

Los Angeles Times

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MONDAY, JULY 5, 2004

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JENNIFER S. ALTMAN For The Times

URBAN ESSENCE: The logo of Laurice Rahme's company, Bond No. 9, is taken from an old subway token. She wants to capture the city in signature scents.

NEW YORK, N.Y.

GERALDINE BAUM

For an inspired perfumer, the city is ripe with possibility

ANYONE who has ever been pregnant in New York in the summer knows the suffering. This town gets a lot riper, like a basket of fruit left out for a weekend. The bad smells take over. It is most obvious underground on the hottest days when a keel-over odor gets trapped in a subway station that someone has decided to use as a urinal. But frankly, even in November a strong wind can carry a Proustian memory of an August day past. Which is to say the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Eau de New York is not a come-

hither perfume.

But there are 8 million aromas in the Naked City, and Laurice Rahme, a French-born businesswoman with red fingernails, would prefer to think they're all wonderful. For the last two years Rahme has been remapping New York with a scent for each neighborhood.

So far her company, Bond No. 9 New York, has created 21 scents tied to 21 New York addresses. The company logo is taken from an old subway token, and the headquarters is at 9 Bond St. downtown, in an enchanting shop filled with

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Scent of the city? Now it's Eau de Metro

[Baum, from Page E1] shapely mannequins and large decanters of the perfumes. They are poured like wine and sold either by the ounce or in 3.4-ounce bottles. They have names like Eau de Noho, Park Avenue, Chelsea Flowers, New York Fling, Broadway Nite and Madison Soiree. And someday, Rahme promises, for \$168 a bottle you'll be able to smell like the Bronx.

Actually, Rahme's mission and method is a little more sophisticated than that. After almost 25 years working in New York for French beauty companies, she decided to create her own line of scents. "I wanted them to be very metro, local — upscale, of course — products."

The Parisians have long peddled their city's cachet with perfumes such as Rive Gauche, Champs-Élysées and Chanel No. 5, named for the address where Coco created her fashion. Rahme enlisted four experienced French perfumers, all familiar with New York, to choose their favorite neighborhoods, to create a scent tailored to their people and spirit. First she offered them "notes." For a cologne geared mostly to men called "New Haarlem," she instructed the perfumer to think "black skin, Billie Holiday, coffee, sex." She rejected his first three tries because they were too sweet.

"He used too much vanilla," she said, and then spritzed a little "New Haarlem" on a testing swab for me.



Photographs by JENNIFER S. ALTMAN For The Times
A CITY DISTILLED: Rahme has created 21 fragrances tailored to 21 New York neighborhoods. She says she wanted her perfumes to be "very metro, local — upscale, of course — products."

"Doesn't it smell like jazz at the Apollo Theater on a beautiful night?"

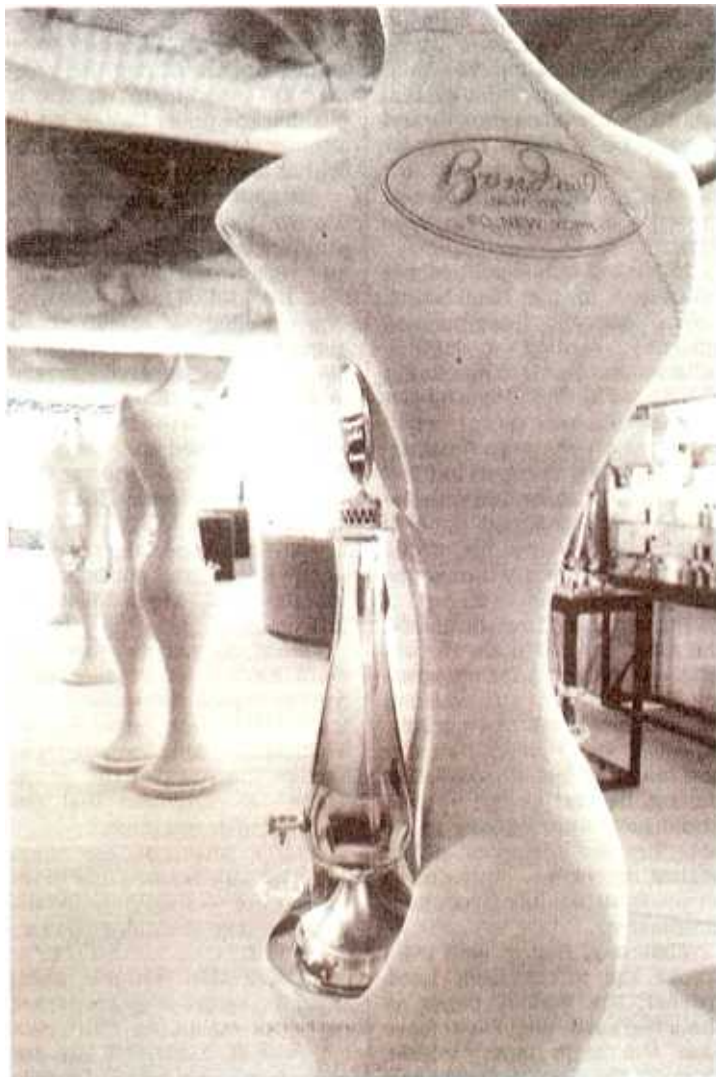
It smelled like the first floor of most department stores to me, but I got the idea. Rahme is trying to market an olfactory connection to the pleasurable, riding-high, coming-up-roses experience that some have inhabiting or visiting New York. (It is even more remarkable that this idea occurred to her in the months after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, when the air had a harsh, acidic smell that reminded us all of death.)

