



# THE 11TH HABANOS FESTIVAL

## A CUBAN CIGAR LOVER'S PARADISE



BY SAMUEL SPURR

Read more on cigars at Samuel's blog: [www.inlumino.com.au](http://www.inlumino.com.au)

Held every year in Havana since 1998, The Habanos Festival celebrates the Cuban cigar. Parties are thrown, events toast the industry's personalities, and new cigars are launched to rave reviews (and sometimes quiet disdain). Open to cigar industry professionals and the general public, this week-long cigar junket infused with Mojitos and Salsa is heaven on earth for Cuban cigar lovers.

"In a world of upheaval there are still some certainties. One of them is great cigars combined with great friends, wine and laughter," proclaims Rob Ayala, a regular visitor to Cuba and Director of Queensland cigar enterprise 'Cigar Czar'. Shortly after returning from the 11th Habanos Festival, he offers his thoughts on the week-long event.

**The new cigars launched at the Festival include the Montecristo Open line, a new Trinidad and an aged Cohiba. What are your initial thoughts?**

"The new Montecristo 'Open' is a line extension to the Montecristo marque and consists of four new cigars: 'Eagle', 'Master', 'Regatta' and 'Junior'. In effect they are a lighter version of the standard Montecristo line. I tried hard to like them.

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There was a general consensus amongst the 2000 or so in attendance that they were one dimensional and uninspiring. I thought they were being kind.

Wednesday night saw the launch of the new Trinidad Robusto 'T'. We were all hoping for a revelation after the Montecristo Open disappointment. Thankfully, The Trinidad was a work of art coming with both a pigtail on the cap and a stunning new tube design. The cigar itself was medium to full-bodied, rich and exquisite. This is a winner... Hallelujah!

Friday night's Gala Dinner saw the release of the Cohiba Gran Reserva which is a Cohiba Siglo VI using the very finest 5 year old tobacco leaf. It is indeed one of the finest cigars I have had the pleasure to smoke. With only 5000 cigars being produced in cases of 15, it will be both expensive and sought after."

**Festival parties are extravagant affairs. Which event was one not to miss?**

The stand out event for me is Pacific Cigar Company's (PCC)

party on the Thursday night. PCC are the authorized Habanos distributors for the Asia-Pacific region and they throw one of the great parties: 120 guests, Cuban band and dancers, rum bar, whisky bar and all held on the terrace of an old run down home in Havana lit only by candles. This is one function where you mingle amongst the dancing crowd until the early hours of the morning!

**What is Habanos S.A. doing right?**

Habanos has made continued improvements in the quality of construction and the use of better aged tobacco leaf in their blends. Young cigars are smoking so much better out of the box than corresponding cigars were three years ago. I also like the commitment to making Edicion Limitada releases taste closer to their marque as opposed to a generic Limited Edition flavour.

**What could Habanos improve on?**

The primary mistake Habanos is making is losing their connection with their rich history. They continue to cull legendary cigars and replace them with new cigars which are large in gauge and even heavier on the pocket. In trying to position the Cuban cigar like Rolex or Krug, they run the risk of disenfranchising two generations of passionate Havanophiles who yearn for a return to a time when great cigars were meant to be shared amongst friends and not stored away by collectors.

**What are you anticipating to be big in 2009?**

Unfortunately price rises. Habanos believes the current economic climate is a perfect time for significant price increases. On a positive note I believe the Cohiba Gran Reserva may go down as one of the great cigars of the last two decades.