

Kimberly:

Do you have a coffee? Are you ready for another maker? Story will join me for today's episode of coffee with makers.

Today's guest on the podcast is Jessica from J. Hannah Co. Now Jessica makes natural perfumes, which I think is really interesting. I met Jessica at Craftcation this year and I immediately sort of started to pick her brain because both my husband and I get headaches usually when scented candles are burning or those sorts of things. And so I was really interested to learn a little bit more about a more natural perfume and Jessica does so much more than just making perfumes. So I'm going to let her tell you a little bit more about all of that.

Jessica:

Hey Kimberly, how are you? Yeah, so I definitely love natural perfumes. I think they're so fascinating and you know what the reality is you can get a headache from pretty much anything if you, you know, natural perfumes can help but, but people can get headaches from them too, depending on who you are. But what I find so fascinating about this material landscape is you're looking at sort of the beginning of perfume is natural. So before we had synthetics, which are, you know, about a hundred years old, but prior to that it was all natural materials. So I'm just fascinated with the history and the process that a lot of perfumers were going through in the beginning of the art form. And then, you know, when I started perfuming it's like an endless landscapes. So I could probably continue this process until my death and still there'd be more to learn. So it's been a really cool landscape to start investigating with my creative practice.

Kimberly:

How did you get into this?

Jessica:

Because I know, right? It's like bizarre little, I started with, my real interest was theater and performance and I was, I actually went to film school and I went to theater school and I graduated with a film degree and uh, I was kind of searching for this, you know, what was the thing I wanted to do? And so I ended up living in Chicago at the time I was working in retail and I worked in this high end bath and body product company that's no longer there. And this is like in the two thousands. And I was like, this is so cool. But everything was from a synthetic product. And I thought, well that's fine. But I really was curious about these natural materials. So I, you know, kind of was stumbling around. And I ended up going to graduate school for Interdisciplinary Art and media and everyone was making these really cool projects like video work that maybe dance or you had someone who was doing work that was painting that you can um, see movement through.

So it was like video painting or all kinds of really cool projects. And I did a piece, it was a, a showroom of robotic housewives, very 1950 Stepford wives and six women standing in front of you. And there were these phones you could pick up and you could hear each little robots, inner thoughts. And these are real women standing there, they're actresses. But I really wanted these phones to be centered and I didn't have enough time and I thought, you know, I'm going to start diving into olfactory artwork. So from my

graduate thesis I went and started studying with different perfumers and I, I found a lot of the work is just hands on. You got to sit in the studio, you've got to do the work. So I made a lot of them really bad perfume over time. I ended up, um, you know, honing the practice and I began studying with a, as I said, a few different perfumers, but mainly Mandy Aftel who's here in Berkeley.

She is a world renowned natural perfume or my mentor, a friend. So I think for me it made a big difference to, to do the work and find the people who are experts in the field and that made my practice become next level. I really went to a different place when I found my, my people, my community. I think that's the case a lot of times with makers is once you sort of find your people, you can't help but grow immensely. You just like the more you push yourself, the more that these people that are in invested in you push you. You can't help but move, you know, even further along in your business. 100% and I can't say it enough, I feel like dabbling is fun, but when you really commit to something, it is a financial commitment. It is a time commitment. It's a commitment to the community and the people involved.

So for me, being a part of perfume wasn't just, I really wanted the community. I wanted to have the conversations and that's how truly Kimberly I became a teacher. I believe natural perfumes are phenomenal, but I love teaching. I love, that's really where I shine is sharing these materials and and having people create with them and make mistakes and try again and keep working. It becomes this ongoing amazing landscape of people. And I think that's the word I use a lot. Landscape. It's funny because that's what a lot of this natural material comes from the land. So you're looking at, you know, materials that are from tree's, berries, resins and fruits. You have materials that are wild harvested. Some are grown and cultivated. So even looking at that, like I, I think about the people that we're growing these some materials takes 20 years to get to the bottle and all of those people around the whole world for making this possible, for us to be able to make the perfume that we sit in the studio and make this day.

Kimberly:

That is so cool. It has to be such a fun element of your business that you get to really think about the things that haven't changed for years and years. You know, they're getting the, you're getting the sense from these berries and hundreds of years ago they were doing the exact same thing and it just feels like you're a little bit more connected to everything because returning to how it was and you're taking a modern approach to this long done craft,

Jessica:

it really is, it's a connection to the process and the, the art work that comes from creating perfume is connected to all of those people before. So for me, I think the natural qualities is, is phenomenal. You, you really get to see, you know, the roses for instance, that are grown in certain regions. Um, I was in Bulgaria last summer. I have a sister in law and a niece and a brother in law and they spend their summers in Bulgaria. She is Bulgarian. And we decided to go to the oldest distillery of roses in Bulgaria. So just going across this landscape and seeing that yes, roses have been growing here forever and there's a reason that the land has meant to grow that type of material, but it's something to say, ha ha, this is, this is not just me. This is a lot of people working together.

Kimberly:

I think it's really a cool take on making my making is stalling and there are, you know, obviously people have been sewing forever, but it's very rare I think within the sewing world to do things the way that they have always been done yet of fancier machine and you do everything easier. Um, so I love this idea of being within a making genre and you're taking it back to the roots and I just think that is really cool.

