

Fragrance formulation

In the Perfumer's Studio

drom fragrances offers a glimpse into the perfumer's creative process

drom fragrances perfumer Pierre-Constantin Gueros is the son of a Parisian furrier. And though as a child he didn't yet know what a perfumer was, the olfactory sensations of that time would stick with him.

"The smell of the factory and smell of the different leathers and fur—that's really something I think I will remember all my life," he says. "And when I say leather, I mean there are so many different leathers. Sometimes I'm frustrated because we don't have the raw materials to translate this leathery aspect. It's sensual, but not really animalic. It's textural—like silk, like wool. It's very difficult to translate that into perfumes. You have the smell in your head, but translating it is very complicated."

Capturing the ethereal in a bottle has been Gueros' mission ever since, from fine fragrance to hair care to body lotion. Recently, he provided *P&F* editor Jeb Gleason-Allured a rare glimpse into the perfumer's creative process and the drom Manhattan fragrance studio he calls home.

Inspirational Space

When drom fragrances chose a location for its Manhattan-based fragrance studio, Tribeca seemed a perfect fit. Set amid a vibrant community of artists, architects and designers, this exclusive neighborhood provides the dynamic environment necessary for innovative fragrance design.

"You need all kinds of stimuli to be creative," says drom president Jim Dellas. "You have to be where it's happening to be able to do it."



The studio's design eliminates traditional offices in favor of a perfume bar—a single counter incorporating multiple open work space.

The studio's design, too, was based on providing perfumers with a dynamic, collaborative creative environment, eliminating traditional offices in favor of a perfume bar—a single counter incorporating multiple open work spaces, allowing perfumers to interact and exchange ideas. Says drom perfumer Jan Fockenbrock, "It's great to just turn around and talk about a creation with a colleague; you can share and recreate immediately."

At the Manhattan studio, clients can work with perfumers at their workstations, allowing the fragrance creators to tweak formulas in real time which can then be sent to the lab, located downstairs. “The variable for miscommunication is not there,” explains Gueros.

“I have exactly the same computer system and work exactly the same way as in Germany,” Gueros continues, “but of course perfumery is a bit different. And working in the studio is a bit different, because in Germany I worked in a closed office and here it’s an open space, so the interaction with the other departments and perfumers is much stronger here.”

From Concept to Fragrance

To illustrate its perfumers’ work process, drom has created fragrances with and for a number of national and international magazine editors, providing a rare

glimpse into the fragrance creation process. When Gleason-Allured and Gueros first consult, the *P&F* editor directs the perfumer to focus the fragrance on whatever is interesting him at the moment. Gueros explains that he’s recently experimented with a vegetal accord reminiscent of *Cannabis sativa* and comprised of woody notes (to provide a resinous effect) and an herbal, tealike note. It sounds intriguing, so they agree to proceed from that base.

Perfumer’s Portrait

As a Parisian child, Pierre-Constantin Gueros’ exposure to nature was limited to the civilized variety to be found in parks. As soon as he was able, he traveled the world, taking in an array of odors. Gueros eventually came to perfumery through the program at Institut Supérieur International du Parfum de la Cosmétique et de l’Aromatique and then started with drom as a junior perfumer. He became a full perfumer two years ago.

“I really enjoy working in an industry where you have the part of big business,” he says, “but you also sometimes work on a very small scale with raw materials that are produced in amounts of 500 kilos coming from a specific place. You can work with products coming from one person in one country in one town. That makes it more human.”

Gueros admits his isn’t the story of the small child knowing he wanted one day to become a perfumer. But gradually his love of scent, of cooking, his associations of colors and scents added up to proficiency for fragrance creation. “When you put everything together,” he says, “you realize that’s probably what you we’re programmed to do.”

Of course, Gueros points out, “Each perfumer’s story is different. Some had a father or a mother or an uncle who was a perfumer. Some others were chemists. And it’s great, because in the end you don’t create the same fragrances when your backgrounds are so different. When you are a chemist, you think, ‘Oh, stability is very important.’ When you come from marketing, you say, ‘Let’s find a crazy accord.’ Each background brings you something different.”



