

GOOD LIFE

MEN'S ELEMENTS

A CIGAR AFICIONADOS LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE



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LEGENDARY FUENTE | PASSES ON
SAOTA | DESIGN PHENOMENON
UNDERSTANDING YOUR HEALTH
BOTTLE NECK | BEAT ALCOHOLISM
RETURN OF ROLLS ROYCE | DAWN
BAPTIZED | AT J. J CALE

ON THE SUNSEEKER

CRUISING THE WILDEST
OCEANS: GOODLIFE SPECIAL

EXCLUSIVE!
ZEGNA | THE LEGACY



NOVEMBER 2016



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CELEBRATING A LEGEND CARLOS FUENTE SNR

BELOW: *Carlos Fuente Sr., center, along with his daughter Cynthia, left, and granddaughter Liana. This picture was taken on 25th Anniversary of Fuente & Newman Premium Cigars March 2016. The Newman family arranged to rename part of 2nd Avenue [in front of the Fuente factory] as Carlos Fuente's Way. The three stood and marvel as they unveil the street sign in the Ybor City area of Tampa.*

August 6th 2016, American cigar magazine Cigar Aficionado posted through their online update the news about the passing of Carlos Fuente Snr. The entire cigar world was lamenting this legends death. Carlos died Friday 5th, August 2016 at the age of 81 years. At the time of his death he was the leader of the Fuente family and chairman of Tabacalera A. Fuente y Cia. Fuente ran one of the world's largest handmade cigar companies, making many brands for a number of American cigar companies, such as Robert Levin's Ashtons and Newmans Diamond Crowns.

He worked alongside his son, Carlos Fuente Jr., president of Tabacalera A. Fuente y Cia, and his daughter, Cynthia Fuente-Suarez who are both still actively involved in the company today. Carlos Fuente Snr was struggling with stomach cancer before his passing. Snr. Lost





Carlos Fuente Sr.

his wife of 62 years in December 2015 and he is survived by his sons Carlos Fuente Jr. and Richard Fuente; daughter Cynthia Fuente-Suarez; brother Arturo Fuente Jr.; grandchildren Liana Fuente, Rosana Fuente, Christina Suarez, Lidiana Fuente, Bianca Suarez, Sofia Fuente and Carlos Fuente III; great-grandsons Alvaro Valerio Jr. and Arturo Valerio and great-granddaughter Anna Valentina Valerio.

The Arturo Fuente cigar brand was born in 1912 in West Tampa, Florida. It was in that year that the brand was launched by a 24-year-old Cuban émigré named Arturo Fuente (November 8, 1887 – February 11, 1973) as A. Fuente & Co. Fuente had come to the United States in 1902, leaving his hometown of Güines, Cuba in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. The original factory used by the company was a three story wooden building, one of nearly 200 cigar-making facilities in the city of Tampa alone. All of these manufacturers would import tobacco from nearby Cuba for production into finished cigars.

The company was incorporated in 1924, by which time A. Fuente & Co. had grown to the point that it employed 500 workers. However late in 1924 disaster struck the company and their building burned to the ground. Production of the brand was halted; it would not be until 1946, 22 years later, that production of the brand resumed. By the end of World War II Arturo Fuente had finally recovered from the catastrophic losses suffered in 1924 fire and the Great Depression had abated, making a return to cigar manufacturing again conceivable. Fuente

relaunched his brand "in the garage," so to speak—adding a few rolling tables to the 160 square foot back porch of his home in Ybor City, Florida.

Production was a family affair at the time of the 1946 restart, with Arturo and his wife rolling full-time, joined by a few other hired torcedores. Arturo's sons—Carlos and Arturo, Jr.—were soon drafted into the enterprise, sweeping the floors and helping with the rolling after school. Carlos Fuente, Sr., the son of Arturo, contracted polio as a boy of 12 but was fortunate in recovering well enough to walk normally, unlike many victims of the disease. He dropped out of school before graduating high school and was married at age 18. Because the cigar business struggled during the 1940s and 1950s, Carlos, Sr. took a job as a baker to help make ends meet, while his wife worked full-time in another factory while both moonlighted at Fuente.

