

SMOKE AND SPIRITS

PAIRING CIGARS AND SPIRITS
TO CREATE AN ADVENTURE
FOR THE SENSES

BY SAMUEL SPURR

Enjoying a premium cigar is, for some, the ultimate indulgence when celebrating, while for others it is a regular pleasure suited to simply pondering life. Finding the beverage that perfectly complements a fine cigar for whatever the occasion is an enjoyable pursuit. And when a good pairing is made, the fusion truly provides an adventure for the senses.

What to look for:

Although a mojito and a cigar sounds like a great match (and it may well be if you're on a beach in Cuba), I've found mojitos to be too acidic and dilute my palate after every sip. Refreshing? You bet. But great with a cigar? Not even close — unless, of course, you're lucky enough to be on a beach in Cuba. For this reason white spirit-based cocktails sometimes don't cut it with cigars, and so premium aged spirits — neat or on the rocks — make better partners. Cognac, rum and single malts are usually a safe bet, especially when escaping a Canadian winter.

When pairing cigars with spirits, everyone's palate differs so this is no definitive guide. As a cigar lover, I enjoy matching a spirit to my cigar and not the other way around — I much prefer being able to taste the nuances, which are often only very slight, of my cigar than my drink. For this reason I appreciate cognac, rum or whisky that complements a cigar's flavour. Some spirits will overpower your palate, making your cigar redundant in the flavour stakes, so finding a libation that plays a supporting role to your cigar is paramount.

The (enjoyable) pursuit of matching cigars and spirits:

The Cohiba Robusto is a classic Cuban cigar and shows notes of light cedar, grass and hints of pepper, and stands up well with Martell XO, which doesn't overpower the Cohiba. The fruit and wood profile of the Martell suits the Cohiba to a tee, as does the light spice the Martell provides on the back of the palate. Another classic Cuban robusto, the Partagas Serie D No.4 is regarded as a medium to full-bodied cigar. The Partagas' cedar, spice and pepper flavours produce a heady, complex smoke and because



of this, I'm hesitant to recommend cognac. Rum lovers would best try pairing the "D4" with Havana Club's Selección de Maestros. The Havana Club's earthiness and slight tobacco notes make it a great match — akin to closing your eyes and imagining yourself amongst the tobacco fields of Cuba's famed tobacco growing region, Pinar del Rio. That said, if cognac is your go-to tippie, Meukow XO is a good fit. The Meukow is stronger than other XOs and has hints of toffee, while underlying cedar flavours make it intriguing.

Habanos SA has created regional editions of Cuban cigars for specific markets for the past decade. In 2007 they released the Bolívar Edición Regional Canada. It is a lighter style of Bolívar, which is traditionally known as a medium-bodied cigar, exhibiting a combination of hay, leather and grassy flavours. A slight citrus zing is also evident — matching very well to the candied apple, peach and woody notes evident in Martell XO. For rum lovers, it would be best to try the Flor de Cana 18. This Nicaraguan rum is lighter than Havana Club's Selección de Maestros and plays an Oscar-winning Best Supporting Actor role to the Bolívar.

Canadian Paul Stulac began his career in cigars as a premium cigar merchant in Halifax. He launched his own line of boutique cigars and recently introduced three new lines, one of which is the White Blinding Light. The White Blinding Light is a full-bodied taste explosion with lashings of strong pepper from the start.

Continued flavours of roasted nuts and peppercorn throughout quickly demonstrate that it would run riot over the elegance of any premium cognac. Consisting of a Habano wrapper from Ecuador, Sumatran binder and Nicaraguan filler, the White Blinding Light paired beautifully with the Dalmore Cigar Malt Reserve whisky. Drawn from casks of three types; American white oak ex-bourbon casks, Matusalem oloroso sherry butts and premier cru Cabernet Sauvignon wine barriques, the Dalmore has loads of spice and a strong but sweet zing on the front palate. This can easily drown out light or medium-bodied cigars, but complements the strength of the Paul Stulac very well.

Cognac aficionados who are newcomers to the world of cigars should seek out light to medium-bodied cigars to start with. Those well-acquainted with Hennessy and Remy Martin will find God of Fire's Serie B 2011 and Davidoff's Special R pair well. A smooth cigar that presents spice, leather, an aged "dustiness" and some floral hints, the God of Fire, created using an Ecuadorian Sun Grown wrapper and Dominican filler and binder, suits both Hennessy and Remy Martin's XO expressions. The Remy Martin just edges out the Hennessy when paired with the God of Fire. The Hennessy's soft fruit is appealing, but the Remy Martin's burnt fruit and soft spiciness make it a great match. Conversely, the Hennessy's soft fruit and lightness on the palate, when compared to the Remy Martin, goes very well

with Davidoff's Special R. Produced in the Dominican Republic the Special R robusto provides elegant honey, espresso and caramel flavours that won't burden a newcomer's senses.

Everyone's palates and preferences are personal. However, discovering the best cigar and spirit pairing is a very enjoyable pastime, so enjoy the pursuit! 🍷

Samuel Spurr is an Australian freelance writer, who specializes in cigars.



Davidoff Special R

PERFECT PAIRINGS



God of Fire Serie B 2011 or Davidoff Special R with Remy Martin XO

Partagas Serie D No. 4 with Havana Club Seleccion de Maestros



White Blinding Light with Dalmore Cigar Malt Reserve whisky



Cohiba Robusto or Bolivar Edicion Regional Canada with Martell XO



Partagas Serie D No. 4 with Meukow XO