



# The Perfume Lover: A Personal History of Scent

*Denyse Beaulieu*

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*The Perfume Lover* is a candid personal account of the process of composing a fragrance, filled with sensual scent descriptions, sexy tidbits, and historical vignettes.

What if the most beautiful night in your life inspired a perfume?

When Denyse Beaulieu was growing up near Montreal, perfume was forbidden in her house, spurring a childhood curiosity that became an intellectual and sensual passion. It is this passion she pursued all the way to Paris, where she now lives, and which led her to become a respected fragrance writer. But little did she know that it would also lead her to achieve a perfume lover's wildest dream: When Denyse tells famous perfumer Bertrand Duchaufour at L'Artisan Parfumeur of a sensual night spent in Seville under a blossoming orange tree, wrapped in the arms of a beautiful man, the story stirs his imagination and together they create a scent that captures the essence of that night. As their unique creative collaboration unfolds, the perfume-in-progress conjures intimate memories, leading Beaulieu to make sense of her life through scents. Throughout the book, she weaves the evocative history of perfumery into her personal journey, in an intensely passionate voice: the masters and the masterpieces, the myths and the myth-busting, down to the molecular mysteries that weld our flesh to flowers.

Now, just to set your nostrils aquiver: *Séville à l'aube* is an orange blossom oriental with zesty, green and balsamic effects, with notes of petitgrain, petitgrain citronnier, orange blossom, beeswax, incense, and lavender, and is now available at fragrance outlets in the U.S.

## The Perfume Lover: A Personal History of Scent Details

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## From Reader Review The Perfume Lover: A Personal History of Scent for online ebook

### Sabrina says

This book is often tagged with the line “What if the most beautiful night in your life inspired a perfume?” So, I was expecting a long, overly-romantic retelling of a heavenly sexual experience that went on for an entire book culminating into “and then it became a perfume”. Which wouldn’t have been a bad thing because hey, everyone could use a lusciously romantic story once in awhile. Especially one that’s actually true.

How very mistaken I was. Denyse is one of the sassiest, most fun writers I’ve read this year. She’s a no-nonsense, sexy, evocative, fashionable woman who knows what she wants when it comes to perfume. And, truth be told, life. The book is an insider’s look into one of the world’s most sensual and precise industries. Denyse manages to take the complexities of chemistry and undertones and duos and quite literally turn you on. The effect is forceful and I was completely caught up in the excitement of conveying a powerful, seductive life experience through scent. And we thought writing was a powerful form of expression!

I have dipped into perfume books in the past and that’s all it’s ever been, a quick dip. I found the history un compelling and the writing too stiff to keep my interest. That changed as Denyse powered through her book, demanding perfection and weaving personal stories with vignettes about perfume. Whether you’re an occasional spritzer, a perfume lover, or an all out scent slut, you will love this book!

PS. It just so happens that I spritzed myself with a tester perfume I got at Sephora before settling down to read this book. I have to say, I was mesmerized by it for the rest of the day. I felt the power of the individual ingredients and was fascinated at the change in what I can only describe as density as the day went on. If I hadn’t been reading The Perfume Lover, I probably would have never noticed how fascinating a scent can be on my own skin. Downside? Now I get to shell out \$90 to get the perfume. Curses!

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### Chloé says

SUCH an interesting concept and for the first two thirds I very much enjoyed the descriptions of sent and learning the compositions of perfume. However, Beaulieu lost me as a reader when she sensationalised her personal life (which is obviously woven into the quest for the sent)to the extent I could not stand her, it became altogether a different book. Disappointing.

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### Monica says

This was the first book I received as a Goodreads giveaway, along with a surprise sample of perfume!

I really would like to give The Perfume Lover a 3.5 - parts of it were fascinating, yet the overall organization kept it from the extra star.

