

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO CIGARS

BY FAMOUS SMOKE SHOP | MAY 2010



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People have been enjoying cigars for centuries, and the wealth of knowledge on the subject could fill volumes. It is best to think of the information below as a complete overview of cigar basics. It is everything you need to know in order to open the door to the world of [cigars](#). But once you have stepped inside, you will realize that the realm of cigar enjoyment is far vaster than you ever could have imagined.

Part 1: History

The history of cigars is essentially the history of tobacco. Native Americans had been smoking tobacco either through a pipe or rolled up in a large leaf for centuries before Christopher Columbus “discovered” tobacco in 1492.

Columbus can be credited with bringing tobacco and cigars to Europe though. But still, Native Americans were the first people to wrap scraps of tobacco up in a larger leaf and smoke it. This is still the essence of a cigar, as we will see when we break down cigars into distinctive components.

Part 2: Parts of a Cigar

In order to properly appreciate a cigar, the smoker needs to be able to identify where the flavors are coming from. Most cigars have three separate parts: wrappers, fillers and binders. Very small cigars will forego the binder altogether, but they are the exception to the rule.

Wrappers

The wrapper is the outermost part of the cigar and it is one of the first things you will notice. They are made from leaves on the widest part of the tobacco plant. The type of wrapper used to make a cigar can determine a lot of that cigar’s distinguishing flavor and characteristics.

Cigar manufacturers have come up with more than 100 different wrapper shades. However, there are seven general classifications that are the most common. Here they are, from the lightest color to the darkest:

- *Double Claro* – This cigar is also commonly known as an American Market Selection, a Candela, or a jade. The leaf is very light and a little bit green in color. They take on this shade because they are picked before reaching full maturity, and they are dried quickly. The Double Claro was once an extremely popular cigar, but they are increasingly rare nowadays.
- *Claro* – The Claro is another light wrapper. They come in light tan, beige or an almost yellowish color. They are oftentimes shade-grown from Connecticut. The Java Claro Robusto is an example of a Connecticut Claro.
- *Colorado Claro* – This category can include Natural and English Market Collection cigars. They are medium brown.
- *Colorado* – The straight-up Colorado is more common and has an easily identifiable reddish-brown color. They are also known as Rosados or Corojos. A good example is the Royal Nicaraguan Colorado Robusto Natural.
- *Colorado Maduro* – These are a darker brown. Often they have a wrapper from Cameroon, or else a Honduran or Nicaraguan wrapper that was grown from a Cuban seed.
- *Maduro* – These cigars are dark brown or black and grown in Connecticut, Mexico, Brazil, and Nicaragua. The Nestico Test Flight is a nutty and peppery-Final Blend is a rich-tasting, full-bodied example.
- *Oscuro* – The Oscuro dropped in popularity for a long time but has experienced a resurgence lately. It is marked by an oily and extremely dark black appearance. Oscuro wrappers are primarily grown in Connecticut, Cuba, Nicaragua, Brazil and Mexico. The La Flor Dominicana Cabinet Oscuro L-500 is a rare example from the Dominican Republic.

Generally speaking, the darker the wrapper, the sweeter the flavor. Conversely, the lighter you go, the dryer the taste. A fair estimate is that the wrapper imparts up to 40-60 percent of the flavor from a cigar's flavor comes from the wrapper, and the rest comes from the filler and binder.

Binders

The binder holds together the filler. Most of the time, binders are made from wrappers that were rejected because they had holes, discoloration or other blemishes.

Fillers

The filler makes up the majority of the tobacco in a cigar. Typically, they are made from a blend of tobaccos of varying strengths to make up the flavor.

The part of the tobacco plant itself can have a big impact on the overall flavor of the cigar. Volado has a weak flavor and comes from the bottom of the plant. Seco leaves are dryer and come from the middle. Lingero leaves are from the top of the plant and have a strong flavor because they get the most access to sunlight. The bigger a cigar is, the more room there is for a variety of leaves, resulting in a more complex flavor.

