

CIGAR NEWS

XIKAR DROPS DEFIANCE NAME— EXPANDS CIGAR BUSINESS

BY DAVID SAVONA

The company that created the teardrop-shaped cigar cutter is amping up its burgeoning cigar business, while dropping the name of its highly rated cigar brand. Xikar Inc. of Kansas City, Missouri, has removed the word “Defiance” from its cigar line, and is now selling cigars under the name **Xikar HC Series**.

Xikar HC Series, which began shipping to cigar stores this month, comes in three varieties: Connecticut Shade, Criollo, and Habano Colorado. The Connecticut, which the company describes as “slightly stronger than the average Connecticut-shade cigar,” is the mildest of the three blends, made with a Connecticut-seed wrapper grown in Ecuador, an Indonesian binder and filler from Costa Rica, Mexico and Nicaragua.

The Criollo, which is a bit stronger, is made from the same blend as the **Defiance by Xikar** cigar. “There’s no change at all,” other than the name, said Jerry H. Dear, executive vice president of sales and marketing at Xikar. “Same shapes, same blend.” The Criollo is made with a shade-grown Nicaraguan wrapper, a sun-grown Nicaraguan binder, and a blend of Honduran and Nicaraguan filler. The blend has received high scores. Defiance by Xikar The Guardian was named one of the top 25 cigars of 2008 by *Cigar Aficionado*, scoring 92 points.

The Habano Colorado is the most full-bodied blend, made with a wrapper from the Jalapa region of Nicaragua, an Estelí, Nicaragua binder, and a mix of Costa Rican, Nicaraguan and Honduran fillers. “This way, we have one for after breakfast, one for midafternoon, and an after-dinner smoke,” said Dear.

Xikar created the Defiance brand in 2007, creating a new cigar distribution company to augment its accessories business. The company called the subsidiary Defiance Cigar Group, and named it so in “direct response to the ever-growing legislative and tax based oppression of cigar smokers, retailers and manufacturers in the United States.” Five percent of proceeds from Defiance went to fight for smokers’ rights. (The HC Collection will not contribute proceeds as did Defiance.)



The name wasn’t a positive one for some cigar smokers. “There was a lot of feedback that people didn’t want to feel defiant when they want to light a cigar—they want to enjoy,” said Dear. “It wasn’t a reason for them to buy a cigar.”

Defiance by Xikar was sold in about 185 stores, said Dear, leaving much room for growth—Xikar accessories are sold in more than 1,200 stores. “It’s a small piece of [the business] now,” said Dear. Five years from now, the goal is for Xikar’s cigar sales to equal accessories sales.

The cigars are made by Jesus Fuego, who made the Defiance brand. Fuego, who doesn’t own a cigar factory, makes cigars inside Nestor Plasencia’s Honduran and Nicaraguan factories. The Criollo is rolled in Honduras, while the other blends are made in Nicaragua.

Each of the Xikar HC Series cigars are available in Robusto, 5 inches long by 50 ring gauge, which has a suggested retail price of \$8.25; Lonsdale, 6 by 46, \$8.50; Toro, 6 1/2 by 52, \$8.75; and a six-inch-long Belicoso, \$9.25. (While the dimensions on the other cigars are identical throughout the lines, the Connecticut Belicoso is slimmer, with a ring gauge of 52, compared to 54 for the others.) The Habano Colorado also comes in a Churchill, which measures 7 inches by 48 ring gauge and has a suggested retail price of \$8.75, and a 4 1/2-inch by 44-ring petite corona, \$7.75.

The band has a large HC in red, flanking a green palm tree, with a ring of gold around it. The word Xikar is smaller than on the Defiance, and appears in small type on the side of the band. Each cigar’s foot also has a slim band bearing the name of the blend and graphic elements of the company’s luxury Havana Collection line of accessories, which the cigar brand pays homage to. Xikar was unable to use the term Havana Collection on a cigar line. “Habanos [S.A.] objected,” said Dear. Xikar continues to sell Havana Collection cigar accessories.

Xikar has created a number of new smoker’s accessories incorporating the HC artwork to complement the brand’s launch, including a lead crystal ashtray, a desktop torch lighter, travel cases, posters and a collection of Cuban music called Havana Rhythms.

Expect to continue to see some Defiance by Xikar cigars on shelves as Xikar works through its remaining inventory. In early May, Dear estimated the company had six or eight weeks of Defiance inventory still in stock. ■

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