What this book did well is tell the complex story of how a perfume is made. The sections highlighting the author's interactions with perfumer Bertrand Duchaufour were compelling, a true lesson in the evocative power of scent. The snippets of perfume history were also interesting, ranging from biblical times to the

modern regulation of perfume ingredients that have changed some classic scents. While reading the book, I was compelled to visit my (somewhat dwindling) perfume selection and try different scents, looking for the notes Denise Beaulieu describes, and making a list of perfumes I would like to try.

Less compelling were the lengthy explanations of the chemistry of the scents thrown into most of the chapters which, to me, bogged the writing down. Though the book is ostensibly organized by following the journey from a shared story of passion leading to the final creation of a perfume, it sometimes reads a bit like separate essays with the author's reminiscences leading the narrative off on distracting tangents: personal history (very personal, at times), chemical analysis, historical perspective, anecdotes all thrown into the same chapter in a sort of stream-of-consciousness. Sometimes this works; sometimes it is extremely distracting.

Overall, *The Perfume Lover* gives us an engaging look into the world of perfumes and how scent affects us personally, providing insight into what makes perfumes work.

On a separate note, the sample of Seville a l'Aube (the perfume created in the book) that Penguin Books included in the giveaway was truly intoxicating! After reading Beaulieu's story, taking a whiff of the perfume transported me to a Catholic Church filled with orange blossoms and a priest who had smoked a cigar before the mass. (Would that we could know the provenance of all perfumes!) It is available from L'Artisan Parfumeurs for about \$135.

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## **Nancy says**

Probably being not being much for fashion or perfumes, I might not have chosen this book, but rather totally scientific explanation of scent, and perfume making. A friend recommended this to me, and I am thankful she took me out of my comfort zone (okay, so it's rut, not a zone). Beaulieu grew up in Montreal with a father, who though he worked in the pharmaceutical field, forbade the use of perfume. He said he was scent allergic. Of course this becomes the "forbidden fruit" for the author. It becomes her passion, not just in an elemental, sensual way, but in an very intellectual way. Her book recounts her adventure in working with a master perfumer to develop a scent that is based on a story she tells him of a romantic adventure in Seville, Spain. She weaves the two strands of her narrative together to give the reader insight into how a niche perfume is created and how it comes to market.

The author takes issue with the idea, often borrowed from clichés of Proust's madeleine, that scent is all about recalling memories and feelings. She brings out the intellectual work that goes into creating a scent, and the materials that go into perfume formulation, as well as the choices that must be made to be true to the idea, and also developing something that might actually be marketable. The perfume that Beaulieu collaborates on is only quasi-bespoke. The idea is that it will go to market. At the close of this adventure, Beaulieu states that the final scent is a result of choices made, and choices not made, which I suppose one can say about any creative effort, including one's life.

There were times I found the organization and author's tone a tad annoying, but the author knows perfume. She is, after all, telling her story, so she is absorbed in that story. (She says several times that she strongly dislikes the smell of lavender--and yes, it becomes overdone in the South of France, but lavender is a scent I love,--so ouch-- but, hey, that's HER opinion, HER call.) Maybe others would not want to meet Beaulieu for "un café", but I would most certainly take her along if I were buying perfume, which I just may start doing.

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## **Laren says**

It was torture to read this book galley without smelling the perfume it inspired! Anyway, just finishing my

book blurb! Wait and see!

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### **Leslie says**

This woman is utterly besotted with her own beauty, wit, intellect and talent.

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### **Liz B says**

See, here's an example of how someone can write an *interesting* memoir even when she herself is not super likable.

Denyse Beaulieu tells her life story through the lens of perfume, along with the story of working closely with perfumer Bertrand Dechaufour to create the perfume that eventually became Seville a l'Aube from L'Artisan.

I am a perfume hobbyist, so both parts of the story were of particular interest, and I bought a sample of Seville a l'Aube after I finished reading. I know I like that perfume *more* than I would otherwise because of the story associated with it.

