

Clutching a map of the Chocolate Mountains, Dr. Ralph Bienfang ponders a new book.

BIENFANG

Rides Again!

By PAT EVANS

A SMELL-BOUND, chocolate-craving professor at O. U. does not believe that an interest and enthusiasm for cacao products can be confined to a whiff and a bite. So, Dr. Ralph Bienfang, professor of pharmacy and a confessed "cacaophile" (his own word), is writing a book about his experiences with chocolate.

This isn't the first time that Bienfang, a faculty member since 1930, has followed an interest into the writing field. His first

book, *The Subtle Sense*, was published by the University of Oklahoma Press in 1946. Dealing with the kinds, uses, and influences of odors, it reflects a penchant for smell which he developed in childhood.

Following the advice of the late Walter S. Campbell that "whatever wells up in you, do it," Bienfang has let knowledge and interest well up to produce a reputation variously as teacher, writer, collector, and civic leader.

the professor who followed his nose to fame is on the scent of another trail: chocolates

Leaning back in his office chair and crossing "pharmacy green"-clad arms behind his head, Bienfang dwelt on his latest enthusiasm, while sidetracking a routine question about his reputation as a "smell collector."

"I'm off on a tangent about chocolate now. It's terrific!" he said, rummaging in file drawers to pull out the information he has gathered for his latest writing project. Maps, sheet music, stamps and letters from all over the world are stashed away in his "chocolate" file, along with handwritten chapter outlines. A fist-sized cacao pod model, its bright yellow papier-maché surface flaked with brown, is perched on his desk corner.

Bienfang began his intensive research into the history and influence of chocolate last November, although his interest goes back to pre college days—back to his first experience with chocolate: a mouse in the toe of a long, black Christmas stocking.

"This mouse was small," Bienfang recalled, "with white eyes, a bittersweet chocolate covering, a white creme center, and a soft cotton tail. It left an indelible mark on the professor. His book, tentatively called *A Chocolate Mouse and Beyond*, recounts his initial experiences with chocolate goodies (puddings steamed in earthenware pots with brown paper covering) to his collegiate appetites (chocolate malts and sundaes).

Subsequent sections of the book will deal with chocolate in the objective sense, from the standpoint of its history, cultivation, manufacture, and influences on nomenclature. A concluding chapter will eulogize the delectable qualities of chocolate, of which there are at least 25 different ones.

A chapter called "Chocolate Journey" will take the arm-chair traveler to the Chocolate Mountains of California and Arizona, Texas' Chocolate Bayou, and the Chocolate Hills of Western Australia.

The U. S. Department of the Interior went through two million place names to furnish information for this chapter. Bienfang has written all over the world to verify chocolate place names. He has come up with 35 or 40 so far.

Bienfang has corresponded with chocolate firms around the world, receiving an-



Senior John Marks, *au naturel*



Alcohol C-16 (rose)



Aldehyde C-8 (rancid honey)



Methyl Coumarin (new t)

a rose is a rose is a rose .

swers from "ever so many" of them typed with chocolate-colored typewriter ribbons. He is currently enjoying a large sampler from Tobler of Switzerland.

However, not all of correspondents for the "chocolate people" chapter have been so helpful. The Soviet embassy in Washington, in answer to a query about chocolate in the U.S.S.R., replied tersely that "of course, Soviet citizens like chocolate as you do, and there are many factories."

The professor's "cacaophilic" interests, as applied to the animal kingdom, have resulted in a chapter on chocolate dogs and cats; such as the chocolate poodle and the chocolate-point Siamese.

Bienfang has also been smelling out chocolate music. In addition to the familiar "Chocolate Soldier" operetta, he has come up with more than 15 chocolate songs such as *Chocolate Sundae on a Saturday Night* and *Choc'late Ice Cream Cone*.

However, as indicated earlier, chocolate is just the current focus of a long-established enthusiasm for fragrant things. As a man whose nose was news, Bienfang made the "Strange As It Seems" column several years ago for his ability to distinguish more than 1,000 different odors.

"I got interested in smells when I was a boy in Wisconsin," he recalled. "My mother's spice drawer was down low, and all the fragrance of cinnamon, and cloves, and spices, came out."

