

GROOMING PERFUME

# Unbottling France's legendary scents

Perfumery's 'museum in a book' has been updated to reveal eight new legends, writes **Stephen Clark**.



For his 1996 book *Perfume Legends*, Michael Edwards interviewed some 160 perfumers, bottle designers, couturiers and executives. That book has become a collector's item.

Now Edwards has released *Perfume Legends II*, which tells the stories of 52 fragrances. There is Coco Chanel in 1921, making the propitious choice of the fifth fragrance shown to her by Russian-born perfumer Ernest Beaux (it became Chanel No. 5). And Madame Grès, the extraordinary couturier whose talent was matched only by her stubborn lack of self-promotion: her 1959 perfume Cabochard is a lost jewel. There is also Paloma Picasso's "olfactory self-portrait" from 1984.

In this edited extract, Edwards reveals the glamour, teamwork and sheer serendipity behind some of our favourite scents and the ways that French fashion houses came to embrace fragrance.

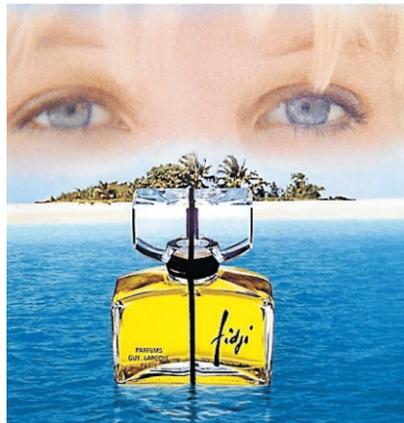


Marcel Rochas with Mae West in her trademark black lace, above; the advent of accessible travel inspired Fidji, below.

**JICKY (1889)**

Created by Aimé Guerlain | Jicky is often called the first synthetic perfume. The name was a diminutive of Jacques, Aimé Guerlain's young nephew, and was intended for both men and women – at that time, fragrances were interchangeable.

When Truman Capote met French novelist Colette in the late 1940s he wrote: "The room smelled of her perfume. At some point, I asked what it was, and Colette said: 'Jicky. The Empress Eugenie always wore it. I like it because it's witty without being coarse – like the better conversationalists. Proust wore it, too'."



"Tabu violinist, New York" were known to reach the company.

**FEMME (1944)**

Created by Edmond Roudnitska for Rochas | Femme was born in December 1944, three months after the liberation of Paris. Alcohol and glassware were still severely rationed and the house of Rochas was allocated only enough to produce a few hundred bottles. The scent was presented in a numbered crystal flacon designed by Marc Lalique, and dressed in Chantilly lace.

"White lace inside, close to the body; black lace, the face to the world," explained Hélène Rochas, widow of fashion pioneer Marcel Rochas (who introduced the bustier and put pockets into skirts). "The black lace signature came from when my husband met Mae West. She always had black lace on things."

**FIDJI (1966)**

Created by Josephine Catapano | Robert Salmon became marketing director of L'Oréal when it was acquired by L'Oréal in 1964. "Later that year I was in Morocco at the Club Med. People had become richer and were hungry to escape the winter to a place in the sun. People from the States were flying to the Caribbean. We realised [travel] was a worldwide megatrend." Fidji linked the cachet of French fashion designer Guy Laroche to the happy island dream. No French perfume of repute had used such American-style marketing techniques before and it changed how prestige perfumes were sold.

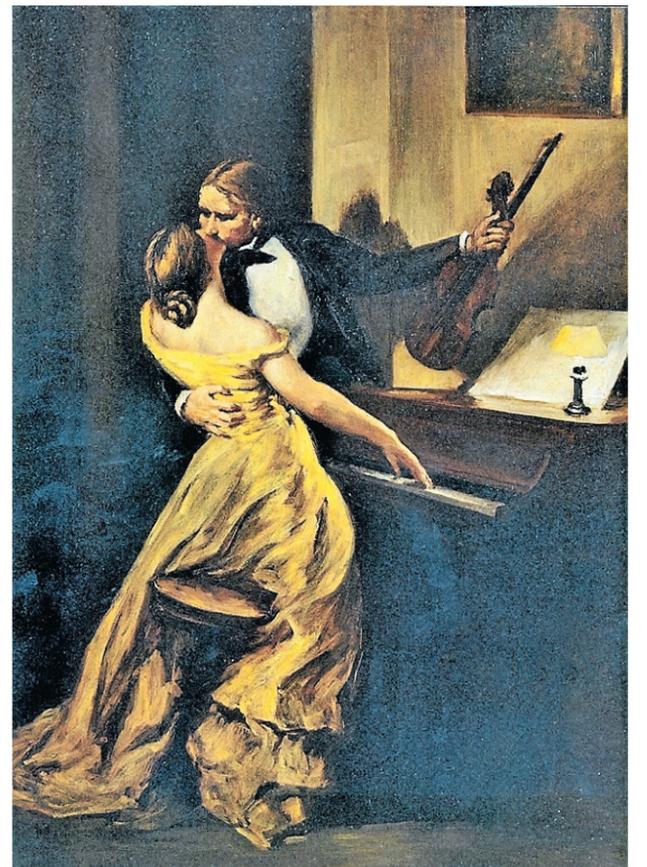
**LOULOU (1987)**

Created by Jean Guichard for Cacharel | By the mid-eighties, competition in the French fragrance market had become brutal. In just one year, more fragrances were launched than in the entire 1960s. Loulou, a sequel to 1978's Anaïs Anaïs, was inspired by silent film star Louise Brooks. "In France, people say that a young girl's skin smells of caramel. That is the smell of toffee," says Guichard. "So we started working around the vanilla-toffee notes."

