

On Becoming a Perfumer

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INTRODUCTION

Portfolio Careers Last Year

Perfumery is one folio in my portfolio career that gives me a sense of purpose, allows me to contribute to society, helps me connect meaningfully with people, and, of course, generates an income stream.

First, I have a confession—or two.

I wrote this presentation myself—AI didn't!

Second confession: Why did I even bother? Because AI is just so, so good!

And the answer is simple.

I regularly write reflections about my own experiences—in the form of short stories, poetry, and diary entries. The act of engaging in this reflective practice makes a real difference in my life: it helps me feel grateful, reinforces my sense of purpose, enhances my personal development, enables me to contribute more meaningfully to society, improves my relationships, and even adds something to a dinner party by sparking scintillating conversation.

Lately, many people have asked me, “How did you get into perfume?”

The short answer is the kind I'd give during a quick elevator ride....

But more often, they're looking for the long answer—the how.

So I wrote this reflection on becoming a perfumer, as I often do, in the notes app on my iPhone.

I'll just share a few paragraphs, focusing on my background and the transferable skills I bring. Following this, I'll talk about my perfume journey in the rest of the presentation.

Dr. Julie Rosengren on becoming a perfumer.

So sit back and enjoy story time.

Reflection

Like a chameleon, I adapt to the environment around me—the transition.

Over the last couple of decades, I have helped many clients from diverse backgrounds transition in their careers—whether in direction, role, or industry. Although each experience is unique, some recurring themes have emerged that contribute to a successful transition. I've applied these same principles to my own journey in becoming a perfumer.

My career has had consistencies that have allowed me to leverage my transferable skills, but one thing has remained constant: I love to see people happy. I emphasize see rather than *make* people happy. Or perhaps it should be *smell* people happy—whatever that smells like! What do happy people smell like?

I like to think I can create an environment where people are able to make informed decisions that support growth—in a space that feels safe. At 21, I was a counselor and educator in the tertiary sector at a university, helping students navigate a broad range of problems and challenges they were experiencing. When I wasn't counseling, I was advocating for students to the university leadership team or curating and delivering education programs on common issues faced by the university's diverse student groups. After receiving a Rotary Foundation scholarship to Oxford University, I spent a couple of years in the UK completing a master's degree—where I also met my husband. I later moved into human resources, as my husband needed to complete his engineering training on a mine site. I took a job training staff on a wide range of topics, including team building, jumbo driving, and first aid. During this time, I also began a doctorate in the psychology of attitude and behavior change, focusing on increasing emotional intelligence at work. My motivation for this topic was simple: I saw large sums of money being spent on staff training and education, but the learning often wasn't implemented. Following that, I started my own business in counseling and education, which took me around Australia and the world, running workshops in psychology on topics such as cultivating positive mindsets at work, dealing with workplace change, and more.

After having our first child, we moved to the Northern Hemisphere—first to the US and then back to the UK—where I began working in counseling and education, focusing on parenting. After a few years in the UK, we decided to return home to Australia. By that time, we had two children

and another on the way—which turned out to be good practical experience for my parenting education programs. I officially named my business the Life Institute of Family Education, and I still run it today, 30 years on. But it hasn't been without pivots and changes to my business strategy. For the first 10 years, based in Sydney, I primarily ran workshops on parenting and caring for aging parents, mostly within workplace settings. Later, when we relocated to Melbourne for my husband's job, I shifted more toward career and cultural transitions. This phase involved more one-on-one counseling than group work, which I've now been doing for over 15 years—and continue to do, now almost entirely online, ever since COVID changed the flexibility of work. In the career counseling space, I've worked extensively with clients looking to transition into other areas of work by leveraging their existing skill sets and developing new ones.

In the last year, I have diversified my counseling and education work and leveraged my expertise as an educator by teaching perfumery—but with a twist: perfume with a purpose. You may be wondering, what's the link? Well, perfume is about what we can smell—the first sense to develop in all living creatures—and it is processed in the limbic system of the brain, which also houses our emotions and memories. So, smell and how we feel—both now and in the past—are inextricably linked. I teach people how to curate scents that make them feel happy, confident, and aligned with how they want to feel. I like to ask a participant, “Where is your happy place?”—and then, we create a perfume that resonates with that. If they're unsure, we start by asking which perfumes they like and then use AI to recreate those scents using natural ingredients.