"My book, *The Subtle Sense*, was written to fulfill this interest in smells, not to satisfy any want or need on the part of the public," he said.

The odor experiences of his childhood are noted with nostalgia in his book: "the

summer smell of peonies . . . new mown hay . . . canning, hot tar from the streets," and the Fourth-of-July atmosphere of "lemonade, hamburgers, and soda pop, along with burning punk and the powder-burned paper of firecrackers."

Studies in pharmacy at the University of Wisconsin (B.S., 1926; M.S., 1928; Ph.D., 1929) didn't take Bienfang far from his childhood predilection. "For," he explained in his side-of-the-mouth drawl, "pharmacy and smell are pretty closely related."

"Pharmacists have been dealing with aromatic substances for thousands of years. A good many of the medicinal herbs are aromatic," he said.

Illustrating his point, he pulled out a two-page list of drugs having fragrance. The list, compiled for a course in pharmacognosy (drug characteristics) includes such substances as oils of caraway, eucalyptus, lavender, and peppermint.

"Some have therapeutic value, and the others are used merely to give fragrance," Bienfang continued. "Fragrance probably led to herbs' first usage as drugs."

"When a man is ill, he looks about for something to make him well—something that is attractive visually and aromatically—such as a bright red poppy," he said.

There were many olfactory therapeutic methods in the past. Ancient doctors such as Hippocrates classed perfume with medicine and prescribed it accordingly. During the plagues in Europe, people stuffed thyme and pennyroyal in their ears and burned cedar and pine boughs in the streets as a preventative. Even in the 19th Century, men fought smallpox with asafetida bags.

Today, many "odofores" (another Bienfang-coined word, meaning fragrance-carrying substances) are proven antiseptics. Beyond the physical effects of the smell-carrying drugs and antiseptics, Bienfang visualizes a psychic benefit from smell.

For example, he described a hypothetical patient, restless and unmanageable, who has spent most of his life as a lumberjack. "This patient," he suggests, "might respond to an aura-room permeated with forest odors."

The psychological influences of smell have received much attention from the pharmacy professor. Filling requests from businessmen across the country and overseas, he has put steak smell on blotters, coffee fragrance in newspaper ink, and burnt-house smell on stationery (for an insurance firm).

"Duplicating odors is mainly a matter of memory," Bienfang said. "First you have to smell an item. Then, when there is a request to create a complex smell, you draw on your memory to figure out the amounts of each item in the complex smell. You have to know a lot of fragrant substances."

Dr. Bienfang became known as a "smell-collector" a few years back through a teaching device designed to made his students more odor-observant. Because the students did not take advantage of their opportunities to familiarize themselves with aromas, he made them collect smells for him.

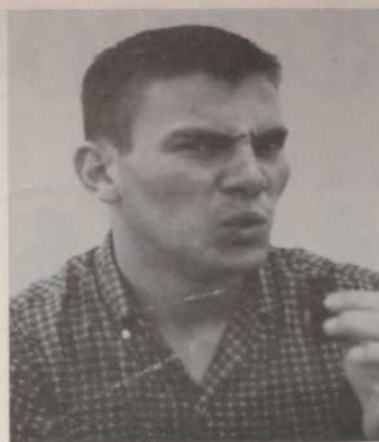
The students were given soda straws as disposable pipettes for aromatic oils and airplane dope as the fixing agent for their collections. The solvent in the dope evaporated, leaving the odor sealed in the plastic residue. These fragrant remains could



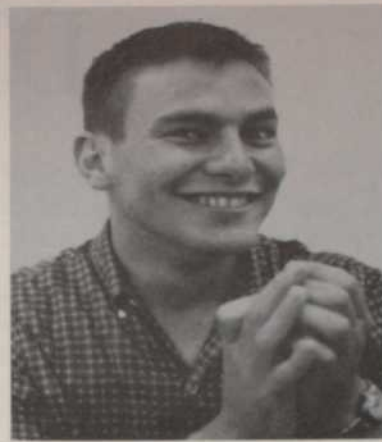
Hydrogen Sulfide



Oil of Ylang Ylang



Acetate C-8 (weedy orange)



Anethol (licorice)

and a smell in Bienfang's jars

then be stashed away in envelopes and filed.

