

Marylene Delbourg-Delphis began her career in France as a philosophy teacher. Her keen interest in consumerism coupled with a creative ability to write led her eventually to journalism. She has been retained by most of the major French magazines to write articles on consumerism.

Soon she became interested in the History of Fashion and Fragrance, and wrote two books on the subject, "Le Chic et le Look" and "Les Silage des Elegants." The latter book was written in order to fill a void in the literature on the his-

tory of perfumery in France. Mme. Delbourg-Delphis further continued her research by developing systems to computerize this data. Part of this research was funded by S.G.D. Glass. She has now founded a computer software business which has already become a leading supplier of computer software in France. The April issue of *Connoisseur* magazine features an article on the computer data bank she has developed. In September she will have published a new book on male eccentrics called "Masculin Singulier."

## History and the Name Game: It Makes Scents

By Marylene Delbourg-Delphis  
President, A.C.I., Paris, France

**A**re the perfumes of the past likely to cast any light on modern times? Most people are inclined to say "no" and to emphasize that obviously a certain period of time has its own rules and its own habits and its own creativity. Some people can just discard the past; others may just adore it. A third possible way is derived from the fact that certain perfumes of the past are still available on the market.

Modern perfumes do not conflict with the older ones, which are perfectly integrated in the modern perfumery landscape thanks to the talent of marketing and communicating people.

Chanel's Number 5 probably is one of the best examples of this permanent updating of the image. Very few consumers know that Chanel's Number 5 was created in 1921. To give another example: young ladies always have had the feeling that l'Air du Temps has just been created—and they have been convinced of it each year for nearly forty years.

The explanation that they are classics usually does not mean anything. I would like to remind you that these perfumes were not consciously designed to last for ages. The opinion then was that women should change their perfume according



to the season, to their mood or to fashion—an opinion which is now coming back with the idea of a perfumery wardrobe.

Perfume houses are endowed with solid bases and a real capacity to nurture their products, but, besides that, what is the secret of the continued existence of those products?

To begin with the smell, it is to be noted that these perfumes generally set a new trend and directly expressed the aspirations of the period in which they were launched. So when creating Chanel's Number 5, Ernest Beaux, who was the creator of this perfume, was not working for the future but for chic ladies of the twenties. In fact the major feature of a successful perfume seems to be its ability to mould into any period of time. The very brand new feature belongs to positioning more than to the scent itself. Although certain notes are related to a certain period of time, they are not condemned to become anachronical when other trends occur because the evolution of olfactive criterias is extremely slow, and because the same fragrance seems to be different according to the period of time and the context in which it is smelled. It is generally acknowledged that the approach to odors is subjective. I would say more in the same direction: an odour has the historical identity of the smeller.

One of the most striking examples is Jicky by Guerlain. It was created in 1889. Women then were very surprised by its lavender note. They had the feeling that it was rather meant for men. They finally adopted the note ten years later. In the late 1910s, women suddenly forgot the lavender note. Being more receptive to the vanilline aspect because of a new amber oriental trend, these women, in the 1920s, tended to be categorize Jicky in the same family as Shalimar.

In the 1930s there was a clear differentiation between Jicky and Shalimar. Jicky was then considered a fresh note and praised for its lavender aspect. Nowadays, it is just thought of as an image of Guerlain without any further qualification.

Scent is only one aspect of the perfume to be able to take the spirit of the times. This is also true in regard with packaging and naming.

For the shape, Pierre Dinand did a lot of work in recreating an old bottle with modern techniques. Whereas the modern consumer of Ombre Rose immediately adopted the style of the bottle, first designed for Mury's Narcisse Bleu.

Before sounding "very Matchabelli," Catchet used to be a Lucien Lelong's brand, (L. L. was a very well-known couture designer before the second world war) and Paris which now sounds "very Saint Laurent" first sounded "very Coty."

Even ads of 60 years ago can have a strangely

modern look.

In fact, there is a structural reason why old perfumes as a whole or through a scent, a bottle or a name still have a meaning nowadays. It is not because they are extremely good, even if they often are. It is because they were built with the same type of concept as ours although their target was not so broad, and because they purely and simply belong to the same universe as ours.

