

# Cigar Snob

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2016

*City of Angels*

CARLOS FUENTE, SR. TRIBUTE P.50

L.A. TRAVEL P.39

CEDRIC THE ENTERTAINER P.91

US \$ 4.95 / CAN \$ 5.95



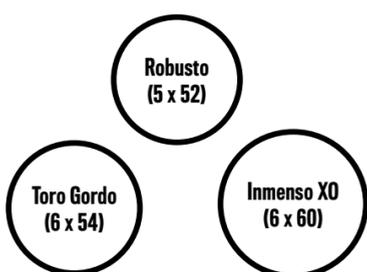
# BRAND BREAKDOWN

## TORO GORDO



AVAILABLE IN 4 SIZES

### TOP 3 SHOWN



## LA ROSA DE SANDIEGO CONNECTICUT

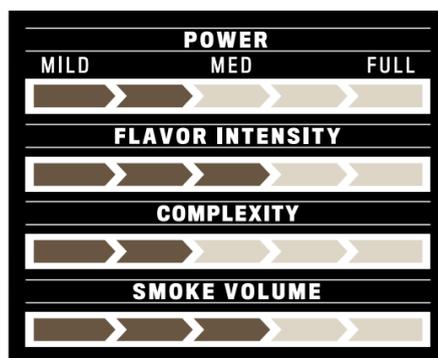
|         |                    |
|---------|--------------------|
| COUNTRY | Nicaragua          |
| WRAPPER | Ecuador            |
| BINDER  | Ecuador            |
| FILLER  | Nicaragua          |
| PRICE   | \$ 6.70 - \$ 11.00 |

### Damian Tapanes President of American Caribbean Cigars

Can you tell us how American Caribbean Cigars got its start?

The need to start a cigar factory in Estelí, Nicaragua grew out of necessity. We operate a cigar store in Miami and it's a store that sells a lot of bundles. So in 2006 we started our own factory to produce bundled cigars for our store. We quickly grew from making bundles to making cigars for other companies when we started working with the Toraños. We started with the Toraño Master, which was the first premium cigar we made. And it sold incredibly well and received a lot of praise from the magazines; if I'm not mistaken for a 4-year stretch it was Toraño's number 1 selling brand.

We continued making cigars for Toraño; the Master Maduro, the Salutem, the Vault, and the Sam Lecia. All of these blends came about as the Toraños kept seeing the quality of our work and the variety of blends that we were developing. And as a result of that relationship we were introduced to Gurkha. And we've been making a lot of cigars for Gurkha like the Royal Challenge Connecticut and Maduro, the Heritage Habano and Maduro, the Rogue, the East India Classic: Havana Blend, the Red Witch, and the Cellar Reserve Platinum just to name some. We make over 200 different premium blends for Gurkha. And we also produce cigars for Sindicato, Don Gonzalez, Cordoba



y Morales, CZ Cigars, Rock-a-Feller Cigars, and more.

And in the middle of all of that, you launched La Rosa de Sandiego at the 2015 IPCPR trade show?

Yes. We launched it last year but we had been working on it for quite some time. A couple of years earlier I was working on the blend and we came up with something that was good. We finished it, let it rest in the aging room, and started packaging it. But before we started selling it I decided to pull the plug and start over.

What happened?

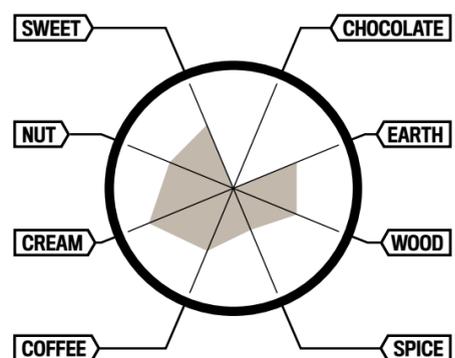
The cigars were good but they weren't memorable. If we were going to finally release our own line of premium cigars, they had to be memorable. So we went back to the drawing board and kept improving the product until we arrived at the three blends we released at the 2015 trade show, the Connecticut, Habano, and Maduro.

Now let's focus a bit on the Connecticut blend. Can you put into words the kind of cigar you were trying to make with the La Rosa de Sandiego Connecticut?

The idea behind that blend was to have a marked difference from the kind of Connecticut wrapped cigar you find in the market today, which is very light and mild. We wanted a Connecticut cigar with a lot of flavor and a little bit of power, a strength level approaching the medium range. We wanted it to be a cigar that you can smoke any time of day, not just a "morning cigar." It is a cigar that you can certainly enjoy in the morning but also after lunch or even dinner because it has just enough power.

