

A close-up photograph of several green tobacco leaves, showing their intricate vein structure and slightly textured surface. The leaves are arranged in a fan-like pattern, with some in sharp focus and others blurred in the background. The lighting is soft, highlighting the natural green color and the fine details of the leaf structure.

CUBAN CIGARS

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**A BRIEF HISTORY
OF HABANOS**

**CUBAN CIGARS: THE
REALITY BEHIND
THE LEGEND**

**HÉCTOR LUIS
PRIETO: A COUNTRY
MAN**

**THE SONS OF
TOBACCO**

**THE SILENCE OF
TOBACCO**

**THE TOBACCO
FIELDS OF MY
CHILDHOOD**

**THE SPIRITS OF
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**TOBACCO CARESSED
BY MUSES AND
DIVAS**

**CIGARS IN CUBAN
ART: CONSOLATION
OF THE PENSIVE**

**CUBAN CIGAR
BANDS**

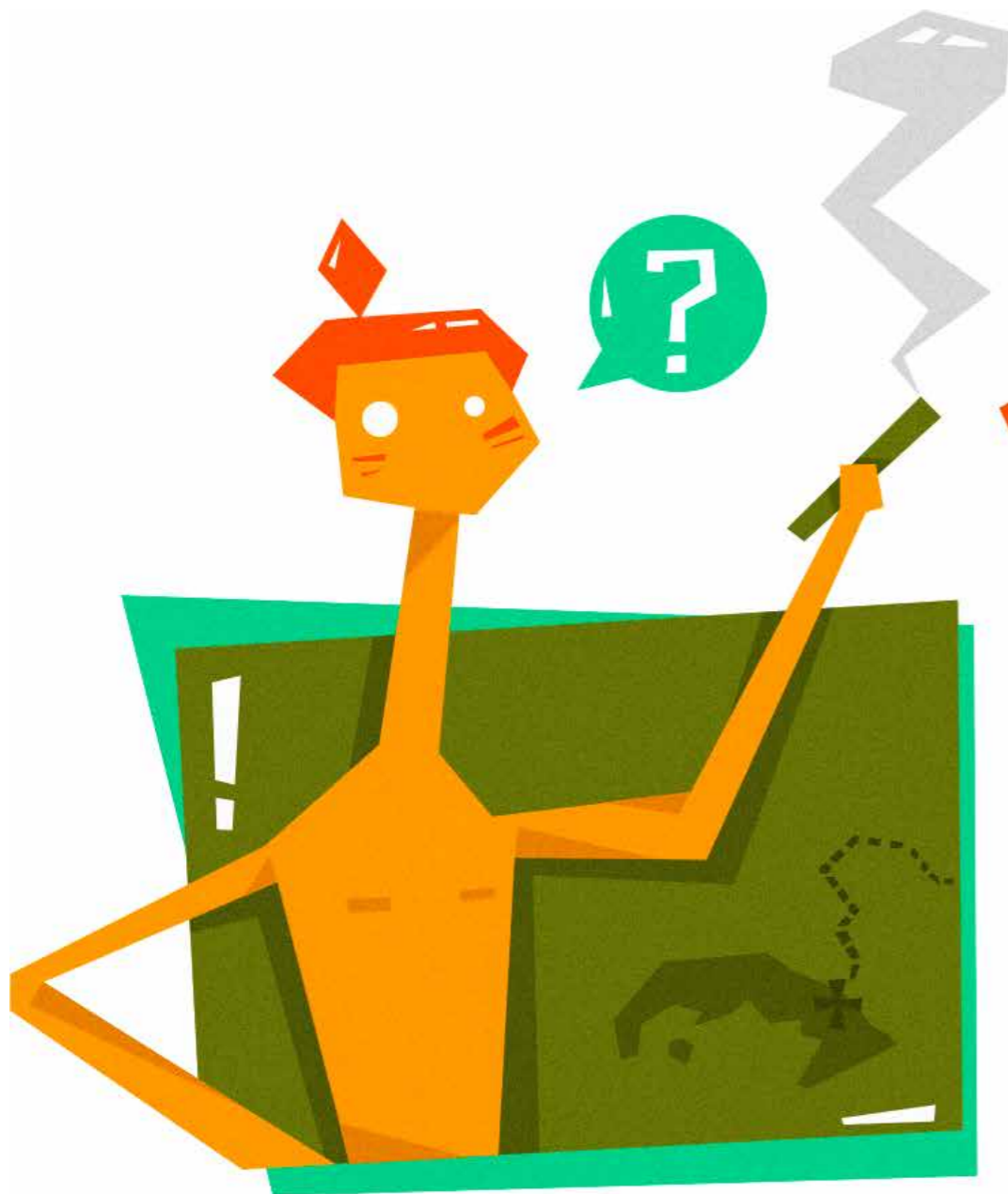
**CUBAN HUMIDORS
ART AND FANTASY**

**THE WORLD'S
LONGEST CIGAR IS
IN CUBA**

HABANO FESTIVAL



A BRIEF HISTORY OF HABANOS



1492
OCTOBER 27

Christopher Columbus arrived in Cuba, landing at Bariay Bay in Gibara, in the eastern part of the Island. He observed that the Caribbean natives were smoking tobacco using a tobago, a reed in the form of a pipe. That's where the name of the plant came from. It seems that the first inhabitants of Cuba believed it had medicinal properties and they used it in their ceremonies.



1542

The first substantial amount of Cuban tobacco arrived in Spain.



1717

APRIL 11

Spanish monarch Phillip V proclaimed the law establishing the Spanish Tobacco Monopoly, authorizing only its sale with Spain.



1717

1717-20 / 1723

Uprising of Jesús del Monte tobacco growers protesting the injustice of the Spanish Tobacco Monopoly and voicing their opposition to disadvantageous negotiations. The insurgents destroyed tobacco fields and so the metropolis was forced to renegotiate the value of their purchases.



1739

The western part of the Island, which produces the best tobacco in Cuba and the world, began to be called Vuelta Abajo, with San Luis and San Juan y Martínez standing out in the region for its soil and climate.

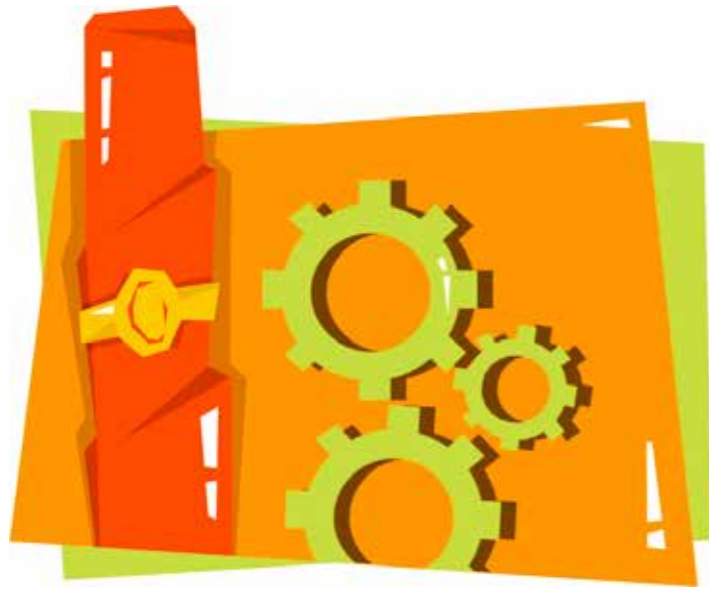
1762

Havana is occupied by the British. For the year British domination was in place, the cigar business increased to a remarkable extent. Cuban producers changed their foreign sales strategies forever after.



1822

Lithography was established in Cuba: the beautiful engraved prints began to be made, first in just one color and then in full color with a profusion of gold. The number of lithographed tobacco collections grew, much to the pride of their creators. Today they are collected by kings and figures from the world of politics, sports and culture.



1857

Several factories using Cuban tobacco were set up in Key West and New York.



1865

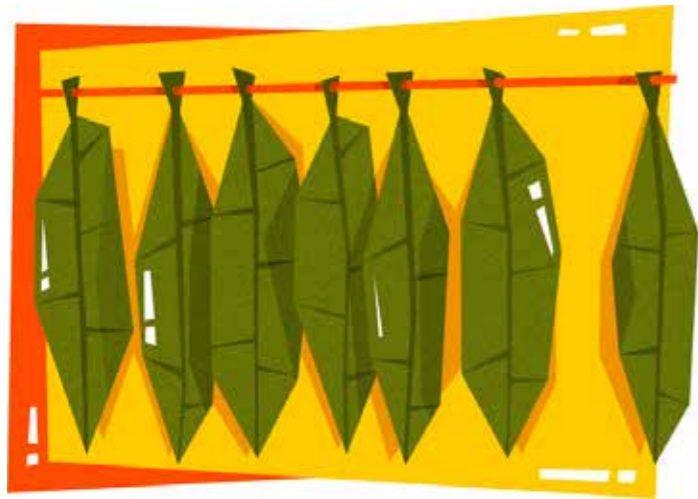
DECEMBER 21

The practice of reading to the cigar makers had its beginnings at the El Fígaro Factory. During the long work day, newspaper and magazine articles, historical books, novels and other literary works are read to them, therefore improving their general education. This is a practice that remains to the present day.



1895

The Cuban War of Independence against Spain broke out. The order confirming the military uprising for February 24 was wrapped inside a cigar.



1904

The use of cloth to cover tobacco plants was introduced. This system brought along the sewing of leaves, replacing the mancuerna system in which two leaves were cut with a section of stalk between them.



1912

JULY 17

The new Warranty Seal for cigar boxes guaranteeing national origin of the cigars was created: the Cuban Habano came into being.

1940

Black worker Ana Rosa López was hired by La Corona Factory to put bands on cigars: this broke the tradition of only white women doing the job.





Robaina cigars began production. This recognized decades of work by farmer Alejandro Robaina (also acknowledged as Habano Ambassador) in the area of Cuchillas de Barbacoa, in the municipality of San Luis where he lived.

1997

1966

COHIBA cigars were born, destined for Fidel Castro and to be used as gifts for Cuban and foreign government officials. The tobacco for this cigar comes from the best soil of San Juan y Martínez, and San Luis.



