

Under the Influence

GET YOUR WAY WITH THE POWER OF SCENT PERSUASION: MEGAN DEEM INVESTIGATES HOW THE RIGHT FRAGRANCE MIGHT MAKE YOU LOOK THINNER AND SEEM MORE CONFIDENT

The ubiquity of aromatherapy (using lavender-fragranced fabric softener to combat insomnia or citrus dish soap to lift spirits while scrubbing) has taught American women how easy it is to self-medicate with scent. But what really has scientists excited is the direct impact odor can have on the brains and behavior of others. Given all the data fragrance researchers have compiled, wearing a perfume simply because one enjoys the smell is nothing less than a colossal missed opportunity. Could a lawyer sway a jury not with her evidence but with her eau de toilette? The perfume savvy are betting on it.

Human hardwiring makes the art of *aromapersuasion* possible. The 1,000 olfactory receptors in the nose help the brain differentiate between more than 10,000 scents, many of which trigger a subconscious response. The brain's olfactory lobe connects to the limbic system, which controls emotion. This explains how a person can smell lavender, for example, and reflexively feel at ease.

The key to aromapersuasion, however, lies in selecting a fragrance that projects enough of its scent to be picked up by others (without overwhelming them) and elicit the desired reaction. Fortunately, a complex synthetic perfume has proved to be as aromatherapeutic as a single-note essential oil, says Alan R. Hirsch, MD, a neurologist and the director of the Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago: "As long as the influential note is strong enough to be apparent, it doesn't matter that it's not worn alone." (A warning to anyone trying to affect a man's behavior through fragrance: According to a study published in *Nature Neuroscience*, the female sense of smell is markedly more acute than that of the opposite sex, so perfume liberally to ensure the wished-for response.)

MIND GAMES

One of the first aroma-persuasive perfumes came about by accident. In 1972 Estée Lauder developed Aliage, a sporty green scent, to symbolize "women entering the workforce and becoming more engaged with activities outside the house," says Peter Lichtenthal, the company's senior vice president of global marketing. Although the scent wasn't formulated to impact the relationship between office-bound women and their new

coworkers, Aliage wearers reported that men commented (favorably) on their perfume while women didn't seem to notice it.

The rosemary and balsam top notes in Aliage (and in others of that time period, such as Revlon's Charlie, launched in 1973) might have been new for women's perfumes (opulent florals were the norm), but men had smelled them in their own colognes for decades. "We have an innate tendency to like others that remind us of ourselves, including through the way they smell," Hirsch says. By wearing green note-based perfumes, women were mimicking men, subliminally prompting them to think of their new colleagues as peers, not as romantic pursuits.

While Aliage might have been a progressive idea in '72, "Now we absolutely have companies asking us to create scents that have specific tactical effects," says Helen Murphy, a senior fragrance development manager at International Flavors & Fragrances Inc. (IFF), the house behind such classics as Calvin Klein Eternity and Yves Saint Laurent Paris. "We consider the emotions that the client wants to convey and engineer the perfume to get those results."

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

With today's extensive range of fragrance options, every application becomes a chance to win friends and influence people. A bride could wear green apple (in Dolce & Gabbana Light Blue) to reduce anxiety in a jittery groom; a woman wishing to hold the attention of those in an early-morning meeting might try an eau de toilette with cinnamon, mint, or citrus (such as Escada's tangerine-accented Rockin' Rio). These notes stimulate the trigeminal nerve (responsible for the tears that come from slicing onions), keeping people alert. Blended floral perfumes (like Black—Kenneth Cole for her, with violet and hyacinth) will help a group remember what it's been told. A study published in *Journal of Neurological and Orthopaedic Medicine and Surgery* found that subjects wearing face masks impregnated with a mixed floral aroma reduced their completion time on written tests by 17 percent compared with when they used unscented masks, showing an increase in learning speed.

Since 1985, IFF, like Hirsch, has been compiling data on emotional responses to individual notes. Coty, one of the first companies to take advantage of this research,

directed IFF to create something that would induce happiness for its Healing Garden In Bloom perfume. After evaluating almost 50 subjects, IFF researchers noted that the odor of night-blooming jasmine harvested at 3 A.M. and of miva orchid picked at 8 A.M. incited the greatest joy among the sniffers. Those two joined other notes such as musk and fern in the final product. Paul Seplowitz, the vice president of product development for Coty, believes the end result trumps nature because the two flowers would never bloom simultaneously in the real world: "There's no way you'd get the same effect just walking through a garden."

