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Pipe Tobacco Primer

BY J.A. SHAPIRA

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Pipe tobacco is entirely about taste, and personal taste is subjective. With hundreds of blends available from around the world, I find it difficult to believe any man has smoked such a wide variety to the point they could rate the very best pipe tobacco on the market. Even independent tobacconists tend to develop their own blends of tobacco. Let's be frank: this article is not about the top pipe tobacco in the world. It's about our personal favorites and ones we believe are worthy of your attention.

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If you don't have a pipe yet, you definitely want to check out our [Guide To Tobacco Pipes & Pipe Smoking](#).



Nostalgic images of the suburban pipe smoker

Types of Pipe Tobacco

There are two primary categories that all tobacco falls into. Aromatics and Non-Aromatics. The difference between the two is rather straightforward: aromatics have flavoring or scent imparted on them whereas non-aromatics do not. Almost all tobacco is technically an aromatic as a genuine and authentic non-aromatic would be tough for most men to smoke with pleasure. A good rule of thumb is that most men who claim to prefer a non-aromatic tobacco just mean they want something that's less flavored and doesn't have strong notes of flavoring. However, this doesn't mean that the tobacco they're smoking is completely raw. It almost never is.

Burley Tobacco

In most cases, burley tobacco is actually used in cigarettes. It's air-cured and light which makes it ideal for cigarette smokers, but it is used as a base layer in pipe tobacco or to enhance the burning of it. It's exceptionally high in nicotine and offers little sweetness and a very slow burn. Burley tobacco is grown around the world and has the unique ability to hide its subtle flavor in almost any blend.

Oriental Tobacco

Also referred to as Turkish tobacco, Oriental tobaccos are spicy and prominently nutty with a nice oiliness and a sweet, yet sour flavor. Even though Latakia is technically an Oriental, the average Oriental brands try to label each separately due to their different profiles. It's a very predominant tobacco found in English blends, and it's very fragrant.



Pipe tobacco close up

Virginia Tobacco

Do not allow yourself to be fooled that Virginia tobacco is only grown in the United States. It actually comes from many different regions around the world but is known for being very sweet. Primarily used as a base, it's the reason so many tobacco blends are referred to as 'Virginian blends'. In many cases, you can also buy a tin of it to smoke straight. The reason Virginia tobacco is so revered is it has some of the most complex flavor profiles of any tobacco. It's relatively light when compared to other tobaccos like Latakia, but it offers a more elegant smoke in many cases. In most instances, the tobacco is only as good as the blend and a sign of poorly made Virginia tobacco is excessive tongue-bite. If you do experience this, it's generally a good indication you're not smoking the right stuff and that it's time to find a new purveyor.

Cavendish Tobacco

Cavendish is an interesting topic because many pipe smokers consider it a type of tobacco when in reality it's just a method that's used to enhance the sweetness of another kind of tobacco through a unique cutting and curing technique. In fact, Cavendish is often just burley tobacco that is treated to mellow its flavor and enhance the aroma.

It comes in many different colors and flavor profiles that often have strong notes of black cherry, [whisky](#), spiced [rum](#), vanilla bean and others. In most cases, Cavendish pipe tobacco is very mild and delicate but with sweeter flavors and more fragrant aromas.

Perique Tobacco

Grown only in St. James Parish, Perique is a spiced tobacco that is fermented and cured together. Often found in Virginia blends, it's very oily with strong notes of dried fruit and black pepper.



