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PERFUME 101:

YOUR ULTIMATE
PERFUME GUIDE

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"A great perfume is a work of art, it can lift our days,
haunt our nights and create the milestones of our
memories. Fragrance
is liquid emotion. And that never goes out of
- Michael Edwards: The Perfume Expert's
Expert fashion."

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THE WORLD OF PERFUME

For many, perfume can be overwhelming and complicated. It is our goal to simplify the technical intricacies and explain enough about the world of perfume to ensure accurate buying decisions can be made for oneself or loved ones.





The Egyptians developed aromatic oils and essences 5000 years ago. Great perfume lovers, they used almond and rose oil, frankincense and myrrh, cedar, mimosa and lily, nutmeg, sweet balsam, cassia, benzoin and labdanum, galbanum and opopanax in such diverse preparations as aphrodisiacs, medicines, cosmetics and incense. In fact, the art of perfumery in Ancient Egypt was so sophisticated that when archaeologists opened Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922 they discovered an ointment that was still fragrant!

The study of fragrance, developed in the Nile Valley, was to inspire other ancient cultures. In Greece, athletes anointed their bodies with aromatic oils, and at banquets Romans refreshed themselves between courses with flowerscented water. It was the Persians who developed the use of exotic ingredients and the technique of extracting oils from flowers through distillation. This expertise was brought to Western Europe at the time of the Crusades.

WHAT DOES 'PERFUME' MEAN?

The word comes from the Latin, meaning 'a sweetsmelling fluid containing the essence of flowers and other substances'. But perfume has its origins in ancient Roman ritual. In the temples of Rome, crushed flowers, leaves, wood shavings, spices and aromatic resins were thrown onto burning coals as offerings to the gods. Their scent was released through smoke, 'per fumum' in Latin.



WHAT IS A 'NOSE'?

A perfumer who creates perfumes, whose olfactory skill composes great fragrances, sublime harmonies whose notes haunt the imagination of men and women the world over.

"To be a 'nose' is not anything mysterious," said the celebrated perfumer Edmond Roudnitska. "The thing you have to reach is not only the memory of a smell, but the memory of a smell in combination - otherwise you are just mixing at random and that is not creating. The creation of a perfume is cerebral, not nasal." Roudnitska always insisted that "time is essential to a creative perfumer. It can take several years to come up with a great perfume. You can't keep sniffing the scent you are working on day after day until you reach perfection ... often you must leave the perfume for months and then come back."

HOW IS A NEW PERFUME CREATED?

A perfumer is rarely a soloist. The conductor of the orchestra, the head of a perfume house, plays a critical role. Like a great symphony, a truly great perfume evolves with a sensory message so emotional, it moves the hearts of women and stirs the senses of men.

"The creation of a perfume is cerebral, not nasal."

The process behind making a fragrance involves various materials being mixed together in the hope that they will produce a pleasing effect. Professional perfumers may have several years' worth of training and experience behind them, but they never know exactly how a scent is going to smell until they physically create it (or weigh it) in their labs. Trial and error and tweaking is the very core of all perfumery, and a fragrance may go through several modifications before producers decide that it's ready for the market place.



PERFUME INGREDIENTS

The ingredients for perfumes come from a number of sources, both natural and synthetic. Flowers and blossoms are the most common source, such as jasmine, rose and tuberose, among many others. Other plant sources include fruits (mostly citrus such as oranges, lemons and limes, but also vanilla and juniper berry, leaves and twigs (lavender, sage and rosemary), bark (cinnamon), wood oils (sandalwood, cedar, pine). There are various other natural aromatic sources including animals (such as ambergris from a whale) and lichens (oakmoss).

Synthetic compounds are used for scents that are not easily extracted from natural sources such as orchids and strawberries. Also think of the synthetic aroma notes as the perfumer's notes, created in laboratories to add originality, character and tenacity to nature's notes. The result was Chanel No 5, the first floral aldehydic perfume; a bouquet dominated by the soft, clean notes of synthetic aldehydes intertwined with the costliest jasmine and may rose from Grasse.

