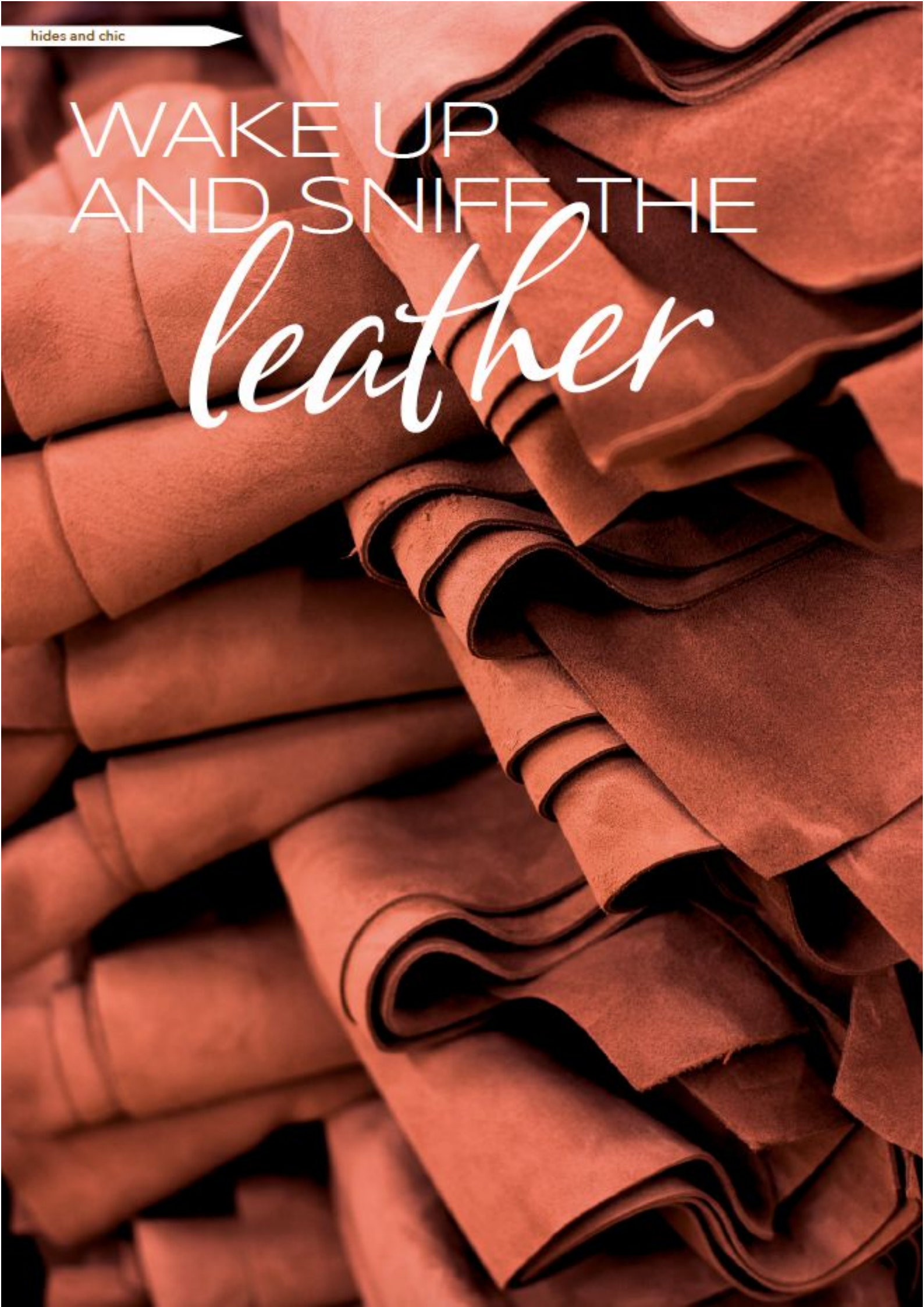


hides and chic

WAKE UP
AND SNIFF THE
leather



Suzy Nightingale discovers why leather and fragrance go hand-in-glove - and explores the scents you should be getting up close and personal with...

It simply wasn't done to present a pair of exquisitely tailored leather gloves to the King still redolent of the pungently malodorous tanning process. And the rest of the aristocracy didn't much fancy stinking of unmentionables, either. Thus the perfume industry as we know it - based in Grasse - was born, the leather being treated with fragrant oils of musk, civet and ambergris to mask the smell of the animal's skins by the *'parfumeur gantiers'*: a Guild of Parisian glove-makers which dates as far back as the 15th Century.