Some fillers are made of long leaves while others are made from short chopped up bits. Long leaves burn slower, and if they are of high quality, they should burn slowly and consistently. There are also “medium filler” cigars that are, aptly, in the middle.

Part 3: Terminology

Before we delve into different cigar categories, it is worth going through some common terms used to describe the various aspects of cigars that may be commonly misunderstood by beginners.

- **Strength:** This is simply a measure of how much nicotine is in a cigar. Strong cigars have more nicotine and mild cigars have less. This is also known as the cigar’s “kick.” Cigars will mellow out and lose nicotine over the years.
- **Flavor:** This doesn’t refer an artificially flavored cigar like vanilla or strawberry. Pure flavor comes from the soil and the climate where the tobacco plant is cultivated. Aging, blending, and storage are other factors that contribute to a cigar’s natural flavor.
- **Scent:** This is how a cigar smells before you light it. Again, soil, climate and aging all combine to create the scent.

- **Aroma:** This is how a cigar smells after you light it. Aroma is the smell of the smoke itself.

Part 4: Shapes and Sizes

Wrapper color is one way of categorizing cigars. Size and shape is another. Below are some of the most common shapes and sizes:

Parejo

Parejos are the most familiar shape of cigar. They are sometimes called coronas. Parejos have a long, straight body with an open end and a cap on the other end that the smoker must cut off. You can also just punch a hole in the tobacco-leaf cap. Below is a list of the most common categories of parejos, their typical approximate sizes (length x width), and common examples for the more popular styles.

It's important to note that specific cigars mentioned below are not necessarily the exact size listed. Those cigars are simply meant to serve as good examples of that particular style. The sizes below are averages for the particular styles, and are good estimations estimates. Variances can and will occur.

- *Rothschild* – 11 cm x 19 mm 4 1/2" x 50 – Tabamex Rothschilds have a rustic look but with a smooth draw and a light taste.
- *Robusto* – 11 cm x 20 mm 5" x 50 – Famous Dominican 4000 Robustos are contain a mild blends of Dominican Cuban-seed Dominican longfillers.
- *Small Panatela* – 13 cm x 13 mm 5" x 33 – Mosaico Small Panatelas are available in a variety of wrapper shades and flavors.
- *Petit Corona* – 13 cm x 17 mm 5" x 42 – The Rocky Patel Vintage 1990 Petite Corona is a short and stocky cigar with a dark and rich flavor.
- *Corona* – 14 5 1/2" cm x 17 mm 42 – The La Floridita Corona Gigante is a long-lasting smoke made of Dominican and Nicaraguan longfillers.
- *Corona Gorda* – 14 cm x 18 mm 5 1/2" x 46 – The CAO Gold Corona Gordas are handmade. They produce smoke with a creamy texture and a hint of sweet spice.

- *Panatela* – 15 cm x 15 mm6" x 38 – The Garcia Y Vega Panatela Deluxe is a smooth and mild cigar that makes a great everyday smoke.
- *Toro* – 15 cm x 20 mm6" x 50 – The Romeo Y Julieta Reserva Real Toro is an expensive luxury cigar. They are extremely flavorful and perfect for special occasions.
- *Corona Grande* – 16 cm x 17 mm – Indian Tabac Super Fuerte Corona Grandes are full-flavored Honduran cigars that have an easy draw and a clean burn.
- *Lonsdale* – 17 cm x 17 mm6 1/2 x 42 – The Maroma Lonsdale is a hand-made cigar with a woody flavor and a sweet smell.
- *Churchill* – 18 cm x 19 or 20 mm7" x 50 – Oliva Serie V Churchill Extras are premium, full-bodied cigars. Their smoke produces a rich mix of chocolate and coffee accents.
- *Double Corona* – 19 cm x 19 mm7 1/2" x 50 – Avo Signature Double Coronas have a blend of four Dominican leaves wrapped in a San Vicente ligero binder that has been aged for four years.
- *Presidente* – 20 cm x 20 mm8" or more x 50 – Famous Nicaraguan 3000 Presidentes are made with dark and oily Ecuadorian wrappers that produce a complex and flavorful smoke.
- *Gran Corona* – 23 cm by 19 mm6 1/2" x 46 – Montesino Gran Coronas are medium-bodied, high quality, and surprisingly affordable.
- *Double Toro/Gordo* – 15 cm x 24 mm6" x 60 – The Oliva Serie O Double Toro is a cigar for a seasoned smoker. The tobaccos are carefully fermented and then aged for five whole years. It creates an incredibly complex and smooth blend.

