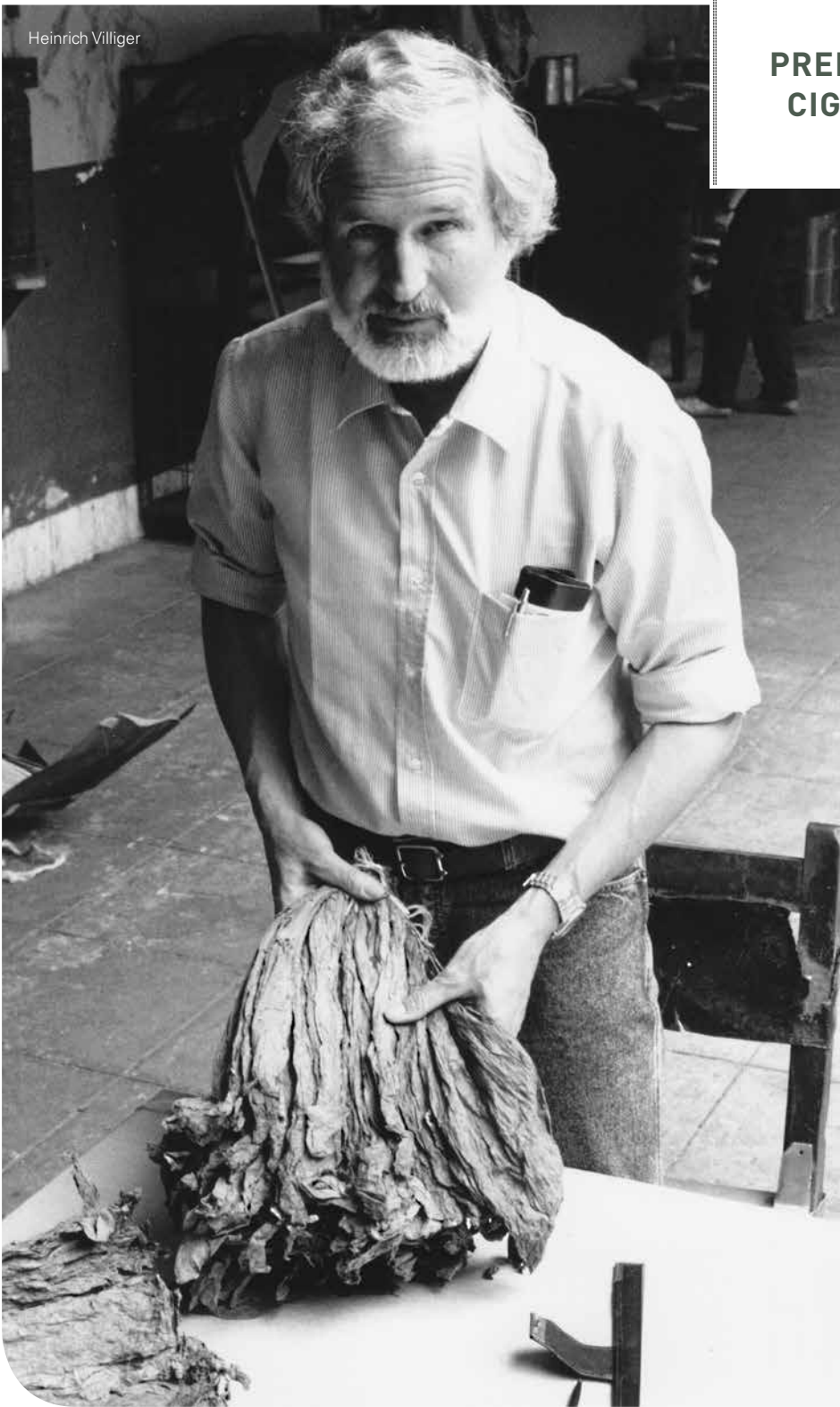


Heinrich Villiger

PREMIUM  
CIGARS



# A Long-Term

P.46



# Commitment

**As Villiger Söhne AG enters its 129th year in business, the company reflects on its history and its dedication to the premium tobacco market and looks toward the future.**

