

# SCENTS OF IDENTITY

We took bride-to-be Julie Coventry W-day fragrance shopping. But did she meet her match?

“Perfume, for me, is something to be saved for special occasions. I work part-time in a hospital and the rest of the week I’m a busy mum-of-two-boys. To work or stand at the edge of a football pitch under a cloud of Chanel No5 would strip it of its luxe-factor. So it’ll come as no surprise that my small but beautifully-formed fragrance collection comprises of duty-free purchases off the back of my fiancé’s golf holidays. I’ve never actually shopped for a scent myself.

But I do know that smell has the ability to trigger a memory more than even a photograph. The smell of lavender sends me straight back to my nan’s potpourri, and while I wish I could say that the smell of leather reminds me of a chi chi bag, in truth it reminds me of being doused in TCP as a kid. I’ve recently learnt that this is because our sense of smell is connected to our limbic system, the bit of our brains that process emotion and memory.

And this is why I’m searching for a memory-tapping perfume for my wedding day. It’ll be my life-long invitation to daydream. I long to find ‘the one’ that will forever transport me and my fiancé back to our big day – and one that my boys will forever link to their mum.

I start by trying to sniff out a link between the bottles on my dressing table. Chanel No5 – the ultimate luxury, like a bouquet of delicate white flowers crushed into a bottle. Estée Lauder Beautiful – a burst of roses and lilies that makes me think of happy, sunny days. LEau d’Issey is my wild card – different but still with a floral backdrop; it’s flowers strewn across the ocean and is my guaranteed mood-improver. And then there’s Calvin Klein Contradiction – sadly discontinued, so used sparingly, I adore how it’s all-flowers fanfare softens into a barely-there second-skin scent.

So while I don’t know heaps about perfume, I know I hate strong, overpowering smells. I definitely don’t want my wedding perfume to announce my arrival at the church! So, with my nostrils flared, the first stop on my fragrance-finding mission is the Ground Floor Perfumery department in Harrods. It’s a fragrance floozie’s paradise. You can flutter from one bottle to



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another sniffing and sampling to your heart’s content. But I feel completely overwhelmed. There’s too much choice and too many sales assistants offering to fire tester sprays in my direction. I’m not even sure whether some are meant for me or my fiancé. Still, nervously I edge my way around the room, finding myself attracted to brand names and bottle designs. Prada Candy Florale – sweet and flowery, like pink sherbet Bon Bons. Marc Jacobs Daisy Dream – chiffon-light and fresh in the prettiest bottle, scattered with fallen flowerheads. La

## HOW TO WEAR PERFUME ON YOUR WEDDING DAY

♥ Fragrance binds well to skin that’s clean and dry. Apply it after your W-morning shower but before you step into your gown.

♥ Apply it to your pulse points: especially the backs of your knees (when your body temperature rises, it’ll release more scent) across your knuckles (if you talk a lot with your hands) and the back of your neck (it’s your body’s natural musk).

♥ After applying to your wrists, resist the urge to rub them together. You’ll only speed up the process to the dry down and miss how your fragrance develops.

♥ Taking care – as some fragrances can stain white material – you could dab a little onto the lining of your dress.

♥ If it has a spray bottle, mist some (from at least five inches away) over your hairstyle before putting on your veil.

♥ L’Occitane have created Fragrance Beautifying Cream, £26, a neutral scented body cream that locks your fragrance in.

♥ As a rule, your groom and guests should only be able to smell it once they’re about an arm’s length from your body. Two squirts should do.

WORDS BY SARAH GREEN. PHOTOGRAPHY: VIKKI GRANT. HAIR: MELLISA BROWN. MAKE-UP: LICA FENSOME. DRESS: IAN STUART. BOTTLE: BRISSI

Perla In Rosa – a playful potion bursting with roses. I leave under a confusing cloud of 11 scents sprayed up my arms and my fragrance budget still burning a hole in my pocket.

I head in the lift up to the 6th floor where I find a little slice of perfume heaven – Roja Dove’s Haute Parfumerie. It’s beautifully laid out – crystal decanters of fine fragrance sitting atop antique furniture. I’m desperate to know which fragrance family I belong to – floral, chypre (dry, warm and earthy), or oriental (rich, sensual and exotic). Luckily, assistant manager Marcel Van Der Merwe is on hand to offer me Odour Profiling, an hour-long consultation to nail my fragrance family. Snuggled between velvet cushions he quizzes me about my perfume habits – what I wear, when I wear them and what is important to me about my wedding perfume. Then he gets me sniffing. Roja’s candle collection contains single note raw materials, the perfect way to uncover my olfactory hits (and misses). With closed eyes, I sample each one. Marcel suspects that florals are my fragrance tippie so begins by getting me to compare two: neroli verses bergamot. I choose citrusy bergamot. Next, I compare bergamot to other floral scents. Lilac? Too powdery. Rose?