“With synthetics, one can achieve the same odour and leave most of the flowers in the field.”



case. Some of them may not contain any naturals at all, but this does not necessarily affect the quality of the perfume: synthetics range in price, beauty and quality in the same way that naturals do. When used by skilled perfumers, they can yield all manner of interesting affects.

Perfumer **Edmond Roudnitska** summarizes the natural versus synthetic debate beautifully. “It is well known that there are natural essences that cost very little, other chemical aroma notes that cost a huge amount. It is therefore not a matter of economy if we use chemical products for the composition of haute couture perfumes.

If we use them, it is that we do not want to dispense with the glorious nuances of scent that simply do not exist in nature and which only chemistry can provide us with. Often a synthetic smell is more beautiful than a real one - think of a flower, when you pick it, it only smells good for a day or so, then it begins to smell awful. With synthetics, one can achieve the same odour and leave most of the flowers in the field.”

PERFUME COMPOSITIONS

THE IDEAL NUMBER OF PERFUME INGREDIENTS

The ideal number of perfume ingredients It varies. A perfume may contain 10, 50, 100 or more different materials but it doesn't necessarily follow that a fragrance made with 300 is superior to one containing 10. The key is how the different ingredients blend together to 'talk' to you. Perfumers today tend to prefer short formulae. The notes are purer, the quality easier to maintain.

PERFUME CONCENTRATIONS

These terms refer to the strength of the fragrance, or more specifically, to how much high grade alcohol and/or water has been added to the fragrance oils. Parfum (generally the most concentrated form you can buy) has 15-25% perfume oil dissolved in alcohol. Any mixture with a lower proportion of oil to alcohol is an eau (water).

Eau Fraiche: 3% or less perfume oil	
Eau de Cologne:	2 - 5% perfume oil
Eau de Toilette: 4 - 10% perfume oil	
Eau de Parfum:	8 - 15% perfume oil
Soie de Parfum: 15 - 18% perfume oil	
Parfum, Perfume or Extract:	15 - 25% perfume oil
Perfume Oil: 15-30% perfume oil in a carrier oil	

Some companies use different notes, or different proportions of notes, in the different forms of fragrance they offer. In addition, some companies reserve costly fragrance oils for their parfum, and use synthetic substitutes in lighter concentrations. Expensive raw materials don't necessarily last longer than cheap raw materials, and a fragrance's lasting power is not necessarily a sign of 'quality' or increased investment in the juice.

PERFUME NOTES

They are the different phases through which a fragrance develops when you spray it on your skin. Each of these stages or groups of 'notes' has a different degree of volatility.

Top or head notes provide the first scent impression of a fragrance once it has been applied to the skin. They are usually lighter, more volatile aromas that evaporate readily. Their scent usually lingers for between 10 to 15 minutes

Middle or heart notes make up the core body of the blend. They will usually take 15 to 30 minutes to fully develop on the skin. They are the notes that classify the fragrance family (floral, oriental, chypre). This is explained below in Michael Edwards' Fragrance Family Classification System.

Base or bottom notes are those with the greatest molecular weight. They last the longest, and are also important as fixatives, that is, they help slow down the evaporation rates of the lighter notes, giving the fragrance holding power. Common base notes include oakmoss, patchouli, woods, musk and vanilla. When a perfume reveals its base notes it is also known as a 'drydown'. They create the memory that makes the theme linger in your mind, and make the fragrance last for some four to five hours on your skin.

“When a perfume reveals its base notes it is also known as a ‘drydown’”

A fragrance which does not have traditional top, middle and base notes is usually described as 'linear'. These perfumes may present the same smell from start to finish, with minimal development. Other fragrances may develop a 'patchwork' upon which several contrasting ideas can be detected at the same time.



FRAGRANCE FAMILIES

In its simplest terms these are ‘aroma groupings’ of related scents. Fragrance families are classification systems that assign individual fragrances into olfactory groups based on their predominant characteristics.

