

# An Introduction to Cigars

A cigar is a tightly-rolled bundle of dried and fermented tobacco that is ignited so that its smoke may be drawn into the mouth. Cigar tobacco is grown in significant quantities in Brazil, Cameroon, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Indonesia, Mexico, Nicaragua, the Philippines, and the Eastern United States.

Tobacco leaves are harvested and aged using a process that combines use of heat and shade to reduce sugar and water content without causing the large leaves to rot. This first part of the process, called curing, takes between 25 and 45 days and varies substantially based upon climatic conditions as well as the construction of sheds or barns used to store harvested tobacco.

The second part of the process, called fermentation, is carried out under conditions designed to help the leaf dry slowly. Temperature and humidity are controlled to ensure that the leaf continues to ferment, without rotting or disintegrating. This is where the flavor, burning, and aroma characteristics are primarily brought out in the leaf.

Once the leaves have aged properly, they are sorted for use as filler or wrapper based upon their appearance and overall quality. During this process, the leaves are continually moistened and handled carefully to ensure each leaf is best used according to its individual qualities. The leaf will continue to be baled, inspected, un-baled, re-inspected, and baled again repeatedly as it continues its aging cycle. When the leaf has matured according to the manufacturer's specifications, it will be used in the production of a cigar.

Although some cigars are cut on both ends, or twirled at both ends, the vast majority come with one straight cut end and one end in a "cap". Most quality handmade cigars, regardless of shape, will have a cap which is one or more small pieces of a wrapper pasted on to one end of the cigar with either a natural tobacco paste or with a mixture of flour and water. The cap end of a cigar must be cut off for the cigar to be smoked properly. It is the rounded end without the tobacco exposed, and this is the end one should always cut. If the cap is cut jaggedly or without care, the end of the cigar will not burn evenly and smokeable tobacco will be lost. Some cigar manufacturers purposely place different types of tobacco from one end to the other to give the cigar smokers a variety of tastes, body and strength from start to finish. Smoking a cigar from the wrong end may result in a bad experience.

There are three basic types of cigar cutters:

- Guillotine or straight cut
- Punch cut
- V-cut also known as notch cut, cat's eye, wedge cut, English cut

At Desert Palm we use the straight cut with a cigar guillotine.

# Lighting

The "head" of the cigar is usually the end closest to the cigar band. The opposite end of the cigar is called the "foot". The band identifies the type of the cigar and may be removed or left on. The smoker cuts the cap from the head of the cigar and ignites the foot of the cigar. The smoker draws smoke from the head of the cigar with the mouth and lips, usually not inhaling into the lungs.

When lighting, the cigar should be rotated to achieve an even burn and the air should be slowly drawn with gentle puffs. A flame that may not impart its own flavor to the cigar should be used. The tip of the cigar should minimally touch the flame, the heat of the flame from a butane or torch lighter can burn the tobacco leaves. A match or cedar spill flame is a milder flame to be used.

Cigars can be lit with the use of butane-filled lighters. Butane is colorless, odorless and burns clean with very little, if any, flavor; but are quite hot as a flame source. It is not recommended to use (lighter) fluid-filled lighters and paper matches since they can influence the taste.

A second option is wooden matches but make sure the chemical head of the match has burned away and you are only placing the burning wooden match on your cigar. Depending on the manufacturer the chemical head portion of the matchstick may contain one or more of the following: gelatin, paraffin wax, potassium chlorate, barium chlorate, glue, polyvinyl chlorides, phosphorus trisulfide, and clay. The strike plate to ignite the match may contain one more of the following: glass particles, red phosphorus and glue. So make sure the head of the match has burned off before approaching your cigar.

A third and most traditional way to light a cigar is to use a cedar spill. A spill is a splinter or a slender piece of wood or twisted paper, for lighting candles, lamps, campfires or fireplaces, etc. A cedar spill for lighting a cigar is a torn narrow strip of Spanish cedar (ideally) and lit using whatever flame source is handy.

