

# Comparing Notes: a Q&A with Christine Nagel

Identifying new talent, new ingredients and evolving creativity

*Mane recently named Christine Nagel vice president, creation, fine fragrance, Europe. In addition to perfumery, she is responsible for the creative direction of the European fine fragrance (EFF) perfumery team, the discovery of new talent for the Mane perfumery school, evaluating new raw materials and pursuing new technologies.*

*Nagel recently spoke with P&F magazine about her new responsibilities and what she looks for in prospective perfumers.*

**P&F: Please tell us more about your responsibilities.**

**Nagel:** This is a new dimension in the fine fragrance strategy, aligned with Mane's vision of innovation, combining technology and creation. In addition to the creation of new fragrances, three fields of activity are essential to the group strategy toward excellence:

- The creative direction of the EFF Mane perfumers' team, the transmission of a unique know-how and expertise with continuous intellectual exchange.
- Discovery and selection of new young talents who will integrate into the Mane School of Perfumery.
- Participation on the Mane scientific committee for fine fragrance, enabling an interface between the fine fragrance perfumery team and Mane scientists to suggest and validate the development steps of new natural ingredients and aroma chemicals. Fundamental and applied research is increasingly end-user driven, meeting the needs of perfumers and consumers alike.

**P&F: What are your objectives in leading the EFF perfumer team?**



Christine Nagel; photo courtesy of Matthieu Dortomb.

**Nagel:** Today, at Mane, we are creators of scents and emotion. Besides the number of projects, customers and competitors, what strikes me the most is the multitude of personalities and sensitivities that meet in the Parisian region.

Succeeding in creating a perfume with a real identity and true values takes a powerful relational exchange between the brand and the perfumer. Beyond creativity, the personality of the perfumer is of prime importance.

My main objective is to capitalize on the Mane values of respect, freedom and professionalism to build a team of perfumers with a capital T and foster an

environment in which they are encouraged to experiment, willing to share and contribute to our mutual success.

I want perfumers to feel happy, since I am convinced that when you are happy you are in the ideal position to give and to arouse desire. This "soul supplement" is what will make our clients gravitate toward us.

**P&F: Can you explain how new talent will be identified and trained for the EFF team?**

**Nagel:** The perfumers of tomorrow will distinguish themselves only if they can show this soul supplement. I am going to look for "fine people." Beyond aestheticism, relational skills, curiosity, creativity and technical know-how, there is no pre-established academic requirement or training. The human being and their personality will take precedence.

In the end, talking about soul supplement, I seek individuals who will inspire me with their spontaneity,

communicative competence, charisma, passion and hard work. The selection will include people from within the company and external candidates—I know that rare pearls can be found in different environments.

Once selected, candidates will be trained at the Mane School of Perfumery for two to three years, following a thorough, customized program that has been perfected over the last 25 years, with an emphasis on natural products, the chemistry of perfumery and cosmetic ingredients, innovation, regulations, and consumer preference as industry drivers.

The program includes different workshops on the history of the industry, the science of olfaction in particular. The apprentice perfumer then completes the training on the job under the mentorship of a fine fragrance senior perfumer.

**P&F: Can you describe the composition and purpose of the fine fragrance scientific committee?**

**Nagel:** The Mane scientific committee's main mission is to ensure the validation of the steps leading from the conception to the industrialization of new fragrance and flavor ingredients.

I have just joined the company, and my first approach has been to take the time to observe the dynamics of its governance, understand its objectives, and better appreciate the culture and tools of the company before suggesting changes.

What strikes me at Mane is its management's ability to listen to perfumers and focus to provide us with differentiating tools. My position in the scientific committee will enable me to suggest areas of research based on purely hedonic and then performance/price ratio considerations.

Any interest shown by perfumers triggers a formal seven-step process from concept to industrialization, which includes an assessment in terms of newness and performance with human and environmental safety and sustainability considerations.

Every year, there is a pipeline of six to seven new captive ingredients (out of 300 or more that perfumers pre-screen), be they patented synthetic molecules or new naturals, without taking into account innovative extracts from our technology and improved processes program.

**P&F: What role will you play in facilitating the connection between technology and creativity?**

**Nagel:** I see myself as a channel for moving creative inspiration back and forth among our scientists and our fine fragrance perfumers to expand the possibilities to express and renew our style. My personal career path, combining science and creation, puts me in the privileged position to enable these two universes, so far removed and yet so complementary, to magnify one another.

**P&F: How has the role of the perfumer evolved throughout your career? How have these changes altered the day-to-day jobs of creative talents?**

**Nagel:** My role as a perfumer has definitely evolved during my career, but I like to think that what evolves is the human being behind the perfumer. I have been a perfumer for 30 years, and my perfumery reflects who I am as a person, events that shaped my character, good or bad, happy or sad.

The mastery goes on growing; creativity thrives on stimulation and diversity. Personally, I took the risk of changing regularly my fragrance house; it is as much a danger as it can be a powerful engine for creativity. In my case, this risk-taking translates into a new learning and enriching experiences. On me, it works like a facelift; it is my touch of madness that rejuvenates me.

Did Pierre-Francois Pascal Guerlain work in the same way as Guerlain's contemporary perfumers? Certainly not; yet they still create and will likely continue to create more Guerlain perfumes.

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