Jessica:

Yeah, it is neat. And you know, there's, there's always innovations too. So, uh, you know, you'll see things that are happening. Um, like just being able to get materials in different ways, you know, or, or, uh, people are doing things and there's always like controversy and things that are happening and, you know, but I, I find like for me, the history of this art form is, is fascinating. Like, oh, just little things like good old Cleopatra was, she was a diva. She had a perfumer that would hang out with and travel around with her and she made, um, scented her sales ever ships. I mean, can you imagine being on the shore? And she's coming with jasmine sails and you know, and she was hanging out with Antony. She apparently wanted her room filled with rose petals. Now filled is for our brain is like, oh, just a few sprinkling of rose petals. And it seems as if she had filled the room with rose petals. Oh Wow. They could have a, a ramp, you know, in the rose petals. Yeah. But it's things like that. The history of this art formers. Really, truly fascinating. Yeah.

Kimberly:

I love that you didn't like start just going into making natural perfumes, that it was sort of like a, a round about way. You know, you're, you're getting your masters and then all of a sudden now it becomes, you're looking at all factory artwork and how that all connects. And I just think that it shows just a general thread through you of being creative and that this is what you've landed on, but you have this history of just being a creative person.

Jessica:

It is true. I think many people who, if they'd be really truly honest, they probably have a lot of threads per of other activities that have enhance their practice. For me, I think, I feel very, um, ice, maybe stifled is the word if I'm using just one thing. So I kind like doing a lot of stuff and that's why it perfume is kind of fun cause I get to teach, I get to make, I get to have conversations with people and then there's a lot of art that's being made around scent and I love that. Um, I'm uh, board member at the Institute for art and Olfaction. It's in Los Angeles and every year they have an award. This year it was an Amsterdam and each category there's various categories and one of them is for experimental art making. And so people are making art exhibition pieces that have some aspect of it is aroma based.

I actually won this award in 2015 for a perfume I created for a another company called Canoe and Austin, Texas. It was a leather perfume and that year the experimental art project was this lovely group of artists that were out of Amsterdam and they did the scented creative deaths. So if you could see the that moment, what did it smell like when the celebrity died? What would it smell like? Oh Wow. Yeah. So they were thinking this broader concept of what scent is and you'll see that a lot is I think right now on the west coast here in lovely United States, there's this big renaissance of perfume and art making and scent. And I was only going to grow bigger and bigger and it's pretty awesome to be a part of this institute for art and Olfaction.

Kimberly:

Well, and it seems like the new and different things that people are trying are going to sort of push beyond just this is making perfume. It's like you said, now you're pushing into other creative avenues because scent is part of any experience. You know, you, you have these memories, there is a scent and I can't name it, I can't even fully describe it, but every time I smell it, I am back in this moment in 2004 in a market. I still don't know what this sentence, but occasionally it will hit me. You should, I'm pretty sure it was like in a fruit market. So there's some times in like a grocery store where that sent will hit me and I'm like, oh my God. I remember walking down the street in the hydro in this fruit market and I'm right there. And so scent is like intertwined in all of our lives and our are just where we are. And it's gotta be fun to be a part of that process for people.

Jessica:

It really is. And one of my favorite things is I teach a beginner perfume class, um, and it's that basic palliate of beginner essences. And I love teaching it and sharing these materials with students, many who are, have never done perfume before. So this is truly a beginner. Some have done and made perfumes. So you'll pull out these essences and some people will just go, oh, they might smell rose or jasmine. And you can see that, that, that trigger, just like you had in the fruit market, it triggered something and they're remembering something. And all of our senses have filters except for our sense of smell. So when we smell, it literally is triggering our emotional, it's the limbic system, so our emotions and memories and you're just getting tapped right there. So if you smell something, yeah, you, you literally, your brain just threw you back into the Cairo market, whether you like it or not, which is fascinating.

Kimberly:

It is. Well, you mentioned teaching and I was so disappointed that I couldn't take your classic Craftcation. I'm pretty sure I was teaching at the exact same time. What got you into teaching? Because I can tell your passion for teaching just in hearing you talk about it. So where did it all start for you?

Jessica:

I must say my mother was a teacher, so I think that might be in my blood potential. She, uh, she taught at first she was teaching speech therapy to special education students and then she switched over in her path and taught gifted and talented students. So she really had this very interesting moment of working with children that had special needs and in all forms and fashions. She was really a wonderful teacher and she always had a following of students that would say, ah, you know, Miss Hannah made a big difference. Mrs Hannah was the one who helped me figure this out. You know, it was just the lovely, a lovely history. So I think my mom's desire to teach, but for me, I, I taught in a program that was a freshman seminar at Columbia College. Chicago happens to be where I also got my graduate degree and I worked there for a long time.

Jessica:

But this program, uh, we did a gathering of instructors and you was sort of like the beginning of the year. And I remember we had a discussion about, about learning and this, uh, instructor, I'm forgetting her name now, but she brought this image and she showed, I was looking at a renaissance painting and all of these students were looking inward at this table and there was a light shining from below the table. And that always struck me is that really, truly we're all fascinated and in all of the platform, it's not

just the teacher teaching, but it's the material that's giving us light and interest and focus. So for me, I love to teach in a way that I'm highlighting the materials and practice. I want people to look at that with awe and wonder, not necessarily my work, but at the work that is bringing us together. So when I teach, I often want to say, okay, let's dig into this.

