

## Portrait of a perfumer

# Maurice Roucel's Signature in Fragrance

Roucel reveals his magnolia signature and passion for the art of perfumery

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Roucel's signature magnolia, *Michelia longifolia*

The shadow of touch is inherent in a person's signature. Its impression exudes character and is as distinct as a footprint in the sand. A perfumer's signature goes even further than the cursive evidence of thought and feeling — it goes right to the heart of memory and emotion.

Perfumer Maurice Roucel is known for his “magnolia” signature, which has shown up in several fine fragrances on the market, most recently *Guess* for women. The essential oil is sourced from Laboratoire Monique Rémy, which was purchased by International Flavors and Fragrances in 2000. The company's products are renowned both for their

quality due to high standards from field to extraction, and the kind of relationships founder Monique Rémy develops with her suppliers. Rémy contacted Roucel when she discovered a rich *Michelia longifolia* essential oil from China in 1989. When smelled in undiluted form, *M. longifolia* is redolent of overripe stone fruits, honeyed wet wood and white flowers. It becomes more floral as the more volatile components evaporate, resembling the smell in late spring air, when magnolia trees bloom.



Maurice Roucel

“It [perfumery] is a science, for sure, but there is an irrational aspect, an emotional and even chaotic aspect, that has to be acknowledged.”

— MAURICE ROUCEL

*Tocade* by Rochas (1993) involved Roucel's landmark application of Rémy's essential oil in which he added the formula in a small dose. In Roucel's opinion, when you are presenting something that may be unfamiliar to the senses, it is best if you do it subtly, an approach that professional chefs have utilized when introducing new or seemingly incongruous ingredients. Roucel just recently discovered the innate truth in his own advice. “I had an experience recently with a raw material that I did not expect. I cannot smell Galaxolide (a synthetic musk), even

# Meet Maurice Roucel

Maurice Roucel is a self-taught perfumer known for such inspired creations as *Castelbajac*, *Helmut Lang*, *Envy* by Gucci, *Tocade* by Rochas and *24 Faubourg* by Hermes, among others. Recent prestige fragrance creations are *Be Delicious* by Donna Karan, *L'Instant* by Guerlain, *'L'* by Lolita Lempika, *Nautica Voyage* by Coty and the *Guess* fragrance.

Roucel has spent more than 33 years in the fragrance industry honing his craft at some of the world's largest perfume houses. He spent six years at Chanel, where he was head of the chromatography laboratory, and another six years as perfumer at International Flavors and Fragrances (IFF). He then joined Quest International, where he continued to develop his mastery over the course of 12 years before joining Dragoco and Symrise since 1996. He has been lead perfumer at Symrise since 1997. The fragrance industry has recognized Roucel with accolades and awards, including the American FiFi and French Oscar for *24 Faubourg*, the European (England) FiFi for *Be Delicious*, the French FiFi for *L'Instant de Guerlain* and the French Oscar for *Tocade*.

## Roucel's Creations†

*Be Delicious* by Donna Karan (2004)  
*Bogart pour Homme* by Jacques Bogart (2004)  
*Broadway Nite* by Bond No. 9 (2003)  
*Castelbajac* by Jean-Charles de Castelbajac (2004)  
*Desire* for women by Alfred Dunhill (1999)  
***Envy* by Gucci\*** (1997)  
*Fresh* by Alfred Dunhill (2005)  
*Gia Mattiolo – UOMO* by Gai Mattiolo (2004)  
***Guess* for women by Coty\*** (2005)  
*Harlem* by Bond No. 9 (2003)  
*Helmut Lang* by Helmut Lang (2000)  
*Imagine* by Ellen Tracy (2003)  
*Iris Silver Mist* Serge Lutens (1994)  
*Jaguar Woman* by Jaguar (with Bernard Ellena) (2004)  
*K de Krizia* by Krizia (1981)  
*KenzoAir* by Kenzo  
*'L'* by Lolita Lempika (2006)  
*Lalique pour Homme* by Lalique (1997)  
*Lei Gianfranco Ferré – LG* by Gianfranco Ferré  
*L'Instant de Guerlain* by Guerlain  
*Missoni* by Estée Lauder (2006)  
*Monsoon* by Coty (1994)  
*Musc Ravageur* by Frederic Malle (2000)  
*Nautica Voyage* by Coty (2006)  
*Oh My Cat?* by Dog Generation (with Bernard Ellena)  
*Pleasures Intense* by Estée Lauder (2004)  
*Red Delicious* by DKNY (2006)  
*Riverside Drive* by Bond No. 9 (2003)  
*Roberto Cavalli* by Roberto Cavalli (2002)  
*Roberto Cavalli Oro* by Roberto Cavalli (2002)  
*Rochas Man* by Rochas (1999)  
*Shalini* by Shalini Kumar  
*Strenesse* by Gabriele Strehle (2001)  
*TL pour Lui* by Ted Lapidus (2003)  
***Tocade* by Rochas\*** (1993)  
***24 Faubourg* by Hermes\*** (1995)

