Perfume Quotes

When naturalperfumery.com launched in 2005, I put perfume quotes on each page, just because I loved the fun and insightful look at the world of perfumery they brought to the website visitor. They didn't appear on the evolutionary next step of that site, which was naturalperfumers.com, and I missed having the varied and thought-provoking quotes from historical records up to the present.

2005 was also the year that perfume blogs appeared on the Internet, and so many glorious quotes emerged from them, it would take an encyclopedia to gather them all together, so I urge you to visit them for further fulfillment of perfume quote needs. I posted a shorter version of this on the Yahoo Natural Perfumery group, and on the website for students of the Natural Perfumery Institute. I asked adjunct faculty Andrine Olson and Katlyn Breene to see if they could find some more fragrant gems to add, and they were kind enough to oblige.

I hope you enjoy these observations, pithy comments, daydream musings, excerpts from movies and books and sometimes just silly sayings that were inspired by the invisible, beautiful perfumes and perfume plants of the world.

There are no titled sections to this compilation: the pages are host to unlikely bedfellows, the profound next to the provocative. Victor Hugo might be next to Theophrastus, Blanche du Bois quoted near a sonnet by Shakespeare, Edmon Roudnitska a neighbor to Isak Dinesen, all united in this little publication meant to bring inspiration and reflection to lovers of perfume. I love just opening the pages at random, and escaping into the heady mix of quotes, and I hope you will, too.

Best wishes,
Anya McCoy, Director and Head Instructor

PS: I didn't include any images because I like to let imagination do that.
Can there be too many perfumes, too many open rosebuds, too many nightingales singing, too many green leaves, too many dawns in life? Can you love each other too much? Can you please each other too much?

Victor Hugo

I anoint myself everyday with oil, burn perfumes and use cosmetics that make me worthier of worshipping thee.

This said in prayer to God Marduk by Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II who reigned circa 605 BC-562 BC

Original text: Then were not summer's distillation left, A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass, Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft, Nor it nor no remembrance what it was. But flowers distilled, though they with winter meet, Leese but their show; their substance still lives sweet.

Modern Text: If we didn't have perfume distilled from summer flowers to keep in a jar, the effects of summer would vanish at the end of the season. Without perfume, we'd have no way of remembering the summer itself or its beauty. But the flowers used to make perfume lose only their outward beauty when winter comes; their beautiful scent lives on sweetly.

Shakespeare Sonnet 5

And in some perfumes is there more delight Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks

Shakespeare Sonnet 130

Tranio, I saw her coral lips to move And with her breath she did perfume the air. Sacred and sweet was all I saw in her.

Shakespeare The Taming of the Shrew

Stanley is not the type that goes for jasmine perfume.

Blanche in “Streetcar Named Desire”

Here comes the time when, vibrating on its stem, every flower fumes like a censer; noises and perfumes circle in the evening air.

Charles Baudelaire
Olfactory training is of prime importance, and should never be neglected or interrupted. Our own perfumers make it a strict rule to test, daily, their knowledge of perfume materials, and this is why a half hour is set apart for this exercise.

Jean Carles

The entire world is in every bottle of perfume.

Chandler Burr

Sabean odours from the spicy shore  
Of Arabic the blest.

John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (bk. IV, l. 162)

Matt's so metro. He wears perfume a lot of the time.

Ben Affleck

And the ripe harvest of the new-mown hay  
Gives it a sweet and wholesome odour.

Colley Cibber, *Richard III (Altered.)* (act V, sc. 3, l. 44)

Perfumery attracts people with desire but no skill; hence, those than can, create, those that can't, steal.

Anonymous

The question about those aromatic advertisements that perfume companies are having stitched into magazines these days is this: under the freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment, is smelling up the place a constitutionally protected form of expression?

Calvin Trillin

As perfume doth remain In the folds where it hath lain, So the thought of you, remaining Deeply folded in my brain, Will not leave me: all things leave me: You remain.

Arthur Symons
To create new arrangements, new olfactory forms, it is enough that you think “in odors”, like the painter “in colors”, and the musician “in sounds”.

Edmond Roudnitska

I send thee this sweet perfume a fragrance to the fragrant, as one would offer wine to the god of wine

Anon

Perfumes are the feelings of flowers.

