



The fragrance wardrobe

WEAR THE SAME CLOTHES SEVEN DAYS A WEEK? US NEITHER. WHY NOT APPLY THE SAME APPROACH TO YOUR PERFUME. IT'S ALL ABOUT CULTIVATING THE PERFECT COLLECTION, SAYS VICTORIA FROLOVA

Photographs OMER KNAZ



There are days when I stand in front of my closet full of clothes and conclude I have nothing to wear. I love dressing up, but my first-thing-in-the-morning sartorial decisions are based on far too many factors: the weather forecast, the day's schedule, my required state of elegance. My perfume wardrobe, on the other hand, has only one decision criterion: my mood.

On a cold, rainy day I wouldn't stroll into the office wearing a sundress, but I will reach for Parfums de Nicolai Eau à la Folie (EDT, around £26 for 30ml), a melange of mango and jasmine that brightens up the darkest mornings. Choosing my scented outfit for the day – be it a breezy gardenia dress or a cosy vanilla shawl – is the ultimate pleasure. We wear our perfume closer to the skin

than any other garment, and it can embellish better than shoes or jewellery or the perfect bag. It's certainly more memorable.

My love of fragrance started with a serendipitous discovery of Robert Piguet's Fracas (EDP, £75 for 50ml), when I was at college. My routine comprised classroom lectures and library study sessions. Fracas cut through this lack of glamour and though I'd be wearing the same old jeans and sweater, I felt as if I were dressed head to toe in haute couture. But much as I loved its drama, the perfume's seductive tuberose and sandalwood presence was occasionally distracting. That's how a bottle of Prescriptives Calyx (EDT, £46 for 50ml) joined Fracas and a fledgling perfume wardrobe was born. Calyx was everything that Fracas wasn't – light-hearted, crisp and casual. Fascinated by the vividly different moods evoked by

these scents, I realised I'd never be able to wear just one perfume, just as I'd never wear the same outfit day in day out, or eat the same meal.

But for many women, owning a perfume wardrobe runs contrary to the popular notion that we should find The One – the perfume that is to be our signature. It's an appealing idea – our very own trademark that creates a lasting impression on family and friends. But the trouble with one scent worn day in, day out, says perfume expert and industry analyst Marian Bendeth, 'is it reveals only one dimension of our personality'. »

THIS SEASON'S HOT NEW SCENTS, FROM LEFT: HERMES 24 Faubourg EDP, £104 for 100ml. THIERRY MUGLER Alien Fragrance of Leather EDP; Angel Fragrance of Leather EDP, both £40 for 30ml. ESTÉE LAUDER Very Estée EDP, £40 for 30ml. DIOR J'Adore l'Absolu EDP, £85 for 75ml. GUCCI Premiere EDP, £45 for

30ml. TERRY DE GUNZBURG Rêve Opulent EDP, £68 for 50ml. THIERRY MUGLER Alien Essence Absolue EDP, £52.50 for 30ml. FENDI Fan di Fendi Extreme EDP, £74 for 75ml. DJHENNE Parfumerie Generale No22, £81.50 for 50ml. MAISON MARTIN MARGIELA Replica Beach Walk EDT, £50 for 100ml

FROM LEFT: ELIE SAAB Le Parfum EDT, £33 for 30ml ☒ YSL Manifesto EDP, £60 for 50ml. LANCOME La Vie Est Belle EDP, £56 for 50ml. DOLCE & GABBANA Velvet Collection Velvet Sublime EDP, £120 for 50ml ☒ CALVIN KLEIN euphoria EDT, £29 for 30ml



It doesn't help, either, that fragrances are frequently discontinued or reformulated, so your signature could easily disappear down the road. But mainly, thinking you have to stick to a single signature scent means you miss out on some incredibly exciting discoveries – and a whole world of pleasure.

For a start, our sense of smell comprises a surprisingly large fraction of our genetic make-up. We use more than 1,000 different sensory receptors to analyse aromas, and each one has its own genetic code. That means our ability to distinguish subtleties among different smells is enormous.

But perfume is more than just the sum of its chemical components; it's about ideas and culture captured in a drop of a liquid. Each fragrance

tells a story, and the process of unravelling its plot is an intellectually stimulating endeavour. Perfume expands our horizons in unexpected ways. Curiosity about the ingredients in your favourite scent might find you reading up about the spice trade. You'll long to visit the frankincense groves in Oman, once you've fallen in love with the peppery spark of this note in Comme des Garçons' Incense Avignon (EDT, £52 for 50ml). Or you may finally get round to reading Truman Capote after discovering he, too, was fascinated by Guerlain's Jicky (EDP, £73 for 50ml). Thinking about these things makes me feel like a citizen of the world.

Yet finding yourself ambushed by the perfume counter can feel daunting. Industry professionals appreciate the irony when they say the most difficult part of choosing a scent is the overwhelming choice. According to the Fragrances of

the World database, in 1991 there were 76 new launches; by 2011 this number had reached 1,200. 'There are just too many mediocre fragrances drowning out the good stuff,' comments Tania Sanchez, co-author of *Perfumes: The A-Z Guide* (Profile Books, £12.99). Between the celebrities and fashion designers offering more and more variations on the same perfume, a trip to the department store can end in confusion.

