

## Life or The School of Cigar Enjoyment

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**Summary:** This short contribution shares the views of the author on how a cigar tasting should be undertaken. Blending together the subjective and objective, the scientific and philosophical, he proposes an approach to tasting involving all the aficionados' senses. For Didier Houvenaghel, the tasting of each cigar should be done with an open mind and with passionate appreciation; thus increasing the enjoyment of the tasting and the intensity of its pleasure.

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What is a cigar? At face value, it is merely five types of leaves - physically and chemically specific - rolled together into a precisely engineered cylinder, a delicacy that delivers its essence through the process of its own destruction.

But more than that, cigars can represent a microcosm on how one chooses to live life; how to approach each and every experience and choice that one must make in our journey.

Two approaches can guide the way we consider the quality of the cigar. The first is the objective, rational approach that measures the absolute, reproducible qualities such as the draw and ash quality. Whoever the observers are and however they feel, the results of the observation should be fact-based and consistent among the group. The second is the subjective, individual approach that is guided by our own experiences and inspirations, giving us our perception of the taste and the emotions brought forth by the cigar. Here the training, the feelings and other personal elements really forge the final appreciation of the tasting and the quality of the cigar. As such, these sensations being particularly personal, nobody is right, nobody is wrong.

How to best enjoy a cigar, and life itself, is to not blindly follow one path at the expense of the other, but to combine both approaches to achieve a ho-

listic appreciation of the experience. Like anything worthwhile, to be able to do this requires patience, practice and dedication.

To appreciate something truly, one must make the effort to genuinely understand it. The subtleties of the cigar, imparted upon it by its genesis in the tobacco field and then the many processes that have developed its final content and shaped its final form, are many. And an understanding of this finesse and sophistication garnered over time and through experience cannot but heighten the appreciation of a good cigar by an aficionado.

The objective characteristics are measurable and the best performance sometimes surprisingly does not always correlate with common perception. But the efforts put forth by the aficionado to apprehend this family of characteristics will be well rewarded.

The subjective feelings and perceptions created in the cigar smoker also require some effort. The emotions evoked by the tasting of the cigar require a frame of mind in the aficionado; an open mindedness that is in the moment, allowing for the proper state for true appreciation.

When these complementary and equally important approaches are combined softly, the cigar at the time of its selection will deliver a delicious expecta-

tion of enjoyment. The ritual is then initiated by the fire and every tasting begins as a quiet breath toward the first revelation of an evolving palette of aromas and tastes. Products of pleasure for our mouth and our other senses, cigars carry aficionados into warm, exotic vistas, like an invitation to travel within the contentment of the senses.

Using such a multifaceted approach in one's own way, the accomplished aficionado will become an active player in shaping a personal mode of appreciation and enjoyment; and by sharing the experiences with other curious tasters will be developing the cigar culture and community. A genuine culture will thus spread among passionate aficionados and develop sustainably the cigar world.

The cigar will then talk, and be a companion to new discoveries and the time of its tasting become an invitation to begin this journey.

Cigar tasting is a School of Life. Truly.

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