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P **Prime Port & Cigar Pairings**

THREE PRICE POINTS SUITED FOR ANY POCKETBOOK

by Paula Barker

Elegance. Pearls and lace. Cary Grant and Audrey Hepburn. Port and cigars. The meal is over, relaxed guests retire to cozy corners to chat, and, unless relegated to the patio, just a few head down the hall to the parlor to partake in that traditional pleasure.

Do you wonder how party hosts select cigars and their sidekick ports? Do you know that cigars have tasting notes? Did it ever occur to you to try the art of pairing a cigar with a port? I consulted three aces to help me compose a guide for matching first-rate cigars of all price categories with compatible ports.

THE EXPERTS:



*Brenda Roberts, Owner, BakerStreet
Tobacconist, Clocks & Unique Gifts*



Christina Vinci, Manager, BakerStreet



Roy Salazar, Chef and Wine Instructor

BakerStreet Tobacconist Clocks & Unique gifts is a petite and charming stop in the heart of Napa, California. Owned for 21 years by Brenda Roberts, the shop was transformed from a cigars-only store into a successful gift boutique. Gentlemen appreciate the opportunity to purchase cutting edge handbags or other sophisticated gifts, while indulging in their own luxuries. Ladies enjoy distinctive eye candy and some might even browse the humidor themselves. Currently women account for almost two percent of cigar smokers, up from a mere 1/10 of 1% in the mid 1980s, according to the Cigar Association of America (www.cigarsmag.com/Cigar_and_Women.htm).



When I walked into BakerStreet seeking gifts and information, I encountered Christina Vinci, the store's friendly young manager. Like a living database, Ms. Vinci rattled off cigars within different price categories that nicely accompany port wines, and was able to explain each cigar's flavor profile. I later contacted owner Brenda Roberts, who confirmed Ms. Vinci's picks and added a few of her own, providing vivid imagery in her descriptions. Roberts' passion for her product is apparent.

Chef Roy Salazar continues to serve as an advisor for my pairing articles. His teaching experience at San Francisco's Culinary Academy has included *Advanced Wine*. He instructs his students that matching fluids with solids also applies to fluids with a solid called *cigars*, and pairing principles closely match those for food.

Below, I employ the brilliance of my three professionals to provide you with attractive port and cigar options. Price ranges for cigars reflect their size differences.

PREMIUM PAIRINGS

1.

THE CIGAR: Padrón, 1964 Anniversary Series with maduro wrapper (Nicaragua). Full-bodied, smooth and rich with hints of spices, wood and coffee. This silky smoke burns perfectly. The emphasis is on quality. \$11-\$20.

THE PORT: Dow's late-bottled vintage. Full-bodied and rich, but perfectly balanced with soft peppery tannins and acidity. Dry finish.

THE PRINCIPLE: Per Chef Roy, "Maduro wraps tend to be spicy with black pepper. So if you think of flavor as a volume knob on a radio—oops, I mean a dial on an iPod— then this volume is fairly loaded. A good late-bottled vintage [LBV] port with its complexity and ripe red fruit, will mellow out the spice with sweetness. Dow's makes a nice LBV."

2.

THE CIGAR: Carlos Torano Reserva Decadencia (Honduras). Infused with Decadencia Chocolate Port (made by Wilson Creek Winery in California); medium-bodied. Roberts says, "It is very subtle – not like a flavored cigar at all. It is a bit like smoking heaven. They come in glass tubes and when you first take the cigar out of the tube, you get a beautiful whiff of port". \$13.25-\$15.60.

THE PORT: Decadencia Chocolate Port. According to Wilson Creek Winery, this port will surprise you with its flavor, yet relax you with its smoothness. Made from 81-year-old vine zinfandel, the port contains just an essence of chocolate.

THE PRINCIPLE: Chef Roy reflects, “This I see in the same way as an entrée with a sauce. If you have a steak with a cabernet sauvignon sauce, then drink the same. A cabernet sauvignon with the steak will be great. I know my basset hounds, Mouton and Lafite, only like their steaks served in this fashion.”

3.

THE CIGAR: Graycliff Chateau Grand Cru (Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua). Full-bodied, earthy and well-balanced. Several reviewers characterize the cigar as seductive and classy. \$21-\$32.

THE PORT: Ten-year-old tawny.

THE PRINCIPLE: Chef Roy explains, “Tawny ports have almond and other nutty tastes . . . the nuts highlight the earthiness of the cigar. A note on tawny ports: they come in ten-year old and 40-plus-year old. I have found that the older Tawnies, while complex, have a very soft/low volume, so sometimes the cigar will be too loud in flavor, and money is really being wasted to some degree. I go maximum a ten-year-old when matching food or cigars with a Tawny Port.”

4.