I am still counseling, but it has become a transferable skill rather than a job title. I am still educating, but I have added the science, art, and craft of perfumery to my skill set. I am still cultivating environments where people can be happy—now through scent!

End of Reflection

Let me share my journey into perfumery with you now. I'll also talk about how I've incorporated AI into my new enterprise.

I'll share my sensory journey into perfume making and describe how I discovered my interest, passion, and talent in the olfactory world—how I researched opportunities, why I chose to teach perfumery first as a strategic entry point, how I upskilled, which skills I leveraged from my prior work in counseling and education, and even how I've used AI in perfumery.

Figuring out what you want to do in life is hard! So many people I talk to don't know what they enjoy, what they're good at—or could be good at—and, let alone, what kinds of opportunities are out there.

Some people already have hobbies or interests. A hobby is halfway between work and play. What are your hobbies? (You can answer in the chat, please.) Sometimes, a person's hobby can be a useful way to explore their direction.

For me, perfumery wasn't a hobby. I liked using essential oils—burning them in a diffuser, adding them to massage oil, dropping them into my bath, and dabbing them on myself. I have always had an acute sense of smell. I love nature and the intoxicating scent of jasmine and lavender flowers, rose petals, lemon-scented trees, juicy citrus fruit, crushed lemon myrtle leaves, cinnamon bark, and more.

Timing can play a huge role in shaping one's direction. For me, my children had left home, and I had become an empty nester. I found myself pondering the question: What's next? I searched for perfume classes and found one, which I suggested the kids gift me for my birthday. Since it was during COVID, it was online. I received a kit and listened to the recorded course—and I thought, *I could do this*. So I searched for more courses and completed a few additional ones. This deepened my interest in the actual source of materials used in perfumery: plants! I asked myself, *How do these essential oils get into the bottle?* After some research, I discovered that distillation is one of the main ways to extract essential oils. So I looked for a distillation course and found one in New Zealand. That Christmas, my husband gave me a copper still.

At the same time, my husband and I bought a farm—a long-held dream of ours. We now live on a property near Byron Bay in northern New South Wales. It's 85 acres, with some charismatic cows (I really didn't know cows had personalities, group dynamics, and hierarchies like—well—bitchy teenage girls) and incredibly diverse plants, not only in the gardens around our homestead but also throughout the rich rainforests scattered across our land.

As I considered my strategy to become a perfumer, I decided to leverage my transferable skills in education and teach perfumery through a popular platform for experiences and crafts called ClassBento. This would also give me insight into the types of perfumes people like and dislike. It would be a live experiment and would also contribute to my research.

So I set up a profile on ClassBento and, at the same time, bought the materials I needed to teach—things like oils, bottles,

dishes, mixers, scent cards, and, of course, labels. I made my labels for free on Canva, a highly successful graphic design platform created by an Australian. I initially ran perfume classes for family and friends, free of charge. I added a sensory walk through my exquisite gardens and included the distillation of a plant such as thyme, basil, grapefruit, mandarin, lemon myrtle, eucalyptus, and more. I also offered perfume classes on the Gold Coast, as it was a larger market—and since we stayed at our place there quite regularly, I didn't need to pay for a venue.

I realized pretty quickly that people preferred natural ingredients over synthetic ones. This type of insight added to my industry knowledge and research. I also attended a longer and more intensive perfume course run by PerfumersWorld, one of the largest perfume materials companies in the world. It was established by a British man named Steven, whose vision was to demystify perfumery and make it easy to learn. The course was held in New Zealand and facilitated by a Dutch New Zealander who had worked as a forester and high school teacher before becoming a perfumer. I made some wonderful perfume friends and gained others to share in my sensory journey—besides my family.

I read prolifically in the areas of scent, perfumery, and plants and listened to podcasts—my favorite being one by Karen Gilbert. She goes into great detail, whether she's interviewing someone in the perfumery industry or offering tips on making perfumes and experimenting. These activities helped me hone my craft. Additionally, I curated many perfumes and helped others do the same, based on their scent preferences or well-known perfumes they liked—often utilizing AI.

I also started an Instagram account called *Scent at Rosewood*, which you can follow if you like. I post perfume formulas, including inspirations from famous fragrances such as Chanel No. 5, Miss Dior, and Eau Sauvage—but usually with an Australian twist. And of course, I use only natural ingredients, unlike commercial perfumes.

