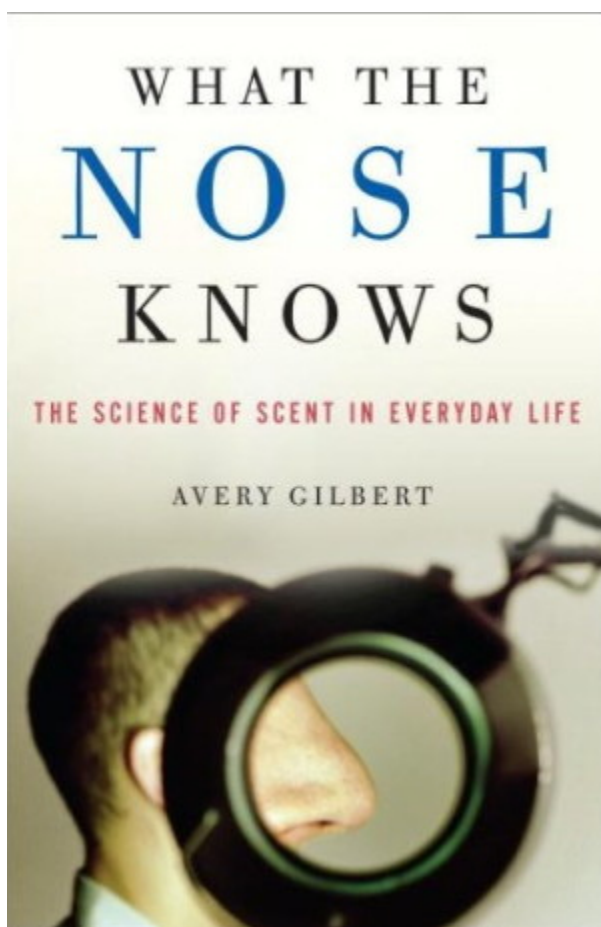


New Book: What the Nose Knows - The Science of Scent in Everyday Life ~ by Avery Gilbert

by [Anya McCoy](#), 11 June 2008 for [Basenotes.net](#)



Avery Gilbert ([website](#)) has "air-kissed fashion celebrities and sniffed the scalps of elderly ladies being shampooed in a mock salon." He was among the first to smell Elizabeth Taylor's White Diamonds, but also one of the first to sniff purified 3-methyl-2-hexenoic acid - the aromatic essence of ripe, unwashed armpits. He knows all about nose fatigue and "sensory truce" among perfume creators and their creations, having been on the team that created Ralph Lauren's Safari (p. 85.)

Gilbert is a Ph.D known as a smell scientist and sensory psychologist. He has that rare ability that many scientists lack – to write in an understandable, entertaining way so that the general public can find an academic study funny and informative. He weaves fact-based stories and astute observations about numerous scent/fragrance/smell/odor(s) known to the modern and the ancient world into his debut book *What the Nose Knows* -

The Science of Scent in Everyday Life.

Gilbert has worked for Givaudan-Roure, been a member of the faculty of the Monell Chemical Senses Center, President of the Sense of Smell Institute and founded three olfactory-related start-up companies. He's been involved with work that looks at, creates, or otherwise is intimately involved with stuff that smells - from perfume to dead bodies to scenting concert theaters. Eclectic and covering the breadth and depth of the world of scent, his ongoing work in the perfume industry includes examining the link between the visual and tactile experiences associated with odor. To that end, he has researched and written on olfactory synesthesia, the ability to see colors and shapes while smelling and founded Synesthetics, Inc., a consulting firm. At Monell, Gilbert co-authored the National Geographic Smell Survey, a six-sample scratch-and-sniff test sent to all 14 million readers of the magazine, the largest participatory study on the sense of smell ever conducted. He invented and validated the Cranial I QuickSniff ®, a rapid smell test for use by doctors.

