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# TOBACCONIST

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A man wearing a red t-shirt and a blue baseball cap is working in a tobacco field. He is using a tool to process large green tobacco leaves that are laid out on wooden racks. The background shows more of the field and some trees.

**Room101 creator excited  
about brand, mission**

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**Davidoff's Dr. Cina  
talks of growth, future**



# The conspiracy begins

**In collaboration with Camacho, Matt Booth brings his world-renowned lifestyle company, Room101, into the cigar world**

By Stephen A. Ross

A new conspiracy entered the cigar world in November 2009. Cigar manufacturers, retailers and consumers have long clamored over a conspiracy between government and anti-tobacco advocates working together to distort scientific evidence and utilizing “newspeak” in support of enacting public smoking bans around the world. While the “Big Brother” government envisioned by George Orwell in *1984* may be extending its influence unchecked, this new conspiracy, which takes its name from the torture chamber in the Ministry of Love in Orwell’s classic novel, is a refreshing challenge to all that’s politically correct and may be “Big Brother’s” own biggest fear manifested.

This new conspiracy will soon have cigar enthusiasts talking about a world-renowned lifestyle company, Room101, collaborating with a highly respected cigar company, Camacho, to create a series of cigars, smoking accessories and fashion apparel and accessories that are supported by an aggressive marketing campaign featuring elements never before seen in the industry that will benefit the business as a whole. ▶▶▶



But the conspiracy is much more than collaboration between Camacho and Room101. It's a philosophy and sense of style that is difficult to describe—a *je ne sais quoi* that arises from the Los Angeles-based fashion and music worlds and is deeply rooted in Japanese artistic and religious elements. The Room101 conspiracy encompasses not only the cigar world, but the worlds of fashion jewelry, sporting equipment, fine cutlery, tailor-made clothing, custom logos for vehicles and furniture hardware. It's a lifestyle company that mirrors the no-holds-barred, take-no-prisoners ethos of Room101's founder, Matt Booth, the talented visionary who began with a concept and created a worldwide movement by following his own instincts and passions.

### The inspiration

The Room101 odyssey began in 1996 when Booth, who describes himself as having been a juvenile delinquent, joined the United States Marine Corps, which he says gave him a fresh start. Serving with the corps as a machine gunner in a line platoon, Booth spent two tours on Okinawa and on mainland Japan. While on Okinawa and Japan, he often went scuba diving or explored the island, visiting its historic sights and learning about its culture. He became particularly fascinated with the symbolism and iconography of the artwork inside the island's religious temples.

"Okinawa and Japan were amazing and they made a huge impression on me," Booth comments over the phone

from his Los Angeles studio. "There were so many impressive and cool sculptures to be seen, particularly ones depicting characters that provide protection from evil. In Okinawa they're called 'Shisha,' which is similar to the Chinese Fu in the sense that it's a dog/lion hybrid character that's very ferocious. The Shisa's faces were always so cool to me. For some reason, I felt a connection when I saw those sculptures and what they symbolized, and in Japan everything means something, which is also true of the symbols used in Room101."

Upon leaving the Marines in 2000, Booth returned to Los Angeles, where he explored his interest in music and pursued a career as a rock musician. While performing on stage as a bassist, Booth also experienced other avenues of the music business. He worked at the famous Whiskey A Go Go as a sound and lighting engineer. He also interned at several record labels. As he learned more about the music industry, Booth discovered that playing music was really the only thing that he was interested in pursuing in the industry. Knowing the difficulty in making ends meet as a professional musician, Booth began looking for other careers to explore.

"Through those experiences I was exposed to the style in L.A. that is intrinsically rock-and-roll culture," Booth says. "This silver subculture is a product of the scene in L.A. I was taken by the style of the jewelry I saw people on the scene wearing. I asked about it and one thing led to another. I was introduced to several guys who



Christian & Julio Eiroa with Matt Booth



were established in making custom jewelry. Eventually, one of them helped me get my start.”

### Room101 becomes reality

Drawing inspiration from the characters and symbols he saw in Okinawa, Booth established Room101 Silver as a jewelry company in 2003. Starting off with rings, necklaces, bracelets and pendants, Booth soon attracted the attention of silver freaks and celebrities such as musicians Busta Rhymes, Slash, Dee Snider and Humpty Hump; mixed martial arts competitors Josh Barnett, Chuck Liddell, Jason Miller and Megumi Fujii; and television presenters Guy Fieri and Michele Smith.

