

PERFUMES: THE GUIDE

PERFUMES: THE GUIDE FALL 2008

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The Guide Goes Quarterly

By Tania Sanchez

The satisfaction that comes from writing a book of nearly 1,500 critical fragrance reviews, bringing appreciation of the art to (we hope) new audiences, and receiving delightful letters from readers is, like many pleasures, brief. Sooner or later one logs into Michael Edwards's *Fragrances of the World* database and asks how many new fragrances have been released since November 2007.

The insensitive answer 557 keeps the diligent perfume critic awake at night. We drew the logical conclusion: for the Guide to stay relevant, we must keep reviewing. Thus this PDF newsletter, which beginning in December you will be able to download by subscription. Published quarterly, each will contain roughly 100 reviews to be consolidated in book format every two years, if such be the will of the gods and our publisher.

This free issue also addresses excellent feedback we've received. Many readers alerted us to important extant fragrances accidentally omitted, plus interesting brands overlooked. Some asked for better indexing, and one industrious reader compiled a spreadsheet (now available for download on our site). Others corrected a handful of gaffes. Some asked for price indications, others for detailed explanations of ratings. Some readers told us they were having great fun asking people what perfumes they wore, then reading aloud the review to guffaws or clucks of approval, as a sort of Personality Quiz for Dinner Parties, a use we had not anticipated but cannot forbid.

Therefore, to all who asked for it (and some who absolutely did not), welcome to our new incarnation.



Rating

- ★★★★★ Masterpiece
- ★★★★ Recommended
- ★★★ Good
- ★★ Not Recommended
- ★ Avoid

Two words preceding each review describe the fragrance's main character. When the reviewers disagree, two ratings are given. Ratings represent the reviewer's recommendation and not objective point scales: please be sure to read the text of a review and test the fragrance personally before buying. We try to assess the most recent formulations from samples obtained directly from firms. Bear in mind that many shops, especially if independently owned, may carry older stock, which may differ in formula or which may have changed over time, especially if bottles have been exposed to air, light, or heat.

Price

- \$\$\$\$ Over \$200
- \$\$\$ From \$101 to \$200
- \$\$ From \$51 to \$100
- \$ From \$1 to \$50

Our indications are based on the standard US retail price of the smallest full-size bottle of the lowest concentration in standard distribution. For example, we will take into account an individually sold one-ounce eau de toilette, but not an eighth-ounce parfum sold only as part of a gift set. We also do not count concentrations below eau de toilette or lotions, soaps, etc. Because sizes, concentrations, and cost of materials vary widely, price indications are intended to help readers shop for fragrance in a given price range and should not be interpreted as a measure of value for money.

Reviews

By Tania Sanchez (TS) and Luca Turin (LT)

Absinth (Nasomatto) ★★ *woody oakmoss* \$\$\$
 Nasomatto (crazy nose) is an Italian niche perfumery, est. 2007. If the volume button on Absinth were turned way down, this fragrance would be a pleasant enough cross between joss-sticks and Lutens's Chêne. At this decibel level, however, it's air-care for those past caring. LT

Acqua di Giò (Giorgio Armani) ★★★★★
melon muguet \$\$

There is a fragrance equivalent to those interiors you see in modern design magazines—vast lofts inhabited sparsely by white cubes and stainless steel tubing, layouts that contractually allow the decorator to sue you if your child jams Spongebob figurines between the cushions. It is the clean floral of the nineties, and wearing one is like believing your lifestyle can accommodate white carpet. All descend from Diorissimo, the great lily-of-the-valley that first perfected the ideal of lemon-scented morning sunlight without sin, and Cristalle, our lady of the green fruity-floral without mercy—both ultimately ideas of Edmond Roudnitska's. In *Acqua di Giò* (1995) Edouard Fléchier and Françoise Caron, two tremendous talents both capable of creating rich, distinctive compositions out of inexpensive materials, engineered the hybrid hygienic floral in its present form, with the addition of a now ubiquitous melon-aquatic fresh smell. The drydown reveals that even peach scents can be made unfriendly. This road leads to Tommy Girl, Envy, and all the race of American florals saving themselves for

marriage. An excellent piece of perfumery. Get your feet off the furniture. TS

Allure Homme Edition Blanche (Chanel) ★★★
sandalwood crabapple \$\$

Nondescript beige-tinted hybrid between Egoïste and Cool Water, with a good, waxy citrus top note and pleasant, woody, sour-apple finish. Has that Chanel touch of a cheap formula made more expensive, like a wood-veneer Ghia version of a basic Ford. Would be great in a soap on a rope. LT

Almost Bare (Bobbi Brown) ★ *chemical floral* \$\$
 Hissy bleached-bones fresh floral, likely just what the brief asked for. Smells like the latex backing on new carpet. LT

Amazing Grace (Philosophy) ★ *generic muguet* \$
 A dull, generic, cutesy-pie, pink, frilly, itchy-bitsy floral thing, mysteriously accompanied by the words "how you climb up the mountain is just as important as how you climb down the mountain." The effect of that gnomish pronouncement is somewhat blunted by the nearby list of ingredients: "benzyl salicylate, benzophenone, hydroxyisohexyl 3-cyclohexene carboxaldehyde, amyl cinnamal, benzyl alcohol, butylphenylmethylpropional, citronellol, geraniol, hexyl cinnamal, hydroxycitronellal, hydroxy methylpentyl 3-cyclohexene carboxaldehyde, limonene." In short, a muguet. LT



Ambre de Cabochard (Grès) ★

chemical fruitcake \$\$

There are so many perfectly serviceable ambers on the market (Ambre Sultan, Eau d'Ambre, Ambre Narguilé, Amber Nude, etc.) that I'd blithely assumed you couldn't screw it up. Grès has managed it with a thin, oddly waxy floral-and-spice formula so cheap Yankee Candle wouldn't stoop to it. Also, it has nothing to do with Cabochard. TS

L'Ame d'un Héros (Guerlain) ★★★

herbaceous floral \$\$\$

Full credit to Guerlain for going against the grain: at a time when everyone serves up different fragrances under the same name, they do just the opposite. This was first called Coriolan, then Chamade Pour Homme (q.v), now A Hero's Soul. But it is the same old (and quite good) thing, possibly slightly improved, a fresh-herbaceous gray confection, slightly nondescript but entirely pleasant, with a brief and incongruous raw-spinach note in the heart. Vastly better than average, though still unmemorable. LT

Amoureuse (Parfums Delrae) ★★★

green lily \$\$\$

Delrae was one of the few firms to flatly refuse to send us fragrances, hence its absence in the first Guide. But despite its small distribution, Delrae is by definition in the public domain, so we managed to obtain fresh samples by other means. Michel Roudnitska's creations for Delrae are well put together classical perfumery, with every material pulling lustily in the same direction. The downside of this vigor is that the Delrae perfumes confidently speak a little too loud, as if slightly tipsy. Amoureuse starts out with a deliciously complex and realistic floral (lily) then settles into a pleasantly old-fashioned powdery-floral heart, a sort of Ma Griffe with the claws filed down. LT

I owned a bottle of this at one point, since at the end of a long day I stumbled upon it in a shop and found it deliciously heady, dizzying, dense green, a sensation like falling asleep under a tree in summer, overwhelmed by damp heat. Sober assessment later revealed that this combination of powerful greens plus syrupy white floral and cardamom was just too much to wear at any time, anywhere. I give it its due as an impressive composition, but I confess I gave it away nearly full. TS

Andy Warhol Lexington Avenue (Bond No. 9)

★★ *almond nailpolish* \$\$\$

Bond continues to perfect the art of packaging—the pink and black, the drawings of shoes, adorable—while not getting the fragrance right.

