

# Tomorrow—perfumes or just odors?

By Maurice Maurin, Creations Aromatiques

This is an attempt to clarify the ideal art of perfumery for which I and a number of my perfumer friends strive. We are perfumers who know very well that we must apply ourselves to the needs of business but who have not given up our art, believing that it is still possible to follow passionately our marvellous craft—a craft that is the source of so many artistic emotions and so many disillusiones, like steppingstones along the path to creation.

Perfumers experimenting with the thousand and one odors of their palette. Perfumers who sometimes are fortunate enough, as anonymous observers, to smell with pride their creation worn by a woman on Fifth Avenue or on the Champs d'Élysees—a pride somewhat lessened by the frustration of being unknown.

What is perfume? What purpose does perfume serve? Essentially, it is a method of seduction, sensual and erotic. It is rare that a person wears perfume just for herself or himself. After the first moment of self-enjoyment in the morning before the bathroom mirror, the perfume is no more destined for one person that for others—the restaurant waiter, colleagues at work, the boss, the lover. Throughout the day, the wearer will enjoy the perfume not only because she likes it but because she likes to share it with others.

Why does she like this perfume? It matches her taste, her personality; it has notes that, consciously or unconsciously, stimulate or calm her emotions. It gets a lot of compliments. It is particularly pleasing to the man in her life. It pleases her sense of fashion—and measured against this one fact, all other criteria become less important.

Before going into the future, we have to make a short trip into the past. I am not going to put you to sleep with a lot of figures but I do think that a few of them are necessary and interesting. To begin with the woman's market—a quick survey of the worldwide scene shows us that between 1900 and 1969, 176 perfumes were created and are still on the market. In the last decade, from 1970 up to now, we find 210 new perfumes.

Being very critical, I find, out of the first 176 perfumes, 47 reasonably or very successful but out of the

last 210 I could not find more than 22—allowing for the fact that some of them are only 2 or 3 years old and that success can build. But, in any case, the disparity between the first 70 years and the last 10 is very large.

The same study has been done on the men's market and the figures are similar. From 1900 to 1969, 149 perfumes with 35 successes; from 1970 to now, 252 with 26 successes.

Does this mean that we are bringing too many perfumes onto the market? Does it mean that today the life of a perfume is much shorter? Does it mean that we are not careful enough in the selection of perfumes that we launch? For a majority of perfumes launched during this last period, I personally found:

- A lack of originality
- An increase in strength
- Very low cost prices

Original perfumes are very few and far between on the market. That is to say, perfumes that are innovative either in their note or in their structure.

In recent years, to increase the strength, we have seen concentrations doubled and tripled. For more than 10 years the cost price of oils has remained stationary, defying the laws of inflation—often at the expense of quality. Although I would define perfumery as an "art craft" it is the echo of an industry. As an industry it has financial obligations, and I have no intention of changing the system. It is quite obvious that the high cost of launching a perfume determines a selection based on maximum consumer acceptance and this is eased by panel test results, which diminish originality even more.

For its part, the supplier of the composition presents a fragrance selected internally with wisdom dictated by the marketplace. Competition is fierce and the supplier would prefer to go with a safe product rather than an impossible winner—to the perfumer's great disappointment.

This fear of originality and the very low cost parameters have resulted in a catastrophic system of formulating. This formula complexity is even more aggravated by the substitution of synthetically reconstituted products for naturals. We end up with an anar-

The officers of the American Society of Perfumers: (from left) Lawrence Janosky, President; William S. Slattery and James Bell, Directors; William Doughty, Secretary; Simone Fedak, Vice-President; Christian Baude and Carlene Mantell, Directors; Emil Buongiorno, Chairman; and Guido Cianciolo, Treasurer.

chistic and uncontrollable formula in which it is not unusual to find two to three hundred elements. It's a little like the recent "retro" style, where we start off with a classical formula and try to modernize it. Accords of the older perfumes were so much more simple. They used large quantities of essences and floral absolutes, giving a roundness and an incomparable strength.

My purpose is not to mourn the past nor to dream of adding into the perfume gigantic droplets of tuberose absolute or brimfuls of musk Tonkin infusion. The barrier to creativity should not be our continual preoccupation.

I am now going to do a little calculation exercise comparing the cost price of one kilo of concentrate and the retail price of one quarter ounce of finished perfume. One can assume that the price of a quarter ounce will be higher. Looking at the subject in reverse, in one quarter of an ounce of finished fragrance there is about 1.5 grams of oil. By a far-fetched calculation, which does not take into account all expenses, this would allow the composition of a perfume to be priced at 150,000 French francs per kilo, or approximately \$15,000 per pound.

I fully realize that the cost of a concentrate is not directly proportional to the esthetic qualities of a perfume. I fully realize that a perfume alone, without bottle, without packaging, is nothing—nor without the promotional support to tell its story. All of these contribute to the product, but the imbalance is becoming too great.

To give you an example of what I'm saying, I recently saw a superb advertisement for Chivas Regal in a magazine. In a full page, there was only an empty bottle of Chivas. The copy read, "If you think that the people are buying our product for the original bottle, try to sell this one!"

The strength of perfumes will persist. It is out of the question now to offer the public perfumes that are

less powerful, less long-lasting. In a world where raw materials are becoming more and more scarce and more and more expensive, we must avoid wasting them. Just as an example—in one year, bergamot increased more than 145 percent and patchouli, more than 100 percent.

