

Humidor 101

How to keep your stogies moist. **BY BRIAN FUERST**

OK, SO YOU BOUGHT THE BOX OF expensive cigars that you know are going to impress everyone who sees you smoking one. But what do you do with the stogies between the smoldering interludes? Most cigar smokers can justify spending a few hundred dollars on cigars, but turn into tightwads when it comes to storing them. Yes, you could theoretically build a humidor out of a tall mason jar or an old cooler, but let's save that for the cheap-ass section. You're above that. You don't want that babe you're trying to impress to see you pull out your Monte Cristo or Cohiba from an Igloo cooler, do you? Of course not. So loosen the wallet and get a good humidor; you'll thank us later.

Of course, now that you have a nice humidor, you need to take proper care of it. Hey; don't screw up your face in consternation; no one ever said cigar maintenance was easy. All humidors require periodic care and maintenance to insure proper care of your treasured cigars.

The biggest mistake you can make is

TO WET OR NOT TO WET

By placing your cigars in a humidor, you're trying to recreate the tropical environments where most cigars are made, and you can't rush this process. Putting cigars into a dry humidor can ruin good smokes.

interior lid. Don't use a paper towel or a fraying cloth; these will leave a paper trail on the wood. After you've wiped down the wood, squirt your sponge with more distilled water, then place it inside the humidor on a plastic bag (to avoid direct contact with the wood) and close the lid.

Next, prepare your humidification device according to the manufacturer's instructions. (Again, never use tap water; use only distilled water.) Once the humidification element is filled, be

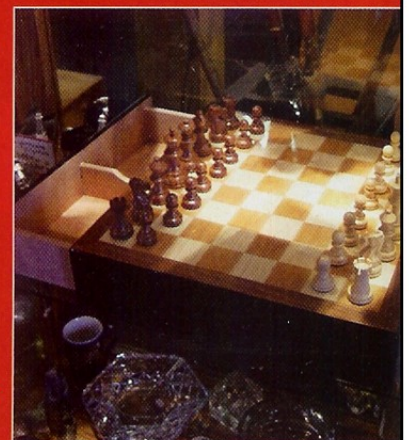
OPENING THE 'DORS: TWO TOP PICKS

DM Chess Humidor

The perfect fusion of chess and cigars, this kingly beauty lets you puff away while contemplating your next devastating move. Capable of holding up to 40 cigars, it also includes a digital meter, humidification system and a magnet for your favorite cutter. \$395; www.danielmarshall.com

Salerno

Compact, but with a serious storage capacity of 300 cigars, the super-stylish Salerno boasts two solid cedar trays, gold piano hinges and a built-in hygrometer. A glass top and sides complete the elegant package. \$149.95; www.tampahumidor.com



Most humidors have an interior made of untreated cedar, the preferred wood for humidifying and aging premium cigars. The wood needs to be humidified, or seasoned, before the box is ready to hold cigars. To accomplish this, take a new sponge (make sure it's unscented and free of soap) and wet it with distilled water (do not use tap water, as it contains minerals that will destroy most humidification systems by leaving deposits that clog the humidor element). Wipe down all the exposed wood, including any trays and dividers, and the

sure to wipe it down to remove the excess water. Rest it on a hand towel for about 30 minutes.

Place the humidification device in the humidor and close it, making sure to check the sponge before doing so. If it is fairly dry, add more distilled water. If it is very damp, leave it alone.

Let the humidifier sit another night, then remove the sponge and plastic bag. The walls of the humidor have now absorbed all the water they need, and you can safely store your cigars. Happy smoking! **ME**

