

how to spend it

Smouldering scents of seduction

A guest perfume blogger selects bottles for a femme fatale's dressing table



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What is the hallmark of the ultimate bombshell perfume? I wonder this as I'm enraptured by the first glimpse of Ava Gardner in the 1946 film noir *The Killers*. She sits at the piano, wearing a black satin gown that elegantly drapes over her curvy figure. She gives Burt Lancaster one look and he is ready to follow her anywhere, even if it will lead to trouble. Such is the power of a bombshell.

My typical day is more about routine than glamour, but perfume is my way to pretend otherwise. When I wear *Jasmin et Cigarette* by *Etat Libre d'Orange* (€119 for 50 ml), a smouldering potion reminiscent of a smoky jazz bar worthy of a film noir, I feel like a femme fatale. It seems like bombshell material to me, but to find out for sure I turn to a couple of experts on the subject of the temptress — *Farran Smith Nehme* and *Laren Stover*, who also happen to be perfume connoisseurs.

A film critic and writer, *Nehme* has an encyclopedic knowledge of the bombshells of classic Hollywood. That she blogs under the name of *The Self-Styled Siren* should reveal that she's intimately familiar with the subject. According to her, a touch of mystery is an essential component. "The siren possesses undeniable sex appeal — think *Marlene Dietrich*, rather than *Grace Kelly*. But she withholds just enough to intrigue you," says *Nehme*. How does it translate into fragrance, then? "It should be nothing that reads too primly, but it cannot be overtly sexy and dramatic. A real bombshell does not announce herself with perfume."

Guerlain's Mitsouko (£202 for 30ml) is one of *Nehme's* favourites for its velvety, sensual dry down of musky peaches and moss. She also loves *Serge Lutens's Tubéreuse Criminelle* (£78 for 50ml) for its unpredictable personality. The fragrance opens up on an icy note of wintergreen

before revealing its warm, creamy layers of white petals. Lutens is a fragrance line slightly off the beaten track, but this is perfect. “While her perfume need not be completely obscure, it is not something that you smell everywhere.” In other words, a femme fatale might pick Chanel Coco (£142 for 15ml), rather than Coco Mademoiselle.

Author Laren Stover has researched the topic enough to write a definitive guide, *The Bombshell Manual of Style*. As she notes, such a woman uses perfume to embellish her moods and, first and foremost, to seduce herself. This is refreshing advice when it seems most perfume adverts suggest wearing scents to make the opposite sex swoon.

“A bombshell believes in her fantasies,” emphasises Stover. “She behaves as if all life is a movie and she is the star, and her perfumes are part of her wardrobe and her emotional set design.” When discussing fragrances with suitably theatrical and seductive potential, Guerlain classics such as Mitsouko and Nahéma (£202 for 30ml) also get top billing from Stover. Sous Le Vent, originally created by Jacques Guerlain in 1933 for Josephine Baker and reintroduced as a limited edition in 2006, is another of her picks. “While not loud, it is certainly not shy. It is sensuous and optimistic at the same time.”

Browns, 27 South Molton Street, London W1 (020-7514 0016; www.brownsfashion.com). Chanel, 26 Old Bond Street, London W1 (020-7493 5040; www.chanel.com and branches/stockists). Etat Libre D’Orange, etatlibredorange.com and see Browns. Guerlain, www.guerlain.com and see Harrods and other stockists. Harrods, 87-135 Brompton Road, London SW1 (020-7730 1234; www.harrods.com). Liberty, Regent Street, London W1 (020-7734 1234; www.liberty.co.uk). Serge Lutens, www.sergelutens.com and see Liberty.

Victoria Frolova has been writing her perfume blog, boisdejasmin.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. Since receiving her professional perfumery training, she has been working as a fragrance consultant and researcher.
