

Fading Scent Trails - A Farewell to SP Parfums

Few things can make a fragrance enthusiast more heartbroken than to see a perfume become discontinued; never to be easily accessed, or – god forbid – smelled again. The tragedy is, therefore, a hundredfold when the unthinkable happens and an entire perfume house closes shop – especially so when the talent behind it has such a fresh and unique voice as Sven Pritzkoleit.

Although most readers will recognize Pritzkoleit as the creator of Zoologist's remarkably feral and still unusually elegant Hyrax, the young German pharmacist has been developing his own brand, SP Parfums, with a steady hand since he unveiled his first creation, Pink Patchouli, in 2006. The house's purposely nostalgic appearance, the bottles' European, old-world charm and the neatly handwritten labels have looked dangerously deceiving from the start: apart from the meticulous attention to detail and the use of first-class materials, there was never anything "old" in any SP perfume. On the contrary – Pritzkoleit himself (and later the perfumers he collaborated with) managed to craft brave, new, and strikingly modern creations, using the vintage as a compass, but never directly as a foundation. Acclaim never followed far behind: in 2016, Pritzkoleit published his book *Duftspuren* ("Scent Trails" – part memoir, part guide to likeminded perfume makers), and in 2019, his perfume *Powder & Dust* (co-authored and inspired by Yana Lysenko of Tommelise fame) won the Art and Olfaction award in the Artisan category.

So it came all the more as a shock when, at the end of this tumultuous year of 2020, Pritzkoleit announced that due to complex and personal reasons he would retire SP Parfums as we know it, sell his remaining stock and would only focus on creating for other houses in the future. Bummer - thanks, 2020!

When I heard the dire news, I immediately jumped to grab one last vial each of the three SP perfumes most pertaining to this blog, and I will now – through their specific cross-section - attempt to give some insight into one of the most exciting and innovative houses of its generation, right before it fades from existence. Read on!

Civette Intense (Sven Pritzkoleit, 2016)

If you have ever smelled the magnificent Hyrax, you will inevitably draw parallels with its precursor Civette Intense, which is understandable. But it does not take long to notice that the two fragrances do not so much relate to each other as prototype and final product (as it would superficially seem at first), but rather as if the nucleus of the same idea had travelled down two different but equally logical paths, in almost entirely opposing directions; by ways more natural and evolutionary than simply derivative.

While Hyrax is a baroque ode both to its titular subject matter and to the superb trimmings that bring it to life, Civette Intense is a sparse, minimalist and focused display showcasing the raw material (or rather its artful, synthetic reconstruction, to be precise), with only the very few additions (namely a subtle green and an equally subdued wood accord of undisclosed components) absolutely necessary to highlight its luxuriously rich facets.

The perfume opens with the piezo chime of a solitary, bright and herbaceous-citrusy accord, reminiscent of freshly cut lemongrass. Like the world's tiniest crystal bell hit with a minuscule mallet, this note rings clean in graceful sustain, way out into the darkness following it – an unexpected and very pleasant

opening. In its wake, a subtly resinous accord buds: half coniferous and half fern-like, all oily and vaguely poisonous; politely behaving as a faint whisper of a background to the main theme: a whopping, unabashed civet reconstruction.

I am not certain how many components Pritzkoleit used to create this accord (I certainly catch whiffs of at least one very distinct and dominating musk), but the result smells convincingly real on the one hand, while on the other it possesses a few signature traits not usually found in other civet constructs. To begin with, it smells patently raw, dark and viscous, as if straight out of the butt of the viverrid in question – quite unlike the fuzzy, velvet warmth we remember civet by. Combined with the delicately noxious herbals of the opening, and with its facets reminiscent of harsh, freshly cured leather, it gives off a certain cold, fresh, stark sparseness. It would prove downright intimidating if Civette Intense was not designed to envelope the wearer in a feral snuggle, quite close to the skin. But it is, and the result is superb: while never actually warming up to become inviting, the boldness and masculinity of the composition at arms' length – especially with the cleverly half-hidden and thus difficult-to-dissect woods in the base - is impossible to resist.