Heinrich Heine

One day I heard a sentence -- was it in a movie? -- that summarizes my philosophy pretty well: "When the gods want to punish you, they grant all your wishes." Very often, when we wish for something, what we get is something else. And it is that other thing that, in my opinion, is the most interesting. This applies to the making of a perfume. From the time the essences are arranged to reach a desired effect to the time when a result is actually achieved by their association, there is a world of difference. At that point in time I usually say to myself, "Thank God, my wish was not granted!

Serge Lutens

When I was a boy, I thought scent was contained in dewdrops on flowers and if I got up very early in the morning, I could collect it and make perfume.

Oscar De La Renta

My lilac trees are old and tall;
I cannot reach their bloom at all.
They send their perfume over trees
And roof and streets, to find the bees.

Louise Driscoll

The lime trees were in bloom. But in the early morning only a faint fragrance drifted through the garden, an airy message, an aromatic echo of the dreams during the short summer night.

Isak Dinesen
Smell is a potent wizard that transports you across thousands of miles and all the years you have lived.

Helen Keller

The gift of perfume to a flower is a special grace like genius or like beauty, and never becomes common or cheap.

John Burroughs

Now fetch me some more alcohol, cher. We must dilute this boof before it starts a chain reaction and blows New Orleans into the Gulf. We have a jasmine Nagasaki cooking here!

Madame Lily Devalier in Jitterbug Perfume, a novel by Tom Robbins

A stream of rich distill’d perfumes.

John Milton, *Comus* (556)

Hast thou not learn’d me how
To make perfumes? distil? preserve? yea, so
That our great king himself doth woo me oft
For my confections?

William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* (Queen, wife to Cymbeline at I, v)

The perfume of iris, from Corinth, was long held in the highest esteem, till that of Cyzicus came into fashion. It was the same, too, with the perfume of roses, from Phaselis, the repute of which was afterwards eclipsed by those of Neapolis, Capua, and Præneste. Oil of saffron, from Soli in Cilicia, was for a long time held in repute beyond any other, and then that from Rhodes; after which perfume of oenanthe, from Cyprus, came into fashion, and then that of Egypt was preferred. At a later period that of Adramytteum came into vogue, and then was supplanted by unguent of marjoram, from Cos, which in its turn was superseded by quince blossom unguent from the same place. As to perfume of cypruss, that from the island of Cyprus was at first preferred, and then that of Egypt; when all on a sudden the unguents of Mendes and metopium rose into esteem.

Pliny The Elder

Dignity is like a perfume; those who use it are scarcely conscious of it

Christina of Sweden quotes (Swedish Queen of Sweden
You have, it appears, a fine nose, young man,” he said, once Grenouille had ceased his wheezings; “without doubt, a fine nose, but…

Giuseppe Baldini in Perfume, a novel by Patrick Suskind

I have the best nose in Paris, Maitre Baldini.

Grenouille in Perfume, a novel by Patrick Suskind

Atlas cedar smells of churned wet clay, but also of warm human skin, of bodies after lovemaking. I like putting something human into a perfume. Nowadays, a lot of them smell clean, as if they were at war with the smells around us.

Jean-Claude Ellena

Frank Flannigan: What does he export and what does he import?  
Ariane Chavasse: Oh, he uh - he exports perfume and imports bananas. There's a fortune in it. Do you realize that for one bottle of perfume you get twelve bananas? 
Frank Flannigan: Twelve bananas for one bottle of - doesn't sound like such a hot deal to me. 
Ariane Chavasse: It's a tiny bottle of perfume and very large bananas.

From the movie “Love in the Afternoon” 1957

I wash with my own soap - wear my own perfume ... go to bed with my own sheets ... have my own food products ... I live on me..

Pierre Cardin

Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other.

(Eight-year-old)

(Therefore), the next step will be for him (the beginner) to establish a classification of odorous materials according to their volatility. While such a classification could be established scientifically, the apprentice perfumer will soon attain unexpected proficiency by forgetting technical information he/she may have, and by establishing "his/her" classification for him/herself, as I had to 40 years ago.

