

HISTORY OF PERFUME

Perfume comes from the Latin 'Per' for through and 'Fumus' for smoke.

Later the French gave the name "perfume" to the pleasant smelling smoke drifting through the air from incense burning.

The first form of perfume was incense used 4000 years ago by the Mesopotamians for religious ceremonies.

During the Egyptian/Pharaohs era, citizens were ordered to perfume themselves at least once a week. They were the first fastidious bath takers and later were copied by the Greeks then the Romans.

The creation of the first liquid perfume is attributed to the Greeks. Fragrant powders mixed with heavy oils - olive oil, vegetable oil, almond oil - the beginnings of aromatherapy. These perfumes were applied at least 3 times a day. The Greeks also used to perfume their animals - cats, dogs and horses!

The link that takes the perfume from the past to present day is the Arabs who traded with the Venetians. The process of extracting essential oils from plants through distillation was developed by an Arab doctor using roses.

Before liquid perfumes, perfumes were created by a mixture of crushed herbs or petals, a very strong concoction!

Catherine Medici brought her own perfumer when she married the French King Charles V, thus starting France's dominance in the world of perfume.

Louis XV's court in the 18th century became known as the 'Perfumed Court' as Louis had different scents created each day. These scents were applied to the skin, clothes, furnishings and fans. It took over from bathing!

Napoleon liked violet, orange and jasmine, whilst Josephine liked musk.

Perfume reached its height in the UK during the reign of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. She had all public places that she attended perfumed.

The greatest changes occurred in the 19th century when tastes changed but more importantly developments in chemistry allowed perfumes to be available to the general public.

At the turn of the 20th century perfumes were still single flower fragrances - rose, violet, lilac and lily of the valley. By the end of the first decade a chemical compound, aldehyde, was developed which allowed fragrances to be bound together creating a floral bouquet.

Grasse in Provence, France, was centre of the perfume trade for many centuries due to growing the essential ingredients -jasmine, rose, lavender and oranges. In 1724, Paris became the commercial centre and many of the famous perfume houses that we recognise today were born, such as Roger & Gallet, and Guerlain.

1920's clothes designer Coco Chanel created her first perfume -No 5.

1930's saw the introduction of 'leather' fragrances with floral notes - Joy and Je Reviens.

1950's was the peak of individual designers creating their own scents - Dior, Ricci, Fath, Balmain.

Cologne

French name derived from the German town of Köln.

The origins of cologne started in Italy with a barber Gian Paolo Ferninis, who went to Germany in the 1700's for work and developed a perfumed water - Aqua Admirabilis made from grape spirit, oil of neroli, bergamot, lavender and rosemary. The French dubbed it 'Eau de Cologne' and it was apparently a favourite of Louis XV's mistress Countess du Barry.

Cologne was used in a variety of ways - diluted in bath water, mixed with wine or eaten on sugar lumps. The formula was sold to Roger & Gallet in 1862. The other half of the family stayed in Köln and sold the formula to Wethelm Mulhens of 4711 fame and is the oldest and most continuous fragrance produced and sold today.

Perfumers or 'noses' today must be good chemists and able to distinguish between Rose and Tulip blindfolded in addition to 100 plus other different essences in each formula

Today most perfumes are a blend of natural and synthetic scents and fixatives that equalise evaporation of the blended scents and add an overall pungency to the perfume, contained within an alcohol solution.