THE CIGAR: La Aurora Preferidos Maduro Ruby (Dominican Republic). Medium-to-full-bodied with cedar undertones, packaged in a gorgeous, ruby-colored tube. “Don’t let the packaging fool you; it smokes as beautifully as its packaging looks—nice and rich, wonderful with port”, Roberts comments. The stick burns with a soft, white smoke and long, white ash. \$22.

THE PORT: Dow’s LBV.

The port is full-bodied and rich, but perfectly balanced with soft peppery tannins and acidity. Dry finish.

THE PRINCIPLE: Chef Roy says the same port used for the above Padrón works for the La Aurora. The “. . . maduro wrap equals spice; sweetness will counter balance it and cause an equilibrium in flavor . . . yin yang, if you will.”

MID-PRICED MATES

1.

THE CIGAR: Camacho Triple Maduro (Honduras). Full-bodied, strong and complex. The core flavor is a damp earthiness, but notes of black pepper and espresso can also be detected. A very dark, triple maduro cigar (meaning, the wrapper, filler and binder are all created using the maduro process, which includes long fermentation at high temperatures). Roberts comments that the cigar presents “. . . a sexy black and silver band and smokes that way!” \$13 to \$16.55.

THE PORT: Dow’s LBV.

The port is full-bodied and rich, but perfectly balanced with soft peppery tannins and acidity. Dry finish.

THE PRINCIPLE: The rationale is the same as for the Padrón and the La Aurora Preferidos cigars, all sporting the maduro wraps.

2.

THE CIGAR: La Flor Dominicana Chisel Maduro (Dominican Republic). Extremely full-bodied with a rich taste. The smoke commences with chocolate and coffee flavors, then introduces spice, cedar, licorice and loud black pepper, finishing with primarily pepper and cedar. Enthusiasts suggest smoking after a heavy meal. \$8-\$10.

THE PORT: Dow's LBV.

The port is full-bodied and rich, but perfectly balanced with soft peppery tannins and acidity. Dry finish.

THE PRINCIPLE: The maduro wrapper really influences the port selection, so the same port is paired with this rich cigar as with the Padrón, La Aurora Preferidos and Camacho, listed above.

3.

THE CIGAR: Rocky Patel Decade (Honduras)

Exceptionally creamy and earthy with a bit of spice on the finish. The Patel is “. . . a new cigar just out that is a wonderful medium-bodied cigar with port”, per Roberts. \$8-\$9.

THE PORT: Ten-year-old tawny.

THE PRINCIPLE: The softer volume in the cigar goes with the softer volume in the wine, according to Chef Roy.

MODEST MATCHES

1.

THE CIGAR: Baccarat Maduro (Honduras).

Easy draw with a rich flavor and attractive aroma. This stick has a hint of sweetness with its sugar tip and is appreciated by experienced cigar smokers, as well as beginners, for its low price. \$3-\$6.

THE PORT: Any high-volume ruby with ripe, red fruit

THE PRINCIPLE: “The less expensive cigars sometimes, if smoked when young (meaning not aged in a humidor) can have loud volume and sometimes off-balance flavors”, says Chef Roy. “The sweetness of a ruby port will cover any flaws of youth and lower price points of the cigars, while also taming the spice.”

2.

THE CIGAR: Arturo Fuente Chateau Maduro (Dominican Republic).

Begins with strong hints of cedar yielding to earth and intense coffee flavors, then increases in body, adding spice and sweetness from the wrapper, and finishes with some woody, though not cedary flavors. The Chateau Fuente is “. . . always reliable and delicious . . . a mild-to-medium-bodied smoke”, according to Roberts. \$6.

THE PORT: LBV

THE PRINCIPLE: “Vintage port is beautiful, yet highly priced. Very complex with low volume. To match a vintage port one needs a very high-caliber cigar that has been aged a long time. As most vintage ports get older, more complexity develops and less volume remains”, Chef Roy explains. Similarly, as a good cigar ages, it develops more complexity and retains less volume.

Some of Salazar’s favorite port houses are Dow, Fonseca, Graham and Taylor. His wife, Chef Julie Tan, and basset hounds, Mouton and Lafite, second those choices.

This port and cigar guide is intended for all levels of experience: beginning cigar smokers, beginning port drinkers and enthusiasts of either fare who have yet to partake of the other luxury, and those who already engage in both pleasures and want to think about some principles for matching.

My own experience with cigars ranges from puffing on my dad’s cigars as a child to smoking with my friends at Giants’ baseball games as a teen to tasting at cigar shops. However, I will be adding a bit of *the good life* to my next party.

Thank you to my contributors:

Manager Christina Vinci and Owner Brenda Roberts

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Chef Roy Salazar, Instructor Le Cordon Bleu of San Francisco



*with wife, Chef Julie Tan and Basset
hounds Mouton and Lafite*

Comments? Suggestions? Questions? Write to me! editorpaula@yahoo.com