

Big Sticks Fine Cigars

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By Kevin Lambert



Bob Guertin is proud of his memorabilia. Like a kid showing off his baseball cards, he walks around the interior of Big Sticks Fine Cigars, pointing at various objects that decorate the wall and shelves of the expansive, aesthetically charming new Mesa location. “See this Peter Schuyler sign? Guess how old it is?” he asks, anticipating a guess that is sure to be way off. “It’s from 1903. This Natalie box from the Owl Cigar Co? 1890. Isn’t it interesting how they packaged cigars back then? They simply came in a box, no individual wrappings or cellophane to keep their humidity.” From the moment you meet Guertin, it becomes obvious that this is no opportunistic business type who simply combined a hobby with a perceived trend in order to make a buck. Money is always nice, sure, but Guertin is wholly invested sentimentally in this new endeavor more than any financial commitments or profits he has considered. This man is obviously passionate about cigars and the rustic accouterments that are part of the industry’s widespread appeal. Couple this fact with the prime location he selected within West Mesa’s brand new Riverview plaza off Dobson Rd, and you have the ingredients for a highly successful new business.

The specs of the store will further convince anyone of the quality operation Guertin has initiated. “This store is unique because the whole humidor (360 sq ft) is lined with $\frac{3}{4}$ inch- thick planked Spanish cedar boards. Cigar smokers know this is the best wood for cigars. It not only keeps humidification right where it should be, but it also maintains the scent, wards off tobacco beetles, and seasons the cigar. You’ll also notice that the floor in the back area, bathroom, and humidor is travertine marble. The ceiling is 13.5 feet high, so that with the wooden walls around the humidor, it looks almost like a second story building.”

And what is Guertin’s favorite cigar? For this answer, he walks to the back entrance and points to one of the many plaques that offer bits of wisdom to curious observers. It reads, ‘The best cigar is the one you enjoy smoking.’ “There are so many different types of cigars and moods you could be feeling, it’s impossible to just say one cigar is my favorite,” he says.

All In The Family!

Guertin’s wife, Marci, has lovingly supported her husband and his initiative with blood, sweat, and tears, and she also lends Big Sticks some genuine legitimacy through her familial background. “Her mom is Cuban,” he says, taking cues from his wife as he retells the history. “She came to Florida when

she was 21, and worked a soda jerk for a number of years. She learned to speak English, and eventually earned her citizenship. A lot of Marci's relatives still live in Cuba." Though Guertin adamantly maintains that this situation has never led to any Cuban products making their way into his possession, he freely admits that he would like see the embargo lifted eventually.

The Guertins are not alone in this grand adventure. Business partners Bernie Smalley and his wife Karen Criswell are also actively involved, though according to Guertin their areas of operation rarely overlap. "He plays golf, and I don't," he says, laughing. "He likes sports, and I'm not a big sports guy. So while he works the golf and sports angle with the people he talks to, I'll work the store."

Aficionados Unite!

The 'Fine' within Big Sticks Fine Cigars was not just thrown into the tagline as a way to enhance the store's appeal. Guertin makes no bones about the demographic he expects to populate his store's sizeable interior. "The average ticket here should be around \$50 to \$60," he explains. "A lot of people out here that smoke cigars are successful people, affluent people who retire, or who own businesses- these are the types I expect to do most of my business with. Look, they have to buy them from somewhere, right? So my vision is to create a comfortable setting where these people will want to bring their friends who smoke. You come here, hang out with your buddies, and forget about the outside world for a while. One of my favorite quotes is, 'A good cigar closes the door to the vulgarities of the world.' I sincerely believe that, so Big Sticks is about making it a reality for the people that spend time here."

Guertin built 108 lockers for regulars who desire a little storage space for their purchases or other personal items while they hang out inside and for the next time when they come back. "There's a growing online market for cigars, sure," he concedes. "But the reason you come to a place like this is to relax and socialize with your friends over a cigar. That's what it's all about. So, starting in June, every first Wednesday of each month we will hold our A.S.H night, which stands for 'Aficionados Smoke Here.' One guy rents a locker, brings some pals, buys some good cigars, then relaxes and plays some pool, or watches the game on one of our comfortable couches. It will go from 5pm-9pm, and if you bring friends with you, then you get discounts on cigars. It gives people a reason to not just buy cigars from us, but to bring their friends and spend time at Big Sticks. Simple as that." The lockers can be rented month to month, with a full year commitment resulting in a two-month discount.

Big Sticks Fine Cigars brings a refined, socially nurturing location to the East Valley for anyone who wants to get together with friends and enjoy a good cigar. Stop by soon to visit Bob and Marci as they hold it down at 70 degrees and 70% humidity for your smoking pleasure.

Big Sticks Fine Cigars is located at 1017 N. Dobson Rd., #106 in Mesa. For more information, call 480-668-6099 or visit www.smokemorecigars.com.