

# The State of Natural Perfumery 2012

by

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I asked six natural perfumers and the owner of a natural perfume line to comment on the trends they see as being a driving force in natural perfumery in 2012. The perfumers come from geographic distances spanning the globe from South Africa to the western United States, from small online-sales-only ateliers to brick-and-mortar retail stores where they display their perfumes. Their opinions and sometimes, their look back at what brought them to those opinions, make this series of commentaries, in their own words, so interesting.

## Where is natural perfumery now, in 2012?

A look back a few years is in order first.

Natural perfumery has come a long way since its first official recognition on perfume blogs in 2005. The blogs were in their infancy, and mainly focused on mainstream and niche perfumes, such as Guerlain and Serge Lutens. I was one of the few natural perfumers posting on the blogs and forums at that time, and saw first-hand the misconceptions about natural perfumery. Many labeled them “hippie store” scents, not knowing that there were natural perfumers creating high-end professional perfumes quite different from those locally available, low-priced simple blends found in the health food stores.

The trouble was that most natural perfumes were only available on the Internet at that time, so the perfume fans posting their opinions had no experience sampling the true, modern, natural perfumes. With few exceptions, no natural perfumer had their line available in brick-and-mortar stores at that time.

In April 2005, I launched [naturalperfumery.com](http://naturalperfumery.com) as a portal and branding site to introduce the public to a dozen natural perfumers and their lines. Within a year, that morphed into the Natural Perfumers Guild. Bloggers were beginning to review natural perfumes, and the perfumes were found to equal mainstream and niche perfumes in artistic quality. Lack of sillage and diffusivity were typically the only negatives, except for the customer who didn't wish to fill a room or elevator with their scent – for them natural perfumes, which tend to stay close to the body, were perfect.

By 2009, when perfume bloggers began to hand out year-end awards, many natural perfumers found their creations receiving “best of” awards. The future of natural perfumery was looking very bright, and a flood of new indie lines have launched since then. In 2012, the tipping point of public acceptance is overwhelmingly positive about natural perfumery.

I am in the thick of numerous discussions on natural perfumery on any given day, due to my hosting a 2200-member natural perfumery discussion group on Yahoo, and with the members of the Natural Perfumers Guild, on their Yahoo group. The infusion of new faces sharing their independent thoughts on our art was very appealing to me, and thus this article was initiated.

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The contributors who have shared their comments on what their view of the state of the art of natural perfumery is in 2012 touch upon topics not addressed much publicly earlier in their careers and the rise of natural perfumery: sustainability, healing properties, distillation and creating their own essences or the retail aspect. For the record, I only know two of the perfumers personally. I reached out to the others because I had noticed

and admired the arc of their businesses and the raves their perfumes received. I found their responses fascinating, and I hope you do, too.

*A little background: In 2008, Grant asked me to write an article on natural perfumery for Basenotes. I looked back to Schopenhauer and history for perspective on what happens when a new idea is introduced to society, and the result was [The Stages of Public Acceptance of Natural Perfumery – An Evolution Unfolds in the Manner of Top Middle and Base Notes in a Perfume](#). I believe we have reached the third and final stage, something not envisioned in 2008, at least not this quickly. We are at the stage of acceptance.*

**Those participating in The State of Natural Perfumery 2012 include:**

- Alexandra Balahoutis – Strange Invisible Perfumes
- Tanja Bochnig – April Aromatics
- Christian David – Honorè des Près
- Tammy Frazier – Frazier Parfums
- Jane Hendler – Ajne Perfumerie
- Eleanor Jane – Tallulah Jane NYC
- Elise Pearlstine – Bellyflowers Perfume

**Alexandra Balahoutis, Perfumer – Strange Invisible Perfumes**

As a botanical perfumer, I have found that it is not always easy to tell the story of what I do. Although I truly love to write and to speak about distillation and fragrance composition, there is just so much to put into perspective for people. Animating the narrative of botanical fragrance design for the average person often involves a lot of education, which honestly can sometimes diminish the fun.

