

Meet the Maker

# Blaise Mautin

Perfumer, Paris

When perfumer Blaise Mautin walks into a room, a subtle waft of talcum undercut with headnotes of lemony rose and hints of jasmine, iris and sandal musk follows him. The result is nowhere near strong enough to offend, but rather clean, bright and befitting the person wearing it—precisely Mautin’s goal.

In a market heavy on mass-produced, celebrity perfumes (e.g., “Eau de Gaga”), there is also a niche for individualized, high-end boutique scents. That’s where Mautin thrives, as the craftsman behind custom luxury fragrances he designs predominantly for interior spaces. From his Paris lab, he defines olfactory brand translations and develops resulting formulas. Once samples are made, the formulas are manufactured into candles, interior spray, perfume, body lotions, soap, etc.

For Le Bristol Paris, for instance, Mautin designed a fragrance that included a wink of Egyptian geranium along with its rose, iris and sandalwood base—a nod to the hotel’s balcony where the flowers bloom in abundance. The Park Hyatt Paris-Vendôme, on the other hand, required an intense patchouli base to match the warm colors and modern wood of the hotel’s interior. And for Japanese menswear brand Visvim, Mautin formulated eight scents, including candles in woody peppermint and an amber room spray dominated by jasmine spices, wood and patchouli.

Born in Paris in the late 1960s, Mautin was always creative, but without direction after attending university in Spain and at Oxford. His uncle got him a job in the family business, Au Nain Bleu—an FAO Schwartz-caliber, high-end toy store begun by his great-great-grandmother in 1836.

For Mautin, assisting customers—often grandparents buying toys for their grandchildren—brought back memories of shopping with his own grandmother as a child, her warm scent mixed with the excitement of a new toy. “When you give a scent to someone, you create an emotion and a memory,” he says. “It’s very personal.”

Mautin pitched the idea of designing a fragrance for the store early on, but Nain Bleu management was hesitant to take on an industry they didn’t know. “They said, ‘You sell toys and we’ll see later on,’” he remembers.

Driven by the idea of developing new products after a year selling toys in Paris and Dubai, Mautin connected with his future employer: Parfumerie Gautier. “The perfume industry sounded great to me,” he says, “but I didn’t know I had the capacity to become a perfume designer.”

So he enrolled in a two-year course at the ISIPCA (Institut supérieur international du parfum, de la cosmétique et de l’aromatique alimentaire), the venerable perfumery school founded by Jean-Jacques Guerlain in 1970 in Versailles. “You learn the essential oils, the historical background of the perfume industry and how to formulate,” Mautin explains. “When I started to compose perfume, I was not afraid because I used to cook when I was a kid—I would make chocolate mousse and duck liver foie gras by watching my mother do it and reinventing recipes. People really liked what I made, and perfume is that same question of taste.”

Although perfumery dates back to ancient Mesopotamia, India and Cyprus, it was the French who refined the art for royalty and the upper class during the Renaissance period, using flowers as a base. But that doesn’t mean becoming a perfumer now is like deciding to be an accountant or lawyer. Much like Italian tailors, “it’s a very secret craft,” Mautin explains. “People don’t share their formulas and normally it’s a family business.”

Now 20 years into his career, Mautin managed to find his footing in the exclusive art, comparing it to being part painter—in that you’re constantly refining your skills—and part cocktail mixologist, because you’re giving your patron what they like while maintaining the integrity of your craft. In fact, it overlaps so much with high-end bartending that Mautin was asked to judge a SO Sauternes cocktail competition in Paris. “They wanted a perfume designer as a member of the jury, and I was really impressed with how they used the compounds in their drinks,” he says. “The difference is in cocktails, they use between three and four compounds; in perfume, you use between 20 and 80, so it’s much more fragile. But it’s exactly the same approach.”

For a Frenchman who raves about Manhattan’s Plaza Athénée and the Peter Cellars wine that he can’t find anywhere in Paris, the ultimate goal is a retail store in New York. “I would love to approach the American market; it would be so exciting,” Mautin says. Plus, “New York is not that far, it’s only a six-hour flight. It’s like we are brothers and sisters, really.”

For now, he remains in his lab in Paris, where he sources essential oils from all over the world and mixes them based on his inspiration and a client’s needs. Mautin intuitively understands the value of creating a true luxury product: “The luxury world is about the details that change your life.”



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