

Industry voices

Perfumers at Work

Our panel of experts discusses craft, trends, regulatory affairs, and the perfumers and perfumes they admire most

When we asked IFF perfumer Carlos Benaim which of his many creations he was most proud of, he said, "I can't answer that. It would be like asking someone to choose a favorite child. Because each fragrance requires one to two years of intense emotional involvement, the creation process is very special to me. Each scent represents a new breakthrough. I have many favorites — and each one is special to me." I'm sure Benaim speaks for most perfumers, who see their craft as an elusive, varied and unique art form. In the first of a series of occasional interviews, we recently spoke with several perfumers — both classically trained and self-taught, independent and corporate — for their takes on the job, art, challenges and rewards of fragrance creation.

Inspiration Never Goes on Holiday

Carlos Benaim, vice president,
senior perfumer, IFF

Unexpected beginnings

Interestingly, I was studying to become a chemical engineer in college and had no inkling that I ever would become a perfumer. My family was in the business of extracting natural essences from plants and flowers in Morocco. My father was a pharmacist and botanist who exposed me to this industry early on. But it was only when he encouraged me to do a chemistry internship in a Grasse, France, perfumery company that I accidentally discovered my fascination with fragrance and perfumery. Quite coincidentally, the chemist with whom I was supposed to study decided to leave on a sailing trip the day before I reported for work. So, while I spent three weeks waiting for him to return, the company put me in a perfumer's training lab. I ended up spending my entire internship smelling and memorizing the odors

of all the natural ingredients available in the lab. This sparked my interest, and right after my engineering studies I started working at IFF.

Life of an artist

A typical day in the lab is like a typical day in a painter's studio. I work on projects that are in all different stages of completion. For each creation, I evaluate its progress, design new experiments, evaluate the fragrance on air, on skin, on blotter, and keep reformulating until I am satisfied.

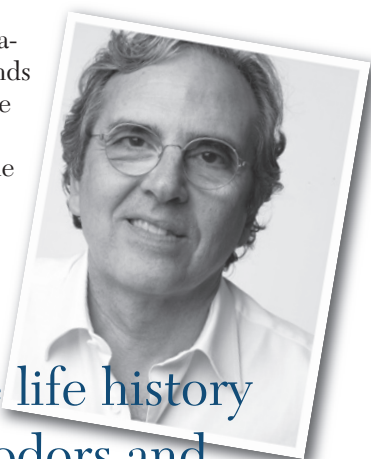
Finding inspiration

For me, inspiration can come from a myriad of sources. Your whole life history of smelling odors and associating them with feelings and nature lives in your olfactive memory and becomes part of a perfumer's



repertoire. Inspiration can come from a vacation where you had a wonderful experience. For instance, when I created *Polo Blue* with Christophe Ladamiel, I had just returned from Caneel Bay in St. John. For me, the sea there was extraordinary — specifically, the color and transparency of the water. So when we were given a brief requesting a fragrance that was evocative of relaxation, the first thing that came to mind was that experience in the American Virgin Islands. The crystal-line, bluish-green water was unforgettable to me, and so I created an accord I called *Caneel Bay*, which together with the “Lush” accord, became the inspiration for *Polo Blue*.

At IFF, we always analyze the sociological trends and look at the relevance to perfumery. We also have very creative people at IFF who can interpret those trends into fragrance concepts.



“Your whole life history of smelling odors and associating them with feelings and nature lives in your olfactive memory and becomes part of a perfumer’s repertoire.”

Carlos Benaim, IFF

Where perfumery is heading

I think that the market always includes both forward-moving action and reaction to the past. The reaction to the excesses of the 1980s was followed by the transparent phase. Now I think that women are tired of transparent fragrances. Women want their fragrance to leave a trail perfuming their environment. I feel that the pendulum has swung back toward fragrances with more substance, done in a different way — a more elegant way, with a lighter touch and more natural ingredients, but definitely richer.

