



Knowledge is power, according to Laudamiel. "I am convinced that just by educating the public; we would boost fragrance sales without doing anything else," he says. Photo credit EDGE CCF.



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Christophe Laudamiel: Perfumer of the Future

Christophe Laudamiel has spent his career eagerly embracing what he sees as the future of fragrance, and in some ways he already lives there.

It's 2037. Fragrance, in its myriad ever-evolving shapes, is no longer just a background track of hotels and public spaces; it is now skillfully woven into entertainment, exhibitions, Broadway shows and a normal part of a movie experience. Scented concerts and opera are not novelties, but regular occurrences. When singers launch a perfume, they incorporate elements of it into fragrance moments during their tour. Consumers know so much more about fragrance that they no longer accept copies of copies and demand to be entertained, amused and surprised. In medicine, fragrance is used therapeutically, and olfaction used diagnostically.

Shopping for fragrance is as easy as selecting what to buy next on iTunes. Integrated scent cataloging and clever scent dispensing have transformed the perfume retail experience. The cacophony of a perfume store with all perfumes sprayed at once is a distant memory.

Fragrance houses approach top universities to work on student projects and select new candidates for their internal training programs. Fragrance chemists and their peers collaborate on cross-disciplinary research and their parent companies donate to causes intended to tackle smell disorders and help organizations working with children who have sensory disabilities. The highlight of the perfumers' extracurricular event calendar is a festival of fragrance, not a golf tournament. When perfumers fly on their private jets, they can make use of the miniature perfume organ on board.

"Children shall be given olfactory education in schools and at home to awake the senses, communication and intelligence," writes Laudamiel in his manifesto, entitled *Liberté égalité fragrancité*^a, which is at once a challenge and a love letter, as well as a wish and a promise.

"... universities shall open real Perfume Studies departments and university courses shall use also smells, fragrance compositions or olfactory science to illustrate their points," he continues.

"... top students at top universities shall routinely join the fragrance industry as much as joining the aerospace industry or Wall Street: to become perfume diffusion engineers, perfume managers, perfumers or anything perfume ... some perfumers shall become academic authorities and be elected Members of the Academies of Arts and Sciences around the world."

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The Valedictorian

"School, school, school, school—it was absolutely drilled into me," Christophe says and grins. "School was really the priority. And I have to say it saved me, or made me who I am today. It was very tough. I was very nerdy, very geeky, actually. Not this haircut, not dressed like this at all," he points to his edgy Mohican haircut and chunky blazing red high top trainers. Laudamiel looks like cult sci-fi film director—Luc Besson's idea of a perfumer.

To raise awareness and transparency for perfumery with the public during his "Over 21" adults-only fragrance exhibit at the Dillon + Lee gallery in New York City earlier this year, Laudamiel posed naked on his Instagram feed, bar a bottle of perfume to act as a fig leaf. Another totally naked picture of himself at the gallery bared the tagline: "A perfumer wearing one of his creations." This is light years away from the bookish nerd Christophe paints himself as during his formative years.



Photo credit: Jost Fink

"And then, at university I was still the same way—I finished as a valedictorian in chemistry and the French and an international champion of chemistry," he says.

"I originally wanted to be a vet in a zoo. It was my childhood dream—but I was told it was difficult to get into if your father didn't already have a practice." The irony of then having chosen a profession arguably even harder to get into is not lost on him. Ultimately, Laudamiel's academic prowess and hard work opened every door for him.

"I was in the French junior chemists' association and always participating in extracurricular things to promote what we were doing. Chemistry has a big image problem; much bigger than perfumery, and so, I've always done things to explain to people that, no, actually, chemistry is cool."

He describes his chemistry teacher in warm tones; as someone who spotted his talent and encouraged him to push for more. She noticed how fast Christophe took to the concepts of chemical reactions and formulae and gave him extra tasks.

Laudamiel was awarded a master's degree in chemistry in 1991 from the European Higher Institute of Chemistry in Strasbourg, France. He entered a Ph.D. program but dropped out to become

^a Manifesto downloadable from the Dillon + Lee gallery website

a teaching assistant at Harvard University as he was already a teaching fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He interned with Procter & Gamble in the flavor division and, in 1994, joined its internal perfumery school in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

P&G

“It was very interesting because I started my perfumery career at Procter & Gamble—and my first studies in chemistry had been in a big university. I liked this kind of environment. I am very scientific and I like to look for the real reasons for things. P&G is a really R&D-oriented company. I loved that combination of perfume esthetics, experiments and R&D straight away,” says Laudamiel.

“You can take quite an academic and somewhat free approach at P&G. If you need something to do your chemistry experiments with, you can just go ahead and get it.

I developed a special way of choosing ingredients and their precise dosages.

“I was already teaching in Harvard but I had an internship at P&G in Cincinnati, in flavors. Proper flavors for Vicks and so on—and my job as a chemist was to mask the bitterness of those cough syrups.

