PERSONAL ESSAY

# Stories of Yale Farm: A Collage of Community Space

// BY BEATRICE BARILLA



CLARIS SHIN

I walked up the familiar gravel path, enjoying the spring sun's glow, golden in the early evening. A crowd of students gathered to enjoy each other's company and the smell of fresh pizza; conversation hummed over live guitar music. But something was off. The normally joyful air was tense. The wooden picnic tables — usually dedicated to a crafting or farming lesson — were instead populated by students writing letters to the dean of Yale College. The very farm in which they sat was under threat.

I first visited the Yale farm last fall to paint flowerpots with the Yale Student Environmental Coalition. Under twinkling fairy lights, I met others who enjoyed spending time in nature and wondered why I had never visited this magical place before. The weekly Friday pizza evenings and community "Knead 2 Know" talks, which spotlight community figures involved in sustainable food production, became a fixture of my Yale experience. The warmth of the Yale Farm community, a space for peer connection, environmental service and sustainability is no secret among Yalies. Their stories demonstrate how the space had a profound impact upon their intellectual development and sense of self.

Mary Ayala '29, a culinary events manager at the Yale Farm — "aka one of the pizza makers," she says — told me about her first workday at the farm.

"Some people were out in the fields while the culinary team was busy prepping food. I was chopping and caramelizing soooooo many onions, but we were blasting music and chatting away the whole time. Some people were forming dough balls, others were tending the fire, and others were chopping and preparing veggies and sauces. It was this amazing, coordinated chaos."

Ayala said she loves how the farm welcomes everyone and how it encourages deeper connections with the land and with people over a shared meal. "It's where I find peace and a deeper sense of purpose, to be a steward of the earth and to build real, meaningful human connections," she said.

Maia Roothaan's '26 experience and mentorship with the Yale Farm has been essential, she said The farm prepared her for her work with the Maroon people of Suriname on Amazon rainforest conservation. From guiding her in research to providing a shared community, she says Yale Farm was "the biggest contributor to her intellectual curiosity at Yale."

Yuki Heeger '29, a Yalie from New Haven, told me that she remembers planting carrots at the farm in elementary school. She told me that New Haven elementary schools often have field trips there to teach kids about food production and foster a connection between them and the land. It's a small memory, but it shows that the farm has impacts beyond Yale. It is interwoven into the lives of the greater New Haven community.

Ella Adebonojo '28 told me that the Yale Farm informed her academic and community identity, while allowing her to spread awareness about food systems across campus and beyond.

Between these stories and my own experience, it's no wonder that the rumored firing of the sustainable food program's director and elimination of the Food, Agriculture and Climate Change certificate program caused uproar. This place is special to the hearts and minds of so many on and off campus. The Yale Farm doesn't just grow crops — it grows community.

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PERSONAL ESSAY

# Smelling the Koolaid

// BY STEPHANIE ALTSCHUL

Le Labo's eau de parfum, Thé Noir, has gone viral. When I'm "taking a lap" around a crowd on a Saturday night, I pass a minimum of three individuals of indeterminate gender cloaked in the distinctive smoky signature. My high school ex-boyfriend was obsessed with the fragrance and, to my dismay, the popular scent makes me feel like I'm being haunted by scented specters of my past every time I smell it.

Yale, at least to my nose, seems to be infatuated with smelling good. Even the orange-shirted athletes on cross campus earlier this week sported a distinctive olfactory layer of something other than eau de locker room and musk gymnasio.

As evidenced by our very own Yale Student Fragrance Organization — whose fragrance-making workshops regularly draw waiting lists of over 200 students — the people have an insatiable scent obsession. I factor myself into this calculation a disproportionate amount. I consider myself a fragrance fan, yes, but probably a little more than just that, given the embarrassing sum I've surrendered to the hobby in the past year and a half.

I'm not alone. Social media influencers like Jeremy Fragrance, Professor Perfume and Paul Fino command millions of views and are just three of dozens of viral creators whose content is devoted entirely to the subject. There's likely some economic masochism at play — fragrance is one of the most aggressively price-gouged commodities on the market. Without a doubt, fragrance collecting is a vanity hobby filled with sculptural, expensive bottles that unsubtly signal wealth. The obsession comes from a materialist need to have more things. It's fun to see the shiny 50mL bottles adorn my desk. As devoted as I am to my collection, I could not fathom displaying it if the bottles weren't beautiful.

The trend envelops people. In a conversation on Beinecke plaza in between classes, Sofia Teifeld '29 shared her thoughts. She told me that "when you're walking by someone on Cross Campus that has perfume on it makes you want to put some on too." There's a bandwagon quality to it, cultural pressure that reframes smelling good as the baseline for not smelling bad.

Sebi Green '29 pointed to the internet as an accelerant. "On the internet, it's become this whole thing that rolls into looksmaxxing culture," he told me. "You need to smell good to be memorable and desirable." Sebi, if I'm not mistaken, was sporting my personal demon Thé Noir, which is genuinely a good scent and is getting all too much hate in this article. But still.

Feeling vaguely disillusioned from the field following my various Thé Noir-filled outings, and perhaps a little depressed thinking about the scent-shaped gap in my bank account, I turned to Mr. Yale Fragrance himself, Brody West Falchuk '28 — my friend crush and fellow Piersonite.

He is, refreshingly, a true believer. There isn't a shadow of doubt in his mind that fragrance is an art form. After 20 minutes with him, I found myself reluctantly agreeing. I started by asking whether he has a signature scent — something I could prescribe to the masses as an alternative to the Thé Noir epidemic. He told me he rarely wears a scent casually. "If you work as a chef the last thing you want to do is cook yourself dinner." Understandable, I guess. But tell me more. How did it start? "I went perfume shopping with my sister," he said, "and I've always been a very scent-oriented person, the chemistry behind it is fascinating."

Potentially sensing my continued apprehension, Brody took on a poetic air, as if he had rehearsed a pro-fragrance soliloquy just for the occasion. "Fragrance is an art you can wear on your body," he said. "You heavily experience it when you're with someone, it's a personal commitment and something that you bring into every space you enter."

I could get on board with this.

The more he described the industry, filled with noses, who are practically designers for fragrance, the more I began to come around. "We're in the Golden Age of fine fragrance right now," Brody told me. I had wondered if working in the industry for Heretic Parfum last year had ruined the magic for him at all. It hadn't. "The more I engaged with the art, I became enveloped and enamored with the magic. The more access you have and the more freedom you're given, the more magic there is to create."

Now, I'm hesitant to label fragrance as anything except an accessory. Not smelling bad does not, technically, require the intervention of a master nose. But I have come to accept that fragrances bring a particular kind of joy into my life, within reason, when informed by a budget. Maybe that's the right way to go about it. As Brody puts it: "Everyone needs to wear clothes, you can't go outside naked, but something like a fine fragrance, you're just wearing it because it makes you happy."

The student fragrance club has evolved exponentially since its birth a few years ago. The team has grown in size and in passion, and, beyond their workshops, they are in the midst of creating a series of Yale-inspired fragrances for the Yale fragrance aficionado, potentially capable of surpassing Thé Noir as the new fragrance that will haunt my every waking moment.

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WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:

## TAKING NAPS ON CROSS CAMPUS