On influential perfumers

Ernest Shiftan was my most influential mentor. I first met him at IFF in Holland in 1968 while doing a yearlong training program in management. His extraordinary talent and warm, engaging manner inspired my wish to work with him and learn from

Regulations and the Perfumer

Our experts react to the effects of toughening legislation in fragrance creation

Carlos Benaim, vice president, senior perfumer, IFF:

Regulations always affect us, but I am very glad that we at IFF take all the necessary precautions to make sure that whatever we use is the best and safest product for the consumer. So, I personally do not object at all to the changes. I find that, as perfumers, we have a tremendous palette at our disposal, and we always are able, either through research and innovation or by cleverly using ingredients we already have, to solve all the problems we face. Great fragrances can be created in spite of roadblocks and prohibitions.

Dennis Maroney, perfumer, IFF:

Regulatory issues definitely have affected my job. Materials are not allowed or restricted for a variety of reasons, and each customer may have different regulations. This is the reason why R&D is so important to IFF — developing new notes that are safe for the environment, while creating new experiences for consumers. The pending REACH registration in Europe will affect all perfumers in the near future as the cost of registering materials may drive many suppliers from the market and raise the cost of many economical ingredients, making them cost-prohibitive when used at current levels.

Bruno Jovanovic, perfumer, IFF: Regulations, although needed, restrict our palette irreversibly. Some great products have vanished or are about to die out because of a lack of data. There is definitely a global paranoia at hand regarding the eventual toxicity of fragrances that may prove completely unjustified.

him. He previously had been the international chief perfumer of IFF and, at the time, had started the IFF perfumery school in New York. He tested me, and although I must have failed miserably in identifying specific ingredients, I think he hired me on the basis of my olfactive descriptions and associations. I trained with him for a year. He was a terrific human being and teacher, and throughout the course of this pivotal year, I committed myself to this professional path.

Favorite scents

Women’s: I love some of the *Guerlain* scents, such as *Shalimar*, I like *Femme*, *L’Air du Temps*, *Clinique Aromatics Elixir*, *Lauren* and *Pleasures*.

Men’s: *Eau Sauvage*, *Paco*, *Provencal* of *L’Artisan Parfumeur*, *Eau Pour Homme*/ *Lavande de Caron*, *Cool Water* and *LeMale*.

The makings of a successful perfumer

I think that one of the most important requirements is to be persistent. It's a very hard road; it's very difficult to get into the business, be accepted *and* create fragrances that succeed in the marketplace. You need to have a tremendous amount of tenacity and resilience. You need to have to have a strong ego to absorb all the rejections on a daily basis. Also, it's very important to explore the creative and artistic side of what we are doing. Many times we are pushed into meeting a brief deadline, and that is definitely not a source of creativity for a perfumer. So, the important thing is not to get caught up in the brief and the test, but to really explore your own creativity, and to come up with interesting ideas and pursue them with diligence and hard work, following through until they reach the public.

On working with flavorists

I have regular contact with some of our flavorists to select ingredients that can create a specific gourmand accent. For instance, we recently used a unique ingredient that creates the typical fresh-baked cookie aroma in a fragrance that is a success on the market today.

The Accidental Perfumer

Yosh Han, perfumer, YOSH olfactory sense

Yosh Han is a self-taught (books and workshops) independent perfumer based in San Francisco (www.eaudeyosh.com). When we asked her what it takes to be a successful perfumer, she said, "Passion, intuition, patience, openness, flexibility, creativity and being on the edge." As to how she came to this unique profession, she told us: "It was accidental. I walked into a store with about 400 bottles lined up against the wall. I was hooked from the beginning. The Chinese character for my name, Yosh, means 'fragrant.' It's possible

that destiny has played a hand in my career."

Han's work has been featured in Vanity Fair, Town & Country and Harper's Bazaar. Her career began with the now-defunct Fragrance Bar (Aspen, Colorado). She is a member of Cosmetic Executive Women.



A day in the life ...