So Beaulieu herself is not a bit modest or self-deprecating. She's extremely sexy and she knows it. Faithfulness to lovers is not one of her top priorities. All of this makes her fun to read about and helps to make this an interesting book. I'm glad she's not my friend, though.

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### **Marc Brackett says**

A most interesting mixture of history and a sensual personal story. Like a perfume this story probably wears better on some than others.

I'm a rather bland individual, I buy the cheaper gas, cheap bread, socks in packages of 20, and have no real sophisticated tastes. Thus this books was a step into a whole other world.

The author's approach to developing a new perfume goes, "It should make me want to say a prayer and get my knickers ripped off, *at the same time.*"

Nothing very bland about that, I'm still wondering what that smells like?

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### **Courtney Johnston says**

I spent 85% of this book wanting to smack Denyse Beaulieu in her smug, self-satisfied, ever-so-seductive face. To wit:

Despite my admiration for the cavity-inducing Hypnotic Poison, olfactory pastries were never

something I could get particularly worked up about. I may want to offer myself up at dessert when the mood strikes; I don't want to smell of it. Which is why Bertrand Duchaufour's take on vanilla delights me particularly: it reminds me of something I'd much rather wrap my lips around after dinner than a spoonful of vanilla icecream ... a good cigar.

Or

Finding my own perfume to herald our clandestine love affair wasn't much of a quandary either. As soon as he smelled Serge Lutens' Tubereuse Criminelle between my breasts, Monsieur whispered 'Criminelle' in gloating tones and proceeded to bare them.

Beaulieu's writing certainly isn't notable for its restraint or its effortlessness: it's as LOOK AT ME as Opium or Poison. But I stuck the book (a mixture of memoir and pop-sci, blended around Beaulieu's, a journalist and perfume blogger's collaboration with a French perfumer to make a scent inspired by 'the most beautiful night of her life - I won't go into it, you'll gag - that was eventually released by L'Artisan Parfumeur) out for the other 15%, which introduced me to perfumes I hadn't heard of and taught me some new things. France, for example, is the historic centre of perfumery because Catherine de'Medici brought her Italian perfumer there with her in 1553. Louis XIV's extreme toileting regime (which required his courtiers to attend upon his every movement) and dedication to fashion was partly political - it kept the men at court too busy and too impoverished to plot insurrection.

I can name you several other books on perfume that I recommend above this (start with Chandler Burr's 'Emperor of Scent'). But at the same time, credit to Beaulieu for getting me actively smelling again, and dropping a bundle on a small and intense bottle of Nasamatto's 'Black Afgano'.

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## **Sarah Lachance says**

Just posted this over on Amazon....

I'm resisting the urge to rate this book lower than the three stars I've given it. The book isn't badly written, it's just that the narrator is insufferably self-centered. It is, after all, a personal history of scent, so some degree of self-aggrandizement is to be expected. The author interweaves her past experiences with a present-day narrative of developing a scent based upon one of these stories with Bertrand Duchaufour, perfumist of L'Artisan Parfumeur. Interesting enough.

Where the book veers into unlikeable territory is when she moves from personal anecdotes to interviews and interactions with Duchaufour and other industry luminaries. She writes him as if he's a reluctant puppet to her string-pulling, pouting when he doesn't take her ideas literally or cancels an appointment or takes too long to get back to her. Her utter insistence in defining her relationship with him and the scent (muse, auteur, author) is insufferably boring. She feels a constant need to establish her dominion over the subject matter and experts. Her explication is less about learning from them and their experiences and more about her demonstrating that she knows as much (if not more) than they do.

Examples:

About Hypnotic Poison: "Was the perfumer Annick Menardo aware of what she was doing when she stuck an almond note into its jasmine sambac, musk and vanilla accords? As any reader of classic English murder mysteries knows, you can tell whether a victim has been poisoned with cyanide from the lingering smell of bitter almonds." Menardo's response when caught with the question? "I don't psychoanalyze myself."

