

JUST GOOD SCENTS

New breed of clean perfumes said to be free of irritating ingredients

AILEEN LALOR

Making perfume is as much an art as painting, composing or penning literature. The greatest can manipulate notes skilfully, dictating how they unfold.

In doing so, perfumers transport you, evoking memories: Your grandmother's dressing table, the best party you ever went to, the precise moment you fell in love.

While many beauty fans see fragrance as pure pleasure, there are some who find it a pain.

Perfume can cause health problems in some people. There are skin irritations, which are relatively easy to tackle (just stop wearing perfume). Trickier to manage are issues caused by inhaling fragrance, especially that worn by others.

"The real issue around scent is unintended exposure," says Karen Bartlett, a professor in the School of Population & Public Health at UBC who specializes in inhalation toxicology. "The way we perceive scent, is that it releases gaseous chemicals. There's a molecule that goes from the perfume to a person's nose.

"That sets up a number of things. It can cause coughs, runny noses and runny eyes or, at the extreme side of things, it can exacerbate or bring on an asthma attack, which can kill a person."

Sufferers also report headaches, dizziness and nausea as a result of being exposed. Then there's the fact that some people simply find some fragrances unpleasant.

We often think of these inhalation reactions as allergies, but they're really more like irritations.

"The perfume industry understands 'perfume allergy' to mean a skin rash, whereas many of the people I talk to who say they are allergic to perfume turn out to get headaches and nausea when they smell it," says writer Tania Sanchez, who co-authored *Perfumes: The A-Z Guide* with biophysicist Luca Turin.

"I'm familiar with those symptoms. I suffer them when I smell an extremely brutal perfume, the discomfort of overwhelming stimulus."

In the past few years, though, a new breed of fragrances has emerged: So-called "clean" perfumes that omit ingredients that are anecdotally connected with respiratory issues. These include preservatives like parabens, phthalates (which make perfume "stick" to skin), sulfates, UV inhibitors and formaldehyde.

It's hard to say for sure if these ingredients are the culprits because there isn't a large body of research yet, but they have been connected with health problems.

"The purpose of these ingredients is 'scent throw' or sillage, when a scent walks into a room ahead of you. They also make the scent last longer on the skin throughout the day and ensure the colour of the perfume remains clear and does not turn golden brown," says Barb



Skylar Arrow, US\$78, at Skylar.com



Gallivant Tokyo, \$130, at Secret Location



Libertine Sex & Jasmine, from \$56, Kiss and Makeup



Phlur Hanami, \$95, at Sephora



7 Virtues Vanilla Woods, \$88, at Sephora



Clean Reserve Fragrance Layering, \$72, at Sephora

Stegemann, founder of Canadian clean perfume brand 7 Virtues.

"A perfume should turn colour, it's not a bad thing. Sillage is not something anyone should want; the person in the next cubicle should not be able to smell your perfume. There is no sillage in our clean fragrances. You would have to lean in and be intimate with the wearer of a clean scent. It's for the wearer and those he or she is extremely intimate with."

Stegemann says her customers consistently say they can wear her products without reacting.

"I have spoken to women in tears telling me they have not worn perfume for decades and now they can again with our line," she says.

Eric Korman, founder of US clean brand Phlur, has had similar experiences.

"From what we've seen over 100,000 customers, removing and avoiding these kinds of additives seems to cut down tremendously on respiratory issues," he says.

Workplace and public space bans are Bartlett's preferred approach to problems with fragrance ("What's wrong with the smell of clean skin?" she wonders), but clean perfumers believe there are other ways to tackle the issue that don't leave fragrance fans wanting.

Stegemann thinks there should be tighter legislation around ingredients, including banning ingredients that might be problematic from all cosmetics, not just perfume, and making it mandatory to

reveal potential skin allergens, as is the case in the EU.

"You can read the ingredients on our packaging and website and know if anything you are specifically allergic to is in there. So you have an informed customer who knows if they can wear your product," she says.

Korman says customers also need to get informed about what denotes quality in a perfume, since people tend to think that longer-

lasting, heavier and more intrusive fragrances are better.

"A light, citrus-based product might evaporate more quickly, but all you need to do is reapply it," he says. "There's definitely a need for re-education about the fact that quality is not the same as staying power. Brands in the mainstream aren't really talking about the art and craft of making a perfume, and how it should or shouldn't be worn."

He believes that perfume fans need to follow simple etiquette rules such as changing things up frequently so they don't get used to a scent and over-apply it.

Sanchez says we should also be careful how we choose our scents.

"If people are going to be stuck next to you for a long time without being able to move, as in the office or at a restaurant, perfume should be worn so that only someone very close can smell it," she says.

6 'CLEAN' SCENTS TO TRY

These scents promise to deliver on perfume, not problems. All are cruelty free, sustainable and environmentally friendly.

7 Virtues Vanilla Woods \$88 | Sephora, sephora.com

The latest scent from this Canadian brand is warm and delicate, brightened up with notes of pear.

Phlur Hanami \$95 | Sephora, sephora.com

Sandalwood is the key note in this fresh blend, which also has fig and white florals.

Clean Reserve Fragrance Layering \$72 | Sephora, sephora.com

There are six travel sprays in this set, designed to be worn in combination so you can create your own blends.

Libertine Sex & Jasmine From \$56 | Kiss and Makeup kissandmakeupstore.com

A heady, sensuous floral with jasmine, vanilla and ambergris from this Edmonton-based perfumer.

Gallivant Tokyo \$130 | Secret Location, secretlocation.ca

Zingy and invigorating, thanks to bergamot, black pepper and a hint of wasabi.

Skylar Arrow US\$78 | Skylar.com

A rich combination of jasmine, vanilla and patchouli.



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