

Scents By

THE SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS



anding



Bringing scent into the marketing mix is a natural extension for hotels that have given careful consideration to appealing to our other senses. As they've fine-tuned their architecture and spiffed their interior design, upped their thread counts and padded their beds, retooled their menus, and remixed the music that accompanies these stage sets, they have discovered that scent also evokes a brand personality that is sure to be remembered.

[JOANN GRECO]

Ahhh! Take a deep breath. Summer is in the air—maybe it's newly blooming June roses, or coconut tanning lotion or simply the distinct but hard-to-describe waft of the summer wind. Whatever it is, we know what “summer” smells like. When we sniff, we inhale a noseful of associations, just like the Proustian protagonist who was swept back to remember things past after an encounter with a lemony Madeleine.

Nice or nauseating, sweet or stinky, smells send us. According to Scent Air, a North Carolina-based scent developer, smell is the closest sense linked to memory. People recall scents with 64 percent accuracy after a year—compared to visual recall which sinks to about 50 percent accuracy after just three months. Research also shows that scent-triggered memories feel stronger, more “real”—especially if they are distinct and if you smell them rarely. That's because the same part of the brain processes both aromas and memories.

As everyone from Hilton to Hyatt, Ritz Carlton to W has gotten a whiff of that power, Scent Air and other companies like

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it have recently added a slew of hospitality clients to their rosters. These hotels are following their noses, and their retail and restaurateur brethren, into a burgeoning field known as scent branding. Scent branding is, simply, enhancing a brand's image through the use of a customized scent, one that consumers will remember pleasantly (whether or not they even notice it) and associate with the brand.

"Westin created a signature White Tea scent for use in public areas in support of its strategy to foster truly memorable experiences for guests and to become a lifestyle brand," says Lelia Siman, a spokesperson for the Starwood brand and a client of Scent Air. "This scent evokes the brand

The Nose Knows

Scents used in public spaces need to be non-offensive, hypoallergenic, and gender-neutral, experts say. In fact, hoteliers— notably those in Las Vegas—have experimented with scent before, but it was often used as a masking agent (remember smoky casinos) and too often wound up turning off guests with its heavy-handed sweetness. Gradually hotels in Vegas learned that aroma has to be subtle, and studies today have found that gambling rates increase by up to 45 percent when players are exposed to pleasant aromas. And even though scent is considered our most personal and subjective sense, certain aromas are thought of as almost universal-

ly pleasant: nutmeg and lavender, for example, are proven relaxants, while citrus and peppermint are stimulants.

"When a guest walks through our doors, we are given an opportunity to make a high impact on their first impression of the hotel," says Siman. Controlled use of scent can further create a desirable and inviting atmosphere. Lobby scents, like those used in retail, are typically dispersed using rented machines (at about \$100 each per

month) placed over doorways and in ventilation systems.

It works, observers say. "People don't walk in and say 'oooh, what's that smell?' but they do inhale, pause, and then most likely walk over to the floral displays," laughs Caryn Kbouti, a spokesperson for Omni. "And when we added a mochachino scent machine near our lobby coffee shops, sales went up by as much as a third," she adds. "You can't smell coffee as

much as you might think because it's vacuum-packed (yes, Starbucks often uses scent machines!), and we wanted to have the wonderful scent that you might have at home when you're getting ready in the morning. It just adds a little touch of indulgence, a moment of pleasure to the guest experience."

The Omni's custom lobby scent—created for them about two years ago by Scent Air—centers on lemongrass. "It's not perfumey, it works for both men and women, it's refreshing and revitalizing. It was ideal for us," Kbouti says. Initially, the chain had wanted to work hibiscus—its logo—but found that the scent wasn't right. Omni also abandons its signature scent occasionally, such as during the Christmas season when it switched to a cinnamon and nutmeg scent.

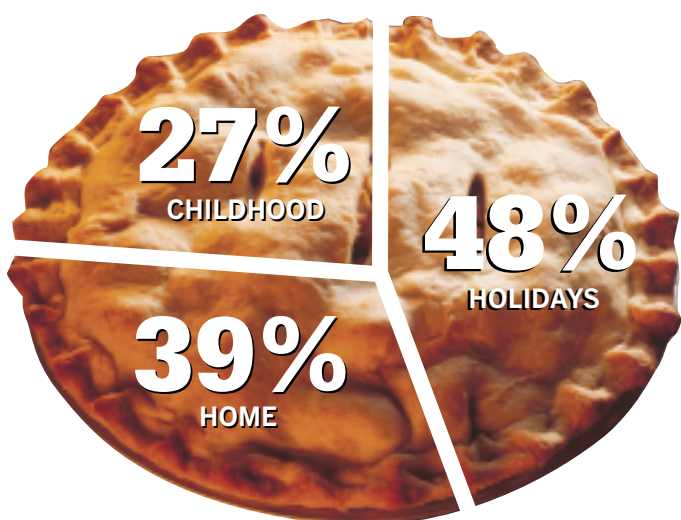
Making Scents of the Seasons

At InterContinental's new boutique brand, Indigo, sensory marketing is all about seasonality, says Gayle Jett, director of brand management for the line, which includes just eight properties. "Our promise to our guests is that we are a refreshing alternative—that they won't find dull beige box hotels," she says. "And part of that is a strategy of seasonal renewal: changing the scents, as well as the sights and sounds. We want to direct an appeal at the guest's five senses, so each season we change our lobby accents—through murals and props—and we change our music, menu, and scents." In the fall, a spiced apple aroma permeated the air at lobbies from Atlanta to Chicago; in the winter, the delectable smell of chocolate wafted from Ottawa to Scottsdale. Scents are chosen for two reasons, says Jett. "They need to be in tune with the season, but more importantly, they also need to take you back to a memory that you associate with good friends, good times—home." Jett says that Indigo talked with customers to help identify memories, but also drew inspiration from retailers like William Sonoma and Yankee Candle.

