

# The Scent of an Island

By Sarah Greaves-Gabbadon (Caribbean Journal April 2015)

What does St Martin smell like? Pear, tomato, clementine and mango.

At least that's how it smells to me. Because those are the scents I used to make my own island-inspired fragrance at Tijon, a perfumerie in St Martin.

Owned by John Berglund, a retired attorney from Minnesota, and his wife, Cyndi, the eight-year-old workshop is the only place in the Caribbean where you can make your own fragrance.



It all begins at the “scent organ,” where more than 300 essential, fragrance and synthetic oils are displayed in neat tiers of brown bottles. Don your lab coat; pick three (no easy feat); and then bring them back to your station in the lab where French songs fill the air as you combine them with your choice of base oil blends, distilled water and alcohol to make your personal perfume.

It's a deeply creative and surprisingly sensuous experience that requires both focus and flexibility. But with millions of possible permutations, there's no “wrong” way to do it, and it's highly unlikely that anyone will ever have made the scent you eventually come up with. John stands by to advise on which types of fragrances pair well, but in the end it's just up to you – and your nose.



In the 90-minute class (85 euros and the most popular of the three workshops Tijon offers) you'll make three "accords" (a mixture of oils used to create perfume) and test them on your skin to decide which one will become the base of your signature eau de parfum. Once you've decided on the accord and made your perfume, you name it and Tijon keeps the formula on file so you can always reorder online.

More than 5,000 people have passed through the perfumery – "It's the second most popular indoor activity on the island," says John with a twinkle in his eye – and between 10 and 20 percent reorder their creations (which cost \$45 and are shipped from Tijon's LaJolla, California store).



I plan to do the same. But as we raise a glass to our morning's labor (each class concludes in true French fashion with a glass of bubbly) I'm having doubts about calling my scent SarahDippity, an overly cute reference to my name and the serendipity that has brought me to this moment on St Martin, now printed on a sticker on the sleek glass bottle.



But life's too short to stress over it. And by the time I get back home I realize: An island by any other name would smell just as sweet.