

Perfume Polytechnic

Exploring olfaction in perfume, art, science & life.

Thirteen Thoughts: Perfumer Interview Series – Paul Kiler of PK Perfumes

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<https://perfumepolytechnic.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/thirteen-thoughts-v2-800-shadow1.jpg>) Thirteen thoughts from perfumers around the globe. Each perfumer profiled at Perfume Polytechnic has been presented with the same set of thirteen questions that probe into scent memories, imagination, education, history, the creative process and philosophy. How each perfumer answers these questions, and what form the answers take, is up to them. Tune in each week for a new instalment to learn more about the olfactory arts and how perfumers think about smell.

Today's interview is the fourth of five weekly instalments of *Thirteen Thoughts, a Perfumer Interview Series*. Today, American perfumer Paul Kiler of PK Perfumes answers the thirteen questions. Next week's instalment will feature 4160Tuesdays' Sarah McCartney.

I want to let each perfumer speak for themselves about who they are, what drives them, and what they do with fragrance, so without any further ado, I introduce you to...

Paul Kiler of PK Perfumes



<https://perfumepolytechnic.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/smlpauls-sniffing-portrait-hi-res-crop-as-desired.jpg>

Paul Kiler of PK Perfumes

1. Tell us about a significant olfactory memory from your childhood.

When I was nine years old, my Grandparents moved from Los Angeles to retire in the California Gold Country foothills, near Sutter Creek, where gold was first found in California in 1848. They bought a house in the mountains in the Gold Country of California, east of Stockton CA. They moved there after retiring from Los Angeles, up to the mountains, which seemed quite remote, to a 9-year-old. Not too many people lived on their mountain then. What I enjoyed when I went to visit was all of the natural scents from their environment. They were in the middle of many cedars, some of which were Incense Cedars. Pine trees, Oak trees, Manzanita bushes/trees, rich red earth, and my beloved meadow ground covering that I loved to walk through and smell. They

called it "Mountain Misery". I was always puzzled by why it had such a hateful name, considering how much I loved its scent. In the summer, this plant has a tremendous odor strength; the little 18" ferns would become laden with a sticky resin that I've since learned contains between 10-12% essential oils, which is extremely high for a natural material to contain.

The Mountain Misery would stick to my shoes and pant legs when I walked through it. It had a really strong odor, and because it came packaged in a sticky resin, the odor would last for almost a week on your clothes and shoes. I revelled in it when I went to visit them. I've since learned that it was called Mountain Misery because it is almost impossible to eradicate for people who wished to remove it and "settle" some land without this ground covering. It seems to be the first thing that comes back after a forest fire, and chokes out other plants, and effectively monopolizes the ground where it grows. I now use the Native name of "Kit-Kit-Dizzie" instead. I wanted to bring these forest memories and even the scent of Kit-Kit-Dizzie into a perfume and it is my perfume called Ere. I love this memory perfume based on my first love affair with scent.

I just loved that smell. When I became a Perfumer, I went back to the mountains where that plant grows, and picked some to tincture for making my fragrance Ere. Ere to me is the scent of the Forest in a bottle. Ere is based on my scent memory of being a small boy running around in the forest of California.

Since I am very much the Artist and Photographer/Observer, what started my love affair with fragrance began with my fascination and appreciation of Beauty, in my case, the Beauty of the natural world around me. An observational and contemplative perspective: Seeing, Listening, Smelling, Hearing, Touching. These of course are the basis of life experience and the initiation of Art. Really, it's simply paying attention to what you experience. Being an Artist in every medium, including Perfumery, is indeed about paying acute attention to what you experience.

2. What is your "origin story"? When, why and how did you decide to become a perfumer?

I think that the "scent of place" fascinated me long before Perfume fascinated me, as my story above mentions. But "Perfume" started to fascinate me when I started to be an adult in my 20's, and I could experience a new scent art form... namely the colognes of the day that I could put on and be enveloped and almost overwhelmed with. This was a great experience to feel. I was mostly appreciative of an early scent, Grey Flannel. I loved how it was very "Orchestral" and multi-dimensional, and it very much related to Time, almost as a performance. I loved to experience Grey Flannel with its facets that seemed to change with different wearings, and it also changed over time. I learned that a fragrance could indeed be Symphonic in scope. This was a real revelation and experience for me in my tender 20's.

