



The Nectar of Gaia: Aroma Chology in the 1990s

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"What is Aromachology? What does it entail? How can it serve us in the future? Is it a cult?...A fad?...or is it a future phenomenon? Both speakers with us today, are very much involved in Aromatherapy. Our first speaker is also a member of the Society of Perfumes. She has worked for IFF, Florasynth and Givaudan. In 1981, she left to pursue academic studies which includes preventive medicine and natural healing techniques. In 1986, she established Santa Fe Fragrances Research, an all natural fragrance company. She is the Director of Aroma Research Institute of America."

It gives me great pleasure to be here today and to have this opportunity to talk to you about a connection that exists between the fragrance industry and the ecology of our planet. Millions of years ago the only fragrance that existed came from the earth itself, through the flora and fauna that was evolving in the biosphere. That portion of the earth's fragrance created by living plants is what John Steele and I refer to as the Nectar of Gaia.

Gaia was the ancient Greek Goddess of Earth and has provided the name for the hypothesis of British scientist, James Lovelock, that the earth is a living organism. Perfumery is the art and craft that developed from the use of the Nectar of Gaia. Aromatics have always been an integral part of our history, evolution and belief systems. Until the 20th Century, perfumery was based entirely on the Nectar of Gaia.

I believe that fragrance, rather than being considered a

vanity and ornamental commodity, could have an important role to play in the vast endeavor to save the environment that is presently underway throughout the world. Sunday, April 22, was the Earth Day celebration and it was observed in 134 countries.

Today's prestige perfume is valued for its power and decisive signature. The contemporary concept of perfume is glamorous, exciting and potent. This image is created by affiliation with a celebrity, designer or lifestyle. A perfume's value does not seem to depend upon the actual cost of its aromatic ingredients, but on an image created primarily through marketing efforts. Of course this does not preclude the fact that the perfume may smell great.

In times not so long ago, perfume was thought of as a precious commodity because it was truly a rare treasure of aromatics gathered from around the world. A natural perfume was valued for its exquisite beauty and because it was brought forth from the sacred earth. Today a natural perfume would be held in high esteem if more people knew what naturals were in comparison to fragrances that contain mostly synthetic ingredients.

For example, the majority of fragrances that are advertised with the scents of rose and jasmin, do not contain the naturally derived botanical essences. People assume that these are the natural flower oils because companies and consumers have been told by representatives of the fragrance industry that they are natural.

There is an attitude in the industry that the evolving interest in naturals can be satisfied through packaging, labeling and marketing without really changing the ingredients. They think that people won't know that difference or don't care. When people don't know the dif-



ference, it is because they have not been able to get accurate information. In spite of this, a growing segment of the population is questioning the legitimacy of label and industry claims and are searching for naturals.

The industry tells people to imagine and fantasize about nature through air fresheners with names like Pine Forest and Country Garden. These are mostly synthetic blends and through them we are being conditioned to accept substitutes.

It may be true that you can fool the brain to believe that a synthetic compound represents nature or can duplicate an olfactory experience of nature, but these are imitations and they can never take the place of the real thing. If we can provide scents that are actually from the pine forest, why focus on manufacturing scents that merely represent the pine forest. If one says that a natural fragrance can be duplicated and replaced by a synthetic fragrance, then one could say that *Tang* is orange juice.

There is a large untapped market of people who presently do not wear perfumes because they do not consider them to be ecologically compatible with their environmental sensitivities. Benefits connected with naturals come from the fact that they are, indeed, extracted from once-living plants and flowers. *This* is the true selling point. It is my opinion that "natural product seekers" are not as concerned with actual odor qualities as they are with the source of the aroma being natural. They also appreciate the aesthetics and subtlety that natural aromatics offer. Again, these people want true naturals, not something that smells exactly like naturals.

A large segment of the population does not use fragrance because they believe that they are allergic to it. More products are appearing that advertise their "fragrance free" formulas or "unscented" quality. Hypo-allergenic usually means fragrance free.

People who are allergic to chemical fragrances often find that they can use botanical fragrances without any adverse effects. The process of consumer rejection of fragrance has now come full circle with the imminent passage of new laws by the California legislature to protect consumers from unwanted fragrance samples in magazine advertisements.

The fragrance industry stands to benefit enormously from the return to naturals. In addition to quality products and an improved public image, you can also anticipate that the market will continue to grow.

