

# Cigar Insider

INTERNET ONLY

MARCH 27, 2007 ■ VOL. 12, NO. 6 ■ FROM THE PUBLISHER OF CIGAR AFICIONADO MAGAZINE

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## FEATURED CIGAR

### BOLIVAR BELICOSO FINO CABINET SELECTION

CUBA ■ PRICE: £12.70 ■ BODY: Medium to Full

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POINTS

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## CIGAR CONSOLIDATION

### THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY IS CONSOLIDATING.

The biggest names in tobacco are expanding their holdings, and in some cases cigars are coming along for the ride. Altadis S.A., the maker of Montecristo and H. Upmann cigars and the owner of half of Cuba's Habanos S.A., is a takeover target. Britain's Imperial Tobacco PLC has bid for the company. See page four. The bid comes in the wake of Japan Tobacco's acquisition of Britain's Gallaher Group and Henri Wintermann's buyout of C.A.O.



## CASA FUENTE SUES FOR RIGHT TO SMOKE

ANYONE WHO HAS VISITED THE CASA FUENTE SHOP in The Forum Shops at Caesars in Las Vegas has probably smoked a cigar on the popular patio out front. The Las Vegas smoking ban has threatened the patio privileges for those visiting the Fuente showcase store. The patio and store sit inside a mall where, according to the law, no smoking is allowed, but the patio is also part of the store itself, where smoking is permitted. Michael Frey, part owner of Casa Fuente, sued this month to keep the patio open for smoking. "I am a cigar store," said Frey. "The law exempts cigar stores. So it does not matter that half of the store is in the mall. I am exempt according to Nevada state law." A temporary restraining order is in effect, so smoking continues, but it is scheduled to expire tomorrow, the same day the Clark County District Court will ultimately decide if the patio at Casa Fuente can go on being cigar-friendly.

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**TASTING REPORT**
**C.A.O. VISION****NEW RELEASE—VERTICAL BRAND TASTING****Country:** Dominican Republic**Maker:** La Aurora S.A.**Distributor:** C.A.O. International Inc.**Filler:** Dom. Rep., Nicaragua, Brazil**Binder:** Dom. Rep.**Wrapper:** Dom. Rep.**Release Date:** February 2006**PRANA****90 POINTS** ■ 6 1/4" x 52 ■ \$16.00

A lightly veined torpedo with a good draw and earthy aroma. It is very woody and toasty with roasted nut flavors and an earthy, woody finish.

**Body:** Medium**EPIPHANY****88 POINTS** ■ 6" x 50 ■ \$14.00

Nice color to this cigar, although it has a rough cap. An easy draw offers leather flavors with dry wood and coffee notes.

**Body:** Mild to Medium**CATALYST****86 POINTS** ■ 5" x 50 ■ \$12.00

Covered in a lush, creamy wrapper, this robusto draws well but burns unevenly. The smoke is woody and has some damp earth notes on the palate.

**Body:** Medium

**BRAND SUMMARY:** The first Dominican-made cigar from C.A.O., Vision features a four-year-old Corajo wrapper grown on Finca Atravesada, a small farm in the Navarrete region of the Dominican Republic. Each cigar has a numbered secondary band at the foot. The cigars come in a white humidified Sensi-Box with an illuminated inner lid and built-in digital hygrometer.

**Average Rating:** 88.0 points**FELIPE POWER****NEW RELEASE—VERTICAL BRAND TASTING****Country:** Dominican Republic**Maker:** Tabacalera Real**Distributor:** Felipe Gregorio Cigars**Filler:** Nicaragua, Dom. Rep.**Binder:** Nicaragua**Wrapper:** Costa Rica**Release Date:** October 2006**SPECIAL R****91 POINTS** ■ 5" x 52 ■ \$10.00 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION

This oily, well-made cigar is wrapped in a good-looking leaf. It is pleasantly sweet with some woody notes and a long sweet finish.

