

A Trio of Top Cigars

By the time of the Cuban revolution in 1959, the Toraño family owned and operated 17 farms throughout Cuba. The family grew tobacco for almost all of the great cigar factories there and exported large quantities of tobacco leaf to factories around the world, including the U.S. Carlos Toraño expanded the Toraño family business into growing tobacco in Nicaragua, Mexico and Ecuador. The company now spans four generations, headed up now by the son of Carlos, Charlie Toraño.

Last year, Toraño, based in Miami, took back control of the marketing and distribution of its products, and as of this past June it has taken over Graycliff Cigar's distribution. The company has been busy with this reorganization, but not too busy to come up with some great new cigars.

The Single Region – Serie Jalapa by Toraño is a blend of all tobacco (wrapper, binder and filler) that comes from one growing region, Jalapa, Nicaragua. More specifically, the tobacco comes from the El Estero Farm there. The wrapper is a Criollo 98 covering this Nicaraguan puro. The cigar is rich, flavorful and a little complex with some changes as it's smoked. It has a touch of sweetness characteristic of tobacco grown in Jalapa. The taste is very smooth but with some body that doesn't bite. The cigars are packed tight with tobacco so they should not be over humidified, as the draw will suffer.

Sizes for this cigar are Robusto, 5"x52, Toro Grande, 6"x54, and a Churchill, 7"x50. The MSRP before state and local taxes is \$6.50 to 6.95. The price is exceptional for the product delivered. The distribution is intended to be to brick-and-mortar stores only.

Altadis U.S.A. has been constructing cigars since 1918 and has some very well known products including Montecristo, Romeo y Julieta, H. Upmann, and Trinidad. The company operates production facilities in the Dominican Republic,

Honduras, Puerto Rico, Florida, and Richmond, VA, and has production affiliations in Mexico and Nicaragua.

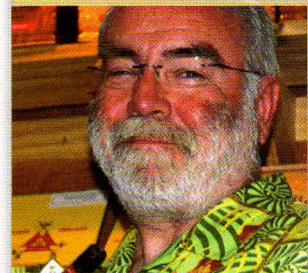
Altadis U.S.A. has also been busy bringing out some new products, including the Warlock cigar, which first debuted last fall. Rolled in Nicaragua, its production is supervised by Omar Ortez, a renowned cigar maker, who created the blend.

The cigars are medium to full bodied and smooth. The smoke is bold with some tastes and flavors detectable but subtle. The fillers are Dominican and Nicaraguan, the binder is Nicaraguan and the wrapper is an Ecuadorian Cubano, dark and oily.

Sizes produced include Belicoso, 6"x54, Churchill, 7"x54, Corona, 5 1/2"x44, Robusto, 4 3/4"x54, and Toro, 6"x54. Prices start at \$5.75 before state and local taxes. Boxes include 21 sticks. Prices are very reasonable for a high end, premium stick. Note that this cigar is not for the beginner; it does pack a punch.

La Gloria Cubana by General Cigar became one of the most popular brands ever created during the cigar boom of 1990s. Originally created by Ernesto Perez-Carrillo in Cuba, the brand varies in its tastes and strengths to please a wide variety of palates. The Artesanos are limited edition blends rolled in special sizes. They commemorate the success of the La Gloria Cubana line in the Dominican Republic. This unusual cigar, the La Gloria Cubana Artesanos de Obelisco, was created as a tribute to the cigar makers at El Credito's "fabrica" in Santiago, Dominican Republic.

It features an Ecuadorian Sumatra wrapper, a Connecticut binder, and a mix of Dominican and Nicaraguan long fillers creating a tasty, mild to medium-bodied taste. Though subtle, many flavors lie underneath, with a bit of spice included. The construction borders on perfect and the draw is excellent. Only the best rollers can do that with this kind of shape. The Obelisco comes only in the size of 5"x44x57. Packaged in a box of 25, the price before state tax and local tax is around \$9 per cigar.**TR**



MIKE SMITH

owned and operated Cigarista cigar shop at the beach in Redington Shores, Fla., for four years. He has smoked cigars for much longer and has written on many topics for Tobacco Retailer and elsewhere. If you have any cigar suggestions or questions, send an e-mail to joemikesmith@earthlink.net.