

March 18, 2013, 11:41 AM ET

Perfumery's Rosy Take on New York City Scents

By Alison Fox



Noah Rabinowitz for The Wall Street Journal

Laurice Rahme, founder of Bond No. 9.

What does Chinatown smell like? For most New Yorkers, the Manhattan neighborhood might call to mind the scent of fresh fish markets and rotating spits of roasting meat.

But for Laurice Rahme, owner of the perfumery chain Bond No. 9, Chinatown has a different scent – spicy, with cinnamon and cardamom.

Rahme's NoHo-based perfumery [has created scents representing 58 city neighborhoods](#) – and they aren't the odors that city dwellers usually associate with sections of the five boroughs.

Think of hot dogs when someone says Coney Island? Rahme's take on the Brooklyn neighborhood is more like a lemon Slurpee. Wall Street doesn't smell of money but instead something masculine with notes of citrus and herbs.

Her company's Harlem scent is dark coffee, vanilla and patchouli, while Union Square smells like the famous flower market.

Why the rosy take on city smells? Rahme, who moved to New York from Paris in the 1970s, decided about 10 years ago she was tired of the assault on her nose, especially following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. So she set out to find the best in the neighborhoods she loved.

"The idea is to capture the attitude of the neighborhood, the spirit and the attitude and the soul," said Rahme, whose fragrances range in price from \$105 to \$350. "It's not about the building and the bars and the restaurants. It's not about that hard architecture."

So in her olfactory optimism, Central Park South, the latest scent to be released, will not smell like horse manure from hansom cabs. Instead, the neighborhood smells like fresh flowers with

classic wood notes.

And Bryant Park doesn't smell like Midtown traffic (or even musty library books) but instead a rose-patchouli concoction — with pink pepper added for “dissonance.”

“I only do the neighborhoods I like, that I find interesting,” said Rahme, who owns five stores. “I’m not doing Third Avenue and 61st Street. Not doing that.”

Of course, sometimes it's just hard to escape the scent of rotting garbage bags piled up on the curb. But Rahme channels the other inescapable smells of city living – ethnic spices, comforting foods and the scents of home.

“People love their neighborhood. New Yorkers are very attached to their neighborhoods,” Rahme added. “So they’re not saying I live here because it smells bad. No, it smells good to them. This is all symbolic, emotional, subjective.”

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