



# Interview with “Cigar Czar” Richard Carleton Hacker

By Kimberly Fisher

If there is one person who knows a lot about cigars and cigarettes, it's Richard Carleton Hacker. Known as one of the world's foremost authorities on the subjects of cigars and cigar smoking, he was given the nickname “the cigar czar” by several media outlets. He has written more than five hundred articles on the topic for publications such as The Robb Report, RobbVices, Collection Magazine, The Tasting Panel, Somm Journal and cigarworld.com. In 1994, he was knighted by the Internationales Tabakskollegium in Germany for his numerous writings on the subject of tobacco.

His book, The Ultimate Cigar Book 4th Edition, was first published in 1993, recently republished and sold



worldwide. The book is touted as the most comprehensive, factual and up-to-date book for the cigar smoker, but it's also perfect for those who just want to learn more about the fascinating and popular world of cigar smoking. We sat down with Richard and chatted about the life of a cigar aficionado.

**Kimberly Fisher: How did you get into cigars? When was the first time?**

**Richard Carleton Hacker:** I started smoking cigars during my senior year in college. I had smoked a pipe (I have never smoked cigarettes), but found cigars a whole new experience. They felt comfortable in the hand and they looked good. Plus, like pipe tobacco, they were made of pure tobacco and nothing else — no additives. And they were easy to clip and light. I started off with inexpensive stogies, but once I lit up a hand-rolled premium cigar, I never looked back. That's when I formed my philosophy that I would rather smoke one good cigar a month than seven mediocre cigars a week.

**KF: For someone just starting off in cigars, what do you recommend?**

**RCH:** Start with a mild cigar, like a Macanudo or a Davidoff Anniversario. Experiment with different brands and different sizes. Don't buy a whole box. Instead, buy single cigars of individual brands and experiment. It's like going to a wine bar and sampling different varietals. Ask a tobacconist for his recommendations as well. As for sizes, one of the most popular is the robusto, which provides plenty of flavor and will last

about 30 to 45 minutes. And remember, with cigars, you don't inhale — you get all the flavor from the smoke, which you then exhale.

**KF: You have traveled the world exploring the making and history of cigars. Where have you been and what are some of your favorite places?**

**RCH:** I've been to every major cigar-making country, including Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica and the U.S., of course — although we don't make nearly a fraction of the cigars we did during the late 19th and early 20th centuries because of labor costs.

I find it interesting that today the most elegant premium cigars are made in third world countries, where labor is cheap. Of all the places I've visited, among my favorites is Cuba, because of its great cigar-making tradition and — politics aside — its people (who are as curious about us as we are about them), and the Dominican Republic, as they supply most of the world's non-Cuban cigars. Plus, I am a big fan of Dominican food and rum.

**KF: What do you think spawned the cigar craze in America?**

**RCH:** It was caused by individuals who literally had money to burn — that is, they had no qualms about lighting up a ten-dollar cigar — and were looking for a new lifestyle experience that was complementary to other aspects in their lives, such as fine dining (cigars are a great



digestif after a meal) as well as whiskies and cognacs, which pair well with cigars. In addition, cigar smoking is a very social endeavor. They invite conversation, especially with fellow cigar smokers. It's a very social thing that breaks down all sociological, ethnic and even political barriers. Plus, cigars have always retained an aura of success. And, they are relaxing to smoke, an important aspect in today's hectic world.

**KF: What is your favorite cigar?**

**RCH:** Whichever one I happen to be smoking.

**KF: In your book you list several types of cigar pairings. What is your typical pairing?**

**RCH:** It depends on my mood, but invariably it involves a stronger spirit rather than a lighter one. A single malt whiskey, such as a Macallan 18 Year Old and a Padron Family Reserve or a Fuente OpusX is nothing short of perfection. I also like pairing certain complex bourbons, like Blanton's, with Honduran cigars, and LBV ports with medium-strength cigars like the Dominican Cohiba or the Cuban H. Upmann.

To learn more about cigars or Richard, please see: [richardcarletonhacker.com](http://richardcarletonhacker.com)

CIGAR IMAGE COURTESY OF FREEIMAGES.COM, ALL OTHER PHOTOS KIMBERLY FISHER