Too flowery. Jasmine? Too heady. Tuberose? Mmm, sweet and creamy. And so it’s bye bye bergamot. Marcel then moves away from the florals – just to check whether I’m hiding a secret passion for other scents. Cedarwood? Too masculine. Vetiver? Wet dirt. Leather? TCP. Ambre? Lush. Like a kick of spice. “Imagine two rooms,” says Marcel. “One is filled with tuberose and the other with ambre. Which one do you want to leave first?” Feeling horribly unfaithful, I discard tuberose. Ambre, Marcel tells me, is from the oriental family...

“They’re both sensual notes,” explains Marcel. “Ambre, a tree resin, has a deep sensual smell while tuberose has a sweeter, lighter, sensual side.” My Odour Profiling continues with my favourite season (summer), my style (casual), and how I want my fragrance to feel (soft but luxurious). Marcel then disappears and returns with four fragrances doused on blotters for me to try ‘blind’. The first one is sweet, fresh and fruity. I love it. The second is sexier and I’m not as keen. Next up, too citrusy, then another that’s too spicy. I try the first one on my skin. It’s light but warm and not overpowering. Marcel reveals my fragrance match to be Lalique de Lalique. The official word is ‘a feminine and radiant fragrance born from a burst of flowers, enhanced by slightly fruity flavours’. Marcel says it’s from the oriental family, but with a floral aspect. Because I’d been so drawn to tuberose, he’d wanted it to play a pivotal role in my otherwise

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ambre-laden wedding perfume. I love it – and the bottle. Two kissing peacocks in Lalique cut glass. Sadly I learn that this bottle is a budget-busting £1000. But thank goodness there’s a £67 version available, too.

For now I’m taking Marcel’s advice. To keep it on my skin and see how I feel about it for the rest of the day. When I walk through the door, my fiancé says I smell amazing...

After it’s worn and washed away, I book an appointment at Illuminum. Truth is, I’ve only heard of the brand because Kate Middleton wore their White Gardenia Petals on her wedding day. But I’m tempted by their Lounge Experience – a guide through their entire collection. So in a low-lit room, I meet Alex who’s sitting behind a table bedecked with brandy glasses. She explains that each glass features the dry down (the lingering part) of a fragrance. The Illuminum line-up comprises two collections: Vaporizer which are like EDTs and Hautes

## Top tips for finding your big-day scent

- 1 Such an important decision should be yours alone. When shopping, talk normally to the sales assistants. Don’t dress it up with fancy language.
- 2 Trust your instincts. Don’t be swayed by the brand name. Fragrances either smell good or bad. Don’t ask friends’ opinions.
- 3 Smelling coffee between fragrances won’t neutralise your nose – it’ll just confuse it with another scent. Smell your own clothes instead.
- 4 When you’ve finally found ‘the one’ ask for a fresh box from the stockroom (just in case the fragrance has been cooking under the bright lights of the shop.)

which are extra strength and ideal for layering. It’s blind test time again with Alex picking scents she thinks I’ll love, and that will suit my UK summer wedding. I begin with the florals, sniffing out Ginger Pear (light and spicy) and White Gardenia Petals (delicate and green) before trying and discarding the citrus, musk and oud offerings. Next up are the floral Hautes. At £150 a pop, luckily layering doesn’t seem to float my fragrance boat, but worn alone White Lotus (floral and creamy) sings out. I try my top three and emerge from the lounge armed with small vials of each and Alex’s advice is to find “one you feel most at peace with”.

Before I’m home I’ve already discarded White Gardenia Petals (it wouldn’t feel like my perfume), and while I’m torn between Ginger Pear and White Lotus, the latter has my eldest son hooked. He calls it ‘my smell’ so I’ve decided to indulge in a bottle.

This whole experience has compelled me to build a fragrance wardrobe for the first time – and wear them. And as for the big day itself, Lalique de Lalique had me at hello. My fiancé’s instant reaction cemented its place on my wedding day. So finally, I’ve got my ‘eau de me’. All I need now is a dress...

## WHERE TO GO

- To book a fragrance consultation at the Harrods Haute Parfumerie, call 0207 893 8797 (£75 cost redeemable against purchase).
- To book the Lounge Experience at Illuminum, call 0207 018 2000.
- Or why not commission a perfumer to create your own personal blend? For Roja Dove, call 01273 827 430, or for Michael Boadi of Illuminum, call 0207 0182 000 (he’ll even tweak an existing fragrance if there’s a note you love).