So as comparisons go, Civette Intense certainly comes from the same quirky but approachable family as Hyrax – but he is older and edgier. Having gone to business school, he now wears a pinstripe suit, and he only talks about his investments at the odd family dinner. Intense indeed. And while he is certainly handsome in a stark, angular way, he doesn't possess the well-rounded, good-natured warmth and joviality of his younger brother. But the thing that they both share is their unexpected elegance: just like Hyrax, Civette Intense makes me want to wear it with a white shirt and a black tie – like all truly good animalics should.

Funfair (Sven Pritzkoleit & Miguel Matos, 2017)

The year 2017 saw the birth of SP Private Perfume Collection; a three-fragrance collaboration (with an added fourth a year later – more on that below) between Pritzkoleit and Miguel Matos – another young, up-and-coming perfumer whose artful, concept-heavy work we have seen steadily popping up in increasingly exciting context all around the fragrance world lately (read about one of his latest work - with Flavius Călaj - here: [Dog 2646 - Posts | Facebook](#)).

The theme of the collaboration was set by Matos (here in the role of creative director), who wanted to immortalize in scent three defining, autobiographical moments from his native Portugal. Suntanglam (a very naughty, somewhat adult rendition of a beach, with notes of suntan oil, hot bodies and smells of... ahem... a recent sexual encounter) was followed by Lisbon Blues (a chypre in the vintage vein, with animalic leather and fragrant flowers to capture the passion and melancholy of the Portuguese capital) and finally, our "Exhibit B", Funfair.

The concept here is a little more specific – and, from an olfactory point of view, more exciting – than the name implies; this is not just any funfair: we are at the celebration of Nossa Senhora da Boa Viagem, an ancient and traditional festival of religious significance, held annually on the beaches of Peniche. Apart from music, laughter, and people enjoying themselves, smells both mundane and religious fill the air: cinnamon churros frying, incense burning; the scent of spices at food stalls, mixed with the fragrance of the flowers carried around by the religious procession – and behind all these, like some ever-present

olfactory canvas: the salty smell of the sea. Quite an experience to render into a fragrance, but SP and Matos have pulled it off – in quite an unusual way, and with frightening acuity. Funfair’s first shock is the churros & incense accord, jumping right out of the sprayer: nutty, wheaty, with an almost tangible spun sugar and cinnamon, and even the nuances of the frying oil, it is a bewildering experience that covers a wide patch of ground between caramel popcorn and sugar-coated pistachios. What makes it so strange is the presence of a rather lifelike nag champa devilishly melding with the sweet notes, making the fragrance teeter precariously on the edge between gourmand and woody territories – it is literally dizzying and disorienting, quite like the atmosphere at the titular festival.

The emergence of a medley of flowers in the heart – namely ylang, rose, saffron and jasmine – adds an extra layer to the oddly alluring cacophony, but the truly unexpected part arrives with the woody-vanillic drydown: the smell of the sea on the night breeze. As spearheaded by the synthetic component Ultrazur, this is no ordinary aquatic addition: briny, fishy, saline and ever so slightly metallic with nuances of seaweed. If at this point you are with me thinking that this must be one unholy thing to wear as personal fragrance, you are not far off: the clashing notes from all over the spectrum and the constant tension between the composition’s gourmand and very much impalatable sides would make this perfume a disaster in any other context. But the saving grace of Funfair - so ingeniously applied by the creators – is that sometimes, in very rare cases, clashes do work: in this particular case, the sweet burnt sugar of churros and the smell of the sea ends up registering as some kind of strange, offbeat salted caramel, and settles as the backbone of the scent – and it does work, and therein lies the olfactory sleight-of-hand that makes this perfume a tiny miracle.

But just like salted caramel, Funfair will not appeal to everyone. Matos stated that it is not a realistic representation of a festival, but a fantasy left behind by the experience – but I beg to differ. What might make Funfair so difficult to wear for some people is that it is a frighteningly accurate depiction of the ALL the festivity’s smells, right down to the seaweed on the shore, or the cold metal of the ferris wheel’s frame. But it is also what makes it magical, and a shining example of conceptual – if not necessarily wearable – perfumery.