Jessica:

It's an exciting materials based, let's go. And so it's just fascinating. And, and a learning space for many people is a place where they were shamed. You know, Gosh, I can't tell you how like colleges and high schools where you just, it was all about learning in a way that was stifling and I love to teach in a way that's just exploring. We keep exploring and we make interesting hypothesis. We see what happens. It doesn't always land. Sometimes you make something that's interesting and you might learn something from that mistake or that interesting shift. So for me it's this landscape of continuing to learn from our learning and potentially new things will be discovered.

Kimberly:

Those have to be the qualities of a good teacher where you're really like sharing your knowledge, but doing it in a way that just allows people to try new things and to see what they like and what they don't like and how maybe they can incorporate the things that they've learned into their lives, whether it be a hobby or just you know, something that they have to be creative. As you're talking, I'm thinking this is exactly how I feel when I'm teaching is this like, it's not going to be perfect. Let's just have fun together. I'm going to share what I know and we're going to learn together and you know, we're going to see what happens at the end. And it may not be perfect, but I hope you can walk away with a new appreciation for what I'm teaching you and maybe an interest in doing it some more. But if not, I hope you had an amazing day learning from me. And it sounds like you feel very similar to

Jessica:

that feeling. I mean, wouldn't you agree a student that comes in wanting perfection is never going to learn? Yeah, it's a dangerous headspace, but we are very much wooed by making very good right away. Um, I think in some ways, I love the moment that the Internet can help us because we can see projects and I, I kind of love also on Netflix. The show nailed it when they really don't nail it. And it's hilarious because that's the reality is we aren't perfect. We're extremely imperfect and we need to just give ourselves grace when we make and we create. I have recently had some students say to me that they feel like I'm giving them, yeah.

Kimberly:

Permission to just like do it, to not try to make it perfect because my, my style is really like, and then I kind of did this and then I tried this and everybody's like, but didn't you use a ruler? I'm like, it's close enough. And so, you know, they sort of feel like in that afternoon together, I've said just, you know, do it, see what happens and you'll learn from it

Jessica:

and you'll sort of develop your own method. But if you're so focused on getting something perfect, it's never going to happen. It will never happen. And also, there's just so much opportunity for disappointment. You will continually be disappointed after disappointment. And there's just, I mean, we

could talk endlessly about the way that we put ourselves in a position for failure. There's just too many opportunities to fail when you're trying to hit a bar too high. But I also believe that when we give ourselves room to play, this is, I'm back to my theater background. Um, Viola Spolin is a theater. She started all of the Improv, um, movement basically. And it's around these games and they're like old parlor games where you just play and you have fun. And one of her quotes I believe was something about, you know, um, I take the moment, we play very seriously.

So playing is serious. So when I am working, I'm playing, but very seriously, I'm not messing around. I'm not just dithering and dabbling and throwing things together. I have a, a process, but it is in an environment that allows me to let go of perfection and just have a moment of what would happen if this went together with that. That's where magic happens.

Kimberly:

Oh, for sure. Well, and in the landscape of teaching, you know, students, like you said, they could easily get themselves built up that they're going to leave a class with this amazing scent. Or in my case, they leave with a finished garment. I tend to remind them that we're going to treat today like a really fun practice. And if you leave with something really great, then that is fantastic. But if not, let's look at it before you leave and I'll help you make some changes. So next time it's even better. And I think that as long as students can enjoy the process and feel like they've had some success, then they're more likely to continue that. I really love that.

Jessica:

I love this idea of setting them up for learning something. Um, cause there is no, there's no way that we can get to better work if we're constantly holding ourselves in judgment. We can't make ourselves have space to learn. Oftentimes. Um, I talk about too is like what are you smelling when you get done with that perfume? Can you smell how this material is stronger than that material because you chose to put more drops in of that one? Or can you see how this one, aren't you glad we only put one drop in because it's so very strong or a lot of people, the other thing that's really challenging with perfume is I might know what will happen in the bottle, but when you put it on someone's skin, it transforms. So I have a wonderful friend that whenever you put anything on her skin gets really powdery and soft.

And then I have another friend that you put things on her and it gets really metallic and sometimes green smelling so you could put the same perfume on both of their skins and it smells very different, so I don't even have the ability to say what will happen once someone makes a perfume in a class and what their skin might do to it, which is so cool. It's so cool. It's like a surprise every single time. Every single time and I get a little high about it. It's like, this is so cool. We are all so similar and different in the same breath.

Kimberly:

Do you find that when you're teaching you like you get excited about this field that you're involved in, like as you're teaching someone something that is just second nature to you? You do it all the time. It makes sense to you on so many levels, but when you're breaking it down for a student and you're explaining things, do you get excited again because you see the excitement in them?

Jessica:

100% and I teach an advanced two day intensive class that is so fun. It's like, let's go play. You have, you've given yourself two days to be here, so let's enjoy our time together. And it is just, it's like, you know, running through the fields, we get to do this then it really is exciting. And one thing that I've, I've had people who return again and again to that class and when they come back and they've learned something or they've been working on something and they're excited to share with me that they've been really exploring something, it makes my work feel like I'm doing the right thing. I'm really in the right place at the right time.

