

Your Home Smells

"Your Home Smells" is a deliberate tactic as an attention-grabber. I'm confident your home doesn't have any unpleasant lingering odors. Continuing from last week's discussion on entryways, there's one more crucial aspect to consider: the subtle yet impactful element of scent when people smell when they enter your home.

Reflecting on my childhood, I recall my father and mother had a 10-inch difference in their height, respectively. Dad, a disciplined Army Sargeant preferred orderliness, while my mother, juggling the responsibilities of raising five children, had a more relaxed approach. On one occasion, she instructed me to alert her when my father arrived home. As soon as I exclaimed "He's here!", she dashed from another room wielding a can of lemon-scented pledge, spraying it high above her head at the entryway before swiftly retreating. When my father entered, all he could detect was the refreshing lemon smell, prompting him to remark on the cleanliness of the house.

While living for a short period in South Korea and teaching English as a Second Language in my home, my students told me once that my house always smells like a bakery. It surprised me because I didn't bake often. However, I soon realized that cultural differences in cooking methods and ingredients, such as the use of butter or the presence of bread and occasional baked goods, contributed to this perception. I took it as a complement to having my home associated with this pleasant aroma. Interestingly, when we first moved into that house, a lingering odor of thawed fish left in a turned-off freezer by the previous tenant greeted us during the initial walkthrough, Phew Yeww! The landlord was not pleased.

Olfactory adaptation, or "nose blindness," happens when we become accustomed to odors. Our home aromas are significant as they become intertwined with our memories. Unlike other senses, the connection between human emotions and the sense of smell is particularly strong. The scents of our homes and even those of our loved ones often become ingrained in our memories due to the close association between emotion and recollection explaining why we frequently link or associate specific scents to moments, especially from our childhood. The smell of tangerines or cigar smoke does that for me.

Some likely home odor culprits are pet funk, mustiness, smelly bedding, or fridge/freezer grime. If I need to "clear the air", sort of speak, I open windows or an outside door. The use of vinegar left in a bowl in a room, baking soda, or a humidifier helps. Then I track down the source of the unpleasant smell to eliminate it.

I'm not fond of artificial room deodorizers or air fresheners, as scent preferences vary widely among individuals. I find the industrial smell of cleaning products off-putting I like scented candles but it's hard to predict if others will too. The cleaner/disinfectant smell is too industrial for me as a lingering scent (kind of reminds me of the pandemic). Not to mention considering other's allergies or smell sensitivities.

One of my favorite tricks is to simmer homemade potpourri on the stove or in a small crockpot, infusing the air with seasonal scents like cinnamon, oranges, lemon peels, or even coffee grounds. Timing the baking of the slice-bake cookies to coincide with arrival times creates a warm and inviting atmosphere. Additionally, the smell of cooked bacon or cinnamon toast wafting through the house on select mornings adds to the cozy ambiance, creating lasting associations.

For moments of solitude, I indulge in the soothing fragrance of my favorite scented candle, using it as a form of emotional therapy. These scents serve as cues that evoke feelings of safety, comfort, love, and joy, shaping our environments and allowing us to reconnect with cherished memories. I have a friend who slow roasts garlic on pizza or Italian dinner night in her home.

Looking back, I can't help but wonder if cleaning products were my father's favorite scent after all.

Do you have a favorite go-to scent that enhances your unique home life? Please email me, with the subject line “ Homekeeper.”

Until next time, warmest regards. Cathery.ch@gmail.com

P.S. “Smell is a potent wizard that transports you across thousands of miles and all the years you have lived.” Helen Keller