

by Sarah Colton



# NOTES FROM PARIS

## Nathalie Feisthauer and Marie-Aude Couture, Fine Fragrance Perfumers At Givaudan, Drafted Into Guerilla Warfare By Comme des Garçons

Guerilla 1 and Guerilla 2! Is this some battle cry in urban fashion and perfume warfare? Nope. Comme des Garçons is taking us on a rollercoaster ride into unexplored new territory for perfumes, so you'd better fasten your seatbelts for this one. How could it be otherwise,



Givaudan Fine Fragrance Senior Perfumer Nathalie Feisthauer at work

Givaudan Fine Fragrance Perfumer Marie-Aude Couture in her Paris office



you might ask, after its Sweet Series and its Série 6 Synthetic? What could be more appropriate for the Guerilla boutiques, those crazy (and successful!) concept boutiques with a shelf-life about as long as the merchandise

they sell? (Guerilla boutiques are designed to be open for a year, and occupy spaces converted from butcher shops, noodle stores—whatever. They have popped up around the world in unlikely neighborhoods ranging from Brooklyn, to Berlin, to Buenos Aires.) And now, Guerilla perfumes?

*Beauty Fashion* went to Givaudan in Paris and talked to the two Perfumers involved, **Marie-Aude Couture**, who designed Guerilla 1, and **Nathalie Feisthauer**, Guerilla 2. They told similar stories of the heady and invigorating freedom ride they took with **Christian Astuguevieille**, Creative Director of Comme des Garçons Parfum. It's wild and it's crazy—and completely unique.

**Beauty Fashion:** I've been hearing amazing things about the way Guerilla 1 and Guerilla 2 got started. Are they true?

**Marie-Aude Couture:** Absolutely. It was total, pure freedom. The idea was to make fragrances for nomad boutiques. Nomad boutiques are already in this freedom concept, so Comme des Garçons wanted a fragrance based on freedom in terms of creation and interpretation. That's all the information we had to start with.

**Nathalie Feisthauer:** When Christian first presented me with the fragrance brief, he told me it was for Comme des Garçons nomad boutiques. From this, all I knew the boutique could be anywhere—from a former bookstore in the historic Mitte district in Berlin, to a building in the back of a parking lot in Buenos Aires. It could even be a former butcher shop. Just about anything. My concept was on a theme of war. Violence. Do color, he said. It needed to be something in that theme.

**BF:** From what I understand about perfume briefs, usually they give you much more direction and more constraints.

**MC:** Exactly. Most briefs these days contain lots of details, many under the marketing umbrella. They include things about the targeted consumer group the fragrance should be designed for, the season it will be launched, the name of the star who will be representing it . . . all sorts of things. That was not the case at all with Guerilla. We had nothing. You find it yourself. [She laughs.] Comme des Garçons fragrances are developed under the freedom banner.

**NF:** I've done two other fragrances with Comme des Garçons, and it's always something that is totally different from the classic market. You have to realize that when people present us with briefs, they often tell us to 'think outside



the box.' The big difference between Christian and just about all the others is that Christian really means it. Comme des Garçons is a rare client in that way.

**BF:** How did you go about coming up with your fragrance proposal?

**MC:** I wanted to be provocative because Comme des Garçons is an unusual and provocative brand. In recounting the history of nomad boutiques, Christian told me that one of them was set up in a former butcher shop. OK, I thought. Now I have a starting point. Get inspired by a butcher shop. Let's see: neon lights, metal hooks, meat, the smell of blood.

