



Story by **Samuel Spurr**

Samuel is a freelance writer regularly published in *Cigar Journal* and doesn't require much arm-twisting to light a cigar. His blog *Inlumino Cigar News Australia* keeps Aussie cigar aficionados up to date with the local cigar scene, and he recently took the 'Seed to Smoke' Perdomo Cigars Tour and penned his experiences for *Bartender's* June issue.

From seed to smoke

NICARAGUA HAZE

Thankfully the two hour flight from Miami to Managua, the capital of Nicaragua, is pretty much over before it begins and upon meeting Nick Perdomo, owner of Perdomo Cigars, we casually skip through Nicaraguan customs. Our bus is loaded up, Perdomo cigars and Cerveza Tona beers are passed around and the good times begin as we commence the two hour journey north to Esteli; the gateway to the Nicaraguan cigar industry.

Tabacalera Perdomo and many other well-known non-Cuban cigar brands are based in Esteli. The town was built on the back of exiled Cuban families keen to start again in a country with excellent terroir. With volcanic soil and a near perfect water table, Esteli, and Nicaragua in general, is very much a tobacco grower's paradise, with many critics claiming Nicaragua's terroir most closely resembles that of the Vuelta Abajo, Cuba's famed growing region.



Cathedral of Santiago Managua Nicaragua on Plaza of the Revolution



From Seed to Smoke

'From seed to smoke' is often proclaimed in the industry, but this is exactly what is delivered on a tour that showcases every part of Perdomo's cigar-making facility. It includes the seedling greenhouse, the fields, curing barns, box factory, rolling floor, ageing room and sorting tables. Tours run twice a week from January through to March and Nick is proud of the level of detail his tour provides. "On other tours, visitors spend time watching cigar rolling and that's pretty much it," he explained, "so I think we provide a lot of 'bang for your buck' on our tour."

Bartender readers would appreciate the time and care that goes into fermentation and distillation processes. However Nick claims that winemaking is child's play compared to making premium cigars. "There

are 3000 steps involved in producing cigars," he states, "and the quality of my cigars begins with quality seed." While many other cigar makers buy their leaf from brokers, Perdomo is one of only a few manufacturers to grow their own tobacco.

Plantations in Esteli, and those in the Condega and Jalapa Valleys further north, supply all of the tobacco required to create Perdomo's all-Nicaraguan cigar blends. "It's not just about the finished cigar," reasons Nick, "it's most important to have the right tobacco. I was tired of buying tobacco from brokers and not getting what I wanted."

The process toward a premium offering

When harvested, leaves from each site are brought to Perdomo's 14

"Bourbon fans will appreciate that all Perdomo wrapper leaf spends time in ex-bourbon French Oak barrels supplied by Blanton's bourbon."

acre production facility (aptly named 'El Monstro' because of its size) for curing, fermentation and ageing, before eventual rolling and further ageing. The curing process, which takes place in a wooden barn the size of a football field, allows the leaves to dry out naturally. Once the curing process is complete, the leaves are taken next door to a similar sized warehouse for fermentation.

Leaves are arranged into pilones, which, through their size and bulk, produce pressure and generate heat to begin the fermentation process. Once the pilones are dismantled, the fermentation process grinds to a halt. Leaves are then sorted prior to being baled for ageing. The baling process exerts just the right amount of pressure on the leaves to promote ageing without continuing the fermentation process.



The growing fields

During the growing season over 2000kg of tobacco are baled up each day. "Each bale is accompanied with information about the type of leaf, which farm it is from, and the baling date," Nick explains. "Over the course of years, the team and I open and inspect each bale to decide which is ready to be rolled into cigars." Bourbon fans will appreciate that all Perdomo wrapper leaf spends time in ex-bourbon oak barrels supplied by Blanton's bourbon. "This additional resting period for wrapper leaf allows for a very minor additional fermentation, but more importantly helps seal flavour and colour."

Cigar rollers at Tabacalera Perdomo produce 375 cigars per day. This may sound like a lot, but rollers at other factories are expected to produce up to 500 cigars per day and as with many things in his operation,



Nick Perdomo - owner Tabacalera Perdomo cigars



Cigar leaves hanging to dry



Leaves hanging - now dry



Leaves stacked into Pilones to begin fermenting

Nick prefers quality over quantity. "Out of 80,000 cigars rolled each day, less than 100 cigars are turned back due to poor construction," Nick proudly states. With stiff competition literally down the road in the form of Padron Cigars, My Father Cigars and Joya de Nicaragua, a particular cigar's blend of binder, filler and wrapper leaf is known by only a handful of employees. "The factory can make five different blends a day with tobacco for a particular blend given to rollers in coded bags," Nick explains. "This is done so that rollers who might end up working for a competitor will never have known what our blends are."

Cuban heritage and a global outlook

Nick's late father Nicholas Snr. and grandfather Silvio worked in the Cuban tobacco industry before the revolution, and the Tabacalera maintains a strong Cuban heritage thanks to two current senior team members. The head of the Perdomo production facility, Sarah Gonzalez, was a former manager in Cuba's H. Upmann factory and knew both Silvio and Nicholas Snr. in Cuba. Aristides Garcia, a legendary Cuban tobacco grower from the Vuelta Abajo region, joined Nick in Esteli twelve years ago. Fitter than the oxen who plough the fields, he's worked with tobacco since he was a young boy and has provided Nick with great insight into all facets of tobacco growing and curing.

Supporting Perdomo's global outlook is the newly created online forum WorldofPerdomo.com promoting the Perdomo cigar story and fostering Perdomo's global fan base. "We know Perdomo has a huge global network of devotees and

WorldofPerdomo.com is bringing them all together," notes Jason Nelson, Perdomo Cigars Australia's managing director. "It is great getting those who know a great cigar together online and subsequently fostering real world connections."

Cigars are labour intensive works of art. The Perdomo Cigars, Seed to Smoke tour experience in Esteli confirmed this. The experience providing an insight into both the art and science of cigar making and I have developed a new found respect for premium hand-made cigars and the countless number of people involved. 🍷