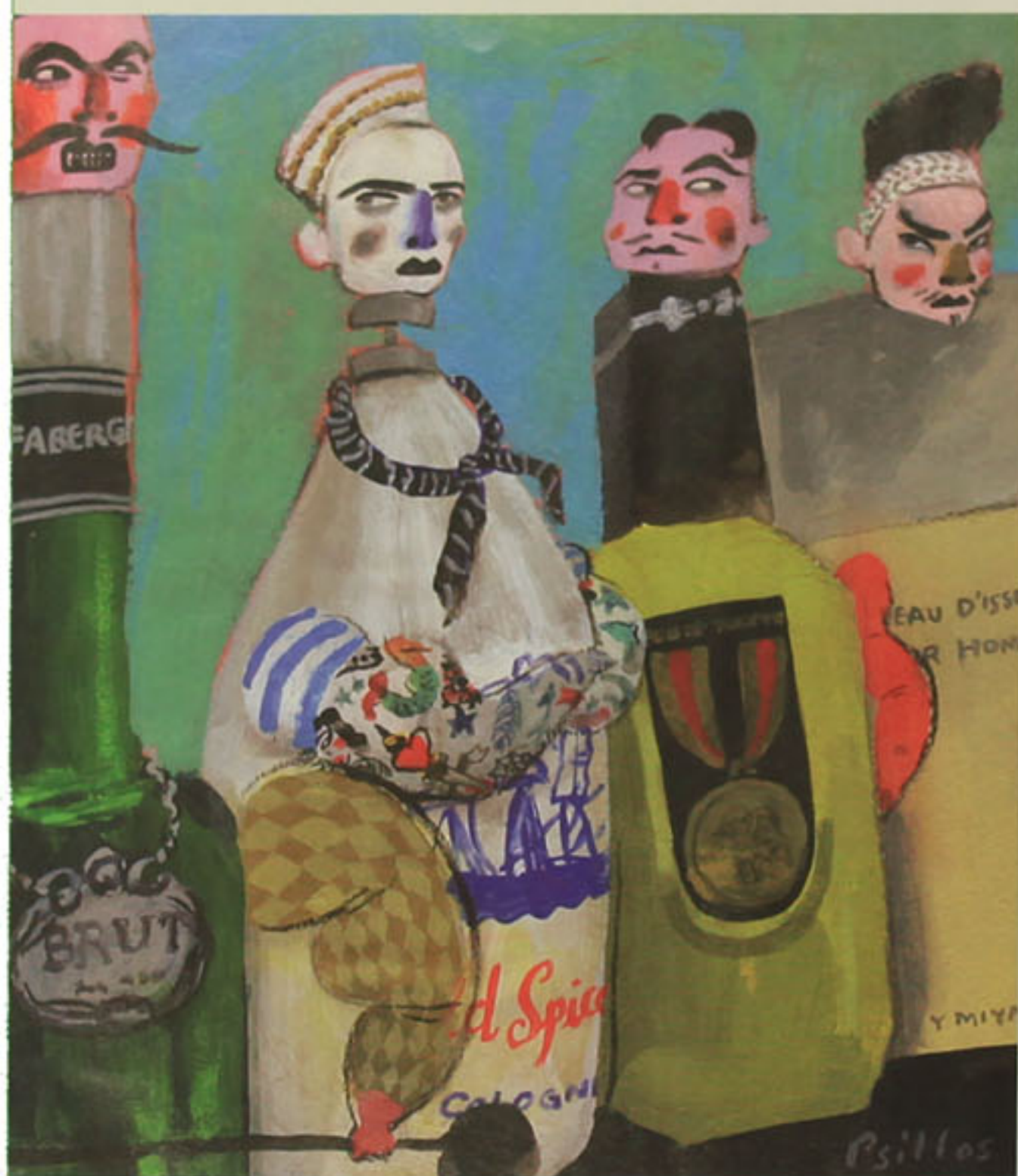


scents of time

Our tastes evolve over the years, so what happens when we revisit the aftershaves of our youth?