I started on a primary sketch, which I called 'Delicatessen.' Have you seen that movie? It's very weird. Rather than being provocative, I decided that my fragrance should be weird like that movie. From there, I began thinking of the smell of the butcher's uniform. It's actually very clean, bleached cotton. And then there's all the sawdust on the floor. To top it off, there are the tacky plastic flowers they use to decorate. So, you can see, there were many things I could be inspired by. I wanted to create such an atmosphere. And believe it or not, I was able to call upon elements from past experience for this. I have had clients who have asked me to illustrate some of those concepts. For example, I have been asked to create the fragrance of neon lights for a client who wanted to illustrate the lights of the city. Metal hooks were also something I knew about creating. Many times, clients come to us and say, "I want a metallic note" or "I don't want a metallic note." Point is, a metallic note is identifiable. Some people want it, and some don't. The meat thing was something else, though. That is particular. But if you think historically, all fragrances and even many today have animalic notes: castoreum, civet and such. They could be my 'sausage.' So, essentially, the only weird part was putting all these things together into one fragrance.

Then Christian, who liked the idea from the beginning, reminded me that there needed to be something about nature in the fragrance. He said, "I miss flowers here. The floral part is important. We want a flower. But a nasty flower." I said, "OK, I've got your nasty flower. How about a champaka flower from India?" He said that was exactly what he had been thinking, and that's how we moved from the crazy butcher shop idea towards a carnivorous flower.

**BF:** Something like a venus fly trap?

**MC:** Exactly.

**BF:** Why is champaca nasty? Does it smell bad?

**MC:** No. What we mean by nasty, I suppose, is that it is

filled with mystery. And usually flowers that smell like tuberose and orange flower are very sensuous, mysterious and dark. You couldn't get that effect with a lily of the valley, which is open and out there. With lily of the valley you get innocence, whereas tuberose and champaka are very deep, dense and toxic.

**BF:** So you wanted the fragrance to smell natural?

**MC:** It's not real nature, but rather nature the way you would imagine it. In many ways, it makes me think of fragrances from the beginning of the century because of the animalic and the aldehydic notes—the metals. It's a revival of notes that haven't often been used since then.

**NF:** My assignment was a theme of war. After my first sketch, Christian asked me for a little more violence. For this, I was inspired by the color red. For me, red is something very violent. I was also working on some synthetic notes, and Christian wanted me to put in the most chemical and the most synthetic notes possible. For this, there are endless possibilities: magic markers, fake leather, rubber. Interestingly, when you make a perfume, it's often the synthetic smell that is the 'fault' to be corrected, and we're usually eliminating the 'faults,' whereas in this case, Christian was looking for a way of expressing a 'fault.' Essentially, we were playing with 'faults.' We don't usually work this way, and it's actually very difficult to do because we don't have a palette. In five or six meetings, we worked with lots of notes that we eventually didn't use. I started out with something I called 'red,' which he liked a lot: raspberries as well as curcuma, a very strongly-colored and flavored red/orange spice. I used a lot of notes in large quantities.

**BF to MC:** Did you and Nathalie ever work together on this?

**MC:** No, we didn't. We are good friends and we know each other well, but we did not work together.

**BF:** Was this deliberate?

**MC:** Yes, as a rule, clients usually like us to keep our own methods, and follow our own instincts.

**BF:** Was Comme des Garçons planning to take two fragrances?

**NF:** No, the plan was to take only one. Ultimately though, we presented two projects; they couldn't choose between them and decided to take both. That's what's so fantastic about Comme des Garçons.

**MC:** The original plan was to have one, but since Christian liked both, he got both. There were some other proposals from Givaudan, and probably in other fragrance houses as well, but they narrowed it down to the two we did.



**BF:** What's it like working with Mr. Astuguevieille?

**NF:** Christian is an artist of many talents who works with a variety of media. He draws, does furniture, jewelry and lots of expos. With him, I am totally free in my work. He gives permission. He is one of the rare people who can put something completely different on the market. They're not going to test it. That's clear. And on top of all that, the Perfumer gets to start with a blank page each time. In many other projects, we start with something that already exists. Never, with Comme des Garçons, which has totally re-thought what perfume could be. They present olfactive stories that never existed before. The idea might be completely crazy and zany, maybe even creating a smell for something that doesn't have an odor, like a photocopying machine at the end of the day. We have to imagine. What's amazing is that by doing this 'free' thing and creating stories from bazaar starting points, we can often come up with original and quite artistic expressions.

