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Creating History: Cuba's Regional Editions

SAMUEL SPURR EXAMINES THE TIME AND EXPERTISE INVESTED INTO SOME OF THE STAND-OUT REGIONAL EDITION CIGARS FROM THE PAST FEW YEARS.



and Frankau said. "Current and future trends of brands and vitolas are examined, as is how well previous UK Regional Editions have been received. Naturally if there have been any Regional Editions from other parts of the world that have caught someone's attention they are also discussed," McGhee said.

Along with official guidelines, distributors pay close attention to their fan base to deliver well-received regional editions. A keen understanding and appreciation of the market ensures we plan appropriate Regional Editions - so much so that Italian cigar fans help our the parameters, Stefano Minoia of Italian distributor Diadema s.p.a said.

"Historically we have proposed alternating vitolas, from large ring gauges to others with a smaller ring gauge. Diadema has always been known as a distributor that devotes a lot of attention to the search for details that are able to distinguish our Regional Editions from others, especially when it comes to packaging and historical brand rings," Minoia said.

Regarding Italia's 2015 and 2011 Regional Editions, Minoia notes that what has been most appreciated about them is that Diadema s.p.a exclusively recovered a historical brand that has not been in production since 1989: La Escepción. "We were the only distributor in the world to obtain permission from Habanos S.A. to do a recovery operation of this type. Even today many collectors are searching for these two now unavailable Regional Editions."

McGhee shares Minoia's sentiments, stating that it's extremely

selection of marcas and vitolas.

"There are rules we must adhere to when submitting a request for a Regional Edition, so we sit down and begin a discussion process," Jimmy McGhee, Head of Communications and Training for Hunters

THE EDICIÓN REGIONAL OR Regional Edition cigar concept, introduced by Habanos S.A. in 2005, comprises limited production cigars made exclusively for a regional market each year. Cuba's worldwide premium brands are excluded from the concept, bringing well-deserved attention to lesser known brands such as Diplomaticos, Por Larrañaga, and Rafael González whose contribution to cigar history and culture should be celebrated.

Part of the attraction of Regional Editions are the cigars' vitolas, many of which are being used within the marca for the very first time, Craig Peterson of Australian cigar accessory retailer Club Vitola said. "Fans of particular marcas appreciate different vitolas being produced that aren't part of the brand's regular production. This, and the fact that they are a very limited release, ensure they are quickly snapped up by cigar collectors."

Official distributors must follow certain Habanos S.A. guidelines to request Regional Editions and as a result, much thought and research goes in to the identification and



important to never lose sight of the fact they are producing cigars for today's market. The Hunters and Frankau team put a lot of effort into every single cigar they request and try to listen to what their customers' requirements are. "Every request we submit to Habanos S.A. is clearly thought out and has a logical, often historical, justification behind it. Nothing is done on a whim. A lot of time and effort is put into these decisions and we have a great deal of fun in the process," McGhee said.

GRAN BRETAÑA

The 2015 Ramon Allones Hunters & Frankau Aniversario 225 was exceptional in many ways. It sold out very quickly, which helps, but it was also a great project to be part of, McGhee notes. "From the selection of the vitola, to the fact we had them rolled and shipped two years

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With over two centuries of history and records to draw from, Hunters and Frankau likes to use these references if it is possible and relevant to do so. "Whether it is with the re-creation of an antique band such as the Por Larrañaga Magnifico, a packaging detail, such as the popper stud used to secure the ribbon on the box of the 2009 Punch Serie D'Oro No.1, or even revisiting a brand no longer producing tripa larga, totalmente a mano cigars such as the La Flor de Cano in 2010 and again in 2013, we like to use history as a reference and inspiration, rather than be held back by it."

Below are some memorable recently released Regional Editions:

ITALIA

The Italian Edición Regional which has been most successful not only in Italy but around the world over the last five years is 2015's La Escepción Don José. "4000 boxes of 25 cigars were snapped up, in part due to the success of the release of the 2011 La Escepción Selectos Finos which only involved 2000 boxes of 25 units," Minoia said. He notes that Italian Regional Editions have always been a huge success and have sold out in a short time. A striking example is the most recent Italian regional edition, the Flor de Cano Casanova, which sold out in just 60 days.

I recently had the opportunity to taste the Italia 2014 Edición Regional Ramón



La Escepcion, a previously recovered brand had not been in production since 1989





Diplomaticos Bushido was a special release size No. 109 a 50 ring gauge x 7.2 inch vitola



The recent Italian edition, the Flor de Cano Cassanova sold out in 60 days

ahead of release, to the commissioning of 225 humidors, each holding four SLB boxes of 25 cigars, to the bespoke Havana Club rum we had made exclusively for us, to the wonderful party we held in Belgrave Square, we worked very hard to make that cigar special and it was. It was a special cigar for a special occasion and one that is hard to beat, thankfully it was also a delicious smoke and they're ageing extremely well," McGhee said.

On a personal note, McGhee's highlight was the 2014 Por Larrañaga Sobresalientes.

The Por Larrañaga blend is distinct, refined and slightly sweet on the palate. "Adorned with the gold band recreated from an original over 100 years old, they look extraordinary."

Tasting a 2014 Por Larrañaga Sobresalientes recently, the 53 ring gauge x 6 inch Robusto Extra begins with a very delicate dried flower aroma that combines with subtle brown sugar and cinnamon flavours. Light black pepper notes increase towards the middle third and are joined by slight lemon zest and

a citrus zing as the cigar hits its stride in the middle third. The Sobresalientes concludes with some almond aromas and increased spiciness in the form of a green chilli and red pepper combination. A real aromatic treat!

ASIA PACIFICO

Released in April 2015, Asia Pacific's 2014 Edición Regional, the Diplomáticos Bushido was a new special release size No. 109, a 50 ring gauge x 7.2 inch vitola that captured attention around the globe.

Created to mark the 400th anniversary of the first Japanese person to set foot in Cuba, The Bushido honours samurai Tsunenaga Hasekura. As one of the rare Catholics in Japan at the time, he was the first Japanese Ambassador to The Vatican. On his way to Rome he stopped in Havana where a statue of the samurai remains, surrounded by stones from his home town's Sendai Castle pointing towards Japan.

"In October 2014, a Japanese delegation went to Cuba and many celebrations happened in Havana, including the launch of the Bushido to the Japanese delegation," Norio Hattori, Pacific Cigar Company's Regional Marketing Director said. "The 109 size was a first for our market and this Regional Edition was, and still is, very successful."

The first third offers subtle flavours, but by the middle of the cigar, the flavours

and aromas really ramp up. Dried flowers, lavender, cedar and even some citrus zing make this a very interesting cigar and one that is increasingly hard to find.

EMIRATOS ÁRABES UNIDOS

The Bolivar Emirati, a 2015 Edición Regional for the United Arab Emirates, was the third release for the UAE by distributors Phoenicia Trading A.A. and is an Edmundo sized vitola measuring 52 ring gauge x 5.3 inches. It starts with thick black pepper, almond, malt and earthiness before progressing to very noticeable nuttiness in the middle third. The second half features an abundance of delicious cayenne pepper, cumin spice, and almond aromas.

"The Sobresalientes concludes with some almond aromas and increased spiciness in the form of a green chilli and red pepper combination."