Kimberly:

Yeah. I think that you know, you know in those moments that this is what you are supposed to be doing, that you are actually making an impact and yeah, it might be perfume that we're talking about, but it is making an impact on these people that they are excited, something creative and that they can't wait to share with you what they've done. And it just feels like, not that you're looking for validation, but it's just showing yes. Like what you are doing is what you should be doing.

Jessica:

And I think there's a lot of art forms that allow for that to be possible. When you start really digging into them and you start feeling, ah yes, this feels right. And I hope that people will, you know, if they are attracted to whatever art form it is that they'll go towards it. Because in my opinion, we need more people doing the work that they're attracted to and interested in and less of the things that they aren't interested in.

Kimberly:

Yes, yes. You know, my mom for most of my life has always said, figure out what you love to do and then find a way to get paid for it. And that is sort of how I've framed everything that I've done is like, okay, what do I really love to do now? Is there a way for me to make this my job because I'm going to be infinitely more happy than if I'm stuck at a desk and I hate going to work everyday. So I think that that's a similar idea. More people need to do the things that they enjoy. And overall everybody's going to be happier.

Jessica:

Agreed. And I, I even to add another layer to that. I think some people will be happier at their desk jobs if they're doing things in their day to day that gives them joy. I mean, I don't, I, I agree with your mom. For me that really fits. But some people don't want to be, um, owning a business. Like they need to be exploring the things that make them shine. I think about, um, and this is probably for you too. There's a group of elders in our, in our realm that were, that were making their own, um, peach preserves or they were doing all kinds of sewing. And those women have influenced my thought process in that this was a part of their daily life. This was a part of who they were. Um, and I think there's this ongoing

conversation too about monetizing the things that make us, uh, have joy. It can be dangerous unless you want to own a business, right? Unless you really want to own a business.

Kimberly:

Exactly. Well, and you know, I've talked about this with quite a few of the guests on the podcast is once you have monetized this thing that you love you, you still love it, but you can never do it just passively. You can't just be like, oh I'm going to go. So a shirt because you're constantly thinking in your head while you're doing it. Okay, so how is this going to relate to my business and am I going to be able to do a blog post? Am I going to be able to post this here and there? And so it does take a little bit of the like care free love of the craft away. But as makers we've got like 10 million other I creative things in our brain that you sort of are forced to then find something new to be your casual thing and

Jessica:

you know, you do this other thing for your business. And I, I think for me, I, I have just the exact same feeling you, you have to do this nine to five worker. It's really more than that obviously. But you can do the work to get the, to get the business continuing in it and moving forward. One thing I did in this past year, which is probably one of my favorite decisions, I found some people who are also likeminded advanced perfumers capable of holding some time and space and their schedules and we've been meeting on a monthly basis and we give each other, um, challenges. And each month we come back together, we bring our perfumes, good, bad or indifferent, and we share them together. And then we talk about materials and our practice and different things that we've been reading and talking about. So it's just our little advanced group of meetup friends, but we're all at the same level, so it doesn't feel like any of us have, um, the Trump card. Like we're not the one that's going to be top dog. We're kind of all in this together. And that's been back to the first conversation we had is it's like these likeminded people that can really help the conversation go forward so you're not just alone in your business. I think that's made a big difference for me.

Kimberly:

Yeah. As a creative, most times we're all working from home in a basement or an extra bedroom. And I think you really need to search out your community, not just your community within the creative field, but your community within like the small business within that creative field. Because no one else totally understands what it's like unless they're deep in this small business working 12 hour days working on weekends and holidays. And it's nice to have other people to bounce ideas off of and not feel like your, you know, dominating their extra mind space. In your case, if you've set up this monthly thing that you guys are all in a similar place, so you're just like, okay, this is what I've got going on. What do you think? Or somebody shares what they learned. And so I love that idea and I think more people need to find their people so that they can have these relationships that they might not get otherwise.

Jessica:

Definitely it makes all the difference in the world.

Kimberly:

So you had mentioned that you sort of like went all in, invested the money to learn this craft. At what point? Once you've sort of dug in, you know, it was related to your masters thesis. At what point did you say, I want to make this a business now?

Jessica:

That's a really good question and it goes back to good people in your life. I was making perfume, I was learning. I mean it's the one thing about this practice of perfuming with synthetics were natural says it's just expensive. You all the materials are extremely expensive and there's never an end to what you can try because think about it, every rose is different from every field. So you get the same rose oils, you could get the same oil from the same field and it smells different from year to year. So for me, that investment was huge. I'm still investing all the time into the materials I have and use. So for me, when I was doing that, it was just kind of a learning and fun experimental place.

And then I started kind of sideways selling to friends and then I wanted to teach and you know, all this. So I was like, you know, I really wanted to teach. I thought it was just this cool practice and I wanted to share perfume and I had no idea how I was going to do it. This was when I was living in Chicago and I had a lovely friend and Caitlin, thank you. Thank you. [inaudible] she, we were sitting having coffee I believe, and she said, okay, I'm going to pull out my calendar now and I want to tell, I want you to tell me when I'm going to come over. And I was like, what? When am I going to come over so you can teach me how to make perfume? And it was the big like, oh, oh you mean right now? Okay, I'll get up my calendar.

