

Cigars Lover MAGAZINE

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Year of the Tiger

- | WELCOME TIGER - AIR PURIFIERS - DRUNK CHICKEN CIGARS - STOLEN THRONE - PAIRINGS: CIGARS & SPIRITS
- | SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED - WHISKY IN YOUR POCKET - RUM NATION - THE GLENDALOUGH VARIATIONS - BATANGA
- | SUNSHINE DREAMING - PALATE, THROAT OR BELLY? - NOT THE USUAL SANDWICH

Drunk Chicken Cigars

Traveling the road less traveled

by Michel Arlia

There are so many cigar brands out there that many go unnoticed, but Drunk Chicken Cigars is not one of them. Drunk Chicken is a brand that is going the road less traveled, be it for their US-based production or unconventional name. We had the chance to talk to the founder and owner, Desiree Sylver, about her what Drunk Chicken is and much more.

Tell us a bit about yourself and what you were doing before launching your cigar brand?

Before launching, I worked full-time for the US federal government as a procurement analyst and working as a professor. I had a routine everyday life where my downtime was enjoying a cigar to relax or release all the stresses of work.

What was your first introduction to cigars, and how do you remember the experience being?

My first introduction to cigars was smoking with my significant other at the time (ex-husband) about twenty years ago at a cigar lounge. He went into the humidor, purchased cigars for us to smoke, and handed me a 6x60 cigar. I was very much in love with the cigar community and how open and friendly everyone was. I was one of the only females in the lounge but always felt welcome. I never really thought much about the brands I was smoking as long as it was a smooth cigar. The bands were removed and discarded most of the time. Now when I go into cigar lounges, I look for cigars I've never smoked and prefer the Toro/Robusto/Lancero vitolas.

You have a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership and were a professor at Strayer University. When did you decide that it was time to quit your job and follow your passion for cigars?

Well, I haven't made that decision yet. I am still working a full-time job and doing Drunk Chicken Cigars. I'm at a transition because I am close to retirement age, looking at early retirement versus going for the long term.

The company name is quite unique, to say the least. What is the background story behind it?

The birth of Drunk Chicken Cigars started with friends and family hanging out in the family backyard, living the dream, eating, drinking, and sharing cigars. This backyard oasis includes over a dozen chickens, dogs, and local wildlife that frequently visit. The "Drunk Chicken" name was established one evening as we enjoyed our typical Saturday festivities. The chickens were "going home to roost" and seemed to stumble as if they were drunk. The Drunk Chicken events grew, becoming the regular safe place to hang out. The notional entry fee was bringing a cigar to smoke and one to share. This quickly evolved into a quest of finding unique cigars none of us had previously smoked. While traveling, the exploration of various cigars bars and shops led to meeting many cigar enthusiasts, including shop owners, cigar diplomats, Cuban hand-rollers, cigar lovers, and junkies like us. The creative juices started to flow as they introduced us to freshly rolled cigars and different brands and flavors of cigars. To impress our friends, we decided to try our hand at having our favorite tobacco leaves blended and hand-rolled

to share back at the "Coop". They were instant hits. Thus Drunk Chicken Cigars "Chicks" were born.

Compared to almost everybody else, your cigars are made in the US. Why did you decide to make cigars in the States, have you looked into other countries as well?

Yes, I looked into manufacturing cigars in other countries and other manufacturers here in the US. Some of the key factors that played in this decision, when I spoke to other boutique lines, the company owners, their ability to actually be involved in the manufacturing process becomes very difficult when it's outside a country when they're having issues or problems, just being able to be there or go there, it was a major issue or concern. Price-wise was somewhat comparable. Yes, we do manufacture a tad bit more expensive, but we also factored in import/export taxes and shipping time to get it. Being here in the US, we don't have to wait for import/export shipping out of the country. So there is a much greater turnaround time that we have. And we really worked well with this manufacturer. We had great chemistry together. When we were blending together, it was just really easy and comfortable when we spoke. All those factors played a part in why we decided to manufacture in the US. Also, it's big on making sure that the US economy is doing well. So we wanted to employ people here in the US too. That was definitely part of our thinking when we started talking about manufacturing.

