

# Stephan Matthews

PUTTING FUN BACK INTO FRAGRANCE  
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## Perfume's Passage of Time



It's like the quest for the Holy Grail. Perfume collectors are constantly searching for a lost fragrance, a "vintage" formulation, or even a different edition of an original bottle. While the latter doesn't pose too much of an issue, the first two can be problematic to say the very least. Everything gets older, including me, and it's this ageing process that can have profound effects upon your "vintage" scent. What you end up buying may smell wonderfully resinous, with vanilla laden qualities, and have a depth of richness that is missing in current fragrances, but are you smelling what the perfumer really intended?

One of the first things that people learn about the construction of a scent is the fragrance pyramid. An ingredient pyramid will also give you an idea of the volatility of the materials that have been used, which translates loosely as the order in which they evaporate off the skin. This is different to the olfactory pyramid, which is the order that you perceive the ingredients. The passage of time can alter these fragrances immensely and this is why "vintage" perfumes that you buy on eBay, or even through respected sellers, should be taken with a pinch of salt.

In a similar way to wine, fragrance develops and matures over time as the ingredients found within it actually age. This is where the first of the problems arise. When a fragrance is released it is generally "as the perfumer intended", everything is in balance. However, the maturing process that happens when a bottled scent is stored for decades throws this careful balance out and the ingredients essentially alter. A particular variety of vetiver for example may be chosen because of the character it imparts to the fragrance, but the prolonged storage may alter this quality and so the scent takes on an unintended aspect.

The biggest issue though with storing perfumes is when we look at the wonderfully volatile citrus ingredients that are found right at the top of the fragrance pyramid. These short lived materials can often disappear over time and so a huge section of the perfume is then noticeably absent. This contributes to the scent feeling richer and heavier, because the piercing hesperidic shot that originally appeared first is missing, and it's also one of the reasons why it can take on a smoky quality, because of the ingredient degrading. If you think about **Shalimar** by **Guerlain** then you will understand the problem.



**Shalimar** is 30% bergamot, which means that when a stored "vintage" bottle is finally enjoyed you can often find that this unbelievably exciting citrus opening is considerably muted. Many fans had always considered the "vintage" to be a truer interpretation of the scent but **Thierry Wasser** and **Frédéric Sacone** blew this idea out of the water with their historic recreations. When they reconstructed **Shalimar** from the original recipe it actually showed that the current formulation was closer to the original formula than a true "vintage" bottle. Yes, it lacked the depth of the "vintage" but that was simply because it was a quality that was never intended in the first place.

So, the next time that you're tempted by a "vintage" fragrance just remember that the passage of time alters perfume in the same way that it also alters us.

Posted by Stephan Matthews at 17:10:00



## MY SCENTED HISTORY



Perfume has always been a great passion of mine and I am lucky enough to work within this fascinating industry. Every day brings new challenges, experiences and delights to a workplace that is crammed full of new releases, evergreens, and fading classics.

This blog will bring together my ramblings on all manner of aspects of the perfume industry from bottle design to fragrance, companies to noses, and everything in between.

Opinions are my own and they do not in any way represent the views of the companies mentioned. Where products or services have been provided by the companies it is stated at the end of the article.

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