



Nieuwsbrief

Zesde genootschapavond op 25 februari 2005

La Caya en Dominican Special

Omdat in de gift van onze Dominicaanse vrienden een rijk assortiment aan La Caya sigaren was opgenomen heeft de redactie van de Nieuwsbrief van Le Cendrier een onderzoekje gedaan naar de herkomst van deze sigaren. Aangezien het hier om een internationaal merk gaat dat in Nederland zelden verkrijgbaar is, is de rest van deze nieuwsbrief grotendeels in het Engels.

La Caya, the new brand in town

For decades Luis Méndez has been acknowledged as a tobacco grower and leaf dealer in his native Santiago, Dominican Republic. Such is his reputation for meticulous cultivation of prized tobacco that many well known manufacturers have contracted for his crops even before seed was placed in the ground. Furthermore, as a dealer importer of tobacco from all over the world, Méndez has developed a knowledge of tobacco that enables him to recognize the qualities smokers yearn for in their cigars.

For all this success, however, Méndez' dream has been to be known as a manufacturer, to produce his own cigars from his own tobaccos. With the introduction of La Caya, his dream is now a reality, and La Caya is a cigar in every way worthy of Luis Méndez' reputation as a tobacco expert. It seems he did more than merely dream of creating a fine cigar; for all those long years of preparation he also devoted himself to the study of the craft.

With this knowledge of manufacturing, coupled with the highest grades of imported tobaccos and those reserved from his own farms, in La Caya Luis Méndez produces a cigar we find to be the equal of much better known brands at much higher prices. It's so good and so modestly priced that La Caya could easily become your favorite everyday cigar. Luis Méndez' La Caya Natural sports an exquisite Ecuador Connecticut-seed shade grown wrapper with a Dominican Olor binder and Costa Rican, Nicaraguan, and Dominican filler. Equally cosmopolitan is the La Caya Maduro. Its San Andres Maduro wrapper surrounds an Indonesian- Sumatra wrapper and Nicaraguan and Dominican filler. Such is his attention to detail, both cigars are packed with individual Spanish cedar wrappings to preserve and enhance the tobacco flavors.



Luis Méndez: "love for tobacco that grew in me shaped my goals"

By 1920, my maternal grandfather had tobacco plantations in La Caya, Laguna Salada; municipality of Montecristi, located in the Northwest of the Dominican Republic.

I grew up in the city of Santiago, but going to the La Caya community every vacation, where our mother was born; there we used to spend our days, between games and watching our uncles processing tobacco in the farms. This scenery created in me a feeling for something as natural as tobacco. When going back to the city, we returned to what was our reality, where my father Mr. Luis Méndez founded in 1963, the same year I was born, the first store of car Accessories Luis Méndez Racing, one of the first in this area.



All our life was immersed in these two different worlds, but that love for tobacco that grew in me shaped my goals; so after analyzing a proposal from one of my uncles regarding the harvest sale of 1996, the prices were very attractive with record numbers for the aromatic leaf; I was highly interested, since this was a traditional business in my mother's family.

Making our dream come true, we sold the entire tobacco crop that year, and since then we founded for the year 1997, Tabacalera La Caya, S.A.. Beginning in February of that year, with the vision to continue with my ancestors' philosophy; also with the cigar production, we began with an amount of 2,500 cigars per day; of course, processing the tobacco that we bought La Caya community. Difficult times for the sale of tobacco soon came, since the Boom had come and gone by the time we started. We were able to place all our production in the American market during great part of 1997.

Already at the end of the year, business plans has changed, we started selling cigars at the local level, in the tourist sector, at first in Sosua. We developed a sales strategy, we were successful and after three months we opened a second store in Cabarete, thus increasing our sales channels. After a year, we were selling in all the national territory (tourist Sector). We got several international clients who bought our cigars with their own private brands; During that time we were located in Las Palomas of Licey. We exported to Germany and the U.S.A.. We were still doing what we had meant from the beginning, processing Dominican tobacco

Soon we met a client, and we became Distributors for Indonesian tobacco for the Cibao area, our beginning in tobacco imports, from Cameroon, Brazil, Ecuador and Indonesia. Since then we have been supplying all the factories that need our services. In this business we obtained solidity, which gave us the basis to buy whole factories, cigars, tobacco, machineries, etc....

We became a company that helped a lot the tobacco sector for the exit of more than 15,000,000 cigars, witch passed through our hands, and we verified many manufacturers because we could sell tobacco and/or prime material to them for a low cost.

With the Dominican tobacco we have plans to export to Spain, Holland, Central America and the U.S.A., in this project we counted with the BHD Bank's help and Agricultural loan bank. In the plantation we had 40 harvesters, with 3,500 tareas where we will harvest tobacco wrapper, binder and filler, to continue our project that gave us life.