How did you approach the blends of the cigars, and what was the learning experience like?

Well, me being a little OCD, I have a spreadsheet of over 200 cigars that I've smoked, which tells you the wrapper, binder, filler for each one of those, and I rated them. I already knew that I loved Havana wrappers, and that was one of the key factors in that three of the cigars have Havana wrappers. We already knew that we wanted the cigars to be smooth. And because we were blending the original cigars for ourselves, it was just working with the manufacturer, sitting down with them, telling them what we wanted. We smoked some Puros; what did we like about it, what we didn't like about it. Then, we added other leaves to the blend. We went from all Ecuadorian/Dominican and just played around. We had a great time working with the manufacturer, trying new cigars, and talking about the differences and what we like. And so for us, the original cigars that we made were absolutely just made for what Rico and I liked in cigars. When we started blending the Homicidal Hen, that was our first cigar we blended for customers, not for ourselves. The Broadleaf was definitely on the list during the blending process, and we wanted to incorporate it, and we didn't see a need to at the time. So we started with the Broadleaf and some of the other blends that we worked out. We also test-marketed the blends with our local friends and local cigar lounges and had them smoke the cigar; what they liked about it, what they didn't like about it. So almost like market research. We received a lot of feedback from potential customers until we got to this blend, where everybody who smoked that cigar thought it was amazing. So as we approach adding new cigars to our line, our customers will definitely be part of our consideration. Also, I love smoking new cigars, so hopefully, you'll see lots of new tobacco, different tobacco, because that's definitely



something that I enjoy when I'm looking for a cigar is what I haven't smoked before and comparing the differences.

Due to regulations, you entered the market at an uncertain time for cigars. Were there any concerns prior the launch?

Major concerns were legal aspects due to changing and growing regulations. Much research was done to ensure no laws would be broken. We continue to follow the US federal regulations to see how it may impact Drunk Chicken Cigar's production and sales.

In the short time you are running your own business, what have you learned about the industry good or bad, that you didn't know before?

Every day I have to get up and give 110% no matter how I feel. There is always something that needs to happen. Owning my own business didn't create more free time, and it's the total opposite, a time stealer. Keeping things positive and laughing at myself helps on the days when everything seems overwhelming.

Smoking cigars has enjoyed something of a renaissance, especially among women. Being a cigar lover for two decades, you have seen the change first hand. What do you think was the catalyst for this newfound appreciation?

As a woman, cigar-smoking attracts attention from men and women, especially when I am not smoking in a cigar lounge. Male smokers are somewhat normalized, while female smokers are still uncommon unless you are in the cigar industry. Men tend to want to teach women how to smoke, assuming that they know best. Typically, they lead women to the flavored and mild cigar sections, as if women needs to start slow or have a flavor attached to their smoking experience. This is far from the truth in my experience (especially the last five years). Female smokers tend to have more refined palates than their male counterparts, meaning they can understand the complexity of a good cigar and can experience the hints of flavor that the tobacco absorbs for the soil. Fortunately, I have not experienced stigmatism as a women cigar smoker. Unlike cigarettes, cigars smoking seemed to be viewed as a luxury, classy, relaxing, social for both men and women.

What are the short and long-term plans for Drunk Chicken?

The short-term plans include shoring up the infrastructure, ensuring we have a good foundation/processes, how we sell, and SOPs (standard operating procedures). When new people come on board, there's training: how people come on board, how new clients/customers come on board. I want to make sure that we're a reliable company when we go into the following year. That is important to me, along with production, making sure that we can keep a steady production schedule, the quality of our cigars, ensuring that we can maintain quality, another one of those things want to put down in our policy, and when are we testing, how we are testing, and what are we looking for when we test, and customer service. I say customer service because I want to make sure that the sales reps are trained properly and understand that our customers are number one, and make sure that we understand their concerns when they have them.