King George III was apparently so taken with his scented gloves that he wanted the fragrance bottled, thus commissioning Creed in 1781 to recreate the scent as something he could splash about the royal personage to his heart's content. This presented James Creed (then royal glove-maker *extraordinaire*) with something of a problem, as the

musk and oils could be blended happily enough. But how to adapt the essence of a skin - something used as a fabric - and transpose that to a liquid...? James obviously performed his magic trick rather well, by the way, for the resulting creation - the very first leather-smelling scent, as far as records show - was Creed Royal English Leather, still in production to this very day (although alas not retailed in the UK...)

But when we describe a scent as 'leathery', what do we actually smell? Let's get this straight: it's not leather itself. But there is an alchemy that master noses perform on a daily basis, magically recreating smells through a blend of synthetics and natural ingredients so that we can't tell them from real. They can evoke the scent of leather by taking disparate raw ingredients such as birch tar (which has a leathery smokiness) and juniper, fizzed up with the soapy

LEATHERS TO LOVE...

L'Artisan Parfumer Dzing! Sticky handfuls of stolen sweets eaten in a sawdust-strewn stable.

Caron Tabac Blond Furtive cigarettes smoked in a leather-clad starlet's dressing room.

Chanel Les Exclusifs Cuir de Russie Lipstick-smeared leather boot ground into rain-filled ashtray (in a very good way).





Paco Rabanne 1 Million Mulberry bag-toting heiress eating pancakes from a golden platter.



Serge Lutens Cuir Mauresque Spice-laden port swigged from a goat-skin goblet.



BeauFort London Coeur de Noir Vanilla pipe-smoking aesthete's ink-stained library desk.

“
*Leather in
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oil that you buy:
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accord*
”



Dior Collection Privée Cuir Cannage Lipstick-kissed letters tied with lace and hidden in a trunk.



Boadicea the Victorious Warriress Battle-scarred breastplate on an incense-infused funeral pyre.



Tom Ford Tuscan Leather Nefarious limousine antics involving chocolate, raspberries & cigars.



Illuminum Piper Leather Pepper-speckled leather-bound poetry book pressing jasmine petals.

cleanliness of aldehydes or - with today's technology - incredibly life-like molecular constructs such as Pylalone (a.k.a Iso Butyl Quinolone) which has the sweet warmth of slightly steaming fresh hay mixed with newly-milled green wood and a drier, tobacco-esque note.

This particular synthetic was used in deliberately hedonistic overdose by master perfumer Germaine Cellier in her rambunctiously furtive Bandit for Robert Piguet. Also the creator of the frankly giddy tuberose Fracas for Piguet, Cellier infamously declared that heady white floral 'for the femmes' while her Bandit she reserved 'for the dykes.' Make of that what you will, but she clearly wasn't blending quiet scents for the shy and retiring, ladling in the Pylalone with gleeful abandon. When Bandit launched to the public, Piguet presented it by using models on the runway wearing masks and brandishing toy knives and guns - a rather daring and, some would say, even shocking image used to sell a scent (not least as this occurred a year before the end of World War II). Leather may be many things, but it ain't for wimps - in fashion and fragrance alike.

Self-taught perfumer Andy Tauer explained to The Perfume Society how he likes to use leather in his creations, because of the particular scent memories the use of this note brings back so vividly for him. 'The first association, when you tell me "leather", honestly, is "Swiss Army" - and me serving there as soldier: my generation had the privilege of serving in thick leather shoes that were made to endure a Swiss invasion of Moscow, including tramping all the way back. As mixed as my memories of proudly serving in the Swiss Army are, I loved the scent of my leather boots...'

'Leather in perfumery is not a natural essential oil that you buy: you have to make your leather accord. Birch tar can be one of the ingredients going in there. Leather as a side note brings out, by

HERMÈS KELLY CALÈCHE

Here, in-house nose Jean-Claude Ellena set about concocting '... a perfume of leather and flowers, as light as an angel's wing.' Hermès relay the story of the bag's transformation from perhaps the all-time iconic status-symbol accessory (popularised by and eventually named after American actress turned fairytale princess, Grace Kelly) to spitzable fantasy: 'A reminder of a visit to the Hermès leather vaults, Kelly Calèche is a light, feminine, joyous expression of leather. It gives a nod to two in-house emblems, and translates the perfumer's tactile and olfactory emotions into an evocation of leather worn next to the skin, gently tanned by the touch, and edged with fresh petals.'



contrast (as so often in perfumery) the flowers. Flowers bloom on skin when there's leather in the base of a fragrance. It's like sticking brightly coloured flowers into my army boots. Wonderful - and a reminder of how precious peace is, too...'

