

Perfumer to Perfumer



A series of conversations between the Australian Priestess of Perfume, Ambrosia Jones, owner of "Perfume by Nature" and other Natural Scent Artists from around the world.

This time I'm interviewing Lyn Ayre, a Canadian Natural Perfumer and teacher.



I e-met Lyn some years ago when I ventured into the online world of natural perfumery... Lyn's Website was one of the most comprehensive I found at the time...she has such a wide range of perfumes, and approaches the subject of perfumery with such a deep love and devotion to the healing side of scent. She and I exchanged emails and samples at the time and I am delighted to share more about this lovely perfumer with the rest of you!

Good Morning, Ambrosia. Thank you so much for sharing this time with me. Natural Perfume is a favourite topic of mine and I love to talk about it, dream about it, and, most of all, make perfumes.



Alcohol & Oil-based perfumes

The first question I tend to ask all perfumers is "Why do you make perfumes?" After all, it's a weird and obscure art form, not to mention a very expensive passion to become involved in...

Why does an artist paint? Why does a poet write? Why does a songwriter create lyrics? (I am a painter/sculptor, writer/poet, singer/songwriter, by the way.) It's a creative urge that is impossible to resist. Once the urge comes on, to marry this with that and see where it takes me, I must follow it to the end. If not right now, then soon. Making perfumes is how I express myself, creatively.

*Crème de Shea
perfumes*



*Solid (or 'glace')
perfumes*

But why perfumery in particular? What is it about scent that inspires you more than other medias? And what made you decide to use only natural ingredients?

I learned that perfumes can be created in four different mediums (alcohol, crème, glace, and oil) so there is a lot of versatility with them. I have always been quite sensitive to synthetic chemicals whether in the form of perfumes, cleaning products, air fresheners, or medications. My body doesn't respond to them very well. I can handle some of them, and have had favourites in all the categories mentioned, over the years. Thankfully, in my early twenties, I found medicinal herbs and in my late forties, I found essential oils through Aromatherapy. When one of my teachers mentioned that my blends smelled more like perfumes than remedies, I was stunned. I hadn't realized I could make natural perfumes until that point. Once I grasped this idea, there was nothing and no one who could stop me. I was hooked.



*Esprit means
'Spirit'*

How did you learn perfumery?

I am self-taught through experimenting, books, and internet sites. I've also re-worked some of the knowledge gained in a variety of Aromatherapy courses and the Master Herbalist courses I've taken. I wish something like my Natural Perfume course had been available to *me* back when I started but there was nothing through correspondence, at that point (believe me, I scoured the internet). With a course and a mentor, it would have been so much easier to accomplish my goal of creating beautiful perfumes from natural essences. Nevertheless, I'm proof that it can be done on one's own.



Students from around the world

I think many of us learnt through pure trial and error in those years...I must say it's wonderful to see more and more people out there sharing their experiences with others now! I know you have been teaching for some time...would you like to tell us a bit more about how you do this?

When I decided to go to the next level of Natural Perfumery and expand my reach in 2007, there were no courses on this subject available to people available online, so I decided to write one from my own experience. I've been teaching it for four years, now, with a very positive, worldwide response. As a teacher in any subject (I teach 27 other courses both in person and through correspondence), I don't hold back with my students. If they ask a question, I take the time to answer as fully as I can. I am in service to my students for the duration of the course and afterwards, if they need me. I'm very grounded and down to earth, as an individual.

The course itself is laid out in six sections plus a resource section with links. Each section has projects to do and send in through email, plus samples to make and send by mail. We begin with the basics - describing scent, working with the tools of the trade, and so on; creating the dilutents; moving on to base notes, heart notes, head notes; and accords/scent similars (ie: leather accord, green accord, hyacinth accord etc); how to do an interview; how to prepare for a review of your perfumes.

I do my best to impress upon my students the idea that familiarity with each essence is absolutely necessary. If you don't know how a drop of Ylang Ylang, for instance, will change the scent profile, you'll have a lot of disappointments. I present other writers work, too, ie: Piesse, and Carles.

Upon receipt of payment, the course is emailed and the student begins to send in assignments and perfumes samples, progressing through the course. I've kept the tuition reasonable as I'm very aware that there will be further costs of the essences and other tools ie: bottles, scent strips etc...

I like the fact that you are keeping your fees down....It's hard to find a good balance between charging what you think is appropriate, and keeping the costs low enough to make our art form accessible to others...let's face it, perfumery is a very expensive hobby...I used to joke that I sold perfume to support my expensive ingredient habit! It's certainly not something to get rich quick with!

That's a very appropriate 'joke' that I can seriously relate to. The feeling of answering the door when the UPS guy comes, and it's like Christmas and my birthday in March, or whatever, is unsurpassable. I LOVE IT!



Like me, your focus when creating a perfume seems to be very much on the healing aspects of scent...would you like to share a bit more about that?

