

cigars

To say that cigars have been in the news recently would be an understatement. Of course, for aficionados, the stories and jokes can grow tiresome. So instead of presidential peccadilloes, let us focus on the reasons to love cigars and what we are supposed to do with them — smoke and enjoy.

Cigar smoking is a symbol of status in the 1990s. And that status carries guidelines, etiquette and a necessary background. So as you head for the sun and fun of the GCSAA Show in Orlando, take some time out for one of life's best pleasures. If you are unsure what to buy, then take this page as a cheat sheet and let the puffing begin.

Cigars wafted to America in 1762, when Israel Putnam, a British Army officer visiting Cuba, brought cigars back to his Connecticut home. Over the last three centuries, cigars have cemented themselves as symbolic of stature, refinement and the good life, as well as having transformed into a multi-billion dollar industry.

If you are a newcomer to the pleasure of a good smoke and are in Orlando, slide over to Art's Premium Cigars and ask for Joe Sostre, the tobacconist who can tell you everything you need to know about cigars: how to cut, light and smoke them and what type of spirit goes best with each cigar.

Sostre suggests that the following cigars are good anytime:

La Gloria Cubana — Full-bodied flavor at a relatively cheap price (\$5 to \$10) depending on the gauge size (circumference) and the length. Experts say the La Gloria Cubana is as close as you can get



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to the flavor, texture and quality of Cuban cigars, which are, unfortunately, still illegal in the United States. The cigars are made with a tasty blend of Dominican, Brazilian and American tobaccos. They are perfect after work with a glass of cognac or brandy.

Padron — At \$3 to \$5, the Padron label is an excellent starter cigar. Made with Nicaraguan tobacco, Sostre calls the Padron an exquisite smoke. And if you enjoy the lower-end Padrons, step up to the Anniversary Series — more pricey, but even more tasteful. Enjoy a Padron with the sweetness of port wine.

OpusX — A spectacular round or a big promotion calls for the best, even if it costs \$20 to \$37. The esteemed Arturo Fuente Company in the Dominican Republic makes this family of highest-quality cigars. The medium- to full-bodied cigars of the OpusX family are considered some of the best in the world.

Now that you have the cigar, you need the rich culture, complete with

epic histories, recommendations, amusing anecdote and list of well-documented best smokes. To move beyond the novice phase, pick up either *Perelman's Pocket Cyclopedia of Cigars* (edited by Richard Perelman) or the heavenly hardback, *The Ultimate Cigar Book*, by Richard Hacker. Both will provide useful information, answer frequently asked questions and offer insight into a culture that refuses to be snuffed out by political correctness.

So whether you're a weekend smoke warrior or a budding enthusiast, keep in mind that the good life of cigars will take some homework. Draw yourself slowly into the culture and watch your enjoyment level increase exponentially.

And remember, despite the news reports, the best cigar is just a cigar.

Editor's note: *Art's Premium Cigars* is located at 1235 N. Orange Ave. in Orlando; phone, 407/895-9772.

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