



## BEAUTY

# How Chanel's Olivier Polge Thinks About Fragrance

● Chanel's in-house perfumer creator outlines his creative process, and how it culminated in the launch of Bleu de Chanel L'Exclusif.

BY JAMES MANSO

**Olivier Polge** may be the in-house perfumer creator for one of fragrance's most historically significant brands but his creative process has had to keep up with the times.

On a trip to New York to promote Chanel's latest launch, Bleu de Chanel L'Exclusif, Polge – whose father Jacques Polge also held the same role at Chanel – said the consumer has changed, and so has his process.

"Men's perfume has become more and more interesting in terms of identity and

in terms of creation. I remember the old generation always speaking about men's perfume, that they had to be fresh or have certain traces of grooming products – but men didn't want to express a strong identity in the perfume they were wearing," Polge said in the Chanel offices. "That is becoming less and less true."

Pointing to the new juice, Polge said that in the years since the Bleu de Chanel pillar launched in 2010, "there has been a more concentrated and deeper scent. Creating perfume for Chanel is very interesting because it brings men's perfume to a level of density and preciousness that we have with women's perfumes. You have to remember, the first perfume we created was No.5 extrait de parfum."

Part of that evolution, though, means thinking beyond genders. Although Bleu de Chanel remains one of the brand's most significant products with male consumers, he thinks beyond gender, customer archetypes or consumer testing.

"I don't like to think too much about who will wear the perfume, at the end of the day," he said. "I would hate to believe you are meant to wear one perfume or another one. When we look around us, at the way we dress and the way we arrange ourselves, people are quite creative with their own personality and there is nothing better than to create a little bit of a surprise."

With that in mind, Polge is careful not to oversaturate the market with newness, "because people would get lost," he said. "These are the types of questions I ask

myself. I don't want people, if they come once a year to a Chanel store, to be lost and to have another perfume every year."

As reported, fragrance is the hottest category in prestige beauty in the U.S., clocking 6 percent gains in the first half of 2025. In recent years, appetite for men's juices has swelled, too.

Despite the size of the category for Chanel, he also believes it should remain a more creative endeavor than a commoditized one. "We [as an industry] have not been true to perfume when we say that it is so consumer-driven, so industrialized. There are so many different ways to market perfumes," he said.

"People speak a lot about niche fragrances. We have seen so many changes that show you can do whatever you want as long as you do it well. And if you don't stage things correctly, nothing sells. You can make the best movie in the world, but if you don't explain what you do or find the correct distribution system, you know it will not be true to you."

For many of Chanel's heavy hitters, they entered the market when consumers hadn't smelled anything like them before. "No.5 was born where nothing existed," Polge said. "Like Coco Mademoiselle, sometimes, we come up with a perfume and we don't exactly know what will be the success. For Bleu L'Exclusif, I am in charge of creating the scent, and also making it in the factory. We launched it at the end of August, but in June, people panicked and they asked us to double production. For us, it's new, this extrait de parfum for men. After a few weeks of sales, it seems to have found its consumer."

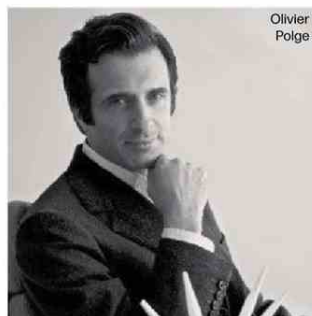
Bringing all of his creativity to each launch requires a diversified and, at times, nebulous set of references. "I have a hard time making a strong parallel between things, but what I like to believe is that I

speak more about mindset and finding inspiration in everything that surrounds you. I think creativity is very much linked to curiosity in a broader sense.

"I'd like to believe that you are as inspired by the color of this table as much as a Botticelli painting," he continued. "This being said, personally, I like music very much. I ended up in the same job as my father, and I strongly believe in my taste in music. Growing up as a teenager, when all my friends were listening to rock and pop, I ended up listening to classical music. And commonly, classical music [and fragrance] often share the same language: notes, accords and a harmony of senses. Both are also not visual."

Speaking of notes, Polge said any given fragrance has between 70 to 80 raw materials, but 10 really set the framework for the rest. Vis-à-vis Bleu de Chanel L'Exclusif, "The best angle to understand Bleu and the evolution of its interpretations is to speak about the woods," he said. Holding blotters with two raw materials – a Cedar-Leathery Accord and Santal de Maré – "I try to bring the identity somewhere else," he said. "There are certain top notes, and those that are citrusy and aromatic. But what stays in the trail that you leave behind, if you wear Bleu, is the woods."

"It's with Bleu that we found our identity with men's perfumes," Polge said. Across the portfolio, he also reiterated upon the Chance franchise with Eau Splendide earlier this year. "What we do throughout our fragrances, No.5, No.19, Coco Mademoiselle and now Bleu, is we think about a new concentration, we think about aesthetic, we think about a reinterpretation with a new facet to express. There has to be a backbone, such as a key raw material, but bringing something new."



Olivier Polge