Also we have our own department for Processing and stripping tobacco, as much as the growth in this area has exceeded all our expectations created in the beginning, almost 6 years ago. We are foretelling a preparation for this year of more than 250,000 pounds of tobacco. From Indonesia, we began a program for being able to supply all Latin America at factory level.

As far as the cigars, we are conscious of the necessity of improving the quality day by day in a competitive market, with good prices. In 2001 we had a production of 2,225,000 cigars and this year we will arrive at 3,000,000 achieving therefore a new average.



La Caya by Tabacalera La Caya

Churchill 7.0 x 50
Torpedo 6.5 x 52
Robusto 5.0 x 50

Wrapper: Ecuador
Filler: Piloto Cubano
Binder: Olor Dominicano

The Latest release from Master Cigar Maker - Luis Tomas Méndez of Tamboril, Dominican Republic. This cigar has received high ratings by SMOKE Magazine. The panelist commented: "The perfect cigar for when you need a quick hit!" "This cigar's even burn was it's strong point." "A great cigar with a good bourbon."



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Tabacalera A Fuente

Fuente Opus X, possibly the most sought-after non-Cuban cigar in the world

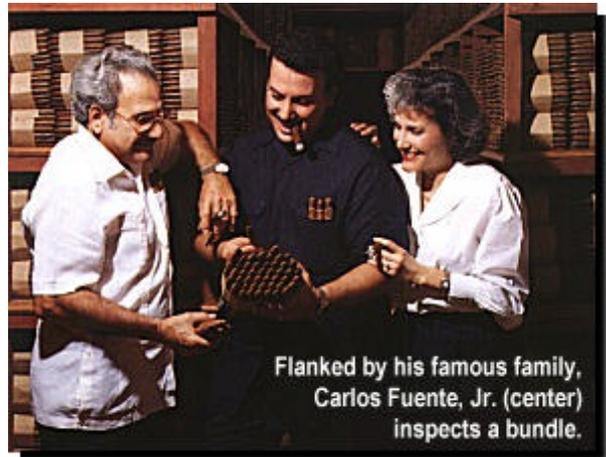
Perhaps no one company has done more to elevate the status of the Dominican Republic as an elite cigar-producing nation than Tabacalera A Fuente, and its high-profile leader, Carlos (“Carlito”) Fuente, Jr. His Fuente Opus X, possibly the most sought-after non-Cuban cigar in the world, is the epitome of what the Dominican cigar community is working to achieve: a Dominican puro, with an exclusive, home-grown wrapper, famed for its full-bodied spiciness and rich flavor.

Success came after a hard-fought battle for the Fuente family, who migrated from Cuba to Florida during the Spanish-American War. Their cigar company was established in 1912 in Tampa’s Ybor City. Since then, neither factory fires, the U.S. embargo

on Cuba, the Sandinista revolution, or downturns in the cigar market - all of which dealt blows to the beleaguered company - could halt its inevitable growth into an industry leader. Along the way, Carlito has earned the admiration (and in some cases outright envy) of his peers in the Dominican Republic. Still, despite the perks of celebrity that festoon his Santiago office, including an array of baseball paraphernalia autographed by his buddy Sammy Sosa, he has not lost touch with his humble roots. He also is determined to give something back to the country that has been most instrumental in that success.

“There is no question I am an American,” Fuente declares. He has set up the Cigar Family Charitable Foundation, which has been involved the past year in some very worthy, high-profile causes in the U.S. as well as the Dominican Republic. “The Foundation has actually become a large part of my daily responsibilities,” he says, “and in a sense, a big part of my heart is there. We’ve raised a lot of money for the Twin Towers Fund in New York, for the policemen and firemen. Here in the Dominican Republic, we’re building a school, funding medical services, a boys’ and girls’ club. We do a lot of events. We also create cigars that are unique, and donate them to charities as collectibles. It’s inspirational when you create a product that can actually help people.”

It also helps when that product is so universally lauded and desired. The Fuente roster reads like a cigar maven’s Christmas list: The Arturo Fuente and Don Carlos lines; Fuente Hemingway; the entire Ashton line; private labels for Mike’s Cigar, Savinelli, and others; and the aforementioned Opus X. Fuente, however, is quick to point out the advances made not by himself, but by the entire nation. “There was not really a cigar culture here,” he reminisces. “It was more of a tobacco [growing] culture. Then there was this big leap in quality the past few years. It’s come a long, long, way.”



Flanked by his famous family,
Carlos Fuente, Jr. (center)
inspects a bundle.

