

■ Story by: **Nikki Goldstein**



Chanel's new men's fragrance is a fresh, woody, brisk and youthful creation with overt accents of pink pepper, vetiver, ginger, jasmine and moss.

Bleu Skies

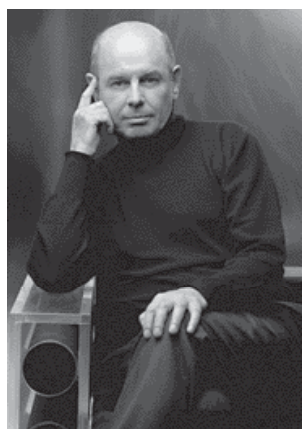
What do you get when you put a young French movie star together with a legendary Hollywood director, then team them with one of the premier perfumers in the world and an iconic global brand? The answer is a marketer's dream: the ingredients for one of the most exciting men's fragrance launches in a decade.

Industry sources state that fragrance accounts for approximately 40 to 45 per cent of Chanel's global cosmetics business. And given that it's been two years since the house has launched a men's fragrance, and that this is the first time it has started a men's campaign of this scope (in Australia alone it will run prime-time free-to-air and cable TV ads for two weeks, along with an extensive print and prime-location billboard campaign), this fragrance carries perhaps a greater burden of expectation than any previous men's scent from the house.

The woody, aromatic Bleu is a new fragrance family for Chanel, and the company has brought out the big guns to get it some notice. Martin Scorsese directed the commercial, which features up-and-coming French actor Gaspard Ulliel (last seen in *La Princesse de Montpensier* at Cannes this year) in a modern and urban tale of celebrity, voyeurism, paparazzi and sex.

The Rolling Stones' *She Said Yeah* provides the soundtrack and adds a rock-and-roll edge to a film that is reminiscent of the Swinging Sixties, with Ulliel playing a character loosely based on '60s British photographer David Bailey snapping his model muses. It also pays homage to Scorsese's past work, with a slightly dangerous macho hero at the centre of the story, and even doffs its cap to Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, as Ulliel turns his back on a clamorous mob of media and paparazzi.

This kind of stellar conjunction has worked well for Chanel. "Both the Nicole Kidman/Baz Luhrmann and Audrey Tautou/Jean-Pierre Jeunet films were incredibly successful for us", says Susie Stenmark, general manager communications Australia and New Zealand for Chanel. (Both those productions were for Chanel No. 5, the



Chanel's master perfumer Jacques Polge has been the in-house nose since 1978 and has created some of the cornerstones of the business – classic fragrances such as Antæus, Coco, Égoïste, the Allure franchise (including Allure Homme Sport for men) and Chance.

world's best-selling female fragrance). Stenmark won't reveal the budget for the ad, but says: "Chanel is a private company and we like to retain the mystery of what we spend. Suffice to say that these sorts of collaborations bring a lot of weight and value to our launches."

But lavish budgets apart, what sustains a fragrance over its lifetime is the juice. If the scent itself does not strike a chord with consumers, the repeat business will slowly but surely die off, killing the perfume with it. Along with Karl Lagerfeld, and the publicity-shy Wertheimer brothers, Alain and Gerard, whose grandfather Pierre co-founded the brand with Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel and who now together own the House of Chanel, master perfumer Jacques Polge has been credited with helping steer the brand's course to success over three decades. If there's anyone in Chanel who's responsible for the long-term success or failure of a fragrance, it's Polge.

"I have been thinking about this new juice for men for something like four or five years," he tells *The AFR Magazine*. The decision to launch now came about, he says, because all the elements had finally come together: "We think we have something that's very strong. A good fragrance, a good name, good packaging, good everything." His creation, Bleu, is fresh, woody, brisk and youthful, with overt accents of pink pepper, vetiver, ginger, jasmine and moss. The scent is dry and light, yet has a lingering depth created by a base composed of cedar, patchouli and frankincense.

"The juice came first and the name came later," Polge reveals. "For me, bleu [blue] is the colour of liberty and freedom. It's also a poetic name. It has a meaning that is larger than its literal meaning. It's bigger than whatever one can say in just a word. It's the colour of the sea, the colour of the sky. And the way we treated it here [with the indigo bottle], is very chic. For a long time, men's fragrances were black, this colour is much better, much richer, refined and elegant."

Polge was raised in the South of France and is inspired by the landscape of his childhood: "Mediterranean is a word that's very important to this fragrance. Woody, dry – it's the smell of the places there. In the South of France, there is a mountain [range] called l'Esterel and if you walk around there the country is very fragrant. Some of the scents that come out of Bleu resonate with that smell".

As with any fragrance, the raw ingredients are important to the final outcome. Polge says, "The job we do is very artisanal and every day we try to improve the raw materials. We have a special sandalwood that is exclusive to Chanel from New Caledonia and it's a quality that nobody else has. We have improved and created a special cedar note as well." Did he set out to make Bleu the male equivalent of No. 5? Polge tempers his response: "If it reaches the success of No. 5, I will be very happy ... The important thing when you create a fragrance is to capture something of your time – a transcription of something that is very much alive but which might also become a classic. With Bleu, it's too soon to say." ■