

## Brief History of Perfume

Perfume has played a highly significant role in the beauty industry throughout the ages. Today there are hundreds of fragrance companies producing thousands of perfumes for both men and women, to use at night or during the day. They are made for the young and old alike, using aromatic essential oils or specially designed for a couture house by a specialist 'Nose' who carefully blends a bouquet of different scents to produce a commercial product and set fashion trends.

Incense was used in Ancient Egypt as a perfume and the word itself comes from the Latin 'per fumus' which meant 'through smoke'. Wood and resins were burnt and used in religious ceremonies, just as they are still today.

In Ancient times perfume was used to make the gods happy! The Ancient Egyptians felt that if they smelled beautiful it would please the gods and they would look favourably on them. They also used perfume to embalm dead bodies and they thought the stronger the perfume the more likely their dead relatives would reach Heaven. They even buried perfume with the deceased relatives in their tombs and there is evidence of this in modern excavations of Egyptian tombs. It has been said that when Tutankhamen's tomb was excavated there was still a trace of the perfumes and oils that were buried with him.

Apart from priests only very rich people could afford perfume and they used the beautiful fragrances not only to perfume themselves but also their environment. Another use of perfume was in bathing, a ritual introduced by the Egyptians to the Romans and Greeks who designed bathhouses that were

# susancressy

spa & beauty therapy in practice

---

luxurious and therapeutic as well as a place to cleanse their bodies. The Egyptians used perfumed oils whilst bathing to counteract the drying effects of the scorching sun and added them to creams and potions to moisturise their bodies.

The Greeks and Romans adapted the perfumes from Egypt, producing their own oils and ointments and even a liquid using fragrant powders and oils.



Perfume was stored in beautiful alabaster and porcelain containers before glass became the chosen material. Today perfume manufacturers copy the beautiful designs from ancient Egypt to provide an exotic twist to the fragrant contents. The Greeks loved floral aromas such as rose or lily and they blended them with olive or almond oil and sometimes added orris root and anise. The oils were used both before and after bathing and by both men

and women alike.

The ancient Romans were the experts when it came to bathing, establishing large and spectacular baths wherever they went, there are still many examples of these ancient baths in the UK. They often bathed three times a day and used pots of fragranced oil to perfume themselves.

# susancressy

spa & beauty therapy in practice

---



The Romans were decadent people enjoying their social pastimes and they included fragrance in some unusual ways. It is said that they put perfume on to birds' wings and when they flew, the fragrance would be

wafted around the room, they also allowed their servants to wear perfume so that they filled the room with a pungent mixture of fragrance as they worked.

The spread of Christianity had a detrimental effect on the use of perfumes as they considered the practice indulgent and not in keeping with Christian values. The use of perfume fell even further with the fall of the Roman Empire but because they did not believe in Christianity the followers of Islam continued using perfume.

The art of perfume making spread throughout the world when travel became more common and trading developed between different nations. More fragrances were discovered in the different countries involved in trade and perfume became a status symbol used by the few who could afford some of the expensive fragrances.

A major advancement in the perfume industry occurred when the distillation process was developed by Avicenna an Arabian chemist and doctor who used this method to extract essential oils from flowers. The first flower he extracted fragrance from was the Rose. Prior to this perfume was made from a mixture of oil and crushed herbs or petals and this resulted in a rather heavy

# susancressy

spa & beauty therapy in practice

---

fragrance. The new distillation process produced lighter 'rosewater' which soon became very popular.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century perfume became very popular in France and not only did they use it on their clothing, they also used it on their furniture to make a room smell fragrant.

During the reigns of Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I the use of perfume reached a peak, because Elizabeth couldn't tolerate any bad smells, all public places where she was in attendance would be perfumed. Many of the ladies of the day developed the skill of mixing different scents to create their very own fragrances.

A lighter fragrance than perfume called Eau de cologne was created in the 18<sup>th</sup> century a blend of; rosemary, bergamot, neroli and lemon. The French even used this new lighter fragrance in drinks, food, and as a medicine taken orally and injected. A new industry in ornate glassware was born when the French copied the Egyptian practise of making ornate perfume bottles and the Baccarat glass factory opened in 1765.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the perfume industry became more scientific and chemistry was used to develop new perfumes.

Grasse a small town in Provence became the world's largest supplier of raw materials to make perfume. The people of Grasse first harvested the rose petals of the pink 'rosa centifolia' or May rose. The petals produced a beautiful perfume, however, a huge amount of petals were required to make a small

# susancressy

spa & beauty therapy in practice

---

amount of perfume - 300.000 rose petals were needed to make a kilogram of rose absolute fine perfume.

A method called solvent extraction was used to extract the oils from the petals and this took a long time to refine making this a very expensive perfume. Because this was popular around the world, cheaper copies were soon made in China, India, South Africa and Morocco using cheap labour and large farms.

French perfumes however still remained the best and one of the pioneers of the French perfume industry was Jean Patou who made the world renowned 'Joy' the most expensive perfume in the world. It was made in 1930 for the rich American clients who had suffered losses in the famous, 'Wall Street Crash.' Two fashion houses followed with their own expensive and now famous brands; Chanel No 5 and Guerlain's Shalimar.

Ernest Beaux created Chanel No. 5 for Coco Chanel in 1921. Chanel believed women should wear perfume wherever they hoped to be kissed. Today Chanel No.5 sells a bottle every 30 seconds.