

Interview Kate Orne
Photography Carlton Davis

LOOKING FOR DROPS OF DESIRE

In a highly competitive field, to create something new demands a deep desire to neither emulate nor imitate: Christopher Draghi and Robert Dobay, the creators behind Source Adage, possess that desire. Together they create distinct fragrances inspired by unspoiled landscapes and environments, transporting us to places we yearn for...



Christopher Draghi



Kate Orne *Is there a scent from your respective childhoods that triggers memories?*

Robert Dobay Mine is quite ordinary. I was 5 or 6 years old and feeling sick, Mom made an old-folks remedy of rose petal syrup. That scent of roses filled the room, I thought it was something magical — something I knew existed in her rose bed but now but could now smell inside. Since that day, as I spent summers with my grandmother in Hungary, I tried to experiment with boiling down herbs from her garden and attempting, in my own childish way, to release their scent and essences. I think this was the first step that really guided me towards the love of different fragrances. The rose beds, the verbenas and geraniums and all those lovely old-fashioned plants — yeah, it made a huge impact on me.

KO *Beautiful ... And you, Chris, what's yours?*

Christopher Draghi There are certain scents... my father, a lawyer, used to cook a lot so many of my memories have to do with the culinary scents. And there is also the smell from his library, the smell of books, the musty paper and the leather upholstered furniture... Those are definitely strong memories for me. I was also spending a lot of time in the woods, hiking, and with the animals — the way you get smells from nature. And in the gardens at our house, the different vegetables and fragrant tomato leaves... we're both drawn to the scents of wood, spice and earthy smells.

KO *You launched 6 years ago, how did you learn to create fragrances?*

CD I studied industrial design to become an automobile designer. I'm also a painter and photographer. Robert also comes from a creative background with interior design, graphic work and topography. So, for us, when we're creating fragrances, it's very much an extension of that same creativity. We both love cooking. Rob does more baking, and I do more savory. But you're mixing ingredients to get a final composition. You're taking ingredients that perhaps, alone, don't do much but together they make sense. Fragrance is the same. The more you smell, the more you experiment with raw ingredients and get to know them, you start to carry a lot of them in your mind. Just like someone who cooks a lot. You can compose your meal even before you put anything into a pan. Because you know what ingredients make sense and how they might react with another — fragrance is the same thing.

KO *How do you resolve creative conflicts?*

CD We both come at it with a lot of enthusiasm and excitement, whether we design a new fragrance for us — or if we are designing for a client. We go about it individually and then we share what we've done. And often will say, "Oh, I like what you did. That makes a lot of sense." Or vice versa. Or some-

times we say, "Hey, I like a little bit of this, a little bit of that." And then we work together to kind of meet in the middle or do a combination.

KO *You complement each other — fragrance after all is about creating harmony.*

RD In fact, the most successful ones are — it's like a fifty / fifty collaboration between the two of us. The other thing is, because we are both designers, we are quite methodical. When we start a new project, we always map out the source of the inspiration, the landscape, the theme, the emotions that we want to evoke. And that sort of lends to a group, a big group, of ingredients that we can decide to use or not use.

CD Yeah, and nothing is off-the-shelf, we create every fragrance from scratch. We do go that extra mile, or ten, to make sure what we create doesn't just smell good but, quality wise, can be on the shelf next to any other fragrance in the world. And because we're a niche company we are not chasing after a trend, we don't do focus groups — we really do design for us, what we want to make that fragrance be, what we want to put in the bottle.

RD And it was the same approach when we designed the store; there's very much a European influence in terms of creating a mood, to give context. Customers might not walk out with a purchase, but that's not important. They understand the fragrances, they understand the mood just by walking through the front door.

In essence, we want to transport the customers somewhere and to trigger their own experiences. We didn't want all white walls and white shelving with boxes. Instead, we pushed the boxes to the back of the store, so people can not only test the fragrances but also walk into the store and understand what we're all about.

We've had some amazing stories from people coming in, who say, "Oh my, that reminds me of ..." And it has nothing to do with what we were thinking, but we love it! Like the other day, a customer smelled a fragrance, one that is very smoky and dark. It's a fragrance we used to have to defend. And she smelled it and went, "Ahh... that tar smokiness ... my grandfather would tar his boat ... I was just transported back to when I was a child in Norway." And it gave me chills to hear that. Because, of course it had nothing to do with our story, but it was just as powerful. ■

Learn more at sourceadage.com

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