“The originality and creativity of our designs has allowed Room101 to be the first silver brand to break through into the fine jewelry market,” Booth explains. “No one prior to us has been doing work that would be essentially taken on by fine jewelry departments. Room101 is not only different because of the fine jewelry segment, which is the Executive Collection, and our character segment. Obviously you have to have your skull for the demand factor but my focus was to always create Japanese deities and theater masks—characters from Japanese culture that had never been done before. We like to separate ourselves with a product that is aesthetically different and superior in quality of our manufacturing.”

Booth states that the creative element is always churning inside of him. He says he sees design possibilities in most everything he comes across—including a drain cover during a visit to an L.A. bar.

“I see designs in everything I look at. Sometimes I will have already thought of it or sometimes it will be the catalyst for a new design. The cornerstone of our Executive Collection series is our big block ring. We’re designing those with different patterns—checkerboards, spheres, etc. And we just came up with one that had a look like expanded metal. A week later, I was at a bar and looked down and saw a drainage cover on the drink dispenser and realized that that was the pattern we were making—perforations with beveled edges. There are a lot of things that can lead to design inspiration. I probably have 50 designs waiting in the wings. I’m an addict when it comes to developing new products.”

With so many ideas running through Booth’s head, Room101 grew into a lifestyle company with the addition of cufflinks, pocketbooks and chains, belts and buckles, custom cases for Zippo lighters,



shirts and leather goods, golf bags, custom knives and now cigars.

“Ultimately branching into other lifestyle categories happened organically, but the idea was always there,” Booth comments. “Room101’s foundation was our innovative jewelry design and it always will be the core of our company. Yet I want to have the world’s most comprehensive lifestyle offerings, hence introducing cigars and smoking accessories. We want to present to people all the finer things in life with our spin on them and our level of quality attached to them, of course.”

### **The cigar conspiracy**

Booth had been introduced to cigar smoking by an uncle, and he occasionally smoked cigars while in the Marines. On his travels around the world, he would often pick up a cigar for his uncle. Now Booth’s proud to be able to give his uncle a box of his own cigars.

“I really only started to explore smoking on a different level when I met the guys at Camacho,” Booth explains. “I had met Camacho’s director of marketing,

Dylan Austin, through a mutual business contact. I invited Camacho to be sponsors at a Conspiracy party I hosted during the Magic fashion convention in Las Vegas and we hit it off immediately. There was instant synergy between us. Not only did we have a great time, but it was an eye-opener for them to see how we do things and give them an idea of what Room101 is about. I had no idea that it would take us to having our own cigars produced.”

After spending time with Camacho, Booth developed a deeper appreciation for cigars. He developed his palate and scrutinized the cigars he enjoyed with more discretion. Having already developed a smoking accessory line, Booth was eager to add humidors to the series. He talked to Austin about the project and several months later the Fumidor, a \$30,000 humidor, was born.

Talking about the Fumidor led Booth and Austin to discuss the possibility of making a cigar. Approximately a month after the conversation about Camacho making a Room101 cigar began, Booth traveled to Honduras to visit Camacho’s factory and farms.

“It was a mind-blowing experience,” Booth relates. “Learning about the process was amazing, and there was so much information that it was really difficult to take it all in at once. It changed my perception of cigars forever.”

Witnessing the cigarmaking process for the first time, Booth began to draw parallels between the worlds of cigars and jewelry.

“That’s when I started relating a lot of what





was going on there to what I do,” he explains. “There are a lot of similarities between the crafts of cigarmaking and making jewelry. The human touch is first and foremost the biggest similarity between manufacturing the two products. In handmade jewelry, there will never be two pieces completely alike. There are slight microscopic differences, and no two cigars are ever possibly the same. I have nothing but tremendous respect for Christian and Don Julio Eiroa and the passion they have for their craft. They’re also very honorable people.”

While touring the factory and visiting the farms was eye-opening for Booth, taking part in creating the blend for Room101 cigars was an even more exciting experience.

