

Present Moments: a relaxing ritual for children

Design by Jonas Bähr

Text by Pieter Desmet

Our house, the spring, a pie in the oven, the laundry drying, a freshly picked strawberry – we are surrounded by scents. We aren't always aware of it, but those scents have a great impact on our emotional lives. They are directly connected to our emotional memory, and that is why the scent of a cookie can bring us back to the happiness of a childhood memory. Can you design that connection between scent and memory? That was Jonas Bähr's design challenge. Jonas aimed to create a design that allows people to approve their moods by means of scent.

Scent and mood

The impact of scent on mood is mainly associative and learned. When you often smell the same scent in the same situation, you will automatically connect that scent to that situation. We recognise this in the perfume of our loved one: no matter where and on whom I smell it, that perfume will always be connected with that one person. The same is true for mood. When we often smell the same scent when we're in a certain mood, this scent is charged with that particular emotion. People who are afraid of horses, will already get nervous when they smell a horse. And people who like to relax in a hot bath, will already calm down just by smelling their favourite bubble bath.



Charging scents

For his design, Jonas used the learned scent-emotion connection. The design is a scent-box for children: Present Moments. The box contains ingredients for a calming ritual. The ritual helps children to relax before going to bed. This stimulates drifting off to sleep and a good night's rest.

The box contains a bottle of perfume, a glass bowl, white scent strips and a transparent container. It works as follows. When children experience a moment of relaxation at home, such as while reading or drawing, they can choose to use the box. First, they put a few scent drops in the bowl. Then they get a scent strip and place it in a slot in the box with the holder. The scent strip absorbs the drops and the scent is then slowly released. When this happens, the colour of the strip changes from white to a rainbow. In this way, the scent is charged with the relaxed feeling of that particular moment.

When going to sleep, the second part of the ritual follows. The rainbow-coloured strip is taken from the box, together with a small nightlight. Now, the children place the strip in the nightlight and place it by their beds as a scented nightlight. The more often Present Moments is used, the stronger the association between the scent and the relaxed mood becomes.

Mood and resilience

In order to create a suitable ritual, Jonas designed Present Moments together with the children from his target group. The children loved to actively work on their own mood. Present Moments turned out to work in different ways. The scent has an immediate, relaxing effect because the children have learned to associate it with a serene mood. The evening part of the ritual stimulates a good night's sleep, which also contributes to a balanced mood. And by making this ritual their own, the children became more aware of their moods and how they can influence their moods in playful ways. With his design, Jonas has shown that it is possible to actively regulate our mood using scents. He experienced this during his project as well: "Now that I pay more attention to scents, I appreciate the little moments in life more, such as during a short walk – simply by enjoying the scents."



Jonas Bähr developed Present Moments as thesis project for the master's programme Design for Interaction at the TU Delft. The project was a joint initiative of International Flavors and Fragrances (IFF) and the Delft Institute of Positive Design (DIOPD) with the goal to explore how scents can contribute to people's well-being. Thesis supervisors were Pieter Desmet, Eric Jepma (TU Delft), Stan Knoop, Jose Santiago Moreno and Marieke Kooijmans (IFF). With special thanks to Jelle and Jip for the photo demonstration. For more information: www.diopd.org



Ready to get started

A pinch of fragrance

Position the card

Remove the card

Assemble the light

A fragrant night light

Colophon

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Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering
Delft University of Technology
The Netherlands

Product concept & design by Jonas Bähr

Text by Pieter Desmet
Photographs by Jonas Bähr
Graphic design by Rozemarijn Klein Heerenbrink

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