**MC:** It's very interesting to work with Christian because he's very respectful of people's freedom. He suggests trails to follow, but you are free to explore them the way you want. He's not a dictator. It's a pleasure to work for him because it's a creative exchange. He's an artist and has his own ways of conducting the work. You get a feeling for the way he works in other fields. He's very much involved in the visual arts. He wants you to reach some expression of a concept, but he doesn't know how you're going to do it and doesn't care. At the same time, he expresses what he wants in a very specific manner. He might say, for example, "Now you need to put a big slash of red in there." What red means, how it smells, the material you use—doesn't matter. You just know that he has worked on many black and white drawings that needed a slash of red. He guides you. He's a very intelligent person, a free and independent thinker. He can be purposely provocative, and yet when you look closely at his work, it's not as provocative as it seems, but rather is a way of turning things in a different manner from the way people usually do.

**BF:** Do you believe this kind of thinking has an influence on mainstream perfumes perhaps the same way 'Off-Broadway' has influence on mainstream theatre?

**NF:** Yes. For example, Comme des Garçons started making 'series' fragrances, and it used to be that only they did them. Now, other brands are doing the same.

**MC:** Definitely yes. Comme des Garçons products have become benchmarks of creativity in the industry, and are carefully observed by other houses. Some of our clients even allude to them in their briefs.

**BF:** How will the fragrances be marketed?

**NF:** It's a very original system of a bottle and lots of little bottles. The box is very wide and flat and there will be one real bottle inside and the rest will be fake. It's something like a toy, with little soldiers.

**BF:** And the two fragrances will be presented like that?

**NF:** No. One will be red and black and the other will be the reverse.

**BF:** When and where will they be launched in France?

**NF and MC:** Those fragrances will only be sold in Comme des Garçons nomad stores.

**BF:** When you do a brief like this, is it like one in a hundred?

**NF:** One in a thousand.

**MC:** Once in a lifetime!

Ms. Feisthauer, Senior Perfumer, and Ms. Couture, Perfumer, are graduates of Givaudan's perfume school and work in the Fine Fragrance division of Givaudan's Paris office. Other fragrance creations to their credit are the following:

### **Nathalie Feisthauer:**

Guerilla 2 (Comme des Garçons); May 2006  
Sticky Cake (Comme des Garçons Sweet Series); 2005  
Yohji Yamamoto pour Femme (Yohji Yamamoto); 2004  
Tar & Soda (Comme des Garçons Série 6 Synthetic); 2004  
L'eau Des Merveilles (with **Ralf Schwieger**) (Hermès); 2004  
Orange Tonic (Azzaro); 2002  
Must for Men (Cartier); 2000  
Must Pour Homme (Cartier); 2000  
Naj Oleari Touch (La Perla); 1999  
Diesel Milk (Diesel); 1997  
Zut (Schiapparelli); 1997  
Yellow Jeans (Versace); 1996  
Blonde (Versace); 1995  
Eau Belle (Azzaro); 1995  
Havana (Aramis); 1994  
Nuits Indiennes (Jean-Louis Scherrer); 1994  
Elysium (Clarins); 1994  
Must Eau de Toilette (Cartier); 1981

### **Marie-Aude Couture:**

Guerilla 1 (Comme des Garçons); 2006  
S de Scherrer (Scherrer); 2006  
Nomad Tea (Comme des Garçons Sweet Series); 2005  
Eau d'Amazonie (Pierre Balmain); 2005  
Jacomino for Her (Jacomino); 2005  
Garage (Comme des Garçons Série 6 Synthetic); 2004  
Hoggar (Yves Rocher); 2004  
Extreme for Men (with **Olivier Pescheux**) (Paul Smith); 2002  
Bleu Marine pour Elle (Pierre Cardin); 2001

**BF**