

# Technical and Philosophical Notes on the Perfumery Creative Process

Lessons derived from global scent tracking—Brazil, Vietnam, the Middle East and beyond

Arcadi Boix Camps, Auram Art & Perfume

Since my arrival in Brazil at age 20, I realized that creativity is just the ability to make, or otherwise bring into existence, something new, be it new solutions to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic object or form. This realization was an inducement to action, an essential and continuing tension between environmental constancies and the interruption of equilibrium in the interest of new possibilities of experience. I observed this in all the great musicians and poets of that time, especially Vinicius de Moraes—tensions between such dualities as intellect and intuition, the conscious and the unconscious, the conventional and the unconventional, and complexity and simplicity.

## Balancing the Artistic and Scientific Impulses in Perfumery

As both perfumer and chemist, I was aware that while the processes of creative thinking in artistic and scientific pursuits have much in common, there are also distinctive differences. The artist places more importance on feeling and individual expression, often going to extremes to divorce himself from environmental constraints. The scientist relies more on disciplined, logical thinking to lead him in new directions. Artistic endeavor is dominantly expressive (although clearly oriented toward a goal), while scientific inventiveness is dominantly disciplined (although flexibly receptive to feelings and to imaginative experiences). I am obsessed with people that combine both impulses: noble artistic creativity and feelings (closely related to inherent wisdom) and scientific creativity (related more to “rational knowledge” than inherent wisdom).

## Further Readings in This Series

Find Camps’ previous writings on perfumery topics at [www.perfumerflavorist.com/camps](http://www.perfumerflavorist.com/camps).

Gardenia in Perfumery

Magnolia and Lily of the Valley

Saffron in Perfumery and Flavors

Perfumery: Techniques in Evolution, Part V (2004)

Perfumery: Techniques in Evolution (1978–1999)

**Working toward “gardenia”:** Living in Brazil, I was obsessed with gardenia, which hid its secrets so deeply. I worked with growing intensity to attain its warm, wonderful smell, which was revered by the Arab philosophers that lived in “Al Andalus” (Andalusia) in the south of Spain so many centuries ago. During this time I distilled and smelled essential oils and created fragrances.<sup>a</sup> Despite its merits, gardenia has always been little used in perfumery. It was for this reason that I started toward the creation of my White Gardenia 10808-3/D, a product that eventually required 30 years of work. I used the same emotions in my perfumery that my artistic mentors used to create poems and music. In my work I tried desperately to find the smell of the rose described in Vinicius De Moraes’ poem “Acalanto da Rosa,” or “Lullaby of the Rose” (presented in the original Portuguese and its English translation):<sup>b</sup>

Dorme a estrela do céu  
Dorme a rosa em seu jardim  
Dorme a lua no mar  
Dorme o amor dentro de mim  
É preciso pisar leve  
Ai, é preciso não falar

Meu amor se adormece  
Quão suave é o seu perfume  
Dorme em paz rosa pura  
O teu sono não tem fim

“A star sleeps in the sky,  
The rose sleeps in its garden  
The moon rests in the sea,  
Love sleeps inside of me.  
You must tread softly,  
Ah, you must not speak.

My love is slumbering,  
How sweet is her perfume,  
Sleep in peace, pure rose,  
Your slumber has no end.”

<sup>a</sup>At the start of my work in Brazil, I did not find the same level of creativity on the nation’s perfume market as I experienced with its musicians and poets. The fragrance environment at the time was, for unknown reasons, quite primitive. I did not worry about it much. I was selling simple and quite rudimentary fragrances meant for soap, detergent and liquid dishwashing, though my mind and passion was focused elsewhere.

<sup>b</sup>Translated from Portuguese by Mirna Rubim.

At the same time, I was inspired by the best roses in the world of perfumery, including Wardia (Firmenich; created by a master perfumer), the beauty of which has not been surpassed. This material possessed the “eternity” I wanted to accomplish with my rose scent. Unfortunately, as I worked to achieve this “dreamed” rose, Moraes’ words were always deeper and more beautiful than my results as a perfumer. This frustration is the key, the root, of the perfumer’s profession. Perfumery is more than just designing a fragrance to be readily accepted by the customer and sold for \$80 on the market, a scent which, in the current atmosphere, will likely be very quickly replaced. Perfumery is the striving for the same eternal beauty attained by the sad and good Moraes’ works.

**Key raw materials:** At that time, I desperately needed my present White Gardenia 10808-3/D, which, like magnolia, combines brilliantly with laevo muscone and Paradisone (Firmenich). Today, I realize just how necessary these materials are for perfumery’s evolution, wisdom and knowledge. The Firmenich chemists that discovered Hedione (Firmenich) and Paradisone were amazing, as were those involved in the revelation of laevo muscone, Ambretone (Takasago) and Aurelione<sup>c</sup> (Symrise). These are great musks.

Gardenia also blends well with sandalwood materials such as Firsantol (Firmenich), nirvanol, Levosandol (Takasago) and Javanol (Givaudan). Gardenia’s combination with green florals produces great effects: Florol (Givaudan), ethyl linalool, Rosoxime (Firmenich), Hedione, Magnolione (Givaudan) and (as mentioned) Paradisone. Fruity florals that work well with gardenia include  $\beta$ -damascenone,  $\alpha$ -teascone, Pomarose (Givaudan),  $\alpha$ -damascone, Deltanate and Thesaron (Takasago).

