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The Development Of The Modern Fragrance Bottle

Title The Development Of The Modern Fragrance Bottle

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Year 1994

Subject Study Of Bottle Shape And Use Of Typography

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank the following for their advice and assistance:

Dr. Frances Ruane - National College of Art and Design

Brendan Carey - Fragrances of Ireland

Miriam Atkinson - Design Box

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. The Pioneers: 1900-40	8
3. The Quiet Years: 1940-70	20
4. The New Breed Of Designers: 1970-Present	24
5. Conclusion	31
6. Bibliography	33

Chapter 1

Introduction

One of the oldest forms of human cultivation is the use of cosmetics and fragrances. Developing out of traditions of deep-rooted rites and hygiene, they were an integral part of the lives of primitive peoples in Asia, Africa and South America. The use of earth colours and ashes as natural cosmetics is still practiced by some tribes and plays an important role, emphasising rank, soothing the spirits of wild animals and demonstrating strength against enemies.

The idea of transforming ourselves through changing our image is inherent and probably comes from our yearning for eternal youth and beauty. The fact that an entire industry has sprung up to satisfy these needs can be seen as a logical outgrowth of our affluence. But this does not mean cosmetics and skin care are a superfluous luxury even in our present society. Not at all above and beyond the purely hygienic aspect, they fulfil a series of important functions.

These days the desire to be beautiful can be achieved to some extent by manipulating our looks. Self confidence, image cultivation and individuality are all terms that are gaining more and more importance in daily life. Even if we do not like to admit it, the old concept still applies: anyone who looks and smells good finds it easier to get along with people.

I will be using the word fragrances to collectively refer to male aftershave, eau de toilette and female perfumes etc. The difference in the names refers to the fact that perfume is the longest lasting

scent on the skin. Up to 38% of perfume is fragrance essence. It can be costly because of the ingredients - 1Kilo of one of the most common base ingredients,Tuberose, can cost £14,000. Eau de perfume has between 8% and 14% fragrance essence and Eau de Toilette has between 3% and 8% fragrance essence.(Oliver, Lucy, 1993, p.21-24)

This thesis intends to look specifically at the development of the design of the flacon and the use and development of typography on these flacons. The word flacon is a general term to describe all types of fragrance bottles. And as I have discovered there has been very little writing which shows the progress and development of the flacon through any part of history. The use of the typography on these flacons can often give tell-tale signs of the release date, target market and price of a fragrance. This thesis will try to compare fragrance flacons whenever possible to find out this sort of information. Unfortunately most fragrance manufacturers have not seemed as interested in the external packaging or as it is more commonly known the box. There are however a few exceptions to the rule and I will be referring to any particular examples of note. The main force behind the development of flacon design came from the French glass manufacturers such as Baccarat and Lalique. As the industry develops into the 1950s it is evident that the great names in glass manufacturing become less dominant as the glass technology becomes more widely available to the smaller less known companies, who often remain anonymous in the later part of the thesis. I have named Chapter three as the quiet years as very little visual references is available on this period. In my opinion the deterioration in flacon design quality,in chapter three is due to the ease of accesiability of glass producing/manufacturing machinery by business-



Fig. 1.1

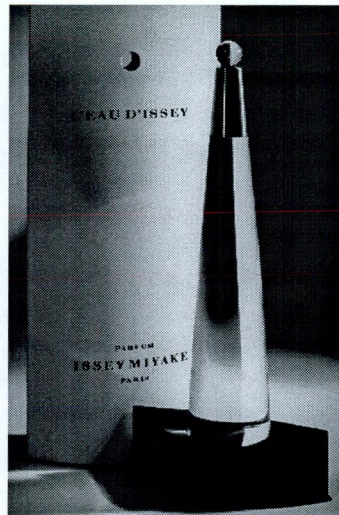


Fig. 1.2

men not designers. I feel is a common occurrence in the history of design with the naive belief that the technology can design. The end result is inevitably a poor quality product.

In Chapter four I investigate the most recent trend of fashion designers who endorse and distribute the fragrances taking all the credit for the designs of the fragrances and flacons. And in fact these elements are commissioned or tendered to smaller design agencies in the areas of Graphics, Product or Industrial Design.

As far as my research has shown no author has previously investigated the relationship between the development of typography and the fragrance flacon. The source material for most of my thesis research has come from three different areas. The first being the history and development of glass, being only concerned with the flacon development. The second source was to be from the many text books available on the development of typography. The final source, which relates more to the contemporary fragrances, is from the fashion and design periodicals. The reason for this possibly alternative location for the third source is in my opinion that most of the contemporary fragrances are developed through fashion houses and these periodicals are what they use as one of their largest media spaces.

