



The Creative Work of the Perfumer...

Perfumers are members of a very special guild in which professional knowledge, routine and craftsmanship are every bit as important as intuition and creativity. In spite of a five-year training curriculum, there is no official professional profile for a perfumer. He – or increasingly she – has usually already completed an education. He or she may formerly have been a chemist, laboratory technician, pharmacist or simply someone from a truly unrelated profession who has found his or her way to the world of fragrance by chance.

Those who become perfumers often first came into contact with this profession through their immediate surroundings: In their own family, as an employee of a perfume shop, a fragrance or cosmetics house. In addition to the training courses that are conducted in these companies to assure a supply of new blood, there are also independent schools of perfumery in France and the United States, for example.

Although prior intellectual and professional training are desirable, what counts first and foremost in this profession are artistic talent and a pronounced ability to

experience on a sensual plane. A perfumer does not have to be able to play a musical instrument, write poetry or paint, for example. Important traits, though, do include a curiosity about beauty, harmony, sounds, pictures, nature and – above all – people. Perfumers “compose” their creations, they take tiny bottles of ingredients from a set of shelves that is termed a “fragrance organ.” In describing perfumes, in fact, they speak of “accords.”

What does autumn smell like in Tuscany?

Although many people are able to recognize their favorite perfume or

distinguish between the scent of a rose and a lily of the valley, they possess virtually none of the skills that characterize “professional sniffers.” Perfumers are able to compose their own creations from some 2,000 available fragrance ingredients. They are able to draw upon their memory to theoretically compose a perfume from the ingredients and “smell” the fundamental fragrance impression in their mind before ever reaching for the first ingredient to begin compounding the actual composition. After being written down on a sheet of paper, or on a computer today, the resulting formula is then physically compounded.

Over the course of numerous attempts, a process that can last for days, weeks or even months, the perfumer refines this composition until it reflects his or her ideal. This ideal is usually dictated by the customer’s instructions – summarized in a so-called briefing – that precede the work of the perfumer. These instructions are often very narrowly defined: The price of the perfume oil, its subsequent flacon, advertising





Perfumer and trainee work closely during the training curriculum.

the scents the other has prepared, and vice versa. As an orientation aid, many perfumers create mnemonics or associate images with the fragrances, such as: Iris = powder, patchouli = Oriental market, geranium = Egypt, jasmin = erotic. Because, as described above, only their olfactory memory, the ability to imagine entire fragrance complexes, to recall them from memory and to rearrange them in their mind, is what constitutes the true talent of a perfumer. The nose is simply the most important "inspection instrument" for the task.

During the second half of their training, the fledgling perfumers have an opportunity to prove themselves by working on actual customer projects. This often involves a stay in a foreign country, which is intended to strengthen their global understanding of their work, while also offering them a opportunity to get to know the regional peculiarities of the country or continent in question in order to broaden their horizon for their future work.

campaign and marketing strategy have already been stipulated, and the perfumer can only work within the narrow bounds of this framework. Sometimes, though, the assignment is very broad, and the briefing might call for only "a scent that is reminiscent of an autumn stroll in Tuscany." It is precisely these "free" assignments that often serve as the nucleus for great perfume classics.

ing of cosmetics, hair care products, toiletries, household cleansers and innumerable chemical-technical products. A great deal of attention is naturally paid to educating the future perfumer's sense of smell and olfactory memory. Even an experienced perfumer practices daily. Typically, two colleagues will prepare various smelling strips for one another; each must then identify

Training that always "follows the nose"

The training curriculum is divided into two parts: During a basic training period of approximately three years, trainees learn to know and differentiate between natural and synthetic fragrance substances, and become familiar with their chemical properties and olfactory qualities.

They learn composition techniques, not just for what are called the fine fragrances but also for the broad field of utility fragran-



A perfume formula.