

*Perelman's Pocket Cyclopedia of Havana Cigars: 3rd edition*

**SMOKING AND STORING**

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**5.01 BUYER BEWARE!**

Havana cigars are well known as luxury items and as such, are sometimes copied by those seeking to make a quick sale and defraud the buyer. To ensure against this to the extent possible, always look for the following indicia of genuine Havana cigars:

- ▶ The seal of the Cuban government warranting the cigars as genuine Havanas. This seal, printed in a medium green color on a white background, has been affixed to all genuine Havanas since July 16, 1912.

The current design was adopted in 1931, but changed for additional security in 1999 by the addition of a serial number in red and an ultraviolet-visible logo.

- ▶ Check the bottom of the box for inscriptions:
  - “Cubatabaco” for cigars made from 1985-94;
  - “Habanos, S.A.” for cigars made from 1994-on;
  - “Hecho en Cuba” since 1960; imprinting prior to that year was almost always in English: “Made in Havana-Cuba.”
  - “Hecho in Cuba” plus – since 1989 – “Totalmente a mano” for handmade cigars. Beginning in 2002, an additional “TC” stamp indicates “tripa corta” or short-filler tobacco was used.
  - “Hecho in Cuba” plus “Hecho a mano” for machine-bunched and hand-finished cigars.
  - Date and factory codes began appearing – in various styles and colors – in 1985.
- ▶ Look for the “Habanos” sticker and the stylized tobacco leaf on the top of boxes produced in 1994 and later.
- ▶ A holographic sticker is attached to all Habanos products authorized for export in 2003 and later.

Inside the box, examine the cigars and note that the position of all of the bands should be identical on each cigar. Moreover, that the color shade of all of the cigars should be identical.

Your best bet: buy from an established tobacconist, fully licensed to carry genuine Havana cigars!

**5.02 CHOOSING YOUR FAVORITES**

There are 33 currently-produced Havana brands and others which are still circulating, even though not presently in production.

There is a full range of strengths in the handmade models, as reviewed in chapter 4 on Havana

brands and sizes. The machine-made models tend to be strong in general, due to their smaller ring gauge (44 is the largest) and their tendency to burn hotter. Because of this, machine-made cigars are much appreciated in some windy, outdoor settings, such as for golf or while yachting.

A much-discussed aspect of all cigars is the wrapper. Although only about two percent of a large cigar by weight, wrappers are sometimes credited with up to 60 percent of the taste! In truth, Cuban factory experts are clear that the filler and binder — the blend of tobaccos and not any single leaf such as the wrapper — makes up *93 percent* of the overall taste. But the wrapper is responsible for the taste on the lips, and since a darker wrapper has more sugar present, a darker wrapper will taste sweeter prior to lighting. In addition, a darker wrapper will result in a lighter shade of ash thanks to the additional oils present.

### 5.03 CARE AND STORAGE

Like any agricultural product, cigars are perishable. With minimal care, however, cigars can be well kept for a long, long time.

To be properly maintained, cigars must be humidified. This can be achieved with an expensive humidor, or a simple sponge judiciously placed inside a well-sealed box so that it does not drip on the cigars inside. The standard notice that comes with all Havanas notes:

*These Havana Cigars have been made with leaves of the finest tobacco in the world. To be fully enjoyed, store them in a humidor. Keep them away from products with strong odor and under correct conditions of temperature (16°C-18°C) and humidity (65-70%).*

Cigars kept in these conditions can last for a very long time; note that there are many marvelous Havanas still being enjoyed from before the formation of Cubatabaco in 1960! Cigars which age well are most often those with strong flavors such as Bolivar, Cohiba, Partagas, Punch and Romeo y Julieta.

Aging of these brands will result in a mellowing in the strength of the cigars as the fermentation process continues. During this period, the internal oils of the leaves will migrate towards the exterior and will leave the wrappers oily and aromatic. For the best results, the cigars should be kept in bundles in a cedar box.

For cigars which have suffered from poor keeping, the simple antidote is better maintenance:

- ▶ Dry cigars which exhibit no breaks in the wrapper can be re-humidified by being placed in a proper humidor of 70 percent humidity for four to five days. Under no circumstances should cigars be placed in a refrigerator; placing cigars in a very wet environment will cause them to “explode” by the pressure exerted by the filler and binder which will absorb this moisture against the wrapper.
- ▶ Cigars which are too wet can be revived by drying them in an environment of less than 60 percent for a few hours or a day at the most.
- ▶ Cigars which show white mold, also known as “plume” should simply be wiped clean with a barely-damp sponge or a soft cloth. If the mold has turned green, the cigars are ruined.

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- ▶ Cigars which show holes or perforations are undoubtedly ruined, thanks to the appetite of the tobacco beetle *Serricone*.

Occasionally, handmade cigars will show a knot or tightness which hurts the draw; these cigars are improperly made - if possible, turn them back to your tobacconist.

Most of all, enjoy your Havanas. After all, the proof is in the smoking!