A familiar comparison is that fragrances, like wines, are grouped into families. Chardonnays, Sauvignon Blancs, Rieslings and Chenin Blancs, for example, are different families or varieties of white wine. Each is superb in its own right, but usually there will be one that you prefer. Likewise, Floral Orientals, Soft Orientals, true Orientals, and Woody Orientals are all fragrances families within the major Oriental classification. They are all Orientals but each fragrance family will have a characteristic scent, a different mood. Instinctively, you will prefer fragrances from some families, and dislike perfumes from others.

“The best way to learn the fragrance families is to just test as many perfumes as you can.”

The most common use of the classifications is to help people find fragrances they might like without wasting time smelling perfumes that aren’t a good match. It simplifies the process and reduces the risk in buying the incorrect perfume. Being an expensive luxury this education will make you more perfume savvy which is imperative!

The best way to learn the fragrance families is to just test as many perfumes as you can. Keep a record of the perfume notes and fragrance families as you buy or test your perfumes. Eventually you’ll learn to recognize the general characteristics of each family.

MICHAEL EDWARDS FRAGRANCE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

(Author and publisher of *Fragrances of the World*)

There are many classification systems but the one that most perfume experts refer to is Michael Edwards' Fragrance Wheel. Each fragrance family of the wheel is clarified below.



SCENT DESCRIPTION



Fragrances derived from the oils of citrus fruits like lemon, mandarin, orange and grapefruit, with a tangy, refreshing character.



Capturing the sharp, fresh scent of grass, verdant fields and violet leaves. While some have a casual, outdoorsy character, others can be more formal.



A relatively new type of scent that emerged in the 1990s, these conjure sea breezes and rainstorms, the beach and freshwater lakes.



From heady bouquets to the delicate scent of a single flower, these fragrances are some of the most loved and widely worn. The rise of aroma chemicals has allowed perfumers to recreate the scent of flowers from which oils could not be traditionally extracted.



With the addition of aldehydes, Edwards notes floral scents take on a more powdery, abstract persona.



Spices, notes of orange flower and aldehydes give florals an oriental flavour.



Flowers muddled with spices, amber and incense create the soft oriental scent. They are less sweet and heavy than a true oriental.



From the most exotic of all the families, these fragrances are sensual, opulent and full-bodied with a seductive heaviness.



Lace an oriental with woody sandalwood or patchouli and you get these deep, sexy characters.



Classic woods include dominant notes of cedar, patchouli, pine, sandalwood and vetiver.



Also known as chypre by perfumers, this family takes its name from the foresty notes of oakmoss and amber mixed with citrus.



The mossy wood family moves into drier territory with the inclusion of cedar, tobacco and burnt wood. Also characterised as leather as this family includes the smoky scent of Russian leather.



Known as the 'universal fragrance family', this set blends citrus and lavender, sweet spices and oriental woods. Many male-oriented fragrances come from this family, but blends of fresh florals, orientals and woody notes are pleasing to the feminine nose too.



PERFUME GLOSSARY

This glossary defines some commonly used terms in the world of perfume and fragrance. De-mystifying perfumes descriptions and write ups in magazines, websites and perfume stores:

Abelmosk: Also known as Musk Mallow, and cultivated for its seeds, which are usually referred to as ambrette.

Absinthe: A strong herbal liqueur distilled with herbs like anise, licorice, hyssop, veronica, fennel, lemon balm, angelica and wormwood.

Absolute: Also known as an essence, this is the material extracted from a plant or flower using one of various solvents.

Accord: A perfume is more than the sum total of its parts. An accord is a combination of two or more different materials that create a novel effect that smells very different from the materials experienced on their own. The personality of a fragrance is determined by its basic accord. For instance, the accord between patchouli and a cotton candy note gives Thierry Mugler Angel, Prada Eau de Parfum and Chanel Coco Mademoiselle their distinctive character.

