

RETAIL REPORT

The Poetry of Perfume

Two Fillmore shops offer their own unique scents

"When nothing else subsists from the past, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered ... the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls ... bearing resiliently, on tiny and almost impalpable drops of their essence, the immense edifice of memory."

— MARCEL PROUST

BY SHELLEY HANDLER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUZIE BIEHLER

HOWEVER melodramatic, the quote from Proust's suffocatingly romantic *Swann's Way* is now known to be scientific truth. The human limbic system, often called the "lizard brain," holds both a portion of long-term memory and the most basic urges to fight, flee or fornicate. It also houses the olfactory system, and the conjunction of all these can cause a single whiff of something familiar to plunge us into our earliest memories.

By extension, perfumes serve as the most sensitive triggers, stirring recollections of sunny days at the beach or deeply intimate moments. Scent — a suggestive art — is also a powerful tool in creating atmospheres both personal and ambient.

This poetic aspect of perfume is not lost on Franck Bouchy, the manager of **ATELIER COLOGNE**, at 2105 Fillmore Street. The way scent intertwines with individual memories, physical chemistry and personal style is something he helps clients navigate with delicate skill. Wearing perfume is an alchemical act, and it begs a look into a shopper's leanings in scent (floral, spicy, leathery?) and lifestyle (are you more campsite or couture?).

Applying his years of experience and passionate study, Bouchy stirs together the wearer's preferences with his own deep knowledge of perfume, and pulls a

selection from Atelier Cologne's library of proprietary scents.

Created in France by founders Sylvie Ganter and Christophe Cervasel, these *cognes absolues* are unique to their perfume house. Ganter starts with the light, citrusy model of historic eau de cologne and adds lingering middle and base notes to turn it into a more substantial, lasting form. Each cologne begins with a story, a memory or a place that Ganter seeks to evoke through scent's subliminal power.

"With scent, we are selling something invisible," says Bouchy, "something that has the power to extend your feelings;



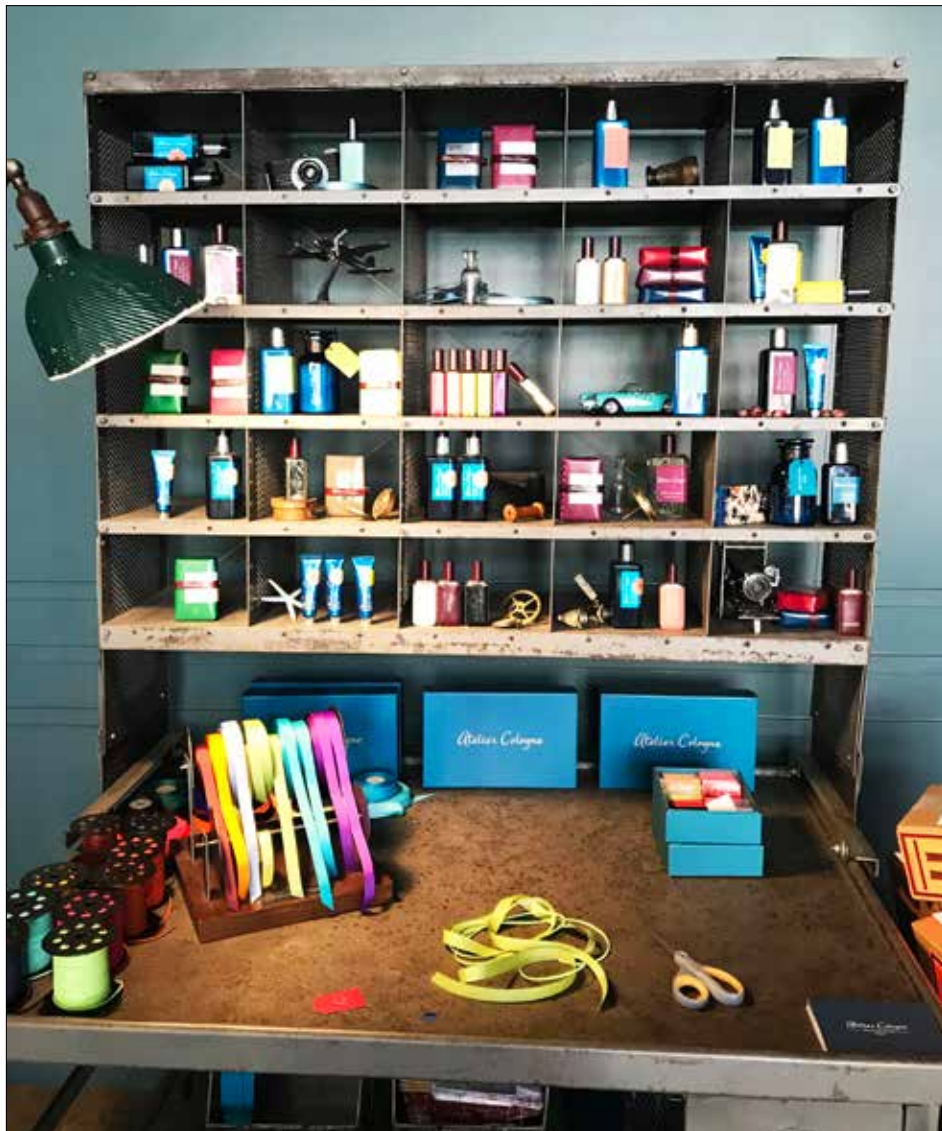
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— FRANK BOUCHY, Atelier Cologne