Lexington Avenue is reminiscent of Jour de Fête (L'Artisan Parfumeur), but never rises above a hodgepodge of several milky notes (anise, almond) trying not to curdle when faced with a screechy peony floral. TS

Andy Warhol Union Square (Bond No. 9) ★

lemony floral \$\$\$

Lightweight copy of Elizabeth Arden's Sunflowers, at something like ten times the price. TS

Aqua Allegoria Figue Iris (Guerlain) ★★

dusty green \$\$

I give up on the Aqua Allegorias: they started out as a nifty idea: simple bold things done with nice raw materials, a sort of Guerlain Lite. They gradually degenerated into garish accords done with blaring aromachemicals, a sort of Impulse Heavy. This thing smells neither of figs nor iris (more like fig leaf and dust) and makes no sense except as an expensive air freshener. LT

Aqua Allegoria Laurier Réglisse (Guerlain) ★★

citrus floral \$\$

Please guys, shape up or quit now. Whatever happened to the old Aquas where the name was apt, the fragrance fresh and humorous, and the quality adequate? This silly thing smells of neither licorice nor bay leaves (that might have been interesting) and instead is a dull, anorexic citrus-floral full of cute but overly powerful aromachemicals, basically a shower gel scent with bells on. A waste of (their) time and (your) money. LT

B Spot (Benefit) ★★ *green melon* \$

Relives a moment in the nineties when a slew of melon-scented body sprays and lotions entered our lives masquerading as the modern idea of freshness. This one has an oily-chemical feel and a sour, unpleasant drydown. TS

Baby Grace (Philosophy) ★ *mimosa musk* \$

Never to be outdone in cuteness, Philosophy's packaging explains, "If God has a face, surely it is that of a child, and if there is a place called heaven, it must smell like a baby." In its gale-force strength, Baby Grace reminds me of the lethally huge toddler in Spirited Away. Good news though: despite the vast diaper, the prevailing smell is merely a bad mimosa reconstruction. LT

Baldessarini (Hugo Boss) ★★★ *woody fruity* \$\$

Named after Boss's boss, Werner B., this fragrance has remained curiously confidential considering its excellence. Part of the problem may be that the Hugo Boss perfume lineup is a model of confusion, and you'd need an audio guide to make sense of the Boss shelf at Sephora. Baldessarini is

supposedly aimed at the Silver Surfer, not the cartoon character, but a man who is (a) on the wrong side of fifty, (b) has all his hair and (c) plenty of cash, and (d) still gets daily opportunities to spread his genes. I manage the first of these criteria effortlessly, so I guess I'm allowed to wear it. Baldessarini is to perfumery what the script for *Toy Story* is to movies: an amazingly skillful multilayered thing enjoyable by everyone for entirely different reasons. Level 1: Splash it on, or better still enter a bathroom after someone else has and it feels like a salubrious, sunny cologne. Level 2: Wait ten minutes, and it enters what musicians would call a development section where fresh, woody, and warm notes shimmer constantly like colored flakes in an opal. Level 3: Wait till the drydown, and you get a superb woody-fruity accord redolent of damascones and damascenones, those astonishing molecules that glow like stained glass and span the olfactory range from raisins to roses. Baldessarini's drydown is not new: it was first tried in *Rochas Globe* (1990), a pioneering and commercially disastrous fragrance that tried to play by a different set of rules, avoid all masculine clichés and ended up, like many of Rochas's efforts, an honorable failure. And behind *Globe*, there is the largely forgotten *Gran Valor* by the distinguished German firm of Mäurer & Wirtz (makers of the timeless *Tabac* and, these days, little else of note). Baldessarini brings it all together, and, successful or not, is one of the best fragrances in the pretty barren field of masculines. LT

Beach (Bobbi Brown) ★★★★★ *lemony jasmine* \$\$
 Predating *Bond No. 9*'s similar *Fire Island* by several years, *Beach* is a mood-lifting breezy smell of French suntan lotion and a happily synthetic ocean breeze, achieving that much desired but elusive cheap-but-cheerful effect. Easy to like. As the name suggests, it would smell its best accompanied by a corn dog with mustard. TS

Beat (Rimmel) ★ *Alizé belch* \$
 At last, we have commercially available in the West the powerful passionfruit odor of which all clean bathrooms in Southeast Asia reek, I assume because it encourages visitors to leave quickly. Exceptionally repulsive, even considered solely against other airheaded fruity florals. TS

Bobbi (Bobbi Brown) ★ *green muguet* \$
 Botched copy of *Gucci Envy*. Hilariously, it comes from the same composition firm, which suggests that the perfumer couldn't even get hold of Maurice Roucel's brilliant formula. LT

Bois de Paradis (Parfums Delrae) ★★★
berry sandalwood \$\$\$
 BdP is a big, busy, warm creation very much—as its name indicates—in the mulled-wine style of *Bois des Iles*, but with added fruit, to give the somewhat weird effect of sangria served piping hot. Very pleasant, but a little loud. LT

Bond Girl 007 (Avon) ★ *fruity floral* \$
 I even put John Barry's 007 theme on the computer speakers to get myself in the mood, but no dice. *Bond* must have run out of buxom call-girls with fake accents because he is now prowling around high schools. The best thing about this deeply uninteresting little floral is the name of the Avon division that markets it: Abdulla G Said M.D. Binzagr Co, in the historic port city of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, a place where the faintest breeze from the perfume souk is guaranteed to blow this dust mote straight back into the Red Sea. LT

Boucheron (Boucheron) ★★★★★
massive floral \$\$
 Composed by Jean-Pierre Béthouart (he of *Fendi Palazzo*) in 1988, this is the *Athena Nikè* of all floral orientals. The genre lends itself to sensory overload and thick orchestral scoring: imagine having at your disposal the combined forces of *Joy* and *Shalimar* to play with, and you will see how most perfumers end up with monsters intent on world domination. But there is beauty to be found in that direction, the oversized, heavy beauty of Art Deco marvels: Hoover Dam, Milan railway station, Moscow State University, stylized grandeur that offsets weight of materials by simplicity of line. When it came out, Boucheron felt like a Firmenich mission statement: We are an aromachemicals manufacturer and can outdo nature as and when we wish. Boucheron, at the time, felt 100% synthetic and, amazingly, none the worse. Being near someone who wears it is like having your picture taken next to a marble foot as big as a car. LT

Cabaret (Grès) ★★★★★ *woody rose* \$\$
Divine surprise! I was not aware of the existence of this fragrance, despite it having been around since 2003. Given *Cabaret*'s fugly bottle and Grès's recent *Marlene Dietrich* series, I was ready for the worst. Ten seconds after putting it on a strip, I was smiling beatifically, for this brilliant Michel Almairac composition turns out to be a landmark, among the earliest of the recent slew of transparent woody roses and one of the best. Looking back over the years, as TS points out, it all started with Almairac's *Voleur de Roses* for *L'Artisan Parfumeur* (1993), which smelled great



but did not quite work. Cabaret's combination of pink pepper and incense up top makes it wonderfully fresh, while a clean rosewater note and huge musk gives it a down-pillow softness that makes you want to go back every hour and spray some more. Makes a superb masculine. LT

Caline (Grès) ★★★ *brilliant floral* \$\$

Some pieces of classical music such as Liszt's *La Campanella* are of scant interest except as essays in right-hand articulation, full of exposed crystalline runs and figurations in the top octave, where even the grandest piano sounds like one with eight keys made for two-year-olds. Many modern white florals mine that artistic seam and are so focused on the treble as to bring to mind nerdy discussions on whether tweeters are best made of paper, beryllium, metal ribbon, or mylar. *Caline* (funny, I thought that was a Patou trademark) is an excellent ribbon tweeter, loud, brilliant, probably capable of ranging beyond what humans can smell or endure. Perfumes like this make me wonder whether there might be an olfactory equivalent of permanent hearing loss. LT

Cardinal (Heeley) ★★★★★ *incense citrus* \$\$\$

James Heeley is a minimalist British designer living in Paris. *Cardinal* is a high-quality, transparently radiant incense fragrance emphasizing the kinship of resins to citrus, very pleasant, quiet, and clean. If, as I do, you love Brian Eno's *Music for Airports* and don't mind hearing a repeated, meditative, pseudorandom musical phrase for hours, this one's for you. LT

Cèdre Blanc (Heeley) ★★★★★ *fresh cedar* \$\$\$

Some of the ideas of Heeley's *Cuir Pleine Fleur* (the velvety vetiver) and *Sel Marin* (salty citrus) are redeployed here in a different form, in a cigarbox context. Arguably less distinctively original than its two congeners, but wonderfully elegant and wearable. LT

Cool Water Woman (Davidoff) ★★

aquatic citrus \$

The masculine *Cool Water* was influential and great, but the feminine feels like a sport masculine: sour lemon, hissy sage, and something like fresh paper, so mean I winced when I smelled it. To end on a positive note, this could be an excellent scent for car wax. TS

Cruel Gardenia (Guerlain) ★★ *Camay soap* \$\$\$\$

The cruelty here is toward the poor saps like myself who, upon hearing the word *gardenia*, are capable of trudging across town for a sniff of the rumor, only to be bitterly disappointed. However, let me treat the name as poetic license, put on my

sober-reviewer cap, the one that says "be fair" at the front, and examine this fragrance on its own terms. Well, that was easy. This is a late fifties formula (somewhere between a knockoff of *Ma Griffe* and *Camay soap*) found in a dumpster in *Holzminden* when *Symrise* decided to clear the archive. Would be perfect if the spray button said "sucker" each time you press it. LT

