

Dr. Fernando Aleu is one of the most remarkable individuals in the fragrance industry. Dr. Aleu is an associate professor of neuropathology at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York. He has published articles in numerous medical journals and has received several awards from the American Association of Neuropathologists in recognition of medical research which he has conducted. On Dr. Aleu's

curriculum vitae under "miscellaneous highlights" are listed:

Founder of Puig of Barcelona in 1968

Founder of Paco Rabanne Perfumes in 1969

Founder of Aleu-Hawthorne Laboratories, Inc. in 1983

President of the Fragrance Foundation from 1974 to 1984

## Is There A Reason To Wear A Fragrance?

By Fernando Aleu, M.D.

President, Paco Rabanne, Puig of Barcelona, USA

Is there a reason to wear a fragrance or, wording the question differently, why do people wear fragrances? People wear fragrances for many reasons. One of the most common, lately, is that one gets sprayed in Bloomingdale's. This, however, does not a fragrance wearer make. The sprayee is simply a fragrance "carrier," someone who has been dealt with like a Mediterranean fruit fly.

In a more serious mood, however, why do we wear fragrances?

Years ago, I was conducting some research at New York University studying the effect of a particular diet on rabbits. During one of the feeding sessions, one of the animals became uncooperative and made some threat displays to me. Because I am a sensitive fellow, I defended myself

elegantly. I had, in my pocket, one of the submissions of what, later on, was going to be Calandre and I simply sprayed the rabbit with it. He did not like it and staged a retreat. The reaction of his cage mates, however, is what interested me. They reacted to the incident with enormous curiosity. Most of them were fascinated by the way the sprayed animal smelled. The "smelly" rabbit became the center of attention of the cage. It was evident to me that the poor Peter Cottontail lost anonymity. He had become a temporary celebrity. In short, he was a different rabbit.

This experience made it quite clear to me that fragrances were either celebrity creators or anonymity decreasers, not a small accomplishment!



A few years ago, in the summer, there was some anxiety about flying DC 10s. The reluctance was caused by a serious accident involving this type of aircraft. DC 10s and Lockheed 1011s are "wide bodies" which look remarkably similar. I was on a flight to San Francisco and my neighbor, all of a sudden, became very apprehensive. He thought we were flying on a DC 10. Without any comfort from me, suddenly he smiled, kind of relaxed and said, "It is a 1011!" How do you know? I asked, just to make conversation, and he replied, assuredly, "*By the smell.*"

Apparently, the air conditioning system of the L1011 has a component that gives a particular odor to the air of the cabin immediately after takeoff and disappears a few minutes later. This odd odor had a calming effect on my neighbor. The calming effect was not the action of the fragrance but that the odor (sensed in previous experiences) was *identified* and *associated* with it.

During my years as a resident at Bellevue, while I was making rounds on a particularly gloomy day, I saw one of the patients spraying herself with some fragrance. "Why are you doing that," I asked. "Are you expecting friends? Do you feel better today?" The answer was no to both. "Why are you doing it then," was my insistent question. "It makes me feel better" was the reply. The spray of fragrance provided a temporary sense of euphoria and well being which this patient appreciated. This ephemeral but significant psychological lift by the simple fact of spraying a fragrance in the air, made a terminal, destitute, friendless old patient feel better. No small feat.

Finally, we all know the story of the Japanese beetles and the "Bag a Bug." As an approach to control this pest, a sexual olfactory lure attracts male beetles to a plastic, vertical surface which interrupts their flight course. They collide against it, they get stunned and they fall into a bag, conveniently placed below. This contraption can become even more effective if, in addition to the sexual fragrance on the plastic surface, the perfume of a rose is added. Instead of catching X Japanese beetles in a bag per minute, the fragranced plastic attracts 3X.

Is it totally unjustified to say that the woman can multiply her sexual attractiveness by 3 by the simple fact of spraying fragrance? Perhaps, and perhaps not.

A historically compelling reason to wear fragrance is that fragrances are, indeed, social enhancers. A woman wearing a fragrance is perceived as a more elegant woman than the one who is not. This social enhancement is increased by the fact that fragrances used to be perceived as



luxurious items.