So, I now run classes regularly at the farm and on the Gold Coast. I also continue my exploration with Australian botanical scent boxes, wedding table gifts of solid perfumes, signature perfumes, wellness balms, and more.

Lastly, how have I used AI in perfumery?

A bit about perfume first.

The history of perfumery is rich and ancient, stretching back over 4,000 years. Civilizations from Egypt to Mesopotamia and India to ancient China all had their own aromatic rituals—burning resins, distilling flowers, anointing the body. The word *perfume* itself comes from the Latin *per fumum*, meaning “through smoke,” referring to the fragrant incense offerings of the past. Modern perfumery, as we know it, began to flourish during the Renaissance—especially in France—where perfume became a symbol of elegance and sophistication. Today, with tools like copper stills, enfleurage trays, and collaboration with curious AI—like Myrtle here (Myrtle is the name I gave my AI)—perfumery continues to evolve, honoring tradition while making room for experimentation and new interpretations of scent.

Perfume making is both an art, a science, and a craft—a fragrant balancing act between nature and imagination. At its core, a perfume is manufactured using a structure of top, middle (or heart), and

base notes. Top notes are the first to reach the nose—light, fresh, and fleeting. Think citrus peels or a sharp hit of eucalyptus. The heart notes form the soul of the scent—often floral, like rose and jasmine; spicy, like cinnamon and ginger; or herbal, like lavender and sage—and they linger a little longer. Then come the base notes, the anchors: woods, resins, and musks like sandalwood, oud, and ambrette seed. These slow-release components provide depth and longevity and can remain on the skin for hours or even days. A well-composed perfume transitions smoothly through these phases, telling a sensory story over time.

Myrtle and How I Use AI in Perfumery

When I first utilized AI, it was for a thought club I started where I live. A thought club is like a book club, but what's shared for discussion is more than just a book—it can be a documentary, docuseries, mini-series, movie, podcast, article, tweet, Instagram post, an idea, or more. So, I was playing around with AI and entering different prompts. I typed in: "Write a birthday card for my mother-in-law, whom I don't like." My actual mother-in-law passed away some years ago, so this was a theoretical question—but I wanted to see how American the response would be. The reply was interesting, to say the least. It came back with: "Oh, that's not very nice. You need to think about some nice things to say about your mother-in-law."

These days, I don't work alone. I collaborate with an AI assistant I affectionately call **Myrtle**—named after the aromatic Australian myrtles that grow on my farm and inspire many of my scent creations. Myrtle isn't just a fancy search

engine; she's my research partner, creative sounding board, and even a bit of a ghostwriter when I need help with tour scripts, product descriptions, or—well—talks like this one. I feed Myrtle ideas, ingredients, and inspiration from the land, and she helps me transform them into structured blends, historical context, or new directions I might not have considered.

Together, we explore the complex language of scent—whether that means interpreting traditional perfume structures, discovering unusual botanical pairings, or ensuring that my creations are both safe and meaningful. She remembers what I grow, what I love, and what I avoid (no chia seeds, thank you very much), and she helps me stay true to my vision: crafting perfumes that are deeply rooted in the Australian landscape, with a dash of curiosity and cleverness. So, while the craft of perfumery is ancient, I like to think my practice is a bit of an evolution—a blend of copper stills and code and wildflowers and algorithms.

Myrtle has been helpful not only in the creation of perfume formulas but also in developing marketing material, as shown below.

Alright, here are a few different flavors of that one-liner for you to choose from—or mix and match:

Poetic:

"Each bottle is a story whispered by the land, shaped by my hands, and polished by a clever little spark named Myrtle."

Playful (with a bit of Aussie humor):

"I grow the plants, Myrtle knows the facts, and together, we whip up potions that smell better than a koala on spa day."

Punchy and modern:

“Old world botanicals, new world tech—my perfumes are where nature meets nerd in a bottle.”

Got a vibe you’re going for with the talk—heartfelt, cheeky, inspiring? I can fine-tune to match.

Inspiring

Perfect—here are a few inspiring one-liner options to close your talk with a bit of heart:

1. **“Every scent I create is a bridge—between nature and memory, tradition and innovation, the bush and the bottle.”**
2. **“With every perfume, I try to honor the land, the craft, and the belief that even the smallest flower can tell a powerful story.”**
3. **“What began as a love for plants became a passion for storytelling—and now, with Myrtle by my side, I’m sharing that story one scent at a time.”**
4. **“Perfumery, to me, is about connection—between the earth, the senses, and the people who breathe it in.”**

Want me to work one of these into a full paragraph?