Cuir Améthyste (Armani Privé) ★

leather violet \$\$\$

I can see how Armani could fall into this trap: leather fragrances like *Cuir de Russie* have an automatic connotation of luxury goods, perfect for the ultra-luxe *Privé* line, and the iris chill at their center might be coaxed into plusher textures if it were switched for the chemically related sweet smell of violets. In fact, *Jolie Madame* managed a violet leather ages ago by pairing the bitterness of isoquinoline leather with an astringent violet accord. Sadly, *Cuir Améthyste* is a cage fight of competing powerful odors battling to the death—cloying, harsh and confused, even after the reformulation that occurred when the first iteration was pulled for being unpresentable. TS

Cuir Pleine Fleur (Heeley) ★★★★★

floral leather \$\$\$

The name of this wonderful fragrance is a play on tanners' slang. *Fleur* refers to the outside layer of leather, bearing marks of hairs and scars, which is split with a blade from the inner layer or *croûte* to make two supple thin sheets. *Fleur*, naturally, also means flower. The structure of CPF is original enough to challenge common assumptions about this fragrance type. To be sure, it contains two ingredients typical of modern leathers: rectified birch tar for the rich smokiness and a leather base (Swederal?) to give a sweet, velvety suede feel. So far so good. But the great originality of CPF lies in the accompaniment, a complex, muted, fresh-green accord of violet leaf, citrus and vetiver so skillfully woven that one perceives a composition in the painterly sense, perhaps a winter scene of rural Russia by *Levitan*, all muted colors with the shadows on snow rendered in a strange but exact purple. CPF should serve as an object lesson to all, from *Hermès* to *Cartier*, who hanker after a new type of beauty in masculine perfumes. I'd love to know who composed this. LT

Début (Parfums Delrae) ★★★★★ *citrus chypre* \$\$\$

As the son of the man (*Edmond Roudnitska*) and woman (*Thérèse*, a considerable perfumer in her own right) who made citrus interesting, *Michel Roudnitska* should excel at a brief involving prominent bergamot and lemon topnotes. And sure enough, *Début* is in some ways an extreme

variation on Diorella, or perhaps on Edmond's forgotten last work, Ocean Rain (1990) for Mario Valentino. The interplay between citrus, bitter notes and floral sweetness is masterly and remains beguilingly unresolved until well into the drydown. I see this as more of an all-sails-to-the-wind masculine, for those who have graduated from Eau Sauvage to Diorella and want to jump further still. *LT*

Deseo (Jennifer Lopez) ★★★ *coconut melon* \$

Like two melodic lines that bump into each other and fall in love to their composer's surprise, Deseo feels like a fortunate accident. The frenetic interest of the last few years in fruity florals has forced perfumers to think like flavorists just at a time when flavorists were beginning to think like perfumers: witness the extraordinary recent progress in tropical fruit mixes. What everyone seems to be rediscovering is the lost art of the cocktail, i.e. perfumery bases mixed and stirred for internal use. Deseo is a clever mix of Sauvignon Blanc and Bailey's or, in perfumery terms, Envy and Rush. Separately, its components would respectively cause toothache and tooth rot. Together they work happily to produce a short-lived but superbly trashy perfume for 18-year-old girls on the prowl. *LT*

Dior Homme Sport (Dior) ★★★★★ *ginger soap* \$

The name tactlessly (and probably correctly) suggests that wearers of the excellent original Dior Homme are lounge lizards in need of a workout. The bottle is a GTI version (red and black spray mechanism, for heaven's sake) of the original. Hedi Slimane, were he still in charge, would never have countenanced either for a second. The fragrance sheds all pretensions to languid weirdness and is a cross between Envy for Men (hot ginger) and any one of the Allure Homme fragrances (aspirational soap-on-a-rope). DHS is very pleasant, competently put together, and free of nasty surprises in the dry-woody drydown. The heart combines a sports-fragrance feel intended for the presentable young buck with a touch of the reassuring middle-aged torpor of the old Paco Rabanne. I find it a mite dull, though admittedly riveting compared to the competition. As such, it deserves to be very successful. *LT*

Dolce Vita (Dior) ★★ *woody fruity* \$\$

DV, released in 1995, was a luscious good-humored sister to the austere beautiful Féminité du Bois released three years earlier by Shiseido. It was briefly discontinued and is now back in the Dior line. Alas, it has been appallingly reformulated and now smells like cheap maraschino

liqueur. Find an old one on the interwebs if you can. *LT*

Dreaming (Tommy Hilfiger) ★★★ (★★)

metallic fruity \$

An attempt to capitalize on the technical advances embodied in Calice Becker's Tommy Girl while changing the color balance from off-white to pink. Dreaming achieves this competently and delivers a fragrance that's squeaky-clean and shiny, like a painting done with transparent nail gloss on polished aluminum. For adolescents. *LT*

I've smelled far better versions of this milky-metallic floral idea (see Bertrand Duchaufour's Flora Bella for Laliq), and this one is not helped by the addition of a sour fruit note like unripened mango. Unfriendly and unpleasant. *TS*

Duro (Nasomatto) ★ *woody amber* \$\$\$

Duro means hard in Italian, as in -on. The press material for Nasomatto says (my translation): "This perfume aims to intensify all aspects of masculine virility." Michael Edwards's database, normally precise about raw materials, says, "Scent of male virility accord." You've guessed it: this is a masculine, intended to celebrate the exuberant, unwarranted fondness Italians have for their weenies. So what does *cazzo* absolute smell like? Why *wood*, of course, followed by a huge synthetic woody-amber that gradually takes over. Duro unusually combines the loud ineptitude of hippie confections with the brutality of cheap aromachemicals. Useful as a contraceptive, but little else. *LT*

Eau de Jatamansi (L'Artisan Parfumeur) ★★★★★

floral spikenard \$\$\$

Italian has the wonderful word *impegnativo*, perhaps best translated as "consequential," to denote things that one should not do lightly; by antonymy, *non impegnativo* denotes the vast and wonderful category of things that must be done lightly if at all. In the world of fragrance, there is (look carefully on your bathroom shelf) an empty parking spot for something which is not an eau de cologne yet not a perfume, something between the inconsequential cologne and the *impegnativo* perfume. This is, I believe, the slot best filled today by all-natural fragrances, be they Marrakech (Aesop), Grezzo (profumo.it), Yatra (Aveda) or, the case in point, Eau de Jatamansi. EdJ announces its purpose clearly: large bottle to signal an intent to use it liberally, plus similarly scented bath line, a candle, i.e. all the hallmarks of private pleasures. It smells utterly delightful, despite suffering from some of the spice-market sameness that afflicts all natural fragrances. The structure, though not wildly original, is excep-

tionally skillful and subtle: fresh woody citrus up top, a caressing dollop of soft rose and a background of, among other things, spikenard and incense. At no point in the fragrance's evolution does it become bare or boring, and it ends on a woody-balsamic benzoin note that is beyond reproach. Composed by Karine Vinchon of Robertet (clearly a new talent to watch), this is a great effort from an outfit that may yet turn out to be the Guerlain of the new century. LT

Eau de Shalimar (Guerlain) ★ *cheap oriental* \$\$\$

A short recap for those who missed the preceding installments of the Shalimar boob job. In the beginning (1925) there was a genius oriental fragrance called Shalimar, the headiest confection imaginable of real vanilla, fresh citrus and herbes de Provence. Some years ago (2003) a need was felt among the thinking heads at LVMH to make a version more accessible to the young. Mathilde Laurent, then in-house perfumer at Guerlain, was drafted. She did a great job, and the late, lamented and altogether beautiful Shalimar Eau Légère was born. Then she fell out with the boss (Jean-Paul Guerlain), who reissued the fragrance under his name with a slightly different and less pleasant top note the following year. Now comes Eau de Shalimar, credited to who but Mathilde Laurent, odd given that she left Guerlain three years ago for Cartier. This may be an attempt to blame the departed, because EdS is comprehensively unpleasant from top to bottom: a loud, cheap, air-care synthetic-vanilla top note with a caricature of Shalimar's thyme-and-lemon-oil accord thrown in, followed by a nasty musky, chemical accord reminiscent of a dirt-cheap knockoff of Habit Rouge mixed with Paco Rabanne pour Homme. To be avoided at all costs. LT

Eau Illuminée (Parfums Delrae) ★★

sour cologne \$\$\$

Eaux de cologne are classically fresh, a style based on easygoing natural materials: citrus, florals, herbs, woods. When composed with good materials and skill, as undoubtedly this one is, they tend to be the most relaxed and unpretentious of fragrances. (See Chanel's Eau de Cologne and the full line of Institut Très Bien for examples.) Something chafes in this one, though. As much as it tries to act natural, it is finally too sour, too green, too uptight. TS

El Attarine (Serge Lutens) ★★★★★

apricot woods \$\$\$ *Paris boutique only.*

I detect in many of the recent Lutens fragrances a growing impatience, a rising tone of voice as if he felt hindered in getting his way, in reaching what has been all along his only goal: making us swoon.