Perfumer Irina Burlakova, who worked on Tocca Colette, (EDP, £50 for 50ml ☒) urges us to not give up. 'We have loads of choice when it >>

'Perfume is more than just the sum of its chemical components; it's about ideas'

FROM LEFT: E. COUDRAY Iris Rose EDT, £63 for 100ml. GIVENCHY Dahlia Noir EDP, £61 for 50ml. SERGE LUTENS Santal Majuscule EDP, £83 for 50ml. VALENTINO Valentina Assoluto EDP, £60 for 50ml. JO LOVES Pink Vetiver EDT, £45 for 30ml



'Give yourself time to learn about your tastes and avoid impulse purchases'

comes to buying clothes and shoes – and we still find that fun. The same goes for fragrance.' To avoid choice-induced paralysis, do some research before you shop. Write down the names of fragrances you've enjoyed and look up their notes and olfactive character via The Fragrance Foundation Directory or the osMoz and iPerfumer apps. Start by sampling fragrances within that family, then slowly step out of your comfort zone by trying scents from other categories. If you're partial to Chanel Coco Mademoiselle (EDP, £65 for 50ml – a fresh oriental),

consider Chanel Coco Noir (EDP, £75 for 50ml – a fruity, spicy scent).

During the first few months of exploration, give yourself time to learn about your tastes and avoid impulsive purchases. Matt Frost is the marketing director at International Flavors & Fragrances, one of the biggest scent manufacturers in the world. 'The biggest mistake is to make a decision at the store,' he cautions. 'It is only through wearing the fragrance over time that we can become comfortable with it and ensure we love the full experience.'

Another reason you need time? Smelling several fragrances at once quickly leads to sensory overload. Marian Bendeth advises limiting the number of scents you test to three or four at a time: 'And allow the alcohol to evaporate for a few seconds – nothing leads to olfactory fatigue quicker.' Instead of taking a deep, long inhale, smell your

blotter or skin in two to three short, quick breaths. Coffee beans are commonly used at the fragrance counter to 'reset' your nose, but the perfumer's cure is to cover it with a scarf and inhale deeply. Essentially you are filtering the air, which helps revive your smell receptors. You can also take a sip of water.

As you sample fragrances, ignore the brand names and price tags. Excellent fragrances are found at all price ranges, and the most expensive are not always the best. A helpful way to establish a reference point for quality is to smell the classics. Fragrances like Guerlain Mitsouko (EDP, £74.50 for 75ml), Clinique Aromatics Elixir (EDP, from £23 for 10ml), Christian Dior Eau Sauvage (EDP, £48.50 for 50ml) and Chanel »

FROM LEFT: BALMAIN Ambre Gris EDP, £61 for 75ml ☒ DIPTYQUE Volutes EDP, £85 for 75ml ☒ KIEHL'S Fig Leaf & Sage EDT, £26 for 30ml ☒ TOM FORD Café Rose EDP, £135 for 50ml. BOSS Nuit EDP, £47 for 50ml



No19 (EDP, £65 for 50ml), are the perfume greats. They may require a longer courtship if you're not used to them, far richer and thicker than many you'll know, but once you experience the way a classic perfume evolves on your skin throughout the day, you won't look back.

The best fragrance wardrobes are well-edited and varied. In my collection, each perfume plays a different role, but I group them into several big categories: casual vs. glamorous; summer vs. winter. Annick Goutal Songs (EDP, £74 for 50ml ☒) and Amouage Lyric Woman (EDP, £150 for 50ml ☒) wear like silk brocade gowns, while L'Artisan Parfumeur La Chasse Aux Papillons (EDT, £55 for 50ml ☒) and Penhaligon Juniper

Sling (EDT, £78 for 50ml) are perfect for casual chic days. Warm, spicy fragrances, like Caron Parfum Sacré (EDP, £67.50 for 50ml) and Tom Ford Black Orchid (EDP, £60 for 50ml) provide comfort on grey winter mornings; balmy summer days call for the stunningly simple and refreshing Atelier Cologne Orange Sanguine, (£95 for 200ml ☒). I also have a few fragrances that are as versatile as a little black dress: the limited edition Prada Infusion de Vétiver, the limited edition Serge Lutens Bois de Violette, Love Chloé (EDP, £52 for 50ml ☒), and Chanel Cuir de Russie (£180 for 200ml).

My wardrobe evolves slowly, and I rarely add more than a couple of new bottles a year. In the meantime, I revisit classics and try new launches. Often I walk away disappointed, but sometimes I find new gems. Serge Lutens Santal

Majuscule (EDP, £83 for 50ml) the latest offering from the maestro of sumptuous perfume fantasies, unfolds in a tapestry of candied roses and smoky sandalwood, and had me beguiled within minutes of discovering it earlier this year. Tom Ford Café Rose (EDP, £135 for 50ml) with its roses roughened up by saffron and spices, is so sultry, it could have been worn by Lauren Bacall in 1940s thriller *Dark Passage*. Each great new discovery reminds me that perfume is a simple pleasure, but it can be a potent accessory. It cheers me up when I feel down. It makes me feel elegant, focused, playful, powerful. It helps me indulge my fantasies and wanderlust. How could I wear only one? ☒

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