## Discovering Materials Around the Globe

During those years in Brazil I traveled extensively to French Polynesia; Hawaii (a place from my childhood), spending a long time in Anahola, Kauai; the Marquesas

<sup>c</sup>Aurelione is an extraordinary Ambretone-related material.

Islands, including Hiva Oa, the most beautiful island in the planet; the Cook Islands; American Samoa; Samoa; Fiji; Tonga; and finally Vietnam.

**Agarwood:** It was in this last locale where I discovered the fabled agarwood oil, which is so rare today. My beguiling impressions of Vietnam—its beautiful royal city of Hue nestled in the river of perfumes, the royal tombs of the Vietnamese emperors—are intrinsically tied to agarwood.<sup>d</sup> I wondered how it was possible to be surrounded by a beauty and exoticism so historically married to terrible violence.

Our company continues to produce Vietnamese agarwood as we use it in our royal mukhallats (royal Arabic perfumes), which are sold to the royal families of the Middle East.<sup>e</sup> Unfortunately, the supply of Oudh Al-Khulud 14865/D is restricted because the supply of real Vietnamese agarwood oil distilled from *Aquillaria crassna* is almost exhausted. Vietnamese agarwood is absolutely unique as it has nearly vanished, though now the tree is again being planted.

Considerable amounts of agarwood oils of Cambodian and Indonesian origins are available, especially from Pokambaru, Sumatra; Kalimantan, Borneo; and Sulawesi, Jayapura and West Papua in Indonesia. Indian agarwood (*Aquilaria agallocha*) is also available. Meanwhile, a mere 20 kilos of the Vietnamese variety (referred to also as aloeswood oil) is currently produced each month. Our company alone requires much more than that.

**Queen of the night:** I found so many exotic scents in these territories, including the abundant “queen of the night,” *Cestrum nocturnum*, which may have been dispersed throughout the South Pacific by Indian travelers. I tried to create a queen of the night scent, a true challenge as the plant’s fragrance varies depending on time of day.

<sup>d</sup>The agarwood produced in neighboring Laos bears some similarity with the Vietnamese variety.

<sup>e</sup>The marble palaces of the Middle East are filled with unbelievable jewels and carpets that smell of agarwood and the most elegant roses such as the Taifi rose, which is ignored by most of today’s perfumers, perhaps due to a cost of \$24,000 per kilo.

This is yet one more olfactive jewel completely ignored by most of the world's perfumers—unfortunate considering the wonderful accords one can complete with it. Its accords with gardenia, for example, are positively extraordinary, particularly when using the Night Queen 22654/D I created during many years of efforts, or the natural absolute that can be used in minute amounts to achieve an effect of celestial olfactory peace. The addition of mango leaf and frangipani leaf absolutes imparts a beautifully unique green, floral and fruity scent that embodies the whole fragrance from the top note to the drydown.

A beautiful accord can be composed with Night Queen 22654/D, White Gardenia 10808-3/D and tiare<sup>f</sup>, with a touch of frangipani absolute and diffused by the softest white musks, plus Helvetolide (Firmenich) or Serenolide (Givaudan). Another great accord can be composed with Azurone (Givaudan), Serenolide, laevo muscone, Hedione, Paradisone and the flowers described above.

A great accord may also be created using Night Queen 22654/D, White Gardenia 10808-3/D, Tiare 22776/D, saffron attar and agarwood oils from Cambodia—particularly those derived from Trat, which mix well with the flowers. A simple accord of Taifi rose oil and Kalimantan (Indonesia) agarwood oil is terrific.

I am very lucky to be one of the few perfumers able to use a material as expensive as Taifi rose oil. This little-used material enables me to create fragrances that have a heightened dimension of royalty and eternal beauty for my clients in the Middle East. This wise and noble culture has praised the scent of flowers such as gardenia, magnolia, rose and jasmine sambac in beautiful poems.

The emotion and art of fragrance creation is embodied in a number of materials embraced in the Middle East, which I have discussed: queen of the night, gardenia, mango leaf, frangipani, Paradisone, Serenolide, laevo muscone, tiare gardenia and Ambrocenide. Think-


ing of these materials and my perfumery work, another of Moraes' poems comes to mind—"Jardim Noturno"<sup>g</sup> ("Night Garden"):

Se meu amor distante  
Eu sou como um jardim noturno  
O meu silêncio é o seu perfume  
A se exalar em vão dentro da noite  
Oh, volta minha amada!  
A morte ronda em teu jardim  
As rosas tremem...  
E a lua nem parece mais lembrar de mim.

"If my love (is) distant,  
I feel as if I were a night garden  
My silence is her fragrance  
Exhaling in vain in the night  
Oh, come back my beloved!  
Death prowls around in your garden  
The roses tremble ...  
And the moon seems not remember me anymore."

*Arcadi Boix Camps is a senior perfumer with decades of formulating experience and a walking encyclopedia of fragrance materials. Camps firmly believes that philosophy and practical formulation skills are inherently entwined in the creation of great perfume. Access further readings and the author's exclusive online philosophical texts at [perfumerflavorist.com/boixcamps](http://perfumerflavorist.com/boixcamps).*

Address correspondence to Arcadi Boix Camps, Auram Art & Perfume, C/Jaume Balmes, 20, 08348-Cabrils (Barcelona), Spain; [aboix@auram.org](mailto:aboix@auram.org).

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<sup>f</sup>The sublime Tahitian gardenia ignored by many perfumers. I reconstructed the flower's scent in my Tiare 22776/D.

<sup>g</sup>Translated from the original Portuguese by Mirna Rubim.