

Fragrant attraction

There's a fine line between pleasure and pain, and a scent can arouse memories of both. How much do noses know? Nicole Wraight makes sense of your love-hate relationship with smell

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN RINTOUL

Recently, a hot guy at a bar told me that when you lock eyes with someone across a room it isn't love at first sight or even lust - it's your sense of smell locating a perfect mate. Sound as plausible as spiral perms making a comeback? Rachel Herz, associate professor of psychology at Brown University, US, says, "Forget fatal attraction - smell is the most important characteristic for a woman, particularly when choosing a romantic partner." In her experiments, subjects exposed to pleasant scents gave higher attractiveness ratings to people in photos than when not fragrance-fuelled. So, it seems beauty is actually in the nose of the beholder.

Your sense of smell warns you of danger; sharpens your awareness of other people and places; helps you respond to those you meet; influences your moods, how long you stay in a room, who you talk to and who you want to see again. And smelling nice just makes you feel damn good. In fact, according to the Fragrance Foundation of Australia, 68 per cent of us wear a perfume every day and spray that bottle at least three times each application - that's about 86,000 squirts over a lifetime. And there's no shortage of choice, with at least 50 new perfumes released each year. No wonder 92 per cent of us own more than one fragrance.

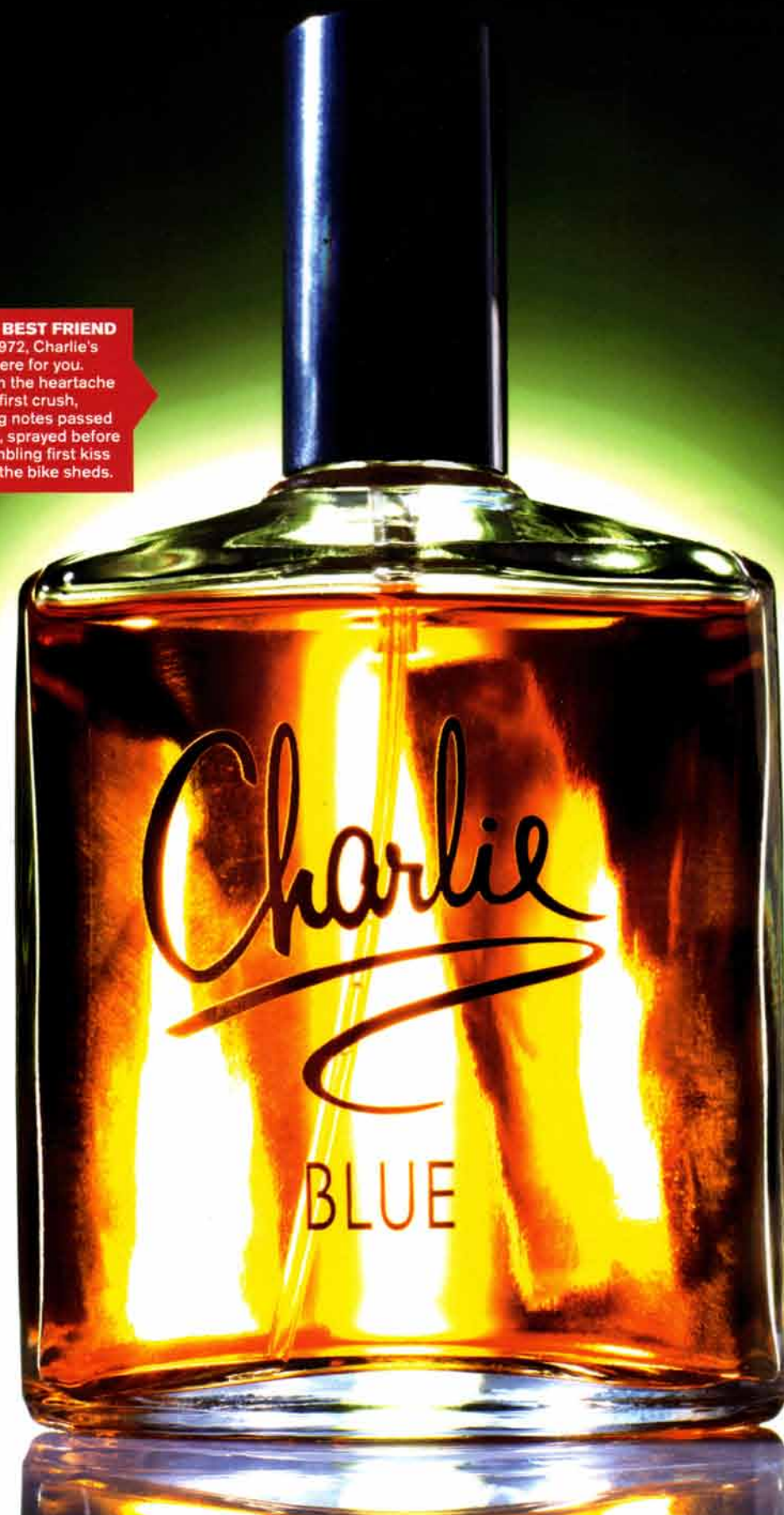
OK, it's not exactly breaking news; wanting to smell good has been on our agenda since the

