





Leading light

Liana Fuente, the multi-talented woman behind the Fuente brand, talks vision, family legacy and the future

by Natalie Glorney

BEING THE GRANDDAUGHTER OF the late Carlos Fuente, Sr. and daughter of Carlos Fuente, Jr. must carry quite a responsibility. The Arturo Fuente brand is renowned in the cigar world as the manufacturer of the world's finest cigars. Celebrating 100 years of hard work, dedication and family tradition in 2012, Fuente cigars are a global benchmark for the cigar industry. From humble beginnings, the company has grown from strength to strength and most importantly, is still family-owned and operated in the Dominican Republic.

A fourth-generation Fuente, Liana Fuente has evolved through many roles within her family's company and is now often the face of Arturo Fuente cigars, travelling the world as a brand ambassador, a role that she takes very seriously.

Liana attended the University of South Florida and Eckerd College where she graduated with distinction with a

Bachelor of Arts in Business. No sooner had she graduated, she was keen to start working and learning each aspect of the family business.

As the current Vice President of Brand Development, Liana oversees all marketing initiatives for Arturo Fuente's various business and charitable endeavours. In addition, she manages Arturo Fuente's online presence and actively sits on the Board of Tampa Connection and the Board of Cigar Family Charitable Foundation. She also is a representative for the Fuente Family Foundation.

With all of these accolades it is hard to imagine how she has time for anything else in her hectic schedule. We sat down with this formidable woman to find out what a typical day looks like for Liana and to congratulate her on her most recent accolade of Tobacco Business Awards 2019's Woman of the Year.



Liana, what is it like to be born into the world-renowned Fuente family?

I love my family and its beautiful legacy. When you have over 100 years of passion, hard work and sacrifice that has come before you, it keeps you humble and dedicated. My grandfather, Don Carlos, was a huge influence on me and I constantly think of him and all that he did for us, just as my father, Carlito, does for us now. I'm truly blessed to be a fourth generation Fuente and able to help keep this legacy going.

You must be incredibly proud of the legacy of the Fuente family story and the brand it has built. What is it like to be working at the forefront of such a dynamic and renowned company?

Our company was established in 1912 – so you can imagine what it has gone through. There have been plenty of dark moments, from political revolutions to devastating fires to unimaginable personal tragedies, but we've had many amazing and wonderful moments as well. Through it all though, as my father

says, it's not about the cigars, it's about the people. The people in this industry, from our employees on the factory floor to those working in the front office, to our friends in the retail business, to the loyal and die-hard customers all over the world.... they are what makes this industry the best to work in. Every great moment I've experienced in the cigar world has been because of the great people that have experienced those same moments with me, so I would say that we are definitely a community in the cigar world!



As well as overseeing the brand's marketing initiatives, you are also very involved in Fuente's philanthropic activities. Can you tell us about that?

Giving back is something that has been ingrained in us by previous generations. My grandfather did so much for local charities in the Tampa Bay area and we try to continue that, whether it's the American Cancer Society, Humane Society or the Boys & Girls Club. Our family has the Fuente Family Foundation which supports many of these initiatives, but we also have the Cigar Family Charitable Foundation which runs a major community operation in the Bonao region of the Dominican Republic. This is near our legendary Chateau de la Fuente farm which provides education, health care, sports and other much needed benefits for the people of that region. This foundation was the brainchild of my father, Carlito, a passionate and loving man who is always looking to give back in meaningful ways. These philanthropic activities are very important to me and my family and we hope to continue them into the future.

You're an incredibly busy woman. What does a typical day look like for you?

The only typical thing about my days is that there is nothing typical about them! Every day is full of unknowns and adventure! Although my office is located at our historic and recently renovated factory building in Ybor City (Tampa, Florida), I travel quite a bit. Whether it's visiting territories throughout the United States, attending major trade shows or events such as the IPCPR or Big Smoke, or flying overseas to work with our international markets in Europe, this job keeps me moving and involved in so many aspects of our operation. I truly love what I do.

“Every great moment I've experienced in the cigar world has been because of the people that have experienced those same moments with me.”



OpusX 20th Anniversary



The Don Carlos Eye of the Shark

What are your earliest memories of your grandfather and what was the best piece of advice he gave you?

When I was young and starting out in the family business my grandfather told me: "If you do not see the smoke from my cigar and you do not smell my aftershave, you're too far. I want you right next to me, learning everything I know." My grandfather was the patriarch of our family and I loved and admired him very much. He was the kind of teacher and mentor that you did not hear much from, you just had to learn from seeing him in action. A man of great character and hard work (indeed, he worked and created our Casa Cuba line from his hospital bed during the final months of his life). He instilled in me that family is everything, that hard work is necessary, that attention to detail is the only thing that keeps quality consistent and that this Fuente legacy is not something we are forced to continue, but that it is something we should truly love and aspire to continue. It is for these reasons and more that I wake up every day and drive to the office with my abuelo, our Don Carlos, always on my mind and in my heart.

You recently won the Tobacco Business Awards 'Woman of the Year' award, congratulations! What does this mean to you?

As a female executive in a predominantly male industry, do you ever face any challenges or come up against any prejudice?

It was a sincere honour to be recognised as Woman of the Year and I truly appreciate it. We work in a historically male-dominated industry, so it is inspiring to see so many women in it now. I was raised and am always surrounded by strong and passionate women in the Fuente family, and I hope more and more women will join this industry. Their hard work and dedication will be an invaluable asset to our great cigar industry for years to come.





THE COMPANY IS NOW more than 100 years old. How do you see your family brand evolving as we move towards a new decade?

The Arturo Fuente Cigar Company celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2012, and the goal of my generation and hopefully those that come after us is to make it to 2112. We have to adapt to changing times like any company does. For example, in today's world the increasing use of social media in marketing and branding efforts means we are constantly looking at ways to evolve and interact with our customers. What has truly set us apart has been our continuous dedication to superb quality.

Our tagline has always been and will always be 'we will never rush the hands of time.' This guarantee of consistent quality is what we, the newer generations, promise to continue for our beloved customers. As my grandfather said: "I never cared about being the largest cigar manufacturer, I always cared about being the best."



Where would you see yourself if you were not in the cigar industry?

The honest answer is that I can't see myself in any other industry. My job means so much more to me because it is part of my history, my heritage, my legacy. It is who I am. With that said, if I had to make a choice, it would definitely be in a field that deals with people. Being around great people is part of what makes my job and our beautiful industry so special, so I would search for an area of employment that would provide that same meaningful connection with people.

How do you see the growth in the Middle East markets and when do you plan to do a tour in this region?

Arturo Fuente and the Middle East is a story of love at first sight. The cigar aficionados from across the region including the UAE, Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait and many more have a deep understanding when it comes to the finest luxury products in the world and immediately took a particular interest in the Arturo Fuente brand of cigars. As people and our passion for cigars we are very much aligned.

Quality, passion, hard work and no compromise on perfection are values we share with our customers. RPMX, the regional agent for Arturo Fuente International underlines the phenomenal growth in the region over the last few years and we are seeing an immense growth in demand. Unfortunately, the supply is very much limited, so it's really a question of making sure the cigars are in the right locations. When it comes to Fuente, quality has no compromise. My family strives to make the best cigars not the most. We will not compromise quantity over quality.