

CIGAR NEWS

STEVE SAKA RETURNS WITH NEW CIGAR: SOBREMESA

BY ANDREW NAGY

After a two-year hiatus, Steve Saka, the former chief executive officer of Drew Estate who had a hand in creating the popular **Liga Privada** blend, has formed his own company and is returning to the cigar industry with a new cigar—the **Sobremesa**.

Saka's new company is called Dunbarton Tobacco & Trust and is named after the New Hampshire town where he and his wife, Cindy, who's also a partner in the company, reside. The couple plan to operate DTT out of the town of almost 3,000 residents.

"The 'Trust' part," of the name, said Saka in an interview with *Cigar Insider*, "stems from a turn-of-the-century bank building I am attempting to buy to headquarter the company in."

For nearly three decades, Saka has been associated with the cigar industry in some capacity. A cigar smoker since 1984, he wrote extensively about cigars for years until 2000, when he was hired to be an executive consultant for cigar retailer and distributor JR Cigars. He worked there for four years before joining Drew Estate, where he oversaw the production of brands such as Liga Privada, Acid and Herrera Esteli. He even held equity in Drew Estate, where he rose from president to CEO, but was bought out after departing in 2013.

"I still have some genuine regrets deciding to depart, but in the end I believe I made the right choice," said Saka in a press release. "Drew Estate had become a juggernaut, and along with that success, I found myself spending too much energy focused on business-related issues and less on what I personally love: the creating and crafting of cigars."

The axiom of Saka's new company is "Puros Sin Compromiso"—cigars without compromise in Spanish. "Cigars are more than just a passion for me, they are my life," said Saka. "... Our sole focus will be on crafting the finest cigars possible without exception."

With this philosophy in mind, Saka has created his first cigar brand under DTT, Sobremesa, which is a Spanish idiom that describes the leisurely time spent relaxing, talking and smoking tableside after dinner is finished. Says Saka: "Sobremesa is one of life's simplest, yet greatest, pleasures."

Sobremesa will debut in five sizes, all under 60 ring gauge: Corona Grande, which measures 5 1/4 inches by 44 ring gauge; Cervantes Fino, 6 1/4 by 46; Robusto Largo, 5 1/4 by 52; El Americano, 6 by 52; and Gran Imperiales, 7 by 54. Each vitola will be packaged in boxes of 25, but prices have not been set yet.

"Here I am, a week-and-a-half before [IPCPR], and I still don't have the price," Saka said with a laugh.

The cigar will be rolled at the Joya de Nicaragua factory in Estelí, an operation Saka developed an excellent relationship with during his time at Drew Estate. However, unlike other brand owners who may simply tap a factory for a cigar that they can then market, Saka is bringing his own ingredients—tobacco, packaging, labels—to them. "Part of the deal was the ability to bring in materials," he said.

While the sizes and factory have been settled, Sobremesa's blend took some time to finalize. Saka says he knew what the wrapper and binder would be, but he said he had been debating the filler tobaccos.

"It's a big departure from Liga Privada," he said, describing both of the potential blends. "It's more of a strength issue. I don't want the strength to overwhelm the flavor." Saka said he waited until the cigars rested for 60 days after being rolled before he smoked them and decided.

The wrapper for Sobremesa will be a rosado Ecuador Habano leaf, while the binder is Matacapán from Mexico. The fillers include four tobaccos that were cultivated from Nicaragua: C-SG seco, which is a Criollo hybrid from Condega, Criollo viso from Pueblo Nuevo, and Criollo '98 viso along with a hybrid ligero from Estelí. Additionally, the final blend includes broadleaf ligero grown in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

Saka said he had 1,250 cigars of both blends in each vitola rolled before making a decision, and he confirmed that Sobremesa is the only cigar he's releasing at the upcoming IPCPR trade show.

While Saka does have a booth at the show, he is on the fence about whether or not he'll be giving out samples.

In line with Saka's banking theme, the art he chose for DDT was resurrected from an old stock certificate issued by United Cigar Stores, a corporation that was under a holding company called Tobacco Products Corp., which crashed in 1929 shortly before the stock market. The image, which has the look of U.S. currency, depicts Greek gods Demeter and Hermes flanking an oval scene of people tending a tobacco field. Additionally, the box art for Sobremesa is based on a La Lunda vista from 1917 featuring a man walking his donkey through a tobacco field, with embossed gold medallions accenting the label. ■