It is difficult for people to place the art of natural perfumery. It is equally difficult to know how to market it. Should one define it as simply another way to avoid toxins and eventual disease? Should one focus on the aroma-therapeutic benefits of the essential oils that botanical scents are made of? Perhaps people should choose these completely natural fragrances in support of the often sustainable and earth-friendly methods employed in their creation. Or is it a way to steer clear of the aroma-terrorism in elevators often associated with overpowering synthetic fragrances? All of these themes flow through the work that I do and the products that I design, however none of them speak to my original motivation.

Before I decided to become a botanical perfumer, I decided simply to become a perfumer. I was in love with the idea of storytelling through lovely and puzzling vapors that cut to the essence of a narrative. I wanted to distill ideas into emotions and convert thoughts into physical experience. I wanted to design strange, invisible compositions that no one, myself included, would ever wholly understand. I suppose the word is mystery, but I tend to be long-winded.

In the beginning, I sampled all sorts of essences, artificial and natural alike. Being somewhat in love with the odd realities of scent, I wanted to have all sorts of things in my palette, whether or not they were possible to extract from plants. I loved the smell of suede and leather. I also wanted to be able to work with the complex, velvety scent of gardenias or the charming aroma of lilac, a flower so full of affability and depth. In the natural realm, I was out of luck... or so I thought.

I found ways of harnessing the scent of leather or lilacs, blending precious, natural essences into synergies that would conjure them to my satisfaction and, believe me, my satisfaction is a very remote destination. There was no need for artificial aromas. The challenge and intrigue of working with naturals began to define my odyssey into perfumery and my style as a perfumer. I realized early that synthetic essences would put me at an esthetic and qualitative disadvantage as a perfumer and I probably had a Coca Cola in my hand at the time. So, to put it simply, I wasn't doing this for my health. My now fully developed commitment to health was pretty latent at that time. As important as purity and eco-consciousness are to me, avoiding brain tumors or climate change really had nothing to do with my original decision.

I say that in the story of perfumery, artistic distillation is a main character. Beautiful compositions cannot live without it... at least not in my mind. In essence (no pun intended), botanical perfumery is the original perfumery, the authentic craft of essence extraction and fragrance composition. It is a luxury. This is what I wish people were more poised to understand. Natural fragrances do not simply belong in the verdant category of holistic medicine. Speaking to this, however, how lovely to be reminded that sometimes beauty is medicine.

*Alexandra Balahoutis*

*Botanical perfumer Alexandra Balahoutis founded her fragrance house in 2000 with the novel conviction that fine perfumery be made of real botanical essences. "Perfumery is the art of essence, so how does one make perfume without it?" <http://siperfumes.com>*

**Tanja Bochnig, Perfumer – April Aromatics**

Some of the most important aspects of Natural Perfumery for me are the healing and therapeutic properties of the plants and essential oils used, which can be felt when wearing all natural perfumes. The marvelous effects natural perfumes can have on the body/mind/ spirit are worth the effort to find and wear them.

In today's world, we are overloaded with synthetic smells in almost every possible product. To follow the beautiful path to enlightenment, also as a yogi, I personally find it important to seek truth in all things. When factory made, synthetic chemicals fog up our minds and bodies, it is nearly impossible to function at a high level, let alone see or understand what is true. When we inhale untrue scents into our minds and brains, we lose our capacity to discern truth. On the physical level, untoward scientific evidence is starting to pile up against synthetics.

Natural Perfumery is about listening to the message of the plants and precious flowers; hearing their subtle voices and taking in the wisdom they so lovingly impart to us.

Similarly, to using herbs for treating physical conditions, for me, natural perfumes are like soothing balms for the soul and heart. The world is going through big, energetic changes with much turmoil. Concomitantly there is the return of "light and love". Many people can feel it. The return of this light will bring more people who are opening up to the spirit world, to the world not visible to our physical eyes. People are softening and becoming more sensitive. With this state of being we can experience the healing power of natural essences and the flowers in their full state. That is why it is important for me to become quiet, go within, learn how to listen and to be able to see all the beauty around us

in nature. Natural Perfumes assist me to do that. I want to leave the new “rules and EU regulations” talk up to other writers. I am sure there is much to talk about. In brief, I can say that in order to have my perfume line in the European stores, I had to undergo all the tests that one can possibly imagine and it was quite nerve wracking, time consuming and expensive. On the other hand, I also understand the necessity and safety aspect of these tests and regulations. This brings about some restrictions in the usage of ingredients, for a natural perfumer.

