





Still Walking His Cigar

Journalist Gay Talese's essay
on his ritual of a cigar stroll,
in our premier issue, set a tone.
We catch up with him two decades later.

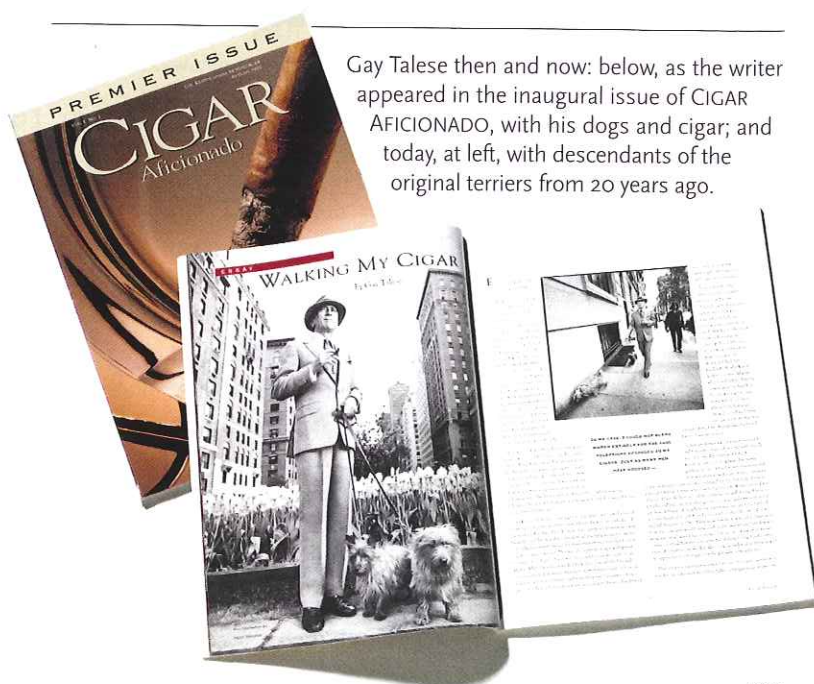
BY MERVYN ROTHSTEIN
PORTRAITS BY DARRYL ESTRINE



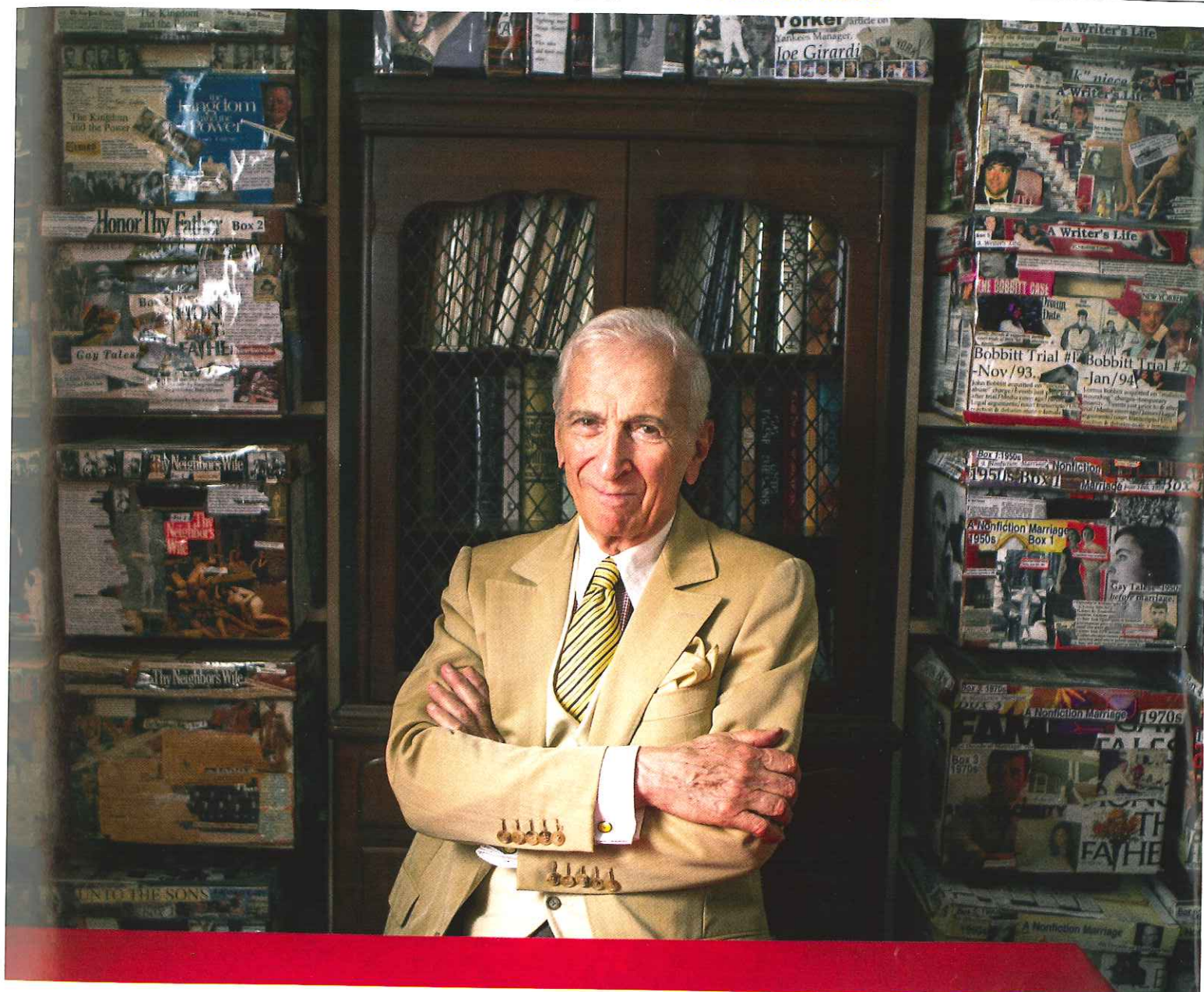
ay Talese, holding a glass of water in one hand and nothing in the other, sits on his living room sofa facing a writer from CIGAR AFICIONADO magazine who leans forward waiting for him to say something. There was a time when many a night, in some fashionable New York dining spot, those empty fingers would be wrapped around a cigar, most probably a Cohiba. No more.