The Festival del Habano began and is held every year in February to celebrate Cuban cigars.

1999



2010

COHIBA Behike is introduced, the most exclusive line under that brand name; for the first time a rare leaf known as medio tiempo is used. This is considered to be the most expensive and exclusive cigar in the world.

CUBAN CIGARS

THE REALITY BEHIND THE LEGEND

For the generations of young Havana students who would spend 45 days every year working in the San Juan y Martínez, San Luis or Sandino tobacco plantations in Pinar del Río, the art of growing tobacco leaves is not just a legend, it is a reality. Ours was a hands-on experience, which has remained engraved in our memories. As years go by we have come to see how valuable that experience was and we are proud to have taken part in many of the phases these aromatic leaves go through in the process of ending up in the eager hands of cigar aficionados.

Out of all the agricultural crops, I don't think that there are too many which require as much wisdom, sensibility and devotion as tobacco does. From the seedling stage until the point when the leaves are ready to be collected, this crop



needs many tasks and much care. No matter how apparently simple the task appears to be, it seems to be imbued with a sense of magic and depends on some secret. Keeping things clean and fighting against the worms are just two important jobs that lead to healthy tobacco yields.

Even the places used to hang the leaves to cure, the so-called tobacco houses, have their own singular charm. The way they are built reflects the conditions needed for the leaves to dry properly. None of this can be ignored so that the future aroma and correct smoothness does not get affected. This goes for both the leaves destined for the filler and those which will

end up being the wrapper. As you stand inside one of these casas, admiring those sheaves hanging in front of you, watching the color transformations day after day, you can quite easily understand the complexity involved in turning out the finished products.

At the next elaboration stage, we have to admit that our tobacco factories also have their special qualities which are inextricably linked with the historical love Cubans have for this plant. The inherent spirituality practically demands that the product should be manufactured by hand.

One important feature of Cuban cigar factories is the presence of the useful and picturesque lector de tabaquería, the person who contributes some entertainment to the patient labors of the cigar makers by reading out loud to them, everything from the newspaper to literary classics. When you visit a cigar factory, it is also interesting to notice the different skills exhibited by the cigar makers.



Because of the Cuban cigar's fame and quality, a number of complicated rituals have also arisen, including the conservation of cigars in humidors. Tradition has it that the best way to end a superb meal is to light up a cigar just after downing a small cup of strong coffee. And so we arrive at the proper way to light a cigar: even before applying the flame, a good cigar taster has gauged its quality through his fingertips. Some smokers remove the bands in order to add them to their collections; others prefer to contemplate them. A perfectly circular white line of ash indicates a satisfactory smoke. The way in which a cigar burns is akin to a candle or a stick of incense. A good, slow burn only increases the pleasure.



Cigar making is a truly artistic action, handcrafted from start to finish. The leaves are selected manually by their size and type according to the specific characteristics of every cigar or vitola. Connoisseurs know that what consistently places Cuban cigars—Habanos—in the forefront of the industry are four factors which come together only on this Island: soil, climate, the variety of Cuban black tobacco and the skills and wisdom perfected over decades by Cuban tobacco growers and cigar makers.

Centuries ago, the Cuban native population, the Tainos, rolled and smoked leaves of what they called “cohibas” as part of ceremonies answering to their particular beliefs and customs. Ever since then, Cuban cigars have been highly appreciated all over the world.

Tabacuba executives told us that Cuban cigar production has a great future for many reasons, including the fact that some units have been enlarged and modernized, and tobacco producers have adopted new measures to deal with any new climatic adversities as well as the appearance of insect pests. A new factory has been built in the Mariel Special Development Zone with the partnership of Brazil’s Souza Cruz. Commissioning and operations in the new facility will begin in 2018 for an annual production capacity of some 8 billion units.

And we must never forget that the symbolism of the cigar is eternal. It has even become the essential companion, in many cases, of celebrities throughout the world.

**CIGAR MAKING
IS A TRULY
ARTISTIC ACTION,
HANDCRAFTED FROM
START TO FINISH**





**HÉCTOR
LUIS
PRIETO**
A
COUNTRY
MAN

Talking to Héctor Luis was not easy. Going back and forth between his horses and the tobacco fields keeps him pretty busy most of the day. But still, talking about cigars, his great passion there is always time for that.

As he told us, tobacco runs through his veins, a legacy inherited from his Canary Island grandparents. “For as long as I can remember, my family has always planted tobacco and smoked cigars; that’s our life.” The Quemado del Rubí Plantation is in the province of Pinar del Río, the mecca of tobacco. He has devoted most of his life to it and it is the talk of the world of cigars.



Many cigar smokers really don’t know all that much about how the whole process ending up with cigars goes. From your experience, could you explain it to us?

Many people would give their eyeteeth for a good cigar. Tobacco requires a process that takes in 536 activities: from preparing the soil, watering seeds, planting, weeding, pruning, picking, sewing the leaves, deveining, rolling

How does your plantation select the seeds it uses?

Here in our San Juan y Martínez municipality, we have a laboratory where the best seed is selected. We have made some strategic decisions in this regard because climate problems have affected the crops to a great extent: the seeds we use these days are climate-resistant, but they maintain their aroma and flavor. Everyone, peasants and the Cuban government authorities alike, is very zealous on this subject.





At this time we are in the first picking and sewing stage of what we commonly call the filler of the cigars. Plants grow their leaves in pairs and the ones closer to the ground are the ones we are sewing right now. Also, we are planting sun grown tobacco, which is used for the filler.

What is the principal challenge faced by tobacco growers today?

The climate. This year has been fantastic but we have had other years that were very bad. We have to concentrate our efforts on improving the seeds, making them more resistant.

The tobacco houses or barns seem to be overrun with women: what part do they play in production?

The history of this crop has always been very much connected with women. They work with the seeds, taking tobacco from the fields, sewing the leaves it is very unusual to see a man sewing leaves; that's a job almost exclusively for women, because of how delicate it is.



Who smokes more? Men or women?

I don't think there is that much difference. I have seen many women smoking cigars, not just in the countryside but also in cities and in other countries. They like cigars and, especially, they know how to smoke them. But for sure they have different preferences. For example, it is usual for them to prefer thin cigars because they handle them more easily and are smooth on the palate. We men usually prefer cigars with a higher caliber and, logically, stronger flavor.

What is your preference among cigars?

Caliber 60. I don't have any specific time of day for smoking, I'll start early in the day and I'm always holding a cigar.

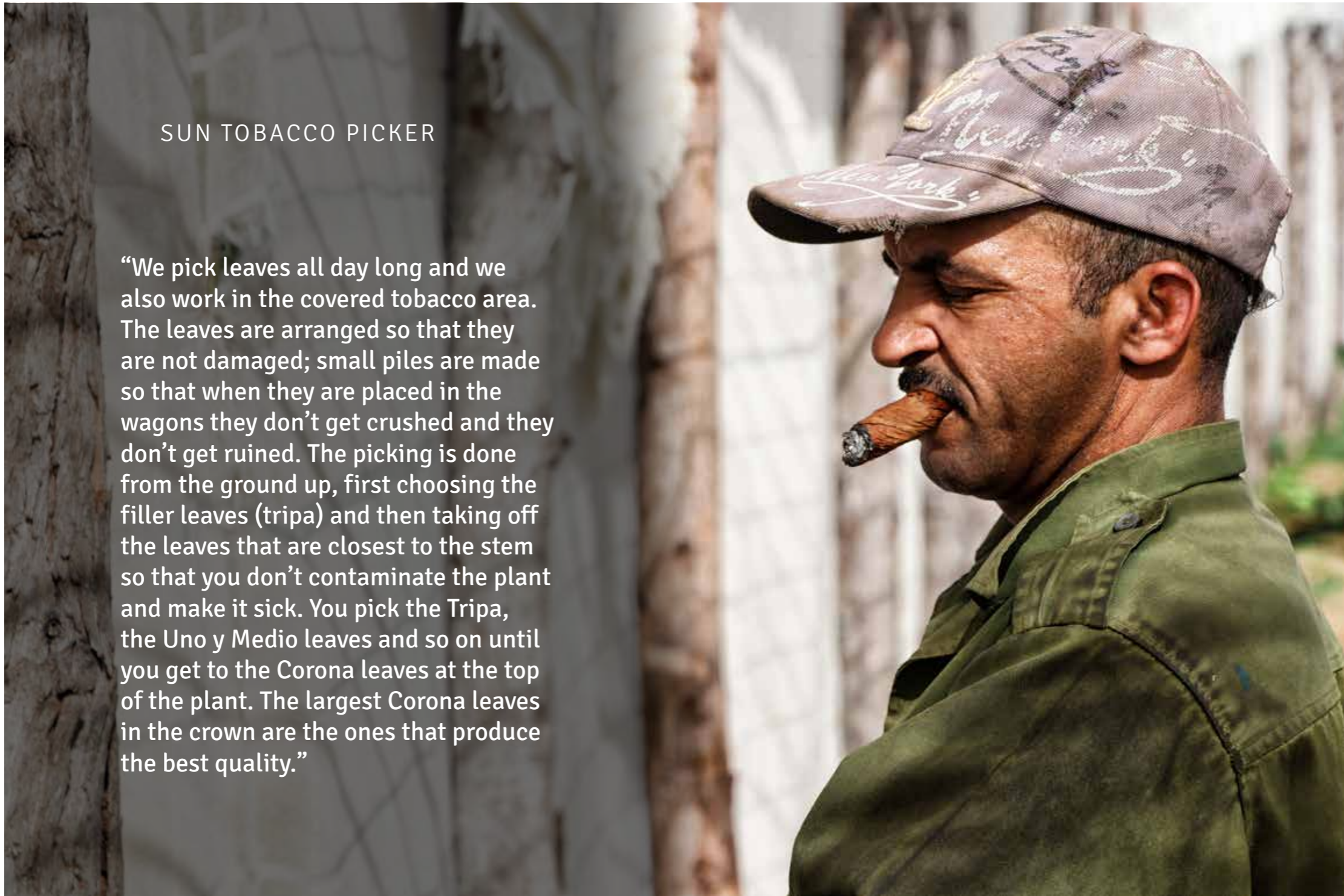
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A photograph of a person wearing a light-colored hat and sunglasses, working in a tobacco field. The person is wearing a pinkish-red shirt and is surrounded by large green tobacco leaves. The background is a blurred field of tobacco plants. The text "THE SONS OF TOBACCO" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font in the upper left quadrant of the image.