For an ADD-addled right-brained person such as myself, this romp around the nose, culture, food, flavor and perfume world is a delight. Not a dry and dusty tome at all, as are so many scent-by-scientists' books, I find I can pick up the book and let it fall open to any page and there's something of interest, well-written and crackling with humor and intellect. Written in a breezy, unaffected style and backed with 40-page "notes" that function as a bibliography, it'll satisfy the most left-brained reader who wants to follow up on the many quotes and facts presented. *What the Nose Knows* will fill in the gaps of your knowledge about scents, and provide a lot of water-cooler – and perfume counter - conversations. Included is probably the most in-depth examination of the use of scent in movie theaters, obviously a passion of Gilbert.

I'm not going to attempt to summarize the chapters in the book, but I will share, as a teaser, many of the topics and the page they're on - I used up one-and-a-half page tags from my Post-It pen before I ran out three-fourths of the way through, so let the roll call of topics begin, albeit not compete:

The Wine Aroma Wheel and the wheels it spawned, from natural perfume to cheese and beer: p.7

The Perfumers Problem – how to manipulate and create with the skeleton: p. 10

The Jean Carles Method of perfume education: p. 11

Linnaeus' categories – helpful nitpicking that endures the test of time: p. 12

Veterans Administration Hospital Analyzes Farts (alert - skatole and indole theory

dashed!) begs the burning question - who has to handle the toot tube?: p. 28

Reefer Madness – a bud by any other name would smell so sweet: p. 31

The Mountain Misery Plant of the Sierras – stinking up an ecosystem: p. 38

Scented Butterflies – would you like a chocolate or vanilla wing?: p. 40

FlavorNet online: p. 47

Don't let your kids play soccer if you want them to grow up to be perfumers: p. 50

Cacosmia – yes, to some people, everything smells like shit: p. 52

Human Odor Perception: p. 61

Calkin and Jellinek – average nose needed, genius memory and association: p. 67

Suskind's Perfume, Rushdie's Midnight's Children: p. 69

One part of the brain sniffs two ways: p. 80

Amateur sniffing a scent strip v. a professional: p. 85

A Nose for the Mouth – hold your nose, you can't taste while you eat. Really: p. 91

South Park's Cartman in Costa Rica, President Chirac in Paris – two side of the same coin: p. 103

Wine glass shape for sniffing, scent strip shape for sniffing - the preferences: p. 110

The Three Traits of Olfactory Genius: p. 128

Percentage of people that are apathetic v. those fanatical about scent: p. 130

Aroma Jockey: p. 131

Emily Dickinson - creepy and a bit crazy about flowers: p. 137

Eugene Rimmel as the Fred Hayman of the 1800's: p. 183

Some more of Gilbert's musings:

- We are in danger of losing culturally meaningful smells. Who remembers what Wite-Out and ditto ink smell like?
- Sniffing coffee beans does not “refresh” the nose after prolonged smelling.
- Every cultural cuisine in the world can be made from a single collection of about two dozen spices.
- When it comes to detecting odors, new evidence suggests that people are often as good as dogs.
- Former Playboy Bunny Izabella St. James gags whenever she smells baby oil because she developed a learned odor aversion to it during her stint at the Playboy Mansion.

From aromas in movies, the perfumer's use of a “skeleton”, Proust's madelines, Smell Museum, GC/MS, GC-O, e-nose coming from a robot factory near you, engineering scent back into flowers to discussing how odor can allow police to have “probable cause” to conduct a search, there is something for everyone in the book. It's as delicious as a frangipani-infused chocolate simultaneously delighting the tastebuds and the scent receptors in the mouth; *What the Nose Knows* will forever change your perceptions about many of the scent myths we know. It'll also open your nose and mind to the exciting new frontier of an ancient sense too-long neglected by scholars. Avery Gilbert hurtles us forward in our thinking about our nose and leaves the nose-governed among us anticipating his next book, wondering what fragrant avenues are there left to sniff out, and what new secrets of the nose will he share with us?

What the Nose Knows is Available from June 24th - [pre-order now from Amazon](#) via the *Basenotes Book Shop*. ■



About the author

Anya McCoy is President and Owner of the Natural Perfumers Guild, and artisan perfumer of Anya's Garden.