And she said, okay, on this day and I'll bring my friend and you're going to teach us how to make perfume. And I was really held accountable by my friend and she knew in her heart of hearts, this is exactly what I needed to do. And she knew that I've been thinking about it and kind of struggling with it and have someone just say, you can do this there and you can't make a mistake cause I'm your friend and I'll just support it. So from that moment on, I was like, okay, I did it with her. I'm going to start opening this up slower and slower and learn. So I've been teaching for about 10 years and when I was beginning my practice, it was in my home. I would have people over who are, you know, trusted friends and their friends. And then I started, uh, I moved to Austin, Texas and I did a really smart thing.

I met up with a woman, um, Clarissa and she helped me with my PR and marketing. And if it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have the business that I have today. And I think that's something else is this is very lonely space, but you have to find the people that will support you. So I definitely understand PR and marketing, but her help at that time was, um, so invaluable. And then my business of teaching really went into full action. I, that's what I did in Austin and then when I moved to San Francisco, which is where I live now, I've been teaching full time as my job and you travel to teach as well, so that's really fun too.

Kimberly:

I know I started really traveling for teaching and it's fun because it feels like now you've got all these other people you get to teach that aren't within a driving distance of where you live and you're experiencing different groups of people in different places you can teach and you teach both big and small, right in little like shops as well as like, did I read at universities are like botanical gardens? I mean you're like, you're a big deal.

Jessica:

Yeah, I, I do teach at botanical gardens. I think that's one of my favorite places to teach because you'll have people who have been gardening for their entire lives. I mean, I had a woman in her late eighties who came to one of my workshops and she knew materials and she could talk directly about that was so fun. So yes, I teach at Botanic Gardens, I've gone to universities just to share materials and lecture, um, as a guest of course. And I've also found that some of my favorite teaching is small shops. So, and that, that, that really is an amazing place to be with people who are just curious and want to learn. And then I also teach in, um, established places for Olfaction, like the Institute for art and Olfaction, which is in La. And a great place. I teach at a place here in San Francisco called Tiger Lily perfumery and teach there from time to time and it's all a perfume shop and they know their stuff. So it just really depends. Um, I have to find the right fit. And right now I'm sort of embarking on a few larger projects and I'm making sure that my, uh, teaching is not overwhelming, you know, because if you say yes to everything, that means there's very little time for exploring new ideas.

Kimberly:

Yeah, exactly. Now I have to ask, do you create or have you created your own distilled sense? Cause I can imagine that's a whole other level of involved. And I, I honestly can't even begin to imagine what is involved in that. But have you done it or are you going to do it or

Jessica:

I will never do that because it's um, it takes a lot of materials for one and a lot of things come from specific parts or regions of the world. So frankincense comes from certain countries. In Africa you have flowers that come from certain countries and are really meant to grow there. And there's fields and fields and fields of these flowers that maybe reap only a few ounces or kilos. You know, you don't have the ability to make materials if you don't have a large field to if reap the materials from. So for me, I think I'm more fascinated with the creative process versus distilling or getting the materials. And I have great regard though, high regard for the people that do this. And there's, if, I mean just for fun, there's a lovely, a documentary on Youtube, I believe now called the frankincense trail and it's just this woman that goes and looks at the people that are harvesting frankincense. And then there's other ways to just do a quick Google of distilling roses and you can see the mounds of roses pedals. That is to get just a little bit of the oil. So for me, I am so glad they're doing it because it makes my practice possible. Yeah.

Kimberly:

I, I can understand because like I said, I had no idea what actually goes into it. Um, but where do you source your materials? You know, you said that there's like Frankincense is from, you know, places in Africa and you've got roses from a very specific place. And how do you source the sense that you're going to then use for your perfumes?

Jessica:

Well, you know, the Internet's amazing, isn't it? I feel that I, and I do kind of point to the fact that the, the Internet has been so available and ready for people just to type in whatever they're interested in. So I get things from all over the world and there's different places where you can buy materials and they have done their research and I trust these companies. So when people are sourcing, you're literally getting stuff from everywhere around the world. And for me that's like a perfume is just a trip. It's a

traveling moment where if you've got frankincense in there and you've got rose from maybe France or Bulgaria and then you've got maybe some wild harvested labdanum or something, you've got these materials that are quite literally from everywhere. So your perfume is just a trip. You're just traveling the world. And it depends on um, the different materials. I don't look at one country or one company as the best. So it just depends on where you buy and what you get and what you want for your projects.

Kimberly:

And now since your whole thing is this natural perfumes and your purchasing materials from other companies, is there some sort of like regulating body around, um, sense or how can you, I mean maybe you can tell just by smelling it if something is synthetic or not, but how, how does that all work?

Jessica:

Yeah, I just buy from companies that are natural and they test their materials to make sure they're not adulterated. Thing is is like synthetics are, I think of them as two different genres, so natural perfumes. Then there's mixed media and then there's synthetics. So you've got the ability to do all three. But I find that naturals are just really fascinating and I love that Pallet of materials. But certainly, I mean that's the beauty as we are capable of making materials, um, or making perfumes with materials from synthetics as well. If someone wanted to.

Kimberly:

And you don't incorporate synthetic materials within your teaching, your perfumes,

Jessica:

you know, I don't, but there are definitely people out there that do. And I, again, I talk about the Institute for art and Olfaction. They have great resources and classes that, um, are encompassing synthetics and naturals.