THE SONS OF TOBACCO

SUN TOBACCO PICKER

“We pick leaves all day long and we also work in the covered tobacco area. The leaves are arranged so that they are not damaged; small piles are made so that when they are placed in the wagons they don’t get crushed and they don’t get ruined. The picking is done from the ground up, first choosing the filler leaves (tripa) and then taking off the leaves that are closest to the stem so that you don’t contaminate the plant and make it sick. You pick the Tripa, the Uno y Medio leaves and so on until you get to the Corona leaves at the top of the plant. The largest Corona leaves in the crown are the ones that produce the best quality.”



“I’ve spent my entire life on this plantation. I am 65 years old and since I was in my 20s I’ve been working in tobacco. When you sew the leaves you have to be careful not to break them, to put your needle in the right place. In my opinion, sewing the leaves is the fundamental job in these processes, otherwise, an entire harvest can be ruined. The first thing is to sew them together. And that’s what I like best about this job and I’ve been doing it since I was very young. It’s a job where I spend a lot of time by myself. When I was young, I worked in the fields, but not now. I really love tobacco, I have dedicated my life to it, even if I don’t smoke; I just like to produce it with my hands.”



ENSARTADORA

“I usually prepare 60 cujes (wooden pole used to hang the leaves sewn in pairs), but sometimes I’ve done 90. You have to be very skilled not to prick your fingers while sewing the leaves quickly. I’ve been doing this job for many years; practice is everything. When we’re not sewing, we women work in the fields in the harvest...”

“This is my second day on the job, but I’ve been coming to the fields since I was a little girl. My mother and my grandmother used to work here. It’s a family tradition to work in tobacco. I like it because it is a quiet work, although it requires great physical effort.”



“Vitola sizes go from 26 to 60 mm. There are different mixes to make the vitolas. Each one has a different mix and so you get a variety of tastes to offer the customers. For example, the COHIBA Behike is a large dry variety, and with greater thickness you get more flavors. People are wrong; they think that the thin cigar is for women because it is a smoother smoke but it is just the opposite.



The thinner the cigar, the more nicotine it has and the stronger it is. I am no smoker but I like to make cigars and don't care if they criticize me whether the cigar is soft, "tight," ugly or bumpy. One of the things I like best about this job is that I get to talk to people because they always ask a lot of questions. Besides, I like accompanying my father every day on the job.”



“Ever since I was 10 years old I’ve been working with tobacco. I’m 26 now and I sew the leaves together on the plantation. These days we sew together 90 pairs of leaves. We use thin packing string and I also pick out the leaves, depending on the type. I learned my job by watching other women do it; it’s a matter of tradition. The knowledge is passed on from generation to generation.”



“One of the most important jobs in tobacco production, and the one that I’ve liked the most since I was a child, is planting the seeds and watering the furrows. First you plant and then you sprinkle with water. Then you wait five or six days so that the plant sets stronger, you fertilize and weed. When it grows bigger, you don’t water it anymore if it rains. Tobacco requires little water and so you water once a day. Temperature is vital for it to grow. The ideal weather for tobacco is cool mornings and warm afternoons.”



A photograph of a tobacco field. In the foreground, a large, vibrant green leaf is prominently displayed, showing its intricate vein structure. The background is filled with rows of tobacco plants, slightly out of focus. In the distance, a building with a red roof and a tall chimney are visible under a cloudy, overcast sky. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

THE SILENCE OF
TOBACCO

You can see it when the farmer puts the first seed into soil: it is a soliloquy with the plant that it will become in five or six months' time. You pray to God that the weather will be good, that there will be enough rain, that there won't be too much sun and that the cold weather will let the stalks and leaves grow strong. This mystical communion is almost always conducted in silence, with no words to get in the way of the ritual.

And so the tobacco plant begins its growing cycle in soil that is perhaps not very fertile, with little water and a lot of sun, and perhaps with an uncertain prognosis for its survival. Likewise, this is a survival process that has to take place in strictest solitude, without the discomfort of having any other plant nearby, otherwise everything dies. And it would seem that the Plant Kingdom has been complicit in deciding to give it its own space, its own path bound up with Man, because very little grows by its side and if it should make an appearance, it is as if the tobacco plant demands that the farmer weed out that inconvenient neighbor plant.



**THIS MYSTICAL
COMMUNION IS
ALMOST ALWAYS
CONDUCTED IN
SILENCE**

Whenever you visit a tobacco plantation, what really impresses you is the tranquility of the place, resignation to the fact that here you have to work hard, but without company.

And so the moment arrives to harvest the leaves. The farmer protects the plant from the north winds that blow in diseases. The tobacco knows that the farmer will not let any pests encroach into its space. The plant stands firm, its leaves grow and the farmer, bending over, first picks the leaves that are closest to the earth. And thus, for a moment, they are together so that the north winds do not stunt growth or impede that future cigar and its final smoke.

When the leaves have been collected, the process of sewing them is undertaken by women, another act of extreme solitude. Should you attempt to strike up a conversation with any of them, you realize that you are cutting into the silence, that you have interrupted the ritual. Their blackened hands, their aprons and their hair pulled back merge together with the sturdy thread and the long needles doing their work in the curing barns. Men and women living at the farm have been involved in jobs related with tobacco ever since they were children, forever.



**THE PLANT STANDS
FIRM, ITS LEAVES
GROW AND THE
FARMER, BENDING
OVER, FIRST PICKS
THE LEAVES THAT
ARE CLOSEST TO THE
EARTH.**





Then, the leaves are left to their fate, slowly drying, while they need yet again the complicity of the farmers to do battle against the inclemency of the weather.

The deveining and the art of making the cigar strike up a new conversation between Man and Leaves. Every one of the layers has its own vital importance for the vitola, but if you were to ask a tobacco farmer how he makes his choices, he would almost always answer: “The leaves tell me; all you have to do is listen to them and you will see how each one reveals itself to you at the right time.”

The Apostle José Martí would write that at a given moment “of supreme anguish we light up a cigar or a cigarette, the smoke then envelops us, not just our chest, but right into our soul, and it later seems that within the whitish spirals some part of our immense sadness dissolves into the distance.”

At the Finca Quemado del Rubí Plantation, I also heard people say that you only give the gift of a cigar to someone you sincerely appreciate so that they can enjoy it in silence and so that they can encounter their deepest thoughts between the smoke and the ash, as my grandfather used to say.



Whenever I hear about and see how scientific and technological advances are applied to growing tobacco, with their comfortable seedbeds, the efficient manner of planting seedlings, the precisely correct amount of water during planting, the new casas de tabaco or “Tobacco houses” [curing barns] and all of today’s conveniences in the long manual process of harvesting, I am inundated by my childhood memories of the tobacco fields.

Preparing the earth for the growing season was always done with yoked oxen right at dawn, when chickens and roosters came out to eat the worms uncovered by the tilled soil. Generally wearing long-sleeved shirts and hats, the barefooted peasants guided their ploughs and the oxen followed their commands. At the break of dawn, you could hear their voices calling out the names of their animals, usually three or four syllables long and pronounced with a distinctive elongation of the vowels: “Coronel!” “Azabache!” “Temporal!”



THE MOST EXPERIENCED TOBACCO FARMERS WOULD DEVOTE THEMSELVES TO NURTURING THE SEEDS INTO SMALL, HEALTHY PLANTS, READY TO BE PLANTED IN THE FIELDS.



They selected the strongest, healthiest seedlings from the seedbeds because that was the decisive moment for planning for a good harvest. The most experienced tobacco farmers would devote themselves to nurturing the seeds into small, healthy plants, ready to be planted in the fields. I can still feel the humidity in those protected areas. Then came the polythene seedling bags and now other more efficient methods are put into practice.

After the furrows had been ploughed in straight lines and to the exact depth, the planting process would begin; a ridge would be left between several furrows. It was common practice to use tubes or hoses to carry the water from its source to where the furrows began and to flood them. This was exhausting work since you had to work completely bent over to the ground and one single farmer would plant huge areas of land. These days, the furrows are no longer being flooded; instead, the water is directed just to the places where it is needed thereby considerably saving a resource that is more and more scarce. Additionally, more people are used to do the planting.

In a short time, the tobacco plants are doing well. You can almost see them growing. Wintertime, Cuban winter of course, with sun, “cold weather” and little rain, creates the best conditions for the harvest. Sun-grown tobacco, as its name indicates, grows directly in the sun, but shade-grown tobacco is practically invisible thanks to the fine grey cheesecloth tent that protects it from solar radiation while allowing for the air to circulate. With this procedure the leaves acquire the light color so highly appreciated in cigars.

When the plants are over one meter tall, their characteristic green combines with a unique smell that hints at the aroma of the cigar and it is difficult to get it out of your memory bank. The farmers are busy hoeing, weeding, snipping off the top buds and any superfluous shoots (these two important tasks are called desbotonar and deshijar, thus preventing essential nutrients from being rerouted elsewhere), and adding fertilizers. Although there was a time when chemicals prevailed in the fields (some farmers would gather the sediment collected along the ditches to “nurture” the soil), today many rely solely on organic fertilizers.



When harvest time arrives, entire families are mobilized. In my mind’s eye I can still see the line of women with their parasols and multi-colored kerchiefs protecting their hair, filing towards the tobacco houses to sew the leaves in pairs on a two to three-meter-long straight pole called cuje. First the leaves closest to the ground, which are called libre de pie, were collected; then it was the turn of the centro leaves centro fino and centro gordo; and finally, the corona leaves. The leaves were moved to the tobacco house in wheelless barrows covered by sacks and after they were strung one by one and separated into clumps, they were hung up, filling the barn right up to the rafters.

In the fields only the stalks remained and these gradually dried up and fell. The oxen used to get in to graze when the grass had grown back. The soil would be prepared in order to plant alternating furrows of beans and corn, and squash seeds would be scattered here and there.

There has been much water under the bridge since then. My life has taken a different path but every time I run across these scenes I am overcome by an inescapable deep-rooted identification with those tobacco farmers who, bending over the furrows, are so far removed from the glamour surrounding that valued product which they bring to life out of the soil of Cuba.