About interviewing Serge Lutens: "This isn't an interview where a person extorts as much as she can from another without disclosing anything. Lutens is asking \*me\* questions."

And despite having written a memoir about scent and memory, she writes: "The next time someone brings up the perfume-as-instant-flashback cliché, I may scream."

Yawn.

I do have to credit Beaulieu for being willing to write herself honestly, even if the result is in writing a not-so-likeable character. If you're looking for well-balanced, informative writing on scent, with an unobtrusive narrator, check out the work of Chandler Burr.

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## Melissa says

The Perfume Love by Denyse Beaulieu is an interesting look into the life of a woman and the birth of a perfume. Denyse's father didn't allow perfume in the house when she was a child and because of or in spite of that Denyse was and still is fascinated by scent and the art of creating it. The Perfume Lover is the story of how a memory of a night in Seville became a perfume. Denyse works with perfumer Bertrand Duchaufour to create the scent that represents her memory of the night she spent in Seville during Holy Week. We learn a little about Denyse and her life and a little about the complicated art of creating a perfume. She has the scent memory of the night and Bertrand has the skill to make that scent come to life. It takes more than a year but in the end Denyse and Bertrand are both satisfied with what they created and have found a perfume house to sell it. Denyse says of the world of perfume "The more I learn, the stranger and more magical it gets."

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## Porkpie says

This is one of the best books on perfume out there right now. It blends the hard science of creating a scent with titillating personal memoirs of romantic travels abroad.

The character portrayals are honest without being catty, the descriptive power of the prose is evocative and specific, and the entire book has a wonderful personal voice to it that kept me reading for hours.

Definitely a book for both 'fumeheads (like me) and people only marginally interested in the topic of perfumery.

All in all, a deftly handled piece of journalism and personal memoir and a must-have for anyone interested in the world of perfume. HIGHLY, HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

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## Olivia says

This is an extremely gorgeous story as well as a useful guide for any beginning perfumista...it is also an impressive account of the creative process. Very grateful that Ms. Beaulieu penned her tale and made such a beautiful scent!

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## Becky says

In a word: Pretentious.

That's the only thing I can come up with to describe the horrible-ness that is Denyse Beaulieu's book "The Perfume Lover: A Personal History of Scent." Perhaps "A Crazy, Obsessive Person's Personal History of Scent and Her Love of Herself" would be a better subtitle. Beaulieu merely comes across as condescending, self-important, and insane. She clearly does not have an ounce of self-awareness, because if she did, she would realize that she sounds like a crazy person throughout the entire book. She delights in describing how amazing she is. She braggingly calls herself a "muse" to a perfumer, and refers to her lover as "Monsieur" throughout the book.

Okay, so you know those "ufologists" who use science and/or pseudoscience to explain why they believe in aliens? You can kind of respect them for their beliefs, even if you don't agree with them, because they can at least hold a quasi-intelligent discussion to support their claims. Now think of that crazy farmer who always claims he was abducted and anally probed by an alien spaceship in the middle of the night while standing in his cornfield... That guy does NOT come across as well-read or intelligent. Instead, he seems kinda batshit crazy. Yeah... that's how Beaulieu sounds as she describes perfume, which she clearly thinks is the most important thing in the history of the universe. She actually uses the phrase "this is so tough and tender that, if it were a man, I'd date it" to describe a perfume.

Yeah... like I said. BATSHIT CRAZY.

This is by far the worst book I've ever read, and I find it ASTOUNDING that the author somehow found editors and publishers willing to tell her story. Seriously.

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## Jazzypom says

Before we go any further, you must know three things about Denyse Beaulieu- she writes about perfume, writes about erotica, and is an escapee from a literary background. In her mind, scents and sensuality are inexorably linked, and with the use of literature as historical reference (a smattering of Marquis de Sade here, and Kant there, you understand). Her sexual life is offered to the reader with spread open thighs- to tie all three points together - which doesn't work in the end.

