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INTERVIEW
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Harvest Inn is an idyllic resort featuring 78 guest rooms and suites that are nestled within five luxuriantly landscaped neighborhoods. Guests are surrounded by towering redwood trees, vineyard views and botanical gardens that create a sublime guest experience.

THE 4TH ANNUAL ONE MAIN CIGAR EVENT AT HARVEST INN

CUBAN CIGAR AND CALIFORNIA WINE LOVERS
GATHER AT THE ST. HELENA-BASED RESORT

by Nick Hammond



WHAT DO LEAVES, GRAPES, FRIENDS AND GREAT FOOD HAVE IN COMMON? Not a busting lot on the face of it. But just try telling that to friends of the One Main Cigar Event, held annually at Harvest Inn, located in the heart of Napa Valley, California.

Rolling vineyards, a five-star hotel, great food, incredible wines and the services of an on-hand cigar expert; what more could you possibly want?

>> Sultry Cuban tunes filled the air at the vineyard affair



THE One Main Cigar Event at Harvest Inn has gone from strong to stronger over the past four years. The Harvest Inn's signature restaurant, Harvest Table, is part of the Napa Valley hostelry's legendary hospitality event, which also includes a rolling tour of some of the area's majestic vineyards.

This past spring, the conclave offered elaborate and artisanally crafted dinners, served outdoors in some of the most magnificent Napa locales. Cigar experiences were abundant, and the event featured a Cuban cigar tasting on a serene vineyard patio at the Harvest Inn. The One Main Cigar Event featured charitable fundraisers as well.

The gathering, which continued the longstanding collaboration with British cigar store owner Ajay Patel, showcased why the event has become an annual must-not-miss affair.

Patel, who runs the La Casa del Habano in Teddington, London, is well known for his extensive research into, and expertise on, the world of the Cuban cigar.

The cigar event he created with the owners of Harvest Inn, Rick Kaufman and Andrew Garay, draws enthusiasts from every corner of the United States and beyond.

"We've had people from San Francisco, Los Angeles, Canada, Miami, Colorado, Chicago, you name it," he says from the lounge of his specialist UK cigar store, with its private keeps, and boxes of rare and exceptional cigars.

"It was an incredible weekend the first time we hosted it—and it's only gotten better as time has gone on."



>> Ajay and Bhavna Patel were amongst many smiling faces at the events



>> The One Main Event appealed to many a gourmand

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FOR this year's event, guests were welcomed to the hotel with a Friday night barbecue—their first steps into a three-day extravaganza celebrating the cigars of Partagas.

“We first came up with the idea after one of our weekends over here,” explains Patel. “The owners of the hotel and I have been friends for a long time, and they would regularly come over for a few days of catching up, eating, drinking and smoking great cigars. They kept urging me to arrange a cigar event with them over there, and I must admit, I was skeptical at first. But one day, we finally agreed to bite the bullet and do it. And we’ve never looked back.”

Around 70 cigar lovers gathered at the One Main Cigar Event to make the most of the vineyard views from Harvest Inn in St Helena. Everything—but everything—about the event is cigar-friendly. And that includes tours of local vineyards such as Francis Ford Coppola’s historic Inglenook Wine Estate.

“That’s an incredible place,” says Patel. “We had a tour of the winery—including the amazing movie memorabilia room and the wine cellars—and were then taken by bus back to Harvest Inn where some of the guys sat around the fire pits into the night, chatting about their cigar experiences and what an amazing weekend we were having.”

There are plenty of other aspects of the weekend to enjoy—from side by side tastings of a current production and a vintage cigar—to a Cuban band, cocktails and port tasting. As an example, this year’s comparison tasting (honoring 174 years of Partagas) was between a vintage Partagas Serie D No.4 from 1998, and the same cigar, this time from a box dated 2016. Comparative smoking sessions are invaluable for Cuban cigar enthusiasts. They highlight the nuances and characteristics of a cigar—but are, in reality, very rarely considered, let alone conducted by someone who can talk you through the process and what you’re tasting.

“It’s very laid back, very informative and just a lot of fun,” says Patel.



>> Ajay Patel displaying his beloved Partagas Cuban cigars for the patio tasting



>> The front entrance of the historic Inglenook Wine Estate



>> A memorable dinner at Inglenook Wine Estate

HE'S no stranger to such events. Making a name for himself as an expert finder of rare, aged and vintage cigars once he'd opened the UK's first La Casa del Habano in the early 2000's, Patel continues to be invited to worldwide events to discuss, describe and dissect a host of cigars, old and new.

"I love talking at these types of events," he says. "Because there's always something new to learn. I talk about the art of smoking a cigar, and while that might sound obvious, you'd be surprised about how much you can learn about tasting cigars in a new way. People at these events tell me that they've learned something fundamental, even if they've been confirmed cigar smokers for some time."

"Vintage cigars never get boring," he says. "There is always something new to learn, something new—or old—to taste, and an intriguing new direction to research into. The business continues to surprise and inspire me, and as all cigar lovers know, the deeper you get involved in cigars, the more amazing people you meet. The One Main Harvest Inn event is just another example of that. It's a phenomenal weekend and we look forward to it every year."

Editor's Note: Harvest Inn offers smaller gatherings on the third Thursday of each month for locals and Bay Area enthusiasts.

Nick Hammond is the UK's premier cigar writer, a winner of the inaugural Spectator Cigar Writer of the Year Award and a regular contributor to cigar publications around the world. He also writes extensively on travel, luxury, food, drink and The Good Life. His new book, Around the World in 80 Cigars: The Travels of An Epicure, is a must read for every cigar lover and world traveler.



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