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C U B A

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History tells us that Europeans discovered the gratifying and harmful practice of smoking when they ran into America in their search for a route to India. It is a proven fact that prior to 1492 Cuban indigenous peoples were inhaling aromatic smoke. But of course the reason for its use has changed: our native, practically extinct forefathers smoked for ritual purposes. This practice was also observed by some African religions but nowadays most people smoke for the sheer pleasure of it.

In spite of the fact that Cuban tobacco owes its current fame primarily to the coveted cigar or Habano, we are noticing that fewer Cubans are smoking them these days. Ever since I was a child, cigar smoking was considered to be “a thing for old guys”. Teenage boys and a growing number of teenage girls preferred cigarettes. Now that trend has been reinforced, with the exception perhaps of an emerging Creole “jet set”. This group can be recognized by their predilection for linen clothing, Panama hats, jewelry and “brand name” perfumes and of course cigars whose aroma, color and texture make it obviously clear that they are expensive. It seems that a man seen to be smoking a good cigar acquires the status of one who has “made it in the world” and a woman smoking a cigar becomes audacious and super-sensual. But my personal image of cigar smokers is still that of little old guys who roll their eyes in ecstasy as they light up their little fat stogies, bought at the neighborhood corner store.



I can't remember ever having seen anyone using snuff; and pipes, which used to be the badge of any “professor” in bad plays, have been declared an extinct species in Cuba. (At the beginning of the 1970s, when just about everything was in short supply, pipes became fleetingly popular when desperate smokers would stuff pipes with the remains of cigarettes, cigars or even dried grass to feed their habit.) The same fate was suffered by the exotic cigarette holder: in the 1950's some ladies in Cuba used them in emulation of Rita Hayworth.

The electronic cigarette still has not come into generalized use. I have to admit that I associate them with sex toys and I have a friend who has fallen in love with the eCig's sweet aroma and annoying buzzing sound without abandoning his addiction to the "natural" version.

I used to innocently think that the numerous anti-smoking campaigns, to which Fidel Castro added his vote when he gave up his ever-present Habano, would have had some effect on the younger generation. That was until my son had his first teenage party at our house. When everyone had left, I swept the ground in the garden, cleaned out the flowerbeds and even the sidewalk and ended up with hundreds of cigarette butts even though the guest list had had less than 20 persons on it. Certainly they had no doubts about the serious nature of the scientific warnings about the toxicity and severe health risks associated with tobacco, as did I. I am even sure that they have heard of cases like that of one of my neighbors who would smoke two packs driving from Havana to Varadero and who died a few days ago from a "surprise" heart attack. No doubt they also console themselves thinking about Sindo Garay, the famous Cuban troubadour who would always be photographed with a cigarette in one hand and a glass of rum in the other and he lived to the ripe old age of one hundred.

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The Spirits of tobacco

The consumption of tobacco has not just endured as the habit of smoking, it has been a way of communicating with the subtle energies of spirits residing within the wide range of religious forms existing in Cuba. The first reference to it can be found in the chronicles of Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (1478-1557) who made important observations about the life, customs and mythology of communities living in the Caribbean area.

The first inhabitants on the Island grew tobacco (*Nicotina tabacum*, L.), a plant that was held in high esteem because it would be used by their priests or healers (*behíques*) during their rituals. Authors such as Oviedo and Hernández Aquino described how *cojóbana* powder, *Anadenantera peregrina*, would be poured into a recipient or into the upper part of the holy *cemí* for the ritual and then they would inhale it through Y-shaped tubes. They used powdered *cojibá*, the name given by the natives to tobacco.

Stories were told about how when natives were ill they would go to publically confess themselves to their own shamans and later to the priests brought in by the Spanish Conquest; their confessions would be accompanied by ablutions, emetics, narcotic powders, inhaled tobacco smoke and little flour-paste idols, etc. In his *Apologética Historia de las Indias* Bartolomé de las Casas describes the manner in which they had to inhale the smoke produced by lit rolls of tobacco leaves; he went on to describe the plant and its diverse uses.

The use of tobacco leaves in herbal teas, as chewing tobacco and powders made up a complex group of cathartic rituals for the material and spiritual purification of the smoker. The Spanish considered this to be a completely alien phenomenon, condemning



the natives' smoking habit as the work of the devil, and they eventually had the Council of the Indies impose severe punishment for the practice of smoking. But this did not mean it would disappear, neither substantively nor existentially. As Dr. Sergio Valdés Bernal wrote in his article *Lingüística y Antropología* "merely the words canoa, tabaco, huracán and Cuba have remained until the present as a legacy of the native Arawak-descendent population, permeating the Spanish language being spoken in colonial Cuba with allusions to the culture and nature of the Cuban milieu".



The knowledge about tobacco and its use was gradually assimilated by the African peoples brought into the country as slaves and it shows up in the various forms of religious practice that made their appearance. In **Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar** Fernando Ortiz affirms: “Tobacco smoke became a visible form of the spirit or fecund supernatural power. Smoke was the very delicate and ephemeral materialization of that power of tobacco that manifested itself in stimulant and narcotic phenomena with their medicinal and fertility-enhancing properties attributed to it by magic”. Along with its symbolic qualities, that rite is also a form of worship and reaffirmation of the continuity with the first connoisseurs of the magical plant, behaving in much the same way as their *cemíes*.

The religions emerging from the African heritage, the imposition of Spanish Catholicism and the vestiges of our native legacy include using the aromatic smoke of lit cigars for their deities, altars, *ngangas*, pots, *otanes*, cauldrons, earthenware jars, persons, herbs,

“Tobacco smoke became a visible form of the spirit or fecund supernatural power”

stones, tools and every other ritual object. Even though the procedures are different for each one of these, as diverse as any explanation of what they are based upon, this practice is alive and well.

The thoughts of two practitioners, backed by years of activity in this religion, are interesting to help us appreciate the presence and importance of tobacco in their practices.

Lázaro Pijuan Torres has been a Babalawo for 27 years. Besides conducting rituals at his house-temple, he tells us that he gets together with his godchildren and religious family to study and delve deeper into the theories that accompany the practice of Ifá. He says that in the literature he studies and in the knowledge transmitted from his elders he hasn't been able to find any references as to when the use of tobacco began. He knows that it didn't originate in Africa and so there is really no basis for it to be used in their rites. It seems to be a cultural matter, passed on and acquired from the natives, the first inhabitants of Cuba, much the same way as it happened in Venezuela and Brazil.

He thinks that it is used most often in the spiritual sessions, masses, visits, etc. where the smoke functions as an element of transmission, of calling out to the spirits. By combining smoke and eau-de-vie one is able to communicate with the dead.



Lázaro tells us that in Ifá, it isn't a central element: "At my house we barely ever smoke, and when we initiate believers it is almost never used. If anyone wishes to smoke they have to leave the room because some orishas consider it to be an offense to smoke in their presence: I am very respectful of that".

Nevertheless he acknowledges its use as an offering to the warriors in the Regla de Osha and to invoke the spirits. The paleros also use it for the spirit of the nganga. He believes it chiefly occurs in the practices of spiritists and santeros; he recalls how smoke can be present in some pataquies such as that of Shangó who was able to flee from his enemies by putting dust in his tobacco.

We interviewed santera **Mirella Despaigne Solano** who has dedicated 30 years to Yemaya; she told us that tobacco is always used in rituals, for working with the spirits of the dead and with the orisha warriors Elegguá, Oggún, Ochosi and Osun. It is also used in Palo practices and in all cases where an African entity possesses a spiritist.

Whenever a celebration is being held at santero houses, offerings are made to the dead. This includes cigars, water, eau-de-vie, flowers, candles and coffee. But the cigars are not lit because they are for the dead. They are lit for the orishas because Elegua and Ochosi smoke: cigars are lit and while conversing and communicating with them the santero wafts the smoke towards their receptacles along with the eau-de-vie.

She explains that during rituals for San Lázaro, Babalú Ayé, every December 17th the deity descends to earth and his followers are allowed to smoke cigars, eat ori (cacao butter) and read predictions: those present say that if the man on crutches is extremely humble and suffering from intense pain the predictions will be more efficacious. For this reason that day is a special one and tobacco (cigars) becomes the primary element in the offering brought in and appearing among the attributes belonging to San Lázaro.