Mesopotamians rubbed incense oil on their bodies about 4000 years ago. But it's the power of the nose that's keeping not only scientists and researchers busy, but fragrance empires searching for ways to affect our daily lives with aromas, too.

"Scent remains one of life's great mysteries," says Michael Edwards, author of *Fragrances Of The World* (\$180, fragrancesoftheworld.com). "We don't know much about it, and it's only in the past 20 years scientists have started to take it seriously."

With hearts and minds (and purses) on the radar, scientific investigation is intense, and the spotlight's on discovering just how our olfactory system (sense of smell) works. For instance, can particular scents comfort and calm us? Is it possible to sniff ourselves thin? >>

GIRL'S BEST FRIEND
Since 1972, Charlie's been there for you. Through the heartache of your first crush, scenting notes passed in class, sprayed before that fumbling first kiss behind the bike sheds.



Can certain aromas make us feel less pain, lower our blood pressure or help us get a good night's sleep?

The nose knows

What we do know is that smell and emotion are located in the same network in the brain: the limbic system, sometimes called the rhinencephalon - the "nose brain". "More than any other sense, the sense of smell circumnavigates the logical part of the brain", says UK psychologist Conrad King. "This is why the smell of perfume can turn men into gibbering idiots, the smell of baking bread can destroy a dieter's best intentions and the smell of baby powder can make a child-adverse person quite broody."

Does catching a whiff of Charlie take you back to school discos, Levi 501s and crimped hair? This is because our nose and emotions

are intrinsically linked. According to Herz, if we didn't have a schnoz we wouldn't be able to experience or process any emotion. Brain-imaging studies have shown that when we smell something, a certain part of our brain activates. The more emotional our reaction to the scent, the more intense the activation is.

Are we born to love some smells, or do we learn it? Another study by Brown University on scent and perception found that when a smell is paired with an emotional event - good or bad - perception of that smell is altered to fit the experience. Herz, who conducted the study, wasn't surprised by the findings: "Some people may smell a rose and be reminded of their father's funeral; others may love the smell of dirt because it reminds them of a happy childhood." So, perception of smell consists not only of the sensation of odours, but of experiences and

emotions associated with them.

Which is why some of us have a "signature scent" - a fragrance that smells like the essence of who we are. It's quite likely that your preferences have actually come from your mum and the type, or fragrance family, she used to wear because we register that scent with love and tenderness. So if your mum wore Jean Patou's Joy, then you'll probably find you lean toward spicy florals. In Japan, it's actually common for men to wear floral fragrances because they're the smells they've grown up with. Take a sniff of the waiter next time you go get some agadashi tofu.

Bottling up emotion

It's these vivid emotional responses that keep the expert "noses" in the fragrance industry >>>

Heavenly scents

Referring to scientific studies, we've matched you with aromas to help you get what you want...



You want a pay rise
SPRAY ON wood
Calvin Klein Secret Obsession \$95

Wearing this woody, smoky, yet feminine scent will help you come across as consummately capable. "Woody fragrances convey sophistication, confidence and strength," says sensory psychologist Dr Avery Gilbert. And they have for, like, ever: ancient Egyptians used wood incense to put the gods (their equivalent of corporate big shots) in favourable moods. One whiff of CK's Secret Obsession and your boss may feel more comfortable leaving the big decisions to you.