“In working with the flavorists, they introduced me to the perfumers. I interviewed for the perfumery job and they took me on as a student of perfumery. You get a mentor and a very strict program of three years of tests and exams. It’s very structured,” explains Laudamiel.

“After three years you get a Creative Perfumery degree—but it’s not guaranteed if you don’t pass all the exams. They did get rid of one of two people before completion. It’s also a lot of training on the job. In the first year you only learn. In the second year you start working on some projects already. So I started in hardcore perfumery in Newcastle—they do Ariel, Lenor, Fairy ... these are the fragrances that I learned first.

“I learned the ingredients for what they’re worth. I didn’t learn to use vetiver because it’s poetic. I do like it but if it doesn’t perform or doesn’t smell right in a composition, it doesn’t belong there. There has to

be more reason than it being cool as an ingredient. I developed a special way of choosing ingredients and their precise dosages,” he says.

Laudamiel ended up in charge of Lenor in Europe and was promoted to the position of a senior perfumer faster than most in P&G history.

“Within six years I received a special R&D recognition award from Cincinnati—I was the only perfumer to receive that award.”

The City That Never Sleeps

Laudamiel wanted to learn more. His hunger for knowledge led him to seek out other opportunities.

“I read all the books I could get on fine fragrance perfumery at the time, but as we all know, there are not that many and you really need to learn from mentors, so I needed a change,” he says.

There was no creative fine fragrance division in P&G, and Christophe landed a position at International Flavors and Fragrances (IFF) in New York. “I left on very good terms—they understood my predicament. It turned out the person who hired me—the boss of fine fragrance perfumery in New York—was an ex P&G Ivory Soap factory manager and a scientist as well; brilliant guy, Chris Palmer. He’s the head of creative perfumery and marketing at Firmenich-Princeton now,” he reminisces. Firmenich now provides for Christophe’s labs in New York and Berlin.

“Something that was always obvious to me, coming from a chemistry background, was to spend nights and nights in the lab honing skills, trying, experimenting; creating. You’d see that in academia, with researchers; you’d see it with chemists, physicists—and, in the arts—musicians spending the whole night in the studio to work on something new.

“I also like and need to weigh my own work a lot. I need to experiment a lot, to see; feel; smell the materials as the action is happening. The lab is where I feel good; I’m at-ease there. I’ve been sleeping—rather—working, in my lab since P&G,” Christophe says and laughs.

“At IFF, the security guards were telling me that the building shuts at midnight. I said what? There is no way. No way. I will lock myself in secret. So that’s just what I did.”

“I decided to stay in and see what would happen. One night I could see the guard going past. And checking the door—oh yes, it’s locked—so he leaves. I knew there was no alarm between my office and the lab, so I just stayed there, doing my stuff,” Christophe explains.

“But one day I strayed too far and the alarm went off ... the maintenance department was upset, but my boss was cool. He told me just be careful next time.” Christophe laughs.

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“I created the innovation department at IFF, which was very new within the perfumery team and I was in charge of leading innovation commercial projects; innovative projects, some perfumery-wise, some technology-wise.”

The Naked Perfumer

Christophe has had some big wins across the mainstream and niche categories:

Ralph Lauren Polo Blue (2002, with Carlos Benaim), Abercrombie & Fitch Fierce (2002, also with Benaim), Clinique Happy Heart (2003, with Olivier Polge), S-Perfume and S-ex (2004), Tom Ford Youth Dew Amber Nude (2005), Michael Kors Island (2005, with Loc Dong), Tom Ford Private Blend Amber Absolute (2007), Estée Lauder Pink Coral (2009) and many more. He co-developed all of the Humiecki & Graef fragrances together with Christoph Hornetz (the pair is playfully referred to in the industry as “Les Christophs”).

People have no access to perfumery behind the scenes. You can visit the White House, but can you visit the fragrance houses in New York?

Some of his latest projects include luxury amenities for well-known hotels around the world, four of the successful Nest fine fragrances and oudh-loaded perfumes for The Fragrance Kitchen (such as Arab Spring, 2013), Strangelove NYC (such as Silence the Sea, 2016) and Tom Ford Private Blend Reserve Amber Absolute (2007).

He developed the fragrances for Thierry Mugler Le Parfum Coffret with Mr. Hornetz—scents based on the famous novel *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* by Patrick Süskind. The project started as his own exploration of the novel and became a designer partnership. Laudamiel is probably one of the few perfumers living today who could have done the themes justice—many of the fragrances in the set require an artistic interpretation of unpleasantness not seen in commercial perfumery, nor taught at perfumery school.



Laudamiel has nearly countless wins across mainstream and niche categories. Pictured: Nest Paradise, 2014, which offers personal, home and fine fragrances. Photo credit Josiah D. Ryan.

