

The Four Ways to Experience Essences and Isolates

Character

When you meet someone for the first time, you usually take away an overall impression. It's the same with essences—they make a certain general impression, shaped by their most dominant attributes. Character words tend to be broad, capturing major attributes of aroma. The character of the essence is the category that it fits into on the wheel, for instance *woody*, *floral*, or *spicy*.

Shape

Perfumers learn to smell in shapes: saffron is flat; cinnamon is pointy. Adding shape to character helps us to think imaginatively—architecturally—about how it will become part of a fragrance. Shape words are very general descriptors of an essence: *deep*, *hollow*, *flat*.

Texture

Another set of words that describe the feel or consistency of an aroma, they help define the sort of tactile characteristics that distinguish one essence from another: *bright*, *crisp*, *dry*.

Fragrance Facets

The fragrance of a given essence is determined not by one or a few dominant aroma molecules but by an entire constellation of what might be hundreds of molecules, some of them present only as traces. Becoming alert to the unique possibilities of a given essence means becoming aware of its nuances as much as its overall character. I call these nuances facets. Naming facets helps you make precise choices when deciding which essence to include in a blend.

Appreciating an essence in all its individuality—noticing and naming its facets, as best we can—begins to suggest how we might work with it as we set about creating fragrance. The words that capture facets tend to be adjectives or nouns that function as metaphors, referencing other kinds of aromas or experiences to remind us how they color the dominant character of an essence, for instance, descriptors like: *jammy*, *powdery*, *camphorous*, *vegetal* and so many more.