One of Hirsch's soon to be released studies found that women who smell of grapefruit are perceived to be eight years younger than they really are. (So much for collagen injections! Stock up now on Jo Malone Grapefruit Cologne.) "The initial hit is most important for making an impression," Hirsch says. And because a fragrance's impact fades the longer one is exposed to it, "you'll need to keep reapplying" to sustain the illusion. An earlier Hirsch study presented in 2003 at the annual meeting of the Association for Chemoreception Sciences showed that a woman wearing a spicy floral perfume (such as the patchouli, amber, and jasmine-laced Paul Smith London for Women) appears 12 pounds lighter—at least to men. It will come as no surprise that women are not so easily fooled. Accustomed to scrutinizing themselves in front of the mirror and on a scale, they're generally able to guess someone's weight correctly regardless of the scent she's wearing.

If nothing else, go big. "Intense florals convey confidence," says Matt Frost, the vice president of marketing for the Quest fragrance house, creator of the popular Thierry Mugler Angel perfume. "They're such a strong presence that even if you're not so self-assured, people will think that you must be to wear such a bold fragrance." He cites Stella by Stella McCartney with its distinct rose note and the tuberose-infused Michael by Michael Kors as two that might help a nervous Nellie seem like Naomi Campbell.

It's not hard to imagine, as more scent-makers tap into the trend, a Machiavellian world in which the right perfume combinations lead one to dizzying heights of job and relationship successes—where changing someone's mind is as easy as changing your fragrance. □

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Scent of a Woman?

By CHANDLER BURR

A woman next to me at a dinner party in Paris a few months ago had on one of the great fragrances, the kind of classic that people just keep buying and wearing. It worked perfectly on her, complementing the gorgeous, ultrafeminine Galliano shirt she was wearing. (She turned out to be Sophie Charbonneau, who manages the Dior shops on Rue Faubourg-St.-Honore and Rue Royale.) It was the smell of opaqueness and clarity mixed together, light and dark folded into each other. And the fragrance was -- I confirmed it during the salad course -- Eau Sauvage, one of Dior's great masculine scents.

As the roles of women have changed and multiplied over the last century, the idea of what is feminine has become a much more interesting question. Like women's clothes and hairstyles, perfume can now be feminine in surprising ways, or masculine without making straight men worry that they're playing "The Crying Game."

Take Miss Dior, a classic scent created in 1947 for an upper-class woman leading a seamless existence. You, on the other hand, have to calibrate your perfume to the E at rush hour, your office in Midtown and the dinner party uptown. You can wear Miss Dior and make an impression at Lincoln Center. Or you can go from orchestra pit to tennis court in Vera Wang, an equally feminine scent, developed for the 21st century. It has the simple self-assurance of a well-washed polo shirt.

I know that lots of people will argue that feminine still means flowery. O.K., well, consider this: a Christmas party on Varick Street. The host introduces me to four friends. Two women, two men. Hello, hi, how are you? Someone is wearing . . . I can't quite place it, but I really like it. I lean toward them (they all know what I write about) and inhale. It turns out that Sarah is wearing Michael Kors for Women, which stumped me precisely because its sweet flowers have the slight powder of metal, the faintest trace of steel dust, to give you the Kors modernism. It could be a woman's scent, but you could also see how it could be a man's.

One of the most wonderful florals, by Molyneux, is Quartz, a fragrance of simple loveliness and grace marked by a quality of absolute lucidity. Molyneux markets it as quintessentially female. But a roommate of mine in boarding school, a football-playing jock, sprayed some on as a joke (I had a bottle of it just because I love it), and later hunted me down and muttered, "Man, where can I get that stuff?" He claimed to have been nuzzled by five cuties in English class.

Many houses make no secret that their "masculines" are worn by women. Women wear everything from Givenchy Pour Homme to Dior's Fahrenheit. I sometimes think more women wear Guerlain's Vetiver than its intended customers do.

Meanwhile, what constitutes "feminine" is expanding beyond all known boundaries. For example, Dolce & Gabbana's Light Blue is an absolutely terrific perfume, rich without a trace of heaviness, sweet

without a hint of stickiness. It smells like the freshest lemon-cake batter. Ever. Narciso Rodriguez's For Her smells like talcum powder and confectioner's sugar sprinkled over slightly unripe plums sitting on an aluminum plate. It was co-created by the perfumer Francis Kurkdjian, who earmarked it as feminine and yet made it just mysterious enough to succeed at androgyny.

Simply, from Clinique, is the smell of strong English breakfast tea with cream and sugar; it's one of the most brilliant feminines around. But don't take my word. Go smell it. As for Donna Karan for Women, I've heard she wanted the smell of "clean." Of course, perfect cleanness smells like nothing at all. What she actually got is the smell of pho, the Vietnamese soup, with its rich broth of fresh mints and succulent green leaves whose name I can never remember. Let me be clear: it doesn't smell like food exactly. Rather, it smells like the idea of this rich, tangy thing. It isn't going after the elegance of Vera Wang, nor the delight of For Her, nor the light luxury of Simply. It is entirely its own, the essence of femininity. Whatever that is.