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Photos courtesy of Daniel Marshall

FORTUNE'S CHILD

A series of fortunate opportunities led **Daniel Marshall** into a career he never could have imagined.



BY STEPHEN A. ROSS

WHEN HE WAS 18 YEARS OLD, DANIEL MARSHALL had big ambitions. Having grown up on California's Pacific coast, Marshall possessed a deep love for yachts and sailing for as long as he could remember. As a child sailing on the ocean with his family, Marshall carved his own Tahitian outrigger model from wood, and he crafted the outrigger's sails from copra. A few years later, Marshall obtained the plans for a Tahitian ketch published by *Mechanix Illustrated* magazine. Using those plans, Marshall built a model good enough to win one of the magazine's Golden Hammer awards.

By his 18th birthday, Marshall had saved enough money to buy his dream boat—a 32-foot yacht that he planned to live on and sail around the world. Admittedly, the yacht needed work—lots of work—but having worked with wood in building models for much of his young life already, Marshall was unfazed by the challenge. Towing the yacht to his father's avocado ranch, he lived in a trailer on the ranch and took jobs working at the nearby marina and a local marine supply store to earn the money to refurbish the boat and set sail on a life of exploration and adventure. Then a fortunate accident changed the course of Marshall's entire life.

Instead of living a life guided by currents and trade winds, Marshall has spent the past 37 years of his life charting the course of an exclusive humidor and cigar company. Today, Marshall is known as one of the best humidor makers in the world, and examples of his work have been enjoyed by celebrities such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, George Burns and George Bush, and have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars in charity auctions throughout the world. He is also a cigar producer who

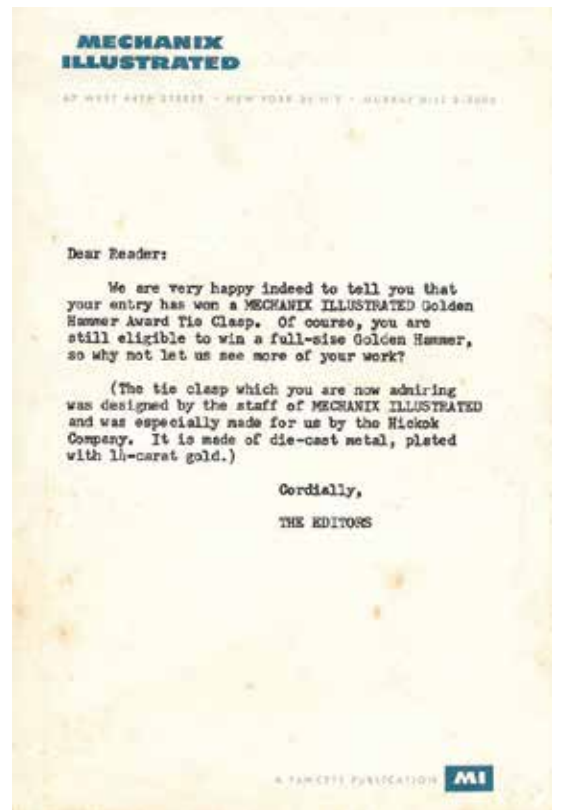
commissioned Manuel Quesada and Nestor Plasencia Sr. to make a line of exclusive cigars, including perhaps the world's most unique cigar, the Daniel Marshall Red Label 24-karat Golden Cigar, which Marshall personally hand rolls in pure Italian gold in his California home.

“Look for the accidents in your life because that's where you can find beauty and amazing dreams can come true, even though they might be completely different from what you could have ever imagined,” the 57-year-old says, reflecting on his life, which took a completely unexpected turn in 1982. “My dream was to be the guy on a 32-foot yacht with the beautiful girl, sailing around the world, but I ended up making beautiful things out of what kind of looked like the wrong direction but actually turned out to have been the right direction.”

Changing Dreams

While Marshall spent most of his days toiling to complete his yacht and set sail, he spent his evenings with his girlfriend, the granddaughter of Joe Bain, a successful entrepreneur who had sold his company for \$60 million in 1965 and was enjoying retirement in Los Angeles' Bel-Air neighborhood. Bain had taken a liking to Marshall and often asked him about his progress on the yacht. As the work on the boat neared completion, Marshall told Bain that he had secured a bank loan to give him the rest of the money he needed to finish the project. Bain reproached Marshall, telling him that he should have sought the loan from him, and he offered him a substantially larger loan.

“I drove home and realized that my life had changed—somebody believed in me,” Marshall says. ➤



Daniel Marshall Continued

Universal Pictures commissioned Daniel Marshall to make a special *Scarface* humidor for Al Pacino when it released the Blu-ray edition of the movie.

While he refused to accept the loan, Marshall wanted to show his gratitude to Bain but pondered over what he could give a man who could afford anything. He decided a gift from the heart would be best, and remembering that Bain enjoyed a cigar while they discussed Marshall's yacht, Marshall decided to turn his talent in woodworking into a present for Bain. Marshall crafted a three-cigar carrying case out of teak wood and found out what cigars Bain enjoyed—Montecruz No. 280 by Alfred Dunhill. He bought the cigars, placed them in the carrying case and put a plaque on the case that read, "To Papa Joe, Love Danny. Thank you for believing in me."

