



MARK OF a man

HE'S SPENT A LIFE BEING LED BY HIS NOSE, AND NOW HE'S ACTING ON IT. RICHARD E GRANT ON HOW HE HAS BRANCHED OUT TO CREATE HIS ULTIMATE SCENT

To sniff or not to sniff?" That is the question that I've probably asked myself more than any other for the past half century. Just as people have regularly asked me why I compulsively "missile" my nose at everything in sight — from flowers, fabric, flesh, food and fruit, to necks, leather, wood, metal, car bonnets, warm brick walls and everything up, down, sideways and in between.

Why not? Frankly, I'm amazed everyone doesn't.

It's one of the greatest pleasures in life — alongside licking your plate clean at the end of a delicious meal — when you get that concentrated reprise of the overture, main course and encore via your tongue and nose. Irresistibly mmmm.

I discovered that the shortest synaptic leap in the brain occurs between your sense of smell and memory, which is why whatever we've inhaled through the years is forever imprinted on our psyches and acts as such a powerful and evocative reminder. While filming in the Mojave desert some years back, I chanced upon one of those stores that sells everything from pincushions to combine harvesters. (Well, not quite, but you know what I mean.) While there, I found a box full of yellow legal pads that were bound together by particularly pungent gum arabic. It stopped me in my tracks, and I was instantly transported back to my first year at school in Swaziland in 1963. It was one of those odd odours that borders somewhere between compulsive/repulsive but is detectable in the dark. When the elderly proprietor asked why I was buying her entire "vintage" stock, I told her that it made me feel like a little boy all over again. Fellow six-year-olds Terence Mdiniso and Jill Smith phantomed up instantly, as all three of us were made to stand outside the classroom door for talking too much behind our lift-up wooden desktops.

A photo album might trigger memory, but never in the unequivocal way that smell does. It happens so fast, you've no time to even think about it. None of the HG Wells stories I'd read time-travelled as effectively as my nose did.

When I was a Cub doing bob-a-job duties to earn another badge from Akela and top up my pocket money, a lady called Mrs MacDonald asked me to remove all the snails I could find in her garden. She grew roses and gardenias, and sniffing those velvety white petals and the texture of the lacquered green leaves discovered close up, made me want simultaneously to eat and steal them. I got home and found that our garden had them, too, so I surreptitiously denuded all the blooms and stuffed them into jam jars filled with boiling sugar water, then buried them in the garden, hoping that by some osmosis,

once the water had cooled down, the combination of sugar, darkness and petals would transform them into perfume.

What I got instead was a wallop reprimand from my furious mother and three jars of putrid stink bombs. But the impulse to try and capture that fragrance lurked and lingered for decades, until two years ago, when the handbag supreme and fellow Caribbean house guest Anya Hindmarch saw me with my head in a gardenia bush and asked, "Are you going to do something about that?" Do you mean psychiatrically? "No, create a perfume."

Anya being Anya, she gave me a list of people to go and see and, whenever doubt came knocking at my door, she encouraged me to pursue my dream of producing a perfume. Two years later that fantasy has become a reality. "Passion is something you cannot fake, and you have it by the bucket-load," she said. "So, the worst-case scenario is, if it doesn't sell, you lose your investment and have a lifetime's supply of bottles to give to anyone you meet until you're boxed up. But it will."

Her belief and encouragement have been an ironclad mantra. My adolescence was an explosive mixture of parental adultery, alcoholism and divorce (theirs), acne and unrequited love (mine), all of which I armour-plated my way through by dousing myself in Christian Dior Eau Sauvage in the hope of at least smelling desirable. Swazi gold is reputed to be the finest marijuana on the planet, and having discovered that I was allergic to alcohol, partaking of pre-Camberwell carrots in my troubled teens was nirvana. I asked the nose Alienor Massenet to blend the earthy-peppery smell of their leaves into the scent that we created together.

The 1970s were defined by all things unisex, and on polling my daughter's generation and the cast of *Girls*, I discovered that the division between male and female fragrances has blurred again — "unisexy" is their norm and any "division" sounds Jurassic. Women feel empowered wearing so-called male scents.

When I emigrated to London in 1982, I sniffed the hypnotic headrush of a bunch of narcissi for the first time at a flower stall in Portobello Road, having rented a bedsit in Blenheim Crescent. Synchronistically, while working as a waiter at Tuttons brasserie in Covent Garden, waiting for acting roles, I was generously tipped by a group of inebriated opera-goers, and treated myself to a bottle of Blenheim Bouquet at Penhaligon's from its shop around the corner.

In retrospect, this cologne boosted my fragile self-worth and made me believe that its invisible magic would improve my life. Which it did, as I subsequently fell in love with the Aberdonian woman I've been

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BEAUTY

He's getting marijuana, gardenia, lime, mandarin... Richard E Grant sits on a throne of his favourite scents

FLORAL: THRONES: SIMON LYCETT/COLOUK. GROOMING: PAUL DOONAVAN AT CLM HAIR AND MAKE-UP USING KIEHL'S. SHOT ON LOCATION AT PETERSHAM NURSERY; PETERSHAMNURSERY.COM

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHRIS FLOYD. FLORIST: SIMON LYCETT



married to for almost three decades, who happened to live in a street called Blenheim Place.