Each day seems to vary. I love to incorporate my own feelings to set the tone. So, depending upon my mood, I will use a particular scent either to enliven or intensify that particular feeling. Once I am in the right head space, I will sort out what is on the books. What deadlines for clients are a high priority? Do I have appointments that day? Or do I have time to create and play? Also, if I get a shipment of new materials, then I want to smell everything and get to know the new ingredient.

"I love it when clients are happier than they expected to be. That's a great day."

Yosh Han, YOSH olfactory sense

Trend seeking

I am very intuitive and can see trends starting to happen before they emerge, so this is a great advantage in terms of new concepts that play off those trends. Mostly, I am inspired by events, travel, people and ingredients. I love working with themes. I also find that concepts are most effective when there is a story behind them. But, most often, there's an extraordinary story and the fragrance evolves from that.

Working with clients

I find that the more open the client is to new ideas, the easier it is to create something magnificent. When a client is very rigid in what they want to

create, there is less room for me to impart my personal expertise. I also find that clients who are able to make decisions are wonderful to work with because they are definitive about what they like or don't like. I like to be flexible and create work based on each specific circumstance, so if a client presents an idea and then relinquishes the creative aspect to me, it's really a dream.

“It's one thing to be gender-neutral, but it's another to be same-sexed.”

Yosh Han, YOSH olfactory sense

When I consult clients, I ask them some questions about the brief, the company, the brand and the overall reasons for creating that scent. It's also important for me to understand the business elements of the concept — whether there are financial restrictions or ingredient parameters. I listen and take notes, and then I re-create the brief using my own notes and language. If the client is available to come to the studio, I'll also have them do smell tests. So, often, language is a barrier in the creative work. For example, licorice to one person might smell a certain way, but that same effect can be created using fennel, anise or basil. So I like to take the wording on the marketing brief and then toss it out and have a blank slate, if possible, especially if the client isn't savvy about scent language. It's so much more important to get the feeling of the scent, rather than the definition of what they think about the fragrance. I like to think of myself as a conduit between the essences and the clients. The resulting fragrance is the aromatic sum/balance of the co-creative energies. I love it when clients are happier than they expected to be. That's a great day.

Where perfumery is headed

I think that perfumery is a hot topic now. Celebrity endorsements have allowed the perfume market to have the limelight. But now it is up to the perfumers to take that cache and really create superimaginative fragrances. People don't really want to smell like other people. Individuality in a globalized society is critical. Connoisseur fragrances also are setting the pace. Consumers are savvy about ingredients, and they want to explore exotics and unusual combinations. What are the significant trends? People don't want to smell “manly” or “feminine” now. And, certainly, people don't want that unisex business anymore. It's one thing to be gender-neutral, but it's another to be same-sexed. People want to express their personality in perfumery. Consumers also want experiences that transport them.

The changing perfumery environment

In the beginning of my career, so many people had no idea what I did. They also did not understand natural perfumery or aromatherapy. The biggest shift has been the acceptance of creating signature perfumes for individuals; that is now a really hot venue for me.

The Catch-22 of naturals

I think that when a particular natural ingredient becomes very popular, you run the risk of seeing low-quality products infiltrating the market with that trendy ingredient. Sandalwood, for example, is always a Catch-22. People love the way sandalwood smells, but the way it's being processed and delivered is a challenge.

Yosh's favorite formulation

I love *Ginger Ciao*. She is very popular commercially — the kind of fragrance that is unforgettable. *Ginger Ciao* also has been able to transcend language and affect people in a way that is indescribable. People resonate with her; she seems to have a life of her own.

Other favorites

When I was younger, I loved *Anaïs Anaïs*. When I met its creator, Bernhard Winkler, in Cannes, it was really an honor. I also love YSL's *M7*.

Comfort and Nostalgia With a Twist of Modernity

Dennis Maroney, perfumer, IFF

Background

I graduated from the University of Connecticut with a BS in psychology and chemistry. I find my psychology degree to be invaluable in my line of work, in understanding what the consumer desires in a particular product. I use psychology more than my chemistry skills.