Laudamiel now likes to educate the general public about perfumery, molecules and the process. When he gives talks on the topic, he'll explain how the first modern perfumes were all full of molecules and he sees light bulbs going off over people's heads. He is motivated by striving for a deeper understanding of how things work, and this drives him to educate others, too. His unconventional approach has earned him a reputation as a public speaker, perfumery and chemistry advocate and a bit of a maverick.

“I want people to do something cool, something hip with fragrance ... we often have the wrong kind of mystery in fragrance today—not the kind of goose-bumps you get from a Broadway play or a movie. People have no access to perfumery behind the scenes. You can visit the White House, but can you visit the fragrance houses in New York? They'll say ‘Ooh, it's too confidential, ooh, the perfumers are too busy.’ So what happens? People know more about cheese and coffee than they do about perfume.”

He wants to educate the consumers about perfumery on one hand and bring more excitement, theatre and mystery into perfumery on the other. He does not see these two positions as contradictory.

“The number of people that come to me, desperate, and say, ‘Please, we'll take crumbs of any knowledge.’ Where can we get that in the world? It's a constant need,” Christophe explains. He has taken to Instagram as means of educating—and shows real commitment to revealing the mysteries and at the same time creating perfumery magic.

Laudamiel founded the not-for-profit Academy of Perfumery and Aromatics in 2002. The New York-based academy is dedicated to the advancement and education of the art of perfumery and aromatics and works with schools, the Osmotheque and other educational institutions, as well as offers its own lectures and training.

He has received several awards for his educational work and perfumery, including the newly created



Prior to his career as a perfumer, Laudamiel aspired to be a veterinarian—which inspired his first ambient brand launch, *The Zoo*, featuring conceptual scents with names like *Scent Tattoo*, *Club Design* (pictured), *Amber Classico Modern* and *Spacewood*. Photo credit: Josiah D. Ryan

Award from the Institute for Art and Olfaction for Exceptional Contribution to Scent Culture (2017).

DreamAir

“In 2008 I had the opportunity to do ambient scenting—which I really wanted to explore,” Christophe explains.

“Spaces, they often smelt like the toilet or they smelt like nothing or of the wrong thing.

“In ambient fragrance, you can also use beautiful ingredients and more of them because they are not sprayed on skin. You also have more freedom of style because the scent diffusers spray the thing in the air every minute. On your skin, within 10 minutes, lemon has evaporated. In ambient fragrance, if you want to do only fresh, you can.”

In 2009, Laudamiel developed fragrances for Stewart Matthew’s *Green Aria: an Opera for Your Nose* at the Guggenheim museum. The three business partners unfortunately came into some disagreements among themselves so the corresponding company folded. Laudamiel co-founded DreamAir on May 7, 2010.

“I still consider us to be at the start-up stage—I think a lot of people look at the successful innovators like Apple and forget that in the beginning, it is

extremely difficult. DreamAir has been growing but no day brings any guarantee.”

“Consumers are most excited about fragrance when it’s presented in unexpected ways, I think,” says Laudamiel. “I mean when you go into Sephora—you have all the fragrances in the air at once. Just think about what it would have sounded like in a record store if they had done that with music.

“Museums; galleries—anywhere you can experience scent in a way that isn’t on your skin—I find this very exciting as well.”

Laudamiel thinks that the combination of old fashioned marketing, sticking to safe themes and abundance of misinformation about fragrance out there are all to blame for stagnating sales.

“That’s why people are buying 20 pairs of shoes and five handbags a year but only very few perfumes,” he says, “and people are not scared of going to iTunes to find music, but they are intimidated by the thousands of fragrances we have because they lack basic knowledge of how to choose among them.

“And the way fragrances are talked about in retail doesn’t make sense to me. You don’t deconstruct a cake by Heston Blumenthal and say it’s made of flour, eggs, sugar, strawberries, cream ... that would be a very weird way to present an elaborate cake.

“I am convinced that just by educating the public; we would boost fragrance sales without doing anything else.”

The Zoo

Christophe has just launched his first own brand, called the Zoo. It features conceptual scents—*Scent Tattoo*, *Club Design*, *Amber Classico Modern*, *Spacewood*. The collection is not based on animal themes, but built around Laudamiel’s broader concept of perfumes as animals that require tender care and feeding; high maintenance and plenty of attention, like a living being with a soul. He sees perfumes as living, breathing things; unlike songs or paintings that are set.

“A lot of the things I am doing are very different. That is why DreamAir has very important reputable partners to co-innovate, to expend the perfumery grounds. I have created a zoo guide to guide people on how to smell as well as a zoo police, and in that, I go against some preconceived ideas,” says Laudamiel.

In devoting his early life to study, Christophe bought himself access to a lifetime of play. And he finally got to do surgery on animals in the zoo. “When I create a new perfume or edit an existing perfume, I call it my surgery,” he says.

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