

IN THE KNOW

BURNING ISSUES

A stylish new breed of cigar bars, lounges and plush spaces designed to skirt around stringent anti-smoking regulations are opening around the world. And, as PETER SWAIN explains, they are inspired, in part, by the whiff of official disapproval

Just as Prohibition in 1920s America created the speakeasy, so recent attempts by authorities worldwide to clamp down on smoking has stimulated a fashionable new generation of grand hotel cigar lounges, where aficionados can legally savour fine Robustos in dedicated soigné surroundings accompanied by the likes of vintage armagnac, fine single malts or even a glass of Dom Pérignon.

The perfect accompaniment to Havana's finest is, of course, a matter of taste, occasion and company, but whatever the choice, all are agreed the shared enthusiasm for one of the finer things in life engenders a unique collegiality among devotees. One such was Winston Churchill, whose penchant for Romeo y Julieta led to the introduction of the "Churchill cigar" – a seven-inch (17.8cm), 47-ring gauge monster – and a bar and terrace bearing his name at the **Hyatt Regency** on Portman Square in London (london.churchill.hyatt.com). The great statesman would have enjoyed the quietly clubbable ambience, refreshed and recast anew, the Cohiba 1966 Limited Edition on offer and the care taken by bar staff when matching classic cocktails to particular tobacco varieties.

He would also have appreciated the bespoke leather armchairs, art books and invitations to private >>



“GOOD CONVERSATION AND THE APPRECIATION OF CIGARS TRANSCEND NATIONAL BORDERS”

tastings at the members-only Viñales Club's terrace at the **Le Royal Monceau** in Paris (leroyalmonceau.com). In this chic new locale on Avenue Hoche, the select few have a key to their private humididor and enjoy exclusive concierge service as well as gifts of cognacs and fine whiskies. Close by on Avenue Montaigne and open until 2am, the subtly lit chestnut brown and black décor of the Cigar Bar in **La Maison Champs Elysees** make it an impeccable choice for a post-prandial puff as well (lamaisonchampselysees.com).

With a similarly rich, dark masculine design, the Long Bar at the **Waldorf Astoria Shanghai** has recently reintroduced a dash of decadence to the Bund (waldorfastorianshanghai.com). The passion for cigar smoking may be global, but just as Bordeaux and Burgundy dominate fine wine lists, Cuban brands still hold sway. So here, signature smokes include Cohiba Behike 54 and Partegas Serie D No.4, one of the world's best Robustos. Patrons also enjoy oysters flown in twice a week from around the world.

Of course, Davidoff would argue that the Dominican Republic is the exception to the Havana rule. Espousing the philosophy that “living well is an art”, the Swiss marque moved its cigar operation there in 1991, and has since rolled out numerous fine emporia worldwide, the latest of which opens soon in Geneva's splendid Belle Époque **Mirador Kempinski** to coincide with the launch of 24 luxe apartments (kempinski.com). Demonstrating its global reach, the Davidoff Lounge in the elegant **Algodon Mansion Buenos Aires** is another success story. In the heart of the embassy district, this rooftop terrace also serves cocktails, the best Argentine wines and features music from top local DJs (algodonmansion.com).



The diplomatic quarter, this time in Tallinn, is the setting for **La Casa del Habano**, an establishment both Estonian and international (havanas.ee). On a recent visit to this commodious snug, two ambassadors were seen debating the earthy undertones of the Montecristo Edmundo with gusto, demonstrating that good conversation and the appreciation of fine cigars transcend national borders. Similarly, the colourful Cigar Lounge in the excitingly contemporary **Le Gray** in Beirut is a haven in which

distinguished denizens can take a leisurely time out from current events on the streets below (legray.com). Also perched above the city, a favourite location for many of the world's best cigar terraces, the rooftop bar at the **Melbourne Supper Club** ([161 Spring Street](http://161SpringStreet)) is popular among the post-theatre crowd looking to escape life's vicissitudes while enjoying a glass of port and a spicy Bolivar Belicoso.

With its walk-in humididor demonstrating serious commitment to quality and choice, the Bentley's Whiskey Bar in the newly opened **Four Seasons Hotel Baku** is a good example of the phenomenon's growing global appeal (fourseasons.com). The successes of this and cigar bars in the likes of the **Ritz-Carlton** in Tokyo (ritzcarlton.com) and the **St George Roma** (stgeorgehotel.it), to name just two more standout properties, all suggests that, despite – or maybe because of – official opprobrium, hoteliers of note are recognising that this particular shared passion has an illustrious future. ■