I began as a lab assistant with zero knowledge of the fragrance industry and was given the opportunity of a lifetime to begin studying the art of perfumery. I started my perfumery training in 1990 at a small company called Kato Worldwide. I then moved to Shaw Mudge and Co., J. Manheimer and Bush Boake Allen (BBA). BBA was purchased by IFF in 2000, and I have worked at IFF since 2001. I am a member of The American Society of Perfumers.

The creative process

When starting a brief, I first visualize myself as the consumer and try to picture how I would want the fragrance to smell. I then will create a number of experiments around a couple of themes that I have determined. Usually we have a number of perfumers together on a project, and we smell each other's work.

A typical day involves smelling with evaluators and other perfumers to determine the best course to take with a particular fragrance. New ideas are tried, and old standards are spun with newer accords to create a feeling of

nuevo retro. Then we smell again. We look at other markets for ideas — flavors, ethnic, overseas. We look at art, music, fashion, restaurants and architecture for inspiration. We also look at classics to revisit or modernize.

Ultimately, all clients want the same thing — a great fragrance. I try to make the best fragrance I can for each and every brief. That said, some clients are more specific in what they are looking for and work closely with the perfumers in developing the scent, while others just look for great test scores. Both ways can create wonderful fragrances.

The state of fragrance

The fine fragrance market today is saturated. There are many ways for consumers to obtain the fragrance they desire from body sprays, candles, dish detergents and eau de toilettes. The outlook is more of the same as consumers seem to enjoy the plethora of fragrance options, but the company that can find a unique delivery system or a new vehicle to promote fragrance will have enormous success. The trends of today evoke a feeling of comfort and nostalgia with a twist of modernity. Consumers post-9/11 still seem to be more family- and home-oriented, and the fragrances reflect that, although with a bit of a playful mode.

Diverging fortunes of fine and household fragrances

The fine fragrance market has become overwhelmed. Consumers seem to be into disposable fragrance: Wear it for a season, and then move on to something new. It has become a true accessory, as opposed to when I began in perfumery and fragrance was a signature of the wearer. Today, fragrance choices change depending upon the consumer's mood. On the flip side, the household and personal care market offers a much wider variety and is far from being saturated. When I began in perfumery, there were two choices for dish detergents — lemon and pine. Now there are apples, florals and melons, and consumers seem to be aching for more. I find this very exciting.

Effects of market conditions

As with any consumer goods product, market conditions affect our work.

When consumer confidence wavers, they spend less disposable income on fragrance and fragranced products.

However, parts of our industry are not as affected by market trends as others. People still need to do laundry, bathe and clean the house, but they may buy a less expensive product than a premium brand to accomplish their daily chores.

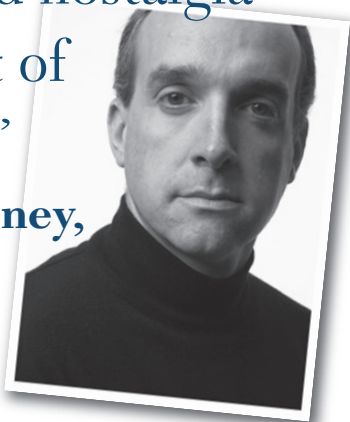
The price of oil also has a huge effect on our industry, as many of the materials we use are petrochemicals. Some



ingredients even are being threatened as the price of oil climbs, meaning that suppliers cannot acquire enough starting material or make enough profit to continue to supply said ingredients.

“The trends of today evoke a feeling of comfort and nostalgia with a twist of modernity.”

**Dennis Maroney,
IFF**



Who and what inspires me

I admire perfumers who have been successful in the industry for many years. To be creative is difficult, but to be creative and successful for a number of years is amazing to me. Some perfumers I admire are Ted Barba, Carlos Benaim, Helga Rotter and Murray Moscona. Some of the fragrances I admire are *Lauren* (my all-time favorite scent), *Herbal Essences*, *Light Blue*, *Agree*, *Cool Water*, Johnson's Baby Powder and J&J Baby Shampoo. (Americans refer to the J&J products that they remember from childhood as “clean.”)