Cigars packaged in boxes or metal tubes may contain a thin wrapping of cedar that may be used to light a cigar, minimizing the problem of lighters or matches affecting the taste. Cedar spills, matches and lighters are all commercially available

# Flavour

Each brand and type of cigar tastes different. While the wrapper does not entirely determine the flavor of the cigar, darker wrappers tend to produce a sweetness, while lighter wrappers usually have a "drier" taste. Whether a cigar is mild, medium, or full bodied does not correlate with quality. Some words used to describe cigar flavor and texture include; spicy, peppery (red or black), sweet, harsh, burnt, green, earthy, woody, cocoa, chestnut, roasted, aged, nutty, creamy, cedar, oak, chewy, fruity, and leathery.

Cigar smoke, which is sometimes inhaled, tastes of tobacco with nuances of other tastes. Many different things affect the scent of cigar smoke: tobacco type, quality of the cigar, added flavors, age and humidity, production method (handmade vs. machine-made) and more. A fine cigar can taste completely different from inhaled cigarette smoke. When smoke is inhaled, as is usual with cigarettes, the tobacco flavor is less noticeable than the sensation from the smoke. Some cigar enthusiasts use a vocabulary similar to that of wine-tasters to describe the overtones and undertones observed while smoking a cigar. Journals are available for recording personal ratings, description of flavors observed, sizes, brands, etc. Cigar tasting is in such respects similar to wine, brandy, whisky, tea, coffee, and beer tasting.

# Smoke

Smoke is produced by incomplete combustion of tobacco during which at least three kinds of chemical reactions occur: pyrolysis breaks down organic molecules into simpler ones, pyrosynthesis recombines these newly formed fragments into chemicals not originally present, and distillation moves compounds such as nicotine from the tobacco into the smoke. For every gram of tobacco smoked, a cigar emits about 120–140 mg of carbon dioxide, 40–60 mg of carbon monoxide, 3–4 mg of isoprene, 1 mg each of hydrogen cyanide and acetaldehyde, and smaller quantities of a large spectrum of volatile N-nitrosamines and volatile organic compounds, with the detailed composition unknown.

The most odorous chemicals in cigar smoke, and arguably the most responsible for the odor, are pyridines. Along with pyrazines, they are also the most odorous chemicals in cigar smoker's breath. These substances are noticeable even at extremely low concentrations of a few parts per billion. During smoking, it is not known whether these chemicals are generated by splitting the chemical bonds of nicotine, or by Maillard reaction between amino acids and sugars in the tobacco.[31]

Cigar smoke is more alkaline than cigarette smoke, and therefore dissolves and is absorbed more readily by the mucous membrane of the mouth, making it easier for the smoker to absorb nicotine without having to inhale.

“Giving up smoking is the easiest thing in the world. I know because I've done it thousands of times.”  
Mark Twain

“The only time I really think is when I smoke, and I quite smoking years ago.”  
Jarod Kintz

## **Mild Bodied**

### **Punch Robustus Exclusivos Emiratos Limited Edition**

Sweet cedary peppery with rich tobacco flavours and medium body smoke comes at first. An inch down the pepper mellows, the sweet tobacco and the cedar wood appears with nut and cocoa on the back ground. Earthines show at the end on this third.

*Recommended with a Castle of Pasagad Cocktail*

### **Hoyo de Mont Epicure No. 2**

A darling among Robusto lovers, this agreeable cigar has gained fame through its subtle floral, nuance and intriguing twinges of sweet ginger and cinnamon.

*Recommended with a Chukka Mule Cocktail*

### **Hoyo de Mont Petit Robusto**

Starts with a sweet, earthy tobacco which progresses, without aggression, to spicy cedar and creamy nut flavor.

*Recommended with a Square Deal Cocktail*

## **Mild to Medium Bodied**

### **Romeo & Julieta Piramides Anejados**

Aged for 6 years in their boxes. Has the aroma of barnyard, toffee, cocoa and a touch earth emanate from the wrapper. Hint of cocoa, earth and leather.

*Recommended with a Nomadic Gaucho Cocktail*

## **Medium Bodied**

### **Bolivar Royal Coronas**

This bolivar caters to modern palate seeking a well- balanced with medium notes of wood, leather and coffee.

*Recommended with a Ride Off Cocktail*

### **Cohiba Lanceros**

Delicate flavours of fragrant flowers and sweet licorice persist in the mouth right upon ignition. Honey and spice cedar quickly join to mingle into fantastically aromatic finale.

*Recommended with The Patron Cocktail*

### **Cohiba Secretos**

The early smoke is filled by intense cedar and black pepper characters; In the second third, a very rich aromatic presence, with essentially scents of wood, pepper, mushrooms and autumn leaves.