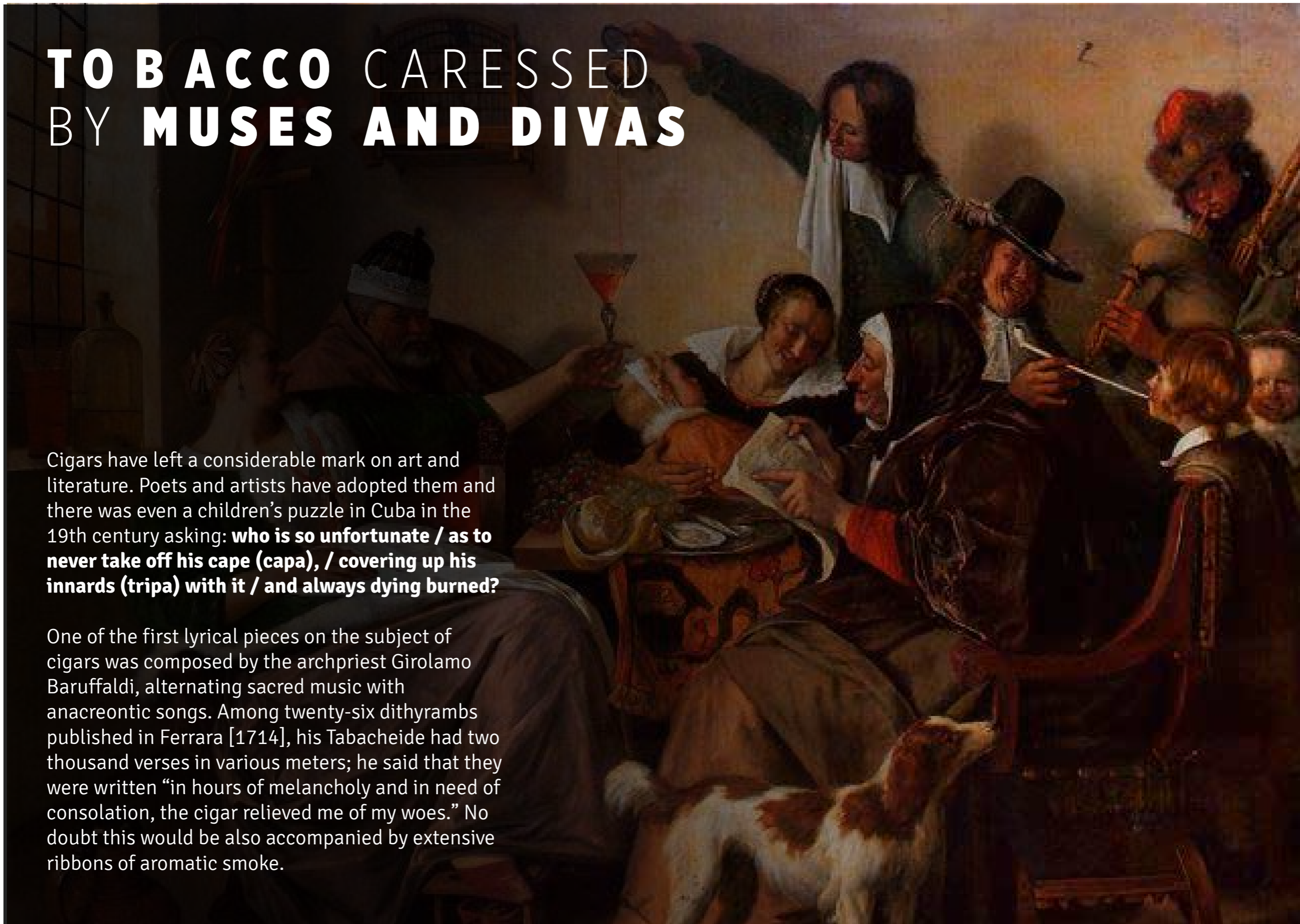
In the practice of Palo, when the spirit of the dead living in the gnanga is invoked, the receptacles must be smoked, in every ritual smoke has to be expelled over the signatures or gandós to be reaffirmed and tobacco is applied to the piles of dust to start the foundational work and to strengthen it.



TO BACCO CARESSED BY MUSES AND DIVAS

Cigars have left a considerable mark on art and literature. Poets and artists have adopted them and there was even a children's puzzle in Cuba in the 19th century asking: **who is so unfortunate / as to never take off his cape (capa), / covering up his innards (tripa) with it / and always dying burned?**

One of the first lyrical pieces on the subject of cigars was composed by the archpriest Girolamo Baruffaldi, alternating sacred music with anacreontic songs. Among twenty-six dithyrambs published in Ferrara [1714], his *Tabacheide* had two thousand verses in various meters; he said that they were written "in hours of melancholy and in need of consolation, the cigar relieved me of my woes." No doubt this would be also accompanied by extensive ribbons of aromatic smoke.





In Spain, which was the chief beneficiary of Cuban cigar production, playwright Tirso de Molina welcomed the arrival of tobacco and other American fruits in *La villana de Vallecas*, at the close of which he provides us with a magnificent dinner: **and at the end he took out / a tubano of tobacco / in the manner of a blessing.** Even today, smokers still have the custom of lighting up after dessert.

During the prolonged reign of Louis XIV, theatrical folk liked to delight in the company of cigars. The provocative Molière had his Don Juan proclaim in front of His Majesty, a passionate anti-smoking militant, that “tobacco is divine, there is nothing like it.” He added: “Whoever can live without tobacco is not worthy of living because tobacco inspires the sentiments of honor and virtue and it is the great passion of the honorable.” Such a statement took a stand to counter the stubbornness of the French monarch, eclipsed by his bitterness towards cigar smoke.

We certainly cannot overlook the wit of Bretón de los Herreros in his grandiloquence: **Although ragged, motley and ugly / Spanish soldiers go to war / and they exist by prowling/ and sleeping on the hard ground, / defeating their enemies / never going without their gunpowder and tobacco. Oh, so well said, / whether by Pedro or Juan, Diego or Ciriaco,/ the man who said: “Against all ills, smoke a cigar.”**

Joseph Warren was desolate at leaving Cuba where he had discovered the pleasures of smoking: **I saw other lands later / and other dreams have beckoned, / but there was never such affliction / to dash my hopes / as when in the mist there remained / the land we so love / and I realized I had lost it / along with the last cigar.** Henry James launched into magnificent prose when singing the praises of cigars: **Herb from a strange flower, empress of smoke, / come you with the night or the day / at the moment of pain or joy, / you are always welcome.**

Lord Byron, to whom Cuban cigars have paid just tribute on marvelous cigar bands, was perhaps the most exalted writer to extol cigars: **Neither subtle perfumes nor adorned papers, / nor costly cases fashioned from leather / of all such temptations I desire: / divest me of such things, grant me a cigar.**

That famous soldier of fortune Walter Raleigh, who has been attributed with bringing tobacco to the English Court, had to deal with the ill will of King James I who defeated him with regal rigor. On a foggy morning on October 29, 1618, facing a firing squad, he demanded his last wish: a puff of a genuine cigar.

Poet Joseph Knight made reference to that dispute between buccaneer and monarch: **¡Oh! Sir Walter Raleigh, of clear and significant name, / how sweet it would have been to know that the insolent / King James, who never once smoked, / would perish in that eternal smoky Hell.**



Our own humble poet Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (Plácido) sanctified the planting of tobacco in the midst of an ideal landscape: **Where the leaves unfurl / the plant reaches out / to the far ends of the precious world, / there I had a tobacco plantation / and in it, a garden.**

Sir Cigar does not settle for his unequaled quality, he requires bards to sing his praises. His ears are delighted by florid musical productions, ranging from guarachas, to tangos and boleros, even to august operatic registers. In fact there was a “between-operas-cigar” designed to be puffed during intermissions, accompanied by champagne flutes and commentary about the show, and then that the cigar made its stage entrance. El secreto de Susana, written by Enrico Colisciano, with music by Wolf Ferrari, had its premiere on December 4, 1909 and arrived at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1911. The comic opera Fábrica de tabaco de Sevilla musicalized the manufacturing of cigars; it premiered in Madrid in 1848, with the music of Soriano Fuentes.



CIGARS IN CUBAN ART

CONSOLATION OF THE PENSIVE

The history of cigars as a leitmotif or coprotagonist in Cuban art goes back to the first half of the 19th century following the arrival in 1822 in Cuba of the lithographic process, prior to its occurrence in countries such as the US, Argentina, Mexico and Spain. This new printmaking technique had been discovered 25 years earlier in 1798 in what is today the Czech Republic, and it was brought to Cuba by the painter Santiago Lasseus y Durant.

After the successful lithography boom, a group of important graphic artists (engravers and lithographers), also motivated by the extraordinary growth of the tobacco industry, started to create striking, colorful prints in the new technique, which permitted them to reproduce small format drawings and paintings using a full range of color and some admirable gold reliefs.



IT WAS UNTIL THE MID 1850S THAT
THE NEW ARTISTIC TECHNIQUES
USED ON CUBAN CIGARS ACQUIRED
SIGNIFICANT COVERAGE ON THE
WORLD MARKET



In the 1840s, these creators left their mark on art with their amazing designs on cigar boxes. According to records of that era, Ramón Allones, with his La Eminencia brand, is given the credit for having been the first one to use lithographed labels on his cigar boxes and the first one to sell deluxe packages, crafted from precious wood, becoming quite the rage in European court circles.

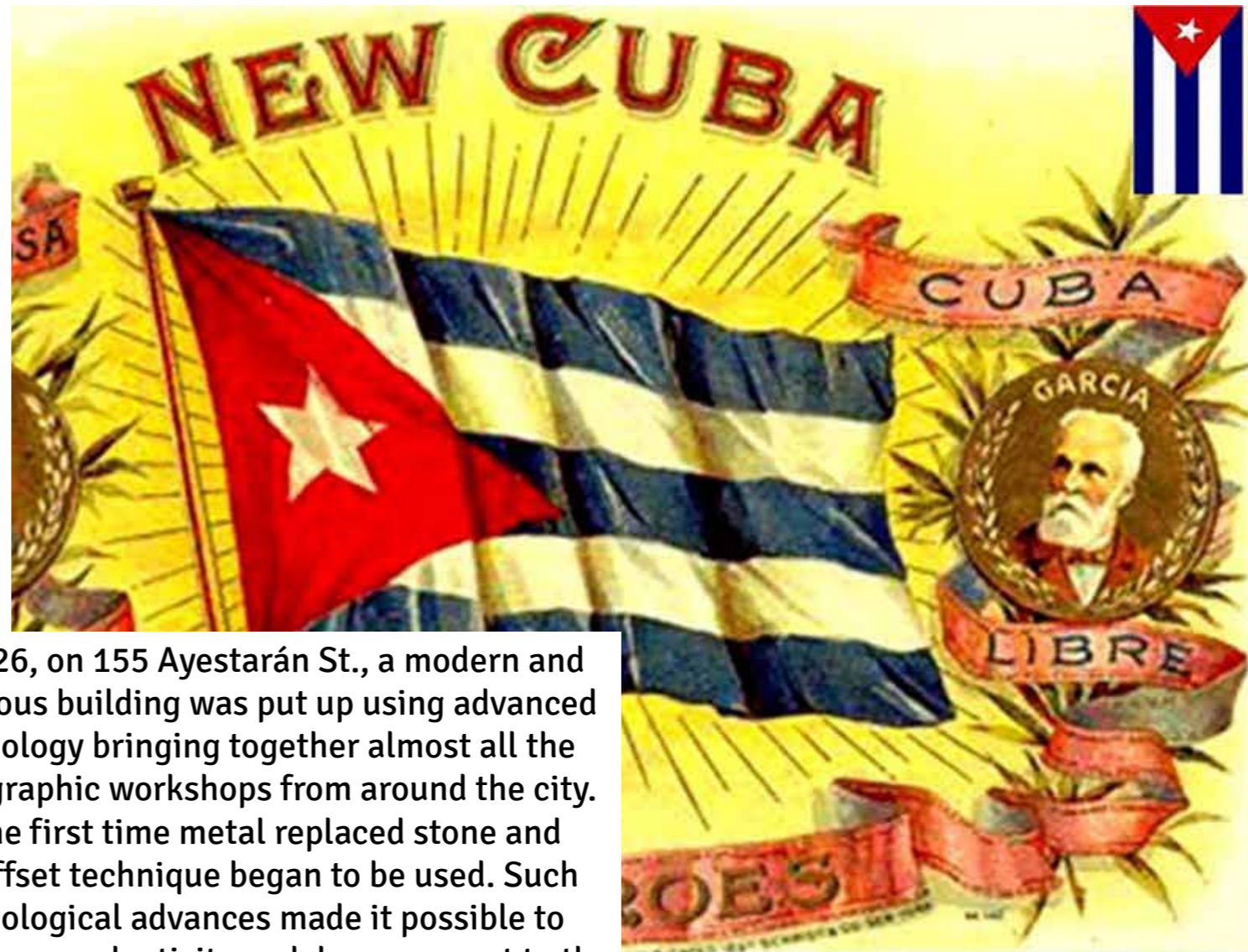
But it wasn't until the mid 1850s that the new artistic techniques used on Cuban cigars acquired significant coverage on the world market. This was accomplished by a structured ad campaign run by Luis Susini with his La Honradez brand founded in 1853. Among the most outstanding lithographic artists designing cigar vitolas, we have Juan de la Mata and Louis Caire; they and others also made great contributions to spreading this art form in Cuba.