When he gave the case to Bain two weeks later, the older man clearly loved the gift. As he inspected it, he marveled at the quality inherent in the case and told Marshall that it was of good enough quality to sell commercially. He encouraged Marshall to approach Alfred Dunhill Ltd. to seek orders. Trusting his mentor, Marshall set out on a journey that began at the Alfred Dunhill shop on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, took a stop in New York City, where the American buyer for Dunhill worked and then concluded his travels in London, where Marshall presented his work to Aubrey Stiles, who was the managing director of Alfred Dunhill at the time.

"I had made a \$250,000 deal to produce humidors with the New York City buyer, but that order got cancelled after three months," Marshall recalls. "I had to go to London to show samples and get the British parent company to approve the quality and ask for their business and start over again."

When Marshall arrived at Dunhill's headquarters in London, he definitely sensed he had entered a hostile room, and he was intimidated. After Marshall finished his presentation, Stiles regrettably informed

him that the humidors he made weren't up to Dunhill's quality standards. Rather than accepting Stiles's judgement, Marshall pulled out a notebook and asked how he could improve the humidors to Dunhill's standards. After hearing the criticism, Marshall asked if he could come back the next day to show them that he could meet Dunhill's quality standards. Stiles agreed, never believing that the young man would have the guts to return. He didn't know Marshall's tenacity.

"From the meeting I went to a hardware store to pick up some supplies, and then I returned to my hotel room and fixed one humidor," Marshall explains. "I went back the next day, and I had satisfied all their critiques and Aubrey placed an order. I later learned from my driver who had hid himself in the bathroom stall so that he could overhear the result of the meeting, that Aubrey had told his executive team that any man who would go to the trouble to fix his humidors in a hotel room would be the man who would make Dunhill humidors. It's about persistence and following through. Business is quite simple when you do that."

Alfred Dunhill Ltd. was Marshall's biggest customer for many years, but other luxury companies also commissioned Daniel Marshall humidors. By the late 1990s, Marshall had gained a reputation for producing some of the world's best humidors. To be sure, a lot of that reputation has been earned by producing one-off humidors for celebrities and for charitable auctions, but Marshall makes a whole line of excellent quality humidors that everyday cigar connoisseurs can trust and enjoy. There's the Affordable Luxury Collection in which cigar enthusiasts can obtain a Daniel Marshall humidor for \$295 to \$595. The humidors are available with Macassar Ebony, Cocobolo Rosewood or Burl finishes, and they feature slots that fit the Daniel



Daniel Marshall showed remarkable woodworking talent as a young man and *Mechanix Illustrated* honored him with its Golden Hammer Award for a model of a Tahitian ketch. His earliest dream was to outfit his own yacht and sail the world.



Marshall Humidification System or his new disposable Humidity Stabilizers. Ambiente by Daniel Marshall humidors features 24-karat gold-plated hinges and locks and have Spanish cedar interiors. One of the most popular Daniel Marshall humidors, Ambiente offers a black matte exterior and comes in 65-count or 125-count sizes, and prices also run from \$295 to \$595. Treasure Chest is Daniel Marshall's most exclusive annual limited edition humididor, and Marshall creates just 200 of them each year. Marshall created the first Treasure Chest humididor in 1992, and one of the first to purchase one was Arnold Schwarzenegger, who later allowed it to be photographed for a story appearing in the May 1997 issue of *Cigar Aficionado* magazine. Daniel Marshall's Treasure Chest humidors feature a gently curving lid that transforms the rare burl wood grain into a pattern that appears in motion. Crafting these humidors takes more than 200 steps and six months and includes Daniel Marshall's "1,000 coat finish" to provide permanent protection, luster and depth to the humididor's exterior. Treasure Chest humidors feature French 24-karat gold hinges, security locks, tasseled keys and Spanish cedar interiors. Each humididor in the collection is inscribed with a serial number from that year's production, and Marshall reserves 10 Treasure Chest humidors each year for charity auctions.

"People buy a Daniel Marshall humididor because they trust us," Marshall says. "Anything that goes wrong with that humididor they will have the best customer experience in getting it corrected. Everyone is treated like a star. That is the DNA of our brand. We don't sell humidors and cigars—we sell experiences and trust. That's what held it together and created the reputation my company enjoys today. People aspire to own a Daniel Marshall humididor."

Adding Cigars

While Marshall built a loyal worldwide following for producing high-quality humidors, many of his customers asked when he would commission his own cigars. Having built his company's reputation on quality, Marshall was highly selective over who would make any potential cigars for him. Eventually, he chose Manuel Quesada, and later Nestor Plasencia Sr., to craft his cigars, which he began commissioning in 1996. Today, the line features three regular production cigars—Black Label, White Label and Red Label.