There is a huge range of pipe tobaccos available

Yenidji Tobacco

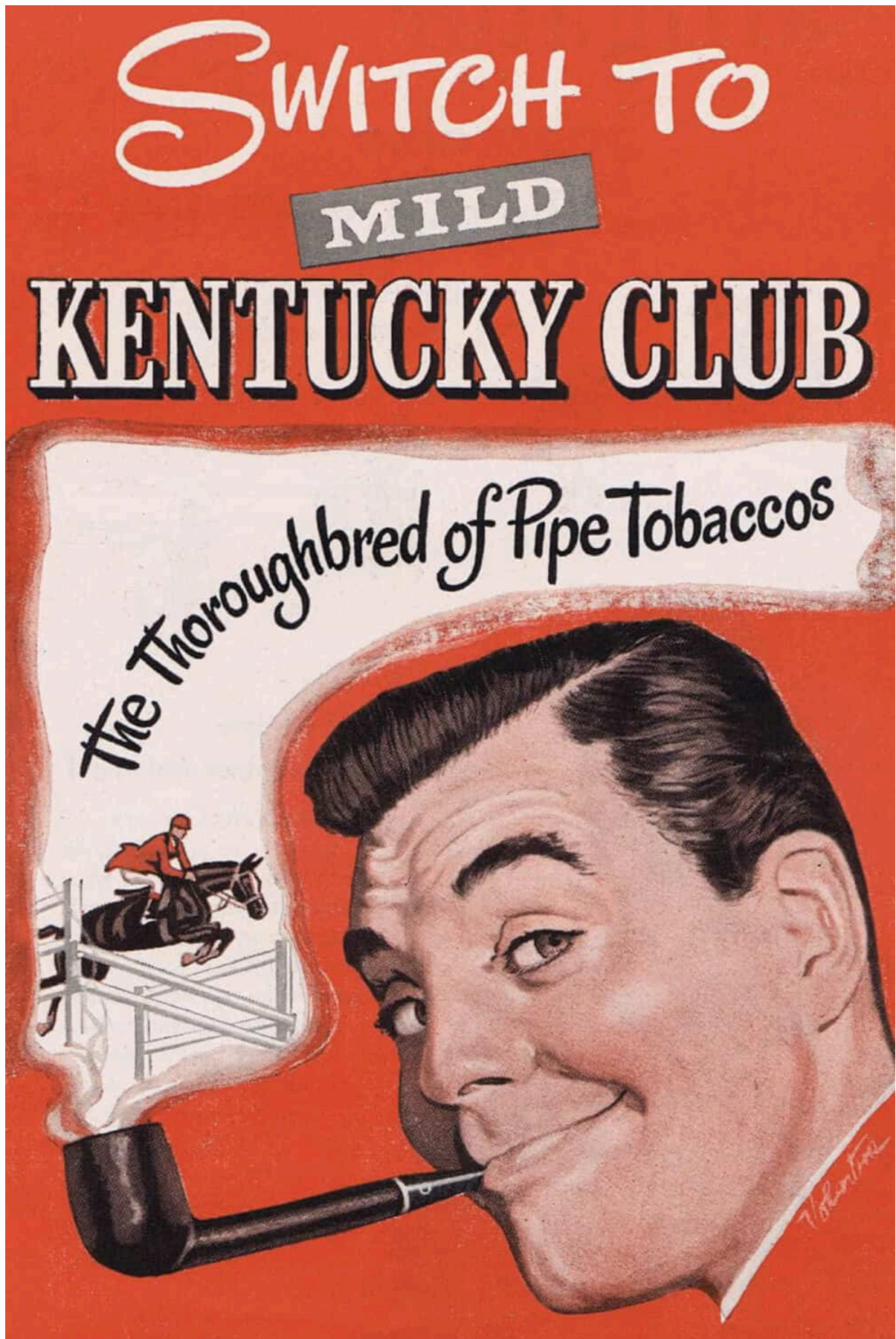
A Greek-style pipe tobacco, it's known for its spice but also it's smoothness and complex taste. It's not the best-known tobacco in the world, but it's followers are fiercely loyal to it.

Turkish Tobacco

Often used to impart a sweet and spicy flavor, it's used as a relatively predominant flavoring in many different blends.

Latakia Tobacco

One of my favorite styles of pipe tobacco, Latakia is a far more intense tobacco with smoky flavors and a spicy bite. It's almost always sold in a blend since it's such an intense smoke and is predominantly found in classic English tobaccos and some American ones as well. Many people believe that Latakia is cured over camel feces, but it's simply a myth and nothing more than that.



A vintage pipe tobacco advert

Tobacco comes in a wide range of cuts, and each cut is really based on preference. While many prefer to buy flake tobacco, others enjoy the ribbon cut or shag cut tobacco. In other cases, some men opt to purchase plug and bar tobacco as it stores far better since it's compressed. They will then cut the tobacco themselves whenever they are ready to enjoy it. I highly recommend starting with a rubbed out flake tobacco as they're the easiest to work with out of the tin.

Where to Buy Pipe Tobacco

In my opinion, the only place worthy of your business is a reputable tobacconist. There truly is no exception, and a relationship with your tobacconist is akin to the relationship a [gentleman](#) should have with his barber or tailor. It's worth it to find a tobacconist who knows your tastes and carries a wide selection of blends to choose from. In fact, many tobacconists have house blends and some will even custom blend a batch for loyal customers.



Custom house blends from a tobacconist

If you happen to live in a place without a reputable tobacconist, and you're not a frequent traveler, the next best option is to purchase pipe tobacco online. There are many online

merchants that specialize exclusively in the sale of pipe tobacco, and they are well worth buying from. One of the added benefits of buying online is that often the price is far less than you would find at a brick and mortar tobacconist. Of course the drawback is not being able to sample, smell or see the tobacco before you buy it.

Tobacco is very much like wine in that there are so many varieties available, and no two from the same tobacco type will taste the same. If you try one Latakia, it might be entirely different from the next. The best way to find the tobacco that you enjoy best is to simply try as many as possible and keep notes of what you liked and disliked about each blend. Once you do find the tobacco that you enjoy the most, you can then buy it in bulk or ask that your tobacconist maintain a stock for you based on your smoking habits and needs. I personally enjoy many different tobaccos, but my daily selection is Davidoff Scottish Mixture. Unfortunately, it's not available at my tobacconist, so I have to ensure I give them plenty of time to order it in or arrange for an out-of-town friend or relative to send it by post.