The first chromolithographic press arrived in Havana in 1861. In 1865 a device patented by E. Gaiffe arrived from France, consisting of a sort of electric engraving contraption called the Magneto-Electrique Machine. Its manufacturers came along to train Cuban technicians in the functioning of this strange electrical apparatus which allowed artists to draw directly onto a piece of polished stone without having to resort to the work of engravers or lithographers.

The growth of the tobacco and engraving industry took place simultaneously into the 1880s. In 1881, Alfredo Pereira Taveira from Portugal introduced photo-lithography and two years later he brought in photo-engraving.

At that time there were already a number of well-known Cuban cigar brands in existence, some of which had been founded in the 1830s by Spanish immigrants and subsequently continued by their descendants. Among the many, we should especially mention the celebrated Partagás (1845), Romeo y Julieta (1875), Por Larrañaga (1834), H. Upmann (1844), El Águila de Oro (1864) and El Cetro (1882).

This boom resulted in the proliferation of lithographic workshops. The first one we should mention would be the Litografía del Gobierno y Real Sociedad Económica La Honradez. Cuban artists and Spanish artists living in Cuba saw a future in creating a wide variety of works. Some of these were veritable artistic jewels, but others were less fortunate due to their creators' lack of talent. In December of 1906, following the War of Independence and after the US intervention, three of the largest lithographic workshops in Havana (Rosendo Fernández Gamoneda, Manuel García and the Litográfica Habana Comercial) merged to create what would be known thereafter as the Compañía Litográfica de la Habana; it was made up of several shops where limestone continued to be used as the matrix in most of the cases related to printing the elements decorating cigar boxes, composed of both inner and outer coverings. Around 1870, vitolas or cigar rings appeared on the scene and this led to the later wave of collecting.



In 1926, on 155 Ayestarán St., a modern and spacious building was put up using advanced technology bringing together almost all the lithographic workshops from around the city. For the first time metal replaced stone and the offset technique began to be used. Such technological advances made it possible to increase productivity and decrease cost to the detriment of the quality of the lithographic labels produced there.

The Golden Age of artistic lithography had faltered, along with the quality and beauty of the decorative elements used by the tobacco trade. The period that saw painters and draftsmen creating drawings on limestone lasted a little over a century; it is an ingenious technique that requires the printmaker to run the prints for each different color.



Founded in February 26, 1993, the Museum of Tobacco—housed in an 18th-century building at 120 Mercaderes St. and refurbished as part of the overall restoration of Havana's Historical Center, preserves valuable collections associated with tobacco-inspired culture such as instruments to process tobacco leaves, pipes, lighters and other implements used in the art of smoking cigars. It also houses an important collection of lithographic stones and labels of the prestigious cigar brands.

Tobacco in the Pinar del Río landscape
Countless artists from the picturesque province of Pinar del Río in the western region of Cuba, home to many of the best tobacco plantations in the world from the 19th century until the present, have used subject matter in their work that shows growing, harvesting and smoking tobacco. These are important works, many of which belong to private and government collections and others which have been sold to international galleries and visitors, particularly due to the remarkable indifference produced on this genre of painting when Cuba was overrun at the end of the 1980s by all the new -isms and trends of international contemporary art.

Many of these creators were, and are, self-taught artists. For that reason much of their work is labeled as Art Naïf. This may be another of the reasons why their work does not travel beyond the local Casas de Cultura and other similar institutions.



Belonging to the so-called artistic avant-garde, he is someone who has gained importance for his murals, paintings, sculptures and ceramics, some of them using the subject of tobacco, and he has become one of the most well-known modern artists in Cuba. The work of the excellent painter, sculptor, engraver, illustrator and cultural promoter Domingo Ravenet Esquerdo (Valencia, España, 1905-La Habana, Cuba, 1969) took a turn to abstraction in the 1950s, while in his sculpture, in Cuba he is considered to be a pioneer in working with forged and cast metal rods, fathering a veritable revolution in art that attempted to promote pure form.

In the 1950s, Ravenet became especially interested in sculpture and artistic ceramics, working from the workshop of Dr. Juan Miguel Rodríguez de la Cruz, a physician who had installed a studio-factory on the outskirts of Havana, some 20 kilometers away in Santiago de las Vegas. Ravenet joined forces there with Amelia Peláez, Wifredo Lam, René Portocarrero, Mariano Rodríguez, María Elena Jubría and other artists, without abandoning his painting which moved gradually towards abstraction while maintaining some figurative characteristics. .

The two pieces created by this artist in reference to tobacco were a mural and a sculpture.

The first one, placed at the Ministry of Labor and Social Security headquarters in 1947, was entitled El tabaco and it shared the building with another work executed in the same technique called La Ganadería (1946): unfortunately both pieces disappeared in the 1970s due to careless building renovations.

In El tabaco, Ravenet divided up his composition for the purpose of recreating different stages in the process through which the valuable tobacco leaves need to pass in order to end up as cigars: harvest, selection, aging, packaging, and cigar-making. The painting was done in a wonderfully realistic style, thereby providing a notable attraction for visitors to the building because of his obvious knowledge and great creativity in interpreting rural customs and ways of life.

His other great work associated with tobacco is his monument to plantation and tobacco factory workers, a sculpture located at the entrance to the town of Santiago de las Vegas, done in homage to the courageous Vuelta Abajo workers who revolted against the commercial monopoly imposed by Spanish colonialism in the 18th century and to the contributions of the Tampa-based tobacco workers towards the organizing and funding of the War of 1895, the first Creole rebellion in Cuba and, according to some historians, in all of the Americas.

The work was designed and executed from 1956 to 1957 and installed by the artist on January 19, 1958. The technique uses the welding of rods and other stainless steel pieces, thereby inaugurating a new style in his artistic oeuvre. It would give way to a style where he could indulge in his abstract-figurative interests during this period.





With its geometric-abstract forms (pyramids, cubes, triangles and squares), the sculpture is seven and a half meters tall: it was erected on an impressive black and white marble base bearing an inscription alluding to the reason for its being placed there. It is crowned by a tobacco flower sprouting from a marble monolith placed over one of the steel platforms.

Ravenet's creations constitute a solid body of work within Cuban art dedicated to tobacco and its heroes.

From the 1980s, with the advent of the visual arts boom in Cuba, encouraged by the creation of a solid system of arts education instituted after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in January of 1959, reputable and emerging artists have recreated an infinite number of works about the consumption, growing and harvesting of tobacco and about its manufacturing processes. Among such figures we should mention the Proyecto Grupo Espiral (PGE), founded in January of 2009 for the purpose of contributing to the growth and affirmation of humanism and man's attitude towards others and reality.

Masters such as Adigio Benítez (1924-2013), National Visual Arts Prizewinner 2002 and National Prizewinner of Artistic Education; Juan Moreira (1938); and Ileana Mulet (1952), all graduates of the San Alejandro Art Academy, as well as Ernesto García Peña (1949) and José Omar Torres López (1953) have all left their mark on visual art focusing on tobacco. This has been a project which has also interested other more recent and less well-known artists.

Photography has left its mark on this subject matter, not only in journalistic photography with its recurrent reports on growing, harvesting and producing cigars, but often in an essentially artistic vein. Some of the well-known photographers who have produced series on tobacco are Luis Bruzón Fuentes (1959) and Miguel Puldon Villarreal (1951).

THE PAINTER OF TOBACCO

Among the Cuban creators whose work touches on tobacco and has made an impression abroad is Milton Brenal (1960), known as the Painter of Tobacco. Not only is tobacco his subject matter, he actually uses tobacco leaves as his medium. Over these, he superimposes drawings of female nudes, portraits and landscapes.

Many other contemporary artists in Cuba have devoted segments of their artistic production to tobacco as a sort of remembrance and tribute to a plant which is part of our national culture and identity. It has been around for over 500 years, when the Spanish colonizers arrived on the Island and noticed how the natives loved smoking what José Martí defined as “Indian leaf, consolation of the pensive, delight of dreamers, architects of the air, fragrant bosom of the winged opal”





CUBAN CIGAR BRANDS

• expression of fantasy •



My father was the classic cigar smoker: he would only light one up when he had enough time to savor it uninterrupted. Ever since I was very young, I would follow him around hoping he would give me the decorative bands on each one of his cigars. And so I turned into an unwitting impromptu collector even sharing bands I had collected with my friends.

Over the years, many of my bands managed to disappear without my noticing, but I have continued to appreciate the delicate originality of most of those designs that identify and

personalize the cigars, adding another element to their seductive power. After smelling the cigars and checking out their textures, buyers will inevitably linger over the image that will finally convince them to make their purchase.

More than once I have heard connoisseurs describe the quality of the bands as being historically on a par with the superb quality of Cuban tobacco. This originated around 1850, when the Cuban lithographic industry was being energetically developed and some of the first lithographs were used to decorate cigar boxes.