However, my brand loyalty was seriously challenged at a party in Tuscany five years ago, when I was dancing with a stranger whose scent sent my brain into a nose-spin, mid-boogie. Fighting an overwhelming impulse to lick her neck like some old vampire, I asked her what she was wearing. She handed me a tiny, half-full glass tube of perfume oil, surreptitiously, as if it were a drug deal, and whispered, "It's yours to keep."

And drugged I certainly was — it was the sexiest scent I had ever smelt and the closest approximation to that elusive gardenia-in-a-bottle I'd yet come across. It has proved to be a flower that has defied being extracted naturally, so it is always a chemical concoction. It was the *coup de foudre* — love at first smell — and it seriously wobbled my marriage vows as I struggled to separate the scent from the stranger, who now seemed an earthly Aphrodite. Instead of forsaking my wife, however, I dumped Blenheim Bouquet, and knew then and there that, before my days were done, I had to try and make my boyhood perfume dream become a middle-aged man's bottled reality.

Fast-forward to Colbert restaurant in Sloane Square, where I meet Massenet, who scrutinises the ingredients I've de-pocketed onto the crisp, white linen — lime, mandarin and marijuana leaves, gardenia petals, pepper, cloves — and my verbal enthusiasms as to whether she can distil these into a signature scent. Citrussy top notes that conjure up subtropical Christmas smells and an undertow of earthy, sexy, dark hurrhggrrmmh — noises are now the only thing that can properly convey what I'm trying to say. Miracle of miracles, Massenet doesn't laugh or dismiss anything, but instead declares "*Mais oui*", she will take me on.

Months of back-and-forth testing sessions ensued, lassoing both my friends' noses and those of the forensically informed perfume-selling team at Liberty, culminating in a eureka moment. Late one night I combined two of my "almost but not quite" favoured blends and asked Massenet if she could mix them together into the lush, sexy, lickably addictive fragrance I had always dreamt of.

Taking the decision on the final edit felt like a big risk. No matter how informed you are by other people's opinions and expert guidance, you have to make the final decision that "This is it." And Jack is it. As it says in small print on the back of the box: "I've been led by my nose all my life."

Jack is my signature in scent. ❖

Exclusively available in store at Liberty from Wednesday, and at jackperfume.co.uk

SIGNATURE SMELLS AA GILL

What should a man smell of? If you say "manly", that just begs a question again — what does "manly" smell like? Is it honest toil, sweat? You don't want to sit next to that on the bus. Is it engine oil and house paint, fertiliser and fish, all the whiffs of bloke? Should a man smell neutral, with just a faint whisper of carbolic and Colgate? Fine, but supermarket dull. Once you decide that manly is a smell that should be smelt, and that you have only five senses to advertise yourself and leaving one empty is a waste, it's a never-ending quest. You sniff through flowers and musk, citrus and oud. At the moment I'm wearing Baudelaire by Byredo, a Swedish scent company. It smells of juniper, black pepper, caraway, incense, hyacinth, leather, papyrus, patchouli and black amber, apparently. You may laugh, but remember — every other sense can be ignored. She doesn't have to look at you, listen to you or touch you, but she can't help smelling you. And that's what lingers.

PATRICK KINMONTH

Artist, set designer, curator

I came late to the idea of scent — I felt that to smell of me was enough. As I grew up, I discovered that scent could become an aura, as subtle as music and as evocative as landscape. It could change my mood and that of those around me. For years, I was addicted to Diptyque Philosykos, based on fig. Mostly I have discovered my scents in the cities where I have worked as an opera director and designer: via Knize Ten from Vienna, I reached Frédéric Malle Vétiver Extraordinaire in Paris. Now I am vacillating between Bois de Violette pour Homme by Berdoues, and Cuir de Russie by the German house of Farina. No hotel bedtime is complete without a spritz of Farina across the pillow, which brings a reassuring consistency to my travels, with its sleepy distillation of meadow grass and spotless German laundries.

PATRICK GRANT

Tailor

Open your shirt like Swiss Toni — two buttons down — and give yourself a couple of squirts of Dior Eau Sauvage (it's fresh and zesty), then button back up; this is enough to last the night. All my fragrances remind me of Friday and Saturday nights, getting ready to go out on the town as a teenager. There's a certain nostalgia for all men with fragrance.

HOW TO WEAR IT

"Men should spritz around the collar, neck and chest," says Linda Pilkington, of the perfumery Ormonde Jayne. "Spray when you are just out of the shower and your body is warm; the perfume settles better and lasts longer. If you're using a cologne, you can have 6-8 good squirts, but if it's an oriental, use only a couple."

Farina Cuir de Russie, £70 for 100ml; roullierwhite.com. Tom Ford Tuscan Leather, £140 for 50ml; selfridges.com. Christian Dior Eau Sauvage, £71 for 100ml; johnlewis.com. Byredo Baudelaire, £130 for 100ml; liberty.co.uk