Since 2005 his fragrances have got louder and heavier, and also in some ways more essential, more original. He is taking greater chances, and as a consequence has produced duds (Miel de Bois) as well as masterpieces (Sarrasins). There is also something admirable in his relentless Arab obsession. Who but the defiantly otherworldly would today produce a perfume named after a madrasa, in this case a magnificent one in Fez? El Attarine is a beautifully dense confection, a sort of supercharged version of his La Myrrhe with an enormous note of candied apricots in the heart extended by aldehydes at one end and the duskiest woods at the other. It is easy, in the cold light of a gray London day, to underestimate this piece of what should properly be called costume perfumery. You certainly don't go shopping for fabric softener wearing this. But the planets do move, and an evening comes when you look up and notice they are in alignment. That night nothing else will do. LT

Elixir (Penhaligon's) ★★ *cinnamon rose* \$\$

Acrid phony potpourri smell, very loud. TS

Ellie (Ellie D) ★★★★★ *green floral* \$\$\$

A green powdery floral in a sort of Laura Ashley, summer-picnic style, very competently done with quality materials, but a bit too suggestive of straw hats and lace-up espadrilles for my taste. LT

Energy Man (United Colors of Benetton) ★★

dull fougère \$\$

So boring and derivative it should be stored for future reference as the Average Perfume of 2008. LT

Energy Woman (United Colors of Benetton) ★

citrus fruity \$\$

Blah. LT

Enslaved (Roja Dove) ★★★★★

vetiver heliotropin \$\$\$\$

Roja Dove is a longtime perfume aficionado who sells a small, personally selected range of fragrances from a tiny boutique on the top floor of Harrods. He has begun issuing perfumes under his own name, crafted by anonymous perfumers. Judging by the three we've tested—Enslaved, Scandal, and Unspoken—he is more curator than creator, since they are blasts from the past, using good materials and Dove's own twist. Unfortunately, Enslaved is Habanita suffering through a badly muddled rose top note. TS

Escale à Portofino (Dior) ★★★★★

almond cologne \$\$\$

Funny how places like Saint Tropez and Portofino, which ceased to be pleasant forty years ago, live

on as legends of luxury. The name's implied suggestion is correct: Portofino is now so crowded that the only way to approach it is from the sea, on a boat you can sleep in. The fragrance is a lovely cologne with a mouthwatering citrus top note, a strange bitter almonds note in the heart, and an excellent, high-quality fresh-waxy, aldehydic drydown in the grand manner. It was composed by François Demachy, formerly of Chanel and now overseer of LVMH fragrances. A set piece, brilliantly executed. Why the trashy packaging? LT

Escentric 01 (Escentric Molecules) ★★★

woody incense \$\$\$

Perfumer Geza Schoen is an aficionado of Iso E Super, nominally a pure molecule, in reality a complex mixture of isomers and impurities adding up to a soft, radiant, velvety woody note with amber aspects. Iso E Super is everywhere, though perhaps not quite in the proportions Schoen uses. His 01 is what perfumers would call an *habillage*, the sort of composition that technical staff put together to showcase a new material and induce perfumers to use it. There are better incense fragrances out there (Heeley's Cardinal, Armani's Bois d'Encens, Amouage's Jubilation XXV), but 01 is not bad. LT

Esprit du Tigre (Heeley) ★★★★★ *tiger balsam* \$\$\$

I remember the first time I smelled Tiger Balsam. It was the year Sputnik went up, I was four, and my father who suffered from migraines had been given a little tin by a fellow who shared his compartment on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Tiger Balsam was then unknown in Europe, and we eked out the half-empty tin as if it were a fabulous relic from the other end of the Silk Road. To this day, nothing so convincingly smells the part of the healer as this cheap but magical mixture of eucalyptus, camphor and cajuput. Esprit du Tigre's top notes of wintergreen (very quiet) and camphor are brilliantly done, almost medicinal but mostly soothingly cool, and they dovetail perfectly into a heart note of cardamom and in due course to a drydown of vetiver and cinnamon. It is a rare pleasure to review a fragrance in which the components are all present and correct, as advertised, of high quality, beautifully put together without any pretentiousness and intended to smell simply, melodiously, quietly good. Bravo. LT

Essence of Man (United Colors of Benetton) ★

shampoo citrus \$\$

Benetton fragrances (all 40) seem to be predicated on the concept of "throw enough crap, some will stick." None does. LT

Essence of Woman (United Colors of Benetton) ★

white floral \$\$

Thin, tinny dreck. LT

L'Été en Douce (L'Artisan Parfumeur) ★★

linden musk \$\$\$

When Mercedes Ruehl's character said of Michelle Pfeiffer's in *Married to the Mob*, "She thinks her shit don't stink," Pfeiffer must have been wafting something like this laundry-soap-on-steroids. It combines an eye-crossingly powerful musk and one of those intensely chemical-tasting tisanes of linden and orange blossom that you find in French supermarkets. Someone is bound to mistake it for "light and fresh." (Formerly known as *Extrait de Songes*, before Goutal complained on behalf of *Songes*.) TS

Euphoria (Calvin Klein) ★★★

redcurrant candyfloss \$

Post-Angel perfumery is an exercise in forever having your cake and never eating it: what made Angel interesting was the contrast between the eat-me vanilla, candyfloss, and blackcurrant, and the "external use only" floral base. Some perfumers borrowed the licentious spirit of Angel (*Insolence*) some the structure (*Flowerbomb*), some the sexual ambivalence (*Coco Mademoiselle*). Some, like Dominique Ropion, took Jacques Guerlain's approach when faced with a new François Coty idea: How can I improve on this? If you're as good as Ropion at handling complex formulae made from powerful aromachemicals, you can lower yourself into Angel's engine room and mess with the machinery so it works less like a Tinguely sculpture and more like a Swiss watch. In *Alien* it almost worked, but in *Euphoria* the thing just hums along. I personally consider these two fragrances to be like a blue comedy act with all the expletives taken out so you can show it on airlines, whereas the whole point of Angel was precisely the raunch. Still, amazing work. LT

Falling in Love (Philosophy) ★★★

blackberry musk \$

It would be tempting to criticize this harmless piece of fluff for being crude, adolescent and cheap. And indeed, since Jean Laporte did a very similar thing in 1978 with *Mûre et Musc*, it's also unoriginal. But a sort of artistic statute of limitations, plus a sudden feeling of indulgence caused by the fumes of ethylene brassylate, make me rather fond of this musky blackberry confection. It should, however, come with a warning not to be sold to anyone over 18. LT

Figuiier (Heeley) ★★★★★ *fig hologram* \$\$\$

I've never been crazy about fig perfumes (Premier Figuier, Philosykos, etc.), though I will readily admit that the surprise effect is wonderful and that they are historically important in clearing the way for later watercolor gardens, e.g. Elléna's work for Hermès. In my opinion, earlier figs were only made wearable by being overly perfumey and losing some of the starkness of the fruit. No such thing here: Figuier is as real as it gets and as a result probably better as a room spray than as a fragrance. The weird green-camphoraceous-catty note of oximes (stemone? buchu?) is as clear as a bell, together with a dusty, earthy, geosmin note and the sweetness of the fruit's red flesh, partly due to the strange Habanero note also found in Un Jardin Après la Mousson. There is no better fig reconstruction out there. A masterwork of hyperrealist perfumery. LT

Five O'Clock au Gingembre (Serge Lutens) ★★★
salty gingerbread \$\$\$

Classic gingerbread is dense with honey, but Miel de Bois proved that too much of that in a fragrance smells like the men's loo at the bar on Friday night. Instead, here a pleasantly salty, meaty note (lily? civet?) lends a spiced-tea composition weight and saves it from smelling like Christmas-themed roomspray, before it settles for the smoky vanillic smell of plain benzoin. TS