Jean Carles
{our company} is developing...a truly modern scent – sharp, hard-edged, assertive, unisexual, urbane, unromantic, nonmysterious, cool, light, elegant, and wholly synthetic...Yes, but what you don’t know is how boring and, ultimately frightening I am finding this scent. I slept last night with it on my pillowcase, and my dreams were totalitarian nightmares...I have the sensation I am smelling control, conformity, domination.

Marcel LeFever in Jitterbug Perfume, a novel by Tom Robbins

If I were a maker of perfumes, I would make one and call it "Spring", and it would smell like this cool, sweet, early-morning air.

Ann Petry

Perfume is ... 'that last and best reserve of the past, the one which when all out tears have run dry, can make us cry again.'

Marcel Proust, Novelist

An amber scent of odorous perfume
Her harbinger.

John Milton, Samson Agonistes (l. 720)

A perfume that lasts bears a sense of the future

Michel Roudnitska

How many times a passing woman's dress, giving off the evaporated whiff of an essence, had whispered to him of long-faded events!

Guy de Maupassant, Novelist.

"In the muggy air intermittently lingered a more acute odor, it was coming from a few sprigs of dried patchouli broken into tiny pieces at the bottom of a glass."

Nana, from Emile Zola

Perfume is ... 'that last and best reserve of the past, the one which when all out tears have run dry, can make us cry again.'

Marcel Proust, Novelist
A perfume must be more mysterious than a copy of something in nature. When a man sees a woman, he shouldn't think of a rose; he should think of that woman.

Perfume Jean Paul Guerlain on the philosophy of his grandfather Jacques Guerlain

Perfume puts the finishing touch to elegance - a detail that subtly underscores the look, an invisible extra that completes a woman's personality. Without it there is something missing.

Gianni Versace

"Perfume, that conqueror of the most subtle of our senses, that informer of our unspoken desires, perfume which from out of the unreliable depths of human memory uncovers the found of tears, the secret of pleasure."

Colette

Two people can't maintain a relationship if the don't like each others smell

Dr Susan Schiffman, professor of medical psychology, Duke University Medical Center, USA

A fragrance is like a dress, an expression of personality. It can be both erotic or powerful, or both, but it always combines femininity and sensuality.

Gianfranco Ferre, Designer

Were not summer's distillations left
A liquid prisoner, pent in walls of glass,
Beauty's effect of beauty was bereft,
Nor it, nor no remembrance what it was;
But flowers distilled, though they with winter meet,
Leese but their show, their substance still lives sweet.

William Shakespeare

Doesn't perfume derive its beauty from that sensation of a time that doesn't flow, but soars? Everything in this world is but smoke.

Françoise Sagan
The fire is laid, the fire shines;  
The incense is laid on the fire, the incense shines.  
Your perfume comes to me, O Incense;  
May my perfume come to you, O Incense.  
Your perfume comes to me, you gods;  
May my perfume come to you, you gods.

Opening of the Mouth ceremony, Utterances from the Pyramid Texts, Ut. 269 A Censing Prayer

Women should have a wardrobe of scents that they change. It's not about putting on a pretty smell that you really like. You need to think specifically about what you want, and how you want to feel - just as you do with your clothes. The French and Italians do that, yet I think we are quite scared about it. It's so much part of our outfit.

Lyn Harris

I saw the sweetest flower wild nature yields,  
A fresh-blown musk-rose; ’twas the first that threw  
Its sweets upon the summer.

John Keats To a Friend who Sent some Roses

The perfume of Arabia hath been brought to thee to make perfect thy smell through the scent of the god. Here are brought to thee liquids which have come forth from Râ, to make perfect . . . thy smell in the Hall [of Judgment]. O sweet-smelling soul of the great god, thou dost contain such a sweet odour that thy face shall neither change nor perish.

Le Rituel de l’Embaumement. Translated by M. Maspero

Every perfume I’ve ever smelled has been to me like a movie, sound and vision, which to most people are thoroughly real senses, but smell ... to me, smell is just as real as they are.

Luca Turin, in The Emperor of Scent by Chandler Burr

There are 2 smells in the afterlife: incense and sulfur. Get used to one of them!

