

# cigar aficionado

THE GOOD LIFE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

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**GOLF SPECIAL**

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WEEKEND  
GOLFER:  
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SHOTMAKER?**

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**TOM  
BERENGER  
LIGHTS UP**

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The Oliva Cigar family struggled in the wake of the cigar boom, but now the company is making superb cigars, many of them value priced. Gilberto Oliva Jr. (foreground, right) inspects an Oliva Serie G. Behind him are his brother Carlos, father, Gilberto, and youngest brother, Jose.

Tabacalera Oliva Tabolisa has been making great strides in Nicaragua. The family-owned business (known as Oliva Cigar Co. in the United States) makes about 6 million cigars a year, about 90 percent of them Oliva-brand cigars. The rest are private labels. "People think we do a lot more private-label [cigars] than we do," says Jose Oliva, 34, one of the brothers working for the company under the tutelage of patriarch Gilberto Oliva Sr., 76, who came to Nicaragua in 1964 from San Juan y Martinez, Cuba. After working for others, in 1969 Gilberto struck out on his own to grow tobacco, but he had to leave in 1979 with the turmoil facing Nicaragua. "In between, Dad grew tobacco in Honduras, Mexico, Panama and the Philippines," says Gilberto Jr. "In 1995, he came back."

Over the past 12 years the Olivas have grown their business, surviving the tough days that followed the cigar boom and now prospering thanks to the succulent blends they make using well-aged tobacco, much of it grown on their own farms. Jose and his older brother, Gilberto Jr., show off several warehouses.

"We ferment at a very slow pace," says Gilberto Jr., a heavyset man who looks younger than his 46 years and wears an easy smile. "We don't like to bring the temperatures too high."

"This takes a tremendous amount of cash flow," says Jose, a quiet man with a dry sense of humor. He's standing among dozens of piles of fermenting tobacco in a warehouse in Palacaguina, Nicaragua.

Humidifying is done the old-fashioned way here, by spraying water on the floors when needed. It's the way Gilberto Sr. prefers it be done—Gilberto Jr. hopes to modernize things like this someday.

The Oliva factory in Estelí is fairly new, having opened in July 2003. It replaced a smaller facility. The workforce, which includes 180 rollers, gets details right. Near a color-sorting table, a woman is cutting a half inch off the foot of each maduro cigar with a chopper. "The maduro wrapper shrinks after rolling," says Jose. The cosmetic cutting ensures that the binder and filler don't peek out like ankles of someone wearing high-water pants.

The brothers eschew the office and take seats at a wooden table in front of the galleria, to watch over the workers. They bring out a few robustos from 2003, the release of their Oliva Master Blends 1. The four-year-old cigar is rich and sublime, mellow and balanced. The company intends to release some of its aged stock as part of a special shipment within the next year.

"Everybody is wishing for the best, and worrying for the worst," says Gilberto Jr. of the political situation. "I have had a couple of meetings with officials, and they have assured me nothing bad will happen."

Oliva had a second cigar factory, in Jalapa, Nicaragua, where few cigars are made, but it recently closed that operation and moved that production across the border to Danlí, Honduras, joining other cigar-makers that have operations on both sides of the border.

# figurados

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Few perfectos burn and smoke as well as the Arturo Fuente Hemingway Best Seller. It is one of the most difficult shapes to roll, but the Dominican Best Seller—a short perfecto with a pointy nipple foot—performed exceptionally from its even burn to its unabating offering of flavors. It scored 93 points. The Cuban Bolivar Belicoso Fino in this test comes from a wood slide-lid cabinet that some aficionados argue will better age a cigar. Regardless of the packaging, this rich and balanced belicoso scored 92 points. Part of the last installment in Oliva's Master Blends series, the Torpedo from Nicaragua scored 91 points.



**NICARAGUA**  
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"  
FILLER: NICARAGUA  
BINDER: NICARAGUA  
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

**OLIVA MASTER BLENDS 3 LIGA MAESTRA  
TORPEDO**  
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.  
U.S.: £12.00 U.K.: N/A

91

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