The young Dominican cigar makers are a diverse lot

Emilio Reyes, while also meticulous in his craftsmanship - he once worked directly for the Cuban government to supervise quality control - seems more comfortable bringing some long-delayed spotlight to the family name with his brands for CTI Tobacco. CTI (abbreviated from its original name, Consolidated Tobacco Industries, after legal wrangles with Altadis), one of the youngest and fastest-growing companies in the Dominican Republic has at its core a formula reminiscent of a cop-buddy movie: the brash, energetic youngster teaming up with the cagey old veteran.

Kristian Baso, a 29-year-old investment fund manager and longtime cigar lover, met Emilio Reyes in a cigar store. The latter's dedication and over 41 years' industry experience convinced Baso that even in this treacherous, post-Boom economy, starting a new cigar company was worth pursuing. For Baso, Reyes's reputation lent his fledgling company legitimacy. "Nobody wants a rich, snot-nosed kid coming onto the block, thinking he can do it better," he admits, "but Emilio and Rolando had a passion and respect for the business. The rest of it is marketing, and you need money to do that. The big boys - General, Altadis, Fuente - took the traditional cigar business to the next level. We're just taking advantage of those same marketing principles. We already knew the quality was there."

CTI is obviously thinking big. Almost right out of the gate came their flagship cigar: a Dominican puro, with wrapper grown from one of Emilio's hundreds of acres of farmland. The Reyes DRG - for Dominican Republic Gold - is the pride and joy of both the Reyeses and Baso, and it is the native-grown wrapper that sets it apart. "Growing wrapper in this country is very expensive," Reyes says. "It is easier to buy it. That is why it's rare: very few people grow wrapper here, so when they do, they are going to use it. They are not going to sell it to anyone." CTI grows wrapper solely for the DRG, and given the expansion of their own portfolio - Pirate's Gold, Reyes Unidos, Flor de Los Reyes, Trader's Reserve, all incorporating filler from Reyes's farms - the company has no plans to add private labels to the workload. An expansion of CTI itself, however, is not out of the question. "The sky's the limit," Baso says, beaming and lighting up a Reyes DRG.

An even younger company than CTI has a man at the helm who has used what he describes as "Rockefeller tactics" to go from supplier to premium cigar manufacturer. As the end of the cigar boom drove many companies to liquidation, Luis Tomas Mendez bought tobacco inventory and cigar factories for fire-sale prices and began pumping out inexpensive cigars for eager distributors. He reinvested the profits to build his La Caya brand, an optimistic entry into the crowded premium cigar market. Is it going to be an uphill battle, I ask him, to stand out from the pack? "For me, it is a challenge," he agrees. "I don't need 100 years, like Leon Jimenes or Fuente. I think when you make a good cigar that smokes well, people will trust you. I don't see it as competing with anyone. I just see it as doing my part." Some would say he's doing more than that: while not yet jumping into the Dominican puro sweepstakes, Mendez is using his vast tobacco resources to create four different wrappers for La Caya: Nicaraguan Habana 2000, Brazilian maduro, Connecticut shade from Ecuador, and Indonesian Java. For U.S. smokers' widely diverse tastes, it would seem he's got the bases covered.

Victor Sinclair, a company that has bought Mendez's tobacco, has upped the ante even more on the American craze for new wrappers. Jose Dominguez, born into a multi-generational tobacco family, had a career as a veterinarian before the cigarmaking bug bit him around 1995, when he started Victor Sinclair with only six employees. (Company legend also has it that he purchased his factory with prize money from his rooster Harry, a renowned champion in the still-popular Dominican sport of cockfighting.) Along with his brother Rafael, Dominguez grew the company swiftly, introducing the Bohemian brand in the U.S. last year, as well as foraying into the flavored cigar market with Honey Delights. The Bohemians' growing appeal lay in the popularity of their Brazilian maduro and Nicaraguan corajo wrappers. The company's newest line, Revolution, takes it a step further. All four of the new cigars have double wrappers: the Side-winder (Brazilian maduro and Brazilian corajo); Predator (Cameroon and Ecuadorian Connecticut); Hellfire (Connecticut and Brazilian maduro); and Hawkeye (Connecticut Shade and Virgin Sun-Grown). The result is a supremely unique smoke with complex nuances. In contrast to many, Dominguez is not one to obsess over crafting a Dominican puro. "A good cigar maker knows how to blend," he maintains. "Why limit yourself to one country?"

The young Dominican cigar makers are a diverse lot, but their goals seem fairly consistent: Quesada calls them "noble smokes - cigars where the punch is with a velvet glove rather than a naked fist. The glove leaves a nice feeling, whereas bare knuckles just leave a mark on your face ... and scratches in your throat."