\*Roucel's use of magnolia signature; †some information sourced from <http://nowsmellthis.blogharbor.com>

when it is undiluted. I was working on a fragrance brief and was using a .01 percent solution and suddenly, I could smell it!" The timbre of his voice is joyful — he now is able to relate to musk emotionally and scientifically.

In perfumery circles, being anosmic to musk is attributed to gender, specifically to men. Whether Roucel's experience is an exception, or the theory is untrue, doesn't seem to matter. What is clear is that Roucel is satisfied with the gift he has been given and has no need to analyze it to accept its truth — that he has felt it and experienced it is enough.

*Michelia longifolia* was less distinct in the "orange floral bouquet" that characterizes Hermes' *24 Faubourg*, but it added depth of character to the fragrance, which is complex and multi-layered. The third appearance of Roucel's magnolia signature can be found in Gucci's *Envy*, where it is more prominent. In the Symrise labs the Gucci fragrance was referred to as

*Fleur de Vigne*, since the inspiration for the composition was the grape flower. This is a flower that isn't cultivated for perfumery as "there would be no wine without the flower," according to Roucel.

"I will never have the power of perfume. The raw materials will do what they want, and *they* will always guide *me*."

— MAURICE ROUCCEL

The comment is delivered with humility and gourmand zeal, leaving no doubt that Roucel is *truly* French.

*Michelia longifolia* can be used as a flavoring agent more easily than it can be used in perfumery because there are

International Fragrance Association (IFRA) guidelines in regard to the toxicity of methyl eugenol, one of the molecular components of the pure essential oil. Roucel refers to Michel Bras, a well-known chef in southern France's Aubrac Mountains who relies on herbs and plants that grow in the region for his cuisine. Bras enjoys using perfumery materials to flavor his dishes. Roucel has a fondness for Bras' cuisine, recalling the use of osmanthus in a chicken dish that was outstanding to his palate. The best osmanthus, like magnolia, is cultivated in China, where the flowers are used in cooking and to perfume tea. Olfactively speaking, osmanthus is a fruity floral that is more jammy than *M. longifolia*, and somewhat animalic due to the presence of indole. Indole is a molecule that is present in most white flowers and has a horsey, barn-like odor that is slightly fetid. The indole is usually an afterthought when you smell a white floral; something that gnaws at some noses more than others.

Roucel has a healthy respect for the art of fragrance. "Today, there is too much of a rational approach to perfumery. It is a science, for sure, but there is an irrational aspect, an emotional and even chaotic aspect, that has to be acknowledged. That is the logic of life. It is not all about mathematics." He lauds Einstein to make a creative point, "The theory of relativity's  $E = mc^2$  is a formula that is so simple, but it took years to come to fruition. A single cell is fragile

and it is the fragility of things that determines what does not remain solid and unchanging. Constant mutation, time and adaptation, these are things that are catalysts for change and discovery. As a perfumer, I am not God. I will never have the power of perfume. The raw materials will do what they want, and *they* will always guide *me*."

Although consumers are more likely to see brand images than the visage of perfumers, one thing is clear: When a great perfumer puts the genie in the bottle, the magic — the "it" factor — is almost always a direct result of the character and life experience of the perfumer. This is certainly the case for Maurice Roucel, whose skills, intelligence and humility are a pleasure, in person or out of a bottle.

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