Agar wood: From the Aquilaria tree, and also called Oud or Aloes wood. The tree, when attacked by a common fungus, produces an aromatic resin that has long been used in the Middle East as a source of incense and perfume. Currently considered endangered in the wild due to overharvesting. Modern oud fragrances frequently use synthetic substitutes.

Aldehydic: A general term that usually refers to metallic and starchy notes like the top notes of Chanel No 5 or Estee Lauder White Linen.

Many modern fragrances do not contain aldehydes in such large doses because they are perceived to be old-fashioned, but a trace presence can give a beautiful sparkling effect. For instance, the aldehydic flourish in the top notes of Lalique Encre Noire Pour Elle lights up this osmanthus and rose composition. Aldehydes are not limited to starchy-waxy notes, however. Cinnamaldehyde is responsible for the aroma of cinnamon. Benzaldehyde smells deliciously of bitter almonds. Vanillin is probably the most commonly used aldehyde material in perfumery, and it smells sweet and creamy.

Amber: In perfumery, this refers to accords developed using plant compounds (such as labdanum) or synthetics, and referred to as amber because they were originally meant to mimic the smell of ambergris.

Ambergris: A sperm whale secretion. Sperm whales produce it to protect their stomachs from the beaks of the cuttlefish they swallow. Ambergris was traditionally used as a fixative, but in modern perfumery, ambergris is usually of synthetic origin (including the synthetic compounds ambrox, ambroxan, amberlyn). Ambergris is described as having a sweet, woody odor. Today, the term “ambergris” is used nearly interchangeably with ‘amber’ (see above) in lists of fragrance notes.

Ambrette: The oil obtained from these seeds has a musklike odor and is frequently used as a substitute for true musk.

Ambroxan: A synthetic compound created as a replacement for Ambergris.

Animalic: Refers to animal-derived ingredients such as civet, ambergris, musk, and castoreum. These are usually replaced by synthetics in

modern perfumery. In large amounts, many of these notes are unpleasant, but in smaller amounts they provide depth and a sensual feel to a fragrance.

Anise:	An annual herb of the parsley family, grown for its fruits (aniseed), which have a strong, licorice-like flavor.
Anosmia:	The inability to smell odors. Many people have selective anosmias, for instance, the inability to smell certain synthetic musks.
Attar:	Attar is the English form of itr, the Arabic word for fragrance or perfume. A traditional attar is made from the distilled essence of floral or other fragrance materials in a base of sandalwood oil.
Baies Rose:	Pink peppercorns, from the tree Schinus Molle, also known as the Peruvian or California pepper tree. These are actually dried berries and not 'true' peppercorns, and you will sometimes see them listed as 'pink berries'.
Balsam of Peru:	A tree resin from Central America, so named because it was historically shipped from Peru. Balsam of Tolu is from a closely related species of tree grown farther south; both resins are said to smell like vanilla and cinnamon.
Bay Rum:	A traditional men's cologne made from the leaves of the Pimenta Racemosa (or Bay Rum tree) distilled in a mixture of rum and water.
Benzoin:	A balsamic resin from the Styrax tree. It has a sweet odor that is sometimes described as smelling like root beer.
Bergamot:	The tangy oil expressed from the nearly ripe, non edible bergamot orange (a variety of bitter orange). The oranges are grown mostly in Italy and are also used to flavor Earl Grey tea.

Calone:

An aroma chemical that adds a 'sea breeze' or marine note, and first used in large quantities in Aramis New West (1988).