Nowhere Fast (Sven Pritzkoleit & Miguel Matos, 2018)

“There's nothin' wrong with goin' nowhere, baby, but we should be goin' nowhere fast” sings Laurie Sargent in Walter Hill’s 1984 movie, *Streets Of Fire*. The cult neo-noir rock musical has always made a compelling case for living (and loving) fast and dying young, so much so that in 2018, Pritzkoleit and Matos teamed up one more time to commemorate it not only with a conceptual fragrance piece, but a whole multidisciplinary art exhibit. The exhibit incorporated elements of visual arts, sculpting, film, and at its center, the scent art piece of the perfume *Nowhere Fast*.

Not necessarily meant to be worn as personal fragrance, the scent was born from the concept of the ephemeral qualities of pleasure, passion, and on a larger scale, of life itself – fitting topic for a medium such as perfume, which itself exists only for a relatively short time before evaporating into nothingness. Evoking this sentiment through a fragrance is a daunting task and can be approached countless of poetic ways (from the practical-minimalist to the symbolist, from the literal to the metaphorical), yet Pritzkoleit and Matos chose to really go out of their way and create a profoundly unique composition that sings of smoke, coal, flames, leather jackets, rock’n’roll, and hot bodies in movement.

To achieve the uncanny result, they have shoehorned an extraordinary amount of material into Nowhere Fast. We have here a floral accord (rose, jasmine, tuberose, ylang), fruits (cassis, raspberry), spices (saffron, cardamom, cloves), resins and incense (nagarmotha, benzoin, styrax, labdanum), whiskey, musks, oakmoss, patchouli, woods (cedar and quaiac), a fat bunch of synthetic molecules (Karanal, Iso E, Galaxolide, Cashmeran, Pyralone, Ambroxan) – and of course, a very prominent civet and castoreum. It is practically impossible cram so many notes together and still hear their individual voices, and this gives Nowhere Fast a markedly compressed quality with almost no chord progression – but it suits the fragrance well and contributes heavily to its oddball qualities. So how does it smell in practice?

Well, like nothing you have ever smelled before, really. The best approach to describe it would be a worn jacket of uncertain material (place it between leather, suede, and plastic), slightly sweaty in an idealized way (it's a sweet, musky smell, not entirely unpleasant) and still patently warm from wear (which wear may have included dancing in smoke machine fog). There's a big amber here, and sweet, rubbery resins, and the undisputed lead of the whole composition, entering at the first moment and only disappearing with the last of the drydown: a whopping big, preposterously realistic accord of a matchstick blazing out. I cannot stress enough how cunningly ingenious this accord is – you really smell everything here: the flame, the ember, the char of the wood, and - most importantly – a sulfurous, acrid, flinty smoke that even slightly stings your nostrils as you take a whiff. But the truly shocking element of it (and the real testament to the talents of both perfumers) is how pleasant it is, actually: providing a dry, prickly counterweight to the resinous, sweet suede, it brings a graceful balance to the perfume - as well as an obviously distinct olfactory footprint that is going to stand out everywhere, while still stylishly managing to steer clear of novelty territory.

Despite of the uncanny theme and execution, Nowhere Fast is a surprisingly warm, light and pleasant wear, with just enough weight to let its slightly quirky but entirely enjoyable timbre noticed by the people around you. Whether you wear it as a personal fragrance or for intellectual pleasure only, it is a helluva feat and an exciting example of how far perfume can go as entertaining, thought-provoking art.

Although I picked the above three fragrances to showcase the ingenuity of Sven Pritzkolet's work through a window specific to this blog, there are many more facets to the German artist's palette that are worth exploring; each more delightful than the other. If this article piqued your interest as a perfume aficionado, do not hesitate: go to Sven's website while it's still up, make a good purchase of whatever of his stock is still available, and drop him a line, asking him to return to us as soon as possible, never to stop creating wonderfully inventive perfumes again.

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