

# The return of lavender

The purple plant is in the throes of a reinvention, but it's not just lavender's unmistakable scent that's making it a modern perfumer's masterstroke, explains Amerley Ollennu

Long associated with fine old-fashioned soap and elderly ladies, I assumed lavender wasn't for me. I like warm, powerful scents, not airily floral fragrances – least of all ones that conjure hand-stitched lavender bags tucked inside knicker drawers. Then, one night, I pulled out a body cream from a bag of testers I'd taken home and applied it blindly before bed. Waking up, I was confused by how well I'd slept, and upon reapplying the cream that morning, how much calmer I felt during the day. I checked the INCI (International Nomenclature of Cosmetic Ingredients) list and saw lavender was one of the top ingredients. A lavender light-bulb moment, if you like – one that's led me to try more and more of the purple stuff, forging a relationship with this intriguing flower that's built on a foundation of feeling, not just smelling.

'We don't smell with our nose,' says perfumer Roja Dove, 'but with the most primitive part of our brain, the cerebellum. When we smell, synapses are stimulated, triggering the release of hormones that govern every reaction or emotion. Generally, lavender is considered to have sensual, soothing qualities – two feel-good associations that work on our subconscious, making us feel secure, confident and calm.'

The word 'lavender' derives in part from the Latin name, *lavare*, which means 'to wash', a nod to its purifying

properties – it's an effective, but gentle, antiseptic. It protects in other ways, too, and it's those soothing qualities Dove described that keep me drawn to the scent; protecting my sense of self, it helps to relax my mind and prompts feelings of wellbeing and comfort – a godsend in a high-stress world. It has a few other key qualities, too. First, as our desire for natural, organic, multi-purpose ingredients strengthens, aromatherapy's influence on mainstream perfumery is set to grow, and as the UK's bestselling aromatherapy essential oil it's fitting, then, that we are witnessing a renaissance. But we are also beginning to demand more from our products – we want to feel transformed outwardly as well as inwardly. Julia Lawless, lauded aromatherapist and managing director of Aqua Oleum, says 'at present there's a good deal of research proving

that if we wear natural perfume made from a calming scent like lavender, this will have a psychologically uplifting and heart-warming effect on the individual wearing it and will leave them in better health.'

Lavender also brings a warming sense of nostalgia to the table. According to Olivier Creed, director and master perfumer at Creed, it sometimes feels as if 'we live in a cruel world of false values, where things are cheap and shoddy in quality, so consumers have begun to look back to a better

“We are drawn to scents that remind us of happy times”



Creed Aberdeen Lavender, £165/100ml; Atkinsons Lavender on the Rocks, £115/100ml; Les Exclusifs de Chanel Jersey, £155/15ml; Diptyque Eau de Lavande, £65/100ml

age when higher standards of care reigned supreme. The past now seems more safe, leisured and joyful, and so we are drawn to scents that remind us of happy times: our childhood, holidays, fine weather, the smell of our grandmother – for many, lavender is the scent that symbolises this.'

## Contemporary makeover

So what are these new lavender scents like? Well, they're miles away from the single-note scents of old. 'Although lavender is experiencing a revival and has been brought back to the fold of modern women's perfumery (it has remained a constant in men's fragrance through the decades), it has had a contemporary makeover to appeal more to today's female fragrance-wearer,' says Selfridges beauty buyer Mark Tranter.

Brigitte Wormser, owner of revived British fragrance label Atkinsons, explains: 'The way lavender is used in fragrance has definitely been modernised. With updated methods of extraction that permit new facets of ingredients to be unveiled, perfumers have started to look at lavender differently and started playing with it again. They've dared to associate it with new ingredients to create new accords to renew the classic lavender structure – often completely 'deconstructing' it to offer a new perception of the scent.'

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Atkinsons' newest perfume, Lavender on the Rocks, does just that; cool top notes of rose, geranium and basil, base notes of amber guaiac wood, oud and saffron wrap around a heart of lavender offering a new conception of the bloom, reinterpreting the often overwhelming smell into something light and spirit-like. Diptyque Eau de Lavande is light too, with a sophisticated blend of three different types of the flower that examines the subtleties of lavender – the juice is delicate yet warm. Les Exclusifs de Chanel Jersey, is also a unique interpretation of lavender that results in a parfum that's neither feminine nor masculine. The Carla lavender used is softened by vanilla, tonka bean and musk, while wildflowers, jasmine and rose add a sunny disposition. Meanwhile, Creed Aberdeen Lavender is a modern twist on a traditional oriental *fougère* found in the Creed archives. Steeped in nostalgia, this is a tribute to the brand's famous patron, Queen Victoria. Mysterious anise-flavoured absinthe, rosemary, bergamot and lemon give way to a bouquet of lavender, iris and rose, rounded off and warmed by dark patchouli, smoky leather and vetiver, making for a lavender scent like you've never smelled before.

As Creed says: 'A faithful friend returns to the perfumer's laboratory. Underrated, good for the body, the soul, the emotions and the mind, this is a reunion to make us all rejoice!'