Anonymous Priest, relayed Father Jay Toborowsky
Floral earth, the sexual planet...squeezed from the reproductive glands of plants and creatures, perfume, the smell of creation, a sign dramatically delivered to our senses of the Earth’s regenerative powers - a message of hope and a message of pleasure...

Tom Robbins from Jitterbug Perfume

My earliest perfume memory: probably that of my mother when she would come to kiss me good night. A silky blend of fabrics and scents from a perfume whose name I have forgotten. It does not matter, really; I remember that it was mauve, tender, powdered with trails of white flowers. I would fall asleep in its softness while it floated around my sleep like a mysterious guardian. Sometimes, it happens that I encounter by chance women on a street or in an elevator who are wearing it, at that very moment all the images come back, rising up from these fragile sillages.

Guy Laroche

This will be the manner of the Kings... he will take your daughters for perfumers...

I Sam 8:13-14

Oil and perfume bring joy to the heart.

Psalms 27:9

"Anthony gave Cleopatra the palm-grove at Jericho in which balsam is produced."

Josephus, The Jewish War 1:361

I for one love perfumes that unveil themselves, that one does not understand immediately; but what is truly moving, what everyone is seeking, is that scent which is closest to skin. The reality of sensuality.

Dominique Ropion

How many times a passing woman's dress, giving off the evaporated whiff of an essence, had whispered to him of long-faded events!

Guy de Maupassant
Aiming to balance too much a perfume, one turns it off, killing in it everything giving its character. There's no need to fear nor to avoid a dominant in a perfume... this "fault" has often been at the base of a great success.

Jean Carles, Legendary 20th Century perfumer

Noble sirs, how does the Tathagata Sugandhakuta teach his Dharma?

They replied the Tathagata does not teach the Dharma by means of sound and language. He disciplines the bodhisattvas only by means of perfumes. At the foot of each perfume-tree sits a bodhisattva and the trees emit perfumes like this one. From the moment they smell that perfume, the bodhisattvas attain the concentration called "the source of all bodhisattvas-virtues. From the moment they attain that concentration all the bodhisattvas-virtues are produced in them."

Vimalakirti, translation by Robert A. F. Thurman

A perfume must be more mysterious than a copy of something in nature. When a man sees a woman, he shouldn't think of a rose; he should think of that woman.

Perfume Jean Paul Guerlain on the philosophy of his grandfather Jacques Guerlain

The pure sensuality of jasmine, and its close relative bouvardia, the double odor of gardenia, the integrity of white tobacco depend on the one who wears them.....

Know yourself, oh woman, madly overcome by so many perfumes.....Know what happens to the precious drop when it touches you, when you moisten your ear lobe or the shadowed valley between your breasts. Experiment! Watch, above all, the glance and the wrinkling of the nose of the one to whom you refuse nothing, nothing, that is, except the name of your perfume. Deceive yourself as little as possible, and do not take lightly this serious business of the right scent. As a result of the harmony you will achieve between your changing, warm, living, indiscreet body and your immutable perfume, you will realize through your perfume bottle the happiness of two people...at the very least.

Colette
Perfume puts the finishing touch to elegance - a detail that subtly underscores the look, an invisible extra that completes a woman's personality. Without it there is something missing.

Gianni Versace

At Moocock, an informal dinner awaited and a lively fire burned in cool air fresh with the scents of flowers. "It's very romantic" Fredericka said.

"I've never understood what it is," Freddy replied, "that moves women to think that a bunch of burning paraffin sticks and some flowers have anything to do with that awful word, romantic." (please read on....)

"Then what would you call it?"

"Elegant and appropriate."

"Ah," she said. Look at this. It's so...appropriate."

Mark Helprin

To imagine a perfume is to create an illusion. I try to achieve the maximum of effects with the minimum of ingredients.

Jean-Claude Ellena

The search for perfume, which is a pleasure, but also an affliction of the noblest of our senses, follows no other path but that of obsession.

Colette

Perfume is the medium by which the lady magically usurps the sexual powers of the blossom."

Tom Robbins, in the Jitterbug Perfume

Scents are like fashion -- The beauty is not intrinsic in the odour. It's in the eye of the beholder, or in this case the nose of the beholder.

