

Comparing Notes: Complexity, Performance and Natural Effects

Perfumers Olivia Jan and Donna Ramanauskas discuss guaiacwood, jasmine *sambac* and oxathiane for fine fragrance, personal care and consumer product applications

When overdosed, guaiacwood imparts the distinct smokiness of bacon, but when employed with finesse, this relatively inexpensive natural provides versatile olfactive effects. Smelling a blotter of guaiacwood, Robertet junior perfumer Donna Ramanauskas says, “I think it fits well into all aspects of perfumery—fine fragrance, household and personal care.” Perfumer and colleague Olivia Jan agrees, “It’s very efficient and works in many directions. It’s a very intriguing material.”

Jan adds, “Once you learn how to use it in a small amount, it’s very interesting because it gives this little smoky black tea note. It also has a spicy note once you get past the smoky note. When I’m using it in a women’s floral note like a spicy lily, it gives ... warmth and more facets. It goes very well in oriental, leathery and woody notes. If you want to give more facets to a tea, you use a very low dosage. If you want a leathery note you can use more. Also, in masculine notes you can use it at higher levels, blending with a very ambery dry wood. It cuts back the smoky notes.”

“It’s also balsamic and slightly peppery,” says Ramanauskas, who uses the material in household and personal care applications. “It works in citrus notes as well. I used it in a lemon gel air freshener. Obviously that’s for performance. It brings so much depth and body, but it doesn’t overwhelm the lemon fragrance. It develops a warm aspect to the lemon.”

“I find this material cuts sweetness,” Jan adds. “When you have a sweet effect in something, you have two options: you remove the sweetness or you add something to make it less obvious. This material has the ability to shear the sweetness.”

Jasmine *sambac*

“Because Robertet is a manufacturer of natural materials, it’s always special to be able to use the company’s exclusives,” says Jan. “As a perfumer, it’s a dream to

have such a wonderful natural palette at your fingertips at all times. To be able to work with some of the best materials available is really something else. For some perfumers it can be intimidating to experiment with naturals at first, but once you do, it opens up a whole new world of fragrance in a way. Robertet for me has been the perfect place to learn and love naturals. So when I was

thinking of what materials to show, I had to pick the one I first fell in love with.” To paraphrase Jan,



Olivia Jan



Donna Ramanauskas

About the Perfumers

Perfumer **Olivia Jan** first became interested in perfumery during a childhood trip to Grasse, France. She later attended ISIPCA then spent a year at Chanel before moving on to Robertet, where she says she completed her initiation into natural materials. Jan is an admitted perfectionist, though she notes that, in any formulation, there comes a time when revisions become detrimental: “sometimes you have to stop or you’re going to ruin [the fragrance].”

Junior perfumer **Donna Ramanauskas** is the daughter of Raymond Ramanauskas, former senior perfumer at Robertet. Growing up amidst the fragrance world, she was surrounded by natural materials such as castor pods and maté leaves. Ramanauskas began her career as an intern in marketing before moving on to work as a technician and, eventually, entering perfume training.

jasmine *sambac*—presented here in a 5% solution—is the type of material that “lives” on the skin. And, like guaiacwood, it works well with a diverse range of notes. “I love it so much,” she says, but concedes it took her some time to learn how to balance it in formulations. “When overdosed,” she says, “you get a green animalic note.” On the blotter, observes Ramanauskas, the material is initially a bit harsh, but gradually mellows, becoming sweet and pleasant. Jan agrees, noting, “This is the kind of material that’s nicer when you smell it [diffused] in the air.” It is this sophisticated, changeable character that leads Ramanauskas to observe, “You could never recreate this synthetically.”

“When it’s used in the right amount,” says Jan, “it gives you the natural blooming effect that you have under an orange flower tree. It’s great to use in white floral notes because it brings life, even in very low amounts. ... It works with woods, orientals, fruits—I don’t see any direction where it doesn’t work, even in low levels in men’s [fragrances]. It’s very nice with woods, musk. With Hedione (Firmenich) it’s a must.” She adds that, even in a 10% solution employed at a very low amount, jasmine *sambac* bestows an aura of “quality and dimension” to formulas. “It’s important to use quality products,” Jan says. “Even if you cannot smell that [specific] product, you have an overall feeling of quality.”

2-Methyl-4-Propyl-1,3-Oxathiane

Even at a 0.01% solution, oxathiane is aggressive, even repellent. Yet the material’s cassislike-green-fatty quality is crucial for a range of fragrance profiles: citrus, including grapefruit; tropical fruits such as mango; strawberry; raspberry; and apple. “I think perfumers tend to stay away from it because there’s such a chance you’re going to go overboard and it’s going to wipe out your fragrance,” says Ramanauskas. “In a citrus fragrance, it’s going to add sparkle on top. It’s going to bring [the fragrance] to life. ... It brings a really natural note to it more so than any other material. If it’s flat, there’s nothing to it. It helps getting rid of that synthetic note that you’re going to find.” This “sparkle” is a crucial element. As Jan explains, consumers don’t have the patience to wait for a fragrance’s essence to make an impression: “It has to catch you right away.”

While Jan employs oxathiane in very low dosages to add dimension and effervescence

to the top notes of fine fragrance creations such as lily of the valley, muguet, tea and white flowers, Ramanauskas finds the ingredient indispensable in numerous applications, notably for its performance in air. “It’s great for shampoos,” she says. “Everybody loves fruity notes—they test the best. So when you add [oxathiane] to any shampoo component in water in use, it brings such a bloom. And that’s what you’re trying to do in shampoo. Performance is key.” Ramanauskas’ father, former Robertet senior perfumer Raymond Ramanauskas, even showed her that GRAS-listed oxathiane works well in lip products. “In lip products it’s difficult for fragrances to shine through,” she says. “If you’re using a fragrance for lips that’s fruity, this works wonders.”

Angel and Aromatics Elixir

Love it or hate it: this theme connects the fragrances selected by Ramanauskas and Jan as personal favorites. *Angel*, the only scent Ramanauskas wears outside the workplace, is notoriously polarizing—and wildly successful. “It created a new category,” says Jan. “It was such a revolution. It’s really memorable. It’s really well done from the beginning to the end.”

“First, what hit you are the nuances of bergamot, the citrus on top,” says Ramanauskas. “But then, in two seconds, the patchouli comes straight through.” In another recurring theme, she points out that the fragrance is markedly different when presented on skin than on a blotter. The fragrance’s chocolate, honey, caramel and maltol-like baked vanilla aspects come to life on skin, she says, adding, “Over time, it completely changes. It becomes much softer. It’s one of those fragrances that you either love or hate. It is a strong, confident fragrance.”

Aromatics Elixir, formulated by Bernard Chant and launched in 1971, is decidedly lower profile in terms of advertising presence and packaging. Yet, says Jan, this austere presented fragrance must also be experienced on the skin to be fully appreciated. “To me, it’s the best chypre,” she says. “It’s so mysterious, the way it’s done—so bold and modern.” On skin, she says, the woods, particularly the patchouli, come to the fore, warming the overall impression of the scent. “The way the elements are put together makes an explosion,” says Jan. “It’s very rosy, jasmine[like] also. The back note is vetiver-patchouli. To me it’s the same as *Angel* because it really makes a statement. You love it or hate it.” On blotters, she says a rose oxide note can be detected, an impression that is muted or even absent on skin. Conversely, Jan says, “When you see [the fragrance] on skin ... you [find] some aspects that you didn’t really see or get on blotters. This is a fragrance you really have to live with.”

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