Throughout the 1950s Fuente remained exclusively a local Tampa brand, with the company's entire production sold in that city on a cash-and-carry basis.

Arturo Fuente, Sr. had originally envisioned passing the small family cigar business on to his eldest son, Arturo, Junior, but it was his younger son Carlos that spent the most time working in the firm, so it was to him that it was offered in 1958. Carlos Fuente, Sr. bought the business from his father for exactly \$1—purchasing \$1,161 in assets and zero debt. At the time the company made only a few thousand cigars a year. Carlos, Sr. was ambitious and sought to expand the business, first seeking to establish new accounts in other parts of Florida before setting his sights on New York City. Fuente initially targeted a Hispanic market for its product. Growth was slow since cigar smokers of the era were brand loyal and not prone to the sampling of new products.

The United States embargo against Cuba would change all that.

Up until the 1962 embargo, cigars were typically made in the United States of Cuban tobacco. Following the embargo, access to Cuban tobacco was abruptly terminated, forcing every cigar maker to change the blends that they used. Carlos Fuente, Sr. later recalled: "In the old days, people were very brand true. Brand loyal. ... I feel the embargo put everybody level. People had to



Carlos Fuente Jnr and Snr

shop around to find a different taste that they liked". Fuente shopped for new sources of tobacco, buying leaf from new regions like Puerto Rico and Colombia. Blending skills were then employed in an effort to create a flavor appealing to smokers who had developed an affection for classic Habano flavors. Rising labor costs made continued American production uneconomical. In addition, the company had increasing difficulty in finding qualified cigar rollers in Florida. Efforts were made to establish the brand's production in Mexico and Puerto Rico, but quality from these factories was deemed insufficient.

In the 1970s contacts were made between Carlos Fuente, Sr. and a representative of the blossoming Nicaraguan cigar industry and the company soon moved its production to Estelí in the Northwestern part of that Central American country. Disaster again struck in 1979, however, when the Fuente factory was burned to the ground during the Nicaraguan Revolution.

With Nicaragua a total loss, Carlos Fuente, Sr. mortgaged his house to raise capital and his son Carlos, Jr. added whatever money he had available and the family moved to the Dominican Republic to begin anew.

"When I first started in the Dominican, all our profit, we stuck it back. All our profit was always invested in tobacco. And aged tobacco is the most important thing that you can have. We always had a lot of aged tobacco. And as we started aging more and more, we started doing better."

In September 1980 Tabacalera A. Fuente opened a 12,000 square foot factory in Santiago Dominican Republic. The company scored its first success of its "Dominican Period" in the middle 1980s with the launch of the medium-bodied Hemingways line – an attempt to break new ground in the market through the use of special shapes. At the end of the 1980s the company began to grow its own tobacco on a substantial scale for the first time, investing in roads and curing barns. The company decided to take on the challenge of growing its own wrapper leaf. This is the most difficult and risky component of a cigar to produce.

In 2012, the Arturo Fuente Company celebrated 100 years of hardwork and family tradition. When A. Fuente & Company was established in 1912, Arturo Fuente would have never dreamed his passion for cigars would become a global benchmark for the cigar industry. He started his company with humble beginnings, rolling and blending cigars in the back of his house with his wife Cristina and his two sons Carlos and Arturo Oscar. Four generations later, the company is still family owned and operated in the Dominican Republic. From the very beginning the focus of making a Fuente cigar was quality; quality tobacco, quality craftsmanship and taking the time necessary to make a truly remarkable cigar. " We don't hurry things; we just do things the way they are supposed to be made"... says Carlos Fuente Sr. **GL**



Carlos Jnr, Sister Cynthia and Carlos Fuente Snr.

MAY YOUR SOUL
REST IN PEACE
CARLOS FUENTE Sr.