

body & soul



Would you like to try a spritz of roast beef, Madam?

Christopher Brosius hates perfumes. Instead, he bottles heart-stirring smells like snow, leather armchairs and wet grass. Tim Teeman reports

Suddenly, off the hot, sticky streets of Brooklyn, I enter *Alice in Wonderland*. In one half of the small shop, little amber vials of liquid are arranged on white shelves, with labels such as strawberry shortcake, soaked earth, sticky toffee pudding, wet grass, Christmas pudding, gun smoke, dust, old fur coat, roast beef and snow.

When you unscrew the lids, those smells spring forth. (I had never knowingly smelt snow or dust, but they seemed “snowy” and “dusty.”) On the other side of the shop are bespoke scents, with names such as Winter 1972, recreated from the past of Christopher Brosius, owner of I Hate Perfume. “Smells are connected to emotion and emotion causes memory, which is why we remember smells,” he says.

The New York shop’s name encapsulates its owner’s philosophy: perfume should be memorable but not “offensive”, like the mass-market scents that, for Brosius, dominate through multimillion dollar marketing muscle rather than superior beauty or subtlety.

The shop is six years old and Brosius has reconstructed aromas for nearly two decades, using pipettes and 2,000 chemicals. Three customers relish

wearing “roast beef”. One woman burst into tears when she smelt an ocean-based scent: her father had died and it reminded her of the family’s beachfront home. “I have a gift for accuracy,” Brosius says. “I love the smell of fresh runner beans when you first cut them; minutes later that smell has gone.”

The 48-year-old perfumier, dressed in black (T-shirt and heavy kilt), is cerebral, arch and precise. In tonight’s episode of the BBC Four series *Perfume*, he sets out to recreate the smell of 1930s rarefied London. The components are books, whisky, “the musty but clean carpets of old gentlemen’s clubs”, leather armchairs, cigars and rain. He sometimes works from a molecular profile (created from gas chromatography) of a particular smell, or simply experiments. “I can make roast beef without roast beef molecules,” he says.

Some aromas are simple: a just-opened chocolate box takes four chemicals; soaked earth comprises 35 to 40. Some take days to perfect, others months, with precise note-taking at every stage. “It’s fairly 18th century,” Brosius says with a smile.

His favourite scent is the stunning floral Cradle of Light, which includes ▶

Chocolate? Dogs’ paw? Strawberries? Clients can take their pick

“My love of water smells is from the river where I played as a child

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◀ the “absolutes” (the very fine extracts pressed out of flowers) of jasmine, gerberas, narcissus and lotus. For the base of many perfumes he uses cedarwood, “dirt smells” and the resin labdanum. For water-based sprays he needs “a good solvent, a couple of polysorbates and hydrogenated castor oil”. He also uses individual aroma chemicals, compounds, essential oils, resins and absolutes. “Most of all you need creative ability,” he says.

Growing up in a small town in Pennsylvania, Brosius recalls “the veil of perfume” left by his Aunt Corinne, an Avon lady, after she had left the house. “I also loved to dig in dirt, creating cities for my toy trucks. My love of water smells comes from the vines hanging over a river nearby.” He studied set and costume design, toyed with fashion and worked in the cosmetics department of Barneys department store. Magazine perfume adverts seduced him, “So when I finally opened the bottles I was expecting to faint with pleasure. It never happened. I was frequently bored; often they were unpleasant.”

As a student he drove a cab. “In the Eighties women wore expensive scents. Giorgio, Poison and Obsession were the real killers. I would finish my shift with the hugest headache and feel sick.” The first scent he wore was Czech & Speake’s Frankincense and Myrrh. Cicely’s Eau de Campagne “was supposed to smell of tomato leaves. Well, the tomato leaves went after ten minutes, leaving something disgusting”. He last wore a mass-market scent in 1990 (Guerlain’s Vetiver) and says that if perfumes are



Christopher Brosius with some of his bottled scents at I Hate Perfume

particularly obnoxious. “I put a handkerchief over my face”. He has chemical sensitivities to the synthetic musk Galaxolide and certain hexanols.

Brosius’s breakthrough — besides having a “brilliant chemistry teacher” — was working at Kiehls, where he experimented blending the company’s fragrance oils and learnt that “if the market is pushing one way, at least 5 per cent of people are running in the other”. He began his own company in 1992,

creating his first perfume, CB93 (geranium, frankincense and galbanum), a year later. After conflict with his business partner he left in 2004, then opened I Hate Perfume.

Brosius has declined requests to recreate blood, pus, gangrene and cannabis, and rejected a theatre director’s desire for the smell of a dead body (“The audience would be puking”). He wants his scents to be “memorable, wearable, not shocking”.

From one who nose Christopher Brosius on his top 5 smells

In no particular order:

- Ripped weeds
- Falling snow
- Dogs’ paws
- Books of any age and kind
- The armpit of a beautiful man

As for why, well that’s much harder to say. *Le nez a ses raisons que la raison connaît pas* (“The nose has its reasons of which reason knows nothing”). Anyone’s favourite smells, very much mine included, are not discovered on the spur of the moment but represent a history of experience. If they tell a tale, mine speak of adventure, anticipation, serenity, beauty, danger and love.

His most sensual, including a “sexy” scent created for actor Alan Cumming, are “animalic” and musky. Piggy combines leather, rubber and white truffle oil. Beast (roast beef and beef jerky) “loses its meat-like quality on the skin and is spicy, crackly, smouldery and smoky”. Brosius is often asked if he uses chemicals. “Dear God, yes,” he says, rolling his eyes. “Our bodies are made of chemicals. But I use more natural materials than comparable perfumers.”