“We smoked so many cigars that I sometimes felt like I was a kid who had been caught smoking and was being punished,” Booth laughs. “There were several batches, each one having 17 to 20 different blends. Christian took tobaccos that he thought I might like and represented my personality and blended them into the cigars we tried. Some you knew right away weren’t right, others you wanted to smoke all the way to a nub. Ultimately, we found my favorite blend.”

Booth describes the blend used for his Room101 cigars as “medium-plus,” one that won’t intimidate a medium-body cigar smoker but has enough strength that consumers who favor full-body cigars will enjoy it. The cigars feature an exclusive Nicaraguan and Honduran hybrid seed called Semilla 101 for the wrapper, a Honduran binder and filler tobaccos from Honduras and the Dominican Republic.

“The blend is fantastic,” Booth explains. “People who smoke the cigars will notice a little zip in the middle of the cigar—a little extra nicotine buzz—it’s got a magical component. There are a lot of little cool intricacies to the flavor profile that you will experience while you smoke that makes it an enjoyable cigar without the hype. It’s an enjoyable cigar without the band. It’s just a good smoke. I like to smoke the 11/18 because when the cigar opens up it’s got some afterburner kicking in. The Robusto is real clean down the line. There are some good earth tones in the flavor profile. I want to feel what I’m smoking and taste it. This is something that won’t let these people down.”

The cigars come in six sizes, each size named for an area code instead of using traditional size names. The sizes are 213 (Corona), 305 (Robusto),



323 (Toro), 404 (Torpedo), 702 (11/18) and 808 (Bertha 6 x 60).

“The area codes have a deeper meaning, like everything that’s associated with Room101,” Booth says. “They represent places where good friends or family live. The price point and quality of the cigar is very good—it’s excellent value for the money. You strip away the hype and marketing campaign—you have a very good cigar. Adding the hype, marketing and the price point in addition to its quality is going to make retailers a lot of money.”

### The conspiracy’s future

As the first Room101 cigars hit retailers’ shelves in November, Booth and Austin began planning for the line’s future. Make no mistake—Room101 cigars are here to stay.

“This is a brand and in no way are we a one-hit wonder,” Booth explicitly states. “This is the first blend in this brand. Over the next couple of years, we’re going to do nothing short of developing this into a force to be reckoned with. As much as this is our own cigar brand, this is also Camacho’s boutique brand. We’re going to make a full go of it. We’re already working on a new product for spring, and the goal is to have a minimum of two new products by the time of the 2010 IPCPR show.”

Room101 cigars is supported by the excellent customer service skills that Camacho has provided and an already aggressive marketing and advertising campaign that will really take off in spring 2010.

“We’re planning a promotional tour in the spring,” Booth explains. “Every retailer who supports the brand to a certain level will receive a stop on the tour. It’s really exciting to be able to incorporate fresh media outlets, such as fashion media, with other lifestyle publications that may or may not have taken notice of something like this in the past. These

are going to be big events, and they will be winners for us and for our retailers. That’s all I can say about the event tour right now, but it will be interesting.”

In addition to the big spring promotional tour, Booth envisions years of support for traditional premium tobacconists. While acknowledging that Room101 cigars is a collaboration between Camacho and his company, Booth also says that it’s a partnership between himself and retailers.

“My goal is to support brick-and-mortar retailers,” Booth comments. “As part of our contract with the retailers, we ask them not to sell the cigars online. Unfortunately, some went against that agreement and we ended their accounts. I’ll do whatever I can to help brick-and-mortar retailers. This is a team effort and I’m going to support the retailers 101 percent.” **T**

## Room101 Silver

Room101 Silver offers a full line of luxury items that sell for as little as \$125 but has largely made its reputation for its Exclusive Collection series, especially the black diamond work, and its custom jewelry.

All of the Room101 accessories are available to retailers. Those interested in carrying Room101 accessories or checking out Booth’s unique work should visit the company’s Web site at [www.Room101silver.com](http://www.Room101silver.com).

Anyone interested in a custom piece should contact Booth. “Something of that nature requires consultation and we’ll go from there. The only two limits are your budget and imagination, and we’ll run out of budget long before we run out of imagination,” he says. Contact Room101 at 877-455-2555; e-mail: [sales@room101silver.com](mailto:sales@room101silver.com).