My company sells completely natural perfumes and related products, however, I am not saying that this is for everyone or every product, as aroma chemicals add longevity and unique qualities that would be difficult to produce with only natural ingredients. There will always be a place in fine perfumery for aroma chemicals when used with discretion in combination with natural essences.

I have introduced hundreds of people to natural fra-

grances and the enthusiasm people display for essential oils is remarkable when you consider how seldom they have had the opportunity to smell naturals. Even more remarkable is the ability of untrained noses to distinguish naturals from synthetics when they sniff them comparatively. It is as if a dormant instinct has been awakened. Perhaps there is such a thing as a genetic olfactory memory, encoded over the millennia. People are yearning for things natural due to their disappointments with things artificial in all areas of life today.

Earth consciousness has been shaped by the problems of ecological imbalance and people have reacted by adjusting their lifestyles to ways that are more harmonious with the systems of nature. A resurgence of interest in aromatherapy has been exploited by the mainstream industry, as well as its grassroots counterpart and as a consequence the role of naturals is becoming significant in today's market.

Aromatherapists believe that natural aromatics inhaled, ingested or externally applied have the ability to affect the body and mind through the limbic and circulatory systems. The fragrance industry focuses on the mood enhancing abilities of blends of aromatics that are predominantly synthetic.

Unquestionably fragrance has the ability to invoke a variety of feelings. Researchers funded by the industry are conducting studies to show how the use of these aromatics affect the brain's activity through EEG tests. Not much is said about how aromatics effect the body, but we know that the effect of aromas cannot be specific only to emotions without also effecting the endocrine system and hormone production. Just as we cannot separate our heads from our bodies, neither can we separate ourselves from the earth.

The emergence of the scientific revolution and the philosophy of mechanism in the 1700s undermined the vitalistic organic concepts about the cosmos that had existed until then. The mechanistic viewpoint has been a key factor in creating the ecological crisis of our time. Mechanism is a philosophical and ethical rationalization that too often permits the irreverent use of the earth's resources for strictly commercial purposes.

The ecological crisis may require that we take a different approach. A holistic approach asks that we look at how our ingredients are derived, at their possible harmful side effects; at the environmental consequences these processes are having on air and water quality; and what we can do to mitigate the damage already done, and prevent further damage in the future.

There is only one major obstacle that, at present, is preventing us from supplying the growing demand for natural fragrances. That is the lack of ready availability of natural aromatic materials. Whereas just forty years ago, the ordinary perfumer's shelf regularly contained several hundred natural essences, most of you today



have only a hundred, more or less, to choose from. At one time there were at least 800 essences known to be extractable from a wide variety of plants.

There are many reasons to consider natural essences. We could borrow from the wine industry and emphasize the many different varieties and nuances, as well as the year of harvest and point of origin. Aromatics do not always have to be predictable. Vintages of aromatics could be used to promote perfumes.

I believe an organization could and should be established by the fragrance industry to study the situation and find ways to encourage the revitalization of a sustainable essence extraction industry both domestically and globally. Plants contribute to the restoration of the environment and the greening of the planet.

Our mineral resources, which pre-existed human life on this planet, are nonrenewable. While population can increase, these mineral resources are not capable of growth or expansion. Some have speculated that we may have less than one hundred years before the supply of fossil fuels run out. Coal and petroleum and their derivatives will escalate in price as supplies decline. The price will also surely rise as society requires that more of the costs of environmental protection and clean-up be factored into the price equation. The domino effect carries these price increases along to all products derived from coal and petro-chemicals, which includes aroma chemicals and fragrances made from them.

Once we calculate the full and real cost of synthetic fragrances today, we suddenly see that whole botanical essences, in which nature has processed and compounded the chemical components herself, are not as costly as we once thought.

I have taken the position of advocating naturals in hopes that all botanically-derived essences will not eventually be replaced by synthetic ingredients as has been the trend. A decrease in the application and use of natural materials has created crop reduction and specific flower oil extinctions.

The late Steffen Arctander believed that synthetics could never replace natural materials. However, he predicted that the oncoming generation unfamiliar with naturals would find that fragrances based exclusively on synthetics would be accepted because people would not know the difference. We must be nearing that time now. Is this our ultimate goal? I hope that you will re-examine what your goals are. Earth Day emphasizes the need for our industry to enlarge its vision and to incorporate the values that this celebration represents.

Reference

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