



Fragrance and Its Packaging—Dealing with the Subliminal

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The art of creating a fragrance and the art of designing a bottle to contain it goes back centuries. The combination of these arts has resulted in fragrance images that are legendary. "Scents of Time" is an international museum exhibition sponsored by the Fragrance Foundation and conceived of by Annette Green, its executive director. I am proud to be serving as its chairman. It will open in October at the Museum of the City of New York and will deal with these images: how fragrance has affected society from 1700 through the 1950s in terms of the perfume, its bottle, its name, the advertising and the presentation.

Imagine a tableau of the 1920s depicting the dramatic new influences of the decade—a photograph of the greatest achievement in architecture, the skyscraper; Chanel's new look modeled by a mannikin of the period seated at an art deco mirrored dressing table on top of which sit several of the great fragrances of the 1920s: Caron's *Nuit de Noel*, Lanvin's *Arpege* and Guerlain's *Shalimar*, displayed as the art objects they were intended to be. In this period setting would be a famous Cartier mystery clock letting us know that scents of time can strike at any hour.

Perfume containers have been created as art throughout the centuries. Museums and private collections abound with exquisite examples of perfume flacons from renaissance to art deco. Perfume bottles have been designed both to please and amuse the consumer and to contain and connote the essence itself.

From rose water to Fendi, fragrances have been created by people like you, and the bottles designed by people like me, to jointly create one indelible image of their subliminal message.

In a graduate class I teach at the Pratt Institute on "how to design a perfume bottle," I hand out one of three different fragrances to each student on the first evening: a floral, a green, an oriental. I stress the importance of smelling the perfume and creating what the scent implies—a color, a name, a bottle.

The imagination is a wonderful thing. At the end of the semester, each student has created a totally different bottle for the same fragrance. As with a great abstract painting, each person comes away with an individual impression.

Perfume—the very word evokes images of glamour, history and beautiful women. Being married to a special woman, I can tell you that



when she appears, her fragrance is part of her persona.

I have been fortunate enough to work on several famous fragrances during my career. The experience of creating a new perfume bottle is without question the designer's finest moment. Whether an attitudinal fragrance or a designer fragrance, I prefer to create the bottle as a symbol of the perfume.

The KL bottle illustrates this thought process. Karl Lagerfeld, as we know, is one of the world's leading fashion designers. His collections from Chloe to Chanel, KL to Fendi are legendary. He is a renaissance man, always aware of the past and awaiting the future. His idea of the ultimate analogy is the Concord flying over the Petite Trianon at Versailles: 20th century state of the arts combined with the 18th century at its zenith. He wanted a fragrance that would reflect this idea. KL, a new type of oriental—even to its color—implies something different. As in the ad copy, "KL—expect the unexpected."

When searching for an idea to capture this fragrance, I came upon the concept of the fan—a seemingly useless accessory of a bygone era, an item used to ventilate southern belles at plantation balls, or a shield behind which to discuss idle gossip at the Court of St. James. After doing some research on fans, I found that they were actually a weapon of flirtation just like a fragrance—used to create a seductive aura of femininity. A woman could hide behind it if she chose, or she could snap it shut to make a point.

Fans, like fragrance, were used by women all over the world, from Katmandu to Bali, from St. Petersburg to Atlanta. As Lagerfeld had always collected fans and often used them when showing his collections, I created the fan as a modern perfume bottle to make it the symbol for the KL fragrance. For me, the subliminal sensuality of the fragrance contained in a crystal fan would create an image of seduction, femininity and fantasy.

We are such lucky people. We create luxuries that bring happiness to others. We deal with the abstract—with the senses. One whiff of Blue Grass can instantly transport you to your very first date. Seeing a bottle of Evening in Paris in an antique shop can remind you of your grandmother's elegant dressing table.

Let NASA send rockets to the moon. We can take you there without ever leaving home!

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