Recommended Pipe Tobacco



The incredible Scottish Mixture by Davidoff

Davidoff Scottish Mixture

My personal favorite and the blend I always keep well stocked, Davidoff's Scottish Mixture is a testament to the brand's pursuit of perfection. It's mild and yet complex with floral aromas and a refined flavor. Blended from hand-selected grades of Burley, Oriental, Virginia and Kentucky tobaccos, it's enhanced with a touch of smoke from single malt Scotch whisky. It is a consistently resplendent blend worth trying.

McClelland Best of Show

I really love this blend of Cavendish, Virginia, burley and black cavendish tobaccos. It's rich and satisfying with hints of sherry cream and peaty whisky. It's a coarse cut that needs to be rubbed out but is truly a member of the holy trinity of aromatic tobaccos. The burst of nougat is a very nice twist that McClelland has managed to perfect. You'll enjoy this one.



Escudo Navy De Luxe

Escudo Navy Deluxe

A blend of Virginia and Perique tobacco, it's a masterpiece of a blend that has a perfect balance of sweet and sour flavors. It is absolutely remarkable in its complexity and quality of smoke, and it is one you are certain to love, or at the very least, admire for its elegance and refinement.

Craftsbury: Frog Morton's Cellar

A part of the Craftsbury series from McClelland, Frog Morton's Cellar is a tribute to JRR Tolkien and one that has deep whisky flavors from its blend of Latakia and Virginia tobaccos. If you really enjoy English tobaccos, this is a great choice. It's slightly sweet but has that old-age refinement one often seeks in new blends. Known for its whisky flavor, I actually notice as much rum in it as I do whisky. It's slightly creamy and has great notes of vanilla and cinnamon on the finish with very little bite.



7 Seas Royal Blend

7 Seas Royal Blend

This ribbon cut tobacco pays homage to the high seas and the days when sailors were king. A blend of Black Cavendish, Virginia, and Burley, it's a great pick for new pipe smokers. It's a very fruity flavor with hints of dried fruits and a bit of bite. It's a pleasant and easy-to-enjoy aromatic that is a great way of introducing yourself to your new pipe.

Gawith, Hoggarth & Co. Sweet Maple Twist

I've never tried a GH & Co tobacco that I didn't eventually become friends with. The fact is that these tobaccos aren't for everyone, and it takes someone with a taste for strong tobaccos to be able to appreciate this excellent brand. However, if you do enjoy a hearty smoke, the Sweet Maple Twist is one you've probably never tried. It's a Virginia tobacco cut into ropes that has this undertone of maple that's not too sweet but manages to waft over your palate like a light breeze. This isn't the best choice for new smokers, but it is one worth trying if you already have a fairly in-depth collection. I was very hesitant to try this blend based on the name (I'm not a fan of overly sweet tobacco), but since it's a Gawith & Hoggarth blend I gave in. I'm very glad I did.



Orlik Golden Sliced

Orlik Golden Sliced

There is something nostalgic about Orlik Golden Sliced tobacco. It's got a very 1950s suburban appeal that draw up images of a suburban father smoking his pipe in a cardigan on his easy-chair. Perhaps it's this, coupled with the citrus tang that is utterly breathtaking. This is a masterful flake tobacco, and its delicate flavor profile is still so magnificent that even strong tobacco lovers will appreciate it. This makes for a very appealing daily tobacco and one I would recommend to any pipe smoker.

Dunhill Deluxe Navy Rolls

A quintessential blend of Virginia and perique tobaccos, Dunhill has once again crafted a delightfully endearing blend. At first glance, I must admit I was a tad put off by a warm tomato ketchup aroma, but once lit it wasn't overly sweet or fruit-forward as I initially expected it to be. It has a very light touch of spice but isn't overpowering in the least. The natural flavors from the Louisiana perique are still present, and the beauty of the Virginia tobacco is clear but without the bite. Overall, this is a great Dunhill tobacco that's worth trying, but it takes a refined palate to be able to appreciate its intricate flavor profile.



Peterson Holiday Season 2015 Pipe Tobacco

Peterson Holiday Season

I became a pipe smoker for two reasons. First, it's a lot less expensive and less time consuming than smoking cigars. Secondly, there's something charming about smoking my pipe on Christmas as the children are sitting around the tree, and Alastair Sim is on the TV. For those cold December nights – especially around the holidays – I really enjoy Peterson's Holiday Season 2014. It's an enticing aromatic blended from Burley, Virginia and Cavendish tobaccos. It has an intoxicating chocolate flavor that's swirled perfectly with ripe vanilla bean, candied fruit, and almonds. The buttery elegance of this blend is perfect for an evening smoke in front of the fireplace, and there's something overwhelmingly relaxing about this blend that should be exceptionally sweet, but somehow isn't at all. This is a limited release so considering buying up as much as possible while you still can.

Of course, also make sure to check out our [lighter guide here](#) and our [Tobacco Guides](#).

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Conclusion

There are so many excellent blends available and far more tobacco types, styles and cuts than we've explored. However, this article was a focus on our favorite pipe tobaccos, not the tobacco itself. For more information about pipe smoking be sure to [click here](#) and read our in-depth guide to pipe tobacco.

What's your favorite tobacco to smoke and what kind of pipe do you smoke it in?



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