**Body:** Medium**TRIPLE R****91 POINTS** ■ 5 1/2" x 55 ■ \$12.00 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION

A dark robusto wrapped in an oily leaf. The draw delivers a good amount of pepper and dark-roasted coffee on the palate with hints of citrus.

**Body:** Medium to Full**OBUS****89 POINTS** ■ 5 1/2" x 55 ■ \$15.00

An unorthodox perfecto with a good draw and burn. The smoke is toasty with coffee bean and mineral notes that carry an underlying sweetness.

**Body:** Medium to Full**FULL POWER****88 POINTS** ■ 6" x 60 ■ \$15.00

The wrapper on this thick cigar is dark and slightly veined. It is predominantly woody and chewy with wisps of leather and a sweet and savory finish.

**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.*

## DOUBLE C

87 POINTS ■ 7 1/2" x 50 ■ \$15.00

Good oils on this large, rustic cigar. It has a draw that is full of spicy, woody smoke. A ginger note surfaces before the tart finish.

**Body:** Full

## NO. 2

86 POINTS ■ 6 1/3" x 54 ■ \$12.00

A roughly rolled torpedo with a tip that tastes artificially sweetened. There are sweet dry notes that mix with damp earth and mushroom flavors.

**Body:** Mild to Medium

## PETIT TORPEDO

84 POINTS ■ 4 1/2" x 50 ■ \$10.00

A mini pyramid with a tip that tastes artificially sweetened. Some muddled vanilla notes are thrown out of balance by earth and balsa wood flavors.

**Body:** Mild to Medium

**BRAND SUMMARY:** Brand owner Philip Wynne created the Felipe Power to celebrate 15 years in the cigar business. The best performers were the Special R and Triple R—both scored 91 points. A novelty cigar called the Leopard (a polka dotted version of the Obus with two wrapper types) was unavailable for this test.

**Average Rating:** 88.0 points

## BOLIVAR

### CURRENT RELEASE

**Country:** Cuba

**Maker:** N/A

**Distributor:** Habanos S.A.

**Filler:** Cuba

**Binder:** Cuba

**Wrapper:** Cuba

**Box Date:** October 2006

## BELICOSO FINO CABINET SELECTION

92 POINTS ■ 5 1/2" x 52 ■ £12.70 ■ HUMIDOR SELECTION

A gorgeous torpedo gleaming with oils. It has a near perfect draw that imparts a luxuriously textured smoke rich with profound wood and tobacco flavors.

**Body:** Medium to Full

## PUNCH

### CURRENT RELEASE

**Country:** Cuba

**Maker:** N/A

**Distributor:** Habanos S.A.

**Filler:** Cuba

**Binder:** Cuba

**Wrapper:** Cuba

**Purchase Date:** January 2006

## NINFAS

90 POINTS ■ 7" x 33 ■ £7.30

Slim and elegant, this cigar is well capped. Although the draw is a bit firm, it is even, delivering toasty flavors that are sweetly spiced and a café au lait finish.

**Body:** Medium

## LA GLORIA CUBANA

### CURRENT RELEASE

**Country:** Cuba

**Maker:** N/A

**Distributor:** Habanos S.A.

**Filler:** Cuba

**Binder:** Cuba

**Wrapper:** Cuba

**Box Date:** June 2001

## TAINO

86 POINTS ■ 7" x 47 ■ 16.50 Sw. FRANCIS

A richly colored cigar with an uneven draw. The flavors are predominantly woody with a slight savoriness that turns into a soggy wood finish.

**Body:** Mild to Medium

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**CIGAR NEWS****ALTADIS S.A. TARGETED  
IN TAKEOVER BID****MOVE COULD TURN HOSTILE,  
RESULT IN LOSS OF JOINT VENTURE  
WITH CUBA'S HABANOS S.A.**

BY DAVID SAVONA

The world's largest cigar company is a target for acquisition by a British competitor.