You want to look slimmer
SPRAY ON floral
Christian Dior Hypnotic Poison \$100

This intoxicating mix of jasmine, bitter almond and cinnamon mingled with sexy vanilla and sandalwood may smell amazing, but skinny? Apparently so - Dr Alan Hirsch of the Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago. In the US, reports that men who smell a spicy floral scent like this one perceived the wearer to be an average of 1.8 kilos lighter than she actually was. And if he really liked the scent, he estimated her at 5.4kg lighter.



You want him to want you
SPRAY ON fruit
Tom Ford Black Orchid \$100

Tom Ford's sensual aroma of orchids, sweetened with black plum and blackcurrant, is a sure-thing attention-getter. "Luscious, fruity notes are disarming but attractive," says Dr Gilbert. The best part? "Edible odours tend to increase male arousal," says Dr Hirsch, whose study showed floral smells increase penile blood flow. Apply this baby for the scent equivalent of a one-two punch.



You want to perk up
SPRAY ON citrus
Giorgio Armani Privé Oranger Alhambra \$159

Lemon gives this unisex scent its cool, crisp edge, and is shown to ease tension and anxiety. "In one study, patients exposed to a lemon aroma reported better moods and fewer negative health symptoms," says psychologist Bryan Raudenbush of Wheeling Jesuit University in the US. Also, researchers at cosmetics company Shiseido have found that citrus cuts down on production of the stress hormone cortisol. Are you happy now?

The average human being is able to recognise around 10,000 different odours

PARTNERS IN CRIME
It took hours to pick an outfit for your first date but Eternity (1985) was the last touch. Then you moved in and shared everything, including CK One (1990). And when it all ended badly, you went on the prowl with an indecent Obsession (1984).



TRUE CONFIDANTE
Older, wiser and comfy in your own skin, Coco has made you feel beautiful and sophisticated since 1921... and every day a little more of No. 5's magic rubs off on you.

on a never-ending quest to move us mentally and physically each time we spray on perfume. Karyn Khoury, senior vice president, Corporate Fragrance Development Worldwide for Estée Lauder, has worked in the fragrance industry for more than 32 years. "Envisioning an emotion, a feeling, a person, even a texture, are limitless – and translating that into a fragrance is my mission," she explains. "With my latest creation, there were lots of people who thought I should be locked up."
In the brief she gave for her latest Estée Lauder fragrance – Sensuous (B, \$100), Khoury recited a poem to every perfumer who worked on the project. Reading out *Phenomenal Woman* by Maya Angelou – "the most powerful, positive and emotionally evocative celebration of

what it means to be a woman" – she declared she wanted to capture the essence of the poem and blend it with the aroma of heated wood. "I wanted to make woods sleeker, more modern, almost melted – being able to bend it and make it malleable," she says, as if capturing the smell of melted wood was as easy as picking a daisy.
Four years later, with the help of Professor Jeannette Haviland-Jones of the Rutgers' Human Emotions Laboratory in New Jersey, US, a fragrance that met the brief was created. "For the first time in history, we went beyond the normal consumer testing parameters – using two different methods of psychological testing – and found Sensuous to be an extremely emotionally active fragrance that

scored very high for connection, intimacy and confidence."
Professor Haviland-Jones has been researching the link between scent and emotion for almost 18 years. "Smell was the forgotten sense, partly because it was so poorly understood," she says. "Western psychology assumes a person's IQ is always his IQ, or her depressive nature is always her nature. The Human Emotions Laboratory is challenging the boundaries of this common assumption. What if you could be smarter when the air is cleaner, or happier when a flower scents your room?"

Aroma therapy

The power of scent even extends to health – mental and physical. For example, according to Dr Alan Hirsch, founder and neurological director of the Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation in Chicago, US, aromas can greatly improve mental alertness. "We found when subjects inhale jasmine, it increased the beta waves in the frontal lobe of the brain that promote wakefulness and clarity," he says. With one thousand jasmine flowers used to make just 30ml of parfum, we think the new interpretation of Chanel No. 5, Eau Première (\$180), is the way forward for sophisticated clarity. Dr Hirsch also found that essential oils of peppermint and vanilla can help you track whatever's in your line of vision more efficiently, and enhance your hand-eye coordination. (For a dose of peppermint, try Thierry Mugler Angel for Men (A, \$164).)