Pierre-Constantin Gueros, the son of a Parisian furrier, has always sought to capture the ethereal in a bottle.

If Gueros has a signature threading together his fragrance creations it begins with the raw materials. “We [perfumers] have a wide palette of 2,000 or 3,000 raw materials,” he says. “Each perfumer has his own palette. I’d say I use 500 raw materials, so it’s already a limitation. I’m very [fond of] ambery and woody notes. I like jasmine a lot also. Most people don’t like the animalic, indolic part of jasmine, but that’s something I’m not sensitive to in a bad way.”

Green notes are another area that piques Gueros’ curiosity. And while one recent example of this category—*T Girl*—did not succeed on the market (“perhaps it was too early”), he argues that it is the wave of the future. “I think green notes are incredibly different from one another, and with safety issues and trying to find ways to make freshness modern and sheer, I would say green notes are [key]. We have some green perfumes on the market at the moment, but there will be more and more.”

Gueros has been with drom for about five years, working in France, Germany and now the United States. “I try not to bring too much of the European market when I work here [in Manhattan],” he says. “I try to put on another hat. I work for the American market. I’m in the process of learning the cultural references that the Americans have to help me create things that are typically American; even if most of the brands now are international, there are some specific things, like cultural relationships to raw materials, to scents—orange blossom, for example. In Europe [that scent relates to] ‘baby;’ here it’s medical products.”



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Some of the “clients” participating in drom’s personal fragrance creation project presented very specific requests for their scents. “We had an editor who wanted a sushi accord for her perfume,” says Guerros. “And for that we didn’t make, of course, a real fishy accord because it wouldn’t smell good. But we could use some of the related elements like ginger, wasabi, the prune alcohol that goes with sushi. And that gives the feeling of being in a Japanese restaurant.” Still other participants requested specific materials, such as grapefruit, or even wanted their scent to reflect events in their lives, like weddings.

In other cases, clients asked for fragrances based around loose concepts like “woody” or “musky.”

About a month after the initial consultation, Guerros and Gleason-Allured sit down for a smelling session. The fresh, modern and sensual fragrance is indeed woody, tealike and resinous, giving the impression (if not the effects) of the *Cannabis sativa* plant. It is also distinctly masculine, due in part to the inclusion of cedarwood.

“The process,” says Guerros, “was first of all to make the base—the accord. Of course, it was not wearable as such because it was very herbal, very earthy. I had to put that in the heart of the perfume and then mix it with some other notes—mandarin, bergamot and lemon as top notes, some spices like nutmeg and pepper, and then in the background sandalwood, musk and some other blond woods to blend it and make it masculine.

“It [the cannabis accord] is one of the things that we are developing at the moment,” continues Guerros. “It’s very interesting because we always design new accords for new marketing concepts and it’s true that there are some societal taboos that we can use in perfume to be modern. And of course cannabis is one of them.” Another advantage, Guerros explains, is that the base is flexible. “I could use this accord to make a feminine perfume. I would probably use sandalwood instead of cedarwood, and I would probably use fruity elements and citrus.”

While this exercise illustrates the perfumer’s creative thought process, it’s clearly different to create for an individual as opposed to a client developing a mass market product. “The whole process of making perfumes for specific people and not for a customer company is very interesting,” says Guerros, “because most of the time you don’t meet the people who are going to wear your perfume. You don’t have any direct feedback on what you’ve done.”

Perfumers typically work strictly with professionals well-versed in the development of fragrances. These professionals view fragrances from a technical point of view that, while practical, lacks the spontaneity of an average consumer’s liking or dislike.

Says drom marketing manager Martha Basanta, “Normally you are creating for whatever beauty company, so you have guidelines, restrictions, parameters—there are so many variables that you have to take into consideration. So, I think that for the perfumers this is a great chance to really be creative and think outside of the box—no restrictions, no rules, no regulations. This is quite exciting and a nice break from the norm.”

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