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What was your first aftershave? Brut? Drakkar Noir? Old Spice? Fahrenheit, perhaps? Mine was Yardley Gold. At the tender age of six, I was presented with a bottle of the precious stuff by my older brother. To me, this signified a long-yearned-for token of acceptance, proof that - Chinese burns and arguments over Lego notwithstanding - he was finally acknowledging me as something approaching an equal.

It was more likely that my sibling simply didn't approve of this particular high street splash-on with its medallion man logo, maroon plastic stopper and the redolent swagger of a hairy-chested, Ford Cortina-driving Seventies dad, so sent it my way like so many other hand-me-downs. But that didn't matter. I owned my first aftershave. And although it initially made my eyes water, I loved

it. Today, Gold still exists (it is now owned and distributed by Parfums Bleu Ltd) but - stripped of its Daley Thompson packaging - its enervating cocktail of rosemary, geranium and leather has somehow lost its lustre.

I acquired my second fragrance at the age of 12. That Christmas, my grandfather gave me a frosted-glass container of Geo F Trumper's Extract of West Indian Limes, by way of a coming-of-age gift. It remains a classic, citrus-heavy cologne that is as bracing as an ice-cold G&T, although it still requires liberal application to compensate for the fact its formula doesn't hang around for long on the skin.

Fragrance-buying during my teenage years was almost entirely dependent upon perceived female appeal. Hence, our entire GCSE year-group acquired bottles of Hugo Man when we discovered all the girls fancied Werner Schreyer, the supermodel face adorning the accompanying poster campaign. This way, when they closed their eyes, wrapped their arms around us and inhaled the signature blend of green apple, sage and cedarwood, they could dream they were snogging a chiselled German überhunk and not some hormonal, gangly juvenile. It proved a win-win for both parties. Uncapping a canteen of Hugo Man still conjures memories of bra straps seemingly harder to pick than a Banham mortice, but its recipe has aged well - even if it is arguably a little too sweet for anyone over 30 to wear beyond the summer months.

The next olfactory milestone of my youth was Paco Rabanne's XS Pour Homme. I was drawn to it because it resembled a Zippo lighter, although, thankfully, it registers more as an amalgam of wild mint, rose, juniper and oak moss than nostril-singeing naphtha. When I started dating an Oxford girl during my A-levels and learned she wore XS Pour Elle, I naturally presumed she was the one. Naturally, she was not. The flip-top carafe now feels dated, though the woody floral inside has mellowed into a classic aromatic fougère.

To see me through the swansong of adolescence, I was determined to find an aftershave that would set me apart from the throng of Lynx-saturated school leavers - albeit in a good way. So I saved up for a bottle of Issey Miyake's L'Eau d'Issey Pour Homme, a creation of the feted Firmenich perfumer Jacques Cavallier.

It was a genuine milestone for men's fragrance, underpinned by exotic ingredients like yuzu (a south-east Asian relative of mandarin fruit), saffron and vetiver. It was also resoundingly fresh and spicy, and altogether more grown-up. Better still, my university girlfriend claimed it made her weak at the knees. Having switched allegiance to other, newer fragrances in the interim, I'm intrigued as to whether it can still impress after so long. Thankfully, it smells as bright and innovative as it did 14 years ago. And my wife reports it to be every bit as knee-weakening.

Parfums Bleu Ltd Gold for Men, £730, Express Chemist, expresschemist.co.uk.
Geo F Trumper Extract of West Indian Limes, from £36, Geo F Trumper, trumpers.com.
Hugo Boss Hugo Man, from £30, available nationwide, hugo.com. Paco Rabanne XS Pour Homme, £34, available nationwide, 020 7494 6220. Issey Miyake L'Eau d'Issey pour Homme, from £38.50, at selected House of Fraser stores; 0844 800 3752