Starwood Hotels' W brand also changes its scent seasonally: in 2006, it was "fresh-

AROMA OF BAKED APPLE PIE

Here's what most people think of...



SOURCE: PIE COUNCIL OF AMERICA

personality of Westin: it is refreshing and sophisticated," she adds. Featuring top notes of geranium and freesia, and undertones of woods and musk, White Tea is the result of almost a year of research and testing. So much does Westin want the scent to become linked with the brand that it recently featured scent strips imbued with "White Tea" in its "This is How it Should Feel" print campaign—the first such instance in the business.

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cut grass” for Spring, “guava” (tart and citrusy) as the weather warmed, “coman” (chocolatey and spicy) in the Fall, and “wish” (plums and berries) in the Winter. Its Sheraton line features “Welcoming Warmth,” a blend of fig, bergamot, jasmine, and freesia, in all lobbies. At its Four Points properties, though, every day is apple pie day, a scent chosen because according to surveys conducted by Four Points partner, the Pie Council of America, it spurs thoughts of childhood (27%), home (39%) and holidays (48%).

Smelling Like A Rose

More luxurious brands, however, follow the scent trail still more closely, creating specific aromas for specific hotels. They are often likelier to work with upscale perfumeries in crafting these custom blends. Park Hyatt, for example, first turned to Parisian Blaise Mautin to create a scent for the toiletries in its property near the Place Vendome. Today the sensual fragrance of patchouli blended with aromas reminiscent of Russian leather and Florida oranges is found throughout the tony property. In the recently opened Park Hyatt Milan, the toiletries in the guest rooms include shower gel, balsam, a body lotion, shampoo and vegetable soap, which are prepared and packaged by an Italian fragrance house, Laura Tonatto. For its Chicago property, Park Hyatt turned to not a designer but a writer—Chandler Burr, who has made a name for himself as *The New York Times*’ first ever perfume critic. Burr’s urbane blend is a peppery mix that also contains hints of

smoky Lapsang Souchong tea—an attempt, he says, to capture the “absolute modernity” of the City of the Big Shoulders.

In London, the legendary Dorchester turned to a homegrown institution, the perfume house of Miller Harris, founded in 2000 as Britain’s first bespoke fragrance maker, for its clean fruity scent. New York’s Carlyle Hotel also uses a Harris scent, a woodsy blend inspired by Central Park, as do Fairmont Hotels and Resorts. In a novel twist, the luxury chain has fashioned two distinct Harris blends: one for city center guests (“Citron Citron,” an international and refreshing-sounding mix of Sicilian lemon, Spanish orange and Jamaican lime) and one for resort guests (“Fleur du Matin,” a bouquet of honeysuckle, jasmine, and neroli). So far, these scents are available only in toiletry form.

For its luxury boutique line, Hilton has diverged from its Crabtree & Evelyn products (which are, incidentally, customized for the chain). At the Conrad Tokyo, for example, two scents—Tres Vert (with green tea top notes) and Tres Noir (a richer, more sophisticated scent)—were developed by a perfumer from Shiseido, the Japanese cosmetics maker, also for use thus far only in toiletries.

Taking Scent Further

A shop on the 28th floor of the Conrad Tokyo sells a set of full-sized shampoo, conditioner, body lotion, bath gel, and soap for about \$40. In fact, it’s become a natural extension for hotels to expand their scent marketing in this direction:

hotel spas have been selling the products they use in treatments for a decade now. So the Dorchester retails its scent in \$70 candle form, packaging the black wax candle in a jar imprinted with the hotel’s distinctive floral pattern, and W’s candles, imbued with the scents of the season, sell for \$25. Westin’s “White Tea” scent is now sold in lobby shops and online in the form of a candle, room diffuser, and potpourri. Prices range from \$25 to \$65. Often hotels are more low-key about the scent’s availability, selling full-sized toiletries or candles upon request through the concierge or housekeeping departments.

In a different twist on the sense of scents, the Park Hyatt Vendome has come full circle in its homage to the “Proustian effect” of aroma by encouraging a partnership between perfumer Mautin and pastry chef Jean-Francois Foucher. Mautin actually created the scent for Foucher’s macaroon, an exclusive little nibble that is—to quote press materials—“unique and indefinable, warm, velvety and smooth.”

Whether playing on the inextricable link of nose and tongue, or by tweaking the unbreakable bond of aroma and memory, today’s hoteliers have literally come to their senses. They’re using scents as a jumping off point for new revenue streams and branding strategies. And, they say, guests, too, are the richer for it. “We’re all just looking to give a fuller story to our brands,” says Jett of Hotel Indigo. “When we do that, we give a fuller experience to our guests.” ■