

OCUDA



"Fashion has really brought me back to the table and out of myself, again [...] it is definitely my comfort zone, and I feel that I am an actor for their pieces—for a simple girl who's almost dumb, that fits the bill pretty well!"

SELMA BLAIR

Photographed by RYAN PFLUGER, wearing PRADA



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No. 27 Walk My Way

Jacques Cavallier-Belletrud

In conversation with CAROLINA BENJUMEA

It's 1PM. The sky occasionally shows a glimpse of the sun, and the cool air of a chilly summer day is perfect for a light jacket. We're on the rooftop of the headquarters of Louis Vuitton, with a view of the Sacré-Cœur and the Seine River. It cannot get more Parisian than this. As journalists and friends of the house enter the building, we perceive the first Louis Vuitton men's fragrance under the creative direction of Pharrell Williams, and conceived by Jacques Cavallier-Belletrud, Master Perfumer at Louis Vuitton. Inspired by light and sun, the scent aims to be an extract of energy. With a long tradition of perfumers dating back four generations, Jacques Cavallier-Belletrud has created some of the most iconic perfumes for various fashion houses and is the 'nez' of Louis Vuitton. A native of Grasse, the French Riviera, the world's capital of perfume, he grew up surrounded by the romantic scenery of beautiful roses and the scent of delicate jasmine flowers. Jacques rubs noses with the finest materials and exquisite scents at his atelier in Grasse, where natural beauty and luxe flourish at every corner.

CAROLINA BENJUMEA. I would like to understand more about the concept of the fragrance. How do you turn sunlight into a scent? Is it a literal idea or more of an abstract concept?

JACQUES CAVALLIER-BELLETRUD. It started just as an inspiration, and where does inspiration come from? It comes from a smile, from somebody's eyes, and from an ingredient. It comes from an experience; like Pacific Chill, the fragrance we created last year in Los Angeles. So, it always comes from something that produces emotions to me. I start [making a scent] and then if the perfume is quite good and interesting, we develop a concept around it. In this case, it was a bit special because Pharrell was the starter for the inspiration. The inspiration can come after a discussion, a show, or after a good meal. Inspiration can start with many, many things. For example, next weekend I want to have a special perfume because I am going for dinner with friends. So, I will probably associate amber with lavender.

C.B. Oh, how nice!

J.C.B. Yes, the association of two ingredients is the beginning of something. I then check the results if somebody says, "You smell so good, Jacques!"

C.B. Who had the initial idea of the sunlight? Was it you or Pharrell?

J.C.B. It was more Pharrell. We were discussing the project of creating

a perfume and we were discussing in general what was important. I said, "Well, your show was fantastic," and he said, "the concept was really about what is important for me today—light. What light is bringing on earth, on people." Then we spoke about photosynthesis, and he mentioned that he loved green notes. C.B. That's interesting. So, Pharrell Williams comes from an artistic background; he is a musician and is now the creative director of men's collections, while you are a perfumer. What was it like to work with such different synergies?

J.C.B. He brought richness, and I tried to bring my richness and my experience. That's the perfect match. Because he's so good, curious, and respectful of people. He knows what creation is, and he knew that he had an expert with him. So it was very easy during the discussion to say, "You know, in perfume, fluidity is the freshness. Light is maybe the fresh note lasting on the skin for a very long time." So as equals, we were discussing things. It's very important to speak the same language. In creation, it's mandatory. And it's what we did. The idea of the perfume came naturally during the discussion in a very simple way.

C.B. Fashion is a fast industry. Every six months there needs to be a new collection, a new trend, a new product. But fragrance is a slower process.

J.C.B. Much slower.

C.B. Absolutely. So, what is the process of

creating a perfume from the initial idea to the final product?

J.C.B. For this one, we made it in less than one year, which is exceptional. Normally, you need a few months, even a few years, to achieve the scent, just the perfume. Once you have the perfume, you have to test it for a few months on the skin, just to check there are no problems. Then, at the same time, you have to be sure to test the compatibility of the fragrance with the pump, and with the iron of the cap, for example. Then you have to produce and ship all over the world. So it's around 14 months, minimum. In this case, it took less than a year.