One needs to become even more creative and find alternative ingredients, which are accepted and safe. Unfortunately, it is no longer permitted to use anything straight from your own garden. These kinds of perfume concoctions must now be made just for private use. Beautiful, ethereal Natural Perfumes are still available to those who choose to wear them, and are willing to listen.

I feel that natural perfumes are the perfumes of the future. Blessed Be!

*Tanja Bochnig*

*"From my earliest childhood, I had a very developed sense of smell and passion for scents, which led me to in my adult years to explore the magic of scent and smells in more depth. I have had the opportunity to study the life of plants and natural perfumery with some of the world's finest natural perfumers, from the "old" school of natural perfumery". <http://aprilaromatics.com>*

## Christian David, Founder - Honore De Pres



I see a fresh attitude towards natural and organic perfumes. They are very much speaking to a 21st century perfumista, breathing new life into old ways of thinking and changing the definition of we consider being fine fragrance. With increasing sophistication, natural perfumes are appealing to those who want simple luxury and authenticity. We are a society that wants to be more in touch with nature- to taste fruits without pesticides, to feel the earth between our hands and to smell an entire field of tuberose

We were lucky with Honore des Pres. Thanks to the undisputed talent of one of the industry's greatest artists Olivia Giacobetti and the use of the finest raw materials we create extraordinary eco certified 100% organic perfumes that are worn all over the world . Our perfumes are sold alongside many niche synthetic brands in cities like London, Moscow, Paris and Tokyo.

In 2012 we will be adding new scents to our critically acclaimed line, which was introduced in 2010. In these particular times when so many of our natural resources are being depleted, I know the luxury of the future will be that of nature. I also believe that this is the way more and more people will want to wear perfume in the years to come.

*Christian David*

*Honoré des Prés was established by Christian David in 2008 with a goal to create 100% natural and artistic perfumes with an urban flair. All Honore des Prés scents are eco-certified and don't contain any synthetic aromachemicals, colorants or phthalates.*

*The fragrances are composed by renowned perfumer Olivia Giacobetti. Honore des Prés has been widely lauded for its commitment to the global environment and is a favorite among celebrities such as Jessica Alba and Rachel Zoe. <http://www.honoredespres.com>*

### **Tammy Frazer, Perfumer – Frazer Parfums**



#### **The Shift of Appreciation**

In this time of transformation, traditional trends are shifting. There is cause for change.

The world took on the momentum of industrialization in the 1920s and ran with it. What we are faced with today is an influx of mass produced product. Conventional retail is no longer and collectors are seeking out original objects such as:

- Things that appreciate with age;
- Nurturing workmanship;
- Design and authenticity.

Industry is being driven by the buying power of the discerning purchaser. The purchaser is key to change.

Entrepreneurship is flourishing for the freedom it affords the designer and for the knowledge gained by the purchaser in this close nit interaction of trade. “One-off” pieces that are rarely duplicated are not just for the elite, but more focused on by the design-minded and educated.

Natural perfume is at the heart of this. On ones skin, the scent can be dramatically

different from any other. It is a layer of communication that speaks volumes of singularity. In times of change, we look to the past and revel in history.

*Tammy Frazer*

*“Each perfume is translated into a Chapter composed at a particular time in my life inspired by my expeditions traveling to the source of the raw materials.” Tammy works only with the finest quality natural raw materials, and is inspired by tradition and innovation. Granddaughter of Graham Wulff, inventor of Oil of Olay, she is following in his footsteps, single-handedly launching her personally handmade perfumes in haute parfumeries and design emporiums in London, Paris, Amsterdam, Rome and Cape Town. <http://frazierparfum.com>*

### **Jane Hendler, Perfumer – Ajne Parfumerie**



A Return to Health and Well Being in Perfumery . My passion and drive in this amazing industry has always been to educate and promote the health and well healing of natural essential oils vs. the use of toxic synthetic aroma chemicals. As an essential oil therapist as well as a perfumer, I understand the transformative healing powers associated with the oils and conversely the array of toxic side effects associated with aroma chemicals.

