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# Gilberto **OLIVA** Sr. + Jose **OLIVA**

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Oliva Cigar Co. has been growing tobacco in Nicaragua for decades. The Miami Lakes, Florida, company (which is not related to the Oliva Tobacco Co. in Tampa) branched out into cigar manufacturing 11 years ago. It now sells a variety of cigars bearing the family name, from the bargain-priced Oliva “O” Classic Olé (which was one of CIGAR AFICIONADO’s Top 25 Cigars of the Year) to the higher-end Oliva Master Blends, a new version of which comes out every year.

Company vice president Jose Oliva joined the family cigar and tobacco business when it started making cigars. He was 22 years old, fresh from studying marketing at St. Thomas University in Miami, and he thought he could teach a few things to his father, family patriarch Gilberto Oliva Sr., who was then 64.

“Working with my father is a thing that has evolved,” says Jose, who is now 33. “Eleven years ago, there was a good deal of frustration, me thinking things needed to be done a certain way. Now, it’s pure admiration and appreciation for him.”

When the Olivas first began making cigars, they tried to emulate the popular brands of the day, putting light-colored Connecticut-seed wrappers around a mix of Dominican and Central American tobaccos. They failed to find an appreciative audience.

Salvation came from the family’s disdain for taking on debt: the company turned to Gilberto’s large inventory of aged Nicaraguan tobaccos and began making *puros*. The change worked well, as Americans were growing more enamored with rich Nicaraguan tobacco leaf.

As a young man, Jose didn’t understand the value of having bales of tobacco piling up in inventory, not making money. “I, being very young, wanted to see additional money put into marketing, additional money put into packaging. He wanted it all to go into tobacco,” he says. “There was a tremendous amount of what I thought I knew.”