

Perfumers blossom in Bay Area

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While Los Angeles is a big perfume hub, the Bay Area more than holds its own.

"San Francisco has a great artistic vibe.... There is a Wild West energy here ... artists, chefs, chocolatiers, writers and designers cross-pollinate ideas regularly," says Bay Area perfumer Yosh Han.

Han, whose mother was an *ikebana* master, is influenced by her work in a flower shop as well as Eastern medicine and philosophy. But she attributes her career to kismet: The Chinese character for her name means "aroma." With scents such as Stargazer (lily and ginger) and Sottile (tea rose and lily of the valley), Han seeks to balance florals, chakras and numerology.

The Bay Area is also home to Mandy Aftel, a pioneer of all-natural perfumery whose 2001 book, "Essence and Alchemy," is an industry bible. Aftel's perfumes consistently win awards for their beauty and complexity, and she has diversified into workshops, scented dinners and Chef's Essences, highly concentrated essential oils (blood orange, cardamom, clary sage) available at Williams Sonoma and embraced by mixologists and foodie chefs.

Ineke Ruhland, a classically trained perfumer who learned her trade at ISPICA (Institut Supérieur International du Parfum, de la Cosmétique et de l'Aromatique Alimentaire) in Versailles, apprenticed at a European perfume house in Paris. Her perfumes, each named after a letter of the alphabet, include After My Own Heart, Balmy Days and Sundays, and Chemical Bonding.

DelRae Roth, a former graphic designer for Esprit, was inspired by the grand style of classic French perfumery to create Parfums DelRae. With renown perfumers such as Yann Vasnier and Michel Roudnitska, Roth creates complex scents like Panache (rum, ylang, rose, musk, jasmine) and Mythique (orris, sandalwood, bergamot).

Laurie Erickson, the nose behind Sonoma Scent Studio, came to perfume through gardening. She craved realistic floral scents she couldn't find at department stores. Today, Erickson has a cult following for elegant fragrances such as Tabac Aurea, Winter Woods, Fireside Intense, Champagne de Bois and Cameo. Forest Walk, her latest, is an intoxicating blend of violets, fir, balsam, jasmine, oakmoss, benzoin and labdanum. It grew out of a project in which Erickson and Mandy Aftel chronicled their creative process on Nathan Branch's fashion and luxury blog.

—Denise Hamilton

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