

An Air Sculptor in His Own Words

Perfumer Christophe Laudamiel discusses his recent “air sculptures,” special raw materials, the creative process and collaborative relationships

In the secretive, under-the-radar profession of perfumery, IFF’s Christophe Laudamiel stands out. This high-profile perfumer has undertaken a number of attention-grabbing projects and speaking engagements, a break from the stereotypical “invisible” nose.

In addition to contributing to fine fragrance projects such as *Clinique Happy Heart*, *Estée Lauder Youth Dew Amber Nude* and *Ralph Lauren Polo Blue*, Laudamiel has gained notoriety for a collection of 15 fragrances inspired by Patrick Süskind’s novel, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*. In addition, as part of a collaborative program run by IFF, he has lectured on fragrance design at The Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Belgium.

Most recently, Laudamiel has moved beyond the fine fragrance bottle. The perfumer re-teamed with frequent collaborator and IFF colleague Christoph Hornetz* on a range of “air sculptures” for the 2008 World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland. The scents were dispersed in conference spaces via aroma dispensers with the aim of evoking a range of complex concepts, including cooperation, high tech, optimism and endangered polar regions.

“Even though Davos has a very corporate image,” says Laudamiel, “it is looking to the future—and the world of olfaction, of smell and perfumery is part of the future.”

Now, in his own words, Laudamiel speaks in-depth about this novel project, his creative process and some of the key materials he employed in his formulations:



“In fragrances we can recreate any kind of atmosphere,” says Laudamiel. “It is not just lavender fields.”

we could show how we could integrate scent into design activities. Olfaction should be an obvious aspect of any design activity. In architecture school or product design school, they don’t teach anything about olfaction. It should be an obvious thing.



Photos courtesy of IFF.

“The fragrances diffuse very differently,” says Laudamiel, pictured here with frequent collaborator Christoph Hornetz (left). “Sometimes one facet of the fragrance pops out, and you go, ‘Oh my God, what is this doing here?’”

Sculpting Scents

We created eight sets [of fragrances for the WEF]. Some of them are about the ingredients, and some are more about the concept—depending on purpose.

One is called *Glacier* ... something cold, clear and crisp. It was a tribute to shrinking ice caps. *Happiness* is to show what fragrances can bring to people and consumers in general. We know the strong link that exists between emotion and fragrances. This one was actually very citrusy—a lot of citrus ingredients from Italy, for instance. Very bright and energetic.

The one that went into the plenary room was called *Six Continents* to symbolize the collaborative world—the theme for the WEF meeting was the power of collaboration/innovation. So, here, I had a fragrance with different facets from different continents. And also, we were explaining that, in perfumery, we have [always] had to collaborate ... no matter the country, the people, race, the geography—whatever—because to create a fragrance formula you have to have so many products from so many parts of the world. Which is quite unique for an industry. The fragrance industry always had to source from many different places.

One [scent], *Artemis*, shows how perfumery helps to protect the environment, plants and the people who grow the plants. Fragrance materials are very high-value ingredients. So, when we use perfume, we are using high-value ingredients. Also, they are usually local plants, so you are helping local [economies] at the same time.

We had a scent called *Swiss Heights*. It was an homage to Davos. Some people called it the “older Davos.” We had something very like the mountain air, the Alpine

Architecture of a Fragrance Partnership

[Christoph Hornetz and I] met in Germany, and Christoph was at the time in antique restoration and going back to school to do something in design. By talking and seeing what I was doing, he found it very interesting and, *bon*, we traveled, went to Morocco and had a lot of experiences smelling herbs. I suggested to him, if he wanted to, that we could collaborate on some fragrance designs, so

*The duo are informally known as “Les Christophes.”

flowers, fir trees ... That was like a blink in the eye.

Gigabyte is a scent inspired by high tech and optimism. In fact, this one Carlos [Benaïm] ... had done for [avant-garde art publication] *Visionaire* [www.visionaireworld.com], so we adapted it for room fragrances. It is this idea of high tech, and it shows that in fragrances we can recreate any kind of atmosphere. It is not just lavender fields or something.

Magnolia & Sage was [intended] to create the same kind of feeling as *Gigabyte*, but with a different ingredient,

to show how we play around with molecules (synthetics) and naturals. The last [scent], because we had to have an old classic of perfumery, was my decision. It was called *Lavender Fields*. For this one we used something special, an organic lavender essence, that Laboratoire Monique Remy gets for us from Provence, France.