Research by Duke University in the US found pleasant odours like plum and peach can lessen pain. (Try the peachy heart notes of Guerlain Mitsouko (F, \$122).) Another study, conducted by the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Hospital in New York, reported that 63 per cent of patients exposed to vanilla during an MRI felt less claustrophobic than those who weren't exposed to any scent. And >>

Scent of a woman
Sniff out the best way to apply your fragrance with this guide from master perfumer Guerlain

Perfume
Also known as extract this is the most highly concentrated and truest interpretation of perfume. The extract expresses itself differently on different skin. Apply a few drops to the insides of wrists and elbows, nape of the neck and décolleté.

Eau de toilette
These have sharper head notes. Its hold on skin lasts longer than perfume, and it can be sprayed directly onto clothes, hair and skin.

Eau de parfum or parfum de toilette
This elixir is more highly concentrated than eau de toilette and leaves an aura in its wake, but is applied the same way as an EDT.

Eau de cologne and eaux fraîches
These are best for those who like light, refreshing scents. They can be applied generously at any time of the day, especially after showering.

Bath products
Lotions, body creams, bath gels, deodorants and oils are great for amplifying the scent of your fragrance, and making it last.

in 2006, researchers from James Cook University in Queensland discovered that vanilla has an analgesic effect – it reduces pain levels. So prepare yourself for a not-fun medical examination or bikini wax with a spritz of vanilla-scented perfume, like YSL's Opium Collector Edition (D, \$122).
There's also promising research from Duke University Medical Center that reveals we may be able to smell ourselves down a dress size. Study participants' tongues were spritzed with a chocolate-scented spray (the odour goes back through

the throat and up into the nasal area, producing a sharp smell, which is why smell accounts for 80 per cent of taste). The result was a decreased urge to binge on chocolate. Give it a try – spray yourself with a fragrance with chocolate notes, like So...? Sinful (C, \$34.95), or rub on some Laura Mercier Chocolate Truffle Soufflé Body Crème (E, \$65).

And according to researchers at Israel's Tel Aviv University, going OTT with perfume could be a sign of depression. Lead researcher Yehuda Shoenfeld believes people suffering with depression can lose their sense of smell and may overcompensate by dousing themselves in scent. He believes that future standardised smell tests may help medical professionals diagnose depression, and – citing research that shows lemon, orange and lavender can lift the spirits – that aromatherapy could be used as an anti-depressant.

There's certainly a long way to go but, with the amalgamation of the science and fragrance industries, it's clear that we're beginning to make sense of our most underrated sense. All power to the nose. **WH**



Know your nose
No one wants to burn their nasal cavity trawling every counter to choose a perfume. We asked Australian fragrance guru Michael Edwards for his best advice

1 Find your fragrance family:
floral, oriental, woody or fresh. At fragrance.org and sephora.com, type in your old fave perfumes and they'll tell you which fragrance family you like.

2 Think about where you'll wear it – is it for work or play? "It's not good etiquette to wear loud, boisterous scents to work but, in the evening, go sensual."

3 Don't wear any other scent, including body moisturiser, or you won't get the true, er, scent. And don't try more than three new perfumes in one day, or your nose won't be able to differentiate. "Try them on your pulse points. Your skin will react and each note will become apparent, but it won't smell as different from the blotter than you might expect."

4 Wait at least an hour to gauge what it really smells like on your skin. "It'll take about five minutes for you to be able to smell top notes and heart notes and up to 24 hours for base notes." Oh, and if it dribbles down your wrist, you've sprayed it too close. It should be a fine mist that instantly dries.

5 You get what you pay for. Generally, the more money you spend, the better the ingredients. A good quality perfume will set you back at least \$100, but anything that costs more than \$300 is just taking the piss. Even expensive ingredients like jasmine and iris don't cost that much to bottle.

Don't buy fragrance in the AM – our sense of smell isn't great in the morning; our ability to perceive aromas increases as the day wears on