

Frills & SPILLS

Lingerie has often been often been compared to a 'second skin'. But have you thought of fragancing your underwear? SUZY NIGHTINGALE reveals all ►



THE LINK BETWEEN fashion and fragrance is enduring. Every design house you can think of has a portfolio of perfumes – and appropriately so, for ‘fragrance is ‘like a new dress – it makes you quite simply marvelous’, according to beauty pioneer Estée Lauder. In the opinion of the late Parisian *couturier* Christian Dior perfume should be ‘the indispensable complement to the personality of women, the finishing touch on a dress.’

But what if we took that one stage further, scenting not just the body beneath the dress, but clothing – and lingerie – itself? It’s a tradition that goes back a long way, and is perhaps most in evidence today in the Middle East, where clothes and underclothes are scented by being draped over scented smoke. In fact, when the Crusaders returned from the holy wars in Arabia, they brought with them their enemies’ scent-making secrets, which included tucking scented sachets into and beneath the clothes they wore.

But while the act of fragancing fabric is a tradition many centuries old, it comes with its own well-stuffed chest of controversies. What perfume to wear, and even more importantly, where to wear it, has been a heated debate – particularly in relation to women. Personal hygiene guides were published throughout the 19th Century, specifically warning women to use fragrance ‘with caution’ – and, as Cheryl Krueger explains in her essay *Decadent Perfume: Under the Skin and Through the Page*, they offered advice on ‘the careful selection of an appropriate scent, proper

dosage and strategic application... Tasteful women were advised to scent their handkerchiefs, linens, writing paper, even shoes, but not their skin.’

The notion of going beyond that to scent one’s smalls seems to have been popularised in the 1800s. Luxurious French lingerie then tended to be trimmed with silk or lace, swags of intricate ruffles and silken ribbons in pastel shades of blue, pink or lilac – that last apparently chosen because it matched well with the scent of violets. As *The Topeka Daily Capital* newspaper in Kansas noted on 25th July 1896, in an article celebrating the ideal of the sophisticated Parisienne woman, ‘All of her lingerie has a dash of lilac peeping about in lace frills, and there is an unmistakable odour of violets about her *boudoir*... Just a few drops of toilet water sprinkled on lingerie before being folded always gives a delightful, lasting odour.’

Surprisingly, it wasn’t until the late 19th Century that the concept was entertained that respectable ladies might apply perfume directly to their bodies, rather than just their clothing. A realisation dawned, as Krueger observes: ‘When it radiates from a woman’s skin, perfume affirms the presence of skin itself.’ Whereupon a debate of flesh–v–fabric as the ‘proper’ place for a lady to apply perfume promptly began to rage. Continues Krueger, there began ‘a growing suspicion of perfume, and vigilance to its implementation and proximity to the body’, the main worry being that ‘women of all classes might leave their scent trail in spaces beyond the privacy of the *boudoir*.’

SMALLS WONDERS

SARAH BAKER PERFUMES LACE

Candlelit glamour, coconut and hedione-laced creaminess on a base of intricately jasmine-infused cedar, with utterly exquisite appeal.

£120 for 50ml eau de parfum

sarahbakerperfumes.com

GUERLAIN EAU DE LINGERIE

Delicate muskiness kisses skin or lingerie alike with a so-chic dusting of iris, rose, creamy sandalwood and the whispered sexiness of ambrette.

£68 for 125ml eau de toilette

At Harrods

We urge you to fragrance your frillies with these intimately inspired scents, whenever and wherever you damn please...

LA PERLA LA MIA PERLA

Narcotic white florals form the texture of silk-like petals in an embrace of creamy warmth – a glistening glow that bustles and builds as you wear this.

£39 for 30ml eau de parfum

johnlewis.com

EDITIONS DE PARFUM FREDÉRIC MALLÉ DANS MON LIT

Evoking the sensation of sleeping on a bed of rose petals; half Turkish rose essence, half LMR’s Rose Water Essential – and

100% pure ecstasy.
£83 for 100ml linen spray

fredericmalle.co.uk



Author Edmond de Goncourt even fictionalised a racy 'case study' of fragrance-enhanced hysteria in his novel *Chérie* (1884), following the decline of a 'hysterical woman' whose autoerotic pleasure is stimulated by perfume – particularly the smell and tangibility of scent used on fabric and bed linens. Goncourt describes how when '...smelling her handkerchief soaked in bouquets,' Chérie experienced happiness while 'having something like a light spasm. There was a relaxing of her nerves, a gentle resolution of her self, a sort of ticklish contentment, a torpor in her body that was at once sensual and a little lethargic, out of which, very often forgetting the people around her, Chérie would get up, to breathe in deeply through her nostrils a new aroma, throwing back her chest with an ever so slight tilt of the head, with her eyes closed in pleasure.'

As perfume-lovers understand, once you've become hooked on perfume, it's a slippery slope. For Chérie this meant waking up each day and lavishly spraying her bedlinen and nightclothes with white heliotrope. 'Immediately after, she would wrap herself in the perfumed sheets, taking care to move as little as possible.' (Which

“Female perfumer Germaine Cellier allegedly stole models' undergarments, in order to 'smell the best of their femininity'”

surely opens up a whole world of fragrant possibilities for your next 'duvet day'.)

Way beyond bedlinen, fragrance and fabrics of all kinds seem to have a natural association – both in the imagination, and in reality. At The Perfume Society workshops and in the Smelling Notes which accompany our Discovery Boxes, we often turn to fabric allusions to conjure up the 'feel' of a fragrance, likening them to the sensual textures of those fabrics used to decorate boudoirs and of lingerie itself – silk, satin, velvet and lace.

