

Getting Gomez

An Interview with Tony Shenton of Hot Ash

Tony Shenton is the leader of Hot Ash, the oldest, continuously active club for cigar lovers and fetishists. Hot Ash holds monthly get-togethers in New York City, and puts cigar men from around the world in touch with one another. Satellite clubs in London, San Francisco, San Diego, Toronto, Nashville, Minneapolis and Atlanta sponsor events throughout the year. For more information about Hot Ash, write to: Hot Ash, PO Box 20147, London Terrace Station, New York, NY 10011.

How did Hot Ash start?

When Hot Ash first started off, we were a New York City-area club, and I sent a little notice to *Drummer*. When they were reporting on clubs, they did not list Hot Ash as a New York-area club. Therefore, I started to get responses from Houston, Sydney, Australia, Atlanta, and I realized there were people out there who really needed this kind of service.

How many members were there initially?

We were a social club before we were a correspondence club. As the social club, we started off with four people. But when we actually got the ball rolling, we had about a dozen here in New York. Once I started entertaining responses by mail, we had at least 10 responses a week for the first five to six weeks. Gradually, as people joined, the progress was incredible—we had 100 members in the first six months. Now we have about 275 members worldwide.

It seems that Hot Ash has been "low profile" for a few years...

We have lost our computer person, which has meant that our newsletter has gone into hibernation. Slowly but surely, I am typing up another issue of the newsletter. However, the calendar is still being published and events have continued to be held. We just doubled the amount of events we're having in New York. In the past couple years, we have affiliated with several other groups of cigar people across the country.

What cities are best for finding cigar men?

That depends on where you're going to look for it. If you're going to be looking in leather bars, the cities that may not already have a local chapter of Hot Ash or equivalent organization: Dallas, Houston, New Orleans, Orlando, Key West. Southern cities are definitely under-organized for this particular fetish. The problem with looking for cigar smokers in a bar—even a leather bar—is that cigar smoking is not encouraged, with the possible exception of a few bars. Cigar smokers are more likely to smoke at home than when they are out.

How can a "cigar renaissance" like we're having in this country occur in the midst of such vehement anti-smoking rhetoric?

You're looking at two very different areas of growth for cigars. The first is that a lot of gay men are finding out about our clubs, and becoming more comfortable with smoking in public. I think fads in general are bad; while *Cigar Aficionado* has liberated some people, I think that most people that are currently sampling cigars—especially these very high-priced, premium cigars—are dilettantes. They may enjoy it because they are told to enjoy it or because they think they should. As far as the anti-smoking furor goes, a lot of that has come about because of revelations about various non-tobacco ingredients—and possibly addictive ones—being placed artificially into cigarettes by mainline tobacco companies. A lot more people look at cigarette smoking as being unhealthful, but they still don't want to give it up. They don't want to admit it, but they like the smell and they like the taste so they'll go to having maybe one cigar a week or one cigar a night instead. They don't view that as being nearly as injurious to their health as smoking a pack of cigarettes a day would be.

Where do you look for jerk-off pictures of cigar smokers?

Even with the anti-smoking furor in the country, it is possible to find images of cigar smokers if you're a voracious magazine

and newspaper reader. There's almost always pictures of people with cigars in the media and I would say, in general, that the average age of people into cigars that you now see pictured has dropped dramatically. I mean, it used to be you only saw people who were gray-haired and wrinkled with cigars; not even good-looking older men. Now you see good-looking men of all ages with cigars.

What is your first cigar memory?

Gomez Addams from "The Addams Family" TV show—John Astin. I knew it had something to do with the cigar, his really bizarre sense of humor, and his train set. My attraction was definitely sexual. I wanted to get Pugsley out of the picture and take his place.

Besides smoke shops, where do you find cigar smokers?

There are still storefronts and factories in this country that will sell cigars fresh from the rollers. There's a couple in the L.A.-area, and there's some in New York City, and strangely enough, there's some in New

Jersey. There's Ybor City, just outside of Tampa, in Florida which is sort of "Cigar Town, U.S.A."—lots of hand-rollers making their own brands in Ybor City. Certainly with all the dinners and special events starting up now, there's a lot more men present with cigars in their faces,

which can be good for jerk-off material. Unfortunately, they do tend to keep the lights on at these events and these gentlemen tend to keep on their pants.

Are there misconceptions about men who smoke cigars?

Well, about cigar fetishists in general: that they are all into the same thing. And they aren't. There are as many different ways to be into cigars as there are gay men who consider a cigar the most interesting sexual toy they could ever find. 



Photo: Jack Fritscher