

Everything you need to know to become a Cigar Aficionado.

Cigars 101

"The best cigar in the world is the one you prefer to smoke on special occasions, enabling you to relax and enjoy that which gives you maximum pleasure."

Zino Davidoff

Created by Churchills of Birmingham 142 S. Woodward 48009

810.647.4555

Three Components of a Cigar

The Filler

This is the "heart" of the cigar. It is usually a combination of two to six different tobaccos from different parts of the mature tobacco plant. As a wine-maker carefully selects a variety of grapes to create the perfect flavor and consistency of a fine wine, the cigar blender chooses the proportion of different tobacco leaves to create the desired taste and texture of a premium cigar. Long leaf filler is the most sought after and allows the cigar to smoke evenly and produce a long tight ash. Short filler is cheaper and used primarily in machine made products. The ash from one of these cigars crumbles.

The Binder

This unique leaf binds the filler tobacco and creates a smooth surface for the application of the wrapper leaf. The binder must be resilient enough to hold the filler in place, and complex enough to complement the taste of the filler and wrapper leaves. Usually this binder is a stronger Mexican or Brazilian leaf and complements a milder Dominican cigar.

The Wrapper

The wrapper is the most costly component of the cigar and is responsible for up to 60% of the cigar's flavor. This leaf is what seduces the aficionado. The wrapper is what we see, feel, smell and ultimately taste. Wrapper tobacco is typically divided into two categories, sun grown and shade grown. Shade grown wrappers are grown under muslins tents to protect the leaves from the harsh direct sunlight. This care produces very silky and delicate leaves. Sun grown wrappers typically have a rougher, darker appearance and provide an extra level of spice to the cigar.

Buying a cigar is easy if you just know what to look for.

Selecting a cigar

The selection of a cigar consists of three important factors:

- appearance
- shape
- size

When choosing a cigar all three of these characteristics will contribute to the smokers enjoyment.

Appearance

The silky, rich appearance of the wrapper is crucial to properly selecting a cigar. An oily dark wrapper is a sign of a well aged product.

Oil will contribute to the cigars flavor and add a new dimension of taste. A light, dry wrapper does not reflect a sign of poor quality, just a cigar with a different style. Usually a milder simpler, taste.

Shape

The shape of a cigar effects the way it will smoke. Larger ring size cigars will smoke fuller and smoother then thinner cigars, which are more concentrated. A cigar that is tapered, or starts with a small ring size on the head end and gradually gets larger at the foot end is called a torpedo or a pyramid. This specialized shape enables the flavors to intensify as the cigar is smoked.

Size

Always choose a cigar you have enough time for. You never want to rush through a cigar, nor do you ever want to re-light a cigar if you can avoid it. More importantly, you need to decide

how you want that cigar to taste. The larger ring size cigars will smoke fuller (not stronger) than smaller ring size cigars where the flavors are compacted into a smaller vessel. A shorter cigar will

sometimes burn hotter than a longer one because the smoke does not have as much time to cool during the length of the cigar. The proportion of filler to wrapper and binder tobaccos also change with a small ring size cigar versus a large ring size cigar. You will burn more filler with a large size and

more wrapper and less filler with a small size cigar. This will change the taste even though the blend is the same in each size cigar.

Tobaccos

The country the tobacco comes from will give us a good indication of what the cigar will taste like. Find out what you like and then seek out that information when selecting a cigar. Any good tobacconist will be able to answer your questions about the origin of the cigar you may choose. Do not rely on the country of origin indicated on the box because it will not show where the filler, binder or wrapper comes from. Each one of these components will greatly affect the way the cigar will taste.

Get to know your tobacconist like you would your stylist or a wine steward at your favorite restaurant. They can be very helpful in proper selection of cigars for you when new products come out or

Claro--Like milky coffee,

pale brown.

Colorado Claro-Tawny or mid brown.

Colorado--Reddish brown and aromatic.

Maduro--Very dark brown and oily.

Oscuro--Black, very strong and little bouquet.

Common Wrapper colors and characteristics.

when you need cigars for a special occasions or to give as a gift. If they get to know your preferences they can choose things that are similar or very different from what you would normally smoke.

Cigar Techniques

Explaining the Rituals

There are many rituals surrounding the proper art of cigar smoking. Many of these have merit but most do not apply to today's cigar smoker.

Cutting the Cigar

How the cigar is cut will determine how that cigar will draw and the amount of flavor and smoke it will bring to the smoker. Care should always be taken when cutting the cigar because it will be the mistake you must live with if you do it wrong.

The most effective and cleanest way is the guillotine or straight cut. This cut will allow for a smooth, easy draw and not inhibit the smoke. Any cut that leaves a part of the cap on will ultimately act as a collector for bitter tars and acids that you would normally release into the air. These will make the cigar smoke bitter and harsh because of the accumulation inside the cap of tobacco left on and restricted air flow space.

The most important thing to do is locate the "cap" that is on the sealed end of the cigar. It is usually a separate piece of tobacco put on the end of the cigar where the rounded end reaches the straight sides. Only remove 1/16th off of the head end to expose the surface area of the filler tobacco inside. This is best done

with a sharp blade in a quick, defined motion. Those who hesitate or use a dull blade will usually get a sloppy cut.

Always remember that cutting a cigar is a very personal thing and there will always be those who prefer other methods. Indulge their preferences if needed, if not educate when you can.

Lighting the Cigar

The ritual of lighting a cigar can become a dramatic event. The way a cigar is lit will affect the way it burns and it may affect the taste.

The two most important things to remember are to use a clean source of fuel, never fluid lighters or candles which can impart impurities into the cigar tobaccos. Butane lighters are fine and matches are O.K. as long as you let the sulfur burn off first. The romance still remains with using a sulfur free wooden cigar match. Also, never let the cigar actually touch the flame. This will char the tobacco unnecessarily.

When lighting a cigar, hold the flame approximately one inch below the tip of the cigar, gently rotating the so the foot end begins to warm. This allows the cigar to accept the flame and it will light effortlessly once you put it into your mouth and begin to draw. Bringing the cigar to your mouth, hold the flame below the cigar and begin to take slow, deep puffs. Rotate the cigar slowly once you see the flame jump up and the end begins to glow. Then take one deep puff and check the end of the cigar to make sure you have lit it evenly. Be patient and again

never put the flame directly into the tobacco.

Topics of Debate

Certain things about cigar smoking will always be issues in which people will love to discuss. We have just covered a few with lighting and cutting. The following are things you should know about to be prepared for conversation.

The Band

Leave the band on if you can, it stimulates conversation among fellow cigar smokers and is no longer seen as a sign of snobbery. If you do wish to take it off, do so only after the cigar has been smoked for a minute so the glue that has held it together will loosen from the wrapper. You may tear the wrapper otherwise. Besides, you don't take the label off a bottle of wine when it's brought to the table, so there is no reason to remove the band.

Cuban Cigars

Debate still continues over the value of Cuban cigars today. Since taste can never be universal, the only way to discuss this is through facts and preferences. Cuban cigars today are very expensive (\$18-\$50 each) and very inconsistent. Some are worth the money but you need to be an educated buyer to find what you are looking for. They are also very strong. Many get much more enjoyment out of non-Cuban products because they are refined. The value in cigars today lies with the Dominican Republic and the up and coming Honduran market.