Cannelle:	French for cinnamon.
Cashmeran:	An aroma chemical with a spicy, ambery, musky, floral odor. Meant to add a powdery, velvet nuance that invokes the smell or feel of cashmere. Often listed in fragrance notes as 'cashmere woods'.
Cassie:	Floral note from acacia farnesiana (sweet acacia), a member of the mimosa family.
Cassis:	Black currant, or a liqueur made from black currant.
Castoreum:	A secretion from the Castor beaver, or a synthetic substitute. Used to impart a leathery aroma to a fragrance.
Champaca:	A flowering tree of the magnolia family, originally found in India, also called the 'Joy Perfume tree' as it was one of the main floral ingredients in that perfume. Traditionally used in Indian incense as well nag champa.
Choya Nakh:	A smoky aroma made from roasted seashells.
Chypre:	Pronounced 'sheepira', French for 'Cyprus' and first used by François Coty to describe the aromas he found on the island of Cyprus. He created a woody, mossy, citrusy perfume named Chypre (launched by Coty in 1917). Classic chypre fragrances generally had sparkling citrus and floral notes over a dark, earthy base of oakmoss, patchouli, woods and labdanum. Modern chypre fragrances usually use less (or no) oakmoss because of regulatory restrictions; sometimes they use synthetic substitutes.
Civet:	The African civet cat looks like a fox, and is related to the mongoose. Civet musk is produced by a gland at the base of the cat's tail. Pure

civet is said to have a strong, disagreeable odor, but in small quantities
to add depth and

Warmth to a fragrance. In addition, civet acts as an excellent fixative. Most modern fragrances use synthetic substitutes.

Clary sage: An herb of the salvia family; the essential oil is described as smelling sweet to bittersweet, with nuances of amber, hay and tobacco.

Coumarin: A compound that smells like vanilla. Usually derived from the tonka bean, but also found in lavender, sweetgrass and other plants. Coumarin is banned as a food additive in the United States due to toxicity issues, but is used to produce anti-coagulant medicines, rat poison, and as a valuable component of incense and perfumes.

Cypriol: An essential oil derived from the roots of *Cyperus Scariosus*, (Indian Papyrus) The term cypriol is sometimes used interchangeably with papyrus (*Cyperus papyrus*) in lists of perfume notes.

Factice: A perfume bottle made for commercial display only. The contents are not actually perfume.

Flanker: A 'sequel' fragrance that capitalizes on the success of a master brand or 'pillar fragrance' For instance, J Lo Glow was followed by the flanker scents Miami Glow and Love at First Glow. Many flankers are released as limited editions. Some flanker scents are variations on the original fragrance (i.e. they might share certain notes), others share nothing more than the name. Flankers are usually packaged in the same bottle as the original (or 'pillar') fragrance, but the bottle might be done in a different color or finish, or have different decoration. New concentrations of existing perfumes are not usually considered flankers.



Frangipani:	The common name for Plumeria, a tropical flower. Frangipani is also known as West Indian Jasmine (although botanically speaking it is not a member of the jasmine family)
Frankincense:	A gum resin from a tree (Genus Boswellia) found in Arabia and Eastern Africa. It is harvested by making an incision in the bark; the milky juice leaks out and is left to harden over a period of months before it is collected. Also called Olibanum.
Galbanum:	A gum resin that imparts a 'green' smell.
Gourmand:	In perfumery, describes fragrances which evoke food smells, such as chocolate, honey, or fruits.
Guaiac (or Gaiac) Wood:	The oil is steam distilled from a South American tree that produces the hardest, densest wood known. Also known as ironwood.
Hedione:	An aroma chemical said to have a soft but radiant jasmine aroma, and also appreciated for its diffusive effect.
Heliotrope:	Botanically speaking, this refers to more than one type of flower, but in perfumery, it refers to the flowers of the family heliotropium, which are said to have a strong, sweet vanilla-like fragrance with undertones of almond.
Indole:	A chemical compound which smells floral at low concentrations, fecal at high concentrations. Used widely in perfumery, also found naturally in some floral notes, such as jasmine, tuberose and orange blossom. The term 'indolic' usually means that a fragrance has a decidedly overripe or animalic characteristic.

Iso E Super: An aroma chemical; described by International Flavors & Fragrances as

“Smooth, woody, amber note with a ‘velvet’ like sensation. Superb floralizer. Used to impart fullness and subtle strength to fragrances.”

