

First Look: Inside the New Symrise Perfumery School in India

With developing markets and Asia-Pacific providing significant sales boosts, Symrise establishes a new resource for the perfumers of tomorrow

Symrise (Holzminden, Germany) has founded a perfumery school at Symrise Private Ltd. in Chennai, India, serving both prospective perfumers and evaluators for Asian markets and beyond. The new program is the latest addition to the company's worldwide Perfumers' Academy, which provides:

1. Training for junior perfumers and continuing education for perfumers, evaluators and sales staff.
2. Graduate and postgraduate training in financial skills, chemistry, presentation techniques, mentoring and coaching, and, for sales staff, olfactory training.
3. Scent Expeditions for senior perfumers, consisting of on-site visits around the world to study plantations, gardens, markets and production facilities in order to gain new olfactive, cultural and market perspectives.

Of the Indian school, Béatrice Favre-Bulle, senior vice president of global fragrance development, home and personal care, said, "By establishing the perfumery school in Chennai, we are now building up an internal talent pool of outstandingly trained perfumers and evaluators for the Asian market. We are offering young talents the chance [to enter] into one of the most coveted occupations in the world. Our aim is to have the right 'nose' for our customers' needs and to convert those needs into unique fragrance compositions that will delight consumers. In this area, sustained investment in our employees right from the start is indispensable."

Markus Steger, regional president of scent and care, Asia-Pacific, said, "India is one of the emerging markets in which we are growing strongly. With its wealth of exotic spices and plants and its unique natural habitats and culture, moreover, the country is an incomparable source of inspiration for fragrance developers ... By training our own perfumers and evaluators in the country itself, we react to the increasing demand of Asia's growth markets for creative talents. Thus, we are not only building our future in the Asian region, but also enabling ourselves to react even better to the needs of our global customers."



"For this moment in the school [students] are free of pressure from daily work," says Marc vom Ende, director of the Chennai-based Perfumery School. "They have two years to study and to learn from scratch."



Formulating for a Booming Asia

In its latest financials, Symrise announced that about 46% of its sales are generated in emerging markets, a figure that is growing continuously. Overall, more than 20% of sales are generated in Asia. The need for olfactive and market expertise in the region is obvious, and so, notes Clemens Tenge, director of corporate communications, the expanded Academy is a boon for bigger projects for local and international customers operating in the Indian market and beyond.

"We thought we should have a [program] in an emerging country that is developing strongly and will be very important for us in the future," says senior perfumer Marc vom Ende, who directs the school in Chennai. "India is one of those countries which has huge potential."

Vom Ende has been with Symrise and its precursors for 22 years, building a background in chemistry research and synthesis, essential oil research, and fine fragrance and personal care perfumery in the United States, Germany, and France. Having worked in so many categories, he will help provide perfumery students with technical knowledge across a range of applications.

“From a creative perspective we have a great environment in India,” says Clemens. “For trainee perfumers it’s a great place to be. The second element is a strategic one for the company. Asia is a growth region within the industry and Symrise. Hence, it is a part of our strategy to strengthen our activities in those emerging Asian markets that are important to us. The perfumery school in India is a good example of this.”

“In India we want to progress, because the market is quite emergent,” says vom Ende. “India is a very inspiring country. If you go on the street there are so many smells you can detect. The food is very diverse and includes a lot of spices. It’s an amazing country—fascinating and motivational. This is ... what’s driving this perfume industry.”

The Program

Standard Perfumery Academy junior perfumer training covers perfumery fundamentals, raw materials, and applications including fine fragrance, personal care, and household products. Following this, students typically relocate to a different country or region for practical-phase training in one of the company’s regional business development centers. The Chennai school will draw its candidates from among both current employees and prospective junior perfumers and evaluators. The two-year course will cover fragrance ingredients, “archetypal” fragrance structures, and market and product knowledge, in addition to insights from evaluation and marketing staff with specialty in the Indian market.

“For each module we’ll have a specialist that will give input,” says vom Ende. “They will come to India for a certain period to give input on this subject. There will be chemistry modules, modules about market products and more. There will be quite a number of people involved from Europe, Asia-Pacific, etc.”

The program, he says, will be highly focused on both the basics of raw materials and ongoing daily training on ingredients, which, vom Ende says, “is a never-ending thing for perfumers. During that time, we put students in an environment where they can learn everything about the raw materials, about the effects those materials will give, and the archetypes for fine fragrance and other applications. They have to smell everything. It’s not that we will give formulas—they have to understand the structure. They will be taught how to understand which materials are working together and building accords and structures of the perfume.

“For this moment in the school they are free of pressure from daily work, which is not usual. Often perfumer trainees are simply trained on-the-job. We decided to take a different approach. Our trainees have those two years, really, to study and to learn from scratch.”

The Students

Prospective trainees for the perfumery school—both inside and outside the company—will include those with chemistry degrees, graduates of perfumery schools and junior talents from within the fragrance industry. Candidates from around the world will be considered.

“We had applications from all over the world that we made our selection from,” says vom Ende of Chennai’s first batch of students. Although being from India is not among the criteria for consideration, the inaugural group of three students comprises Indian nationals hailing from Mumbai, Chennai and the Indian countryside.

“Something that is very important for the students is curiosity,” says vom Ende. “They need to want to learn about smells and be passionate about the impressions that they get from the effects of smells. This is more or less the focus for me in the perfumery school.

“For the school we are looking both for people who want to be educated there and learn through the school, and people who have originated from India and understand this market. At the same time we want to work not only on the Indian market and have a deep understanding of the culture, but also in the end prepare them to work anywhere in the Symrise world.”

Of the students, vom Ende adds, “Ideally we want to keep them all. So that means if they’re up to the level of our expectations we would like to have them, later on, as perfumers. Therefore we are only taking on an amount of people that we can [fit] in our organization.”

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