Richer clients pay Brosius \$15,000 (£9,000) to create their own fragrances. “Everything I do is designed to tint the skin, not say: ‘I’m wearing perfume,’” he insists, adding you should wear scents “anywhere where another person’s nose is going to be but not where you might be licked: so the neck, the front of the underarm, the feet or base of the spine”.

So far the smell of banknotes has eluded Brosius, because he cannot acquire the molecular structure of the notes’ ink because of the risk of forgery, “and gasoline, because the chemicals that make it smell like gasoline are highly inflammable or toxic. I can replicate a French baguette or cookie at room temperature, but the ‘fresh-baked’ element remains an olfactory mystery: how we get that smell of heat into a bottle.” He is “slowly zeroing in on dogs’ paws” and “would love to do a good lilac, lily of the valley, gardenia, peony or freesia”. His eyes dance. “Smell this,” he instructs. The vial reads: “Doll’s head”. I inhale. Wow, that really is my sister’s old Sindy. **Perfume: Bottling the Memory, BBC Four, tonight, 9pm**

body&soulhealth



Dr Mark

JOE MCLAREN



Matters of the heart

When dealing with arterial disease, minutes can make all the difference between life and death, says Dr Mark Porter

YOU are only as young as your arteries is a familiar adage to doctors. While most people worry about cancer, it’s the state of their circulation that is most likely to determine their quality of life, or send them to an early grave. “furring up of the pipes” being the underlying cause of illnesses

from impotence to stroke and heart attack. About a third of people in the UK still die from cardiovascular disease, which means it just pips cancer to take the “biggest killer” title. Despite the widespread perception that we are a nation of slothful fatties heading for an early grave, arterial disease has plummeted during my lifetime.

Today is the 50th birthday of the British Heart Foundation — and there is much to celebrate. When the organisation was formed in 1961, nearly 200,000 British men and women died from heart disease every year. Today, that figure has dropped to 80,000. And the fall in deaths among the middle aged is even more pronounced, suggesting the outlook is rosy.

There are a number of factors behind the drop, including falling smoking rates, better health education and improved living standards. But it’s the modern medical approach to managing risk factors, such as high blood pressure and cholesterol, and treating heart attacks that has changed the most.

Fifty years ago, heart attacks were often managed at home by GPs, not least because those who were admitted to hospital were unlikely to be offered anything different, standard protocol then being little more than pain relief (morphine) and bed rest (six weeks). There were no coronary care units, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and defibrillators were in their infancy. Little wonder that as many as a third of patients died on the ward.

Today, any decent first aider can do CPR, there are defibrillator units in supermarkets and every big hospital has a specialised cardiac unit where survival rates can be as high as 95 per cent or more; 19 out of 20 patients admitted with a heart attack will be discharged. And hospital stays have fallen from six weeks to a few days.

But time is of the essence. Back in the Sixties it wasn’t unusual for a GP to see a patient complaining of severe chest pain hours, or even days, after their symptoms had started. These days chest pain is regarded as a medical emergency and people are encouraged to bypass their GP, dial 999 and get into hospital as soon as possible. There they will receive treatment to clear the blockage in their coronary artery that is starving their heart of essential nutrients, causing the pain and endangering their life.

There are two ways to restore normal coronary blood flow — using clot-busting drugs that dissolve the blockage, or passing a small balloon into the artery to stretch it and open it up (angioplasty). The trick is to remove the obstruction before any permanent damage is done. For clot-busting drugs, this means administering them within an hour of the onset of symptoms and within a couple of hours for angioplasty. It is a logistical nightmare, but one that the NHS is embracing.

When I visited the London Chest Hospital a couple of years ago, its angioplasty team was managing an average door-to-balloon time (from when the ambulance wheels stop to when the artery is dilated) of just 52 minutes. Four hundred staff managed to maintain this service 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Not every hospital can match that, and there is still great variation in access to such units across the UK, but strides are being made.

Even so, it’s no good having a super-efficient hospital service if there is delay in getting there. And this is why it is so important that the public treat chest pain as an emergency and dial 999. Minutes really can mean the difference between life and death. **For more information on heart attack and its treatment visit bhf.org.uk**

Act fast to survive a heart attack

Heart attack symptoms vary, but typically include central chest pain — often described as a heaviness or “crushing” — that lasts for ten minutes or more and may spread to the neck, jaw or arms. Victims may appear pale and clammy, feel sick and/or faint, and complain of shortness of breath. If in doubt, dial 999. If you have aspirin to hand and are not allergic to the drug, crush one 300mg tablet in your mouth and swallow it.



Having not exercised for many years, I have recently started to jog twice a week. However, I get shooting pains up my shins during and after running. Is this because I’m unfit or because I’m wearing the wrong footwear? I’m in reasonably good shape otherwise.

This sounds like classic “shin splints” — a poorly understood problem thought to be due to the repeated impact of running. It is very common in novices taking up the sport. I suggest that you switch to a bike for a couple of weeks to give your legs a rest and seek expert advice on your footwear from a good sports-shoe shop. You should wear only purpose-made running shoes and ideally change them every 300-400 miles (ie, every 6-9 months if you run 10 miles a week).

You might want to consider switching to grass and cross-country runs after the two-week rest, as this is likely to cause much less jarring on the legs than running on tarmac and pavements. Lastly, if you use a treadmill, avoid running on a gradient (uphill); personal experience suggests that this puts more strain on the muscles around the shin and can also aggravate lower-back problems.

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