C.B. Oh wow. How come?

J.C.B. Yeah, because it was Pharrell! [Laughs] The fragrance took two months, so we saved a lot of time, because when the perfume was sent to check on the skin, at the same time, they were working on the bottle, and it went very, very well and very quickly. And for the name, we knew that the name was free, as it was a name approved already.

C.B. So, you used the science of photosynthesis as the foundation to create the fragrance. Considering this, what is the effect of photosynthesis on humans?

J.C.B. Thanks to photosynthesis we can eat, we can drink, we can live. But on earth, the influence of the sun is...well, going to the beach is a kind of photosynthesis because we



JACQUES CAVALLIER-BELLETRUD
Portrait by MARC ALEXANDER SHELLY

are mixed with water and the sun, so it is kind of that.
C.B. How many trials were necessary to find the scent that best represented the sun?
J.C.B. I don't remember. I think it's... 30 trials?

[Camille Cavallier Belletrud, Daughter of Jacques, steps in to correct: "No, 10."]

J.C.B. Yes, 10! Which is not a lot...
C.B. It's not? Usually, how many trials do you do with a perfume?
J.C.B. Well, on average, it can be 30 to 100. But it depends. Sometimes it's one.

C.B. Did you think that the process of making this perfume was easy or was it a hard one?
J.C.B. Easy, very easy. Because it's very simple to work with geniuses. They are making your life very easy, respecting what you are doing. We were focused. You don't spend 10 hours in meetings to say nothing. I mean, we spent one hour, two hours, three hours, and every point was really deep and interesting.
C.B. I read once that the Eau de Cologne Impériale from Guerlain was used by Empress Eugenie to fight her migraines. I don't know if that's true or not, but I wanted to know what are the therapeutic properties

of perfumes and how can we take advantage of them? Because we use perfumes as just an accessory or a luxury product, but how can we really take advantage of their properties?
J.C.B. Well, we don't know if that is true, honestly. But does smelling your perfume make you happier? For sure! Much more comfortable too, maybe conqueror, maybe seductive. The influence of the perfume on the mood is crucial. It has meaning. Because when you are smelling your perfume and you love your perfume, you are connecting with your childhood. You're connecting with what you are deeply. It reveals a secret part of your personality. So, it's very complex and very intense at the same time. We know what is happening in the brain, because now we can measure the emotions linked to the scents and the perfumes, what that is making in your brain. Scientific people are saying that lavender is making your mood better, and quieter. That's true, but when you mix it with other ingredients, I don't know.
C.B. Do you recognize which scents make you feel better, happier, more relaxed...?
J.C.B. Of course, the ones I prefer.
C.B. Which are...?
J.C.B. I love Imagination from Louis Vuitton, Ombre Nomade, and Stellar Times. I love many. LVERS, of course, for different reasons, as a client, not as a perfumer.
C.B. When you got the first briefings and the first ideas, how did you make sure to align this fragrance to the Louis Vuitton brand, its image, its legacy, and its values? How did you make sure that it fit the right Louis Vuitton man?
J.C.B. For me, Louis Vuitton perfumery has a maximum quality in the bottle. It's a way of using mostly natural raw materials. First of all, expressing what the brand is doing in terms of communication, in terms of products, in terms of colors. It's linked to the DNA of the Maison.
C.B. When you did the presentation, you talked about a new type of masculinity. You



talked about la recherche de la sophistication, and also the feminization of men. Which of these characteristics were important to create the fragrance?

J.C.B. Yes! For me, it’s time to say things as they are. There is also a masculinization of women worldwide. But I think all the big lovers are not macho because they can cry. Like Marcello Mastroianni. I mean, they’re able to deliver true emotions.

C.B. And what do you think are the characteristics of a good men’s fragrance with these changes that we see in the conception of masculinity in general?