Leo Crabtree - founder of literary and maritime-history inspired new fragrance house, BeauFort London - is also self-confessed lover of leather, and explained its use in their Coeur de Noir. 'For me, the leather needed to be hushed but absolutely there. I see it as a sort of envelope that acts as a base ▶

for the accords of dry paper and ink - much in the same way a book's leather binding holds it together. It is structurally essential but not overbearing. I know I am not alone in loving the smell of bookshops and libraries, and here my aim was partly to recreate a visual hallucination I have of my grandfather's study, which incorporated the "old book smell". Pen drawings. Pipe tobacco. Absence. The hallucination is just that: it bears no relation to the reality (I never met my grandfather, nor visited his study, though his art has

remained close to me throughout my life) but in my mind these elements are duly distorted into a shape the fragrance faithfully recreates.'

A plethora of materials both natural and synthetic, then, may be sculpted in varying ways to create anything from a soothingly skin-like scent to a library. Or perhaps, through a clever blend of patchouli, black tea and tobacco, the scent of a well-worn leather jacket with its familiarity: an all-enveloping cocoon of touchy-feel-y-ness that, when sniffed, brings about the sensation

that you could almost reach out and stroke it.

Indeed, as part of the questions in our Smelling Notes (individual postcards accompanying each fragrance in our Discovery Boxes), and during our 'How to Improve Your Sense of Smell Workshops' (see the Events section on our website for forthcoming dates near you), we often prompt perfume-lovers to imagine the fragrance as a piece of material. It's remarkable how often complete strangers who don't know exactly what they're smelling (and haven't discussed it with the rest of the group) will choose exactly the same material: something they can almost feel beneath their fingers or bury their face into as they sniff.

More remarkable still, perhaps, is that it's often the exact same colour of fabric - 'green velvet curtains' people will say, on describing a scent, or 'blue linen' and of course, 'dark leather, freshly-buffed', 'expensive beige suede' or 'buttery soft white leather.' It is the perfumer's hypnotic skill to make us want to reach out and touch the very thing they are hallucinogenically recreating in a bottle.

Leatheriness in a fragrance can be an evocation of luxury goods. Or comforting womb-like libraries to get lost in. It can offer the almost overwhelming sexual stimuli of nuzzleable warm skin, an immediate sensation of closeness - of running the tips of your fingers over buttery soft napa... or the fetishistic adoration of killer heels.

It's not the easiest note in fragrance to fall in love with if you're faint of heart, but not all leather scents are stridently animalic or reminiscent of Elvis Presley's pelvic gyrations. Having read about the history, and heard how modern-day perfumers are using their personal accords, we urge you to come out of the fragrance closet - and bury your nose in some of these... ■

BOTTEGA VENETA

Tomas Maier, creative director of the luxury leather accessories brand, described the inspiration for the fragrance created by perfumer Michel Almairac: 'An old house in the beautiful countryside in the Veneto region of Italy with rolling green hills, where we're from. I envisioned a room with old wood floors, library walls and leather-bound books with the windows open wide, the breeze coming in and cut grass, hay, moss, garden flowers, growing through the room and everything mixing up. That's where we started...'





Blood Concept O Withnail-esque 'naughty cigarettes' smoked on orange-juice spilled Chesterfield.



Acqua di Parma Colonia Leather Italian bouquet clasped firmly in a gauntlet's grip.



Dior Les Créations de Monsieur Dior Diorling Freshly-scrubbed debutante in a leather mask.



Memo French Leather Gallic muse sipping gin cocktail wearing nothing but a vintage leather coat.

“
Leather may be many things, but it ain't for wimps - in fashion and fragrance alike
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Atelier Cologne Gold Leather Tipsy party drinking Long Island Ice Teas in a wood-panelled bar.



Tauer Perfumes Lonestar Memories Melancholic cowboy simmers coffee, while horse chews carrot.



Evody Parfums Cuir Blanc Supple and swoonsome, a cadeau of violetting dusting powder.



Arquiste Aleksandr Fur-coated cad polishes his boots on a frosty afternoon before the duel.