

JULY 2011

IMAGE

## Swiss Mix

Niche perfumer Andy Tauer creates fragrant liquid stories inspired by the unlikely realms of poetry and film



PHOTO: BARTHOLOMEW COOKE

UNCOMMON  
SCENTSDENISE  
HAMILTON

Swiss perfumer Andy Tauer sits at an outdoor café on Beverly Boulevard, savoring blueberry-ricotta pancakes. Earlier, he jogged up to the Griffith Observatory, then along canyon trails to the Hollywood Sign. “L.A. smells like blooming citrus trees, rosebushes, iris, jasmine everywhere,” he says enthusiastically. A truck barrels past, belching exhaust. We wrinkle our noses. “[It] has the slightly disturbing smell of homeless people and the perfume used in detergents. You use heavier stuff, in higher concentrations. L.A. also smells of fat and sugar—the cheap donuts served at my hotel.”

There’s nothing cheap about Tauer’s perfumes, which contain up to 50 percent high-quality raw materials, including rose oil, linden blossom, neroli, labdanum and frankincense. The exquisite handcrafted fragrances, concocted at his home laboratory in Zurich in batches of 500 to 1,000 bottles, blend classic European perfumery with a 21st-century sensibility that approaches conceptual art.

Six years ago, Tauer abandoned a career in molecular biology for the quixotic goal of making perfume. When influential critic Luca Turin called his second fragrance—L’Air du Désert Marocain—a five-star masterpiece, Tauer rocketed into the scent stratosphere. His line, which will comprise 17 perfumes by year’s end, continues to win accolades. (His Orange Star won the U.K. Fragrance Foundation’s 2011 FiFi Award for niche perfume.)

Lacking a marketing or ad budget, Tauer calls the Web a “huge factor” in his success. Blogs and reviewers are pixilated by his “fragrant liquid stories,” and readers flock to his tauerperfumes.com blog, in which he muses on what notes a “fetish” perfume might have, bemoans the price of rare rose oils, opines on flacon design and talks of his battle with Adobe Illustrator to create labels.

Tauer is skilled at articulating his creative process. In 2008, he accepted a challenge by the blog Memory & Desire to create a perfume inspired by an Ezra Pound couplet. Tauer described how he listened to Steve Reich’s music, painted a tableau, jotted down poetic images and then began to compose the notes. (The result sits in a drawer, unborn, awaiting the alchemical inspiration to transform it into a fully realized scent.)

Recently, Tauer and perfumer Mandy Aftel—whose book *Essence and Alchemy: A Natural History of Perfume* first inspired him to take up the art—exchanged a series of letters on Nathan Branch’s blog, Good Taste Is a Trillion-Dollar Industry, going back and forth on the challenges of crafting a perfume using natural materials.

Tauer chronicled the genesis of Zeta, which debuted in April, recounting his lifelong love of linden blossoms, his discovery of a small Bulgarian firm that uses carbon-dioxide-extraction technology and his endeavors to bring the idealized image to fragrant life.

He succeeded beautifully. Zeta is liquid yellow sunshine that feels at once modern and retro, redolent of linden blossom, narcissus, orange-blossom absolute, bergamot, honey yellow rose, orris root, vanilla, sandalwood and ylang-ylang.

## 50 Johnnys

A name that's rock 'n' roll gold



CAN YOU RECALL 'EM ALL?

The exquisite fragrances, concocted at his home laboratory in Zurich, blend classic European

This fall, Tauer will move in a new direction with three perfumes he has labeled Pentachords—each made of only five all-synthetic ingredients. Tauer's White, Auburn and Verdant are futuristic, minimalist essences, closer to Comme des Garçons' offbeat fragrances than floral-heavy Guerlains.

He calls the trio a welcome departure: "It's a mind game—or, ahem, a nose game. With such a reductivist approach, the challenge is to create something that will develop and last, that is modern and beautiful and unique." The three bow this summer in Italy—Tauer's largest market, perhaps because Italians revere artisanal perfumers.

## perfumery with a 21st-century sensibility that approaches conceptual art.

Tauer's final project for 2011 is Tableau de Parfums, designed in collaboration with Memphis filmmaker Brian Pera and inspired by Pera's *Woman's Picture*, which screens at L.A.'s Outfest this month. The movie examines the lives of three women—Miriam, Loretta and Ingrid—and Tauer composed olfactory portraits of each. The first to roll out—in Los Angeles in October—is Miriam (played by Ann Magnuson), a gorgeous, powdery, retro floral that blends rose oil, iris, violet flower and green leaf, fennel, vanilla, aldehydes and the sandalwood of Australia and Mysore, India.

Tauer and Pera have teamed up with LuckyScent/Scent Bar, the only bricks-and-mortar store in Los Angeles that carries his line, to create a series of short films that will be serialized in perfume blogs in advance of the Miriam launch. It's a perfect illustration of the perfumer's cross-pollinating artistic collaborations.

Ever candid, Tauer tells of the struggle of indie perfumers without deep pockets or economies of scale. He can't afford to use certain proprietary aromachemicals or compete for high-quality raw materials with big firms that buy up entire harvests.

Still, small and nimble means lower overhead and the possibility of creative collaborations. He works with a Swiss supplier to find new sources, whether it's linden essence from Bulgaria, exquisite rose oil from a family-run firm in Morocco or small quantities of that Mysore sandalwood, whose export was severely curtailed by the Indian government several years ago due to deforestation. It wouldn't be enough for Chanel, which sells upwards of a million bottles of No. 5 alone each year, but it's sufficient for Tauer's needs.

"It's a privilege to be smaller," Tauer says, a mischievous sparkle in his eyes. "I can do things Chanel can't."

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Love beauty.. natural and pure.  
good for the mind, body, soul.  
smell transcends...is art.

Posted by: [kara rane](#) | [07/03/2011 at 04:16 PM](#)

Thanks very much indeed for giving Tauer Perfumes the exposure it deserves. Andys scents are amongst the most beautiful, the most exquisite being produced today.

Posted by: [Persolaise](#) | [07/04/2011 at 03:26 AM](#)

I know of his Lair du desert marocain. Its a masterpiece and must be smelled by anyone who enjoys perfume.

Posted by: [Smith](#) | [07/06/2011 at 03:11 PM](#)

Hi Smith,

I agree! LAir du Desert Marocain is the portal through which many people enter Tauer's world. But it is only the beginning of the journey!

Posted by: [denise hamilton](#) | 07/10/2011 at 02:48 PM

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This article fascinated me when i read it just a couple of days ago. I went straight to the LuckyScent website and ordered LAir du Desert Marocain without sampling. The package arrived less than 48 hours later and what an amazing revelation! Unbelievably complex, nuanced, unique, powerful and truly unconventional. Being a neophyte to niche perfumery i cant compare, but i know what i like, and this is truly olfactory art in a bottle! I went back and ordered 6 new samples from the website. Thank you for this intriguing, compelling story!

Posted by: [M Castrejon](#) | 07/29/2011 at 07:13 PM

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Andy Tauer is one of those special niche perfumers who deserve much recognition in the industry. He has many fans already in the global market. Not only is he a fabulous perfumer, he is a dear and lovely man. I am thrilled to see him in the LA Times. Congrats Andy! -

The Perfume Magazine.com

Posted by: [Raphaella Barkley](#) | 11/20/2011 at 01:19 PM

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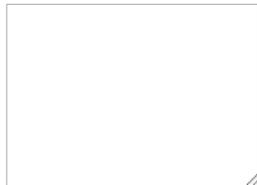
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