

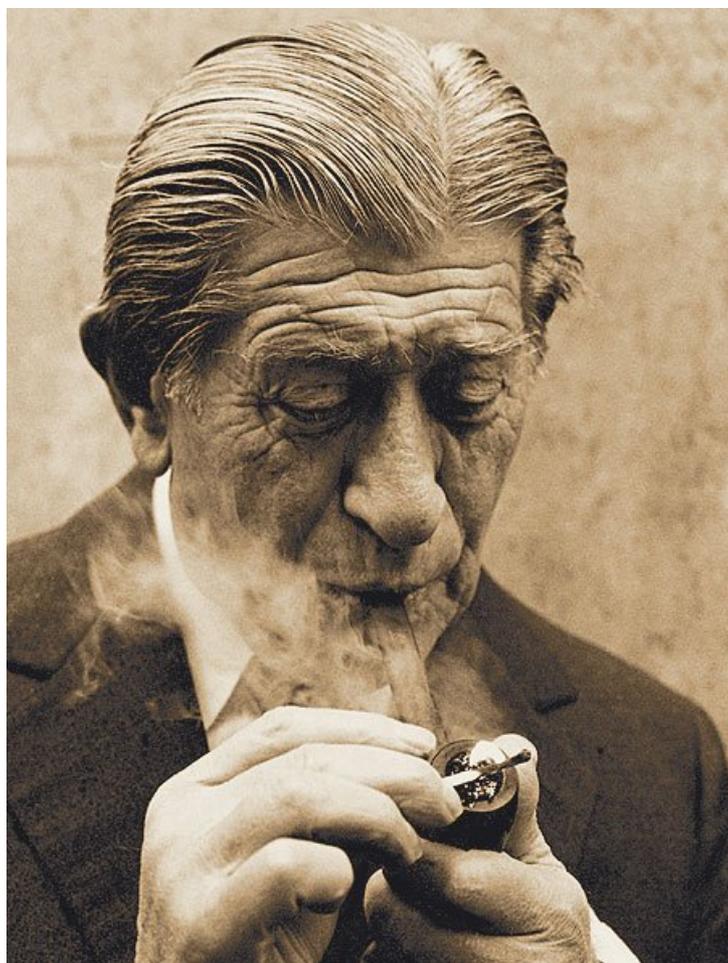
CLASSIC DRIVER

Zino Davidoff: the legend of a 100 years



When Zino Davidoff was born on 11 March 1906 in the Ukrainian city of Kiev, the first smell to greet him was the aroma of the oriental tobacco from which his father Henri secretly rolled cigarettes for friends and acquaintances in the family home.

At the age of five, Zino and his family fled from the pogroms in czarist Russia, reaching Geneva in 1911, where his father immediately opened a small tobacco shop on the Place des Philosophes. After leaving school, Zino decided he would prefer to see the world rather than attend university and set sail for South America, moneyless and with just a dinner jacket. Shortly after arrival in Argentina, Davidoff – a stateless person – had his “League of Nations” passport stolen. The local authorities, unfamiliar with this document, took Davidoff to be a diplomat from his easy, confident manner and issued him with new ID documents without further ado. That’s how Zino gained his Argentinean citizenship that was later to be followed by the Swiss citizenship.





For five years, starting in 1925, Zino worked in tobacco plantations and cigar factories in Argentina, Brazil and Cuba. In Havana he learnt everything about the cultivation, storage and exploitation of the incomparable Cuban “Puro”. On his return to Geneva in 1930, he wasted no time in expanding his father’s business with a cigar department and a special cellar, in which the valuable tobaccos could be stored without loss of quality. This forerunner of today’s humidor was the first of its kind in the world.

In the years that followed, Davidoff’s tobacco shop earned a reputation mainly through the import of Cuban cigars. In the 1930s, business was at first still slow, but the shop in Geneva was soon regarded as the world’s premier address for Havana cigar lovers. During the Second World War, Davidoff benefited from his good relationships with the Cubans. They allowed him to take charge of their large cigar warehouse in Paris before the Germans invaded France, with the result that for a considerable time Davidoff was the only dealer able to supply Havana cigars.



After the end of WW2, the Cubans set out with Davidoff to conquer the European market, which was dominated by German, Dutch and Swiss manufacturers. Zino surprised his partners in Havana with the idea of naming selected cigars after the “Grand Cru” wines of Bordeaux and he named his first line after the legendary “G.C.” appellations “Château Haut-Brion”, “Château Lafite”, “Château Latour”, “Château Margaux” and “Château Yquem”. With this began the rise of an empire that even the Cuban revolution in 1959 failed to disturb. In recognition of his great service, his Cuban business partners offered to produce his

own line for him in 1970. This was the moment the renowned "Davidoff No. 1", "Davidoff No. 2" and the "Ambassadrice" were born.



Around that time, in 1967, the first edition of his now renowned "The Connoisseur's Book of the Cigar" appeared - the compendium became a standard work for cigar smokers with more than 200,000 copies sold in different languages. In 1970, Zino Davidoff ensured the continuation of his company and sold the business to the old-established family company Oettinger from Basel.

On 14 January 1994, Zino Davidoff passed away in Geneva at the age of 88 leaving a motto for the cigar connoisseurs of the world: "Smoke less, but better and longer - make a cult of it, even a philosophy!"

Text: Classic Driver
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