The Materials

We [employed] several naturals and several molecules. We had, for instance, *gentiane*—a blue flower that grows

Trend Tracking: Beyond Simple Gourmand Fragrances

IFF recently hosted “Culinary Trends Influence Fragrance Creation,” an olfactive journey among diverse foods and cultures.

“Looking at flavors is one of the ways to provide IFF perfumers with new creative inspiration,” said Alexandra Niel-Jones, global marketing manager, who noted that the project’s objective is in line with IFF’s vision to create unique scent and taste experiences people love. “We searched the latest ingredients to draw inspiration, not to recreate a precise flavor,” she added, citing the example of the Szechuan pepper, “and to add some of that flavor to use as a building block in a fragrance.”

Niel-Jones, working with global marketing manager Amanda Anastasiou, searched recipes, chefs’ Web sites and cooking shows, to name a few, for inspiration. The research resulted in the identification of three major trends—Fusion, Culinary Tourism and Feel Good—all of which explored, in Niel-Jones’ words, the “importance of fragrance in driving differentiation and success in a product, whether it is fine fragrance or dishwashing liquid.”

Fusion is described as the creation of new and unique taste experiences, with sensorial clues, multiple textures and blends of ingredients. This trend has been highlighted in recent years by the “molecular gastronomy” school of cooking, which emphasizes the chemical and physical processes of cooking. Molecular gastronomy often highlights the use of novel cooking techniques and unusual ingredients that yield avant-garde textures, tastes and smells (scented air). Crediting Ferran Adria (elbulli.com)^{*} as a key proponent of molecular gastronomy, Anastasiou noted a second-wave molecular gastronomy dish called Trout Roe, featured at Chicago’s Alinea Restaurant (alinea-restaurant.com). The dish combines freeze-dried coconut milk, pineapple air, hand-harvested trout roe and elements of licorice.

Chaos and Harmony, a sub-trend of Fusion, unites such diverse flavors as saffron and vanilla, and herbs and chocolate. **Tongue-Tied**, another sub-trend of Fusion, combines innovative ingredients

with multisensorial applications, such as a beautiful scented candle with a crackling wick. The **Culture Clash** element of Fusion, meanwhile, may unite ginger and lychee in a caipirinha.

“Perfumers found ginger to be a new clean, fresh way to possibly be built into a home cleaning product,” said Anastasiou.

Culinary Tourism, which allows one to experience other cultures through food, enables perfumers to create unique and memorable experiences through scent. **Regional Authenticity** digs a layer deeper, directing focus to specific regions or towns, further distinguishing flavors such as Oaxacan mole, with its cinnamon, chocolate and chiles. **Ingredient Trade Ups**, meanwhile, boost the cachet of a specific region or place of origin, whether Valencia lemon or Brazilian cherry. This approach has already begun in functional fragrances as well as fine fragrances.

The **Feel Good** trend addresses the well-being achieved within and without via personal care, home care or elsewhere. Simply put, people want to feel good about what they are eating and how they are living. Sub-trend **Culinary World** harkens back to simplicity, and nourishing the mind, body and soul. **Home Grown**, another sub-trend, refers to wholesome cooking, farm-to-table freshness and local ingredients. **Warm and Cozy** references familiar, indulgent flavors and gourmand notes that translate to fine fragrance, candles, body washes. **Classics Reinvented**, on the other hand, creates luxurious interpretations of “low brow,” or familiar, foods—think revamped mac n’ cheese, or translations of the traditional cupcake into red velvets with mascarpone.

Finally, **Food and Fun** looks at updates, like rhubarb/vanilla candles, where perfumers used rhubarb accords to add a different dimension of fruit and tartness to compositions.

“By putting presentations like this together for the Creative Group,” said Niel-Jones, “we want them to be inspired to think outside the box and ultimately differentiate our customers’ products in the marketplace.”

Reporting by Nancy Jeffries, contributing editor, GCI magazine.

^{*}According to Adria’s own list of culinary tenets, “Cooking is a language through which all the following properties may be expressed: harmony, creativity, happiness, beauty, poetry, complexity, magic, humor, provocation and culture.”

in the mountains. We had real raspberry leaves—this is not much used in fragrance at the moment—and magnolia oil from China. We had a molecule called Arctical [IFF],** which is very clean, a little bit cold—not much used yet because it's hard to handle, I have to say. But it's very unique.