Imperial Tobacco PLC, the world's fourth largest tobacco company, made a 11.5 billion euro (\$15.3 billion) offer for Altadis S.A. on March 14. The board of French/Spanish Altadis—which owns half of Cuba's Habanos S.A. as well as all of **Montecristo** and **H. Upmann** maker Altadis U.S.A. Inc.—rejected the deal soon after, and tobacco sector analysts said Imperial might go hostile with the bid, taking it directly to Altadis shareholders.

“The board, in conjunction with its financial and legal advisors, has carefully considered this approach and has unanimously rejected it, on the grounds that it does not reflect the strategic value of the company and its unique and diversified assets, as well as their future growth prospects,” wrote Altadis in a statement on its Web site.

On Thursday, three of Altadis's biggest shareholders told the Altadis board to take a bid from Imperial if another bidder did not arise. First reported in *The Times* of London, it said that institutional investors Franklin, Fidelity and Morgan Stanley reached out to Altadis. The investors, according to *The Times*, hold a total of 23 percent of Altadis stock.

Cigars would be a smaller part of this deal than cigarettes. In addition to its cigar and logistics business, Altadis makes Gitanes and Galouises cigarettes. Imperial, which is headquartered in Bristol, England, makes Davidoff and West cigarettes, among many others. It also makes Drum rolling tobacco and has an extremely small cigar business, with a machine-made brand called Classic that it sells in the United Kingdom. The company had sales of £11.7 billion (\$23 billion) in 2006.

Altadis had sales of 4 billion euros (\$5.3 billion) in 2006.

Sales of cigarettes, the biggest sector at 1.7 billion euros, declined 14.5 percent. Cigar sales were up 0.4 percent to 888 million euros (\$1.2 billion).

While cigarettes are the primary gem, cigars are part of the allure Altadis holds for Imperial. “I think Imperial is quite interested in the Altadis cigar business,” said a tobacco sector analyst. “Imperial has always stressed it is a multiproduct tobacco company.” Altadis also has a much greater sales presence in the United States, virtually unknown territory to Imperial. “The U.S. offers great potential for the group,” wrote Imperial in its latest annual report.

The global tobacco market is consolidating. Japan Tobacco International, the maker of Camel and Winston cigarettes, is in the process of acquiring Britain's Gallaher PLC, the maker of Benson & Hedges.

The cigar market has also had some activity, with the recent acquisition of boutique cigarmaker C.A.O. International Inc. by Holland's Henri Wintermanns Cigars, a major player in the mass-market cigar business.

Possibilities abound with the potential Altadis deal. Various press reports have mentioned other conceivable bidders for Altadis, including Altria, the giant of the sector, which owns Marlboro; BAT, the owner of the Dunhill brand; and Japan Tobacco. Altria is likely out due to antitrust issues, and Japan Tobacco is in the midst of completing its Gallaher deal, making it an unlikely bidder as well.

Other sources have speculated that Altadis might be separated into three companies—cigarettes, cigars and logistics—to increase shareholder value. It's possible that Altadis's partnership with Habanos would disappear in the wake of an acquisition. “There is a change of control clause” in the Habanos-Altadis joint venture, said the analyst. While cash-strapped Cuba would be hard pressed to come up with the money itself to buy its way out of the joint venture—Altadis bought half of Habanos in October 2000 for \$477 million—some other company could come forward and offer to take Altadis's place as the owner of half of Habanos. “If someone came forward to the Cuban government, and it wasn't Imperial, and said it's worth this much, then the Cubans would have the option to raise a little more money from that business,” said the analyst.

An Altadis spokesperson in Madrid declined to comment, and an executive at Altadis U.S.A. said commenting was up to the parent company.