It is somewhat useful to make a distinction between the actual past and a reflection on the past which history means in the strict sense of the term. That each generation needs to innovate from a marketing, aesthetic or stylistic point of view is a denial of the past but a constant behavior in the history of perfumery. Oblivion may be the principle of progress but it is also the symbol of faithfulness to the real history of perfumes and finally a permanent tribute to the very foundations of modern perfumery.

At the turn of the century modern perfumery effectively appeared and settled in, thanks to a reaction against a two or three thousand year old conception of odors.

A violent shock occurred with the chemical revolution at the middle of the 19th century: 1833 cinnamic aldehyde, 1840 borneol, 1842 anethol, 1844 salicylate de methyl. A wave of aldehydes: coumarine in 1868, heliotropine, terpineol 1878, vanilline 1877, quinoleines 1880-1885, muscs 1880 and others. These innovations became commonly used in the 1880s, a period when the delay between the creation of new substances and their use considerably lessened. Many important perfumers understood the impact of this revolution and one of the major ones was Aimee Guerlain with Jicky.

This revolution echoed on all the aspects of perfumery. Old designations for perfumes began to vanish. For up to then, there used to be a sort of conventional dictionary of names and phrases for the bouquets, for instance: *parfum japonais*, *bouquet du jockey club*, *bouquet des gardes*, *bouquet de coeur*, *bouquet de buckingham palace*. Each of them corresponded to a certain formula which was not supposed to be different from one house to another. The difference was only in the quality of raw materials. The *bouquet des delices* would always be a certain proportion of rose, violette, tuberose, iris, amber, bergamote and lemon.

At the turn of the century, things changed radically. "This year (i.e., 1895)," a fashion journalist wrote in one of the major papers called *Le Gaoulois*, "flowers in perfumes are hardly to be identified. You cannot put names on them. These perfumes are: *le Jardin de mon cure*, *Vere Novo*,



Belle France.”

These perfumes could not be analyzed by the nose. They awoke a certain new sensation difficult to define and the feeling that they were appropriately named although it was unexplainable. As they could not be referred to any conventional designation or fixed knowledge, fancy names now functioned as a sort of passport to a new romance. The magic spell of a new strength, inasmuch as chemical products had pushed to a new concentration of natural products, had to be enshrined into a new verbal setting—the world of desire, the realms of adventure, the dreams of escape from a rather stifling “bourgeois” life. Perfumery began to rank with the theatre, with the novel or poetry. Besides being an art of mixing materials, it became an art of finding names, creating packagings, and ads—the art of building a whole concept and an art of stage setting.

As women read, the very popular Marcel Prevost’s works or attended Paul Hervieu’s plays, so perfumes were now supposed to be in accordance with the background.

When the tango occurred, a parfum was named Tango (1914). When the cinema became popular, the perfumery setting became cinematographical (small bourgeoisie target). So a successful perfume was supposed to be the closest possible to women’s aspirations or lifestyle. This is the reason that the history of perfumes is a display of every day life and hopes. Perfumery is the mirror of the social history: the strange sentimentality of the flapper (*My Sin*, *L’Aimant*), the arrival of sport (*Le Sien*), the air travel fascination (*Vol de Nuit*), or possibly the art of positioning a perfume: wear *Soir de Paris* in all the nice circumstances.

You play with love and do not make it. You play with Opium without dying. You take Poison for your own sake. You enjoy Decadence as British writers did seventy years ago so defined by Arthur Symons as “an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity, an oversubtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity.” You are a splendid Maxim’s courtesane inside your puritan way of being a liberated woman. Your Obsession never leads you to Dr. Freud. You once loved scandal in just being Shocking and Dangerous without taking any risk. Like novels, perfumes happened to tell a condensed but manifold story to become a compensatory life and a way of playing with life.

Address correspondence to Ms. Marylene Delburg-Delphis, President, A.C.I., 38 Avenue Hoche, Paris 75008, France, or to her U.S. representative Susan Hays, Hazon Concepts, P.O. Box 214, Gracie Station, New York, New York 10028.