Fleur de Cabotine (Grès) ★★ *floral fougère* \$

Doing a "fleur" of the disastrous Cabotine is like making a fragrance inspired by Karl Rove's nickname. The result, though, is far funnier than the intent, basically Brut overlaid with Glade. I see no reason why trendy guys could not wear this to great advantage. LT

Fleur de Liane (L'Artisan Parfumeur) ★★
melon floral \$\$

If you missed the melon-aquatic floral trend when it made the rounds the first time, L'Artisan Parfumeur offers you another chance to experience it in all its howling power. This type of scent has always been a little like a perky neighbor who cheers you up if you encounter her once, but after a couple of minutes of shrill exclamations starts to wear on your nerves. Impressive duration, impossible to wash off. Very similar to old aquatic masculines like New West and Kenzo Pour Homme. TS

Fleur d'Oranger 2007 (L'Artisan Parfumeur)

★★★★ *orange blossom* \$\$\$\$

One hates to encourage gimmickry—limited editions always bring to mind Hummel figurines. The fragrance's claim to spotlight one year's harvest of a particular material, in this case the

orange blossom output of a single producer in Tunisia, seems to draw a parallel to wine, though Fleur d'Oranger uses several materials, while wine should be grape juice, period. In accordance with the high concept, each bottle costs an astonishing \$295 for 100 ml of eau de parfum. Nevertheless, this is pretty, bright, and far better than other soliflores like Jo Malone's or Serge Lutens's, with impressive radiance and lasting power. I would prefer more of a complex composition to showcase the material, like Institut Très Bien's Cologne à l'Italienne, but if you're mad about orange blossom and can't get rid of money fast enough, this is the one. TS

Flower (Cynthia Rowley) ★★★ *big lily* \$

A very competent, accurate lily soliflore, complete with that weird salami note that makes lilies smell so oddly appetizing. If Firmenich were to market a lily base to save perfumers the trouble of reinventing the chastity belt, this would be it. LT

Giorgio (Giorgio Beverly Hills) ★★★★★
fruity tuberose \$\$

It is considered polite to deplore the excesses of the eighties (and to trot out Opium, Poison, and Giorgio as exhibits), much as one would disapprove of Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero and welcome the return to sanity represented by the Claudius (nineties) school of fragrance: pinched, mean, and full of sour probity. Yet insofar as perfume is more circuses than bread, I suspect many people harbor a sneaking fondness for the bad old days. Upon revisiting the scoundrels for this guide, I was struck by the fact that the problem was not that one was tired of cheap magic (witness the fact that Angel came later and did very well, and Insolence carries on the tradition), but that a new style was needed. Surprise fades fastest of all the emotions, and what is amazing is how long these contrivances kept us interested. The secret of Giorgio was the discovery of an accord that could stand up to a monstrously powerful tuberose while extending it in interesting directions. Two heroically strong aromachemicals were drafted: one being allyl amyl glycolate, an intense fruity-peppery ester reminiscent of pineapple, and the second a mysterious Schiff's base made between helional (a fresh-almondy-marine material) and methyl anthranilate (the Concord grape smell). Most Schiff's bases are colored because of the carbon-nitrogen double bond, hence Giorgio's bright yellow tinge. The result was a cute, twelve-foot-tall singing canary, at first impossible to ignore, and at length too big to love. But if any composition embodies what makes half-natural, half-synthetic—i.e. classical—perfumery great, it is Giorgio. LT

Gold Man (United Colors of Benetton) ★

hissy patchouli \$\$

Dreadful, cheap patchouli mixed with a battleship gray woody-citrus base. Could be used as a repellent. LT

Gold Woman (United Colors of Benetton) ★

fruity mess \$\$

Not properly speaking a fine fragrance. LT

Guerlain Homme (Guerlain) ★★★★★

rum wood \$\$\$

First, the good news: the fragrance smells great and the bottle looks fine. Now the sad news: both are derivative. The fragrance is uncomfortably close in structure to the wonderful Yohji Homme (q.v.): the cool-warm balance, the presence of rum, mint, and an anisic note. On balance though, since Yohji is discontinued I'd rather have GH than nothing. As for the bottle, designed by coachbuilder Pininfarina (go back to work! the nose of the Scaglietti needs fixing!), it is a blatant copy of Dior Homme. Add to this the name and one wonders: is Guerlain hoping no one will notice? LT

I find GH sufficiently different from Yohji Homme to give me pause before recommending it as an alternative: the Guerlain is much paler and less profound, lacking the deliciously *roasted* quality that made YH so interesting. TS

Hindu Grass (Nasomatto) ★★★★★ *fresh spicy* \$\$\$

If you speak as loud as Nasomatto, make sure you have something interesting to say. Hindu Grass is the only fragrance of the range that does, a lovely accord of cardamom, rose notes, and fresh, aromatic herbs. It's still an 8.5 on the Richter scale, but as a seismologist once pointed out to me, earthquakes can be entertaining if you're out of doors. Very nice provided you only put on the smallest spritz several hours before joining the company of humans. LT

Une Histoire de Chypre (Molinard for Aedes de

Venustas) ★★(★★★★) *fruity chypre* \$\$\$

Aedes.com only.

What an odd project this is: the best niche fragrance store in NYC teaming up with one of Grasse's egregiously trashy -ards (the other two being Fragonard and Galimard) to come up with —Diorella on the cheap and with too much peach lactone in the drydown. This is the sort of stuff that, thirty years ago, might have been called Fiorella and sold in discount buckets or at kiosks outside Moscow Metro stations. It serves as a reminder of the fact that Grasse, in addition to housing some of the most distinguished raw

materials and composition firms, was always a haven for a varied fauna of perfumery low-lives buying and selling stolen formulae and knockoffs. Perfumer Françoise Caron once told me the choice for a kid growing up in Grasse was between perfumery and stealing mopeds. I now realize the latter may have been the more ethical option. LT

I don't think it's as bad as all that, but then again I'm fond of this style. At a distance, it gives a convincing impression of something very like Diorella but peachier, with a bit of chemical white noise. Up close, it's rougher, and I too would counsel getting the real Diorella or Frédéric Malle's Parfum de Thérèse instead. I'm a little disappointed, also, for personal reasons, because I'd hoped it would be the actual resurrection of Coty's long defunct Chypre, not Roudnitska's fruity take on it. TS

Homage (Amouage) ★★★★★ *incense rose* \$\$\$\$

At the impossibly swank launch in Muscat of Amouage's two Jubilation scents, guests found, upon arrival in their hotel room, a limited-edition bottle in a plain white box labeled simply Attar, i.e. fragrance. When sampled, this anonymous thing turned out to be breathtakingly beautiful, at once lofty, tremendously radiant, and dizzyingly rich. Faced with such an apparition, most of us immediately look around for someone to share our impressions, and the more witnesses the better. I felt the usual mixture of pride and frustration at being in possession of a thing of beauty that few others could share. For company, I gave some to my eight-year old daughter who wears it on big occasions. Thankfully, this mysterious Attar, renamed Homage, is now available in limited distribution. The firm tells me it was composed in house, chiefly of Cambodian oud, Taif rose and Omani silver frankincense, which is to say, the best and most expensive stuff around. Oman was making perfumes when Europeans only bathed once a year on doctor's orders. While there, I had occasion to sample, both in shops and in the wake of passing Omanis, the local style of oud, a fiercely elegant accord of rose and wood that radiates avian beauty. For Homage, the firm has gone one better on the usual composition and added not only frankincense, which fills the composition with stratospheric light and ice, but apparently some citrus oils to make it more pleasing to Western noses. Mine finds it irresistible. LT

Inner Grace (Philosophy) ★★★ *green chypre* \$

Devoid of Philosophy's usual toe-curlingly embarrassing copy on the back of the bottle, this fragrance was apparently dedicated to the late

Dana Reeve, indomitable wife of Christopher Reeve and head of his foundation for the disabled. It is an odd, peppery-green abstract floral, a bit as if Givenchy III and Y (YSL) had been co-distilled to extract only the top notes. It has the urgent, brittle quality of someone whose voice is pitched slightly high by chronic stress. Pretty good if a little bare. LT

Instinct After Dark (David Beckham) ★★

grape citrus \$

A Cool Water with a surprising top note of purple soda. Too low-budget to work, but interesting that Coty tried it. TS

