

# #ShareMyStash

Contemporary artist Sarah Baker's photography, sculpture and films are inspired by 'fashion, luxury and celebrity'. But when she created a fictional fragrance house as part of her work it spiralled into the creation of an actual perfume line – feeding an ongoing fragrant obsession. Words: SUZY NIGHTINGALE Photos: CARSON PARKIN-FAIRLEY

UNLIKE MOST of the fragrance-lovers we interview for #ShareMyStash, Sarah Baker doesn't claim she was born with an innate love of perfume. Indeed, when we meet in the Hackney studio where she keeps the majority of her stash, she laughingly admits that, as a child, 'for years I convinced myself I was actually allergic to perfume, because my sister wore so much of it and I'd be stuck in the car with her on long journeys.'

As it turned out, this wasn't a case of olfactory over-exposure. 'I think there was a bit of sibling rivalry there, because my sister really loved fragrance. It was her "thing", not mine.' But things changed. As a teenager, Sarah became enamoured with The Body Shop's White Musk. 'I became obsessed with it. My friend Alice and I had a ritual of going to The Body Shop and dousing ourselves with it. I swear it bonded us. I smell it now and think of all the fun times, like sleepovers, laughing together... And of course it was really affordable.'

In 2000, Sarah upped sticks from her birthplace, America, to attend college in the UK. Since graduating from Goldsmiths, her artwork has reflected a taste for 'luxurious motifs and opulent realms', directly inspired by glamorous adverts set around the culture of fashion and luxurious fabrics. 'That's always been the starting point,' she smiles. 'A jacket or a belt or item of clothing that could inspire a whole body of work.'

But her personal fragrant journey properly began in 2012, when Sarah created a film inspired by Patrizia Reggiani (who was convicted of hiring a hit-man to kill her

husband, the fashion world figure Maurizio Gucci). 'I'm really interested in exploring soap operas in my work and here was a real life one.'

Sarah invented a fashion company that she named 'Imperio Rosso', and with a budget from the Arts Council made a deliberately hyperbolic film about her fictional fashion moguls' passionate, fashion and perfume-obsessed lives. It was during the making of the movie that Sarah finally realised 'I wanted to enter into the world of commerce and create an actual, real-life scent brand. I had become really interested in celebrity perfumes – what are you buying into when you purchase them, their personality encapsulated in a fragrance? But rather than just coming up with one perfume I decided to create a line of scents based on my love of luxury fabrics.'

Collaborating with perfumer Ashley Eden, in 2016 Sarah Baker Perfumes debuted with Greek Keys – a sparkling, sun-kissed Mediterranean scent – and Leopard, an unashamedly grown-up Chypre Sarah describes as smelling like 'short skirts, spilled drinks, smudged lipstick and profanity.' Later that year, she worked with 4160 Tuesdays perfumer Sarah

McCartney to create Lace – a creamy, romantic 'candlelit boudoir' concoction – and Tartan, akin to a mossy, woody, cosy snuggle after a wet walk in the Highlands.

Far from the giddy glamour of perfume adverts, Sarah admits it was a tough road to actually create this independent perfume house. But one of the keys to her success, she explains, was discovering the bottle manufacturers Pochpac. 'They're great for a fledgling



**Sarah Baker's own fragrances have pride of place, showcased in a vintage cabinet**



“Perfume has a lot of connotations as a glamorous, frivolous rich-person’s thing – but in fact it’s completely attainable”



**Above: Sarah's impressive collection of fragrances spans several decades of treasures, displayed on glass shelves**

brand like mine to work with – they'll do a smaller run of bottles, but can still offer a custom cap or more interesting labels, which is a life-saver for small business.'

She shucks off any hint of snobbery around the question of fragrance, meanwhile. 'Perfume has a lot of connotations as being a glamorous, frivolous rich-person's thing, but if you look at the price of a Chanel or Gucci perfume compared to their handbags, the fragrances are completely attainable – whereas the fashion probably isn't.'

But it's Sarah's fabulous, archived collection of scents which really brings us to her studio today. Sniffing our way through Sarah's private scent stash, she apologises for them being 'rather chaotically organised,' but it's obvious that perfume provides a deeply emotional connection for her. Each shelf of the department store-like display units groans with an envy-inducing, eclectic array of perfumes ranging from Gwen Stefani's bestselling Harajuku Girls through to ultra-niche. Clearly, perfume has now burrowed its way into Sarah's bloodstream – as is clear from her descriptions of her favourites (see right).

As we begin spreading out her 'Top 10' she lingers over each bottle, carefully smelling and considering why, exactly, she chose it. 'They're all dear to me for very particular reasons,' she says. 'But they're not necessarily those I enjoy wearing every day. A lot of my favourites are there because they remind me of people I know, so they're extremely personal to me.'