The Creative Process

We had total freedom. All the themes and fragrances we decided ourselves. The WEF was very interested in integrating fragrance in their [sessions]. It's not just artistic—it's artistic and creative to show people what is going on on this planet. We gave sessions, but they also said we should do something to excite the people. They [had a visual exhibition], and they said “what could we do to showcase fragrances and olfaction?”

I sent the fragrances in advance for them to see that we were not putting out fragrances that people would say “what the heck is this?” You have to be realistic. These are rooms where people are working, so I didn't do anything controversial. It's not a gallery—it's a working environment, but with interesting themes. Then we went two days in advance to do all the trials; they had to have security approve it—the whole shebang.

The scents were very well received; in fact, I was prepared to get some [negative feedback]—you know, some people get negative—but I didn't hear anything negative. Everybody that talked to me said it was a very good idea, that it was very, very interesting. Some people found it interesting, but were scared that others would react negatively, because it's new—but no. I was very surprised about that.

When [the project is] explained, it becomes obvious that it should be this way. And we got support from WEF, to the highest level. Like anything new, it has to be approved, of course, and this also gave legitimacy to the whole thing. If the WEF is using it, it means there must be something behind it, it must be something serious, and it must be something worth looking at.

And it's the way you do something. We were not there to advertise. The air sculptures were there to show perfumery with a capital “P,” and say, “You know, guys, you are at the forefront of a lot of new things, new messages, new ways of thinking ... so here is something you have not

looked into that is extremely important.” When I spoke to the panel, they'd say, “Oh yeah, it's true, we just never thought about it. We have to look into it.” You cannot ignore that people have an emotion and are reacting with a sense of smell. It's part of life. The question is not, anymore, *should* we have it. It is part of our biology. The question is *how* should we do it ... You cannot argue *should* we have pictures or not, *should* we see or not, *should* we hear or not. It's not a question. It's part of life. It's part of human beings. It's part of our genes. How can we use scent more and in a very exciting way?

Unique Engineering Challenges

You spray [a traditional perfume] on the skin and the fragrance is by itself for the next several hours. So you have

**Arctical reportedly imparts a “fresh citrus linen top note with enhanced stability for consumer product applications.”

to build it [for that purpose], whereas in the air, you have a machine that delivers fragrance in the air all the time. So [however the machine's timing is set], you have fragrance released in the air. It's not about having a fragrance by itself, so the balance, for instance, of the top notes and then the long-lasting notes is very different. In fact, you really don't talk about the long-lasting notes. They are there for what they smell like, not because they have to support the fragrance for several hours. If I use patchouli, for instance, it's because it smells like patchouli, not because it's going to allow my fragrance to diffuse for six hours on skin. So, it's a very different kind of dosage. Through the machine, the fragrances diffuse very differently. Sometimes one facet of the fragrance pops out, and you go, "Oh my God, what is this doing here?"

When it's a fragrance in the air, people don't realize it's so complex ... It is a piece of art, or piece of design. It is as complex as a piece of photography. [Visual art is] not just there because it makes the world look pretty. People like the fragrance because it smells nice, and it's much better than other years because the rooms aren't so stuffy, but I say, "Yeah, but you have to look a bit further. It's not just something to smell nice; it is something designed so that you understand something." But people have to be trained. Just by the nose, they cannot build a world. They are not used to that. Like when they look at a picture, they go much further than looking at the picture. They build a whole atmosphere from the picture, but they are not used to doing that with a fragrance. That's why I chose the analogy of an air sculpture.

People ask Hornetz and I all the time ... "Oh my God. Can you recreate that memory for me?" Like for chef Heston Blumenthal [of The Fat Duck in London]. He wanted me to recreate the scent of his grandfather's red leather sofa, with his grandfather smoking a pipe, and it was Christmastime. So people have very strong memories of atmospheres. The scent of someone—someone they loved, or the perfume of their grandmother or the scent of a place. People are very much into an atmosphere or a place. And they feel very strongly about that, and they would give a lot to re-experience these experiences. It's a scent and it's linked to memory.

Looking Forward

I think perfumers will be asked to explore many more odor characters. A larger variety of things than what we see today on the market. Today on the market, I'd say you see about 30% of what we can do with perfumery. There are a lot of older [olfactive] families that are not explored. So I think we will be asked to explore many more families in a very thorough way. And I think there will be more custom work. Because people get very passionate and personal, and many don't even know what we can do, that we can recreate some things. Or create something totally ... abstract, conceptual.

Reporting courtesy of Jeff Falk, senior editor, GCI magazine.

Find more news and articles on Christophe Laudamiel at perfumerflavorist.com.

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