

Creative Perfumery in a Commercial World

By Guy Robert, Quintessence, Paris, France

The world of perfumes is based on the fragrance as a method of communication. Perfumery language is a key to perception. The use of perfumes is a part of our social behavior (courting behavior, aggressive behavior). It has intimate, personal and social uses.

Smelling a perfume is like contemplating a flame: the perfume is image-creator, it is living poetry, it is the "grand opening" to the dream (and loving and wearing a perfume is "burning" it.)

Guy Robert, Quintessence, was the speaker at the Opening Plenary Session of the Congress. Seated to his left are Edward R. Schwartz, President, American Society of Perfumers; Claude Pfeiffer, President, Societe Technique des Parfumeurs de France; Bernard Nicoll, President, British Society of Perfumers; B. Streschnak, Vice-President, Fachgruppe Parfumerie—SEPAWA; and John F. Doyle, Congress Program Committee Chairman.

Above all, perfumery has a biological function of magical belief. Then hypnosis operates, creating a sort of religious ecstasy. (This is, of course, speaking of "my" perfume, not yours.) And this is why one should not neglect the extraordinary excitement brought to our imagination by the simplest fragrance.

Creativity

Our perfumery work is to build images, visions, atmosphere, scenery: *Dream*. in the old times, as well as today, the processing has been the same:

- To collect the raw materials, to make the choice of constituents
- To imagine the mood, to research the dream, the hypothesis
- To build the fragrance

To realize an original creation, there are three usual ways. Take a classical note and try to transcend it, catch an accidental mixture or use an involuntary mistake, and/or use a friend's idea (preferably a late friend).

Creativity Teamwork

There is a great distance between the marketing entrepreneur and the users of our perfumes. Creativity is always shared: part should come from the marketing people, part should be brought by the creative perfumer.

A single perfumer cannot imagine, realize, and sell the fragrance any more. Competition at the concept level, competition in the knowledge of the customers, knowledge of what other perfumers are working on, knowledge of the evolution of the customer's taste, implications of the advertising campaigns, and the tremendous speed of the changes in all these disciplines makes necessary a team of individuals. On this team, the various creators of the elements of the concept should work closely together.

Under the direction of the marketing entrepreneur, people responsible for the perfume, people in charge of the advertising, creators of the bottle and of the packaging should aim at creating a new fashion, sticking to the marketing concept.

The marketing concept is a sort of mood shaping, a look for real artistic values, the art of building a theme.

The "Old Times"

There was a time when every perfumer worked slowly and carefully with a limited number of raw materials. (They did not know how lucky they were.) Rare briefings gave them a general line, a sketch of what sort of fragrance their customers were expecting.

A great part of their time was devoted to "personal research" that is trials made without direction given—trials made "to please oneself." Many perfumers lost time that way, but some very original creations have been achieved with success due to that sort of method.

Some perfumers were looking for the space structure of a smell, and trying to balance it so well, so that someone in the future would not say "what a great perfume!" but "what a great perfumer!" These sorts of creative perfumers still exist; they represent what I could call "decadent perfumery." It seems more elegant, for them, to decay than to flourish. As Georges Mikes would say: "they prefer constructive decay, to futile progress."

In these old times, technical people were shared according to the "specialty." Some were

devoted to prestige products, some were kept very successfully working on mass-market colognes, or in detergent fragrances; some worked on soap perfumery or dusting powder perfumes.

This was so well established that I was once asked by customers who were launching a prestige perfume created by one of my well known competitors to make the soap and the talcum version. This was because I had been lucky enough to realize in a few of my perfumery lines, soaps or dusting powder versions whose fragrances recalled closely the smell of the "extrait."

Our customers never fell into that sort of trap: they were as careful when selecting a mass-market perfume as when selecting a perfume for a luxury line (they know which side of their bread is buttered.)

Creative Perfumery "On The Move"

To quote Marcel Carles (in a Barcelona Perfumers Meeting in 1976 as I remember): "One of the characteristics of our modern society, is that we are all under pressure from most aggressive sources. In the perfumery world also, the perfume is not any more considered as a masterpiece, a work of art, but as a regular consumer product."

Today, we have accelerated the return, the yield, and this must be based on very heavy technical skill. We have to stick to the commercial speedy needs, we have to stick to our lively industry. We have two absolute necessities:

- to perform quickly
- to be efficient

Are we perfumers not precise enough? Are we not testers of experience, or judges of authenticity? Artistic and scientific criticism should become functions interposed between natural human expression, and thought, and skill. Then, let us play the notes clearly (repeat the work, practising scales)

- Let us quest for a high level of skill
- Let us strengthen our desire for achievement

For this, we need to have deep knowledge:

- of the historical part of our art (that means the 40 to 50 perfumes which were at the origin of every perfume made for the last 95 years)
- of the specialties or bases used by the creators of these perfumes (maybe more than 100)
- of the various heirs made, on purpose or by accidental genius, by small variations in the formulae of the 50 greats, or made with real

creativity, combining new ideas or piling up new products on old ideas (again more than 100)

When I say "knowledge," that means not only being able to produce these fragrances at their original step, but also being able to transpose each of them into cheaper versions, to adapt them for soaps, detergents, skin or hair products, dusting powder, candle sticks, or to adapt them to special medias, special container materials, colors and so on. This knowledge includes the ability to use specialties, and also to replace as well as possible missing raw materials, products not considered as safe by some standards.

Back to the Lab

We have now to find the "tricky way" to create at high speed. We also have to admit that there is a need for sorts of imitations in some markets where the customer wants to follow existing successes. There is a strengthening demand for immediately appealing products, for easy money makers. Very few of our customers are strong enough to impose original products; but we have to help them to create original looking perfumes made of safe old successes. (We have to try to avoid the "splendid" way toward equality that will make us all equally miserable.)

Our perfumes have to look like our modern world: efficient, sensuous. They need to have a style, to show structures, rhythm, symbols.

Young customers are in search of simple smells, of new florals, of more natural impressions. They also look for richness, luxury, real artistic values.

Creative Perfumery in a Commercial World

A new commercial world has arrived. There are new selling channels, new workshop organizations; there is research on magic (brain frame, new moods), for special sensorial attractions, for new buying stimulations.

A change in our mission has shown itself. We must at the same time seize everything new, everything innovative, anticipate in every way; we must also contribute to creating new consuming mediums, new consuming patterns.

Let us teach our customers to be more "human."

Let us encourage them to look for beauty, not make a habit of looking for technical smells.

We can find commercial harmony while developing successful creations.

Address correspondence to Guy Robert, Quintessence, 17, rue Alfred Roll, 75017 Paris, France.

