

Architecture Nose

**Towards multisensory architecture, an
exploration of the sense of smell**

Reflection

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In January 2019, we were asked to write a theory thesis on a subject of our choice. Sensitized by a person of my close circle, I found myself particularly interested in the experience of space of the visually impaired. At that stage of the research, I was looking for multisensorial answers to how the built environment can be perceived, which promptly led me to our sense of smell.

And while the subject passionated me, the more books I read, the more research I did, the more I realized how unfamiliar I was with this sense. Though smells are everywhere around us, in every activity and place we participate in during our lives, in my experience of architecture, sight and touch prevailed. So much so that I realized how little I used my nose. While there is a sociological aspect to why we, humans, don't trust our noses anymore, I recollected memories of me not being able to smell moments others could. I remember then going through the kitchen cabinet and specifically thinking "Oh no... It's true! I have a terrible sense of smell!" This little fear I always carried in me, this semi-joke about not being able to really smell the delicate scent of a flower, or the stink bombs thrown in High School, was, in fact, true.

This personal awareness led me to direct my research on smells in the built environment, and this six-months research paper of the first year of Master became my fascination, a subject I found so thrilling I could not stop exploring. But quickly came disappointment and frustration. Indeed, the amount of literature on the subject isn't exactly impressive and while too many of my questions were left unanswered, I decided to find professionals of the field to satisfy my curiosity.

This is how I contacted the perfumer Fredrik Dalman of the Maison Mona di Orio, in Amsterdam, a man of great creativity, talent, and patience, who guided me through the rudiments of perfumery, discussed the potentials of scents for designers and gave me exercises to train my sense of smell.

But I knew there was much more to discover which led me to start my graduation at the ExploreLab, a place of curiosity and fascination where I was able to pursue my need for knowledge. The first year's research being on the descriptive side of the spectrum, we decided, Stavros Kousoulas, Roel van de Pas, and I, to follow a more speculative approach for the graduation. There were two parts of the research, a theoretical and an experimental one. As I was fascinated by the power of smells to manipulate people, we looked into the theories of affects with the texts of Deleuze and Guattari, Spinoza, Mallgrave, Massumi, Grosz and others, wondering how do smells affect architecture and the humans inhabiting it. Parallel to that, I focused on 1:1 experiments, researching the interactions between the space outside of the body and the body itself, studying the alterations of materials, construction techniques, spaces but also bodies and minds.

This approach made the relation between research and design quite evident, as the design assignment follows the understanding of the site's specificities (material, odorous and affective) acquired through the research part of the project. The experiments also were a first hands-on application to the potentials of smells for me as an architect, by emphasizing a multisensorial approach of the project.

The proposed project explores the smellscape potential of my hometown, Lyon (France), both in its natural (flora, seasons, weather) and material way (constructions, activities) and aims at enhancing it through different interventions. Choosing Lyon felt like a need, as it is one of the places I have the most odorous memories, but also because, knowing the area very well I was able to focus my research on smells and architecture quickly enough. The choice of a site helped contain the different materials, plants, and construction techniques to study and brought new representation tactics to the project, such as smellmaps making. The design methodology looked into existing smellscape markers and social challenges and explores how a future intervention

could be envisioned as a development of series of landscape designs and architectures, each of them using the techniques explored through the research .

The participation of different professionals and students greatly helped understand the various aspects of the graduation. I indeed continued discussing with perfumer F. Dalman throughout the year, who provided great expertise to the understanding of scented molecules on a physical and psychological level. In Lyon, I met with landscape gardener Pauline Renault, of Sémiramis Paysage, who advised me about plant choices and their different properties. Last but not least, a panel of students and friends accepted to test each of my experiments, allowing me to understand the intimate and personal aspect of this sense and providing with data useful to the progress of the graduation.

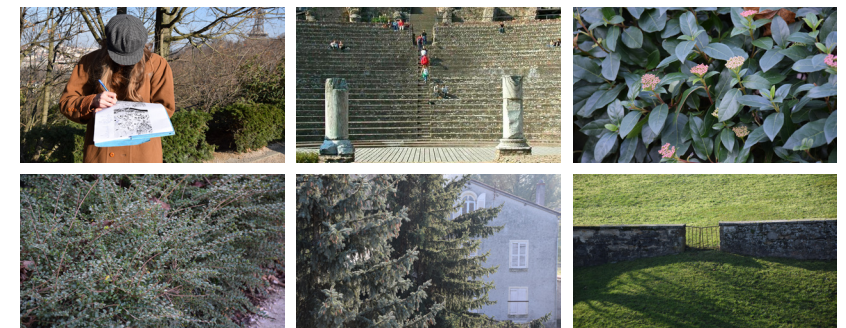
Overall, I'd say that this graduation project taught me not only about smells, but about our relation to our environment, the attention we pay to details, the place we give to invisible poeties. I also learned to invent new architectural solutions to a subject I had never encountered before, which I believe made me more resourcefull towards designing.

Please note that all the designs elaborated were considered as *some* of the architectural answers to the question of smells in the built environment, and are, therefore, non-exhaustive. Another person would approach the matter in a different way, or explore different options than I did. This graduation research is just a start to a greater innovation!



Smellmap / Discovering the olfactive patrimony of the site

Mineral smells	Forestry smells	Activities smells
Dusty	Wet soil	Burnt wood
Wet stone	Pine	Cafeteria
Stone / Chalky	Grass	



Smellmap / Visiting with our noses