A collector of the off-beat and *avant garde*, Sarah

describes how satisfying it is to see the twin interests of her life now fusing, declaring herself 'fascinated by the way art and fragrance movements are going.' There is also, she observes, an intriguing exploration of the senses taking place in the world of perfumery – and to illustrate, while we explore her scent collection, Sarah enthusiastically hands me a small dish of multi-coloured chewing gums. As I chew my way through a deeply intriguing 'edible perfume', Sarah reveals that they're Swiss-made sweeties from a company called Perfume Sucks, created by Andreas Wilhelm to sit alongside his perfume collection of the same name.

The perfume.sucks website offers a gourmand orris gum, as well as a collection of three different sweets which are described as 'The world's smallest olfactive art installation – it happens only in your mouth.' Created for Switzerland's Festival of Scents in autumn 2017, the particular 'art chewing gum' I'm munching on, it turns out, is Andreas's interpretation of a stew from the Middle Ages! Sarah met Andreas through her close relationship with the Institute of Art and Olfaction, at their Berlin Summit in 2017. 'I really like Andreas's perfumes – and think he's a very interesting person, moving into the gourmand world in a unique way.' And as she observes: 'Gum is interesting because you don't swallow it. You hang on for it longer than you would a candy, so you get to have a beginning, a middle and an end, like a fragrance.'

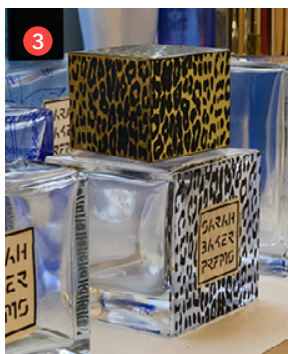
The majority of the actual, spritzable fragrances Sarah

*I just have to hold the bottles, and I love that ritual of putting on a perfume while getting ready for a night out*

finally settles on for her Top 10 are from ultra-niche houses, or are one-off art pieces made by friends or for family members. But there's still a place in Sarah's soul for modern classics and treasures found in dusty pharmacies. For Sarah, though, it's often the object itself that draws her. 'I just love to hold the bottles, and that ritual of putting on a perfume while getting ready for a night out. Dior Hypnotic Poison is a particularly great bottle to hold, for example. Sometimes you can feel the vibe of a fragrance from just seeing the bottle, before you even touch it.'

Looking at the selection in front of us on the table, Sarah stands, hands on hips, gazing at them fondly as if staring at a family photograph. 'It's a funny collection to see altogether...' she admits. But as her fingers brush each bottle in turn, it's obvious that Sarah Baker – artist, filmmaker and now, perfume house founder – has completely moved on from those dreaded fragrance-filled road-trips, and fallen under the scented spell that we understand only too well.

[sarahbakerperfumes.com](http://sarahbakerperfumes.com)



## Sarah Baker's Top 10

**1 AUSTIN YOUNG ACCIDENT** 'By perfumer Brent Leonesio, the smelling notes are basically: "A transvestite got into a car accident." So, we're on the side of the highway, the smell of brakes, gasoline, too much make-up, broken glass. It's the first time I realised a fragrance could be descriptive in a storytelling way. It's outrageous.'

**2 SULTAN PASHA ATTARS IRISOIR** 'It's kind of a throwback to classic perfumes. I met Sultan [the perfumer] and he put some straight on my hand. I could still smell it the next day, which is incredible.'

**3 SARAH BAKER PERFUMES LEOPARD** 'My original bottle and packaging; I have so little left, but it's incredibly dear to me. It was the first fragrance I ever worked on - ferociously empowering, and reminds me of my mother getting ready to go on an evening out, or to a business meeting.'

**4 RÉGIME DE FLEURS NITESURF** 'I'd been admiring Régime des Fleurs from afar and recently came to know founder, Ezra Woods. It's bubblegum, floral but ozone-y; to me it's LA - someone jogging down Venice Beach wearing a fluorescent thong.'

**5 PERFUME SUCKS RED** 'Inspired by stew that warriors would eat in the Middle Ages, with cardamom, fenugreek, a whisper of potato and white thyme. It's sensational!'

**6 4160 TUESDAYS OLD SPORT** 'Based on F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, it smells very classic and expensive to me, I'm picturing him on his balcony overlooking his estate.'

**7 SARAH BAKER MCEVOY** 'I made this myself for my dad, and my husband made me this lovely little musical box for it to go in.'

**8 NEANDERTHAL LIGHT** 'I like to envision the environment surrounding the Neanderthals, things they would have foraged for, which is what the perfumer had in mind. It's so creative.'

**9 IMPERIAL ROSSO DEADLY SCENT** 'A conceptual fragrance for a live performance; the notes describe a murder scene: the marble foyer, the chocolate cake, the leather gloves of the chauffeur. I'd like to release this, with the scent as a merchandise item to buy after the performance!'

**10 DIOR DIORISSIMO** 'This one is really sentimental to me because it belonged to my aunt. She was an artist and extremely eccentric, half the lights in her house didn't work, there were plants coming out the walls, behind the sofa... It's amazing to have this as a reminder of her.' 📌