Altria is the world's largest tobacco company, followed by Japan Tobacco, BAT and Imperial. ■

## FIRST NEW SIZE IN 20 YEARS FOR LA UNICA

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

This spring, J.C. Newman Cigar Co. will be adding a new size to its La Unica brand—the No. 600, which will measure 6 inches by 50 ring gauge and retail for \$4.95 per cigar. The size is the first brand extension since La Unica was launched 20 years ago.



The thick toro was created to commemorate the brand's switch from bundles to boxes, and also to accommodate lovers of the toro size. La Unica was first released as a bundle brand in 1986, but J.C. Newman recently announced that the cigars would now be packaged in wooden slide-lid boxes of 20. With the 600, La Unica will have six sizes in its portfolio. Made by Tabacalera A. Fuente y Cia. in the Dominican Republic, the brand comes in Connecticut shade (natural) or Connecticut broadleaf (maduro) wrappers with all-Dominican binders and fillers. ■



The cigar will not be officially released until April 24, but is being made available to attendees of the Avo Uvezian Limited Edition Cigar Dinner Tour. Aficionados will be able to try the new cigar as well as meet Uvezian in person.

The New York City Avo Dinner was held at Rothmann's Steakhouse on March 23, and was sponsored by Davidoff of Geneva.

"People tell me every year that they hope we do this until I'm 100 years old," said Uvezian at the dinner, "but I tell them no. Ninety-nine is my limit."

The event includes a four-course dinner, a selection of Avo cigars (including the L.E.07) and entertainment provided by Avo Uvezian's jazz band. The Avo dinner tour will hit cities across the country until the end of April. For a listing of tour locations, visit [www.cigaraficionado.com](http://www.cigaraficionado.com). ■

## AVO CELEBRATES 81st WITH AVO L.E.07 CIGAR

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

The new Avo L.E.07 cigar is launching in celebration of musician Avo Uvezian's 81st birthday. Years in the making, the 5 5/8 inch by 48 ring toro is the brainchild of Avo Uvezian and Hendrik (Henke) Kelner, who runs the factories where Avo and Davidoff cigars are made.

The Avo L.E.07 is made with a combination of piloto Cubano and San Vicente tobaccos, which are known to be strong varieties, and milder Olor tobacco, all from the Dominican Republic, under an Ecuadoran wrapper. Packaged in boxes of 20 cigars, the L.E.07 comes unbanded and will retail for \$11.50 per cigar or \$230 a box. Only 4,000 boxes were produced.

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## TORAÑOS ACQUIRE MOUNTAIN IN NICARAGUA, MOVE FACTORY

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

The Toraño family has bought a mountain. Purchased a year ago from private owners, the Toraños will be breaking ground this spring to turn the mountain into the new center of its cigar manufacturing operations in Nicaragua.

The mountain overlooks the city of Estelí, where most Nicaraguan cigars are made. On the flat plane at the mountain's base, the Toraños plan on building a 45,000-square-foot cigar factory. About halfway up the mountain, the Toraños will be constructing a cigar lounge with a city view and a lodging facility for visitors.



TORAÑO'S MOUNTAIN ON THE RIGHT OVERLOOKS THE CITY OF ESTELÍ.

The Toraños have purchased 33 acres of land, including fertile farmland near the mountain that the family intends to use for growing noncommercial experimental tobacco. The factory and farm have been named Esperanza, Spanish for hope, after the Toraños' La Esperanza farm that was seized in Cuba after the revolution.

"The Estelí valley in Nicaragua is one of the most beautiful areas in Central America," said Aaron Gunther, director of marketing for Toraño. "The Esperanza facility will be right at the entrance to the city of Estelí."

This is an impressive investment given the uncertain outlook for Nicaragua with the return of Sandinista president Daniel Ortega, who has many cigarmakers worried about the future.