The world fragrance market at present is valued at £30¹ billion annually. And with a new fragrance launch occurring on average every six days, there are a lot of examples to choose from. I will be examining a sample of the leaders, the failures and the novelty or bizarre looking fragrances from the earliest ≈1900 (Fig. 1.1)² right up to the latest ≈1994 (Fig. 1.2)³. These flacon designs will also vary in construction from the use of some of the cheapest materials to the most precious known to man. Analysing

1. Armstrong, 1993, p.162.

2. First ever Lalique fragrance flacon

3. Contemporary fragrance flacon, by Issey Miyake



the design ingredients and concepts throughout the history of the flacon I hope to show how our contemporary fragrance flacons developed, and how they compare to their predecessors. Through these findings it may be possible to suggest briefly the shape of things to come.

A brief overview of the early centuries in which fragrance played a role will help to set the scene for the subsequent chapters. Man's use of fragrances that are obtained naturally from flowers, herbs, roots and grasses has existed on record as far back as the Old and New Testaments, notably frankincense and myrrh. Spice-derived fragrances- especially in the form of burning incense- were among the first used in early ancient and later biblical times. Around A.D. 900 an Arabian physician, Avicenna, was probably the first to use distillation to extract volatile oils from flowers, fragrant rose water being one of his creations. Early Egyptian perfume containers have survived and interestingly, although some are carved calcite (similar to alabaster) and onyx, most are made of opaque glass, such as a turquoise flacon bearing the name of Queen Hatshepsut dating to 1500B.C. These were largely made by wrapping molten glass around a core of sand made from techniques first learnt from the phoenicians, who developed glass blowing techniques around 1000B.C.

The classical Romans produced large amounts of glass, and their flacons were generally translucent, crystal or semicrystal glass with globular bodies and long necks terminating in wide rims. With the return of the crusades, to the West from the mysterious East, a revival of interest in fragrances took place. By the Twelfth century, the forerunners of modern *perfumer* appear in the annals of history. In England, the Guild of Pepperers⁴ in London, referred to as early as 1179, comprised merchants who sold

4. importer of oriental goods

drugs, spices and perfumed waters. Perfumes were highly popular in Tudor England, though most of these were imported from Italy and France. In Italy the allure of perfume first made itself felt in the early 1500s in Venice, which was then a very important centre of commerce. It was during the 1500s that florentine glassmakers created fragrance flacons, usually of cut crystal.

It was not until the Eighteenth Century that perfume became a major industry and this occurred in France. This was displayed clearly by the court of Louis XV, which was sometimes referred to as la cour parfumée (the perfumed court). Names which we are quite familiar today were created during this period - Houbigant and Roger et Gallet, both of which commissioned Lalique to design flacons for them. In England and America, too, still-existent perfumers started out in the 1700s, including Woods of Windsor, Floris and Yardley in Britain and Caswell-Massey in Newport, Rhode Island. Fragrances in the 1800s were only affordable by figures in high society. However everything was soon to change. (Mary lou, 1991, p.7-14)

Chapter 2

The Pioneers: 1900-40

In the early part of the 1900s fragrance flacons were made by major glass making firms such as Baccarat and Lalique in France. The only competition to these French companies came from Great Britain- these companies being Stephenson & Williams and Thomas Webb & Sons. Unfortunately however these British glass manufacturers did not have great perfumers to create fragrances to fill their flacons as did the French.

In France, we can see that the vibrancy of contemporary artistic movements such as Impressionism, Symbolism and Art Nouveau, (to name but a few), were questioning people's concept of art and design. These thoughts were to find their way into the designs of the great glass makers. Glass lent itself well to the concept of Art Nouveau, an international style of decoration that matured steadily through the 1890s, reaching its peak at the turn of the century, and continuing to be fashionable until the end of the following decade. There were two main decorative styles in Art Nouveau. The one most commonly associated with the movement, and developed in France and Belgium, drew its inspiration from nature, creating a decorative style by exaggerating the curvilinear shapes of plant forms, with stems and tendrils twisting almost beyond recognition forming complex patterns. These distortions were meant to express the emotional force of nature. The second style, the linear two dimensional and symbolic conception of Art Nouveau, reached a state of mature geometric elegance in the work of Charles Rennie Mackintosh.