Rahme's gushing press releases reflect her over-the-top enthusiasm for a luxe version of this place. One reads, "From the most audacious (and several are very audacious) to the wittiest and most whimsical, the scents all convey a courage, a gustiness that captures (as in a genie's bottle) the uncompromising spirit of this grand-scale, fast-paced, hard-working, hard-living kaleidoscopic city."

Less-than-grand aromas

IT'S easy to get worn down by this kind of talk — about how invigorating and grand New York is. In fact, there's nothing more overused than "grand" to describe life here. Sure, it's grand in New York — that is, if you're a winner who can knock back a few Mojitos after dinner before being chauffeured to the Lower East Side on FDR Drive, past the glittering skyline, to some edgy, white-hot club on Ludlow Street.

It's not so grand, however, at 2 in the afternoon in 90-degree heat on the Bowery with exhaust fumes blasting at your ankles and the stench of garbage in the gutter assaulting your nose. You know you're in New York then. There is nothing "discreet" (Park Avenue) or "sparkling" (New York Fling) or "strong floral" (Madison Soiree) about it.



HIP ATTRACTIONS: *Rahme's shop, at 9 Bond St. downtown, is filled with shapely mannequins and perfume decanters.*

After I left Rahme in NoHo I decided to take my testing swab of Nouveau Bowery to the place itself. The essence of lime, basil and wild lily were combined to make this perfume, according to Rahme, for people "who don't like perfume, who are trendy and living in a neighborhood in full renaissance."

I immediately found one of those people. Adriana Sukedo is 24; she was born in Colombia, raised in Italy and educated in France; she is thin, beautiful, stylish; she is a part-time fashion designer living with her boyfriend, a full-time fashion designer, in a brand new \$4,000-a-month one-bedroom apartment in a building that replaced a flophouse. I gave her a whiff of Nouveau Bowery.

"It's real fresh," she said

sweetly. "But I have scent." She wears Stella, as in the designer Stella McCartney.

I gave a whiff to Arthur, a 70ish toothless transient whom I found sitting on a chair in front of a furniture store on the Bowery. He shook his head. "It's nice, but here, smell this," he said, leaning forward and pulling his T-shirt toward me. "This smells like the Bowery." Try bottling that.

Finally I found the doorman at Sukedo's building, Barry Murray, taking a coffee break

with his pal Daniel "Junior" Salito, a construction worker. They took a break from their break to take a whiff.

"Oooooooooohhhh, fresh and sex-y," said Murray, smiling and closing his eyes.

Junior took his time. Actually, he is a big scent man — he keeps 15 colognes on the dresser in his Queens apartment. "I like my Izzy and my Georgie," he said of his Isaac Mizrahi and Giorgio Armani brands.

He took the Nouveau Bowery testing swab from me and turned it over a couple of times, smelling each side repeatedly.

"You know," he said, pausing for another whiff, "I love it!

"It's got that very spring-into-summer feeling. You know, when you come into the city at night and it's warm out and all the ladies are wearing a little less clothing and there's a lot of action on the street, and a lot of excitement, and you know it's Saturday night and you're in the greatest city in the world. . . ."

His description was positively baroque. Junior liked Nouveau Bowery so much, in fact, that I dug through my bag for other test swabs of New Harlem and Central Park and another new scent that Rahme is debuting in the fall called Wall Street.

"Wow, that smells like money!" Junior exclaimed.

Finally I leaned over to smell what he was wearing that afternoon, but he shyly withdrew.

"I've been cutting stone since 6 o'clock this morning," he said. "I probably don't smell so good by now."

My little experiment left me thinking that Rahme may be onto something. It's not just that the place in the brain that register smells is quite close to the place that stores memories. It's also that she understands how a "grand" place like New York has a strange effect on the people who live here — even if everything in their lives isn't coming up roses.

But if you ask me, in the summertime, New York still stinks.

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