

INTERVIEW WITH BIRGIT OECKHER

about the writing of ‘The Story of Puredistance’

Birgit Oeckher, who lives in Vienna, is the writer of the recently launched book ‘The Story of Puredistance’. In the following article and interview we learn more about Birgit and the writing of this book. Birgit was writing about perfume on her blog Olfactoria’s Travels for five years. In the past four years she has used her love for perfume and writing – and her affection for Puredistance – to tell the story of our company. Read the interview below to learn more.

1. When did you first learn about Puredistance?

To be honest, I don’t remember where I read about it first, it was very likely a perfume website like Now Smell This or Fragrantica. But I do remember thinking how very exclusive this brand wanted to be and I read about it with a bit of an eyeroll, the cynical part of me never failed to take a chance to sneer a bit. I soon joined the fan camp though, as soon as I smelled the first perfume – Puredistance I.

2. In what ways do you personally relate to the DNA of Puredistance?

I find the core beliefs of Jan Ewoud Vos and therefore the brand’s very relatable. The pure aesthetic, the reverence for all things classy and beautiful appeals to me. The struggle or seeming contradiction between craving luxury and having a social conscience is also something I personally relate to very much.

3. When was the first time in your life when you thought of writing a book one day?

It sounds corny, but I always wanted to write books. I have been a voracious reader from an early age and writing books myself seemed a logical extension. That said, there is a big, and I mean very big gulf between the desire to write and the actual sitting down to do it part. It is the latter I struggle with in a major way. That I completed this book is still a bit unreal to me. I sit at my desk with fifty physical copies of the book right next to me and I still can’t quite believe that it is really done.

4. Can you tell us a bit more about your process of writing and collecting information about Puredistance?

Looking back, there were three stages of creating the book. For one, there where the interviews with Jan Ewoud Vos. He came to Vienna, we met at the hotel he was staying in, and I mostly just let him talk. I took notes by hand and only rarely interrupted him to clarify a point or go deeper into a subject, but in general I found that Jan Ewoud enjoyed speaking freely and reminiscing about his past, describing the present and planning the future, therefore it was easy for me to accumulate a lot of material from the main source.

We had several in person sessions and a few phone calls. A second stage was finding information about Puredistance from other sources. I interviewed the perfumers, the team in Groningen, I (at least feel like I) read every perfume review and article about Vos and the brand in existence. The third part was the actual writing. If I just count that, I would have been done in two weeks but for me the hardest part was sitting down and committing. Once I started to write, it would go very well, but after I had to stop for the day, it took me weeks to go back to

the file and continue. You could say I am very lazy, and I would have to agree with you.

5. You know a lot about the world of niche perfumes and now you know almost everything about Puredistance. What makes Puredistance, according to you, different from most other perfume brands?

I don’t know this for a fact, but I believe most businesses are in it for the money. Sounds awful, but when it comes down to it, it is probably true. And I’m not sure if I would be an exception myself, given the chance. But Jan Ewoud and Puredistance definitely are that exception. Of course, it is way easier to be blasé about money if you have some, but for most people the greed never stops, no matter how many billions they earn.

Jan Ewoud is motivated by other things, he cares more about his personal growth and his relationships, than the growth of his bank account and status. A second very important feature of Puredistance is the quality of their product. I don’t know a lot of other brands who are so adamant about every little detail to be of the highest quality possible, from fragrance ingredients to packaging, it is all top of the line, no corners cut, ever.

6. Do you think writing books about perfume will be extinct one day and will be replaced by short social media posts?

What a horrible scenario! Well, I certainly hope that will not be the case, although it certainly tends to go in that direction already for many things like fashion or beauty related reporting. I hope perfume writing will be an exception, because it deals with an invisible work of art, it will always take more effort than posting a picture of the bottle it comes in. And the people interested in perfume beyond a superficial level, are generally willing to read more than 140 characters. I hope they will demonstrate this fact right away by reading my book.

7. What did writing this book cost you?

Many hours of sleep and my peace of mind. Just joking about that last part – but only a little. Seriously though, I have lived with a constant shadow of guilt over my head for the past five years. Knowing myself though, I will manage to get under some other cloud of guilt in no time, it is who I am...

8. How did you benefit from writing this book?

I gained the experience that it is possible for me to tackle a long text and to finish it. Also, I feel proud that I wrote this book in English, which is not my native language.

9. Do you already have an idea about writing a next book?

If I do, it is nothing I would share right now. I do like the idea of writing a book again, but for now I am also enjoying the relative lack of guilt I grew so accustomed to over the past years, and the freedom to have anxiety attacks about things other than writing.

10. If someone is short of time or patience, what chapter or chapters in the book one needs to read to get the essence of Puredistance best?

I will of course be very sad for this person with so little time and/or patience and a little offended too. But, if need be, the first and the last chapters tell you a lot about Puredistance and the force behind it.