Kimberly:

How has your making evolved over the years?

Jessica:

I sort of feel like the really connects to me being a mom. I feel like I've been sort of dabbling around with different things. And when I started really focusing and honing in on perfume, I knew that this was exactly the right medium for me. And I really dug into it and committed to it. And then educating was a big part of that. And as I became a mom, I realized, Oh, I don't have a lot of extra time. So I found that I sort of doubled down on getting things done. And when I, and I know Kimberly, you get this, it's like you just have to get it done because you don't have a lot of extra hours when you have children or you have maybe some other person that you're caring for in your life. So I think there's a lot of people who get this is that you have to make every moment count. So when I first began, I was kind of Lottie to whatever happens and now I'm like, get it done. You got it this time. You got these things to do. And in some ways I feel that there's a beauty in that and there's also a bit of sadness that you just don't have a lot of free Lottie dots. Okay.

Kimberly:

Yeah. Do you find that you're more productive when you're like, I've got three hours today, I need to do work for three hours, or do you find that that stifles you and you're like, ah, I have so much to do but I only have three hours and then it's like hard to to buckle down and get work done.

Jessica:

Dude, I love lists. I love a good old list. I will just put everything on there and one of my best friends back in the day, she would say, now you need to put the first thing on your list. Make a list so you can cross that out. So I definitely love a list, but when I have only a certain amount of time, if I'm not using that time, the guilt is heavy. I have to use that time wisely because if you don't get another moment to like build into your day, if you don't get it done that three hours, like you're saying. So for me it's, it's valuable to get things done. I, I feel that when I'm making a commitment to other people that I must keep my promises. So when I want to teach well at a venue or a new place, I want to teach it that might top and most powerful self. So I don't want to mess around with that. I want to give my all,

Kimberly:

yeah, I find that my eye, I mean not that I don't work well on my own projects, but I do find that anytime someone else is involved, I am at a like a super level of like I, there's a deadline, I'm going to meet it. You have a question, I'm gonna answer, I'm going to do Mike absolute best. And it's just, it feels like you should, if you've got people expecting something of you, then you want to do your absolute best. And I'm finding some times that that's not the case with people because people that I work with are like, oh, you're so on top of things. I love that you keep to the deadlines. And I'm thinking, do other people not keep to their deadlines? So I don't think that that's universal. I don't think that everybody is quite on top of things when they do projects for other people.

Jessica:

I know, I know I have a challenge even going there because I feel like, um, I just want to represent the, the work that I do in my business in such a strong way and is I think sad for me when other people don't have the same belief. But I think there's also different ways that people do their work.

Kimberly:

Exactly. And what works for me and what works for you is not gonna work for everybody. And you know, somebody who doesn't have kids who might be in their early twenties and just, it's just them, it's their life is going to look very different than somebody who, you know, is caring for somebody or has children or has a job outside of this business that they're also running.

Jessica:

And I, I mean, and even the other layer, I totally agree with you Kimberly. There's another aspect that I've feel valuable that we don't talk about a lot is just the levels of anxiety and depression that can really affect the mentality of our work and how we present ourselves in the world. So, you know, if someone's struggling with those things, there is no amount of deadline or motivation that's going to help them. And it, I think there's such value and really addressing that. We're just all so very different and we're all dealing with our own demons and struggles and just to get up out of bed sometimes for some people is an unbelievable task. So I feel like there's an interesting moment where when I think about how I work in the world and how other people work in the world, we're all just doing the best we can.

Kimberly:

Exactly. And I think that reminding ourselves and helping to remind other people that it's okay. Like you said, if if the biggest thing you did today was get out of bed, then you got out of bed. Because there have been times years ago where I didn't even get out of bed. I just like laid in bed all day and if you did a million things on your to do list, that's fantastic too. I think it's recognizing that you can only do so much yourself and some days are good and some days aren't. And you know, just sort of like leaning into that and just accepting that everybody is different. And you know, with social it's so hard to not compare what you're doing, how your business is going to all of these other people

Jessica:

that are in your degree. So true. It's just, it is very odd when there's just this onslaught, it's just ongoing forever. And you can have imposter syndrome till the end of time and the social media platforms are not helpful in that. And I think the best thing, sometimes it's just a turn it off and step away and continue. I have a really lovely Grad school advisor and she would, um, she would just say, just go do your work. Just go do your work. And that's always been in my head and I am thankful for her. Just go do your work because that impostor syndrome will take you down.

Kimberly:

Oh, exactly. And you know, I mean puts doubt where there shouldn't be doubt. And sometimes for me I'm like, no, I shouldn't feel that way. Like I am really good at what I do. And regardless of whether this person is getting more sales or more likes or whatever, like that doesn't impact me and my knowledge and my business. And so, but it's hard. It's hard if you're insecure already and then now you're feeling like you are horrible at what you do. Um, you're more likely to probably just be like, okay, maybe I'm done. Like maybe this just isn't for me. And I've had those moments. I remember calling my mom, you know, cause I'm 36 but probably last year I called my mom and was like, I'm horrible at this. No one wants to buy my patterns. Why am I even doing it? And she's like, no. He's like, well, like we both know that's not true. And I'm like, yeah, but she's like, no, really, like just, you know, it, it's okay. Take a break, take a little bit of a break and then you know, you have to sort of center yourself again and remember that you actually do know what you're doing and that you are on this path for your business. And we

don't really know where that path is leading. None of us know what the future holds for our business and so you just, like you said, you have to just do the work and I think that if that's something that you are enjoying and that you are good at, it will all come together. It just might be on a different timeline than other people

Jessica:

and it's so true. You have to do your own path, your own work, your own platforms. You don't have to worry about what other people are doing. I find it to be very challenging and not, not just for me. I mean I'm seeing this manifesting in people who I care about too and yet you want to present yourself to the world in the most beautiful light and I think that's why things like creative conferences and being part of your communities and not just holding away. It goes back every single time for me about reaching out to other people.

