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Miriam Vareldzis

PALETTE NATURALS

A BRIEF STORY BEHIND A BRAND

“Each note tells an entire story; and is a perfume creation itself.”

When people ask me about my company, Palette Naturals, and how it came to be, I always take a deep breath and a long pause. What they see is the result of a long and winding journey that started in my teen years, and took more turns than the Labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral

When Aromatika Magazine invited me to write, I was flattered and honoured, and then frozen. How do I share my story without writing a memoir? How can I convey the myriad serendipitous events, "chance" meetings, and plot twists that felt like divine intervention that brought me here?

Even the invitation to write for you here now holds an angel's touch. After my dear friend John Steele wrote his piece for Aromatika (Winter 2024 & Spring 2025), I eagerly logged on to purchase those issues for myself. Once purchased, there was a minor glitch with the download, so I contacted the publisher. Upon receiving my note and swiftly clearing up

the technical snag, he graciously extended the offer that I, too, write a piece for their upcoming Perfume Special, having heard my interview with the lovely Karen Gilbert on her podcast. (Sept. 2023).

Such is the story behind the brand: a story of inspiration, inner belief, fearless naïveté, challenges, pitfalls, hurdles and intermittent triumphs. Such is the story of all our endeavours, really. Adventure lay in the telling, and I hope lay in the outcome.

Palette Naturals was born out of a need: a need to solve a problem.

During my years spent working for Robertet, the beautiful French fragrance and perfumery ingredients house, I was back on the West Coast of the USA. I had



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spent my formative career years living in New York City, where I began my fragrance industry career at IFF (International Flavors & Fragrances Inc.), after several years with the lighting-fast, Limited Brands-owned start-up Gryphon Development, the generator of all Bath & Body Works and Victoria's Secret bath empires (another story!).

Back to Robertet, the years were 2012–2016. We were just coming out of the big housing and financial crises of 2008–9, when every other person had lost a job, was struggling with income, or was in fear of losing their home. Entrepreneurial energy was coming back. Creativity was bursting on the West Coast. The Indie perfumery movement was burgeoning.

In fact, even I took advantage of those couple of downturn years of the housing crisis and gave myself permission to create and launch my own 'Indie' perfume line, *40notes Perfume*, in 2010,



< **"The Labyrinth at Chartres"**
A gift to Miriam painted by R. Keays
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> after losing my job in the fragrance industry to the crisis (from Agilex, a company now part of Firmenich).

THE LABYRINTH HAS CIRCLED AND TURNED

After launching my own labour of love perfumery collection, I had a deep desire to dive into learning about natural materials. This inner drive led me to reach out, and following the first rule of manifesting (after visualisation!), I told my trusted friends and colleagues my desire. Through serendipitous connections and perseverance, I connected with Robertet and pitched my own idea. In fact, they needed someone on the West Coast to handle this new uptick in potential.



Early years

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Many meetings and a trip to NYC later, they hired me in 2012, and I became responsible for natural ingredients sales and creative fragrance direction for clients across the West Coast and Western USA.

This period was marked by new entrepreneurial energy in the West Coast perfumery and skincare scene. Natural materials were the gold standard, and everybody yearned for a transparent ingredients list. "Clean beauty" became the torch guiding product development.

And, as with all new ventures and startups, one thing is constant: money

is tight, and minimums requested are low. Not a good formula for engaging a large supplier like Robertet.

The new demands posed a massive quandary for me: on one hand, the excitement of calling on eager new companies who wanted to forge a new path for their 'clean and green' brands, on the other hand, meeting them with the long-standing roadblocks that accompany working with a large, top-tier fragrance house with expensive oil minimums, the pushback when requesting a transparent ingredient list, and ultimately passing along the message I had to deliver: "their potential is too small". In other words, not worth the cost of development.

As hard as it was to admit, I could see the writing on the wall. This energetic yet undeveloped client pool could not, even aggregately, meet the "sales goals" of a large supplier.

After delivering the news to clients that "we could not continue to work together" more than once, I realised at that rate I would be out of a job!

It was during this agonising professional time that my creative brain reached back to my architecture training. Yes, the Labyrinth turns here, but as a reference. I graduated with a degree in Interior Architecture, moved to NYC, and began my life and career with the "big modernist firms" that defined the '80s – the precursor to my joining the beauty/fragrance industry in 1991.

Combining my decades of experi-

ence in the fragrance industry, my understanding of naturals, and my training in architecture, my design brain kicked in: create a collection! A kit of parts, working independently or together. They stack, layer, and combine. Like Lego's, for scent!

