



Photo Courtesy of Edgar Hollt



Making Cigars Cool: 101

Designer Matt Booth lays out his plan for world domination and keeping cigars cool with a new line of boutique smokes from his Room 101 brand. ➔ By Evan Dashevsky

When Matt Booth left the Marine Corps in 2000, he decided to make a move into a very different theater of combat: as an aspiring musician in Hollywood. It seems that you couldn't find two lifestyles farther apart from that of the soldier and the aspiring LA rocker. "On the surface they appear drastically different," comments Booth who these days looks more the part of the latter with arms full of ink and fingers full of bling (while still an avid supporter of those in fatigues through organizations like the Wounded Warrior Project). "We just happen to be soldiers for a different cause now. It takes a certain amount of intestinal fortitude to climb the ladder in any industry—the lessons I learned and experiences I had while serving in the military helped to shape my work ethic along with the multitude of core character traits needed to succeed."

To be successful in today's music scene, it's expected that the performer not just excite the ears, but the eyes. "The look" is essential for anyone trying to mark their place in aural history. Nowhere is this truer than in the overlapping patchwork of trends and fashions known as Los Angeles. "This silver subculture was born and bred here in L.A.—and this style of jewelry is pretty much standard issue—especially for guys that fashion themselves as rock stars. I was given a few pieces to wear in photo shoots and I soon became completely obsessed with it. I found several established designers here that I began to get my 'supply' from. My interest grew from obtaining new pieces to making sure I got something that no one else had—a 'custom.' Jewelry design began to take a front seat and music moved to the back."

By 2003, Matt was hooked into this new addiction he formed his own jewelry and accessory company, Room 101. The brand centers around an aesthetic he describes as "West Coast meets Far East. I blend LA flavor with traditional characters and deities found in Japanese Buddhism and Noh Theater. The sculptures I came across while in the East while I was in the Marine Corps made a huge impression on me. When I realized I could translate them into jewelry design, that was the direction I knew I wanted to take with my collection."

The Room 101 brand, which takes its name from the brainwashing room in Orwell's dystopic epic *1984*, took off and became a must-have for

the rocker set in Los Angeles and beyond. Room 101, which incorporates everything from rings, pendants, cutlery, and even golf bags is expanding from accessories into another of Matt's passions: cigars. Room 101 Cigars is being produced in conjunction with the Camacho guys whom Booth first came into contact with at a Room 101 event at the MAGIC convention in Las Vegas. "There was clearly synergy between our camps. I started a conversation surrounding the smoker's accessory collection I had been developing. Talk quickly turned to an actual cigar—and the next thing I knew, I was in Honduras helping design the cigar."

Matt, for his part, claims not to be a tobacco expert, but rather a cigar enthusiast. When it came time to collaborate on creating the Room 101 cigar, Matt teamed up with Camacho's master craftsman Christian Eiora. "Christian took my preference in flavor profiles, strength, and—I feel—a bit of my personality and blended a multitude of cigars for me to choose from for the final product. The process involved traveling to the Camacho facilities in Honduras—this is where I really got to sink my teeth into the entire process. It was nothing short of mind blowing. As it is a collaboration, I lent a hand with design element in regards to packaging and imagery and aesthetic surrounding the brand."

The Room 101 brand has found a niche creating custom products tailored to an individual customer's needs. Booth is looking to extend that individualistic attitude into the cigar world with what he gladly boasts as a boutique cigar, a brand for those in the know. "In my business I have seen a continuing increase in the demand for custom work. People come to us because they want something made for them *personally*. I feel that in some ways we are seeing the rebirth of the custom culture. The avid cigar smoker, in my mind, fits right in line with this. And I believe that the ever-growing boutique cigar market, which the Room 101 project is a component of, is at the tip of this spear."

Currently, Booth is busy introducing Room 101 cigar to the world in the media rounds and in person. "Having our own cigar is a dream come true—and we're livin' it in the here and now. Anyone that wants to come along for the ride is more than welcome to join the party because we're just getting started." As far as goals for the future? "That's easy. Total world domination." **S**