Studies have shown that nearly 20% of the population has minor to severe reactions to synthetically derived aroma chemicals (my husband and I included). I was amazed to find that the average woman actually takes on 5 pounds of toxic weight a year because of the use of synthetic cosmetics, body products and fragrances. This certainly makes sense as your skin is your biggest organ and everything that is applied onto it goes directly into your blood stream within minutes and builds up in your system. The great news is that people are becoming educated, as there has been a strong movement over that past 10 years or so to understanding organic food and farming.

This movement started with establishments such as Whole Foods, Earthbound Farms, etc and the wonderful array of books and documentaries that have created an awareness of the reality of what is really happening in the food industry and how it affects your body

and environment. Now that most are starting to understand this they are starting to also realize that there is another level that is as important and that has to do with what they use on their body. When I first launched Ajne Parfumerie 8 years ago, I felt that I was climbing an uphill battle as people had a rough time understanding the differences or importance of naturals. At that time everyone seemed to want the immediate dry down and the longest lasting fragrance. Very few understood the difference, and at times were even off put by the wonderful benefits of naturals. Natural scents are non invasive, they stay close to your body, no TMP (to much perfume), you're organic as is the perfume, why not wear something that is unique to you and enhances your natural organic scent.

Natural fragrance also stimulates an ancient part of your brain called the limbic system, and the smells of natural plants and essential oils are literally written in your DNA They are scents that your ancestors smelled, so they truly have a strong effect on memory and emotion in an ancient and powerful way. Today's manufactured scents are made in a test tube so they don't carry that same strong limbic reaction. I am delighted to see the masses getting this and appreciating the benefits of naturals. Many places of business have become fragrance free, yet natural fragrances are accepted in these environments. Working as a natural perfumer is such an amazing gift for me. When I have a session with a client I am able to shift them from the ordinary left brain which is all about present time and linear space and take them to the magnificent journey of the right brain which is totally creative, emotional, non linear, and strongly connected to memories. I can actually see them shift as I work with them, they start to smile and relax or maybe they cry. I always tell people before a session, be aware because I am going to get you naturally high on natural scent by shifting you over to your ancient right brain. It is amazing what natural scent can do.

*Jane Hendler*

*It was on Mt. Shasta that Jane Hendler shared with her husband her life's dream to create plant-derived fragrances, skin and body care so balanced and pure, they could have transformative effects upon the wearer. Thus, Jane and her husband planted an organic farm and opened the doors of Ajne in Carmel, California where they share their passion for pure and precious organic ingredients. <http://ajne.com>*

**Eleanor Jane, Perfumer – Tallulah Jane NYC****The Matter of Wildcrafted Botanicals**

There are number of different means of harvesting the botanicals which comprise a natural perfumers scent palette. Conventional, organic, biodynamic, fair-trade cultivation are a few as well as the most traditional of them all, wildcrafted. Indeed, a number of the ingredients perfumers rely on today are sourced from the wild for reasons of convenience or the impracticality of cultivating that particular crop. It seems more and more common though that the Natural Perfumer is actively searching out wildcrafted sources for a few reasons.

One of the benefits of wildcrafted ingredients is that they grow as naturally as is possible in their habitat and are rooted in rich, unadulterated soil. They are a result of the nutrients, sunshine and rain that freely occur in its natural habitat. The result is a crop which is nearly as pure as can be produced. Because of how wildcrafted ingredients are harvested it is impossible to verify that they are indeed organic even though they were in all likelihood never exposed to chemicals or pesticides.

Wildcrafting is also much kinder to the environment, as land does not need to clearing for crop space and generally only the branches or flowers from the plant are taken and the living plant is left.

Many suppliers sign contracts ensuring that any plant taken from the wild is replaced with seedlings or that only the part of the plant needed for the oils is used. Additionally, these companies pledge to only gather 10% of the audited crop to not over-harvest the resources.