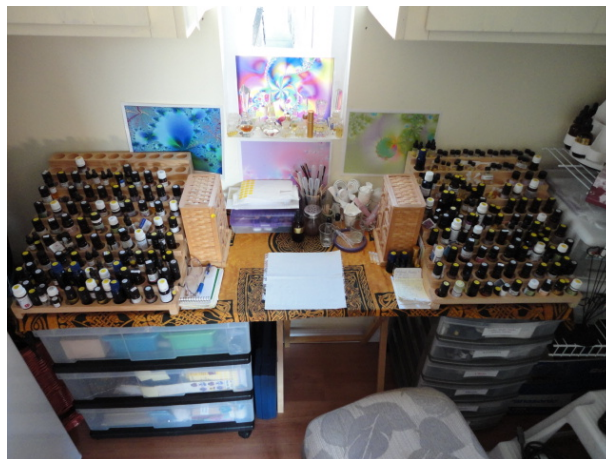
I hold a deep reverence for all of nature, therefore, I work with the spirit of the plant that created the scent. I connect with these plant spirits and give thanks to them for the gift they give to the world -

the gift of scent. Essential oils also give us the gift of 'colour' as their jewel tones first speak to our eyes. When we take that colour in, balance and harmony are created in the Root, Sacral, Solar Plexus, and Heart Chakras. *Gaia, our Mother Earth, is wise as her plant-life shows all the colours of the Chakras and the most predominant colour of all is green, for the Heart.*

My perfume is created with a sense of gratitude and love in my heart. If my emotions are out of whack for some reason, I don't enter my Atelier and bring that dense energy in there. All essential oils are healing as that is their nature. The healing aspect that is noticeable, when using them for perfumes, is the response to the scent itself. Some scents fill a person with joy; uplift a flagging spirit; revitalise; and otherwise change the emotional demeanour of a person.

One of the main points of focus in my correspondence course is scent profiling. It is woven through every section and for every sample. Each student must deeply experience the scent of each essence and of each combination of essences in order to grow in appreciation of how that aroma can change us physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. It has been an amazing journey, so far, to see how many people in the world want to do exactly this.

It will be the same for the upcoming in-person Five-Day Perfume Intensive "Pyramid of Olfactory Pleasure" happening this August 2011 – there will be a lot of scent-profiling – training the nose – perfume making, and many other fun activities and exercises.



My perfume Atelier

And this is such an important thing to do! I see newbie perfumers out there all the time asking for formulas to work with and wanting to jump straight in to creating complicated accords and notes...but in reality, you'll never get anywhere unless you take the time to really understand the ingredients you work with one by one....

Yes, I know this behaviour happens and I've responded to it a few times. There are lots of courses for perfumers to take now and this makes it so much easier to understand. For instance, the things that are learned in my correspondence course "A Path To The Heart Of Spirit" will give a person a place to expand and create any style of perfume they choose. This learning can be applied to all known natural essences and one can create his or her own creations. Why copy what has already been done? Familiarity with the ingredients in one's Atelier is crucial to learning perfumery. This takes a lot of experimentation. There are lots of good courses out there, my own included.

Perfumery, and in particular Natural Perfumery is certainly becoming more and more popular...I think it is the reverence for nature you speak of, and a deep yearning to connect to something deep and special....scent is one of our most primal senses...and perfumery speaks to this primal nature so deeply...

Yes, it truly does for me, too. I'm literally transported to another world or realm when I am working with essential oils and plant extracts.

What are your personal favourite ingredients to work with?

There are many but here are my top three favourites: I love Labdanum. It's rich, moist, thick, gooey, molasses-like aroma is truly to live for. It provides depth and character to a perfume.

Labdanum is one of my great loves too...there is something so deep and mysterious about it...I love it's history of having been used by the oracles of Delphi as well...the scented smoke from the molten resin drifting up to the priestesses as they connect to the otherworld...I recently used it in a new perfume called "Avalon" for exactly this reason.....

The three Jasmines that I'm familiar with cover a broad spectrum of aromas from raunchy, (*Jasmine auriculatum*) to rebellious (*Jasmine grandiflorum*) to rich (*Jasmine sambac*).

And they are so different too! I find that Jasmine grande is sweet and lusciously delicate, jasmine sambac is the raunchy one with a dry twist, and jasmine auriculatum has a green twiggy note to it that takes it down a whole different road....

Ruby Red Grapefruit is luscious, and lip-licking good. It's fun, playful, and uplifting to the spirit.

Ah, my favourite citrus! Fresh without sweetness, tart, robust, the ultimate blokey topnote!

Which Ingredients don't you like or find really challenging?

I find working with some CO2's to be challenging as the ones I've used so far tend to break up into thousands of tiny little bubbles and cloud the blend. There is a process to get the perfume clear again, however I tend to stay away from them as my time in the Atelier is limited by my other duties. This is fine with me as there are so many other versions of the ones I want to work with.

Some of them certainly are a bit painful...I've found I've had to create a kind of fluid enfleurage system to get their scent into oil bases in particular. Mind you absolutes can be pretty challenging too and often require soaking and filtering...you may want to persevere with them though...there are a few new ones out there that are pretty special...I have a divine ambrette seed CO2 that is quite different from the absolute...really soft and buttery....

