

SPIRITS OF PANAMA  
 Ron Abuelo rum heir Juan Carlos  
 Varela is president of Panama and  
 adored by his citizens.



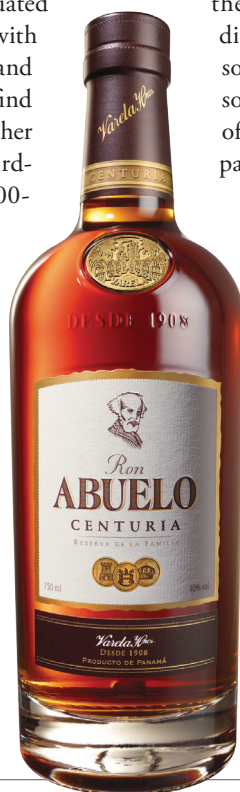
## Rum Runners

Panama's president and its finest aged rum have a surprising Atlanta connection.

| By Katie Kelly Bell |

Brothers Juan Carlos and Luis Varela graduated from the Georgia Institute of Technology with industrial engineering degrees back in 1985 and 1981, respectively, so it's a bit remarkable to find one running the nation of Panama and the other running a distillery. Both brothers are third-generation Varelas—a family who enjoys a 100-year legacy in the distilled spirits business and is globally recognized as a producer of one of the world's most exquisite aged rums: Ron Abuelo Centuria.

The family produces four rums under the Ron Abuelo label: añejo, 7-year, 12-year and the 30-year Centuria. As the newly elected president of Panama, Juan Carlos is tied to politics, so brother Luis runs the company. Luis is coy about choosing a favorite spirit, as he explains, "They are like my children; I love them all. I usually drink the 7- or 12-year rums on the rocks [though]." Juan Carlos, however, admits to a favorite: Centuria, the family crown jewel and



the 30-year solera-aged rum named for the distillery's 100th anniversary. Politics is messy, so one can appreciate his need for a spirit with some seriousness. Centuria delivers with notes of honey, hazelnut, vanilla and smoke on the palate, with a silky finish.

Centuria's complexity comes from a mixture of solera aging and an intentional departure from an overly sweet flavor profile. Indeed, Centuria is one of the most savory, least sweet rums on the market. Of course, when the moment calls for a cocktail, the Varelas' mixer of choice—and this should be no surprise to Atlantans—is Coke. Luis suggests crafting an abuelo libre, (which is a play on *pintao*), a popular Panamanian cocktail, a mixture of their 7-year rum with sparkling water, lime juice, sugar syrup, mint leaves, sparkling water and "painted" with a little Coke, of course. *From \$150, Green's Beverages, The Juice Box and Total Wine & More*