

Comparing Notes: Carlos Benaim, Pascal Gaurin and Laurent Le Guerneck

Modern naturals, the dark side of patchouli and reinventing florals

It takes about 350 kg of flowers, harvested between April and October in Madurai, India, to produce 550 g of Laboratoire Monique Remy's (LMR)^a contemporary take on jasmine *sambac*. IFF perfumer Pascal Gaurin says that this material imparts more green and leafy notes than other *sambac* varieties.

The overall impression, he adds, is one of luxury.

"To me," says perfumer Carlos Benaim, "it's much more modern than the jasmine absolute we know from the past. It doesn't have the animal note. It's much more creamy, green, very happy and explosive in a way, as a note. I use it in a lot of my creations, starting with *Pure Poison* (Dior) [created in collaboration with Olivier Polge and Dominique Ropion], *Armani Code* for women [with Olivier Polge and Dominique Ropion], *Flowerbomb* [with Domitille Bertier and Olivier Polge] and many other things I've done." In a composition, says Benaim, "It brings a lot of color, naturalness ... [when] you have something where you have a lot of synthetic ingredients and you need to have a touch of velvety feeling, a flowery feeling." In addition, the material's relatively low cost compared to other jasmines means that formulators can afford to use a little extra in a fragrance. "I'm developing [a fragrance] right now where I use half a percent," says Benaim. "Usually you go to 1 ppt, more or less, to get an effect."

Perfumer Laurent Le Guerneck says, "What's good about jasmine *sambac* is it's a very modern jasmine note," adding that other jasmines tend to have a very animalic note. This version of the material, however, imparts a petal-like blooming character and natural effect. "I love indole," he says, "and that's the jasmine that contains the most indole, so it's a way to use indole in a natural way." In short, he says, it provides the most bang for the buck.

Patchouli Heart

Benaim describes his first exposure to patchouli as markedly underwhelming. "To me, patchouli is very interesting because the first time I ever smelled it I was in Holland as a trainee. Someone showed it to me and said, 'This is one of the most extraordinary materials in perfumery.' And I said, 'Why, what's the big deal?' I couldn't understand,



Pascal Gaurin



Carlos Benaim



Laurent Le Guerneck

until I started working with it—the qualities and power it has; the long-lastingness, the diffusion."

Benaim explains that patchouli has played a role in countless successful fragrances, including *Angel*. Turning to his own career, he notes, "My first big success was *Polo* (Ralph Lauren), which has over 20% patchouli oil in it. There's something there that gives you tremendous impact." But all things, including naturals, must evolve. So, much as it did with jasmine *sambac*, LMR has provided Benaim with a newer, contemporary patchouli—patchouli heart—with which to formulate a new iteration of patchouli-accented fragrances. The ingredient is the product of recombined patchouli fractions that impart the eponymous heart note, eschewing the material's traditional and undesirable terpenic aspect.

"With the introduction of this new type of patchouli," says Benaim, "we're able to use very large amounts in fragrances and you won't affect the top notes. You could have a top note that's much more fruity-floral with a lot of other characteristics and still have a tremendous amount of patchouli. It allows you to have all the floralcy, the prettiness, the fruitiness, all the things that people like—yet have the support of the patchouli underneath [the composition]. For instance, in the latest *Euphoria Spring Temptation* by Calvin Klein, where I worked with Loc [Dong], we used a [large] amount of that patchouli heart. I use it in men's fragrances, for instance *Polo Blue* (Ralph Lauren), which was the next generation." Having worked on *Polo* in 1978, which employed great amounts of patchouli oil, Benaim—in collaboration with then-colleague

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^aLaboratoire Monique Remy is IFF's boutique naturals house.

Christophe Laudamiel—considered how the characteristics of the new fragrance (launched in 2002) could link back to the original. Patchouli was the answer. The perfumers sought to use “a different quality in a different context ... and create something for today.” Using the revised patchouli, Benaim says, “you’re able to see the freshness, the marine effect, with the support underneath.”

The Dark Side of Patchouli

Meanwhile, when Gaurin smells patchouli MD, or molecular distillation, from LMR, he is taken back to his childhood. “In certain parts of central France,” he says, “where my grandparents are from, there are very deep, dark woods. You smell moss. It’s very humid, mushroomy. You can hardly see during the day. It’s very dense. Very earthy.” This is the essence of patchouli MD, a product that is very different from Benaim’s favored patchouli heart.