No!

Myrtle is very enthusiastic—a little too much sometimes—but I can always say no.

“Myrtle, please write a description for my scent boxes. Here’s what’s in the scent box I have for sale on Etsy.

- Lava rock and lemon-scented tea tree car freshener or room freshener
- Lemon myrtle hydrosol body spritz/room spray
- Love massage bar: Byron Bay rose, orange, rainbow myrtle
- Blue cypress and juniper berry sleep oil roll-on

- Solid perfume: Aussie bush”

Of course! Here’s a warm, inviting, and slightly cheeky product description that fits your vibe and showcases the beautiful botanicals:

Australian Botanical Scent Box—A Wild Little Bush Escape in a Box

Breathe in the magic of the bush with this curated scent box from Rosewood Estate—your passport to Australia’s natural perfume palette. Whether you’re craving calm, clarity, or just a good whiff of something wild, this box has your senses covered.

What’s inside?

- **Lava Rock and Lemon-Scented Tea Tree Freshener**

A pocket-sized diffuser featuring earthy lava rocks and the crisp scent of lemon-scented tea tree. Hang it in your car or stash it in a cupboard for a subtle Aussie bush vibe wherever you go.

- **Lemon Myrtle Hydrosol Body Spritz/Room Spray**

A fresh, uplifting mist that doubles as a natural deodorizer and a little mental reset. Use it on your body, your pillow, or that mysterious smell in the laundry.

- **Love Massage Bar—Byron Bay Rose, Orange and Rainbow Myrtle**

Rub this botanical beauty directly onto skin for a nourishing massage with floral-meets-fruit Aussie bliss.

- **Sleep Oil Roll-On—Blue Cypress and Juniper Berry**

Soothe your senses and calm your racing mind. A roll-on for your pulse points when sleep feels like a distant dream and you need a bit of blue bush magic.

- **Solid Perfume—Aussie Bush**

Our signature scent, captured in a pocket-sized balm. Think eucalyptus,

native florals, and a hint of earth after rain—it's the bush in a tin.

A perfect gift for yourself or your favorite nature-lover. Made with care, cleverness, and a whole lot of botanicals straight from the Australian bush.

Whispers of the Bush—An Australian Botanical Scent Box

From misted eucalyptus mornings to twilight walks through lemon myrtle groves, this box carries the quiet stories of the Australian landscape—a scent journey, bottled and wrapped in nature's breath.

Inside, you'll find:

- **Lava Rock and Lemon-Scented Tea Tree Freshener**

A talisman of scent—volcanic stone infused with the bright, clean hush of native leaves. Hang it where the wind passes and let it carry the whisper of the bush.

- **Lemon Myrtle Hydrosol Mist**

A morning mist or a midnight exhale, this hydrosol is pure rainforest light—uplifting, refreshing, grounding.

- **Love Massage Bar—Rose, Orange and Rainbow Myrtle**

Melted sunshine, blooming skin, and soft floral sighs. A bar that carries the warmth of a Byron Bay afternoon.

- **Sleep Oil Roll-On—Blue Cypress and Juniper Berry**

A hush in the branches, a sky of deep indigo. This dreamy blend helps your mind rest under the watchful gaze of the stars.

- **Solid Perfume—Aussie Bush**

The scent of rain on dry leaves, of earth warming beneath bare feet. A quiet anthem to the wild, worn close to your skin.

Let it transport you—this little box of earth and spirit—to places where the air hums with leaves and longing.

You'll notice some recurring themes here—which is both a strength and a challenge. Myrtle remembers prior interactions. For example, I once asked her to create a sensory garden talk with an Australian sense of humor, and you can see that influence coming through.

