest business segment, accounting for 25 percent of sales. Its considerable cigar portfolio includes such benchmark brands as **Macanudo**, **La Gloria Cubana**, **Hoyo de Monterrey** and **Punch**.

Altadis S.A., the largest maker of cigars in the world, operates on a different financial calendar than Swedish Match. At the end of August, the French/Spanish company (it has headquarters in Paris and Madrid), reported its results for the first half of fiscal 2006, which showed a double-digit rise in cigar sales.

Altadis’s cigar division had sales of 450 million euros (\$575 million) for the first half of the year, an increase over the same period in 2005. Fifty-seven percent of those sales came from the United States, 15 percent from Cuba and 16 percent from Europe.

Sales at U.S. subsidiary Altadis U.S.A. Inc. were up 10.3 percent in dollar terms, said the company. EBITA, earnings before interest, tax and amortization, was 142 million euros (\$181 million). The company said its cigar division was the best performer in the group.

In addition to owning half of Habanos S.A., the world-wide distributor of Cuban cigars, Altadis also makes many non-Cuban premium cigar brands such as **Montecristo**, **H. Upmann** and **Quintero** for sale in the United States. It’s also a major producer of machine-made cigars. ■

## OLIVA RELEASES ROUND TRIO

BY DAVID SAVONA

Most of the accolades given to burgeoning cigarmaker Oliva Cigar Co. have gone to the company's square cigars, which are finished in the style known as trunk pressing. In a bit of a switch, Oliva recently released a trio of cigars that are round. The three new sizes are part of the **Oliva Serie G** line, which used to be known as **Oliva Grand Cameroon**.

"We decided to make some round sizes so that connoisseurs who preferred round cigars could enjoy this blend as well," said Oliva vice president Jose Oliva. "The round shape allows for more tobacco and delivers a very different flavor."

The sizes are the Toro, which measures 6 inches by 50 ring and has a suggested retail price of \$3.35; Double Robusto, which is 5 inches by 54 and sells for \$3.95, and Special G, a tidy perfecto measuring 3 3/4 inches long with a 49 ring gauge at its fattest point. It retails for \$2.50. The Toro is also available in a tubed version, which sells for \$3.85.

The cigars are wrapped in Cameroon wrapper, and have Nicaraguan filler and binder. Oliva is a family-owned company headquartered in Miami Lakes, Florida, and it rolls all of its cigars in Nicaragua, many of them with Nicaraguan tobacco grown on its farms.

The Oliva cigars in the Serie G line have scored exceptionally well in blind tastings. In a vertical brand tasting under the old name Grand Cameroon conducted in the March 7 *Cigar Insider*, the line scored an average of 90.2 points. Four of the five sizes scored 90 points or more, and one, the Belicoso, scored 92. For more ratings on Oliva cigars, [click here](#). ■

## CUSANO LANCERO LAUNCHES IN UNITED STATES

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

A thin, elegant cigar called the **Cuvée Grand** is hitting American cigar stores this month, and it marks a new concept in cigar marketing for Cusano Cigars. President and brand owner Mike Chiusano enlisted a special design



team dedicated solely to the purpose of creating and manifesting the cigar. What makes it different from the regular line of Cusano brands is that the name "Cusano" is absent from the box. The cigar debuted on the European market four months ago and is only now reaching the United States.

"We decided it was time to look at other brands to either buy or to distribute," said Chiusano. "Cuvée Grand is a collaborative effort between Tabadom [Tabacos Dominicanos, a cigar company run by Hendrik Kelner], DomRey Cigar [Cusano's marketing arm] and Cusano. We were looking to develop a cigar that could compete with Cuba, strengthwise, but a smooth strength. This is why we launched in Europe first, because the market there is 60 percent Cuban."

Cuvée Grand is a 7 inch by 40 ring gauge lancero that will retail for \$12 each, or \$240 per box of 20, considerably more than most of the Cusano brand portfolio. The cigar consists of an Ecuadoran wrapper Chiusano called Dos Cubanos, a hybrid of two Cuban seeds. The binder is from Mexico and the filler is a combination of San Vicente tobacco from two growing regions in the Dominican Republic, and Honduran tobacco.

"Cuvée Grand was three years in the making," said Chiusano. "When Champagne makers produce Champagne, they take the best vintages and blend their Cuvée." Cusano named the cigar with this notion in mind.

The brand will be small, with two varieties: Chiusano said only 17,000 will be released. Fewer than half will have darker wrappers, which Chiusano said went through double fermentation. Each lancero has a handwritten serial number on a black and gold band at the foot of the cigar.

Cuvée Grand will make its U.S. debut on November 20 at the Davidoff of Geneva retail shop on Madison Avenue in New York City.

Look for a rating in an upcoming *Cigar Insider*. ■

**Cigar Insider** subscribers have access to our entire cigar ratings database. View it at [www.cigaraficionado.com](http://www.cigaraficionado.com).



## CIGAR LOVERS RAISE \$50,000 FOR DOMINICAN CHARITY

BY DAVID SAVONA

A group of cigar smokers raised \$53,000 in late October to help the poor of the Dominican Republic. The money was raised in an online auction of rare cigars and other items on CigarFamily.com, the Web site of the Fuente and Newman cigar companies.



