

## Like A ROCK

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The Rocky Patel Premium Cigar Co. will "reach \$25 million in sales this year and we're among the top one or two sellers in more than 50% of the retail stores where we are sold." That's Rocky Patel in an interview in the newest issue of Smoke magazine.

"When I moved to Florida," he said, "I decided to seriously focus on quality because when I traveled to cigar shops I discovered that most of the hard core customers were true connoisseurs. I saw that the market was very similar to the wine market of twenty years ago when people were getting educated. I realized that people's cigar palates were getting more sophisticated and we needed to meet that demand."

Patel has earned the respect of his fellow cigar makers by his fanatical drive for quality in all aspects of the cigar-making process: in the fields, in curing, sorting, rolling and packaging. The success of his hot-selling Vintage lines is a testament to his drive:

"Once we've sorted the leaves into primings, we ferment for a period of time based on the thickness of the leaves, taking the taste to another level while getting rid of most of the ammonia, nicotine and fertilizer from the leaf. This process allows us to build a cigar that has immensely rich taste but without sour taste or a bad finish. Once the tobacco is fermented, we put it away for anywhere from two to four years . . . in the instance of the Vintages, the wrappers are 8 to 12 years old."

And the future? "I think the next wave will go back to cleaner, richer cigar with greater tastes."