



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.

When the Temperatures Drop, Grab a Cigar



Winter has arrived and I can tell as I start this column in Atlanta at 70 degrees and fly to Denver to finish it where they've just had the first snow and a 16-degree night. It's time to find a good cigar shop for the winter if you don't have one to enjoy year round. They're your best choice to try new items before you invest in a box, even if it isn't with them.

The three cigars covered in this issue are the JFR, the Gurkha Ninja, and the La Gloria Cubana Serie N.

Tropical Tobacco DBA Tabacalera Tropical is the company that manufactures the JFR, which stands for "Just for Retailers." The company is one of the largest tobacco producers in Central America. Their headquarters and production facilities are in Esteli, Nicaragua and their U.S. offices are in Doral, FL. They grow Cuban-seed tobacco using Cuban traditional methods.

This medium-bodied cigar is a great value. It's not the prettiest stick you'll ever see. What it does have is lots of good taste. That taste is wood and spice for the most part. The draw is good and the burn is reasonable, especially for such a modestly priced premium cigar. The blend appears to be all Nicaraguan including some Cuban seed Corojo 1999 though no one is saying for sure. It does have a bite that gets more pronounced the further down it's smoked.

Sizes available include the Robusto, 5 ½" x 50, Piramide, 6 ¼" x 52, Super Toro, 6 ½" x 52, Titan, 6" x 60 and a 770 L.E., 7" x 70. The Maduro version has the first four sizes and not the L.E. They are all packaged at 50 to a box. The prices run about \$4.5 to \$6 before state and local taxes.

Kaizad Hansotia founded the Gurkha Cigar Company. His family made fine watches, specializing in luxury timepieces. While on vacation, Hansotia met a Portuguese man making and selling cigars. Hansotia bought the entire inventory and brand, Gurkha, for \$149 to have

special gifts to give to his best watch customers. Hansotia met cigar maker Charlie Toraño and the company began the rise to its current fame. Hansotia consciously attempted to create a luxury product, a "boutique brand."

They make small amounts of high quality and carefully constructed products. With a wide variety of products, some incredible, they also have a wide variety of price points leaning toward the high end. His Majesty's Reserve brand has 18-year-old tobacco infused with an entire bottle of Louis XIII de Rémy Martin for a box of 20 cigars that retail for \$15,000 per box, the most expensive cigars ever made.

For such a history, the Ninja cigars are practically a give away at the \$5-\$6 range before state and local taxes. The Ninja is a medium to full bodied, Maduro wrapper cigar with a complex blend. It's a rich cigar with lots of flavors such as wood, chocolate, coffee and other sweetness. Inside that Brazilian Maduro wrapper is a Dominican binder enclosing a blend of Nicaraguan filler tobaccos. The Ninja starts out medium bodied and is at full strength by the time you reach the second third of the smoke. It finishes strong but not harsh though a little less sweet toward the end. The draw and burn are both excellent.



The sizes available for the Ninja are as the Spike, 4.5" x 48, the Knife, 5" x 55, a Torpedo, 6" x 52, a Churchill, 7" x 50, and the XO, 6" x 60. They come in a box of 20. They have received ratings as high as 91, outstanding for this price point.

The General Cigar Company is celebrating its 51st anniversary this year and keeps coming up with winners. The La Gloria Cubana Serie N is from the Team La Gloria Cubana, Yuri Guillen (General Cigar Dominicana's production manager of manufacturing) together with Michael Giannini and Rick Rodriguez. The cigar is a sister brand to the critically acclaimed La Gloria Cubana Serie R collection and was released in October of 2010. It may be slightly milder than the R but may be a bit smoother as well.

Proprietary Nicaraguan tobaccos are combined with La Gloria's signature Ecuadoran Sumatra wrappers. This offering is spicy and full-bodied as well as balanced. Lots of taste and flavor run the full length of this stick. These are for more experienced smokers as they are too heavy for beginners.

Serie N cigars are available in four sizes with a price range of \$5.95 to \$7.00 per cigar before state and local taxes. The cigars are packaged in eye-catching red hexagon-shaped boxes of 24. Four sizes are available including the Generoso, 5.75" x 49, the Glorioso, 6.5" x 58, the JSB, 5.5" x 54 and the Rojo, 6.5" x 46.

I look forward to reviewing these smokes for you and have written this column for over four years now. If you have any suggestions or questions, send an email to mike@gulfshorewriter.com. Long ashes, dear readers. **TR**