Illustration by Robert Trondsen

**CARLOS FUENTE JR.**

The auction was run by site members, cigar smokers from around the globe who have come to know and support the Cigar Family Charitable Foundation created by Fuente/Newman to bring a better life to the poor living around Chateau de la Fuente, a tobacco farm in the Dominican Republic. The charity has raised more than \$3 million since its inception, much of it from cigar smokers, and this annual auction is a key part of the fund-raising efforts. One of the foundation's greatest achievements was building a school in the Dominican Republic to educate children who previously had no easy way to get to a school.

"This was a tradition that was started by Cigar Family members," said Carlos Fuente Jr., president of Tabacalera A. Fuente y Cia. "It's a way of them showing their gratitude for the products they enjoy."

Many of the products that were auctioned are custom-made cigars that are never sold in cigar shops. There were various cigars of unusual shape and size made in the Fuente factories, including **Fuente Fuente OpusX** Football cigars (one sold for \$1,000, another for \$675) and an **Arturo Fuente** Culebra made with three wrappers, each a different

color (\$1,150). Some old Cuban cigars were also sold, including a pair of 1922 candelas, which went for \$155. The most expensive lot in the auction, a combination package containing several old Cuban cigars, including five 1958 H. Upmann cigars from 1958, sold for \$2,760.

Fuente said that many of the lots on the virtual block had been purchased at previous auctions, only to be put up for sale again by their new owners. "It's really amazing," said Fuente Jr., "people coming together for this great cause. And it goes a long way."

For information on how you can contribute to the charity, go to [www.cf-cf.com](http://www.cf-cf.com). ■

## \$35,000 FOR SMOKING

BY MICHAEL MORETTI

A municipal court judge in Roxbury, New Jersey, issued nearly \$35,000 in fines to Smiles II, a local bar found guilty of violating statutes prohibiting indoor smoking.

Between late April through early September, the restaurant apparently racked up 35 violations, specifically for allowing smoking inside the establishment and failing to post "no smoking" signs on the premises. The bar was fined \$250 for the first violation, \$500 for the second and \$1000 for each of the 33 additional infractions in accordance with the state's outline for enforcement of the law. ■

## NEW DIAMOND CROWN HUMIDORS FROM J.C. NEWMAN

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

The line of **Diamond Crown** brand humidors offered by the J.C. Newman Cigar Co. has been expanded with the St. James series, a line of high-gloss humidors fashioned out of exotic woods.

St. James humidors begin as six-sided boxes and are then cut open to form separate lid and base sections to ensure that the lid and base will always be flush, maintaining the continuity of the wood grain of each piece. Fortified with walls measuring 11/16 of an inch thick, the humidors are made with tongue-and-groove detailing for added stability. Quadrant hinges limit the humidor lid to approximately

95 degrees of travel, just passed the vertical point, so the lid stays up. Both lid and base are hinged for precise closure.

There are four humidors in the St. James line: The Windsor, which comes in 90-count and 160-count sizes, is finished with African Bubinga. The Oxford, which also comes in 90-count or 160-count cigar capacity, is decorated in Brazilian Rosewood. All models are hand-veneered and come replete with silver handles, custom lock and key, a hygrometer and a Diamond Crown IMAS (Invisible Magnetic Attachment System) humidification system. What makes the system “invisible” is the metal plate built into the lid underneath the wood veneer and the magnets placed behind the actual humidifier. The resulting magnetic field allows the unit to be affixed to the underside of the humidor’s lid without the use of Velcro or visible magnets.

The interior of each humidor is lined with Spanish cedar. A Spanish Cedar aeration rack sits on top and is designed to increase airflow throughout the humidor. The Windsor and Oxford 160 count models, which measure 16 1/4 by 11 7/8 by 6 1/2 inches, retail for \$525. The 90 count models, which measure 14 1/4 by 9 3/4 by 4 1/4 inches, retail for \$325. They are packed in a custom felt storage bag. ■



## RECORD CIGAR AFICIONADO BIG SMOKE IN LAS VEGAS

More than 6,000 cigar lovers sampled some of the finest cigars, spirits and food this weekend in Las Vegas at the Venetian Hotel, making it the best attended Big Smoke in the magazine’s history. There were Big Smokes on Friday and Saturday evenings, with dozens of cigar brands being handed out, in many cases by the people who craft them. On Saturday and Sunday mornings, a sold-out audience experienced cigar and lifestyle seminars. The seminar highlights included a Humidipak bag filled with six cigars: three from the rising stars of the cigar world—a Tatuaje, Oliva and Padilla—and three rare

anniversary cigars—an Avo 80th, an Ashton Estate Sun Grown 20-Year Salute, and the first appearance of the Padrón 80th Anniversary, a long perfecto.

For much more on the Big Smoke, see our extensive coverage at [www.cigaraficionado.com](http://www.cigaraficionado.com). ■

### 2006 CIGAR AFICIONADO “BIG SMOKE” LINEUP

November 21

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