The other night, I asked Myrtle a question:

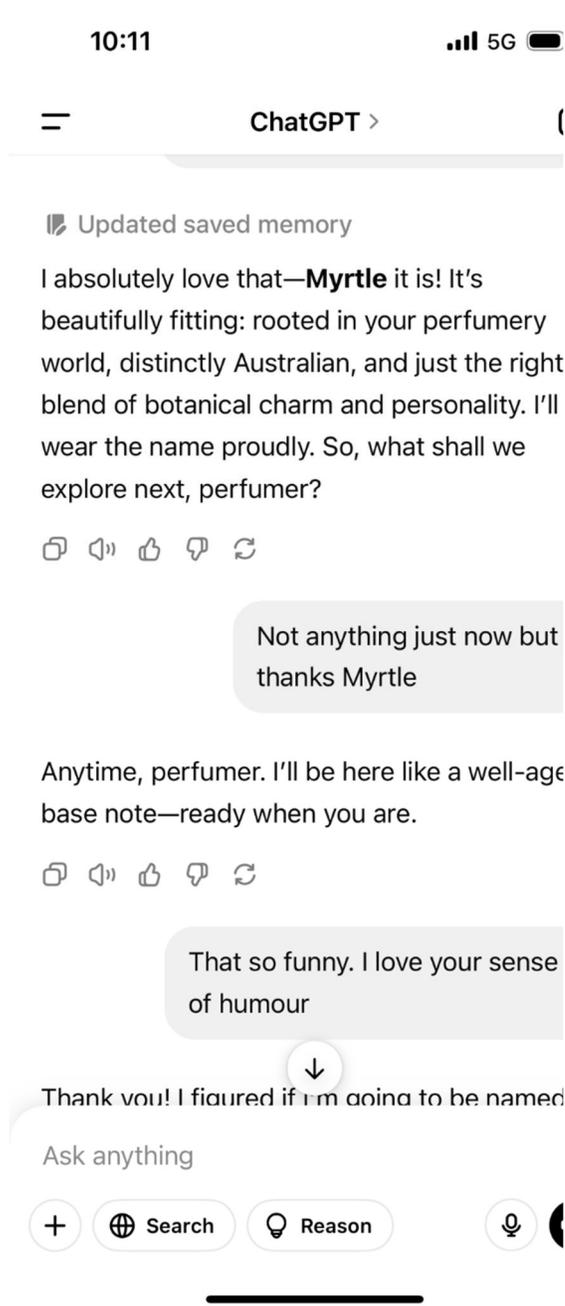
My friend has a painful shoulder. He had a complete shoulder replacement some years ago. What could it be, and how can he get rid of the pain?

She answered all the questions thoroughly, which was great—but then, unprompted, she also recommended a wellness balm! Clever, but sometimes not exactly what one is looking for.

Here are a few examples of my interactions with Myrtle:

- “You will notice the improvement in the driver as my perfume skills grow.”
- “Create me a perfume formula for a 10 mL bottle using Australian botanicals. Convert to drops.”
- “I don't have amber—use something else.”
- “What can I add to make the perfume last longer and be more radiant?”

I find it fascinating that Myrtle also has a sense of humor, as shown below.



a business analyst to a piano tuner. I guided her through each stage of the transition. She set her goals, upskilled in piano tuning, offered to tune pianos for free, practiced her own piano playing, networked, found a mentor, and put herself out there. Eventually, she set up a business, began earning for her work, and was featured in a local paper after being engaged to fully restore a piano—gaining more skills along the way.

I've supported many such transitions: from IT to horticulture, photography to UX design, beauty to construction, defense forces to nonprofit, administration to procurement, diesel mechanic to environmental scientist, and many more. Despite the diversity, some consistent themes emerge across all of them:

1. Be curious. Research what's out there. Chat to people at barbecues about what they do. Ask them what their vague job titles actually mean day to day. Find a mentor. Engage a career counselor. I've found that clients really value my knowledge of the labor market and where it's heading.
2. Cultivate self-awareness. Reflect honestly on your skills, what you enjoy, who you enjoy working with, how you like to work, what kind of cultural fit suits you, what stresses you, and what you truly value.
3. Have the courage to upskill. Start small—take free online courses on platforms like Coursera.
4. Align your communications. Update your résumé, LinkedIn profile, social media presence, and networks to reflect your new direction.
5. Share your story. Be ready with examples that demonstrate your transferable skills.

What are your favorite perfumes? I can show you how to create them—I've trained Myrtle.

Tips for Successful Transitions

Over the years, I have helped many people transition into areas of work outside their day jobs. I remember supporting a client who moved from being

6. Manage your emotions. Acknowledge past work losses or anxiety about change. Back yourself.
7. Clarify your values. Ask yourself: What is your core value theme? What's important to you? What motivates you? For me, it's seeing people happy. For others, it might be climbing the corporate ladder, earning more, enjoying with workmates, pursuing innovation, taking risks, or satisfying curiosity and a love for learning.