Your offices are inside of your cigar shop so you interact with customers quite a bit. What sort of comments do you hear about the Connecticut?

Not only in our store but when we visit stores all over the country, the first thing consumers can appreciate is how smooth and clean it is. It is a flavorful Connecticut but it is a clean smoke that doesn't dirty your palate and has no harshness on your throat. You can smoke more than one and it doesn't burn out your palate.



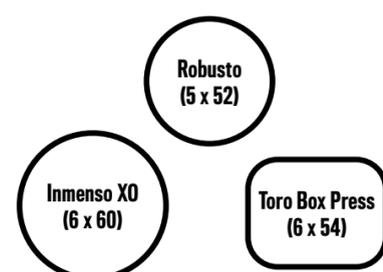
# BRAND BREAKDOWN

## ROBUSTO



AVAILABLE IN 5 SIZES

### TOP 3 SHOWN



## LA ROSA DE SANDIEGO HABANO

|         |                              |
|---------|------------------------------|
| COUNTRY | Nicaragua                    |
| WRAPPER | Ecuador                      |
| BINDER  | Ecuador                      |
| FILLER  | Nicaragua & USA/Pennsylvania |
| PRICE   | \$ 6.75 - \$ 11.00           |

### Damian Tapanes President of American Caribbean Cigars

Your cigar factory has developed hundreds of blends for other companies. How is La Rosa de Sandiego different?

Well, La Rosa de Sandiego is MY baby. What I mean by that is that when cigar companies ask us to make a cigar for them, they are asking for a cigar with a certain profile, a certain price point, and a certain finish. But in this case I am the customer and I want certain things from the cigar and to achieve that we have to do things a little differently. For example, I want the fillers in the La Rosa de Sandiego to be sweeter and that requires an additional fermentation. That added fermentation not only makes the tobacco a little sweeter but it also produces a cleaner smoke. That's why the La Rosa de Sandiego cigars have no bitterness or harshness whatsoever. Also, the rollers in our factory who make La Rosa de Sandiego only make that cigar.

You talk about this very personal process that makes La Rosa de Sandiego different but how do you maintain the level of quality and personalization while you are away?

First off I spend the majority of my time down in Estelí, no matter what, you have to be there. But the fact is that we have an incredible team at the factory led by Juan José Hernández Valdez, who everyone calls "Lolito." He was the first person I hired when we started the factory. Lolito is a fourth-generation tobacco man from Cuba who had already been working in Nicaragua so he was familiar with how things work down there. He's not only extremely knowledgeable but he takes

great pride in his work. He and I work on every single blend together.

Let's get into the La Rosa de Sandiego Habano. What kind of cigar were you trying to make when you set out to develop that blend?

We wanted a cigar with a very Nicaraguan flavor profile. A cigar that was flavorful, had a good amount of power, but that was balanced by its sweetness. The key to the Habano blend is the interplay between the Ometepe, Jalapa, and Pennsylvania Broadleaf tobaccos in the filler. Together they provide a combination of strength, flavor intensity, and sweetness that are the essence of that cigar. The wrapper is also a major component. It is an Ecuadorean Habano 2000 that we age for more than 2 years. We work the wrapper until it is exactly how we want it. It needs to have an even color, a good amount of oils, an even burn, and excellent flavor.

You say you ferment it two years but how do you know exactly when it is ready?

The great thing about tobacco is that it's like the neighborhood snitch. It tells you everything! Throughout all of its phases, tobacco tells you when it's ready to go from one phase to the next. There is no guesswork. When it's time to prep the seedbeds, when it's time to do each priming, when it's time to transfer the leaves to the curing barn, when it's time to bring them down and start the selection process, when it's time to put them in "pilónes," and then in the fermentation process it tells you when it's ready. You cannot accelerate the process. With other types of products you can accelerate certain things but with tobacco you have to wait, it'll tell you when.

What about the factory? What are you doing in that phase to ensure the quality is up to your standards?

For La Rosa de Sandiego we only use the "entubado" method of bunching. This is a more time consuming way of preparing the bunch where each leaf is rolled into a tube-like form, then each little tube is bunched and held together by the binder. And for the head we again use a traditional Cuban method and apply a triple cap. In La Rosa de Sandiego we truly set out to make the best cigar that we can make.