"While it is true that some other cigar manufacturers are

a little reluctant to invest in Nicaragua because of the political situation, we have a number of reasons to be optimistic," said Charlie Toraño, president of Carlos Toraño Cigars. "First, our business partners, the Fidel Olivas family (including sons Jose, Aldrin and Oscar) are Nicaraguan and they have a finger on the pulse of what is happening politically, economically and culturally. Our partners are confident with the new Ortega government and we're confident that Ortega wants a stable Nicaragua. The people there do not want another war, and we don't believe that the Ortega government wants another war. We do expect some changes with the new government and we expect that we will be able to adjust accordingly. We're not expecting nationalization because that's not what the Nicaraguan people want."

Currently, Toraño has three buildings at the foot of the mountain temporarily functioning as packing, rolling and bale storage facilities. They will all be converted to storage once the new factory is built. Toraño also rents an auxiliary storage facility in Estelí, owns a facility in Ocotol called Protalasa near the Honduran border, and has an additional facility in Danlí, Honduras.

As far as cigar production is concerned, the Esperanza factory will be making only the cigars that are already rolled in Nicaragua—**Carlos Toraño Noventa** and **Toraño 1916 Cameroon**.

C.A.O. International Inc.'s Nicaraguan cigars will be made in the Esperanza factory as well. For the moment, the C.A.O operation has been moved from its former site in Estelí (which was where Toraño cigars were made) to one of the buildings at the foot of the mountain.

"We're very excited about moving into this new plot of land," said Tim Ozgener, president of C.A.O. "It will be a very detail-oriented place that will give people a better idea of what goes into the development of a cigar—a progressive factory that will not lose the traditional roots of cigar making."

The entire operation employs approximately 1,400 workers, but Toraño anticipates significantly enlarging that number once the new factory is built. Ultimately, Toraño foresees his factory with 400 rollers and 400 bunchers.

"We love the ethic and culture that the Nicaraguan people bring to the manufacturing process," said Toraño. "The Nicaraguans have a great passion for tobacco and cigars. We look forward to sharing that passion with them as we build for the future." ■

## LAST SHIPMENT OF AURORA 100 AÑOS CIGARS

BY DAVID SAVONA

Tax day, April 15, will also be the date when the final shipment of **Aurora 100 Años** cigars is released to the market. The highly regarded cigars—the Belicoso size was named *Cigar Aficionado*'s No. 2 cigar of the year in January 2005—have scored very well in *Cigar Aficionado* and *Cigar Insider* taste tests. Only 400,000 were made. They have been rolled and released in small batches since 2004 rather than all at one time.

The bands of each of the cigars are individually numbered, and La Aurora S.A., the cigarmaker that created the brand, began by releasing the higher numbers, working down.

“The numbers are really getting low,” said Jose Blanco, Aurora’s director of marketing.

They won’t go all the way to No. 1 however—the box containing that cigar is being saved by the company. “We’re keeping No. 1 for the museum,” said Blanco. ■



cigars in the hands of celebrities. In January, the company keyed on the cavalcade of awards shows, being selected to provide cigars at the 12th Annual Critics Choice Awards and at the 64th Annual Golden Globes, where it sponsored the HBO Luxury Lounge. NBA athletes also got a taste at the All-Star Weekend in Las Vegas in February, when C.A.O. smokes were included in gift bags to players staying at the Palms, the All-Star Game’s official host hotel.

Altadis U.S.A. Inc. went Hollywood in January as well, bringing **Montecristo** cigars to the Globes as the exclusive sponsor of the Best Life House, a VIP party destination offered to presenters, nominees and other celebrities. After Tinseltown, Altadis flew back to Florida and teamed with Hugh Hefner, offering its **Don Diego** brand as the cigar of choice at The Playboy Super Bowl Saturday Night Party. The party kicked off the night before the big game at the AmericanAirlines arena, home of Miami Heat basketball. The featured cigar was The Playboy by Don Diego, which was launched at the Playboy Mansion in California in 1996. Also, guests at the Super Bowl Gala event, which took place as part of the Super Bowl week lineup, were treated to Montecristo Classic, White and Platinum cigars coupled by face time with some of the NFL’s greatest running backs ever: Eric Dickerson, Marcus Allen, Barry Sanders, Emmitt Smith, Gale Sayers and Marshall Faulk.