for a brief while, your emotions will be larger, carried forward by the perfume."

Scent can also beautifully set a scene. The shop's Bois Blonds (light wood) combines Moroccan neroli, gaiac wood from Central America and Indian pink peppercorn. Atelier Cologne's website describes this quietly sultry cologne as bearing "the golden light of neroli and the spicy heat of the woodland," promising to take the wearer "slowly towards winter."

A block up at 2238 Fillmore Street, **LE LABO** applies its own particular vision in formulating unique scents. While Atelier Cologne's products spring from a two-centuries-old model, Le Labo takes



Atelier Cologne's products, presentation and packaging spring from a two-centuries-old model.





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Some are an outright olfactory shock.”*

— JOHN ASLIMOV, Le Labo

a more modern, minimalist approach. From the name, Le Labo (short for “the laboratory”), to the pared-down packaging, the product is edgier, less genteel, but no less alluring. And manager John Aslimov takes similar pride in his knowledge and skill in matching customer to scent.

Here, perfumes such as Santal 26 are named for their primary ingredient, such as Santal (sandalwood), followed by the number of other notes that round out that fragrance — 26 others, for this particular scent. In the hands of other perfumers, the sandalwood might sing loudly enough to drown out the accompanying choir. At Le Labo, the scent may be atonal, but its notes are skillfully gathered to make their own provocative harmony.

“These perfumes are not meant to make nice,” says Aslimov. “Some are an outright olfactory shock.”

And instead of the florid copy and costly ad campaigns that accompany most commercial scents, Le Labo — which was purchased by the Estee

Lauder conglomerate in 2014 — lets the label on the bottles do all the talking, in text-length simplicity. The packaging is deliberately spare. Matte gray labels and kraft paper boxes house the perfumes, and deliberately dented gray paint cans hold Le Labo’s scented candles.



Giving the gift of scent presumes that the giver knows the receiver well enough to assert what might play well with his or her particular style. And rather than take a swing at a gift that might miss, both perfumeries offer “discovery sets” with five to 16 small vials that allow a person to sample and sniff to make an informed personal selection. Delightful on their own, these kits extend the gift along with the luxury of choice and time

— especially when accompanied with a gift certificate.

They also offer the chance to follow Proust’s deeply romantic lead and give something that reverberates in the memories of both the wearer and the beholder.



In its products and its pared-down packaging, Le Labo offers a more modern and minimalist approach that is edgier and less genteel, but no less alluring.