The novel is an introduction to this new perfume that's going to be launched in July by the house of L'Artisan Parfumeur, called Seville at Dawn (but in French, I can't spell it, sorry). The perfume is inspired by the author who spent a night with a stranger in Seville during Holy Week as a teenager, the air redolent with orange blossoms, beeswax, incense, underscored with the stink of tobacco and lust as the guy stuck his hand down her knickers.

Hold that thought, because it comes up again.

Ms Beaulieu stakes her ground with scent being personal, transformational. Life changing, and yet capturing a snapshot of a culture, of a time. Remember how everyone was wearing Obsession back in the 1980s- a heavy, almost cloying, sweaty miasma? One's scent is its own country, she states - a border without boundaries, permeable, distinct yet changeable. With this observation, she launches into the state of perfumery, and I give the book three stars for the insight she gives into the business/art/alchemy of said industry.

The book shines when she speaks about what chemicals a perfumer may use to invoke which scent, the science of top and base notes, and tells the reason why all modern perfumes as we know them tend to smell alike. Surprisingly, it's due to what we like in our detergents and room fresheners, and those scents dictating what we like in our perfumes, think of that philosophy perfume that's supposed to smell like clean laundry, for example. The sickly sweet smell of Bodyworks or Victoria Secret spritzes. Or the relatively light scents of Jo Malone. Pretty, inoffensive, and entirely too fleeting.

In addition to that, she pretty much states why perfumes don't last as long as they used to - because of the customer not wanting to 'search' to see if a perfume suits them any more (in terms of base notes and how it reacts to the skin), the manufacturers stick to top notes, neglecting base notes (no dry down) reducing the ceremony of perfume to nothing more than a .98p bottle of impulse that you buy from superdrug - and keep spraying on through the day because as soon as the scent hits the air, it's a distant memory. Which is okay for something for .89p per 50ml - but for a perfume such as Alien, for £30 for 15ml, it should be unthinkable. Also, there's the threat of reformulated formulas- because it's cheaper that way. The Jicky you remember from so long ago? Now a watered down version of its original self. Mourn for Guerlain, because its perfumes are not what they used to be.

Parts of the book are inspired though - the notion of perfume as scent not having to be \*pretty\* is refreshing. Perfume should have 'skank'- as in, notes of sperm and blood, silage, faecal and body odour. Some flowers do smell like sperm, and others (like the oft coveted jasmine) can smell like decay as well as beauty. It made me understand why the French spray their clothing with linen sprays instead of washing them - the veil of orange blossom and lime softening a body's natural smell but not erasing it. It's given me an impetus to try perfumes that challenge, provoke and perhaps fall in love with.

Now, coming back to that guy and that night in Seville. With the aid of Bertrand Duchaufour, she tries to search for scent to tell the story, to capture the moment. I can see what Ms Beaulieu was trying to do with this - the ribbons of her seduction/awakening sensuality as a teenager weaving in and out of the eyelets of perfumery, industry, the tension between art and commerce, and her past life.

However, she's waylaid by the memories of her sexual experiences, as if she's writing for a more literary Penthouse or erotic confessionals, complete with ellipses (like this...). The short affair she had with the mail man, the long affair she had while married to her husband. In addition to that, her writing style is so affected at turns, you can only shake your head and push on.

Overall, I'd say the book is worth a read, for the terminology of perfume, its spotted history, the process of how a perfumer works to a brief. It's done its job in that it's made me interested in the perfume tie in itself, because I've been to Seville. I too have my own scent memory of Seville - orange blossoms in the evening, with beeswax and fermented fecal matter from the horses' backside. Churros and chocolate. Which chemicals and essential oils would I use for that?

If nothing else, you should read this book if you're looking to find your own scent, because there's enough information to stir you to look further into perfume, and demand more.