A Little Personal Space Goes a Long Way

Bruno Jovanovic, perfumer, IFF

I knew I was an artist

I knew I was an artist since my early childhood. I've always had the need to create. I guess my mother, a big fragrance consumer and lover, played a role as well. My diplomas include a bachelor of science in chemistry and a master of “perfumery arts” from two universities in Paris. Following school, I started interning in a small Paris-based company (Argeville) and then moved to Munich to work at drom international. After two years I moved to New York, where I joined IFF.

The perfumer's life

Perfumery has become very fast-paced. The brands are launching new fragrances every year, thus increasing our workload significantly. Perfumers mainly work

in their offices. We interact with the lab through our assistants who compound the formulas we create on our computers. This enables the perfumers to have their own personal space, which is very important for creativity and needed isolation.

Usually I start my day by smelling drydowns of fragrances I sprayed the day before in order to evaluate longevity and performance. Then we move on to the client briefs — basically creating formulas for different customers. Usually we spend a lot of time evaluating with the fragrance development and sales managers. This way, the fragrance evolves from a draft to a finished product.

Typically, the customer comes up with a concept and eventually an olfactive direction. You then create a fragrance that the fragrance development managers, along with the sales manager responsible for the account, evaluate in order to verify that it's compatible with the customer's wishes. The client then smells it and asks for reworks or adjustments. Of course, when a customer wants a floral note, for example, every perfumer's interpretation of the theme is very different. The final scent is, thus, a combination of the perfumer's and the client's visions. When everybody is happy, the fragrance is launched on the market.

Sources of inspiration

I firmly believe that, in order to be able to make new trends, you need to have a very good knowledge of the past and the history of fragrances. This allows you to see and understand the evolution of the different olfactive families, thus enabling you to imagine — or even guess — the future.

Personal inspirations are another very important facet. Many times, personal experiences enable the perfumer to create new olfactive forms or even trends. Besides these, fragrance companies have many resources, including marketing and the odor evaluation board, which scrutinize the market looking for eventual gaps (missing olfactive families) that would be interesting to explore.

Last, but not least, by bringing out new unique raw materials, our research and development department enables the perfumer to eventually start new trends based on these new products.

Diverse customers

Every customer has his or her own personality and approach to a brief or project; this is one of the reasons why this profession is

so interesting. Some perfumers love this variety and gladly work for all of them, whereas others like to work for only a couple because they feel that their respective personalities match.



The return of chypre

After more than a decade of transparent, sheer notes, it seems like the market is slowly going back to heavier fragrance.

“After more than a decade of transparent, sheer notes, it seems like the market is slowly going back to heavier fragrance.”

Bruno Jovanovic, IFF

Everybody is talking about an eventual modernized return of the chypre family, so appreciated in the 1980s, and completely forgotten during the 1990s and the new millennium. All perfumers welcome the return to a more engaged perfumery.

Inspirations

As a perfumer, you tend to like a lot of fragrances — mainly because they all have something really unique about them. If I were to cite some names, these would be: *Angel* (Thierry Mugler), *Shalimar* (Guerlain), *Feminite Du Bois* (Shiseido), *Kenzo pour Homme* (Kenzo) and *Azzaro pour Homme* (Azzaro). Perfumers I admire include Francois Coty, Jacques Guerlain and Sophia Grojsman.

Experimenting with flavor concepts

I have done many translations of flavors for fragrances. This means that I've modified flavor formulas so that they may be used in fragrances. This is a very enriching experience because it allows you to discover unique flavor ingredients that you then can use in your creations and thus gain a certain edginess.

To get a copy of this article or others from a searchable database, visit the P&F magazine Article Archives at www.perfumerflavorist.com/articles. 