BY ANTOINE REID



In an age where tobacco companies are under the attack of increasing regulations and anti-smoking movements, any company that manages to beat the odds is impressive. Villiger Söhne AG, which dates back to 1888, has proven itself to be resilient and dedicated to not just cigars but to all premium tobacco categories. For much of its existence, the company was run by different members of the Villiger family, all innovators and entrepreneurs in their own way. Over the generations, Villiger has evolved and transformed, going from being a cigar manufacturer in Switzerland to an international company today with divisions around the world.

Today, Villiger remains as committed to tobacco as it was at its start. The company's portfolio is packed with a variety of products that are both machine and handmade, but above all, are made from premium, top-quality tobacco. From cigars and cigarillos to pipe tobacco, Villiger has something for every type of smoker in the market. To fully grasp the dedication and efforts made to establish Villiger as a global premium tobacco company, one must pay homage to the individuals who paved the way for the brand with over 129 years of history enriched in tobacco.

#### A FAMILY HISTORY IN TOBACCO

Villiger's story began in the Swiss town of Pfeffikon in 1888 when 28-year-old Jean Villiger founded his cigar company. When Jean died in 1902, just 14 years after founding the company, his wife Louise defied many stereotypes of the time by taking on the leadership role at Villiger. Wanting to continue what was built and inspired by his legacy, Jean expanded into the German and international markets, even as the world was engulfed in wars.

After World War I, Louise's sons Hans and Max led the company. As they continued to build on the legacy of their parents, Hans and Max brought new innovative ideas to the company's products and helped establish Villiger's European footprint and dominance with the development of products like Villiger Rillos, the first cigarillos with attached mouthpieces, and the ECO cig-

arillos, a then-innovative new type of filtered cigarillos.

In 1951, after receiving formal training in raw tobacco, Heinrich Villiger assumed control of his family's company and like those before him, he had a global vision for the company. Heinrich wanted Villiger to be an international company and known by many around the globe. He began purchasing Cuban tobacco for Villiger's Pfeffikon production facility and set the stage for Villiger to become the world's largest private purveyor of Cuban tobacco. He introduced the world to Villiger at the New York 1964 World Exhibition; he set up different divisions and distribution channels around the world to help spread Villigers' influence; he also continued to develop the company's product portfolio to expand it beyond machine-made cigars to include handmade cigars and pipe tobacco. Heinrich Villiger led the company for 65 years before stepping down in March of 2016—but the Villiger story was far from over.

#### A DIVERSE TOBACCO PORTFOLIO

Villiger is known for its machine-made tobacco products that carry the label of being premium. While there's sometimes a stigma attached to machine-made tobacco products, Villiger works hard to prove that one can make a premium product by machine. Only top-quality, premium tobacco is used in its machine-made products like the Export, a brand that incorporates over seven different tobaccos. The company puts its focus on quality and consistency, two characteristics that have helped its box-pressed Export brand find global success.

"Export is machine-made and a 70-year-old brand with nice, classical packaging and one that you will find all over the world," described René Castañeda, president of Villiger North America. "It's a product that can either be in the humidor or that can be sold at the counter in a display. It's a short, premium cigar, made for the person who doesn't want to spend \$10 on a cigar he or she just wants to smoke for 10 or 15 minutes." Export is available in three blends: Natural, Maduro and Brazil.

