



# CIGAR PRESS

## MAGAZINE

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**On March 12th 2012, six unlikely characters were brought together in Miami Florida for what became the greatest day in history for a new era of cigars. For one brief moment in time, in the back of a Little Havana cigar factory, history was made. They dared to be themselves. They dared to be unique. They dared to be great. They are, The Unusual Suspects.**



**Originally featured in Volume 5 Issue 4 of Cigar Press thirteen years ago, we knew that history was being made. Each one of the guys in the original feature were the first wave, the tip of the spear in what has become a major segment in the cigar industry - one that was thought to be a phase, one that was doubted from the skeptics, one that ruffled feathers causing disruption and panic in a traditional, centuries old industry. However, time pushed on and boutique cigars have become a flourishing mainstay in the premium cigar space.**

**Forever known as the Unusual Suspects, they graced the cover of Cigar Press Magazine for what has become one of the most well-known covers in cigar magazine history. They represented a movement the industry had never seen. Today, each one of them continues to represent the ideals of what boutique brands are, regardless of the size they have become. Each one has forged their place in history making brands that are unique and expressive of their original vision.**

# UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

## — THE DAY THAT MADE HISTORY —

**Jonathan Drew**



**Pete Johnson**



**Dion Giolito**



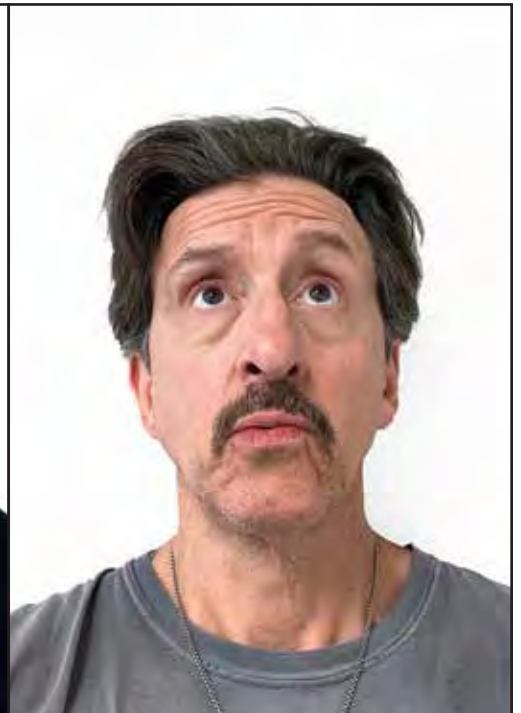
**Matt Booth**



**George Rico**



**Jon Huber**







# Dion Giolito - Illusione Cigars

**Cigar Press - What influence did the original Unusual Suspects have for you?**

**Dion Giolito** - Jonathan Drew planted a new flag in the market. Pete Johnson "out-Cuban'd the Cubans in both design and flavor. Matt Booth brought LA style and attitude along with a wicked sense of humor to the culture. George Rico brought a second-generation attitude with tobaccos that weren't all that prevalent in the marketplace and made them relevant. John Huber came from a Company that let him be himself through talent, design and packaging that also changed the landscape. He also happens to be a very good blender. And myself, I immersed myself in tobacco and shrouded them in conspiracies, which by the way, have all come true.

**CP - How important do you think it is for a brand owner to be in the factory, hands on with the blends and process?**

**DG** - It's extremely important to not only be a part of the process but to "lead the charge," so to speak. I can look anyone in the eye at any given blend and tell them which tobaccos, farms, lots, primings and percentages that go into each of my blends. It's for this reason that I'm in Nica usually every 4-6 weeks. It all starts with the raw materials. I learned from the best early on and was not afraid to ask questions. I go through the entire process from Pilon to Puro\* (yes, that's my phrase mf'ers - don't steal it!) and it is critical in order to maintain consistency in the unique flavor profile of Illusione cigars that has established our brand and separates us from others. For me, it all starts with the Viso and I work my way out from there to the other primings - Seco, Ligero, etc. It's a process that's dictated by mother nature and she can be very temperamental from crop year to crop year, farm to farm, Lot to lot and even priming to priming. It's important to select and smoke through all of the tobaccos to make sure that they check all of the boxes when it comes to what I'm looking for in the blending and manufacturing process - how your palate reacts, the sensation in the olfactory senses, the conscious, the subconscious and beyond. One leaf can make or break the blend. I'm fortunate that Eduardo Fernandez allows me to do this to ensure that all Illusione cigars within our book of brands perform properly and to specific flavor specifications. All of his farms (and he has a lot of them) have a specific flavor style relative to the seed-type that's grown in them and I can tell you the exact flavor profiles and aromas that each of those farms exhibit. I have no special gifts when it comes to this, it just comes from years of experience.

**CP - In the original interview we asked where you'd like to see Illusione in the future. You said buried deep in the catacombs of the Vatican. How many Illusione cigars do you think the pope is stashing away today and what do you think his go-to cigar would be?**

**DG** - I don't think that our Holy Father smokes cigars but, if he were to enjoy my cigars, he would probably stash away The Group of Five. Of course, he would have a healthy number of Original Documents as well, for obvious reasons.

**CP - You all represent what the boutique cigar side of the industry should represent. Do you feel that the new "boutique" companies still represent that today?**

**DG** - I think all of us really weren't seen as traditional even though, we honor the "tradition" of Cigar Culture that was passed down to us from our mentors like Henke, Carlito, Ernesto Carillo, Nick Perdomo, Pepin, Nestor... The list goes on and on. These masters ran through fire to create their vision to humbly present their creations to the culture for enjoyment.... and judgement. Guys like Jonathan Drew broke the mold and brought in his brand of culture and infused it into cigar making creating a market where there was virtually none back then. That guy right there had brass balls. His products were unique and experienced a tremendous amount of resistance in the 'old guard' cigar culture but, he kept going. He kept grinding and innovating until everyone understood his message and eventually was welcomed with open arms and was celebrated, in many cases, as the new era of cigar culture. Drew Estate's UF-13 is still to this day, one of my all-time favorite cigars. As far as the new 'boutiques' go, I think that there are some VERY cool and interesting things going on. Of course, there are always going to be some start-up companies out there that don't give a shit and just want to pick your pockets. It's unavoidable but, It's like that in all industries. Just look at the Bourbon/Whiskey industry as an example and even the craft brewing market.

**CP - One of the more common traits about the "boutique" cigar side of things, is that a lot of the companies don't own their own factory. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of that?**

**DG** - I look to it like being a 'guest chef' walking into one of the most respected restaurants in the Napa Valley, and even in the world. Being able to go into the kitchen and utilize the high-level ingredients along with sourcing other local ingredients to compose a menu that is unique to my style and soul. It's special. I can just concentrate on creativity. I don't have to worry about payroll, employment, overhead/expense. I just get to dedicate 100% effort into creating something that's representative of me without all of the white noise. I'm truly grateful to be in this position.

**CP - Did you ever think you would make it this far?**

**DG** - It's almost been 20 years. Crazy. At times it can be mindless and easy. Other times it's like herding cats with a garden hose. It's a grind that I enjoy through good times and bad, great markets and struggling economies. I like solving problems. In some cases, I feel that finding solutions to problems that arise in the tobacco process is almost a greater feeling of accomplishment than all the sales and back-patting that comes with birthing a new project.

**CP - Any final thoughts, cigars or otherwise?**

**DG** - Yeah. Epstein didn't kill himself. \*CP

