

## A NEW STAR IN THE SKY

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From the floor of the 2007 Tobacco Plus Expo!

Las Vegas, NV, April 27 &ndash; How do you make a cigar a success?

Perhaps no other question so vexes cigar makers and smokeshop owners, but &ndash; as in the movies &ndash; sometimes a star can carry the day. At the 2007 Tobacco Plus Expo at the Las Vegas Convention Center, it&rsquo;s clear that there is such a star on the rise.

Jose &ldquo;Pepin&rdquo; Garcia.

After spending the first 50 years of his life rising to the top of the production administration in the Cuban cigar industry, he went to Nicaragua in 2001 and decided to stay. It wasn&rsquo;t long before he ended up in the United States and set up a tiny shop in Miami called El Rey de Los Habanos, or &ldquo;The King of the Habanos.&rdquo; It was a prophetic choice of name.

Garcia toiled like all start-ups, but got an unexpected break when Pete Johnson of Havana Cellars in Los Angeles asked him to help a small line of cigars for Johnson to sell to his friends in smokeshops around the country. That brand was Tatuaje, which launched in 2004 and became an almost overnight success for its bold flavor and outstanding craftsmanship.

Johnson was taking orders faster than Garcia could fill them, but the success of the brand allowed Garcia to begin offering his own lines on the national market and at the 2005 Retail Tobacco Dealers of America trade show, he introduced the El Rey de Los Habanos, Don Pepin Garcia and Don Pepin Garcia Serie JJ. All three have done very well, but Garcia&rsquo;s reputation was even further enhanced with the introduction of the Padilla Miami 8 & 11, also well received and strongly promoted by the Padilla brothers. The combination of high quality, strong promotion, good reviews and a powerful word-of-mouth campaign among smokeshops and smokers made Garcia a sought-after cigar maker.

The business expanded enough to cause Garcia to open a factory &ndash; the Tabacalera Cubana &ndash; in Esteli, Nicaragua and created an immediate frenzy among enthusiasts not seen since El Credito&rsquo;s Ernesto Perez-Carrillo opened a facility in the Dominican Republic in the 1990s. Then, devotees of his La Gloria Cubana line wanted to get the cigars he made at his original facility in Miami rather than the new factory in the Dominican Republic. For Garcia, the demand is not just for more cigars, but more from Miami! As with the La Gloria Cubana, the situation is returning to normal, but Garcia is the cigar star of the hour.

And the best part? &ldquo;He is one of the nicest people you will meet,&rdquo; said Jonathan Drew, the power behind the Drew Estates factory and the Acid, Natural and Chateau Real lines. &ldquo;A real gentleman; we&rsquo;re all happy for him.&rdquo; A great compliment from the always-energetic Drew, but especially for someone who is a direct competitor. Perhaps that&rsquo;s the best measure of America&rsquo;s newest cigar star.

Stop by, we stock the Don Pepin & Tatuaje cigars.