In Tahiti he came across the beautiful tiaré flower, which had a freshness he needed to balance the "gourmand" flavours.

**TABU (1932)**

Created by Jean Carles for Dana | Tabu's patchouli/carnation accord "is a scorching whiff from an era when liqueurs cured ills, and jewellery looked like candied fruit", wrote perfume critic Luca Turin. *The Tabu violinist*, originally painted in 1898 by French artist René Prinet was first used to advertise Tabu in 1941. Everyone assumes that the lady is wearing Tabu, a brew so potent it causes the man to forget both music and decorum. Letters addressed to



Jicky and Mitsouko from the Guerlain family, above left; *The Tabu violinist*, above, became synonymous with the perfume brand; Issey, right, was designed to smell like fresh water.



"We associate vanilla with something very agreeable, because, as children, we were spoiled by cakes and ice cream. More than that, it's a scent that men find sexy."



From top: Cacharel's Loulou; Frédéric Malle's Portrait of a Lady.

**L'EAU D'ISSEY (1992)**

Created by Jacques Cavallier for Issey Miyake | The scent of the sea became one of the fragrance signatures of the 1990s. The aroma material used to replicate the scent of sea air was Calone. First synthesised in 1966, Calone was used primarily to give laundry products the scent of fresh linen.

Issey Miyake had to be persuaded to launch a fragrance by Chantal Roos, who had steered Opium to market.

When asked what sort of fragrance he liked, Miyake replied "Water, something that doesn't smell at all."

With a month to go before the launch date, the perfumer Cavallier worked day and night to come up with something new. "The fresh ozone notes in L'Eau d'Issey are not the kind you find in other ozonic fragrances," he says. "We wanted them to be purer and very natural, with the scent of fresh water rather than sea water."

**OPIUM (1977)**

Created by Jean-Louis Sieuzac, Raymond Chailan and Françoise Marin | After designing bottles for Y, Rive Gauche and Pour Homme, designer Pierre Dinand was asked to create the bottle for a new Oriental perfume, at that time named Ichi (Japanese for No. 1).

He showed Yves Saint Laurent a design, originally intended for Kenzo, based on inrō – small decorative boxes that Japanese men used to hang on their belts.

In Marrakech, Yves was enthusiastic. "That's where the samurai kept their medicine and their opium pellets," he exclaimed. "Opium... Opium? Oh, that would be a fantastic name."

The name scared Squibb Corporation, which co-owned Parfums Yves Saint Laurent with Charles of the Ritz. Progress stalled until 1976 when marketing executive Chantal Roos came on board. "The wood gave it too rustic an appearance," she said. "Monsieur Saint Laurent agreed. 'Why not lacquer it?' he suggested. Lacquer would have cost a fortune so we replicated it with a beautiful nylon plastic."



Yves Saint Laurent loved the 'Opium' name.

Robert Miller, president of Charles of the Ritz, flew to Paris months later with the first production samples. "Yves was so upset, he didn't want to go ahead with the project," says Miller.

"We made it clear that we would never have developed a perfume named Opium on our own... that we had invested substantially... and if the project did not

proceed, we would hold Saint Laurent accountable for any losses we sustained."

Saint Laurent was uncertain about the plastic. "Unfortunately, we already owned some \$US2 million worth of plastic material, so I told him we couldn't do anything about that."

Saint Laurent accepted the situation. "The perfume bottle was finished with a cord, knotted through a wooden ball," Miller recalls. "It looks wrong," said Yves. He walked out of the room, and returned a few minutes later with a box of black tassels.

"One by one, he took them out of the box and placed them against the bottle. Finally, he found the tassel he liked. Next, he told me to change the lettering of the logo. The O was too slim for his taste. Then he looked at the cap of the perfume bottle. 'It's too small,' he said. He replaced the cap of the 1/2 oz bottle with the cap designed for the 1 oz bottle."

"We could not change the 'O' for the first production run but we managed the beads and tassel," says Roos. "We bought them from a shop in the centre of Paris. Imagine the time it took the staff in the factory to thread each bead by hand. Imagine the costs!" STEPHEN CLARK

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Need to know

Where to buy *Perfume Legends II* is available at [fragrancesoftheworld.com](http://fragrancesoftheworld.com) for \$215. Also available is the latest edition of *Fragrances of the World*, Michael Edwards' annual reference guide to more than 12,000 fragrances

**PORTRAIT OF A LADY (2010)**

Created by Dominique Ropion for Frédéric Malle | Frédéric Malle of Editions de Parfums regards himself as a fragrance publisher or curator, and the perfumers as authors or artists. "He told us that we could do whatever we wanted," says perfumer Dominique Ropion. "With no price or time limit, no panel tests, and no marketing influences." Perfumers told Malle, "You have put the church back in the middle of the village."

The Editions de Parfums boutique in Paris resembles a gentleman's library but with three floor-to-ceiling space-age glass tubes ("smelling capsules") and a large refrigerator filled with squat black labelled bottles. **L&L**