Slowly but surely, the idea crystallised into a coherent form. I sketched my concept, like in the old days. Notebooks filled with ideas and drawings: a collection of accords. I got excited thinking about scent types. What would I need? What would I love to have? The answer seemed clear to me: a collection of 100% natural perfumery blending accords by olfactive families, serving as "**The Building Blocks of Natural Perfumery**".

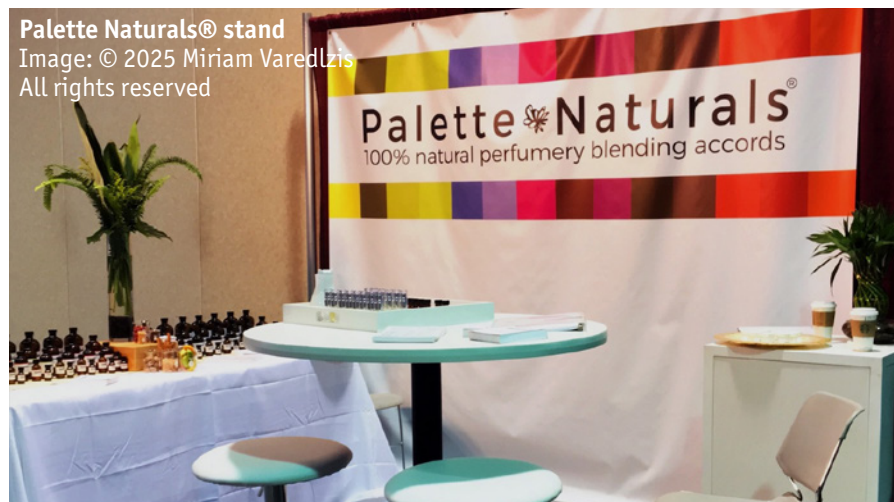
"How simple!", I thought, "I'm going just to do it". Famous last words of every entrepreneur! So, I became an Indie niche natural ingredients supplier.

THE BIRTH OF A NEW VENTURE

For 18 months during development, creativity, inspiration, frustration, travel, trust, and tears came together to forge the relationships, suppliers, and partnerships that got me off the ground. Inspiration and adrenaline will get you so far, but those relationships continue to this day.

There's much more to the story; creating and launching a brand is worthy of a book itself.

I eventually parted ways with Rob-



Palette Naturals® stand

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erted in the Spring of 2016. In the Fall of 2017, nearly 18 months later, Palette Naturals launched with its original 14 accords at the Society of Cosmetic Chemists Suppliers Day Show in Long Beach, CA.

My booth was located near the front entrance, just next to the magnificent IFF booth. AS IF to say "you are on the right track", the Universe offered me a wonderful affirmation from the divine with my booth just next to my origins. Evidence of coming full circle from the very first fragrance house that hired me, that trained me so magnificently, IFF New York, 23 years prior.

GROWING UP TO THE CHALLENGE

The concept of Palette Naturals was new and ahead of its time. Those days (and it was not that long ago), it was rare, if not impossible, to see a transparent ingredient list for a fragrance formulation, natural or otherwise. It was forbidden to see the complete INCI list and deemed intellectual property: formulators' secrets.

And yet, the consumer was changing. In the face of such corporate industry secrecy, conspiracy arises: "What are they hiding?", "Why can't we know what goes on our skin?", "Are they lying about what is actually in the formula"? These are some of the questions I encountered during those years, with clients desperate to be on the cutting edge of what consumers were clamouring for. And frustrated to not have their suppliers' support. I felt emboldened.

But I also experienced pushback. The second day of the tradeshow, two gentlemen approached my booth. I could see they were industry veterans, most likely from one of the older legacy fragrance houses. I greeted them politely; why wouldn't I? They are my guests, and I'm eager to share my collection. After inquiring, smelling, and asking a few questions, they passively-aggressively said, with the lilt of their accent, "You can't do this!" *Pardon!* Their message was crystal clear: "You can't start opening up ingredient lists and showing our industry secrets to the world."

Well, it didn't end there. On the last day of the show, I received a call that went directly to my voicemail. After I packed up, loaded to ship, and returned to the hotel exhausted yet exhilarated by my launch, I retrieved my messages. One was a man asking me to return his call. He happened to be the president of "said" company. And his tone was menacing and direct. "What are you doing, releasing the ingredient lists? You can't do this in our industry. It is not allowed!" Undeterred, I received his message loud and clear: at last, the veterans of this club did not want the light of day shining into their realm.

To be clear, all of the INCI lists freely available on the Palette Naturals website for each accord are just 'ingredient lists'. Not formulas! The materials are listed in alphabetical order, with Latin binomials and CAS numbers. Clear. Transparent.

