

A Woman Is a Woman...But a Good Cigar Is a Smoke!

The origins of cigar smoking are still unknown. In Guatemala, a ceramic pot dating back to the tenth century features a Mayan smoking tobacco leaves tied together with a string. Sikar, the term for smoking used by the Mayans may have inspired the name cigar.

Christopher Columbus is generally credited with the introduction of tobacco to Europe. In due course, Spanish and other European sailors adopted the hobby of smoking rolls of leaves, as did the Conquistadors, and smoking primitive cigars spread to Spain and Portugal and eventually France, most probably through Jean Nicot, the French ambassador to Portugal, who gave his name to nicotine. Later, the hobby spread to Italy and, after Sir Walter Raleigh's voyages to the Americas, to Britain. Smoking became familiar throughout Europe—in pipes in Britain—by the mid-16th century and, half a century later, tobacco started to be grown commercially in America.

In 1885, Spanish cigar manufacturer Vicente Martinez Ybor moved his Principe de Gales (Prince of Wales) operations, buying land near the then-small city of Tampa, Florida and building the largest cigar factory in the world at the time in the new company town of Ybor City. Friendly rival and Flor de Sánchez y Haya owner Ignacio Haya built his own factory nearby in the same year, and many other cigar manufacturers soon followed, especially after an 1886 fire that gutted much of Key West. Thousands of Cuban and Spanish tabaqueros came to the area from Key West, Cuba and New York to produce hundreds of millions of cigars annually. Local output peaked in 1929, when workers in Ybor City and West Tampa rolled over 500,000,000 "clear Havana" cigars, earning the town the nickname "Cigar Capital of the World".



In New York, cigars were made by rollers working in their own homes. In 1883, cigars were being manufactured in 127 apartment houses in New York, employing 1,962 families and 7,924 individuals.

As of 1905, there were 80,000 cigar-making operations in the United States, most of them small, family-operated shops where cigars were rolled and sold immediately. While most cigars are now made by machine, some, as a matter of prestige and quality, are still rolled by hand. This is especially true in Central America and Cuba, as well as in small chinchales found in virtually every sizable city in the United States. Boxes of hand-rolled cigars bear the phrase *totalmente a mano* (totally by hand) or *hecho a mano* (made by hand). These premium hand-rolled cigars are significantly different than the machine-made cigars sold in packs at drugstores and other outlets. Since the 1990s and onwards, this has led to severe contention between producers and aficionados of premium handmade cigars and cigarette manufacturing companies that create machine-made, chemically formulated/altered products resembling cigars, and subsequently labeled as cigars.

The prevalence of cigar smoking varies depending on location, era, and population surveyed, and prevalence estimates vary somewhat. The U.S. is the top consuming country by far, followed by Germany and the UK; the U.S. and western Europe account for about 75% of cigar sales worldwide. A 2005 survey estimated that 2.2% of adults smoke cigars, far less than the 21% of adults who smoke cigarettes; it also estimated that 4.3% of men but only 0.3% of women smoke cigars. [<http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cigar>]

If you're going to collect Cigar covers, rather than Tobacco in general, you'll be going after the older covers, as seen here, which means it's going to be tough—lots of DQ's, Safety Firsts, and the like. But, the real collector isn't daunted by a challenge. And the end product is certainly worth it. Those older Cigar covers are beautiful.