Kimberly:

Exactly. And not being scared to do that because sometimes you can be like, oh my God, I don't really want to email that person, but I can pretty much guarantee most of the time they're going to be like, oh, that's fantastic. It's great to hear from you. And then you've now created this sense of community and the fear of rejection keeps you from actually reaching out to these people. I recently have gotten multiple emails, probably two or three emails in the last week where somebody has said, I really would love to learn. You know what you do, how you do it, like tell me so that I can sort of see if this is something I want to do. And every time I get one I'm like, this is so cool. And yes, let me tell you what I know and I hope that this will get you excited about something within this field, but I would never want somebody to not email me because they think I'm going to ignore them if I ignore them. It's because I ignore all my emails and it's just a business, not a personal thing. And eventually I'll get there if I'm, if it's deep in my emails, but you know, like I want people to feel like they can approach me and ask me any question that they have and I'll do my best to help them. Um, I want people to find that community because I have found that community within this field.

Jessica:

Absolutely. And it is true. It's sometimes I think there's a desire to, um, to hold back. And, um, when I was first beginning my practice, I was doing a lot of knitting and I had this manual knitting machine from the 1950s and I would make these bags and scarves and interesting things with this knitting machine. This is back in like the 2000, 2005 ish. And I love this knitting machine. Um, but the reality is that you go to these shows, and this is right, of course when the DIY movement was happening, and I remember this woman, I would go to this show that would happen periodically and she was so excited because she had made something and she saw someone else riffing off of that. And my instinct was, how did you not get intimidated, jealous, angry, and she said, because we only get better when we all work together. And it was so beautiful that she was really seeing how she was inspiring other makers. And I hope that I can

adopt that. And when I'm working with my students is that they can see their work and continue it in the, in the vein that they choose, but hopefully be inspired by whatever I'm teaching.

Kimberly:

Yeah. I think that we can all do better if we just work together because someone might take the things that they've learned in your class and do something really cool and you'll be like, I never even thought to do that with the knowledge that I shared with you. And it just feels like none of us know everything. So why not work with other people and learn from them what they might be brewing in their brain and make changes or be inspired by all of these other makers. So I don't think that you really ever lose out by collaborating and being within these communities. You just get better. They get better. The entire like industry just gets better

Jessica:

and it's one of the reasons this podcast is so great. I mean we're really able to tap in and hear people who are doing their thing.

Kimberly:

Yeah, well that's what I really wanted with this podcast was just this chance for us to hear these stories of lots of different makers and I've had people say, I knew nothing about dying yarn, but then I listened to that episode and I realized that just because it's different than what I do, there's really cool things that I can learn and it's also to be exposed to new and different things. I think that makers in general have a million creative things going on in their brain. We are always looking for something new to try and we can only be exposed to new things with this podcast and so I'm really having fun hearing these stories and sharing these stories and learning about these things I would have never known before. It's so great. Yeah. What is it like having a small business? We've touched on this a bit. I mean, you've been doing this for 10 years and it has to be, you've learned things over the years. I can imagine.

Did you have sort of business knowledge going into it or was it like a lot of us where we're just like, now we're going to do this and how do I do accounting and how do I do this and that

Jessica:

and I still get stressed out about those things. I mean it's not my instinct in many makers have this knee jerk reaction and love for the practice of whatever they're making. So then they want to do the next level and that tends to be monetizing and then they have to do all these other things, these businessy things. And that's another skill set are truly is. So for me the, the reaching out to other people has made a big difference. But you know, the thing that's made my business possible is that I always have some sort of side thing that has nothing connected to my business. So like, um, I took a class at hand craft

studio school this a few months ago with a maker named Aaron Wheeler. And she does, um, collage. It's paint painted paper collage. And I was like, you know, I have never explored this. It sounds interesting.

I'm going to do it. And it was truly like a gift to my maker. So I had to do something in this class. I had however many hours it was to do it and I didn't have to think about perfume at all. And I walked away with the collage and I was very happy about it. And she was a fantastic instructor and you know, it really was a gift. So I think in some ways we have to continue as Julia camera would say, um, go on these artists states with ourselves and you have to continue to spark your creativity and your interest. And that actually was a panel I was on and at Craftcation about sparking creativity and how we have to continue to honor that we are creative beings. Um, and however that manifests for the maker and the business owner. So I love perfume and it's great and I love doing it, but there's all these other little, little voices in my head that say, hey, try this. Try that. And so I recommend continuing to explore other mediums.