Marshall describes the Black Label as the mildest offering in the line but notes that it is complex and offers silky smoothness and creaminess. The White Label is made with a Cameroon wrapper and offers a rich, spicy and sweet flavor. The Red Label is the richest and most full-bodied cigar in the Daniel Marshall cigar offerings, but it is smooth as well. All of the tobaccos used in these cigars are aged at least five years, and each finished cigar is set aside for another year of aging. The result has been a cigar brand that has consistently received high ratings across the cigar media for more than 20 years.

"I'm a big believer in time and age and how it benefits tobacco," Marshall explains. "I have seen it firsthand. How tobacco evolves over time is quite remarkable. It benefits from age even more than wine, in my opinion. My cigars are made from the best tobacco that can be bought, and no expense is spared. Using the best rollers and the best companies—the real masters of the art—I want cigars that are rich and smooth. I have been very blessed to have cigars that I am proud of and that can stand up and be offered alongside Cuban cigars anywhere around the world." ►



For the Daniel Marshall Red Label 24-karat Golden Cigar, Marshall applies the Italian gold leaf wrapper himself.



The Daniel Marshall Treasure Chest humidor is the most exclusive humidor line the company offers.



All of Daniel Marshall's cigars are made by Manuel Quesada and Nestor Plasencia Sr.

Daniel Marshall Continued

The Man with the Golden Cigar

While Marshall has three varieties of regularly produced cigars, he also offers an extremely limited cigar. The Daniel Marshall Red Label 24-karat Golden Cigar sounds like something that might come straight out of a James Bond movie but the concept actually evolved when Universal Pictures commissioned Marshall to make 1,000 *Scarface*-themed humidors to launch the Blu-ray edition of the classic gangster movie. One of the Universal Pictures executives asked Marshall to make a very special humidor to present to the movie's star, Al Pacino. In the movie, Pacino played the role of Tony Montana, an over-the-top Cuban drug kingpin. Marshall made the humidor with the same theme as the rest of the *Scarface* humidors but included Swarovski crystal on its exterior surfaces. He wanted to put some unique cigars that Tony Montana would likely have smoked inside but had trouble coming up with a good idea. He thought about encasing the cigars in powdered sugar to represent cocaine. Another idea was to wrap the cigars in fake \$500 bills. Ultimately, a friend suggested encasing the cigars in a gold wrapper. At first, Marshall hated the idea but after a few hours of consideration, he decided to give it a try.

"The Golden Cigar was another one of those fortunate accidents that have helped me in my career," Marshall says. "When it was suggested to me, I threw it out completely because I didn't want to associate myself with glitz—glamour, yes, but never something that was a joke or over the top. I was with Dunhill and Cartier, and I didn't want to be laughed at. Additionally, I hate gold leaf. I had worked with it making the George Bush Inauguration humidor, and it gets everywhere and it's expensive, but as I was driving home that night it dawned on me that my friend had a good idea."

It took two months for Marshall to discover the process of making the 24-karat Italian gold leaf adhere to the cigar and look good. He made 20 of the cigars for Pacino's humidor, and when he presented it to the Oscar-winning actor, Marshall got the reaction he wanted—Pacino loved it, and everyone laughed and smiled at the gift. The Golden

Cigar might have ended with Pacino's humidor, but the *Robb Report* wrote a story on it, and other news outlets spread the word around the world. Soon, Marshall received orders for more Golden Cigars.

Every Daniel Marshall Red Label 24-karat Golden Cigar comes in the Torpedo size (6 1/4 x 54) and is personally wrapped by Marshall in more than 50 pieces of gold leaf. The cigars are made in Nicaragua at the Plasencia factory, and the blend represents a collaboration between Marshall, Plasencia and Quesada. The tobaccos in the blend are aged at least five years, and the cigar offers a medium- to full-bodied tasting experience with notes of chocolate, espresso and spice. After the cigars are made in Nicaragua, they're shipped to California, where Marshall lovingly rolls the best cigars in gold leaf. Each Golden Cigar is presented in its own Spanish cedar box that is signed by Marshall.

"I make them myself—it's my meditation and quiet time," Marshall explains. "I think about what it represents and who's buying it, what they're going to use it for and how it will help them commemorate a special moment in their lives. I can't make them fast enough. Only I make them. I like to do it myself, and we insert a little card that explains that I make it myself. I sign the cabinet, and I think that is special."

There's a lot that's special about Daniel Marshall and his eponymous company, and Marshall is the first to acknowledge it and gives the credit for his success not to his own doing but to the accidental occurrences that happened to give him the life, and the career, he enjoys today. Making humidors and crafting cigars has allowed him to meet a lot of interesting people around the world—some famous and others not so much—but to Marshall, everyone is a celebrity, and he hopes that they all will experience life's good fortune as he has.

"This industry has given me my family, my best friends and my livelihood," he concludes. "It's something that I love to be a part of. It's a modern-day campfire that has taught me the importance of people. Life is one big campfire, and you can make your dreams come true. The beautiful world we live in is so multidimensional. You must open oneself up to the unknown and enjoy the experience." **TB**