Intense Euphoria Men (Calvin Klein) ★★★

cantaloupe fougère \$\$\$

This perfume reminds me of that test for unconscious sexism involving a surgeon saying, "I cannot operate on this boy, he is my son," though the boy's father has been injured in the same car crash. (A: The surgeon is a woman.) If IEM were a feminine fragrance, everyone would find it OK, a little fruity, a little woody, a little herbaceous, so what? But it's a masculine! And just the way a guy gets compliments from female guests when he clears the table and does the dishes for the first time in eighteen months, this thing will be deemed awesome because it is so cute, so new-century, so stay-at-home. In truth, it's not bad, and the top notes are fun, a sort of fruit salad drenched in Cool Water. It suddenly runs out of formula cash after an hour leaving only a synthetic sandalwood, so spray it on fabric. Bravo to the marketing people for courage. Please do this again and next time make it interesting. LT

Iris de Nuit (Heeley) ★★★★★ *ambrette iris* \$\$\$

Chic, as opposed to mere luxury, arguably requires the mixture of the rare and the industrial, expensive and cheap, refined and rustic. The iris root note has such a propensity toward sadness (Iris Silver Mist) and pallor (28 La Pausa) that it needs some friends to drag it out of doors and compel it to have a good time. IdN achieves this by marrying expensive iris with the chemically related (and dirt-cheap) ionones of violets and a note I've always liked, a sort of iris with freckles, the inexpensive and cheerfully rooty carrot seed. IDN's top notes are extraordinarily wine-like, after which the composition settles to a gray-velvet shade. Once again, as in all Heeley's perfumes, the composition is structurally sound, held together in this case by a lovely note of ambrette seed, a natural macrolide musk, which discreetly emphasizes both the silvery and fruity aspects of the other components. If there were such a thing as English perfumery, natural, quietly confident,

refined, it would look something like Heeley's range. LT

Itislove (Salvador Dali) ★★ *rose vanilla* \$\$

Knockoff of the gorgeous Tocade (Rochas), with harsh, mall-girl pink synthetic florals substituted for Tocade's deep, multifaceted rose. TS

Insolence EdP (Guerlain) ★★★★★

Godzilla floral \$\$\$

In their haste to copy Angel, most perfume houses lost track of the fact that what made it great was not just the smell, that weird combination of patchouli, candyfloss and blackcurrant, but the effect, the *taraaa!!!* moment, the euphoric surprise that a perfume could be so outrageous and still win. The first Insolence came close, except that the shock was spoiled by a violets hairspray top note that made it stumble as it cartwheeled onto the stage. When Guerlain PR offered to send me the new Insolence EdP, I inquired whether the formula was different. The young lady on the phone said yes with a knowing chuckle. And by golly, it really is different. Guerlain has finally decided that this thing should not even try to be classy and has embraced it as the most deliciously vulgar perfume on the market today. Maurice Roucel's serious compositions are always complex, but there is so much going on here that it feels like a seventies action movie poster, with a helicopter hovering over a burning building at right, two cars jumping off a pier towards the viewer in the middle, a girl in a white dress being lifted out of a swamp in a guy's arms at left, and an erupting volcano in the background. The accord is tuberose, red fruit, orange blossom and a green-peppery Poème-type note that fits perfectly in this context. All four are heavy hitters, and the combination is simply huge. There is something reckless, irreversible, cataclysmic about pressing the spray button on Insolence EdP, even when it is pointed well away from you. I put some on a smelling strip, left it on the table and walked out for lunch. The perfume ran after me: enough had strayed onto the back on my hand to create a cloud of pink-neon trashiness that made me feel I was being driven to the local cafe in a stretch limo. When I came back the strip greeted me heartily across the room. I know I will regret saying this (especially sitting next to it at dinners and concerts), but this Insolence is a masterpiece. LT

Un Jardin après la Mousson (Hermès) ★★★★★

floral pepper \$\$\$

This is Jean-Claude Elléna's third Garden, after the innovative Méditerranée and the somewhat sullen Nil. Elléna is a perfumer of great inventiveness and refinement, and this is a piece of work to

admire as well as enjoy. The core accord, best enjoyed on skin for simultaneity of effect, is a remarkable idea, a combination of melon, capsicum and peppercorns that, to my nose, adds up to the incongruously fruity note that distinguishes Habanero chilies from mere hot ones. Elléna's skill here is didactic: as you smell it, the construction comes apart and flies back together like an instructional video, and the effect is delightful. On a paper strip or on fabric, the fragrance is rather different, with the notes peaking at different times in a succession of fresh, watery effects that holds the attention while remaining abstract. I have often complained about a slightly bloodless aspect of recent Hermès creations. In this case it is essential to the artistic effect and completely convincing: as often happens with perfectly tuned fragrances, the mix is much stronger than it appears at first sniff. Excellent. LT

Jasper Conran Woman (Jasper Conran) ★★★★★
citrus chypre \$\$\$

A bright, balanced, classic citrus eau de cologne, with a dash of green-resinous-woody chypre in the manner of Chanel Pour Monsieur, a lemon top note that wakes you up like birdsong at sunrise, and a good soapy jasmine that keeps it all going. Feels like an all-grown-up version of L'Artisan Parfumeur's Thé pour un Été. TS

Knize Ten (Knize) ★★★★★ *amber leather* \$\$

As Alphonse Allais put it, "As time passes, one meets fewer and fewer people who knew Napoleon." Knize Ten, like the sole veteran of the Grande Armée who lived long enough to be photographed, must feel terribly lonely these days, for it is the only survivor of the androgynous, reckless, dandified twenties leathers. Its elder by five years, Tabac Blond (1919), recently died a death at the hands of IFRA regulations and Caron perfumer Richard Frayse, and if you look around there are no pre-WWII leathers left standing: Kobako, Shocking and no doubt many others, all gone. (Cuir de Russie does not count in this context, because it is primarily a stupendous iris floral with a leather accent.) Knize Ten was composed by François Coty and Vincent Roubert, respectively the man who invented all of perfumery and the man who did Iris Gris. For a long period Ten was out of stock, the firm did not know when it would come back, etc. and I feared the worst. I cannot vouch for the exact resemblance of today's formula to the original. What I can say is (a) it smells wonderful, with all the proper requisites of a leather, including smoky and amber notes firmly in place, (b) contains a splendid strawberry top note, which, by a classic piece of perfumery misdirection, kisses you on

the lips just as you focus on the dry, dark background, (c) goes on forever in a completely civilized manner, and (d) does not cost the earth. Let me put it simply: everyone should own this perfume, because there is only one like it. LT

Lily and Spice (Penhaligon's) ★★★ *lily saffron* \$\$

Penhaligon's is a frustrating outfit: they are clearly capable of good top-down design, their range is coherent, they are not outrageously priced and have so far avoided the high-concept nonsense typical of niche firms and stuck to making decent semi-synthetic fragrances like everyone else. But one wishes they would try harder: many of their fragrances are boring and trite, aimed, it would seem, at tourists who go to Fortnum and Mason's to buy presents for the family back in Modena. Lily and Spice is one of their better offerings, a very solid lily soliflore with an unusual saffron note, made very fashionable a couple of years ago by a Givaudan ingredient. Oddly, the cresolic-spice combination gives L&S a leather aspect I have not encountered in lily soliflores before. Nice but still a bit dull. LT

Maybe Baby (Benefit) ★★★ *peach muguet* \$

Basically friendly, simple peachy floral without pretensions—sort of Pear's soap. Smells good then gently goes away. TS

Menthe Fraîche (Heeley) ★★★ *shiso mint* \$\$\$

Mint (see Cartier's Roadster below) is hard to work with, being rather volatile and with connotations of toothpaste. Menthe Fraîche is a brilliant essay in mintiness, with an intense, almost nail-varnish like ketonic note up top and an exotic accord of shiso, peppermint and lemon verbena underneath, the whole thing cleverly glued together by a lovely, green, hissy violet-leaf note. Whoever did this was certainly not fooling around, and MF is easy to admire though arguably harder to wear. LT

My Dream (Grès) ★ *white floral* \$\$

The troubled house of Grès, which after the death of Alix Grès was briefly owned by businessman Bernard Tapie, now appears to be in Swiss hands. The parent firm Art & Fragrance also owns Lalique and, God help us, Alain Delon and Jaguar fragrances. The new Grès goes beyond celebrity fragrance to create dead-celebrity fragrance. (Advantages: no fees or royalties. Disadvantages: no photo-ops.) Or rather three DCFs, dedicated to poor Marlene Dietrich who is not here to complain, as she certainly would. My Dream is a totally uninteresting "fresh" floral, so intensely derivative that it feels as though the perfumer has

even lost track of what it was he was trying to copy. LT

My Life (Grès) ★★ *citrus almonds* \$\$

Unlike the appalling *My Dream*, this “Hommage à Marlene Dietrich” has an interesting structure based on a weird accord of grapefruit, jasmine and heliotropin but, sadly, feels as if it has trickled up to fine perfumery from some plug in air-care thing. Very nearly good, and the idea may be perfectible. LT