*Recommended with an Espresso Martini*

### **Cohiba Siglo No. 2**

If you like silky, oily wrappers and a spicy woodiness in the smoke then this is the cigar for you. A tasty, creamy, smooth, with a grassy flavour combined with hints of fresh beans cigar that gives almost 2 hours of pleasure, which continued with the wonderful aftertaste.

*Recommended with a Rare Manhattan Cocktail*

### **Cohiba Siglo No. 6**

*Floral with the touch of cocoa*

*Recommended with a Side Car Cocktail*

### **Cuaba Exclusivos**

Mellow woodiness with hints of herbs and subtle honey with a mild and toasted tobacco taste leaving a pleasant smooth woody and sweet aftertaste.

*Recommended with our Gaja, Barberesco, Piedmont, Italy*

### **Punch Royal Coronation**

The length and ring gauge perfectly suits the flavours and pace of smoke of this cigar. Woody flavours, with hint of dried fruit smoke pleasantly in gradually increasing power.

*Recommended with a Boulevardier Cocktail*

### **Punch Punch, Gran Corona**

Upper cut by punch marries the classic, rich taste of punch with Nicaraguan spice to produce this alluring, medium-bodied smoke that peppers palate with an array of complex flavours.

*Recommended with Alvaro Palacio, La Vendimia, Rioja, Spain*

### **Montecristo No. 2**

Taste rich in wood and spice, yet maintain a creamy feel the whole way through.

*Recommended with Alexander Cocktail*

### **Romeo & Julieta Wide Churchills**

There are light aromas of tobacco and citrus at cold, with the hint of honey caramel and some coffee,

*Recommended with Glenfidich 15 years*

## **Medium to Full Bodied**

### **Cohiba Genios**

It has warm notes of toasted sweet vanilla and dark cocoa beans are immediately apparent on the palate that enjoys an opulent and well-rounded smoke

*Recommended with a Brandy Alexander Cocktail*

### **Cohiba Piramides Extra**

The aromas are mild, with notes of flowers and little bit of pepper.

*Recommended with a Head & Canes Cocktail*

### **Montecristo No. 4**

A little earthy in the beginning, delivered a lot of spice in the second third. Closer to the end, soft notes of cocoa and coffee appeared.

*Recommended with Beaujolais- Village, Georges Dubeouf, France*

### **Montecristo A-Cabinet**

It's rich and very present aromas are at first matte, then earthy, then increasingly concentrated and finally become almost intoxicatingly overpowering in the final phase.

*Recommended with Hennessy Paradis*

### **Montecristo Edmundo 25**

An earthy, woody cigar with subtle complexity and a light nutty character. Has traces of chocolate, vanilla beans and hints of leather with the classic Monte bitter-sweet tang.

*Recommended with Ron Zacappa 23 year old*

# Full Bodied

## **Bolivar Exclusivos Emiratos Limited Edition**

A pleasant woody “cedar like” with earth pepper and leather aromas on the nose

*Recommended with Ron Zaccappa, XO*

## **Partagas Short**

An explosion of different aromas led by vanilla, coffee, wood and leather all come together to produce an ‘espresso’ type start to this Tres Petit Corona. It’s overloaded with wonderful hot spicy flavours.

*Recommended with an Old Fashioned Cocktail*

## **Bolivar Petit Belicosos**

Gives way to powerful flavours of leather and some strong herbs and spice. Going forward, the intensity decreases, but not by sacrificing the rich flavours. Towards the end, a lot of oils gather to build up a nice bitter chocolate ending.

*Recommended with Hennessy Richard*

## **Cohiba 1966 Limited Edition 2011**

Full of sweet aromas, with barnyard, grass and earthy scents emerging from the foot. The prelight smoke is perfect

*Recommended with Remy Martin, Louis XIII, Cognac, France*

## **Partagas Series D No. 4**

Woody, cinnamon and with touch of spice

*Recommended with Berheim Wheat Whiskey*

## **Punch Churchills**

Has a characteristic of a particular earthiness. This earthiness is always present, combining with gentle herbal notes in the first third. The second and final phases are marked by herbal notes, earthy with hints of Cuban cedar and an after taste of a smooth shadow of spiciness.

*Recommended with Jagermeister served chilled*