



Desperately Seeking SCENT

Jessica Hough had never found a fragrance that she could commit to. Here she sets out on an odyssey to find The One

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LINO BALDISSIN

MY LIFE IN PERFUME – SO FAR

I first created my own fragrance at the tender age of five, eagerly grabbing handfuls of petals from my mother's prize-winning roses and vigorously stuffing them into jam jars. Then began the finely tuned distilling process involving the Guerlain Shalimar from her nightstand, dousing said rose petals with the expensive perfume. A few glugs of Matey bubble bath stirred in with my sister's hairbrush and the process was complete, ready to sell to passing dog walkers over the garden gate. My first actual perfume was Revlon's Charlie Red, which I bought because a girl at school wore it, and she had almost certainly kissed a boy. Second was CK One, because my sister Kate wore it because Kate Moss wore it and I idolised both of them. Next came Gucci Envy, because it came with a free body lotion in Boots at Christmas, and that was followed by a brief summer of love with Elizabeth Arden Sunflowers. Since then, I've pretty much worn whichever perfume I've been given. As a beauty journalist, I have taken part in workshops with top perfumers, sniffed more than my fair share of blotters, and can hold my own in discussions about notes and chypres – but I have never once selected a perfume for myself. This really has nothing to do with my job and everything to do with being a female whose family repeatedly mark Christmas and birthdays with the gift of perfume. I have found my perfect red lipstick, I have found the perfect-fitting jeans, I have even managed to find the right man – so the final frontier must be to find my signature scent. Yet I have little idea how to go about it.



FIRST STOP, THE BEAUTY HALL

Buying fragrance sounds like it should be easy, like buying shoes. It's not. I am of the firm belief that beauty halls are designed to lure women in while simultaneously terrifying them. The bright lights, the shiny surfaces, the blinding smiles on the flawless counter girls. It's just so seductive and yet does nothing but disorient me to the point where I forget what I came in for. Instead, I find myself resembling Edward Scissorhands as I juggle the numerous long card blotters, each with a different scent, none of which I can remember the name of. The golden rule of perfume shopping, as I recall, is to never smell more than three at one time, and to walk away from the counter to let the notes settle. So I wander off, but get so distracted by the endless shelves of glinting bottles that I end up collecting more, rather than whittling down. Clearly I am not ready for an actual retail experience and need to take it a little slower.