As other aids in classroom presentation, Bienfang has also manufactured words and worked out symbols to present pharmaceutical terms more vividly. A candy cane depicts the sweetness of carbohydrates and Neptune's trident shows an enzyme's role as a "spur to chemical change" in the presence of water. These symbols are displayed on Kodachrome slides to help Bienfang's undergraduate students identify the properties of the pharmaceutical categories they study. Some of the new words Bienfang has coined include: "biodrug," a drug referable to a living form in origin; "petrodrug," a drug of petroleum origin; and "macrovirus," a large virus.

Dr. Bienfang has led the way in the new use of the old name of Pharmacist. He has suggested that it be used as a title and abbreviated Phm., similar to Reverend and Captain. Journalists have picked up the abbreviation recently, and Bienfang hopes the title will catch on for "dignity and professionalism."

This desire to promote professionalism has led Bienfang from serving as a clothes-horse for "pharmacy-green" uniforms to writing pharmacy "phantasies" and songs.

Gesturing to his pale-green, cotton jacket, Bienfang explained that it was the result of a 22-year-old personal project to make pharmacy green a professional symbol. The color is a "dried-leaf green" because so many medieval drugs were compounded from dried leaves. Also, olive is reserved for pharmacy in the collegiate color code.

The professor found the right material and shade for his proposed pharmacist's

costume just last year. After buying 10 yards of the silky cotton, he had a coat and trousers made.

"The Oklahoma City uniform firm which made my outfit became so interested in the project that it will display a similar uniform at the next pharmacists' convention," Bienfang said.

Pharmacy green also figures in the science-fiction-like predictions he has written about pharmacies in 1977. In these phantasies, printed in *Hospital Progress* magazine, Phm. Gnafneib (Bienfang spelled backward) is a green-uniformed professional who may specialize in such things as radio-active drugs or atomic injections.

Bienfang's song-writing interest developed during World War II when, wanting "an identity for our people in the services," he wrote morale-building songs for the U. S. Army Pharmacy and Hospital Corps.

The morale songs Bienfang wrote held up better than the corps they were intended for:

Pharmacy graduates often had found their ordinary BA degrees landed them higher-ranking positions than their MS degrees in pharmacy. So, Bienfang and his colleagues began agitating for a separate corps. "We put the Pharmacy corps through," he recalls. "The Army didn't want it, but they got it—and got rid of it as soon as they could."

Bienfang doesn't confine his interests to the world of test tubes and smells. He is also active in campus and civic affairs.

"I find myself getting letters from myself," he said, commenting on his dual role of chairman of the Cleveland County Red

Cross (for his third term) and chairman for the Norman United Fund board.

He's also a member and past president of the Norman Lions Club. On the O. U. campus he is sponsor of Kappa Psi, men's professional pharmacy fraternity; a member of the publications board, the tenure committee, and the president's religious leadership award committee.

And in his spare time? There's always a collection of 5,000 old post cards to classify. This hobby crystallized about four years ago when Bienfang bought the last box of cards from an almost-defunct post card company. He now gets cards from correspondents over the country.

Post cards dated from 1898 to 1918, the first twenty years of picture post cards in the United States, are his collection specialty. Holiday cards, printed with gold and embossed with holly or other appropriate symbols, are special favorites, along with cards depicting "human foibles and frailties." These cards feature puns, expressions like Twenty-three skidoo! Leap Year cards of girls putting pistols to their boyfriends' heads, and husbands walking the baby at night.

"These investigations and collections elicit little home response," Bienfang said. "Mrs. Bienfang (the former Bess Marriott, '27ed) is tolerant, he said, "but Jane (now Mrs. James Harlow, jr., '57ed) mostly sniffs and says 'here we go again!'"

But where he'll go next time, after the chocolate business is finished, is anybody's guess. "I wouldn't have the slightest idea," he admitted, "for, to paraphrase Will Rogers, I never saw a thing that didn't interest me."