

how to spend it

A top perfume blogger celebrates the creator of a dark, seductive scent



Some devotees say this perfume is the ultimate love potion

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Victoria Frolova has been writing her perfume blog, www.boisdejasmn.com, since 2005. It began as a hobby – her interest in perfume had been kindled while growing up in a family of chemical engineers – but it quickly turned into a full-time undertaking. Here she writes about the renegade perfumer who created a seductive, divisive scent.

One drop of Fracas envelops its wearer in an opulent veil of tuberose. Created for the fashion house Robert Piguet in 1948, Fracas assumes a dark and brooding demeanour. It is seductive and smouldering, alternating between the salty richness of warm skin and the creamy sweetness of white petals. The response to Fracas is likewise unpredictable – some believe it to be the ultimate love potion; others recoil at the thought of being smothered in its heady embrace.

Fracas was created by Germaine Cellier (1909-1976), one of the first renowned female perfumers. To her, the divided response to Fracas would come as no surprise as she loved exploring bold and dazzling compositions while always pushing the boundaries of perfumery. Thus the coquettish and soft tuberose becomes a femme fatale in Fracas. In Bandit, another Cellier creation for Robert Piguet, she simultaneously devastates and seduces using the raw, animalic intensity of leather. And in Balmain Vent Vert, the explosive accord of bitter green notes produces such a disconcerting and unsettling aura that it becomes unforgettable. Cellier's amazing talent and nonconformist vision have fascinated her contemporaries, and her fragrances continue to mesmerise today.

Cellier was born in 1909 in Bordeaux, and subsequently came to Paris to study chemistry. After finishing her degree, she obtained a position within Roure Bertrand (now Givaudan), a fragrance supply company, where she composed fragrances for fashion houses such as Robert Piguet, Nina Ricci and Pierre Balmain. Rising as a perfumer within what was a male-dominated and conservative industry, Cellier faced resistance and prejudice. A strikingly beautiful woman, she was also fiercely outspoken and direct, which would not endear her to some of her colleagues. Yet, a testament to her talent is the number of renowned fragrances inspired by her creations, from Carven Ma Griffe to Chanel No 19.

As for Fracas, it remains a gold-standard tuberose which still has few rivals. Thus, whenever I don this sultry and iconoclastic fragrance, I pay homage to its renegade creator, Germaine Cellier.