Despite all these assurances and best practices wildcrafting has the potential to cause a

great deal of stress on the environment if not monitored. Many plants and trees which have traditionally been wild harvested have been driven to the point of endangerment. Indian Sandalwood is a prime example. *Santalum album*, the most prized of the Sandalwood species, has been harvested to the point where the Indian government had to seize ownership of all trees and strictly control its harvest. Many other species are similarly at risk, but fortunately steps are being taken to more properly manage the harvests and for producers to become more responsible stewards.

That wildcrafted ingredients are being employed more and more frequently by natural perfumers, and traditional perfumers as well, will only benefit the fragrance industry by imparting some of the highest quality and purest essences into the perfumers' palettes. However, their heavier inclusion also means that potential to over-tax the existing supplies has to be kept in mind by producers, perfumers, customers and everyone in-between.

### *Eleanor Jane*

*Eleanor had worked with essential oils for many years, both for their aromatherapeutic benefits as well as mixing blends for her own personal body products. She turned her experience with these botanicals and resins into perfumery after learning about all the toxic chemicals that went into each bottle she had sitting on her vanity. Eleanor began studying under natural perfumers and started blending more complex formulas which then happily turned into Tallulah Jane, after the exceeding demand from friends and family for bottles of her fragrances. <http://tallulahjanenyc.com>*

### **Elise Pearlstine, Perfumer, Soapmaker, Distiller, Scientist – Bellyflowers Perfume**



I have been making natural perfumes for nearly seven years now which qualifies me as somewhat new to the art but also in a position to see some of the changes that have

occurred in the new millennium. The fascinating thing for me has been the development of a variety of new natural materials and methods of cultivation, of harvest and obtaining the scent.

My most immediate connection with aromatic extraction was also one of my early ones. As part of a University of Florida funded study on essential oils I was in Europe to visit with distillers and to learn more about the process and potential for development of a Florida essential oil industry. Our first visit in France was to a distiller in the mountains of Provence north of Grasse. We met a lovely gentleman at a parking area in a tiny French town and got into his old four-wheel drive vehicle for a ride to his still. He keeps it in the mountains above the village to take advantage of the altitude, which allows him to distill at lower temperatures.

It is here that I smelled Wild Carrot Seed Essential Oil for the first time and fell in love. Bright, nutty and slightly floral with a true scent of carrot, it was a revelation and found its way into my perfume Wild Chypre. Knowing the distiller and the place of origin made this more meaningful.

In my quest for ingredients it has become apparent that many producers are offering wild crafted essential oils, absolutes and concretes; organic essential oils and new extracts such as CO2. These add a lovely dimension to perfume construction and enhance the story behind the formula. Many other natural perfumers seem to share this desire for a concept to their perfumes that reflect the natural ingredients or evoke a sense of place. For example, a perfume may be built around a particularly lovely sandalwood or rose that becomes part of the narrative. Or, using a knowledge of the integral properties of a particular oil or extract, a perfumer may seek to evoke a feeling or attitude in the wearer. Adding to the intrigue of a perfume are artisanal tinctures or enfleurages that many natural perfumers use.

For me, that palette of ingredients is what makes natural perfumery a vibrant and growing art and one that is gaining ever-greater attention.

*Elise Pearlstine*

*Elise's love of natural perfumes and soaps is an instinctive draw to the natural world as reflected in her doctoral degree in wildlife ecology. In her faculty position with the University of Florida, Elise is focused on habitat relations in agricultural lands and working with land owners to enhance wildlife habitat opportunities. She has also initiated evaluations of small farm opportunities for introducing essential oil crops in their planting rotations. <http://bellyflowers.com>*

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### **About the author**

Anya originally offered the natural perfume line “Anya’s Tropical Essences” on South Beach, Miami in the early 1990s. Her studies in ethnobotany and landscape architecture always involved fragrant plants, a lifelong passion of hers. She is self-taught in the style of French classical perfumery, and has knowledge of Middle Eastern and Indian perfumery techniques. She is the President of the Natural Perfumers Guild and teaches basic perfumery at <http://PerfumeClasses.com>