Kimberly:

Well, and I think that's an interesting idea too, because as you take other classes, you are a teacher so you are being exposed to lots of different, not just making things but teachers and teaching styles. And you may see this one little thing that that teacher does that you think, oh my gosh, I never thought to do that. That's amazing and I should incorporate that. So it sort of feels like you're learning about yourself, you're learning about your business, you're learning about business in general and it's just sort of an ever evolving process that you wouldn't get if you weren't pushing yourself to try things and see what happens.

Jessica:

It's so true. I totally agree. But I also think not, and I would guess you would say the same is doing things that are really out of your wheelhouse. Just things that like I go to this crazy yoga class that pushes me or I might do, um, just walks in. I'm in San Francisco, so really hard blocks in neighborhoods that I'm not familiar with so I can see the landscape. So doing things that just get me out of the humdrum boring life that I have with. Cause I think when we do the same thing with our businesses, it can get really boring and not inspiring. So finding ways to continue to inspire ourselves.

Kimberly:

Yeah. And I think that you can't avoid that as a maker, as a maker, as a creative. You've always got your brain tuned to creative things and you almost don't have enough time to do all of the things. Um, but at the same time it's good to take a little break and try something new because sometimes you just need to shut business brain off, be creative, and then you're going to come back more refreshed. Even if it was just an afternoon class, you're going to come back excited about what you do in a way that you might not, if you never gave yourself a chance to just like be in it. And it's hard. It's hard to make that time. I get it, but I can't say enough about how it's influenced and helped me. Yeah. Uh, myself as well, and I'm, you know, recently obsessed with indigo dye.

Kimberly:

And so I took a class cause I was like, I'm going to, instead of just teaching myself, I'm going to take a class. I learned so much. It's solidified my obsession with indigo dye and now that is just a really fun thing that I do. Like I just, I'm like, this is really cool. I'm going to do this, but I have a better understanding of it and now I can incorporate this into my actual business. The things that I'm dying, I can so with, and it just feels like this perfect marriage, but it's not my business. So I still get to really enjoy the process. I love about monetizing it. Yeah. And it's so important that we find these places where we get to have some space to play. Yeah, exactly. Um, so what is something you have planned for the future for your business if you can share it?

Every time I ask this, I'm always like, you may not actually be able to share these things if they're sort of a big project or something exciting that's coming up for your business.

Jessica:

This is so hard because I feel like every true business owner has about 15 things they're dreaming for me. And it may not happen now, but at some point I just love the idea of traveling more. So with my work and being part of different lands gapes I go back to that word a lot because I think about like traveling to the regions that these materials are being sourced from and that would be an interesting now none of this is planned, but these are the dreams of the word. Yeah. And I also feel like there's, for me, um, hi, I'm very much wanting to continue the conversation with my students about creating at advanced levels and creating, um, potentially some higher standards for the work so that we can all have good language around the work that we're creating. So for me, there's always an interest in building community and how that community is supporting one another. I love all of that.

Kimberly:

I think that you can't help but make your business better as you're implementing all of these things with your students and within your business. And I can only imagine how amazing it would be to travel the world and see these places that these scents are coming from and just appreciating it on a really basic level.

Jessica:

Yeah. And I do it in small ways, but I hope to continue to discontinue to travel a bit more. Um, and you know, with kids, I have a three year old, so she's actually at an age where she can travel a bit easier. And that's how, um, I think we could do some really cool stuff. And you know, it's fun having a kid too. Like she's really into it. Like I have little jars that are just her little smell jars and she gets to smell them and I have things that, um, I'll have on scent strips and she'll come over and want to smell them. Mum Can I smell? And so she'll smell these little scent strips. So I think there's also this awe and wonder about raising a kid in this world and having them appreciate this land and earth that we're a part of.

Kimberly:

I think that seeing these things through the eyes of kids just makes you really appreciate it. And I can tell you, because I know this from my daughter, your Kiddo is going to be your biggest cheerleader. My daughter, who is almost nine, will randomly tell people, did you know my mom has a podcast? You can find it at a coffee with makers or she'll be like, you know, have you thought about going to my mom's retreat? You can find all the information on our website. And I'm like, you're just telling clerks at the grocery store about neat. I'm like, you're the perfect like hype man for my business. And I think that your child is going to just not that like this is just life. I, my mom is creative, I am creative and this is just a part of what everybody grows up with even though it's not.

Kimberly:

But it's such a fun childhood I think. Yeah, it really is. It's, it's fun to see it through her eyes. It's really fun to share these creative things with our kids. It's so true. Thank you so much Jessica. This was a blast. I so good to talk to you. I agree. I think that, you know, we keep talking about this community and how you've got to find your people and there's something to be said for just like sitting down and talking and learning. You can't help but grow as you learn people's maker stories. And I just thank you so much for taking the time and thank you for having me. It's nice to have some coffee with you. Yes, exactly. Now before we go, can you tell people where they can find you?

Jessica:

Sure. I have a website, which is Jay Hannah co.com. I'm on Instagram, I'm on Twitter, and then I'm teaching all over. So my actual schedule is on my website. You can find everywhere. I'm teaching there.

Kimberly:

Perfect. Well, I will put all of this in the show notes so people can find you and follow you and join you. I'm secretly hoping you'll come to Seattle soon to teach so I can take a class. But thank you again, Jessica. This was amazing.