Karo Karounde: (sometimes karo karunde) a flowering shrub from Africa. The scent, which is apparently very potent in the wild, has been described as somewhat similar to jasmine, but woodier, spicier and more herbal. Found in L'Artisan Timbaktu, Etro Shaal Nur and Comme des Garçons Sequoia.

Labdanum: An aromatic gum that originates from the rockrose bush (Genus Cistus). The sweet woody odor is said to mimic ambergris, and can also be used to impart a leather note.

Licorice: A shrub native to Europe and Asia. The roots are used for candy and flavoring, and are said to be 50 times sweeter than sugar. Almost all licorice candy sold in the United States, however, is flavored with anethole, which is derived from anise.

Muguet: French for Lily of the Valley.

Myrrh: A gum resin produced from a bush found in Arabia and Eastern Africa.

Nag Champa: The name of perfume oil originally made in the Hindu and Buddhist monasteries of India and Nepal and used to perfume incense. Traditionally made from a sandalwood base, to which are added a variety of flower oils, including that from the flower of the Champaca tree.

Neroli: Oil from the blossoms of either the sweet or bitter orange tree. True neroli is created using steam distillation, whereas ‘orange blossom’ is usually extracted with solvents.

Oakmoss: (Sometimes karo karunde) A flowering shrub from Africa. The scent, which is apparently very potent in the wild, has been described as somewhat similar to jasmine, but woodier, spicier and more herbal. Found in L'Artisan Timbuktu, Etro Shaal Nur and Comme des Garçons Sequoia.

Opoponax: Also known as 'sweet myrrh' and 'bisabol myrrh'. Has a sweet, balsam-like, lavender-like fragrance when used as incense. King Solomon supposedly regarded opoponax as one of the 'noblest' of all incense gums.

Orris: Derived from the rhizome of the Iris plant.

Osmanthus: A flowering tree native to China, valued for its delicate fruity apricot aroma.
Known as the Tea Olive in the southern United States.

Oud: Sometimes spelled oudh. The Arabic word for wood, in perfumery usually refers to wood from the Agar tree

Ozonic: Used to describe aroma chemicals that are meant to mimic the smell of fresh air. Frequently described as the smell of air right after a thunderstorm.

Patchouli: A bushy shrub originally from Malaysia and India. Supposedly the leaves were folded into the cashmere shawls shipped from India to England during Victorian times in order to protect the fabric from moths; eventually, the scent became a badge of authenticity and customers refused to buy unscented shawls. Patchouli has a musty-sweet, spicy-earthy aroma; modern patchouli is often molecularly altered to remove the musty components.

Pillar fragrance: A pillar fragrance is a standalone fragrance meant to hold up the brand, that is, it is not a flanker. An example is Yves Saint Laurent

Opium, which has been followed by a long string of flankers, including Belle de Opium.

Pikaki: A form of jasmine (Jasmine Sambac) grown in Hawaii and used for making leis. Also known as Arabian jasmine, and widely used to make jasmine tea.

Sandalwood: Oil extracted from the heartwood of the Sandal tree, originally found in India. One of the oldest known perfumery ingredients, the powdered wood is also used to make incense. Indian sandalwood is now endangered; so many modern perfumes use Australian sandalwood or synthetic substitutes.

Sillage: The trail of scent left behind by a perfume. Fragrances with minimal sillage are often said to “stay close to the skin”.

Soliflore: A fragrance which focuses on a single flower, or which tries to recreate the aroma of a single flower.

Tagetes: Marigold.

Tonka Bean: A thumb-size pod from a plant native to Brazil, said to smell of vanilla with strong hints of cinnamon, cloves and almonds. Cheaper than vanilla pods, and sometimes used as a vanilla substitute outside of the United States.

Vanilla: Vanilla is derived from the seed pod of the vanilla orchid, a flowering vine which is native to Mexico (although most of the vanilla available today comes from Madagascar). The vanilla orchid flower itself is scentless. True vanilla requires extensive hand-processing, and is therefore expensive.



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