One can hear the expression of “the Golden Age of cigar band production” being used to describe the years up to the 1920s. This was when their quality and beauty competed only with those that were produced in Mexico and the Philippines. And when this industry was mechanized by the introduction of offset printing, cigar band quality declined.

Cuban cigar producers rely on the bands in their war against constant imitations and forgeries. For that reason, the best Cuban cigar bands have the brand name incorporated somewhere in the center or on the wings.

Some Cuban cigar brands have a remarkable number of different bands. Among these are Partagás, Romeo y Julieta and José Gener. There are collectors who have proudly amassed over one thousand different Romeo y Julieta bands. Within so much diversity, imaginations have obviously been left to soar and people all over the world have acquired a much greater appreciation of Cuban creativity and talent in the cigar production business.



The Cuban industry has a production line that devotes itself to more popular and less expensive cigars. These bands tend to be simpler, have a single color, and very practical lettering and designs but they nevertheless possess great charm. Among these, the names El Cacique, Los Cazadores, El Coloso and El Crédito should be praised for their lovely bands. Another interesting fact is that the Cuban cigar industry is one of the few in the world to use purely domestically produced bands.

The best of the thematic bands usually stress the colors gold and red, but H. Upmann, for example, goes lighter on the gold and impresses collectors with their complicated, almost Baroque multi-colored designs. There is a distinct preference for regal, aristocratic symbols such as crowns, coats of arms, lions and coins, but Cuban bands generally emphasize sobriety and functionality, rather

than trying to overwhelm with embellishments that lack content.

The most well-known Cuban cigar brand name is COHIBA, and its history is closely associated with the bands that have identified them since 1966. Of their four lines, Clásica, 1492, Maduro 5 and COHIBA Behike, the latter is considered to be the most exclusive. But all the lines have been rationally transforming their bands and improving their quality. Recently, we have news that the newest productions have been using holographic printing techniques and so there is one more reason to continue being proud of those tiny masterpieces that are such an important element for one of Cuba's greatest exports.



CUBAN HUMIDORS

ART AND FANTASY



Humidors provide the ideal conditions for cigars to preserve their appearance, aroma and texture, right up to the moment they are smoked. In particular, they regulate humidity and temperature and so prevent their disintegration or becoming dried out. They come in different sizes and forms, generally adapting to the number and size of the cigars they contain and to the preference of the smoker.

They have undergone quite an evolution over the years. Besides fulfilling their specific functions, humidors have also taken on esthetic qualities. Their creators are specialized in the production of these items, turning out pieces of art that may be compared to sculpture. Many sing the praises of these objects declaring them to be worthy of the cigars they hold.

Some of the most outstanding manufacturers of humidors these days are Raúl Valladares, José Ernesto Aguilera, Neury Alberto Santana, Moisés González and Marlene Acosta. In the western part of Cuba, in the province of Pinar del Río, teams of artisans collaborate under the brand name of De Cuba.

Raúl Valladares is the creator of Humidores Cohiba—his humidors harmonize with the Cohiba brand name taking into account the characteristics of their cigars and vitolas. They are both exclusive and majestic.

José Ernesto Aguilera uses the bodies of these boxes to illustrate fragments of day-to-day scenes involving those anonymous picturesque characters that play an important role in life on our Island. He calls this series Tesoros de Cuba. Aguilera has been praised for his talent at mixing different materials: cedar, silver, gold and bronze along with precious and semi-precious stones. He has been acknowledged as the leader and founder of the Humidores Habana project, which has been creating these objects d'art for the past twenty years.

The humidors fashioned by Neury Alberto Santana focus on highlighting Cuban colonial heritage in a spectacular manner. In many of his pieces, he has been inspired by the façades of some of the tobacco factories such as H. Upmann, Partagás, Trinidad and San Cristóbal.



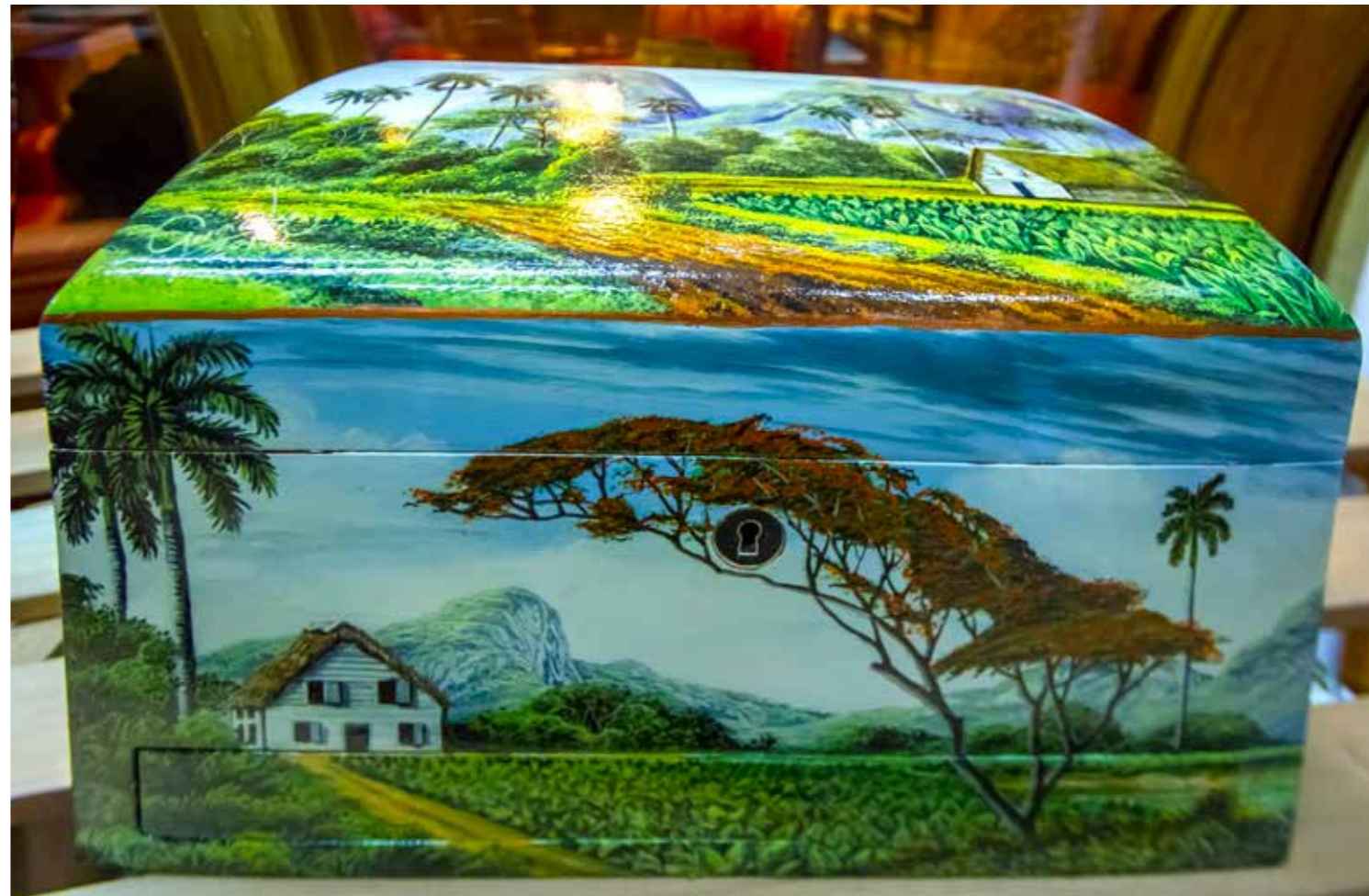
Since 1998, the duo made up of Moisés González and Marlene Acosta have been turning out unique compositions that most resemble sculpture, often using motifs from peasant life and rural vignettes. The 35 artists and artisans of the De Cuba group are led by Luis Milán, producing excellent work that is striking for its unity of vision.

In Cuba, humidors come even closer to being considered works of art when they are decorated by some of the Island's famous painters. Each of their distinctive styles is translated to these mini-canvases, easily and immediately identifiable by art lovers.

The list of these artists is a long one that includes Zaida del Río, Carlos Guzmán, Reynerio Tamayo, Aldo Soler, Kadir López, Rubén Alpízar, Guillermo Rodríguez Malberti, Milton Bernal, Eduardo Miguel Martínez and Arién Guerra. Each year, during the Festival del Habano, they are asked to enrich and add a cultural sheen to the festive event.

Reynerio Tamayo and Guillermo Rodríguez Malberti have produced designs that show their obvious delight in being associated with the subject of cigars imprinting their mature sense of humor on these small scale unique objects. The works signed by Zaida del Río and Carlos Guzmán are outstanding for their vibrant use of color and symbolism, letting our imaginations run wild with suggestions of a variety of stories. Aldo Soler seduces us with his depictions of faces and Rubén Alpízar, as always, delves into a personal mythical world.

There are many reasons why humidors have become very valued objects that can be presented to famous visitors. They have become part of Cuban culture, a splendid accompaniment for the cigars they protect.