J.C.B. It’s delivering something that is not cheap, which seems to be sophisticated, and remarkable, with volume, but not overpowering.

C.B. For which kind of event would you use the fragrance LVERS?

J.C.B. Well, there is no specific event. But LVERS can be worn by a man in a tuxedo going to a famous party with famous people. A very sophisticated man. You can wear LVERS on a Monday when going to the office to meet with your team or with other people. You will be very sophisticated.

C.B. During the presentation you also evoked the notion of humanity in perfumes. How can we imprint this notion of humanity in the fragrance industry?

J.C.B. It’s the print of what is humanity today. Trying to capture different pieces of cultures worldwide and mix them, to put them in a bottle. For example, Peru balsam, extracted from San Salvador, has been used for a long time in Germany as an anti-coughing syrup, but for perfumes it’s fantastic. It delivers some sweet, vanilla tones. Fantastic! So, it’s part of the Mayan history that we are putting in a bottle. I believe in those kinds of signals.

C.B. That’s actually my next question. Can every flower be used to make a fragrance?

J.C.B. No. Because there are flowers that you cannot extract. So, you have to reproduce them and the reproduction is not the same thing. As an idea, why not? With

your imagination, you can compose a perfume based on the flowers that you smell, for instance, in Colombia. Like a Pittosporum from Bogota, which smells delicious, like an orange flower. That can be part of the inspiration, but it will be reproduced without the ingredients. That’s what I mean.

C.B. What is your favorite ingredient to work with?

J.C.B. I have no favorite ingredients, I love to work with roses though, but I love all flowers. Some woods, the amber notes, the spices. It’s



LVers in Paris by MARC ALEXANDER SHELLEY

not a matter of preference, it’s a matter of the way we are seeing raw materials. Making those materials is [for perfumers] what colors are for the painters.

C.B. Traveling has been at the core of Louis Vuitton since its inception, but right now you live in Grasse, surrounded by a wide variety of beautiful flowers. However, other countries such as the Netherlands and Colombia are also known for the variety and quality of their flowers. How important is it to travel and explore other materials that you cannot find in Grasse?

J.C.B. It’s very important. I was very, very sad during COVID

because we were immobile. It’s good for imagination but I love to go to Colombia, to China... I was in Singapore two or three weeks ago and in New York a week ago. Each time it’s not necessary to seek raw materials, but to go to a city like Singapore, it’s something different in terms of scents. New York is the same thing. If we go deep into China, smelling the flowers of Magnolia, it’s fantastic too. Or going to Sicily and Calabria for orange, mandarin, and bergamot citruses. It’s a fantastic experience that brings a lot of inspiration. Traveling is essential because a true creator has to be very curious, not only about this activity but about everything. If something surprises you or attracts you, you can bring it into your activity. But you need to have the eyes of a baby discovering the world.

C.B. Applying perfume became for most people an everyday activity. But how can the practice of applying perfume become a more mindful practice where we can enjoy its wellness properties?

J.C.B. So first...buy Louis Vuitton perfume! [Laughs] Second, personally, when I want to discover a perfume, I put it on this part of the hand [top of the wrist] not here [the pulse], so the perfume comes back to me. Also, when you wear the perfume you spray [without clothing] then you put on your clothes and you spray again. I spray my shoulder because people who are behind me can smell me, at the same time, I do it

so the perfume comes back to me, so I know what I’m wearing, and it makes a true difference! And that’s how you know if the perfume is for you or not. The best way is to take time to choose your perfume. The perfume is like choosing a man. I mean, it’s better to try it before, you know what I mean? I don’t want to be rude. But you need some experience, and the experience of living with a perfume, as with somebody, is to spray the perfume, and then when the perfume comes back it should surprise you. If the perfume is not surprising you, just forget it.

“It’s very important to speak the same language. In creation, it’s mandatory. And it’s what we did. The idea of the perfume came naturally during the discussion in a very simple way.” – Jacques Cavallier-Belletrud



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