

APRIL 2011

IMAGE: UNCOMMON SCENTS

Orange Zest

The waft of tangy citrus evokes the spirit of sunny Southern Californias *by* DENISE HAMILTON



MARK HANAUER

Orange groves occupy a deep historical, cultural and even mythic place in the Southern California psyche, which is probably why I'm a sucker for perfumes with this intoxicating note. Even hard-boiled noir master Raymond Chandler waxed poetic, observing in *The Big Sleep*, "But not even the drenched darkness could hide the flawless lines of the orange trees wheeling away like endless spokes into the night."

Today, most of the groves are gone, but lone trees linger in backyards, including mine. When the fruit hangs heavy, it's a ritual pleasure to fill my arms, then decide whether to juice them or slice them into fat wedges for eating.

Perfumers, too, face choices, since the orange tree gracefully offers all of itself to the fragrant arts. With the bitter-orange tree, distinct notes are even catalogued by name: neroli, the concentrated green oil steam-distilled from flowers; bigarade, extract from the peel; and petitgrain, from the solvent extraction of leaves and green twigs.

And that's only the beginning.

Orange fragrances can be squeaky clean and virginal, or they can seduce with a sybaritic note similar to another white flower—jasmine. They can be citrusy green, sweet candied or pale powdery. There are wan florals that whisper of spring and tart colognes that cool a summer sweat. We gather around the Batchelder-tile fireplace in winter to spicy resinous oranges, oaky orange *chypres* and orange incenses that would be at home in Babylonian temples.

Since I love the intense sweetness of blood oranges, I appreciate Guerlain's Mandarin Basilic. Another winner: Orange Sanguine by Atelier, a new boutique firm that also makes Grand Néroli. All Atelier colognes are *absolues*, with a higher concentration of perfume oils to increase longevity.

If I'm watching my pennies, I might opt for Petitgrain Tonic by Malin + Goetz, a synthesized concoction that comes in a retro apothecary bottle. (One of the founders once worked at Kiehl's.) And I'm a longtime fan of L'Occitane's orange fragrances, which smell like they contain high-quality naturals and are found at many malls.

Jean-Claude Ellena's Bigarade Concentrée for Frédéric Malle is the olfactory equivalent of eating a sun-ripened tangerine—a perfect mouthwatering balance of tart and sweet.

Hermès Eau d'Orange Verte is a bracing unisex tonic, and both Jo Malone's Orange Blossom and Lime Basil & Mandarin colognes are cooling enough to mitigate any Santa Ana wind. For a waft of Florentine history, splurge on one of the many orange-accented cologne scents from Santa Maria Novella.

The rustic, resinous character of Annick Goutal's Néroli evokes the smell of colorfully labeled orange crates in the Sunkist warehouse after a harvest.

When quirky French firm Etat Libre d'Orange approached Tilda Swinton about developing a celebrity fragrance, she wanted to include mandarins, her favorite fall fruit. The result—Like This—was recently feted at Scent Bar in West Hollywood, and Swinton even stopped in for a meet-and-greet with perfume fans.

50 Johnnys

A name that's rock 'n' roll gold



CAN YOU RECALL 'EM ALL?

Orange can play well with others, too, adding depth, resonance and piquancy to the rich oriental perfumes the classic French houses do oh so well.

Hermès 24, Faubourg—especially the eau de parfum concentration—brings a tantalizing blend of rich florals and orange. Bitter orange is what gives Caron's almost extinct Alpona its deep resinous citrus note. And for a more contemporary composition, Caron's Montaigne delivers orange with vanilla, musk, spices and benzoin.

I can't get enough of Serge Lutens' Fleurs d'Oranger, which marries the indolic allure of orange blossom with the Lutens-esque base of honeyed, candied fruits. For more of a postmodern take, his fluorescent fruity Mandarine Mandarin is akin to a Warholian silkscreen essay on orange.

Sadly, one of my holy grails is Fendi's late, lamented Theorema, a resinous orange *chypre* that lands squarely on my sweet spot but never devolves into tooth-decay territory.

In Etro's Messe de Minuit, clove-studded orange pomander balls are married to incense, creating a fragrance both exalted and holiday cozy.

When I sniff Maharanih by Parfums de Nicolaï, I envision orange opening the door and vanilla, woods and warm spices waltzing in for a fabulous perfume party, while the Viennese classic Knize Ten (created in 1925) is awash in petitgrain, orange and orange blossom.

For epicurean orange, I give props to ProFumum's Dulcis in Fundo, in which citrusy orange swirls with caramelized vanilla amber. I want to both wear and eat this cross between a foodie dessert and a kid-favorite orange Creamside.

I'm impressed by indie perfumer Ava Luxe's Neroli Blossom and Dawn Spencer Hurwitz's sweeter Fleurs D'Oranger, the latter with its hints of vanilla, resins and musk.

In Switzerland, where winters are long, dark and snowy, self-taught indie perfumer Andy Tauer dreams of Mediterranean climates, concocting batches of Orange Star, a powdery mandarin, violet and vanilla scent.


Orange also shacks up quite well with leather—Miller Harris' Cuir d'Oranger is a perfectly harmonious modern marriage of the two scents.

The orange groves of Southern California sing me their olfactory siren song of promise and potential. And I am left bewitched by the multifaceted character of this commonplace yet most noble of fruits that is emblematic of the place we call home.

Categories: [Uncommon Scents](#)

ShareThis

COMMENTS

 You can follow this conversation by subscribing to the [comment feed](#) for this post.

Very nice, Denise. Now I have a, new, "must try", list.

Posted by: [katheen](#) | [04/04/2011 at 05:39 AM](#)

After wandering through my backyard orange trees I decided I wanted to smell just like that. Are there any essential oils or perfumes that smell EXACTLY like orange blossoms - with no other scents to muddy the waters? I have yet to find one that perfectly captures that intoxicating smell.

Posted by: [CC](#) | [04/17/2011 at 10:58 AM](#)

Great site and a great topic as well i really get amazed to read this thanks. thanks for this awesome post

Posted by: [Testking 1Y0-A21](#) | [07/26/2011 at 05:43 AM](#)

Thanks for making my morning a little bit better with this great article!!

Posted by: [cheap snapbacks](#) | [12/19/2011 at 10:40 PM](#)

OHH. flower is beautiful!