Allow me, then, to summarize some of the reasons mentioned, illustrating why people wear fragrances.

- Fragrances make them noticed (the case of my rabbit).
- Fragrances are identifying agents. They evoke memories and, as such, they associate experiences.
- Fragrances create a feeling of well being.
- They increase sexual attraction.
- They enhance our social status.

In addition, some of the fragrances we sell do smell good.

These are formidable assets which, by the way, have very little to do with the nose. These reactions are cerebrally mediated: on the brain! That marvelously complex structure that people have behind their noses.

A colleague at this podium has referred, several times, to the need to market fragrances aggressively because we are dealing with a mature market. Aggressiveness is not the word I would subscribe to. If anything, in my view, our industry has become *overly aggressive*. In doing so, it has minimized the attraction of what we are trying to sell. That fragrances have become *secondary* objectives in the buying impulse, primarily triggered by a bag, an umbrella, a telephone or a watch, is an admission by insecure manufacturers that the products they sell "per se" are not desirable enough to motivate a cautious consumer to open wallet or purse.

The answer to the maturity of our industry does not lie on more aggressivity (a bigger umbrella). One of the solutions to the puzzle is to learn more about the sense of smell, which is the wondrous sense, several times as sensitive as the most sophisticated, laboratory analytical equipment. The way it works is largely unknown. It is here that lies the challenge and the possibility of increasing our markets and fragrance usage. For example, by learning how to cure people that are odor blind—the anosmics—maybe ten percent of the population, we have to learn how what we sell works. It is the Fragrance Foundation that is spearheading a movement via the Fragrance Foundation Research Fund to support and finance research to clarify olfactory facts and, in doing so, enlarge our markets.

Unremitting blitz of hype will trivialize everything we do. Elegance will suffer, vulgarization will triumph. I recently read one of the documents that was sent to the personnel working behind the counter which included a glowing

congratulatory note to a rep who had the marvelous idea of scenting the handrail of the escalator of a department store. If this well-meaning person would have understood that one of the reasons people buy fragrance is to be identified and remembered, she would have realized, before spraying the escalator, then the following comment would be a likely outcome: "I love you honey, but your fragrance reminds me of an escalator." This is not a way to create repeat sales. Identification, memorability and elegance will suffer if we treat fragrance this way. It may also result in a decrease of the euphoria of the patient at Bellevue who has no interest whatsoever of being identified as an escalator. The marketing of fragrances has to be elegant, has to be provocative, has to be sophisticated and humorous. Fragrance advertising has to place emphasis on what fragrances do.

Our advertising agency, Ogilvy & Mather, understood this need clearly. Some people feel that the Paco Rabanne advertisements are sexy. They aren't. They have nothing to do with sex. Whether a man appears half naked or half dressed, all depends on how you look at things. The ever present telephone conversation, invariably follows a similar script. A woman calls. She says: "I miss you." He answers: "I miss you too." She asks "You know what else you are going to miss?" "What?" "The bottle of Paco." "Why on earth did you take it?" "*It reminds me of you.*" The selling line. *Memorability*. The logical conclusion of the ad has a formidable impact. Paco Rabanne will help you to be remembered. What is remembered is up to you.

The aggressiveness that characterizes today's marketing leads to excess. Do not forget: everything excessive becomes insignificant.

Perfumery, as a form of art, demands the proper ambiance, the proper surroundings. Perfumers should demand from the manufacturers not to throw masterpieces to peddlers. Fragrances have to be sold. Not peddled. If we treat our products with respect, and motivate professional people to promote sales in a creative way, we can be assured that people will continue to buy and wear fragrance in increasing numbers. They have done it for thousands of years. Why should they stop now? People like to be noticed, remembered, identified, feel euphoric, attractive and considered elegant.

As long as we provide these formidable intangibles, fragrances are here to stay and to prosper. The challenge is up to us.

Address correspondence to Fernando Aleu, M.D., President, Paco Rabanne Parfumes, 660 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10021, U.S.A.

