

From Helena to Rihanna: Kathleen Galvin's Unique Career in Fragrance and Beauty

When Kathleen Galvin joined beauty product house Helena Rubinstein at the start of her career, all of the company's departments were housed under one roof, including labs, manufacturing and marketing.

"That gave me a wonderful opportunity to learn a little bit about everybody's work," says Galvin. "I was getting to see how [chemistry] was applied in the consumer products world. I really got a good picture of everything."

At the same time, brand managers worked on multiple lines simultaneously, affording Galvin development opportunities in skin care, color cosmetics, hair care and fragrance brands that ranged from the mass market (ex: *Ultra Feminine*) to high-end offerings (ex: *SkinLife* and *Heaven Sent*).

Galvin, who will be honored during the 30th annual open dinner of Women in Flavor and Fragrance Commerce (WFFC; www.wffc.org), carried this diverse experience with her to positions with Clinique and Revlon, and later to naturals-focused iNatural in Massachusetts and Goodebodies in Miami. At these latter two companies she was able to work with product concepts and ingredients that have since become part of the mainstream, including moisturizing serums, gentle preservatives, natural fragrance materials and non-petroleum-derivative alternative ingredients.

"The mainstream part of the industry thought that this was not a serious take on products, one of those cute fads that would go away," says Galvin. "I never believed that."

Galvin's move to Parlux Fragrances, where she holds the position of vice president of marketing and advertising, returned her to the world of fragrance, first as a brand manager for Alexandra de Markoff's color cosmetics, skin care products and fragrances. She soon expanded into fragrance product development and marketing.

"My work is often a diplomatic mission," Galvin says of her current position managing licensed brands for designers and celebrities that have included Rihanna, Paris Hilton, Queen Latifah and designer Marc Ecko. She describes each project as a unique experience, with the celebrities and designers holding varying degrees of creative input and approval power over facets such as the final fragrance, ancillary products and formulas, and packaging, depending on the contract. While some licensors will select a fragrance from an array presented by Galvin's teams, others will help build a fragrance from the ground up, beginning with an assessment of their own fragrance, ingredient, accord and packaging preferences.



Kathleen Galvin

"Some of them have good noses," Galvin says of the celebrity and designer personalities. "Others may be anosmic to some things." And sometimes these licensors have in mind niche boutique-type scents that aren't appropriate for the targeted consumer channel. The job, Galvin notes, is to "translate inspiration" into a successful launch.

Highlights that stand out for Galvin include her work with fashion designer Josie Natori, whom Galvin describes as, "an amazing woman in terms of her personal style, design aesthetic and astuteness in business." Galvin also shows great pride in the success Parlux has experienced with the series of scents launched under the Paris

Hilton brand, which has sold more than \$1 billion worldwide since its inception. "The business that we do on Paris Hilton brands worldwide astounds most people when they hear the numbers," she says. "Celebrity fragrance seems to be waning a bit, and Paris isn't in the media the way she used to be, but the fragrances have built a good consumer base and continue to sell." Finally, says Galvin, her work with Rihanna taught her a lesson that sometimes the celebrity knows best. "She has a very good nose," Galvin says of the pop star. "As we were developing her first fragrance she was only 21. She knows what she likes and she's very strong in her opinions." Galvin says that initially retailers and other experts were skeptical that Rihanna's debut scent packaging, fragrance strength and other product facets were going to find consumer acceptance. However, Galvin says, "Rihanna wouldn't budge and we stuck with her instincts and we had a tremendous success."

In addition to the designers and celebrities, Galvin says she values her work with perfumers. "I so admire them because they have to be good chemists, they have to know what's going to work well together, they have to be grounded enough in the business to know that what they're creating has to fit a pricing profile, and they have to give it their absolute best because they want to win the business." At the same time, she understands the fierce competition not only among fragrance houses, but among perfumers within each company. "I realize it's a tremendous task they have in front of them," she says. "They bring such great energy to it. It's been such a privilege to work with them. I look at them as artists."

Galvin, who says she was surprised by the WFFC's honor, says, "I very much appreciate the opportunities they give to members to network, socialize and do what I think of as real-world continuing education. I think it's tremendously valuable to create an organization where the women of our industry have the opportunity to learn from each other. I'm very grateful that they've found my efforts worthy, whether for mentoring or product development or promoting our industry."

She concludes, "I've been given such diverse opportunities, such interesting people to work with; it's been a joy. For me this is the perfect job."

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