Yes, Ambrette CO2 is divine; Ambrette seed is another love affair of mine.



Perfume Samples

And now onto your perfumes themselves....I'm sitting here with a collection dabbled over my wrists and arms....they are very pretty...in fact I think I'd use that word to describe your particular slant on perfume...they are all gentle, friendly, caring kind of scents. Not overly girly or sweet as such, and not daring, weird or outrageous. You seem to create perfumes that can be worn comfortably, that make a person feel cared about, comforted, liked....they are friendly perfumes, all of them!

Gentle, friendly perfumes – I like that. What we do in life truly reflects who we are. Thank you for saying that, Ambrosia.

I sell samples of all of my perfumes because I truly believe each one will smell differently on each individual. In order to get the one that is right for 'you', purchasing samples is a good idea.

I think my favourite one is “Hedgerow” it's such an interesting scent...I loved the way you described it before I even smelt it:

“I had a daydream about being in the middle of a maze which utilized tall hedging cedars coming to points at the end. There was a fairy garden with flowers of every hue. I was safe; cocooned within. The green smell around me was completely uplifting. This is Hedgerow.”

Hedgerows have always had a special place in my heart...in fact I once wrote an article about them for an Australian magazine! They are a kind of “in-between” place, harbours for small animals and wild plants along the edges of civilisation... to me it also has a distinct cotton candy touch, a childlike sweetness which is very fitting to a fairy garden...

Yes, reminiscent of labyrinths and the holy walk of the humble. When walking in the maze or the labyrinth, one can become contemplative and still. We can allow our elementary senses to take over and guide us, becoming absorbed in the aromas and the colours; becoming one with the limbs that move us and the breath that breathes us; becoming enchanted, once again, in the garden of life.

Which of your other perfumes are you most proud of?

I love my perfumes and I get very attached to them. Each one is made from a story or query in my mind. I take pride in them as any artist would her paintings or poems. Ones that are my personal favourites have also been my best-sellers: Citrance, Entranced, Evolution, May Roses Bloom, and Souvenirs de la Vie, to name a few.

Do you have any special stories about any of them?

My stories are fairly basic and always begin with a ‘wonder’ in my mind. Making Natural Perfume is a great way to creatively challenge myself.

With Eau d’Esprit, I wanted to use all parts of the Bitter Orange (or Seville Orange) tree in one perfume. It had to be fresh and fun with a sexy edge. This I did. It is well-balanced and sumptuous.

I wanted to create a citrus perfume that didn’t just fly off the skin. I accomplished my goal and even those who don’t necessarily enjoy citrus perfumes love Citrance. I did this by marrying the citrus notes of Himalayan Cedarwood in the base, with Litsea and Lemongrass in the heart, and other lemony notes to top it off.

Yeah this one is really pretty...I smelt it some years ago when we first exchanged samples...it's a lovely soft and elegant citrus...very nice indeed!

I had a dream of a very musky perfume that was sexy and alluring for those deep dark nights of passion. Entranced was created with this in mind and, I might add, works every time I use it.

Grin! I think every perfumer needs to create at least one perfume like that! Mine are “Love Potion” and “Craving”! It's not easy creating a natural musky perfume is it?! “Craving” was the one I developed for the “Mystery of Musk” competition last year...and BOY was that an epic journey! I ended up combining a whole collection of gourmand notes with really ratty musky hyraceum and Arabian Oud to get a seriously musky effect...

Ooo, Ambrosia, that sound absolutely sinful. <grin>

That musk challenge would have been a fun. I didn’t know it was happening, at the time, but read all about it later.

What did you use in “Entranced”?

Entranced was created before my own musk blend was born so the musky notes came from Cassie, Ambergris, and Ambrette seed absolute.

Musk has been a craving of mine for years. I used to wear perfumes that were very heavy on the

musk notes. In so many ways, I wish I could still do so as I loved them. I've smelled Ethylene Brassylate and that is the note I remember, however, I cannot tolerate it now, even at .01%.



Essential Musk Fixative

So, I set about creating my own musk blend and have succeeded in producing a worthy aroma. We each have our own ideas about what musk smells like. I'm sure many of us have smelled the aroma of the original musk from the poor little deer. (The whole idea of hurting animals thoroughly offends me so I don't use any ingredients that do.)

Over the years, I've taken good notes and when I've seen written, 'the musky note of ___', and 'the scent of musk from ___', I've written it all down in the 'musk file' on my computer. I've also done my own 'noticing' and put these notes in there, too. I've come up with 15 essences that, when blended together in particular proportions and left to marry for six weeks, take me to a place of bliss, warmth, and sunshine, just the way musk perfumes used to. My 'Essential Musk Fixative' contains notes of Oudh, Thyme, Cassie, and Spikenard, to name a few.

Thanks so much for agreeing to this interview and review of your perfume journeys. We appreciate you taking the time, Lyn.

It's been fun sharing with you again, Ambrosia. I've enjoyed our conversation about Natural Perfumery and scent.

With Much Love and Gratitude,

Lyn Ayre