The Super Bowl’s celebration in Miami this past February was ripe with premium smokes. Rocky Patel Cigars joined such companies as Snow Queen vodka, BMW and Corona beer as a sponsor of the pre-Super Bowl bash Leather & Lace. Mega-playmates such as Carmen Electra, Brande Roderick and Jenny McCarthy served as hostesses at the trendy Chakra lounge located on Ocean Drive in Miami Beach. Rocky Patel Cigars followed up the next night by cosponsoring the Saturday Spectacular hosted by movie star and *Cigar Aficionado* cover subject John Travolta and NFL great Marcus Allen at the International Sky Terrace at the Bank of America building.

Miami has received a robust amount of cigar sponsorship in the last few months even without the Super Bowl coming to town. The elite Havana Club opened in December at the top of the 55-story Wachovia Financial Center. The private health and social club features the Club Macanudo Lounge. The exclusive enclave for cigar lovers is the latest addition to a franchise of Club Macanudos that General Cigar Co. has opened in various spots around the world. Mayor Manny Diaz attended the

## CIGAR-SPONSORED EVENTS ON THE RISE

BY MICHAEL MORETTI

Cigars have made recent appearances at Hollywood’s award shows, the NBA All-Star weekend and the mania surrounding the Super Bowl. With celebrating people ready and willing to light up cigars, some of the top cigar companies have gone coast-to-coast to accommodate them.

Exclusive sponsorships of high-profile happenings and sporting events are a growing trend in the cigar industry as cigar companies look to extend themselves to different audiences. A look thus far at 2007 shows that the trend will not be slowing down any time soon.

C.A.O. International Inc. has been increasingly involved in the entertainment industry, always managing to put

opening of the club, which featured entertainment from Cuban trumpet great Arturo Sandoval.

In January, Tabacalera Perdomo extended an existing partnership with the 2006 NBA champion Miami Heat. As part of the partnership, Perdomo provides cigars for various events for the sports franchise, including the team's Honorary Captain program, which allows season ticket holders to have cigars while hobnobbing with players and coaches, and its Heat Scramble Classic Golf tournament, which benefits the Heat's charitable foundation.

There will no doubt be more to come from the cigar industry around the country and the world in 2007. ■

## NEW SUN GROWN SIXTY FROM ROCKY PATEL

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

**R**ocky Patel has added a hefty new size to his Sun Grown series—The Sixty. The 6 inch by 60 ring gauge cigar marks the seventh size in the brand, which debuted in late 2004. It is produced at the El Paraiso factory in Danlí, Honduras, and is made with an Ecuadoran sun-grown Sumatra-seed wrapper, Nicaraguan binder, and filler from Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic. The Sun Grown Sixty is also the fourth 60 ring gauge cigar inducted into the Rocky Patel portfolio: it was first introduced last year, taking shape in the Vintage 1990 and 1992 brands. Shortly after, The Sixty reappeared in the Vintage 1999 cigar line. Unlike the other Sixties, the Sun Grown Sixty is finished off with a pigtail cap uncharacteristic of any of Patel's cigars. It comes in boxes of 20, retailing for \$8.50 per cigar. For a rating on the new Sun Grown Sixty,

see an upcoming issue of *Cigar Insider*. ■



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### 2007 CIGAR AFICIONADO "BIG SMOKE" LINEUP

April 10

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LAS VEGAS • THE VENETIAN

November 9-10—Big Smoke Evenings

November 20

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### IN THE NEXT CIGAR INSIDER

Montecristo releases a new cigar brand made with Cameroon wrappers from western Africa, plus the exclusive *Cigar Insider* preview of ratings of the best cigars from the June issue of *Cigar Aficionado* magazine.

Your Next CIGAR INSIDER Arrives on Tuesday, April 10.

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