"I long for the lust of cigar smoking," Talese says. "People like me, at this point we're nostalgia smokers, who look back in fondness at the glory days when after dinner at a restaurant, several restaurants, in Manhattan you had the option of taking out a good, or not so good, cigar and enjoying it and not arousing the passions or rancor of the fellow patrons and the restaurant owner."

Over the last 20 years, since the first issue of CIGAR AFICIONADO in September 1992, Talese has been a cigar advocate for the magazine.



Gay Talese then and now: below, as the writer appeared in the inaugural issue of CIGAR AFICIONADO, with his dogs and cigar; and today, at left, with descendants of the original terriers from 20 years ago.



Talese, often hailed as a founder of the "New Journalism" movement, stores notes from his writings in boxes that he decorates himself to match their themes.

In that issue, he wrote "Walking My Cigar" about the pleasures of lighting up while taking his two Australian terriers for an after-dinner walk near his townhouse on Manhattan's East Side. Things have changed much in that time, and cigar smokers, Talese included, are having an increasingly difficult time finding public, sometimes even private, places to smoke.

In New York City, smoking is prohibited not only in most restaurants and bars, but in city parks, in pedestrian plazas and on city beaches. Some buildings are even banning, or considering bans on, smoking in apartments. Talese will talk about the effects that those changes have had on his light-up life, about the antismoking culture that most if not all cigar smokers face these days. It is a conversation filled with memory, a kind of remembrance of cigars past, and regret about the present day.

"One of the great tragedies of my lifetime was the death of Elaine Kaufman," Talese says. Kaufman, who died in 2010 at age 81, was the proprietor of Elaine's, a renowned and star-studded Upper East Side eatery that for decades was home to writers, performers, athletes, socialites and other celebrities—among them Woody Allen, Michael Caine, George Plimpton, Joseph Heller and Mario Puzo. And Gay Talese. "Before the edict against smoking, she had one of the great cigar ambiances in the city. She liked

smoking. Cigar smoking when you're with other cigar smokers in a place such as Elaine's was almost 40 years of joy. It was the way to end an evening. You had a dinner—even if it wasn't a great dinner, because you knew at Elaine's you weren't going to have a great dinner. You knew what you were getting. You paid for ambience."

Elaine's wasn't the only place, he says. "Many, many restaurants throughout the city allowed you to smoke cigars. Gallagher's was one that comes to mind." The 21 Club "was also a great cigar-smoking place. It was fun. We'd discuss sports, and we'd discuss cigars, and argue ring size and you'd argue about a certain label. It was like wine tasting."

One of the things Talese has "come to miss so much in my senior years is the prerogative of opening my jacket, reaching in for a cigar, unwrapping it, lighting it with these big kitchen matches I've always saved, smoking it and sharing my cigars. The positive side is at least I had more than a half century—I'm 80 now, and I started smoking cigars when I was 19—of the pleasure of cigars."

One joy, he says, "was having dinner, having a brandy or a Cointreau. A Galliano. Something sweet, and have a cigar with it. Plus a little ice cream on the side. Maybe a few strawberries on top of a scoop of vanilla.