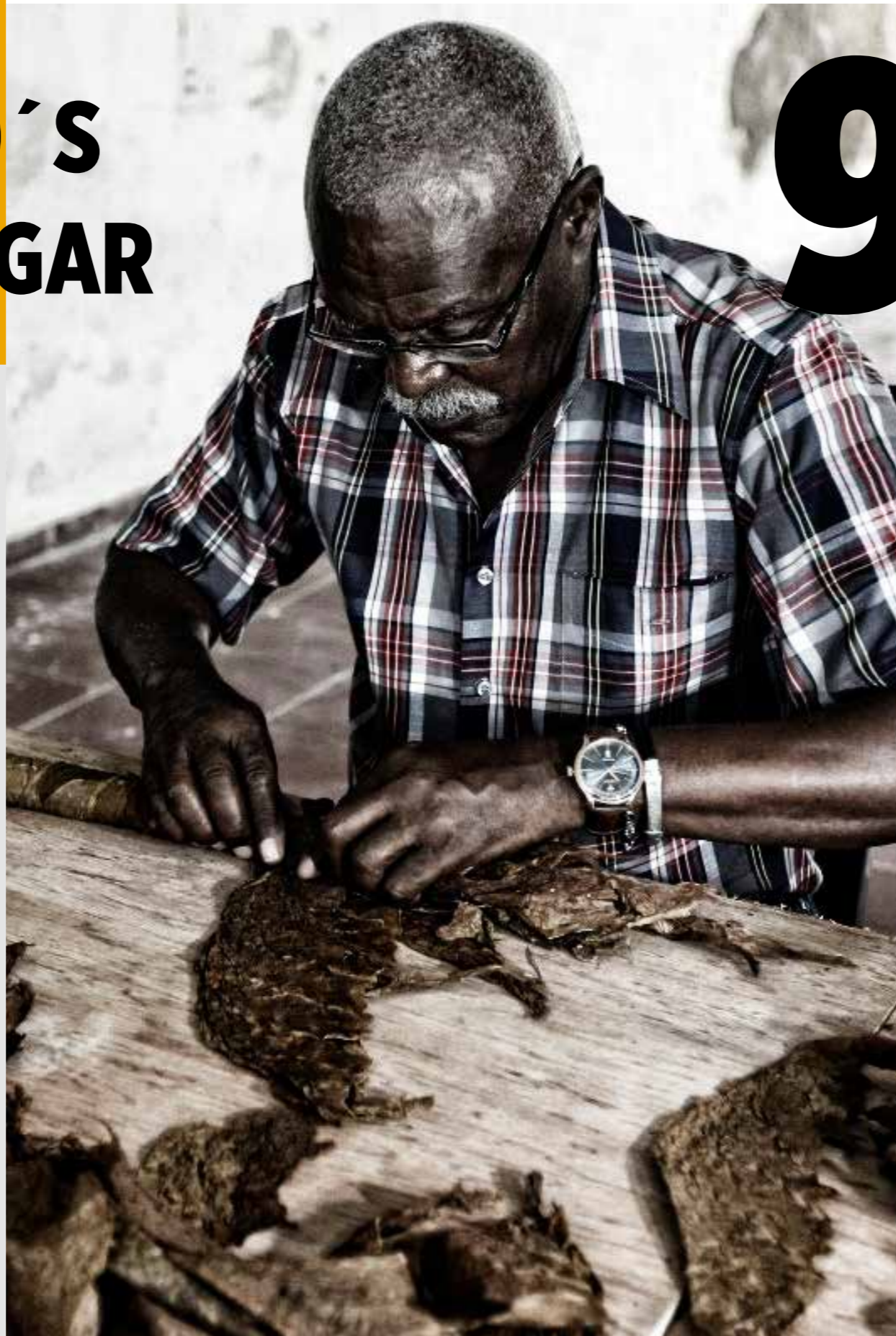


THE WORLD'S LONGEST CIGAR IS IN CUBA

The cigar roller who makes the world's longest cigar lives in Cuba. He's 71 and still has confidence in his skills and shows love for his work. José Castelar (Cueto), a five-time winner of the Guinness Record, beat his own 2011 world mark of 81.80 meters. It took him about eight working sessions.

Cueto really reached the 90 meters in the length of his cigar. This is his sixth world record in the Premium (hand rolled) type, and he used some 80 kg of raw materials for this record (a mixture of different types of tobacco leaves).

In order to give a good finish to his big cigar, Cueto selected leaves with special texture and sheen.



90m

José Castelar, who learnt to make cigars when he was 5, is proud to belong to the family of Cuban cigar rollers. In Cuba, cigar rollers have always enjoyed prestige and recognition by the population, as many of them engaged in the wars for national liberation. In fact, cigars were used to hide within them secret messages that were supposed to travel long distances to reach their destination.

Cueto has an assistant, René Valdés Miller, who prepares the leaves for him, as they should be stretched and tied to make the final outer layer of cigars.



HABANO FESTIVAL

Held from February to March, Habano Festival came to an end with the celebration of the Gala Evening that paid tribute to the Cohiba brand, with exclusive tastings of its new releases. The gala hosted 1200 guests that enjoyed live performances by Cuban pianist and composer Chucho Valdés, the Spanish flamenco singer Estrella Morente and the Uruguayan singer-songwriter Jorge Drexler.

The traditional humidor auction of seven collector's items reached a total of €865,000 that were entirely donated to the Cuban Public Health System.

The Habano Festival featured the auction of the first humidor of the exclusive special series "Cohiba Aniversario", which raised €320,000. The humidor is in itself a work of art and a unique collector's item, heralding true innovation in terms of traditional craftsmanship and technical design. This unique humidor is made of different several hardwoods, including Makassar ebony, Sycamore, and Light Bossé or Scented Guarea.

The innovative external marquetry that decorates the doors is the result of a long process of experimentation. The humidor is lined with 24-carat gold plated authentic



Cuban tobacco leaves from the Vuelta Abajo region, considered the best tobacco growing area in the world. This exquisite work was carried out by expert Parisian artisans from the prestigious ELIE BLEU workshop.

The auctioned piece is part of the exclusive series of 50 humidors, each of which contains 50 Habanos with a vitola of the same name. This is a limited series of 50 humidors, all numbered and personalized with the owner's name. Each humidor is also unique in the size of its ring gauge, being the first in the history of Habanos to offer 60 mm (60 mm ring gauge x 178 mm length).

The annual Habano Festival, which celebrates the world's finest tobacco, reached a milestone in its history, gathering over 2000 participants from over 60 countries



WITH **SIR TERENCE CONRAN** AT THE **FESTIVAL DEL HABANO**

Maybe someone was having a quiet joke. Perhaps it was a coincidence. But for one reason or another, Havana's Karl Marx theater was the setting for the inaugural night of celebrations in honor of that great capitalist prop, the hand-rolled cigar. The visitors, more likely to be socialites than socialists, come every year to rub shoulders with like-minded aficionados. And smoke, almost continuously. With many countries around the world now shunning smokers, Cuba, which has not enforced its own anti-smoking legislation, has become something of a haven.

"We have been driven to special corners of the world," says Hong Kong-based cigar distributor David Tang. "Places where people still understand that smoking is not a sin."



Visitors to the festival spend much of the week touring the factories where the

objects of their desires are rolled. For British designer and restaurateur Sir Terence Conran, coming to Cuba for the first time having smoked Cuban cigars almost every day for the last 53 of his 85 years, is like a pilgrimage. In the vast rolling room of H. Upmann, the air thick with the aroma of tobacco leaf, he recalls his first cigar.

"We opened the Habitat store in May 1964, and someone suggested that the best way to celebrate was with a Montecristo cigar."



The festival is of course not just about smoking cigars. It has a serious business side. Behind closed doors, in the factories' tasting rooms, retailers are thinking of ways to defend their livelihoods against anti-smoking legislation. They know that they will probably end up selling fewer cigars. One strategy is to go more upmarket.

The week ends with an extravagant final dinner that is held in Pabexpo. Glancing around the several guests, it seemed quite clear that there are plenty of cigar smokers with plenty of money around the world. The dinner ends with an auction of hand-crafted humidors. The bids which go towards Cuban health care soar into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Stephen Gibbs the BBC correspondent in Cuba



CUBA★

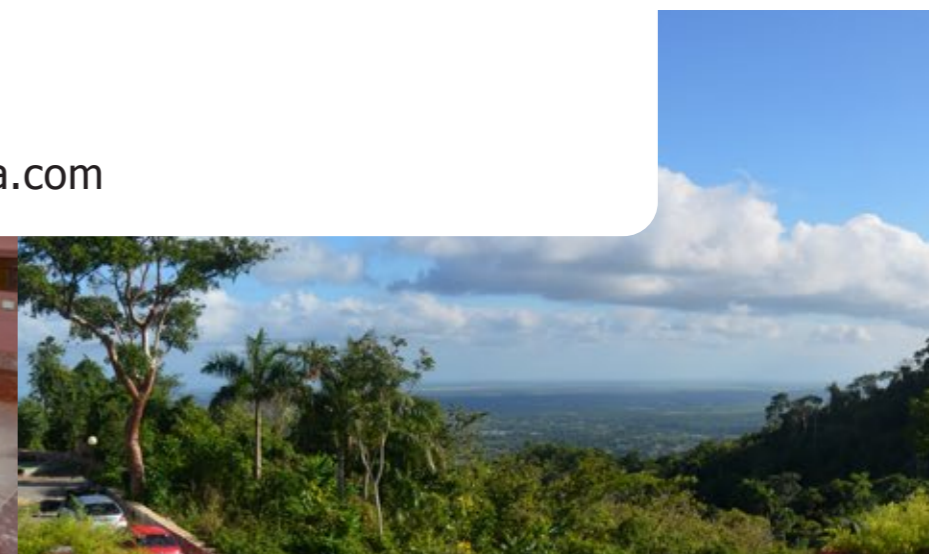
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Neptuno e/ Prado y Zulueta, Habana Vieja

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Luxurious historic mansion facing Plaza de Armas

Narciso López, Habana Vieja

SARATOGA

Stunning view from roof-top pool. Beautiful décor.

Paseo del Prado #603 esq. a Dragones, Habana Vieja
(

TERRAL

Wonderful ocean front location. Newly renovated.

Malecón esq. a Lealtad, Centro Habana
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BOUTIQUE HOTELS IN OLD HAVANA

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PALACIO DEL MARQUÉS...

Cuban baroque meets modern minimalist

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■ MERCURE SEVILLA

Stunning views from the roof garden restaurant.

Trocadero #55 entre Prado y Zulueta, Habana Vieja

■ HOTEL NACIONAL

Eclectic art-deco architecture. Gorgeous gardens.

Calle O esq. a 21, Vedado

■ RIVIERA

Spectacular views over wave-lashed Malecón

Paseo y Malecón, Vedado

ECONOMICAL/BUDGET HOTELS

■ BOSQUE

On the banks of the Río Almendares.

Calle 28-A e/ 49-A y 49-B, Reparto Kohly, Playa

■ DEAUVILLE

Lack of pretension, great location.

Galiano e/ San Lázaro y Malecón, Centro Habana

■ SAINT JOHN'S

Lively disco, tiny quirky pool. Popular.

Calle O e/ 23 y 25, Vedado

■ VEDADO

Good budget option with a bit of a buzz

Calle O e/ 23 y 25, Vedado

HAVANA'S Best Hotels