As the glass industry found itself becoming increasingly mechanised by the dawn of the new century, the perfumers equally had their developments: namely, Aldehydes. These Aldehydes were chemical fragrances which could save the perfumers the large expense of purchasing all natural ingredients.

*"The recent discoveries of chemical ingredients which, to a great extent, could replace the rare and costly essences which had been necessary to fix scents, meant that perfumes could be produced in a greater quantities and in a wider range of varieties."*¹

A new problem had now arisen where by the hand designed flacons in which the scents were sold were now more costly than the liquids inside. This situation gave the druggist a golden opportunity to profit. The druggist could purchase the chemical ingredients, mix their own fragrances, and sell these fragrances in plain pharmaceutical bottles wrapped in plain waxed paper. It is at this stage of history that the design of the flacon had to communicate with the customer. Otherwise the cheaper more homogenous brand would have taken too large a share of the market.

Baccarat, Lalique and Poiret, the French flacon design pioneers, were now being utilised to their full. Perfumers such as Coty, Worth and Guerlain teamed up with these glass craftsmen to produce commercially designed fragrances.

Into this new market of craftsman and perfumer came the first team to produce a fragrance and flacon. They were Coty and Lalique. François Coty and René Lalique together would manufacture their

1. Martin Battersby, 1971, p.65.



Fig. 1.1

finest fragrance, present it in a very tasteful and simple container and sell it at a reasonable price (Fig 1.1). This flacon is especially elegant with its neoclassical female figures in relief emphasised by a *pâtiné* (form of glass colouring or tinting). Since Lalique designed this piece in 1910, I would tend to feel that he was no follower of fashion. With all the excitement in the art world right on his very doorstep, he produced a flacon in a neoclassical style. Realising that crystal is one of the finest transporters of light, he had a golden opportunity to explore light through the design of the flacon as other artists were doing with their canvases. Was this a conscious decision on Lalique's behalf to differentiate the Arts from the Crafts? (Dawes, 1986, p. 13-16)

The following quote describes the state of glass design and Lalique's own mood when, in about 1905, Coty and Lalique first made contact.

"With the exception of Gallé, very few (glass) artists had seen the part which could be played both industrially and artistically by this admirable material. But Lalique's fertile imagination saw all its decorative possibilities.....to infinity. Was it not then a case of building up everything again - or rebuilding?"

He was in this state of mind when he was visited by the perfumer, Coty, who came to ask him to make glass labels for the scent-bottles manufactured by the Cristalleries de Baccarat. First of all, Lalique refused. To design the whole bottle might interest him, but to add a decorative motive to an already existing bottle seemed to him purile and supererogatory. If M.Coty would leave him free to do what he liked, he, Lalique,



Fig. 1.2

would be satisfied. So M. Coty gave in....(Lalique)was enamoured of the idea of making the scent bottle a work of Art, a precious vessel containing a precious essence."²

Baccarat, too, participated closely in the innovation of Coty. In 1906, Coty commissioned a flacon from the Baccarat crystalworks for a rose based perfume which would be costlier than usual in its crystal container. The story of how Coty overcame the refusal of a large department store's director to stock the new perfume has become a legend in the industry. Upon leaving the director's office, Coty deliberately dropped the costly flacon on the staircase. In shattering, the fragrance of roses evaporated into the air, creating such a demand for it among the store's customers, that the director himself called Coty the next day with a substantial order.

The relationship between Baccarat and Coty was the turning point for the crystalworks of Baccarat. There was now no reason to restrain the designs of the flacon, with regard to manufacturing costs, as Coty had proved his point that people were willing to pay a high price if the product was good enough, both in its appearance and its contents (fragrance). Baccarat's clientele list was to grow steadily from this point onwards. Baccarat now began to experiment a little more in his designs, which will be discussed a little further on. Design modifications were at first limited to the moulded shape of the stopper. Then, gradually, the stopper began to influence the shape of the flacons themselves. The most innovative of these were the flacons designed for parfums D'Orsay (Fig 1.2) (Curtis, 1992, p.14)

Preceding the war Baccarat worked with the most prominent perfume producers. Besides Coty,