My Passion (Grès) ★★ *attempted chypre* \$\$

An unbalanced but not uninteresting fragrance, reminiscent of a Givenchy III without oakmoss. It smells like a Meursault left out overnight in a glass, feels strangely old-fashioned up top, but is manifestly missing a load-bearing strut and topples over during the drydown. LT

Narcotic Venus (Nasomatto) ★★ *tuberose foghorn* \$\$\$

I never thought I'd meet a tuberose that would make me hanker for the quiet of *Amarige*, but this is it. Blaring, unsubtle, a kind of scrambled *Insolence* without the skill and the fun. If you meet someone who wears this, run. LT

No 5 Eau Première (Chanel) ★★★★★
aldehydic floral \$\$\$

I have always liked objects, such as carabiners and pin shackles, that come in a wide range of sizes without changing shape. The No 5 collection will soon deserve to be sold in ship-chandlers, since it now includes essentially the same thing in four sizes. Eau Première is the most compact of the lot, with less emphasis on flowers and more on citrus, first fresh lemon and later warm orange-peel, so much so that it briefly comes within the orbit of *Baghari* before retreating into powder-puff plushness. This is abstract, classical perfumery at its best, revisited by people who do not see modernization as an excuse for screwing up. I still find 31 rue Cambon more immediately affecting, but the restrained elegance of Eau Première is of the sort one never tires of. Would also make a tremendous masculine. LT

Noir (Christian Lacroix) ★★ *generic guy* \$

Murky, dishwasher-colored hybrid between a defanged *Fahrenheit* and an *Allure Homme* done on the cheap. So boring that one imagines the whole chain of command, from perfumers to evaluators and marketing people, having to drink Jolt at regular intervals merely to stay awake. The best of the recent Lacroix. LT



Pure Grace (Philosophy) ★★★ *soapy floral* \$

Described on the back of the bottle as the clean smell of soap and water (surely only the former) this pretty much does what it says and in small doses gives a convincingly scrubbed, rosy-cheeked impression. The sort of thing Clean Perfumes would do if they weren't anosmic. LT

Roadster (Cartier) ★★★ *warm mint* \$\$\$

After a couple of years in *purdah* in the bespoke perfumery division (pray for an end to that nonsense), Cartier's in-house perfumer, Mathilde Laurent, was encouraged to submit proposals for a fragrance intended for mass distribution. The motto was apparently “new freshness,” a concept that has the effect of making one instantly feel as tired as the brains that came up with it. Nevertheless, Laurent's submission won. Her idea was to use mint as a top note, usually a no-no in fragrance because the suit who writes the checks will invariably mention toothpaste at some point. And mint is tricky: its menthol note is a coolant and lasts only seconds, while the remainder, i.e. what distinguishes mint absolute from menthol crystals, is more generically herbaceous. If only the laws of physics could be repealed and menthol could be made to stay, say, as long as linalool, then it might be possible to do a *Jicky* with mint instead of lavender. Your fearless reviewer, trusting that the EU has by now tested everything on animals, sprayed *Roadster* inside his mouth and can report there is very little menthol in there. Nevertheless the top notes briefly possess an arresting freshness, as if *Guerlain's mole-gray Ame d'un Héros* had decided to wear a bright blue tie. From there, things evolve quite rapidly, first to a radiant cedarwood masculine of the furrowed-brow-and-gold-watch persuasion and then, as if Laurent was trying to inject some sunset glow into that character, to a warm *Ambre 83* accord reminiscent of her *Attrape-Coeurs*. The whole thing works well enough, and in the context of contemporary masculine perfumery, is tantamount to an upgrade to business class. Nevertheless, I expected better. LT

Rose Alexandrie (Armani Privé) ★★★★★
resinous tuberose \$\$\$

In our first book, I'd noted that the blend of old-fashioned and modern in *Estée Lauder's Beautiful* smelled dated. *Rose Alexandrie* solves this knotty problem in true Alexandrian style: with a drastic cut. The half of *Beautiful* that stays is a brilliant, candied, slightly metallic, tuberose-rose with a resinous green background—a floral midway between *Fracas* and *Knowing*—while the half that's left out is the powerful ambery-mossy bit that was basically *Cabochar*. It still has the spotlight

movie-star smile of a classical rose chypre, but its feeling of transparency is excitingly new. The drydown is a comfortable slide into fresh musk. Appropriate anywhere that fire-engine red lipstick is. Now, if you will forgive me a curmudgeonly excursion, let me point out that Rose Alexandrie could have been a Lauder fragrance of twenty years ago, when you could count on a fragrance priced for ordinary humans to be this coherent from top to drydown and made of stuff this good; you didn't have to pay nearly \$200 a bottle, journey to a big city Saks, and deal with some guy in a black turtleneck. TS

Rouge (Christian Lacroix) ★★ *grapefruit milk* \$

Remember the scene in the movie *Heathers* in which Winona Ryder's character proposes making another character vomit by serving her a mixture of milk and orange juice? That's the top note here: a small, sad, grapefruit-flavored version of the grand Gucci Rush. Resolves into a mild woody rose of no great distinction. TS

Scandal (Roja Dove) ★★★ *rose tuberose* \$\$\$\$

Here is the Fracas tuberose perfume taken to the absolute limit, made preposterously intense by way of a liqueur-like rose streaked through with apricot and raspberry. It is enormously rude and will cause everyone sitting next to you to push his plate away after one bite and to lean back while talking to you as if you clutched him in a tango. Good materials, very competently done, but frightening. TS

Sel Marin (Heeley) ★★★★ *salty vetiver* \$\$\$

We've seen this fresh-salty, bracingly marine idea of citrus, helional and vetiver before, notably in Diptyque's *Virgilio* and Miller Harris *Fleurs de Sel*, but in truth I think this iteration is the best so far. LT

Sensuous (Estée Lauder) ★★★ *lily sandalwood* \$\$

Lauder has long been synonymous with so-called "icy" blondes and abstract, squeaky-clean white florals. Aside from *Youth Dew*, their orientals (*Cinnabar*, *Spellbound*) have always been less assured. This time, to ease the transition, the advertising mixes blondes with brunettes (two each) to signify that New Hampshire and tennis legs have not gone out of style. The four beauties are wearing the same morning-after guy's shirt, lucky man. The message is half-prim, half-sexy. The fragrance has a tan, creamy texture in which a lily note meshes with vetiver and a synthetic sandalwood—synthetic because natural sandalwood oil is, because of restrictions due to over-harvesting, missing from the perfumer's palette.

Sensuous suffers for it. As always with Lauder, the radiance is perfectly calibrated, and gives a faithful impression at fifteen paces without being loud. However, up close the fragrance disintegrates over the first hour into a bare array of disconnected things failing to cohere: white floral, synthetic wood, praline-like amber. All told, thin and lacking in mystery. LT

Serge Noire (Serge Lutens) ★ *camphor clove* \$\$\$

Serge, as well as being Lutens's given name, is a type of fabric, in France generally of silk, so *serge noire* is, roughly, a black twill. You would expect an eponymous fragrance from the dramatic Lutens to be his ultimate personal statement of what a fragrance should be: i.e., a hell of an oriental. Instead, this is an oriental from hell. *Serge Noire*, in one go, collects all the faults of the Lutens style. It is violently powerful, as is his *Gris Clair*; concentrates exclusively on the indolic, rubbery, mothball-camphor off-notes of florals, as in *Miel de Bois* and to lesser extent *Fleurs d'Oranger* and *Tubéreuse Criminelle*; is cloying, as is *Cèdre*; has clove in such quantities that you think of dentists; and indulges to the hilt all the hippie clichés of spices and woods, creating an overwhelming funk reminiscent of Chinese herbalist cough syrup. All the same, there is a set of values for which this fragrance is the zenith and not the nadir, but I am not a cultural relativist and I say this is a disaster. TS