We moved away from the Beach, where I was used to going into the garage and making art in the temperate environment there. We bought a house inland, halfway between Los Angeles and the Beach, and the hot desert of Palm Springs. This meant that it was extremely hot in the summer in the garage, and would freeze at night in the winter. So this weather extreme drove me inside for artistic expression. It was then that I started to explore the path of Perfumery, looking for a way to

create a scent for myself that I not only liked (as opposed to so much of the mass market Men's fragrances at the time that were hideous) and also I have some allergies to materials, so I wanted to wear what didn't give me headaches. I also have a strong distaste for the overabundance of Vanillic scents in the American culture of fragrance and flavors. So I had set for myself a task, and set about solving the issues related to the problem.

It was January 2005 when we moved and I started shortly thereafter exploring fragrance composition. As I grew in acquisition of materials, skills, knowledge, and all other things pertinent to the Art of Perfumery, I kept up my regular job, and studied, studied, and studied. I'd been looking for an Artistic pursuit that didn't matter where I lived, and Perfumery really fit the bill, and fit me and my talents, persona, and contemplative spirit.



(<https://perfumepolytechnic.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/smlpaul-sniffing-brugmansia-hires.jpg>).

Paul Kiler of PK Perfumes

3. Do you have any formal training in perfumery, or are you self-taught? Have there been any mentors or other personal or cultural influences on your work as a perfumer?

I am completely Self Taught, and have been almost completely self-taught in many of the Artistic disciplines that I've worked in. I've chosen to occupy the boundless territory that lies beyond the convention of College degrees and external cultural validation of a set of informational and educational constructs. Many of my different resumes have this across the top:

"All men who have turned out worth anything have had the chief hand in their own education."

Sir Walter Scott

Cultural influences/influencers/Mentors have been several communities of fellow learning Perfumers found in Internet discussion groups facilitated by the major search engines. It is here that I started as a know-nothing plebe, and now years later, I moderate for the largest of these groups, which has 2,200 Perfumer members worldwide.

4. Who are your favourite perfumers or perfume houses, and what do you like about their work?

My favorite Perfume Houses are Frederic Malle and Zoologist. These are my favorites because they are driven by visionary people who help direct and curate and free the Perfumers to create works of Olfactory Art that exist well outside the mass market drivel produced for the world.

My favorite Perfumers? Ernest Beaux, Henri Robert, and Dominique Ropion. The first two perfumers are old-school and worked with many naturals in their perfumes (as I also choose to do so when composing perfumes). I really admire Dominique Ropion, who composed Frederic Malle's Carnal Flower, which is a stunning tuberose. He also composed many more fragrances for the Frederic Malle line as well.

5. Describe your brand to us: tell us about the kind(s) of perfume that you make, as well as your brand's philosophy or ethos.

My tagline is: Handmade Artisanal and Real Perfumes For All – Complex, Enigmatic, and Luxurious.

My great hope is to make perfumes of great grace and beauty that people can experience the best of their lives in, and if possible, help them even to amplify their experience of life and loves...

6. How do you come up with the idea for a new perfume? For example, do ideas come to you spontaneously, do you work conceptually, or do you try to fill gaps in your range?

Artistic inspiration comes from so many sources, maybe a place, an abstract idea, a romance, a flower, or a really great material. Starting with the idea, then thinking about what else compliments and reinforces the concept. Sometimes surprises walk in and tear it apart, sending it in an unexpected direction, or can work out so very nicely. I think in this part of creation, that I am more experiential than theoretical. Success can come quickly sometimes, or with many months or years of trying to make your vision a reality. Perfumery is very contemplative, and also then, much patience is often required.



(<https://perfumepolytechnic.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/smlbottles-banner-hi-res.jpg>).

PK Perfumes – some of the range

7. What element of your perfume making process do you think readers of this blog would be interested or surprised to learn about?

PLAY: The concept of “Play” is extremely important for me. Giving myself the freedom to play and seek, and find and fail are all so important to this Art form. “Play” allows for dynamics of interesting juxtapositions and contrast to happen without predictions of results, and this happy play can have astounding results and consequences.

COLOR and FEELING: If I am trying to illustrate a color in a perfume or trying to emulate a feeling, these can be very different or difficult, and require much thought, and trial and error to encapsulate in a perfume, because these things work on our own learned experiences and associations with scent, and can be extremely personal. This is a difficulty in the Art of Perfumery.

8. What are the current challenges you face as a perfumer, both creatively and in regard to manufacturing, distributing and marketing your perfume?

SCALE: Manufacturing, distributing and marketing are all challenging and engage all your capabilities and vulnerabilities regardless of the scale of your business or how you make perfume. Both larger scale and smaller scale production generate their own issues to work through, and when moving upscale there are translational issues that need hard work to make the scent work in a larger scale as well as it did in the smaller scale.