But beyond that, we're witnessing a definite trend for perfuming intimate apparel with fragrance, celebrating that longstanding affinity between the two. When launching her trio of lingerie fragrances – Rose de Grasse, Fleur du Mexique and Gibson Girls – Ludmilla Bitá, founder of Lebanese fragrance house Ideo, describes being inspired by the 'old tradition in some parts of the Middle East of perfuming your lingerie. Ladies in conservative families used to do it to feel sexy when they're intimate with their husbands, without appearing as such in public.' This hide-and-seek of scent layering, she continues, is 'something opposite to the Instagram culture of show-it-all. ▶

4160 TUESDAYS TART'S KNICKER DRAWER

Accidentally created when Sarah McCartney blended six existing fragrances, this voluptuous entanglement of flowers, amber, fruits and spiced incense is the racy depiction of women 'up to no good'. (And all the better for it.)

£50 for 30ml eau de parfum
4160tuesdays.com

ANINE BING SAVAGE ROSE

Luscious, lacy blooms with masculine hints, this Danish lingerie/fashion designer's scent captures rudeness among ruffles in the rose garden.

€65 for 15ml perfume oil
eu.aninebing.com

IDEO GIBSON GIRLS

Gardenia and jasmine beckon beguilingly, iris powders a peachy base while orange blossom, cassis and coumarin ultimately gain control.

£45 for 50ml eau de toilette
roullierwhite.com

AGENT PROVOCATEUR BLUE SILK

Rosy pink pepper and aromatic juniper spice lemon and mandarin, leading to honeyed flesh of nectarine shot through with vetiver's smokiness.

£69 for 100ml eau de parfum
agentprovocateur.com





Lace camisole from
Kilian's limited
edition collection

DO IT THE FRENCH WAY

In her book *Fatale: How French Women Do It*, Edith Kunz suggests 'The artful application of fragrance' should take 'about 15 minutes from bath to blush.' Going on to list the vital areas that should be dabbed with perfume and in which order, Kunz proposes the 'everyday' routine French women have employed for centuries – a scented ritual apparently passed down from mother to daughter. Follow this fragrant how-to, to waft forth in a cloud of fragrant femininity.

- Heels, arches, and between the toes
- The inner and outer anklebone
- Behind the knees
- The underside of the *derrière* (!)
- The pubic area and the navel
- Under each breast and between the breasts
- The shoulders and upper arms
- Inside the bend of the elbow
- The pulse points at the inner wrist
- The back of the hand and between the fingers
- The hollow at the bottom of the neck
- All around the collarbone
- Under the chin
- Along the jaw line
- Behind the ears and on the earlobes
- On the temples
- Along the back of the neck to the shoulder blades
- Around the hairline.

And don't forget the all-important last step. Kunz says 'The process is completed by tucking an aromatic cotton puff inside the bra between the lady's two tender treasures.' (Her words. Not mine, I hasten to add.)

Spraying your lingerie and making your partner discover the scent slowly, step-by-step is very sexy,' she notes.

And (without wanting to be gross), our bodies do also naturally leave traces of our personal aroma-print on lingerie itself, of course. It's a two-way thing. In the introduction to *Exposed: A History of Lingerie*, author and museum curator Valerie Steele notes the sexual allure of lingerie lies partly in the fact a woman's body exudes scents that 'rub off onto the silky fabric that veils it – but this veil also contributes an erotic charm of its own, involving the attraction of concealment and mystery.' Which may explain why, while seeking inspiration for the swaggeringly buxom *Fracas*, female perfumer Germaine Cellier allegedly stole models' undergarments, in order to 'smell the best of their femininity.'

Last year, niche perfume house By Kilian married the twin themes of perfume and underwear, launching a limited edition collection of perfumed skimpiers in collaboration with French luxury brand Fleur du Mal. Infused with a specially encapsulated version of By Kilian's Love, Don't be Shy fragrance, the scent worked with body heat, wafting orange blossom, iris, rose and amber and ensuring the act of undressing was transformed into an even steamier affair.

This year, luxury lingerie designers Coco de Mer have collaborated with the V&A for a collection entitled 'The

“Perfume is the unseen, unforgettable, ultimate accessory of fashion that heralds your arrival and prolongs your departure”

Beauty of Nature', influenced by objects in the museum's archives – including an 18th-Century English perfume bottle. The 'Golden Heron' pieces were inspired with the intimate opulence of that *flacon* in mind, the lingerie mirroring the colours of the original bottle with deep blue satin offset by golden embroidery.

But if you are gripped by the urge to scent your smalls, one caveat. If your lingerie happens to be pale in colour, spritz your chosen fragrance onto a tissue, first, to ensure there's no risk of staining. Alternatively, we like to layer handkerchiefs or tissues that we've sprayed with perfume between knickers and bras, in our lingerie drawers. (Those drawers are also where we keep unwrapped bars of soap, before use – they're fantastic for fragrancing underwear.)

Savvy women have long understood all about creating a fragrant trail and using it to their advantage. Coco Chanel once exclaimed that perfume should be 'the unseen, unforgettable, ultimate accessory of fashion that heralds your arrival and prolongs your departure.'

Whether that perfume wafts forth from your skin, your unmentionables – or both – is entirely your call. 📌



A scent composed
as the perfect spritz
for your smalls