

The Sense of Wonder of Perfumes

Fragrances are the fusion of science and art where chemists become creators and molecules make memories. Fragrances are unique.

They are designed with care, passion and ingenuity. They (from a fresh-smelling shampoo to freshly-laundered clothing) give pleasure to billions of people around the world who use and enjoy fragrance every day. The word *perfume* is derived from the Latin "*per-fumum*" meaning *through smoke*. The art of making perfumes "*perfumery*" began more than 4,000 years ago. The art possibly originated from the ancient Egyptians, and the Persians, Greeks and the Roman Empire all could have contributed to bring this art to the modern day and age. Scents or the fragrances inspire a range of positive emotions, such as joy, pleasure, cleanliness, attraction; they also act as expressions of status and promote spiritual aspects of life.

The first perfume was the fragrant flower and it continues to uphold that fame up to the present day. The modern perfume was made in 1370 at the command of Queen Elizabeth



of Hungary and was known as "Hungary Water". Since then many perfumery arts were developed. A fragrance is a chemical compound that has a smell or odour. By the 18th century, aromatic plants were being grown in the Grasse region of France to provide the growing perfume industry with raw materials. Agarwood resin found in Walla Patta tree is used to produce an expensive perfume, thus, illicit cutting and smuggling of these trees have become frequent events in modern Sri Lanka.

Even today, France remains the centre of the European perfume design and trade. These chemical constituents are from natural aromatic raw materials, obtained from plants using distillation, expression and extraction, and from some synthetic materials. These ingredients consist of (i) essential oils classified by structural group (e.g., alcohols, esters, aldehydes, and terpenes); (ii) fixatives: natural or synthetic substances used to reduce the evaporation rate, to increase perceived odour strength, and to improve stability; and (iii) solvents, the liquid in which the perfume oil is dissolved in (typically 2% water: ethanol).

The language of fragrance: The essential oils used in perfumes are classified according to their volatility, or the rate they diffuse into the air, therefore each essential oil has three notes.

Top notes come out first (very volatile): first noticeable odours from a perfume last for few minutes to 30 minutes or less. They are often tangy or feature citrus-like smells that are easy to detect (e.g.: bergamot, juniper berry, cedar wood, lavender, geranium, gardenia, cinnamon).

Middle notes are often aromatic flowers: they may last for an about hour (e.g.: clove, ylang-ylang, lavender, jasmine, rose, and geranium).

Base notes are often woody fragrances, last longest or least volatile: they provide an enduring fragrance for longer time (e.g.: frankincense, myrrh, sandalwood and vanilla).



Types of perfumes: this reflects the concentration of aromatic compounds (in percentage basis) in a solvent.

- **Perfume/parfum :** 15-40% of aromatic compounds present in the solvent and will last for all day
- **Eau de Parfum :** 10-20% of aromatic compounds. Sometimes listed as "millésime" and last for around 6 hours
- **Eau de Toilette :** 5-15% of aromatic compounds and will last for about 3-4 hours
- **Eau de Cologne :** 3-8% of aromatic compounds and will last for about 2 hours
- **Splash and After shave :** 1-3% of aromatic compounds

Right perfume for body chemistry : Choosing the right perfume is not an easy task. It is not simple as buying the first thing that smells good on a paper strip. Because the perfume in the bottle smells different than the paper strip or on your skin. According to the fragrance pyramid, what we smell first is the top note and it is the strongest part of the perfume, and it fades quickly. The top note fades into the middle note and then in to the base note. As the base note lasts for a longer period of time the fragrances starts its magic when the body heat rises. Therefore, perfumes smell differently depending on the skin oil, mood, acid-base balance, pigmentation and environmental factors.

Choosing the fragrance : Before you purchase any fragrance, carry out few simple tests to make sure that it is something you want to wear and that you will enjoy! Do a simple sniff test of the bottle first to get the main idea of what it smells like. The key, however, is to try a bit of the fragrance on your skin. Our skin has its own unique code of hormones and pheromones that can slightly or even extremely alter the smell. It is a good idea to spray a small amount on your pulse points (wrists) where the areas the veins flow close to the skin. These spots emit heat, which helps fragrance develop faster. The typical places to spray scent all fall under this category: the neck, wrists, cleavage. Then after few minutes smell the scent on your skin. Sometimes, depending on your own chemical makeup, it can enhance or diminish the smell. It can also be altered if you have a certain chemistry that does not match the scent's mixture. Therefore, the perfume that smells nice to your friend will not suits you. You should figure out the best fit for you!!

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