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return to my own mission.

I adored the beauty of these materials. I stood for transparency and truth. I would offer naturals with the claim validated by an international standard (ISO 9235). And make these inherently expensive, gorgeous materials accessible by providing the lowest possible minimums.

As we've all witnessed, the industry was no match for the consumer. Slowly acquiescing, they are reluctantly catching up. Ingredient list transparency is coming into its own.

As our very first press headline, in *Cosmetic Design*, affirmed: "Palette Naturals has arrived and fragrance ingredient labelling will never be the same"¹

In the 8+ years since I launched the company, the collection has grown to 22 Accords across 18 olfactive families. Our very first orders shipped internationally and, to date, have landed in nearly 20 countries, and now live within the formulations of countless brands and perfumery collections across the world.



Blending and filling...
Image: © 2025 Miriam Varedzlis
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Palette Naturals fragrance wheel
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accord name	olfactive family	signature notes	organoleptic description
CITRUS A	Citrus	bergamot, mandarin, orange, grapefruit, lemon	citrusy, refreshing, sunny, bright, clean, crisp

THE PANDEMIC YEARS

As anyone with a calendar knows, the timeline since our launch has included the most significant interruption of life and business any of us has known in our lifetimes, the pandemic. With our launch in October 2017 and a ramp-up in 2018, we really had only 2+ years before the brakes hit us all. The blessing of Zoom allowed me to offer olfactory fragrance training to cosmetic chemists, creative teams, entrepreneurs, Indie perfumers, and aromatherapists from the USA to Australia. Sample kits of the accords shipped, blotters travelled. We smelled together, simultaneously, via the internet. Palette Naturals was able to keep shipping and growing, albeit extremely slowly.

I am profoundly proud and grateful that we were never in debt, stayed in business, and remain fully founder-owned to this day.

LABYRINTH FULL CIRCLE

As I've shared in the wonderfully generous interview with Karen Gilbert, my former IFF colleague based in London, on her podcast (Sept 2023), my earliest fragrance "career" began working behind the fragrance counters within our local department store. Fragrance was not new to me. Like many of you, our mothers and grandmothers wore *Chanel No. 5*, *Je Reviens* by Worth, and *Shalimar* by Guerlain. And in my mother's case, I found a lovely white-floral French fragrance called *Casaque*, as well as *Joy* by Jean Patou. The mythology in our household was that my mother could smell

which spices she needed for her cooking creations without tasting them. She just carefully hovered over the pot and smelled the steam. Yet we were an American, West Coast family (yes, Greek by descent, and therefore by definition, excellent cooks!). Still, I was not from a lineage of French, Grasse-based perfumer forefathers.

My experiences at the fragrance counter exposed me to the perfumes of the day, when many of the "modern classics" were born, as well as the older "dowager perfumes" that still had a customer base. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I was laying the olfactory foundation for my scent references. Many, many years and two careers later, I would meet and work with some of the actual perfumers who created those very same essences.

I have been privileged to spend years behind the scenes in this mysteriously glamorous, secretive, artistic and

technical industry. Titans have taught, and true artists mentored me.

EPILOGUE

For better or worse, there is no question in anyone's mind that the fragrance world has changed since I joined the industry, from any of my points of entry. Instead of a handful of launches per year, we now have thousands. Also true, instead of blackout secrecy, we now see shafts of light from behind the curtain. The Indie movement exploded, making perfumery an accessible new art form, a creative expression, and a viable option for the beauty business. Availability has opened up astronomically in education, raw materials sourcing and packaging.

Palette Naturals is part of this new world. A Living Library of "*Mother Nature's Formulae*".



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Miriam originally studied architecture and interiors and worked in NYC. Thirty+ years ago, she changed her direction and joined the fragrance industry. She was mentored by one of the industry's leading noses, Ann Gottlieb, and received her fragrance apprenticeship training. Later, she joined the renowned IFF and, as a fragrance evaluator, collaborated with master perfumers on some of the world's most successful fragrances. In 2012, she began a 'deep dive' into the world of natural botanical ingredients after launching her own brand, 40notes, before joining Robertet. Today, Miriam focuses on natural botanical essences, has developed custom blending Soul Essence Sessions, and continues to be the "nose behind the brand" for several beauty and fragrance companies. Miriam is now fully immersed in her new inspiration, Palette Naturals®.

www.palettenaturals.com www.creativeintuitiveperfumery.com www.40notes.com





Palette Naturals®

A collection of a 100% natural perfumery blending accords dedicated to enhancing the development of all-natural scent formulations in health & beauty, personal care, fine fragrance and home care products.

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