“It’s not ‘designer,’” says Gaurin, noting that he loves the material’s polarizing elements. “It takes a position—you either love it or hate it. You’re going to have a reaction.” This version of patchouli, which has a bit of a damp character, eschews back notes and has an unusually high level of alcohol that traps the most volatile and valued facets of patchouli. “It’s a much purer version of patchouli,” Gaurin says. “There’s something very raw about it, very earthy, leathery. It’s not necessarily an easy product to work with because it’s not the kind of product that goes unnoticed. It has a lot of character, personality. It has much more head note, it’s much more in your face. It has more of a mushroom aspect than regular patchouli. It has something a bit more rugged, woody—it’s darker in a sense, in terms of smell. And so, it’s a bit more edgy.” In fact, the patchouli MD amplifies polarity. “It makes [fragrances] louder and brings more character. There’s a purity in it that I like.”

Gaurin likes to deploy this polarity in both men’s and women’s scents. Its leathery notes, even in trace amounts, can add valuable contrast in transparent and fresh notes, making bright aspects even brighter. “I’ve used it at over 10% in a formula,” he says, citing *Tom Ford Private Blend Black Violet*, on which he collaborated with perfumer Clement Gavarry. Of that fragrance he says, “It’s something I’m attached to. ... It’s a fragrance I love wearing because it has a richness and complexity of materials ... and the dry down’s absolutely amazing. I love wearing it and I loved doing it. ... It has a duality of man-woman. It has tremendous symmetry.”

Fragrance Monuments

But when asked for an example of a fragrance he admires, Gaurin strays from fine fragrance: *Downy April Fresh*. “I absolutely love it,” he says, “I think it’s a fantastic achievement.” Gaurin describes the scent as a classic in its own right and a “monument” in its category.

The perfumer began his career at IFF working primarily in functional fragrances in Hong Kong, far from his current fine fragrance milieu. The work there was highly technical and the cost ceilings obviously much lower than in fine fragrance. Gaurin notes that the work there taught him efficiency: “Every cent counts.” During this time, he learned the discipline of meeting strength and stability

needs, and today retains a respect for functional fragrance work. Gaurin makes little distinction when it comes to the art of formulating fine or functional fragrances. Either way, he says, “You have to bring an emotion to people.”

Similarly, he says, *Eternity for Women* (Calvin Klein) is “a monster. If you walk behind a woman wearing it, you may love it, you may hate it—it doesn’t matter. You know it. It’s a huge statement. You cannot miss it. Its signature is phenomenal.”

Both *Downey April Fresh* and *Eternity for Women* have proven themselves on the market over time. This is Gaurin’s lesson: “Whether you like it or not . . . you have to understand why it is what it is.” The perfumer returns to this point repeatedly: a fragrance that doesn’t get a reaction is probably a failure on some level. The worst fate, perhaps, is to formulate a fragrance that triggers little or no reaction—good or bad. “It’s the worst insult not being remembered,” he says. “As a perfumer you’re asked to develop fragrances that you don’t necessarily like.” For this reason, he adds, it is crucial to understand that fragrances win briefs for a reason. “You have to find a way to appreciate something for how it’s done, not necessarily what it is from your own personal taste.”

Reinventing Florals with Texture

Tuberose is Le Guerneck’s favorite flower. No surprise, then, that his first big success was with *Michael for Women* (Michael Kors) in 2000. Of that fragrance he says, “I had to reinvent the big white floral. For me, tuberose is the queen of every flower. It’s a flower that has a lot of facets; many more than jasmine. You have green, the creamy lactonic

piece, you have that very dense indole-anthranilate [aspect], which gives you the volume and intensity that . . . is very feminine.” But to modernize tuberose, Le Guerneck employs the green-violet undecavertol. This material, LeGuerneck says, helped reboot the traditional “big, white heavy floral” with its varying effects of texture and modernity. “It brings a nice freshness on top. When you use a lot you get a nice petally effect, very smooth, almost creaminess. At trace amounts it gives you a green, steady sparkle.” While floralcy takes center stage in *Michael for Women*, LeGuerneck explains that tuberose effects appear as key facets in other formulations. “In a women’s fragrance it gives me texture. In a men’s it would bring me a very nice freshness.”

Another of Le Guerneck’s favorite materials, Phenoxanol,^b also reinterprets a classic floral—rose. “It’s not a traditional rose note,” he says of the feminine-oriented ingredient. “It has a certain fattiness and powderyness to it. I like this material not so much for the character, but what it brings to the composition. It’s all about texture.” LeGuerneck explains that he uses the material less as a note than as a modifier that radiates its effect throughout a formulation, much like damascone, β -ionone and methyl anthranilate. “If you use even a trace of this product [in a fragrance], it will change the character.”

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^bPhenoxanol is a trademark of IFF.

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