



Thakoon

# FRAGRANCE BY DESIGN

*Lights, music, models—and PERFUME! Fashion designers are using olfactory branding to make their shows truly memorable.*

TEXT: STEPHANIE EPIRO



Victoria Beckham



Dawn Goldworm



Victoria Beckham used Diptyque Figurier Verte candles to light the entrance of her fall/winter 2012/2013 show; Rachel Zoe used the French brand's Feu de Bois candle.

Celebrated designer Thakoon Panichgul's spring/summer 2012 show is about to start, and the fashion flock seated in the Grand Ballroom of New York's Plaza Hotel are tapping their heels to the building Indian tabla music. The lights dim dramatically, and, before the first model strides out, vapours of an intoxicating spicy, leathery fragrance curl through the air. After the show, editors who headed backstage discovered Les Cowboys Les Indiens, a scent specifically created to act as a conduit between Thakoon's Western-cowboy- and maharaja-inspired clothing and the show's environment.

"The concept was about pulling two distinctly different ideas together, and scenting was a great way to create mood and

association," says Panichgul, who wanted to give the audience "a sensory-overload effect and a sense of chaos" to go with the dizzying print-on-print, high-colour collection.

Take a whiff of fragrance and fashion's new frontier: olfactory branding. Fashion and fragrance already share a decades-long love story (evidenced in the rows of perfume bottles on department-store shelves). But now the link has become an integral part of a brand's strategy. "Just as the music creates a more powerful emotional experience during a fashion show, scent is the newest way to complete the experience and finish creating the world the stylist designs," says Dawn Goldworm, a nose for Coty celebrity fragrances and one of the founders of the New York/Paris-based olfactory branding agency 12.29. (Her twin sister, Samantha, the company's co-founder, handles the marketing side of things.) "It's a way to differentiate [the brand's] show from others during the jam-packed schedule of fashion week."

Named for the sisters' birth date, 12.29 recently wrapped up its sixth fashion season, creating scents for the Chadwick Bell, Yaz Bukey and Calla Haynes fall/winter 2012/2013 shows. And Rodarte and Jason Wu enlisted the duo's blending bravado to scent their runway shows for spring/summer 2010 and fall/winter 2010/2011 respectively.

Toronto-born Haynes, who commissioned 12.29 to scent three of her shows, says that tapping into the allure of aroma is another way to leave an impression in a runway environment. "Scenting is more subtle than visual or aural elements, but it digs into the subconscious much faster," says the Paris-based designer. "I hope it hooks the audience and makes them want to know more."

The sartorial spritzing continued with Diptyque, whose coterie of scented candles set the vibe for several fall/winter 2012/2013 presentations. In London, Antonio Berardi used the luxe French house's sweet-myrrh-scented Opoponax Room Spray to fragrance both his invitations and his show. Diptyque's >

IMAXTREE (RUNWAY & BACKSTAGE)

Herbal  
essences

new

Bye-Bye  
BREAKAGE  
COLLECTION



BUILT-IN  
Damage  
PROTECTION  
EVERY TIME YOU  
SHAMPOO  
& CONDITION

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ELLE  
BEAUTY

“Scenting is more subtle...but it digs into the subconscious much faster.”

bestselling candles, the fruity Baies and woody Feu de Bois, were lit at Jenni Kayne and Rachel Zoe. Victoria Beckham chose Figuier Verte, saying that the candles were “super-chic and perfect for the presentation,” and set them on the stairs inside the entrance to the New York Public Library to create atmosphere.

“Fashion shows and presentations are all about the complete experience, and designers look to us to help create the mood,” says Olivia Grimaux, international communication director for Diptyque. “Wes Gordon chose woody and smoky scents that he felt tied in with his collection. Other designers [namely Zoe and Beckham] wanted to create a personal environment to present their collections by lighting the candles that they use in their own homes.”

While scent creators, designers and show-fatigued fashionistas agree that scents help a collection leave a lasting impression, retailers and hotel owners have long depended on the sense of smell to captivate the customer. Dr. Leslie B. Vosshall, a professor at New York’s Rockefeller University and head of its Laboratory of Neurogenetics and Behavior, says that many retailers diffuse a pretty, mood-lifting smell such as floral or vanilla. “Good smells have the power to put people in a good mood, perhaps encouraging them to spend more time and money in the store,” she says. “If the scent is a strong one, used only by that store, the customer may bond to the scent of the store.”

Abercrombie & Fitch was among the first retailers to embrace scent marketing, according to Alex Cosic, national sales manager for the global marketing scenting agency Air Aroma. All of the American sportswear stores

are redolent with the brand’s signature scent (so that each garment leaves the store branded with the fragrance), which is often blasted at levels high enough to spill out into the surrounding street.

A luxury-loaded leather scent is emitted in the plush surrounds of Louis Vuitton boutiques by Air Aroma’s diffusing machines, which have also been used at Benetton and Max Mara. “Scent helps customers be enveloped by the experience, and luxury stores want to give that full emotional experience,” says Cosic. Translation? The in-store fragrance will make you feel good about spending next month’s paycheque on a gleaming crocodile-leather handbag.

Of course, any process of bringing fragrance to fashion has to start with inspiration. Before blending 12.29’s made-to-measure concoctions, Goldworm asks the designer to explain his or her muse. When Chadwick Bell described his fall/winter 2012/2013 look via a lost, chic woman standing in a faded yellow hallway near an opium den, 12.29’s scent riposte was Oriental Smoke tinged with saffron, incense and leather notes.

Bell believes that scent not only added a little mystery to his collection but also a real sense of connection for the audience. “Scent is such an integral part of the memory process,” he says. “If I can create an intimacy of that very moment and that collection, perhaps in the future if someone were to stumble upon even a single note within the whole of the scent, it would immediately take them back to the show. They’d relive the collection, the woman and the theme. It completes the whole experience.” ▷