

Bill and his favourite Cuban by *Sung Ho Cheung*

Just in from our man in Hong Kong...

Now that Bill's in town, I wonder if he'll pass up the opportunity to enjoy a couple of his favourite Cuban cigars. And, if the temptation proves to be too irresistible, where could he go to get them?

Until recently, there was only one or two established specialist cigar retail outlets in Hong Kong, which were around before the flood - so to speak. Now, you can get a haircut and get a cigar as part of the same package. They'll even cut it for you! However, we're more interested with the established cigar retail outlets as follows...

Cohiba Divan at the Mandarin Oriental - Hong Kong's principal cigar divan and probably the most well known is situated in the central (business) district, in the ageing Mandarin Oriental hotel, on the ground floor - tucked away by the hotel's sweetie shop. The *Cohiba Divan* is owned and run by David Tsang's *Pacific Cigar Company Ltd* - he that controls the flow of Cuban cigars not only in Asia, but also in Canada too.

When you enter the divan's diminutive room, it's darkly lit interior and oddly coloured walls (looks like heavy nicotine stains) aren't the most inviting of places to walk into, especially if there are a couple of regulars taking time out to have a puff. It's a bit like walking into the old style western bar - when suddenly, the piano player stops playing and all eyes are on you. But, after you get over the initial shock, the staff are incredibly inviting and are pleased to show you into the small walk-in humidor, in which you will find just about all of the premium Cuban cigars: you name it, they've probably got it. Once you've made your selection - and it must be noted - they are as happy for you to buy one stick as buy a couple of boxes - you would be treated with the same courteous service. After selecting your favourite stogie, they will cut, light and fuss over it, then fix you a drink - and all you need to do is sit back and enjoy the experience. The only problem is the stifling lack of fresh and/or clean air which means, if you get more than a couple of people puffing away at the same time, don't bother to light your just-purchased cigar - just stand still and inhale!

They have recently opened another cigar divan at the Sheraton Hotel and Towers, on Kowloon side - to cater to those without the time or inclination to make the cross-harbour journey.

Aficionado Cigarros - Hong Kong's other great cigar specialist *Aficionado Cigarros* is situated on the 1st floor of an older-type building at 13-15 Wo On Lane, a quiet side street in the trendy *Lan Kwai Fong* district - which incidentally, is just a few minutes pleasant walk from the Mandarin Hotel. It's simple and pleasing decor and beautifully appointed lounge is the perfect place to enjoy a wide range of Cuban and other premium quality cigars. The engaging owner - Nicky Peck, is ever pleased to welcome new faces and invite them into his (cigar) parlour. The custom-designed walk-in humidor carries an incredibly attractive range of premium cigars - Cuban and many others including *Arturo Fuente, La Gloria Cubana, Pleiades, Te-Amo, Licenciados, Fonseca, Joya de Nicaragua, La Fontana, Baccarat, Camacho*, as well as their own line of premium cigars *Aficionado Cigarros* and many more besides. Nick - a true cigar aficionado or his charming brother Harry (a chemist), will help you choose a perfectly maintained cigar, they will offer to cut, shape and light it for you, then offer you a complimentary drink. And if there happens to be a bottle of wine just opened, they'll offer you a glass of that too. In this store, you can also purchase a wide selection of cigar accessories, humidors, lighters and books. In fact, just about anything you need to make your cigar smoking all the more pleasurable. The air inside the store is clean, fresh and free from cigar odour. So, if you're looking to buy a gift or just interested to see more, it's a very pleasant experience - even for the non-smoker.

Davidoff Store - The Landmark - This smallish cigar store is the ideal place for the cigar snob. Here, you can enjoy all the aplomb that unfortunately sometimes goes hand-in-hand with cigars - including the upmarket prices. The staff deign to serve you, and once the deal is done, you may leave now - thank you very much. Perhaps they get ideas that are a little above their station, as indeed, they do serve some of the finest cigars - Cuban and Davidoff mostly, and a goodly range of very, very, very expensive humidors, pipes, lighters etc. If you like this sort of atmosphere, then this is the place for you.

Tabacalera Cigar Divan - This very new cigar divan is located in the Shangri-La Hotel, just above Pacific Place - one of Hong Kong's mega malls. It is so new, the paint is yet to dry properly. They have no walk-in humidor, only a nice single wall of humidor cabinets. It's a relatively tiny

place too. The cigars tend to be from the Philippines, but also include Macanudo, Macanudo Vintage, Don Juan Urquino Vintage, Henry Clay etc. There are a couple of lounge chairs and a few magazines. The staff seem a little lonely here and are often very attentive to anybody who happens to be passing and pops in for a closer look. A good place to enjoy a puff or two, whilst the wife/mother/daughter are doing their shopping downstairs at Pacific Place - and watch the paint dry - so to speak.

Prices of Cuban Cigars in Hong Kong - Cuban cigars are priced in-line with most sales outlets in Hong Kong, as set by the wholesaler - *Pacific Cigar Company Ltd.* Here's a price list that will give you some idea of the cost of a premium smoke in Hong Kong!

Cigar	Purchase Price (1 stick)	Date of Purchase
Hoya de Monetrety - Dbl Corona	HKD200	May 98
Punch Churchill	HKD170	May 98
Romeo y Julietta - Exhibition no. 4	HKD110	May 98
Partagas Serie D No 4	HKD130	May 98
Partagas Lusitania	HKD200	May 98
Monte Cristo No. 2 Torpedo	HKD135	May 98
Cohiba Robusto	HKD230	May 98
Cohiba Siglo III	HKD150	May 98
Hoya de Monterrey - Epicure no. 2	HKD120	May 98
Hoya de Monetrety - Dbl Corona	HKD200	May 98

So where would Bill go to find his favourite Cuban? Well, who knows but you can safely bet that either his favourite Cuban found him, or somebody would have gone on his account. Or maybe, he actually did go himself. I'll try and update you once the dust has settled - he's leaving Hong Kong tonight. Meanwhile, we're currently experiencing a deluge in Hong Kong and Bill's just finishing his chat with the specially invited American Chamber of Commerce audience, comprising Hong Kong's great and good. You might have seen it on TV? Now that it's almost over, if I were Bill, I know where I would go for a quiet puff.