Villiger also has many premium handmade cigar products, the most popular of them being the Villiger San'Doro. This line has earned high ratings among the leading cigar magazines and websites. San'Doro is a super-premium cigar priced affordably between \$8 and \$10. This cigar is available in three different varieties: Claro, Colorado and Maduro, which is the strongest of the three blends. Oliva makes the Colorado and Claro





**VILLIGER**  
THE WORLD OF CIGARS

CLASSIC  
NEVER GOES OUT OF  
STYLE



VILLIGERCIGARS.COM

**WARNING: Cigar smoking can cause cancers of the mouth and throat, even if you do not inhale.**

Heinrich Villiger  
Circa 1970



**ee**

**We need to make sure we have great products that are of great quality because there is no second chance. We need to make sure we have an excellent product from the start.**

**”**

blends and the Maduro is produced in Villiger’s cigar factory located in Bahai, Brazil.

In addition to making premium machine- and hand-made cigars, Villiger also produces its own line of pipe tobacco. While pipe tobacco among a heavy cigar portfolio may be surprising, it fits well into Heinrich Villiger’s intent that the company be viewed not just as a cigar manufacturer but a premium tobacco company.

“When you look at us as a company, we give space and attention to pipe tobacco and you’ll see more efforts from Villiger to make people aware of it,” Castañeda explained. “We have the handmade and machine-made cigars and we have pipe tobacco. The cohesive message is that we are committed 100 percent to premium tobacco.”

#### IN FOR THE LONG HAUL

Today, Heinrich Villiger continues to be involved in the day-to-day operations of Villiger Söhne AG but, as in the past, a new generation of innovative and inspired leaders are carrying on the vision first set forth by Jean Villiger in 1888. Villiger has a new CEO, Robert Suter, and the North America division has a new president, René Castañeda. The company has undergone many changes in the past year but one thing remains—Villiger is wholeheartedly dedicated to premium tobacco and making top-quality products from it. From world wars to regulations in the European market, Villiger has faced its share of obstacles but it has yet to bow to any of them. Each challenge has inspired those at the helm of the company to rise to the occasion, innovate, and search for ways to improve itself. The FDA challenge is no different.

“Whatever we put into the market now is a long-term commitment and not just a flavor of the month,” explained Castañeda. “We need to make sure we have great products that are of great quality because there is no second chance. We need to make sure we have an excellent product from the start.”

Castañeda is a veteran in the cigar industry, having served as a product representative for many years before assuming the role of president of Villiger North America. Though he may not have the family name, he understands the work that must be done in order for Villiger to remain a formidable force in the tobacco industry. He, like those who have helped shape Villiger’s long history, also looks to those who came before him for inspiration and direction.

“Mr. [Heinrich] Villiger is the most passionate person about tobacco that I’ve ever met,” Castañeda declared. “Tobacco is his life. He is a firm believer that even with all the regulations and all the anti-tobacco movements in the world, that we as a company need to push forward [in] developing premium handmade cigars. He thinks that if anything goes wrong with the regulations, that handmade cigars have a better chance of surviving in the long term.”

#### LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Despite the FDA’s growing presence in the U.S. tobacco industry, Villiger remains dedicated to growing its presence here. The company has already faced regulations in the European market and has worked diligently on becoming compliant in order to continue serving its customers, and it plans to do the same here in the U.S. Castañeda reports that 70 percent of the company’s portfolio meets the requirements to be grandfathered into the FDA’s deeming regulations. When it comes to the company’s handmade products, Villiger is working through the substantial equivalence requirements ahead of time to ensure its products are available to its customers.

Castañeda and those at Villiger understand that while work must be done to secure its portfolio of products, it will not be successful without its key partners—the tobacco retailers. Customer service comes above all in Villiger’s marketing strategy going forward. The company’s sales representatives are constantly going through training sessions focused on Villiger’s many products. Sales representatives are also trained in how to carry out store events, another important marketing element for both retailers and consumers. The overall philosophy is if you are carrying Villiger products, then Villiger wants to help you in any way possible to make those products successful and profitable in your store.

“Here in the U.S. we’re trying to evolve and make sure we have a good foundation for our customers to have a good understanding of our company, its philosophy and our portfolio of products,” states Castañeda. “We want to show that we’re committed 100 percent from the beginning to the end.” **TB**



Villiger’s René Castañeda