



ALPHA MEN ASIA | REDEFINING MAN

SOCIETY

## Influencer: Eric Piras



By **NICK WALTON** — 20th March 2021



**We discuss cigar appreciation, flavours for beginners, and changing traditions with Eric Piras of Hong Kong's Bertie Cigar Lounge.**



## **What first drew you to cigars?**

I first joined the cigar industry in 1996, when Sir David Tang offered for me to join his company, which I did as Regional Director for The Pacific Cigar Company, Habanos' exclusive distributor in Asia-Pacific and Canada, largely contributing to the building of their brands and the development of the Casa del Habanos franchise in these regions.

## **You have mentioned that cigar choice should be about the time of the day, the mood, and the environment. Can you give us an example of how you select which cigars you will enjoy?**

While this is correct, it's also very subjective! When you enjoy a cigar, it is always for your pleasure, and this will be according to your mood and state of mind. As an example, I like to start my day with a kick by enjoying a "Short" with an espresso. Short is the name of the size of the *vitola* (in Spanish the name for length and ring gauge of that cigar). Then I like a *Robusto* before lunch, although in reality, except for business lunches, I rarely have lunch. Later in the day, I would prefer a *Corona Gorda* or *Churchill*, and then, after dinner, I will select another *Robusto* or *Toro*, which would be rich, full bodied and smooth.

All those cigars can be from Cuba, Nicaragua, Honduras, or Dominican Republic. Since it's my job to taste new cigars, I often pick up newly released cigars, new limited-edition releases, or samples to taste in the morning. At this time, your palate is clean, allowing you to properly taste new cigars or cigars you have not smoked for a long time.





### **What are the best cigars for those new to the scene?**

I always suggest a light to medium cigar and not too big. However, for new aficionados or aficionadas, it is my advice not to begin your journey in the cigar world with a cigarillo or a full-strength, full-body cigar. Visit [Bertie Cigar Lounge](#) and my team or I can recommend the best of a selection for novices. Bertie's walk-in humidor holds over 500 different cigars so there's something for everyone.



**Everyone knows Cuba as being synonymous with cigar production, but which other countries should we look to when selecting a cigar manufacturer?**

We have plenty of wonderful cigars at Bertie, including those from the main *terroirs* like Joya de Nicaragua from Nicaragua, Arturo Fuente and Ashton from the Dominican Republic, and Flor de Selva and Villa Zamorano from Honduras. We also offer boutique brands like Gerard cigars, Azan, Cumpay, and a few others like Toscano, which are hand-made in Italy, and Great Wall cigars hand-made in China with imported tobacco.

Nicaraguan cigars are leading the global sales, followed by the Dominican Republic and then Cuba and Honduras.





## **What are the biggest mistakes people make when choosing a cigar?**

It's a difficult question as it depends very much of the person's history with cigars. Often the father or a member of the family was a cigar smoker so the selection can be a souvenir of what that person was smoking. In Asia in particular, they look at the brand and often that brand is not right for a novice. Why? It's often a high-end brand of pretty complex cigars, but a high price point doesn't always make it suitable for beginners.

Also, the majority of people think that a smaller cigar is less powerful than a bigger one and this is a wrong assumption. Robusto, Short Robusto, and cigars with 48 and 50 ring gauge deliver much more aroma and are easier to enjoy than a Petit-Corona or cigarillo, which have smaller ring gauges and deliver much more *fortes* (strength).

## **When it comes to pairing a cigar with spirits or wine, what elements should we be looking for? What are your favourite pairings?**

Never associate a strong cigar with a strong spirit or wine. They will go against each other. You're better off selecting an association that delivers a combination of aromas and flavours. However, this is not always easy and it's also very subjective, as it comes down to personal taste.

My favourite pairing is with rums or whiskies or ports. Rums and cigars often come historically from the same countries of origins and whiskies and ports and cigars are very traditional pairings. However, you will find excellent pairings with selected sakes or even cocktails. Also, don't forget traditional spirits like chartreuse, Cognac, Armagnac or vielle prune, a plum brandy and a very French traditional spirits. One of the most difficult pairings for me is with Champagne and white wines.





## **How has the cigar scene evolved in the face of vaping and a movement away from tobacco?**

It seems that the young people (over 18 y/o) stop going with cigarettes, which is very good. They should not become addicts! They prefer smoking less but also smoking better and more natural products, so cigar sales have increased, while cigarette consumption is globally declining. I cannot talk about vaping as I will not be objective... I am totally against it! However, everyone is free to choose for themselves.



Premium cigars are totally handmade using 100 per cent natural selected tobacco and artisanal processes. It takes an average of three years from the tobacco process, fermentation, and ageing until you have a finished cigar that you put in your mouth and this makes them much better and more natural than any other smoking products.

## **Tell us about Bertie, the experience it offers cigar lovers in Hong Kong and its range of cigars.**

Bertie Cigar Lounge is the one and only cigar divan in Hong Kong offering such a large selection of cigars for all tastes and all budgets. As I mentioned, we hold over 500 different cigars from five *terroirs* (countries of origin). You will receive plenty of advice from our skilled team, who are trained to answer any questions, from beginners to real aficionados. We also offer the best brands, best cigars, and a choice ranging from regular cigars to exceptional vintages and limited edition, as well as regional editions from all over the planet.

### **ABOUT AUTHOR**



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Nick Walton is a Hong Kong-based photojournalist and Group Managing Editor for Artemis Communications, producers of Alpha Men Asia, JETSETTER Magazine, Explorer Magazine, The Art of Business Travel, Mirandus, IKHLAS, The Journal and The Edition.