



COLOR ME FRAGRANT

An “aha” moment inspires Orlando designer to create a new home accessory.

BY LISA WALKER

Inspiration is a mysterious thing. It strikes seemingly out of the blue, and in a flash, it reveals something that, in retrospect, seems perfectly obvious. Orlando designer Tod Young had one of those “aha” moments more than a year ago. As he sprayed air freshener in his home, sunlight streaming through a window lit up the mist, producing a burst of rainbow colors. Young looked through the rainbow at his home’s jewel-tone walls and furniture, and as the floral fragrance filled the room, he thought, “Why can’t air freshener smell the way my room looks?”

In that moment, Palettes was born. A designer with broad experience in product development, advertising and interior

design, Young intuitively felt he was onto something big: Why not create a line of home fragrances that evoke the basic color schemes most often used in homes?

“Scent is the next dimension in design; it completes the experience,” he says. “You coordinate paint colors and flooring and then match them with furnishings and accessories. Palettes will give you a coordinated scent that reflects your interior.”

Connecting smell to sight may sound a bit out there, but it’s a time-tested technique that has been used by theater designers and Disney Imagineers. Way back in 1916, a theater owner blew rose-oil scent into an auditorium while screening a news-



reel about the Rose Bowl. Smell-O-Vision, a system for releasing scents through pipes under each seat in a theater, debuted at the 1939 World's Fair and was used in the 1960 film *Scent of Mystery*. Disney has used scents in several Disney World attractions.

Bringing that kind of coordination to the home, however, had never been done. Current home fragrances are sold by their scent, not by sight. In a film, the director controls the visuals and can match the scents to what the audience is seeing. But don't home interiors vary too much for a limited range of scents to match?

"I knew from my interior design work that there are six basic color palettes," Young recalls. "Most homes are decorated using neutrals, pastels, primary colors, jewel tones, earth tones or gray tones."

Reducing the range of interiors to just six basic schemes made Young's idea feasible. The next step was to create the scents that would connect with and enhance those interiors.

Young approached his colleagues at Higher Advertising in Orlando where he's the president. Vice President Mark Jerkins and the others embraced Young's idea, and it quickly became an adjunct to their marketing work, filling spare hours.

Having settled on the six interior schemes, they researched the home-fragrance market thoroughly, talking to product designers, marketers and retailers. Slowly, the product line defined itself. As Young puts it, the question then became, "What does pastel smell like?" For help, they turned to one of the leading European fragrance houses.

"We met with the head of their U.S. operations and explained Palettes to him," Young recalls. "Halfway through the meeting, he called in his head scent designer and asked what she was working on. She ticked off a list of projects, and he said, 'Put those on hold. This is your first priority.'"

There are dozens of ways to dispense scents in the home: pressurized cans, evaporators (such as Air Wick), heated oil (Glade PlugIns), candles and more. The group settled on candles and sprays for Palettes, which is scheduled to debut nationally this fall. Retail pricing is \$48 for a candle and \$38 for a spray bottle.

"Our candles are soy-based, so they're eco-friendly," Young says. "Most candles have about 5 percent fragrance by weight; ours have 12 percent. That means they last longer. They burn for up to 80 hours and will scent a room even without being lit."

Young and Jerkins previewed the line at last year's New York home accessories show and report it was very well received.

"We're looking at higher-end retail," Jerkins explains, "and we will be carried in the Frontgate catalog."

An exclusive arrangement with a prominent home accessory catalog is in the offing, too. As to where Palettes could go next, Young and Jerkins say they've already talked seriously about personal fragrances that coordinate with your style of dress – sporty, formal or casual – and to paint manufacturers about infusing their scents directly into a line of paints.

Orlando gets some notice for advances in electronic media, biotech and medical lasers, but it's never been known in consumer product circles as anything other than a great test market. Young and Jerkins may just change that. Their idea seems to have the potential to become not just a successful line, but a whole category of products. If that happens, there will doubtless be the temptation for them to "go Hollywood" and relocate. But for now, they're firmly committed to growing their business here in Central Florida. After all, their offices are on a street named for one of the most pungent of scents – and one closely identified with the South – Magnolia. Perhaps Young's mystical moment of inspiration was mixed with just a little bit of kismet.