Richard Doherty
The First Jasmines

Ah, these jasmines, these white jasmines!
I seem to remember the first day when I filled my hands
with these jasmines, these white jasmines.

I have loved the sunlight, the sky and the green earth;
I have heard the liquid murmur of the river
through the darkness of midnight;
Autumn sunsets have come to me at the bend of the road
in the lonely waste, like a bride raising her veil
to accept her lover.
Yet my memory is still sweet with the first white jasmines
that I held in my hands when I was a child.

Many a glad day has come in my life,
and I have laughed with merrymakers on festival nights.

On grey mornings of rain
I have crooned many an idle song.

I have worn round my neck the evening wreath of
BAKULAS woven by the hand of love.

Yet my heart is sweet with the memory of the first fresh jasmines
that filled my hands when I was a child.

Rabindranath Tagore

The choice of a perfume has as much to do with the regional culture as
with one’s preferences. It is even much more controlled by existing social
codes than by desires believed to be one’s own.

Pierre Bourdon

I've learned, that when you turn out the lights, you don't see a woman's
dress, or her jewels, or the hairstyle she's worked so hard to achieve. You
smell her scent, which is the most intense form of memory. And my secret
is that love has been related to every fragrance I've created. As my
grandfather told me when I was 16, we should always create perfumes for
the women whom we love.

Jean-Paul Guerlain
Where should one use perfume? a young woman asked.
Wherever one wants to be kissed.

Coco Chanel

Fastidious women are as delicately refined in their selection of sweet odours as in every other personal appointment. A high-bred woman does not associate herself with musk or patchouli. The shadow of the clear pungent lavender may precede her but the most sensitive, refined women shrink intuitively from the odours that attract the parvenu. Some of us, in these days of musk and suffocating rose, have frequently wished the promiscuous use of these powerful odours might be restricted.

Harriet Hubbard Ayer

You shall not escape two sermons', he exclaimed. This morning you had the curé's, tonight you shall have the grandfather's. Listen to me; I am going to give you a piece of advice: Adore one another. I don't make undue flourishes. I go right to the point, be happy. The only sages in creation are the turtledoves. The philosophers say: Moderate your joys. I say; Give them full rein. Be enamored like devils. Be rabid. The philosophers talk nonsense. I would like to cram their philosophy back down their throats.

Retro perfumes put us back in touch with who we are at the deepest level, and for this reason they are of great value. (...) In the face of contemporary uniformity, they offer the imagination of a fragrance, their tenacity upon the skin, their capacity to surprise, their evolving notes...they place a bet on personality

Victoire Gobin Daudé

We laugh at the efforts of the musk deer to find the source of the scent which comes from itself and despair at our efforts to find the peace which is our essence.

Ramakrishna

I advise women to switch perfumes. I find sad the type of woman who uses the same perfume all of her life, who, maybe because of her insecurities or lack of personality or taste does not try out other, different fragrances. The woman who appreciates perfume is the one who experiments, alternates, whose scent changes.

Alberto Morillas
For him, there was never enough cold cream applied on her skin, never enough patchouli scenting her handkerchiefs.

Gustave Flaubert (from Madame Bovary)

Of course they visited the parfumeries and indulged in all manner of mingled fragrances, cunning fards, and rare oils. Some of the scents were made from real flowers, others from mysterious unnatural blossoms, whose odours were full of the intoxications of desire. There was Jasmine, full of intangible charm, refined and delicate as a Schubert melody; Geranium, curiously reminiscent of withered loves; unblended Ambergris, that had the power to excite the most anaemic virgins; Civet; Saffron; Benzoin; Stephanotis; Kiss-me-quick; Frangipanni; Cul-me-to-you; Bouquet des Amours; Peau d'Espagne; Fleur d'Amour; Jicky; Bouquet Largillerie; Jardin de mon Curé; and Bosom-Caresser.

from Count Fanny's Nuptials by Simon Arrow, 1907

To me, simplicity is the consecration of an artist - any artist in any domain - be it painting, or sculpture, or perfume. Only when they reach the peak of their talent do artists begin to simplify their work.

Edmond Roudnitska

A women who doesn't wear perfume has no future.

Coco Chanel