If the escalation of power through concentration and the use of very strong raw materials continues, in several years there will no longer be perfumes—just odors—and we will be selling on the market a chemical molecule that is:

Cheap

Strong on top

Strong in the middle

Strong at the bottom

Conforming to IFRA and RIFM regulations

With a special Japanese visa

If this happens, the era of perfume will be over. We should not forget that the one role played by perfume is that of seduction. Will being submerged in such a strong odor add something to a woman's charm? Refusing to accept such an extreme eventuality, I believe that the evolution of perfumery must undergo a renovation in the way we formulate.

The perfumer's palette is better equipped than it was 50 years ago, and we must be more flexible in studying new accords. We should profit from the originality of synthetic materials and have the audacity and flair to use them. We must not forget that in a simple accord, we use three notes to get a fourth that is different and more powerful than the strongest of the three. We should try, as well, to broaden perfumery by the nonconformist use of naturals. Happily, there is yet a large number that are accessible. We should get out of the habit of staying with the traditional order of the formula—muguet, rose, jasmine, wood, moss, musk—so that, however involuntary, we do not end up with an infinite number of copies of very successful classics.

Speaking of naturals, I think it useful to explain my position. I am a faithful advocate of naturals. They are still indispensable to the elaboration of a perfume. But the way they are used should be reviewed. When essence of ambrette or ylang ylang is written in the formula, we should not deceive ourselves—only the pure essence should be used. Sadly, this is not done in the majority of cases and it is to a large part our fault.

Because of financial imperatives, we also impose price limitations on our raw materials suppliers and, therefore, should not expect to be able to use their best essences. This is serious because the idea of the pure product is lost. I exaggerate a little—but I remember a young perfumer refusing a vetiver because it did not smell cedarwood enough.

It occurs to me that I am straying somewhat from the subject but it seems important to me to redefine the perfumer. Is the perfumer an artist? Certainly not in the sense of the great masters of art. A perfumer is, however, an artist working in an "art craft." As with the Companions of medieval times, one should have a perfect knowledge of one's craft and, like them, travel throughout the world in search of perfection, always clinging to the attainment of one's masterpiece.

If each perfumer has the chance to see on the market three or four of his or her best compositions and

the life of these perfumes is long, he or she would be most content. The evocation of the word, "masterpiece," demonstrates very well that it is difficult for perfumers, in their professional lives, to create several innovative perfumes—only perhaps some original and unique accords on which they work over the years.

The perfumer must continually study existing perfumes. The brand leaders must concentrate on introducing perfumes of originality, perfumes of esthetic quality, perfumes that have been carefully developed. The time devoted to pure creativity is variable according to the perfumers and the companies that employ them. It is very true that the conception of an original perfume demands great concentration, as well as freedom of spirit and time to spend.

It is not unusual for perfumers to have to solve several problems in a day. Even if the difficulty is minimal, they must have the time to involve themselves in the problem in order to resolve it.

Freed of daily tasks perfumers can devote the rest of their time to free composition, which is to say the study of a personal idea without precise client requests. This is the part of a perfumer's work that is the most enjoyable and rewarding—not having to face limitations.

That is when a perfumer's imagination can have

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## The challenge of the 80s—Perfumes or just odors?

free rein. Once completed, the perfume can take its place in a selection for a brief and would have a better chance for success over a perfume thrown together quickly in response to circumstance.

Several of our clients have reproached us for submitting a perfume "off the shelf." I am tempted to respond, "Not off the shelf, but from under the counter." Shelf perfumes have been in the front line of internal selection and have already competed in a number of battles. The perfumes from under the counter may have been around, but they are still untested.

At this point, I would like to comment on some practices that are, I believe, becoming too common. One concerns the perfume that is subjected to so many modifications that the original concept is often altered and sometimes distorted. A perfumer is asked to do impossible things. A submitted perfume should normally be a finished work on which only shadings and retouching should be done. If the submission is not in the client's target, it should be eliminated.

Another practice that is developing is that of the partially open formula—a thinly veiled strategy to lower the cost of the concentrate. I totally understand the client's concern for profitability but this can lead to the suppliers' lessening the quality of services currently given to clients. It could also start a permutation of perfumers towards finished goods houses.

What direction will perfumery take in the next decade? It is possible that it will go toward "perfume by perfumer" rather than "perfume by couturier." In France, we are seeing the establishment of perfumeries that are national rather than international, even regional.

Several elements can affect the evolution of perfumery.

The political climate

The economic situation

The discovery of new synthetic materials

The use of unusual natural materials

One can try to predict the future technical and commercial trends but it is very difficult to define the olfactive trends. It is impossible to be in the minds of all perfumers and to know what personal creative forces will direct them. I will try to define some trends in which I believe personally. Essentially the family will be chypre with some evident florals but no one floral particularly dominant. The fruity perfumes will continue but as in the case of florals, less typical. I see also a tendency towards woody notes; perfumes having a natural connotation but in a more surrealistic form. In general, perfumes will be less simplistic and they will require more valid and realistic promotional support rather than fairytale or fantasy positioning.

Should all these conditions be fulfilled, today's perfumers must surpass themselves if the person standing on this podium in ten years' time is to speak enthusiastically about the perfumes of this decade.

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