REGULATIONS: The current IFRA recommendations (<http://www.ifraorg.org/>) and EU regulations (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/07/07/us-perfume-regulation-insight-idUSKBN0FC0EB20140707>) are throttling the entire Perfume Industry and is making the creation of REAL Perfumes extremely difficult, almost to the point of impossibility. I define REAL PERFUMES as the classic style that existed pre-regulations, where one combines the best naturals with the best aromatic materials to create and design the best possible perfumes. As it stands now, the usage of Naturals is being extremely curtailed almost to the point of it being pointless for them to even exist, as well as all of the occupations that go into the making of these naturals too... THIS IS AN INTERNATIONAL TRAVESTY. I can't speak out ENOUGH in protest of this regulational idiocy, and destruction of our worldwide Perfume Heritage and culture, and the destruction of the Jobs of poor farmers and workers around the world.

9. How has your work as a perfumer affected your perception of everyday smells?

My new Artistic Profession has heightened my analytical capability to dissect smells that I perceive into their individual molecular constituents. This has seemed so far to be more amusing to me than an annoyance. It also helps me to tear apart the odors experienced in flavors too.



(<https://perfumepolytechnic.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/smlforest-bottle-shot-hi-res.jpg>).

Ere by Paul Kiler for PK Perfumes

10. Many ingredients that are edible are also used in fragrance (chocolate, vanilla, coffee and rose, to name a few). If you could reverse this process and turn *any* perfume ingredient into an edible ingredient, what would that be? Which fragrance ingredient do you think would *taste* nice as a flavour?

I think that Labdanum resin would make a really great flavor, and would be on the top of my list... It has a really warm, ambery long-lasting wonderful odor profile. It would make some lovely desserts I think...

11. If you had a time machine, which historical period in perfumery would you like to go back to and work in as a perfumer?

There's no time like the Present. The current day is by far my choice, without question.

12. If you could invent a new olfactory gadget, tool or technology, what would it be and how would it benefit perfumers and/or society?

To benefit Perfumers, or at least something that **I REALLY** want, is a pocket headspace GC-MS analyser, capable of telling you the molecular makeup and constituents of whatever you are smelling at that moment, or of a particular item or flower...

To benefit the rest of the world: the same thing, as it would allow much more natural smelling fragrances to mimic the natural world better.

13. What is the purpose of perfume?

Freedom – the freedom to help us experience great Grace and Love in our every moment, if we choose to enjoy it. And still retain the freedom to choose not to wear Perfume and instead experience the place that we presently occupy, and the scents of the people around us.

Thanks for allowing me to explore these thoughts with all of you here,

Fragrantly Yours,

Paul Kiler

PK Perfumes

I hope you've enjoyed the fourth instalment of Perfume Polytechnic's Perfumer Interview Series with Paul Kiler of PK Perfumes. I want to thank Paul very much for his passionate and interesting answers! If you'd like to find out more about PK Perfumes and Paul Kiler's range of fragrances, visit the [PK Perfumes Website \(http://pkperfumes.com/\)](http://pkperfumes.com/). You can also find PK Perfumes listed on [Fragrantica \(http://www.fragrantica.com/designers/PK-Perfumes.html\)](http://www.fragrantica.com/designers/PK-Perfumes.html).

Last week Angelo Orazio Pregoni of O'Driù answered the thirteen questions. You can read his very unconventional interview [here](https://perfumepolytechnic.wordpress.com/2015/02/20/thirteen-thoughts-perfumer-interview-series-angelo-orazio-pregoni-of-odriu/)

(<https://perfumepolytechnic.wordpress.com/2015/02/20/thirteen-thoughts-perfumer-interview-series-angelo-orazio-pregoni-of-odriu/>)! If you'd like to catch up with week 2's interview with Mark Evans of Evocative Perfumes, [click here](https://perfumepolytechnic.wordpress.com/2015/02/12/thirteen-thoughts-perfumer-interview-series-mark-evans-of-evocative-perfumes/)

(<https://perfumepolytechnic.wordpress.com/2015/02/12/thirteen-thoughts-perfumer-interview-series-mark-evans-of-evocative-perfumes/>). Emma Leah of Fleurance was interviewed

in week 1 of *Thirteen Thoughts*. To read Emma's interview, [click here](https://perfumepolytechnic.wordpress.com/2015/02/06/thirteen-thoughts-perfumer-interview-series-emma-leah-of-fleurage-perfume-atelier/) (<https://perfumepolytechnic.wordpress.com/2015/02/06/thirteen-thoughts-perfumer-interview-series-emma-leah-of-fleurage-perfume-atelier/>).

NEXT WEEK'S *Thirteen Thoughts: Perfumer Interview Series* will feature Sarah McCartney of 4160Tuesdays. Make sure you visit Perfume Polytechnic again this time next week to find out how Sarah answers the same thirteen questions!

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