Figurado

Figurados are actually just irregularly shaped cigars. They are more difficult to make than the standard parejo. At one point they were the most popular shapes, although

they fell out of favor in the early 20th century. Recently they have made a slight comeback. Here are a few irregular cigars:

- *Torpedo* – This is basically a parejo with a pointed cap. The Flor De Oliva Torpedo is a great example of this style. They are handmade in Nicaragua.
- *Pyramid* – Pyramids start with a broad foot and narrow down to a pointed cap. Gran Habano Connecticut #1 Pyramids are rich but mellow and very high quality.
- *Perfecto* – These are narrow at either-end and bulge out in the center. CAO Gold Perfectos are a fine specimen that features the traditional rounded shape.
- *Presidente* – Yes, we mentioned Presidentes in with the parejos. However, they can sometimes be considered figurados when they are extra large. The Flor De Oliva Super Giant is a medium-bodied Nicaraguan cigar. At a whopping ten inches long, it certainly qualifies for figurado status.
- *Culebras* – These cigars are actually made up of three smaller cigars twisted together. Davidoff Special C Culebras are made from Dominican filler and Connecticut wrappers.
- *Tuoscaniano* – Also known as the cheroot, this cigar is long, slim, and slightly thicker in the middle. Kentucky Cheroots are entirely American-made and grown and have a hearty flavor.

Part 5: Etiquette

So far, we have gone over the technicalities of cigars. Now we have come to discussing the customs and rituals of smoking cigars. This is just as important as knowing the ins and outs of the types and sizes. In fact, it may be even more important. If you know just a few things about cigar etiquette you can fit in with long-time connoisseurs.

Get a Humidor

This cannot be understated. It is a sad day when a perfectly good cigar goes to waste because of improper storage. The Capri Elegant Humidor is small, affordable, and fully functional. There is no excuse to let fine cigars go bad when there are options like the Capri Elegant Humidor.

Buy a Cigar Cutter

As previously noted, many cigars have a tobacco cap that needs to be cut off before lighting. As mentioned above, there are a lot of cigars that come with a tobacco-covered cap that needs to be cut. Biting off the end of a cigar may look cool in a movie, but rest assured that you'll just end up with stray tobacco leaves in your mouth – not quite the mark of sophistication and refinement you may be going for. The Montecristo Signature Cutter is a double guillotine Japanese Samurai steel cutter that is sturdy and practical.

Carry a Lighter

Asking for a light is a dead giveaway that someone is a cigar novice. The Xikar EX Windproof Flame Cigar Lighter is a quality choice that shoots emits out a strong torch flame to ensure proper roasting and lighting of your cigar.

Don't Grind out Your Cigar

As a rough guide, when a cigar is $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way done you've smoked $\frac{3}{4}$ of the cigar, it should be set to the side of an ashtray and allowed to go out on its own. This prevents excess tobacco from taking up all the room in the ashtray. The Flor De Gonzalez Ashtray has four large stirrups to fit most cigars.

Take Your Time

Cigar smoking is supposed to be fun and leisurely. It isn't a race to the end. Break any other rule but this one, because someone who is calmly and coolly enjoying a fine cigar is at least doing the most important thing right.

Taking up the hobby of cigar smoking is the same as learning the ins and outs of any other time honored tradition. Once you have read up on the basics, the only way to learn more is to experience it for yourself.

This handy guide is a good start, but now you're ready to start exploring on your own. Talking to other cigar smokers, reading cigar internet forums, and sampling different varieties of cigars is are the next steps to developing your ability to properly appreciate a good cigar.