

CALERA

WINE OFFERING WINTER 2004-2005

ATTACK OF THE PERFUME / COLOGNE WEARERS

By Josh Jensen

How many times have you had the uncomfortable experience of sitting down to, and looking forward to, a wonderful, brilliantly prepared meal only to realize that the person next to you has lathered up specially for the occasion with huge amounts of smelly perfume, cheap cologne or toxic after shave chemicals? Not many, you say? Or even none?

Then you're luckier by far than I.

Over the years I've had quite a few meals, and even more wine tastings, marred or completely wrecked by people who haven't figured out that simple, untreated, freshly washed human skin is just fine by itself because it has an unobtrusive, naturally pleasant, subtle aroma. Our bodies certainly don't need, and in my opinion don't benefit from, the application of fake smells from perfumes, scented deodorants, scented hand lotions, overpowering body lotions, and obnoxious hair lotions, gels and sprays.



Overly smelly beauty (?) aids such as these are a historical legacy left over from the middle ages and the renaissance up through the Victorian era, periods when people didn't have time to wash their bodies frequently enough. And they didn't have dry cleaning back then, so rich folks tried to cover up the bad smells in their clothes with perfume. To

go back even further into ancient history, to the good old days of the Roman Empire, bad body smells weren't a problem, at least among the upper classes, because frequent bathing was absolutely central to Roman civilization. Large scale public baths were as much a feature of Roman life as malls are of American life today. But enough of the history lesson.

It is my contention that, as long as one has washed fairly recently with soap and water, one "smells" just fine, using that verb in both its intransitive and transitive meanings. One can "smell" fine in the sense that others find your aromatics to be pleasant, or at least inoffensive. One can also, given a proper but not necessarily rigorous soap-and-water regime, "smell" the things around you. Such smells can be the nostalgic aroma of wet earth after a rain, or the several varieties of wild sage that grow in profusion all around our winery, or fresh road tar and asphalt when you're going over or near a newly resurfaced road, or cigarette smoke as you enter or leave a big city building now that people aren't allowed to smoke inside but instead are forced to loiter around just outside the entrances, creating a gamut the rest of us have to run on the way in and out.

Using our sense of smell to help in detecting the presence or absence of dangerous creatures or features in our immediate surroundings was in fact an important survival tool that evolved, for those among us who believe in evolution, to help our species survive. In earlier eras that meant being able to smell approaching bears, lions or saber-toothed tigers, and also forest fires or the campfires of enemy tribes. Today we use it mostly to detect approaching life insurance salesmen, or tax collectors.

In our modern world it can also be highly enjoyable to be able to smell, in addition to wet earth and sage growing wild in the countryside, the things we are about to eat when we sit down to a meal: fresh toast, and garlic, and soups, and meats just off the mesquite grill, fancy sauces, the tang of vinegar and herbs in a freshly tossed salad, and -- you knew this was coming -- wines.

Our sense of smell is a major component in our ability to taste, as we all know intuitively. When you have a head cold and your nose is congested, you can't smell things, obviously, but you can't really taste them properly, either. Food doesn't have much flavor when we're sick with that kind of cold. It doesn't taste "right," i.e., the way it usually tastes. That's because you don't have that sense of smell to "guide" your taste buds.

Let me point out that the issue of whether or not to abuse your body by applying aromatic substances is an olfactory, not a gender, issue. Scientific research shows that 51% of documented instances of aromatic substance abuse are committed by women, and 49% by men. Statically, it's a dead heat, and neither side can claim to have any sort of mandate to continue this abuse.

Lest you think that I am the only person who feels strongly that people shouldn't indulge in fake aromatics abuse, or -- heaven forbid! -- that I am somehow staking out an extreme position in this "aromas" corner of the larger culture wars, I'll share an experience I had a few years ago. This is a true story, I swear!

One day I was peacefully swimming laps in an enormous Olympic pool in San Francisco when the woman swimming in the lane next to me challenged me -- me, Josh Jensen! -- wanting to know if I'd put on cologne or something because it was making her sick. We were swimming! In a pool that contained about a million gallons of heavily chlorinated water! Godfrey Daniels!!

I told her no, that I hadn't used cologne or after-shave or heavily scented products in about 20 years, and the only thing I had put on my skin was some unscented deodorant about 10 hours before. She said she didn't really believe me, I must have put on some strong smelling chemical or other. No, I steadfastly assured her, nothing of the kind. She said I should be honest and own up to it, and that I'd ruined her workout. I said I'd gone into the pool to have a workout, not a debate on skincare, and that, furthermore, *she'd* wrecked *my* workout. She was nonplussed by the whole experience, and soon left. I was flummoxed by being accused of such a crime. I mean, my skincare is pure as the driven snow! I swear, some people these days are getting downright picky!

It was a lot like the recent presidential and vice-presidential debates.

SO, to get back to perfumes / colognes / after-shaves and their effects on food appreciation and wine evaluations, let me leave you with a few generally accepted rules.

I. If you're going out to a nice dinner at someone's house or an elegant restaurant, or if you're hosting one yourself, take a pass on the man-made aromatic substances. That way you'll be able to fully appreciate the aromas of the dinner, and the WINES. Most restaurants have a strict no-scents policy for their wait-staff, for this very reason. Oh, and

don't put over-the-top aromatic flowers on the table as a centerpiece. If you have been a heavy user of artificially aromatic (should-be-banned) substances for many years and lack the courage, or the motivation, to go cold turkey, try applying 1 or 2 molecules of perfume when getting ready for your big night out (instructions below).

2. If you are going to a wine tasting, or visiting a winery, even 1 molecule of perfume is too much. If you land a job in a winery, apply no more than half a molecule of cologne or perfume per day. It's funny, on the very rare occasions that we hire someone new here at Calera, they always seem to douse themselves (or maybe they have someone else do it for them?) head to foot with artificial smells for their first day on the job, and they show up just reeking. The rest of us practically pass out as soon as he or she walks onto the property, and we have to open all the windows no matter how nasty it is outside. Someone then gets delegated to inform the new hire, as diplomatically as possible, and with all available tact, that they can't EVER do that again, not ONE SINGLE TIME, or they'll get FIRED.

3. If you're going to someone's house for a nice dinner and you don't realize until you've already arrived that you inadvertently doused yourself with cologne or perfume and you're a walking example of olfactory overload, just ask your hostess if it would be o.k. if you ate out in the back yard. Make up some little excuse, such as that you have a bad cold and you don't want to give it to anyone else. Or tell her you love the outdoors and you just feel the need to commune with nature.

4. Here is the scientific method for applying 1 molecule of perfume (if required by law or local customs): Take an ordinary sewing needle and dip the point into your favorite perfume. Then take the needle out and shake it to remove the excess moisture. Then wave it a bit more in the air to evaporate as much more of the moisture as is possible. Then gently touch the point of the needle to the back of one of your ear lobes, always the recommended location. If the law requires a minimum to 2 molecules, then repeat the steps above, and apply the point of the sewing needle to the back to the other ear lobe. If local customs require 10 molecules -- a fairly heavy dose, in my opinion -- that can be achieved by inserting the needle precisely a quarter inch into each ear lobe. This is not entirely without pain, obviously, but it will allow you to venture forth into the night secure in the knowledge that you are wearing perfume. Or cologne.