Shalini (Shalini) ★★★★ *fresh tuberose* \$\$\$\$

The blurb says *Shalini* is a "celebration of the emergence of a woman's inner butterfly," perish the thought. The fragrance, composed by the great Maurice Roucel, is a sleek tuberose-based white floral with a deliciously bitter-fresh, almost fougère-like heart. While very good, it is simply not worth the money. *Shalini* attempts to settle in that weird part of the lift vs. drag curve of economics, where the more you charge the more you sell. The 2.2 oz. *parfum* in the cheesoid neo-Nina-Ricci bottle costs \$900, though the 1 oz. is more reasonably priced at \$400. Only 900 bottles were made, so hurry. Or rather, don't. LT

Shiloh (Hors la Monde) ★★★★

gunpowder rose \$\$\$

Nothing wakes up the pedant in me like inaccurate, pretentious copy in perfume press packs. The makers of *Shiloh* claim that *Hors la Monde* is pronounced *Orlamonde* and refers to a "beautiful quaint castle" overlooking the French Riviera. Having lived for four years next to said castle, I am in a position to reveal that it is in fact Maurice Maeterlinck's *Villa Orlamonde*, now a

hotel called Palais Maeterlinck next to Nice, and that the “la” in “Hors la Monde” is up there with “Professeur de Parfums” in the annals of mangled French. This said, Shiloh is a sensationally uncompromising fragrance made for those who thought Sinan was soft, Parfum de Peau wimpy, Coriandre a copout and Knowing way too quiet. Michel Roudnitska’s Shiloh takes the fluorescent woody rose to an extreme that simply cannot be outshone. If Hellboy had an equally brick-red sister, she’d be splashing it on. LT

Silver Musk (Nasomatto) ★★(★★) *large musk* \$\$\$
Musk molecules usually contain between 14 and 16 carbon atoms, close to the maximum size a molecule can have and still bind to olfactory receptors. Musks therefore lie at the ragged edge of human perception, and most people will be anosmic to one or more of the commonly used ones. Perfumers usually mix a few to make sure one comes through. Whatever the mixture in Silver Musk is, I can hardly perceive it. Interesting, however, to document the strange olfactory phenomenon akin to blind-sight whereby one knows something is there without perceiving it. LT

I smell it entire: it’s a cheap fougere that makes you automatically say “shaving cream,” plus a weird metallic musk. TS

Stoned (Solange) ★★★★★
patchouli cotton-candy \$\$\$\$

This hybrid of Habanita, Shalimar and Vanilia attempts the ultimate amber oriental by combining the features of past greats. This means, along with the usual vanilla and balsams, you find powdery heliotropin, patchouli, citrus, and crisp vetiver, modernized with a big dose of ethylmaltol (cotton candy). Attractive, rich, sweet and plush as anyone could want, but terribly familiar and somehow out of focus from all angles. In other words, this is loving pastiche, but not as distinctive as its forebears and much more expensive. Claims to be mixed with “diamond dust,” which has no perceptible effect, though I haven’t tried to sharpen the kitchen knives with it. TS

Tea for Two (L’Artisan Parfumeur) ★★ ★
smoke cinnamon \$\$

That wonderful Indian concoction of spices, tea, and milk known as chai tea was one of those food fads that, like some sort of starlet of the palate,

had its brief moment of fame before we all moved on to pomegranate juice. In 2000, Olivia Giacobetti used the theme as an excuse for a transparent spice oriental, dry and plain, with the bare minimum of sweetness, a touch of leathery smoke, and a well-judged hole where the amber usually goes. Probably a better room fragrance than a personal perfume and, judged as an attempt at modernizing the oriental genre, completely trounced by Fendi’s (depressingly discontinued) Theorema (1998). Still, not bad. TS

U for Her (Ungaro) ★★ *rosy citrus* \$

It took four perfumers, and good ones at that, to produce this measly nonentity? Doesn’t IFF have a hundred like this on the shelf? Ungaro used to do pretty good stuff in the eighties, but this is pathetic. LT

U for Him (Ungaro) ★★ ★ *lavender musk* \$

This composition is as messy as an 18-year-old guy’s bedroom and tries to recapitulate every recent masculine cliché while sticking to a tight formula budget. Nevertheless, it has a cheerful, cheap aftershave directness that could work on a goofy, pretty boy. LT

Unspoken (Roja Dove) ★★ ★ *patchouli floral* \$\$\$

A little museum piece, which LT reckons smells most, in his memory, like Houbigant’s long-lost Parfum Idéal (1900). After a huge (and vile) patchouli top note, which threatens to stop the bus at Woodstock, it settles to a pleasant rose-floral bouquet plus citrus, with that patchouli, now mollified, humming along in back. Old-fashioned but not uptight, made of good stuff, in general this smells all right if uninspired. One reason Dove’s scents smell somewhat fusty is that they do not employ enough of what a graphic designer would call white space. At its best, Unspoken’s floral aspect reminds me of our beloved Lady Stetson, though I like the Lady better. TS

Verveine (Heeley) ★★ ★ ★ *lemon verbena* \$\$\$

In French bars and restaurants, infusions are served in large, thick-walled, frequently octagonal cups and, particularly when ordered after a slap-up meal spanning pan-fried frog’s legs to profiteroles, have the feel of an absolution from sins of recent commission. Verveine is especially effective, with its semiprecious color of liquid peridot and the little paper tab that says “du

Velay,” a caressingly-named, mysterious and so far unidentified region from which all verbena apparently originates. Heeley’s Verveine perfectly captures the plangent, minor-third feel of verbena in a fresh, floral context. Compare and contrast this with Eau de Guerlain, where a similar idea is arrived at from a sprightly citrus direction. LT

Vetiver Babylone (Armani Privé) ★★★

woody citrus \$\$\$

Does not significantly smell of vetiver. For the first hour it’s a remake of Terre d’Hermès with the sparkle removed. Nice grapefruit citrus top note, basically inoffensive milky-metallic wood dry-down, with a sporty structure that LT assures me is derived ultimately from the eighties predecessor of all these sad citrus-wood masculines—Cacharel Pour l’Homme. I can’t figure out who would spend this kind of money on something that smells so cheap, no matter what the actual cost of materials. TS

Wind Song (Prince Matchabelli) ★★★

nostalgic floral \$

When I first heard of Prince Matchabelli, I imagined him to be an advertising fiction, the product of Madison Avenue’s finest, the sort of fake Italian (-elli) aristocrat that wears drawn-on moustaches and slicked-down hair with a center parting in forties movies. And I was wrong. Prince George Matchabelli was the real thing, a Georgian nobleman (1885-1935) who trained as a chemist, worked as a diplomat, married an Italian actress, and moved to the US in 1923, where he started his own perfume firm and, according to some, mixed his early compositions himself. This one was done in 1952 by Ernest Shiftan (Brut, Le De, Jean Naté, Intimate and Detchema) and Léon Hardy (Cachet, Tea Rose). It is a fizzy aldehydic-floral in the abstract rose-carnation style, a wonderfully straightforward old-fashioned fragrance that makes me feel as if I’ve been sifting through a box of family black and white photos with scalloped edges and an embossed signature in the corner. LT

Yatra (Aveda) ★★★★★ *rose patchouli* \$\$

Before the Lauder purchase, Aveda used to have a full lineup of fragrances named after (what else?) the chakras, those whistle-stops of the spirit on its way up to the train shed. In my recollection, the fragrances were well put together, suffered from ills common to most all-natural perfumery, and

smelled like paisley for the nose: richly colored, dark, complicated in a wallpaper sort of way, and essentially formless. Some years ago I met Aveda’s distinguished Japanese perfumer, Koichi Shiozawa, and he explained to me the immense technical difficulties facing the natural perfumer: small, expensive, and shrinking palette, variable quality. Something must have happened in the natural materials field, because the creations are getting better, either because they use new materials or because a lost skill is being rebuilt and extended. Yatra is remarkably similar to Aesop’s Marrakech, only more floral, and is in some ways a hippie version of Aromatics Elixir. It includes a piercing earthy patchouli at the top of the heart accord, which gives it lift and brilliance and dispels what would otherwise be herbaceous murk. Yatra has some of the easy nobility of archaic fragrances but with an oddly modern touch. LT

Corrections

Thanks to readers who wrote in correcting points of fact in the guide. In addition, there were misprints we’d like to clear up.

Rive Gauche Pour Homme should have received four stars, not three.

Inhale and Exhale are from the LUSH spinoff brand B Never Too Busy to Be Beautiful, not Parfum d’Empire, which merely shares a PR consultant who mailed them in the same box. Our apologies for the misattribution.

Bois de Violette mentions the fourth of the Bois as Un Bois Vanille. It should have been Bois Oriental. (Thanks to Elena Vosnaki for the correction.)