2. Gabriel Mourey, "Lalique's Glassware", Commercial Art, July 1926, 32, 34.

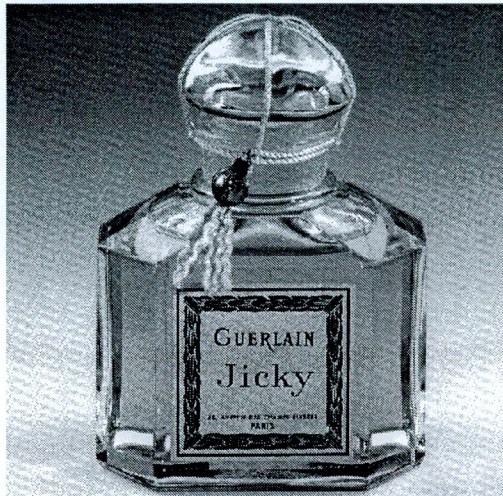


Fig. 1.3



Fig. 1.4

there were the houses of Roger & Gallet, Bourjois and the most prestigious of all, Guerlain. The Guerlain flacons resembled no others, yet they reflected the taste of the time, and are more or less recognisable as to period (Fig 1.3 and 1.4)

The Guerlain flacon, Fig 1.3, is not dissimilar in its physical shape, with its sturdy sharp rectangular features, to Fig 1.4, with its 'gendarme's cap' stopper, except for the typography on the printed paper labels. These two examples are some of the forerunners of flacons to have printed labels attached to their facades. Both of these flacons were used to contain up to four different fragrances between 1908-47 and 1912-47 respectively. Fig 1.4 was used to contain the fragrances called Fol Arome, Mitsouko and L'Heure Bleue.

By comparing the typography on each of the labels of Fig 1.3 and Fig 1.4 we can suggest a date for the launch of each fragrance, as no official record is available. *Jicky* consists of 3 typefaces the prominent face being the word *Jicky* printed in, upper and lower case, a typeface which was based on Bodoni, according to the Vox classification (Fig 1.5). The Vox classification which was developed in the mid 1950s by French typographer Maximilien Vox³ (1894 - 1974). It is a substitute for the traditional rough-and-ready terms such as Old Style, Modern, Transitional, Egyptian, Sans-Serif and Latin; the more descriptive term Incises, describes all types with pointed serifs while Manuaines describes all pen and brush-formed letters. This Bodoni like face gives us a sense of the modern look which makes it almost timeless. But the brand name Guerlain on Fig 1.3 was set in a later version of an Art Nouveau typeface, suggesting the year 1910. (Carter, 1987, p.15)

3. Founder-editor of the journal *Caractère*, and founder President of the Typographers Summer school at Lurs-en-Provence.

aei

Mesones
Sub-scripted Egyptian.

aei

Lindes
Semi-script.

aei

Inches
Types with pointed serifs, however unusual, based on above-on lettering. Fatigue.

aei

Manuscript
Pen and brush-formal letters, including all blackletter.

aei

Scripture
Scripts with joining lines.

aei

Humanities
Early roman faces such as Jenson's.

aei

Gothic
Later romans from printers such as Aldus Manutius and his punchcutters Francesco Griffo, and from the punchcutter Claude Garamond.

aei

Reales
Traditional faces. The Reales group was later renamed 'Garamond' from Philippe Garamond's Roman du roi and Reales de Carbon and Jomard are included in this category.

aei

Diaries
Modern face: Didot and Bodoni.

Fig. 1.5

ECKMANN

Geschnitten nach den Entwürfen
des Herrn Professor O. Eckmann

Fig. 1.6

The word Guerlain in Fig 1.4 appears to have been created earlier because of its fat rather unrefined Art Nouveau typeface. This Art Nouveau typeface is very similar to Eckmannschrift, typeset by Otto Eckmann in 1900 (Fig 1.6). From this information I can suggest that Jicky Fig 1.3 was launched prior to Mitsouko Fig 1.4 by maybe ten years.

Apart from this, the label of Jicky has both typographically and physically achieved more sympathy with the shape of the flacon than Mitsouko. The Jicky label, with its square edged shape, sits well on the flacon, whereas the circular shape of the Mitsouko label is similar in appearance to a life ring, stuck onto the flacon for no apparent reason other than to display information about the product in an indifferent way.

The glass manufacturer's signatures were always engraved onto the finished piece with a diamond-point drill. These signatures have always been discrete but still recognisable, as they were often as much a selling point as the fragrances themselves.

Fragrance logotypes were in general, etched onto the mould of the flacon, so as to appear in relief on the surface of the moulded glass flacon. These logos were then often painted by hand to further enhance their clarity. There were no techniques similar to screen printing available in the early 1900s, hand painting texts and images were the only method of applying inks.

It was in 1910 that the first handmade cardboard containers for fragrance flacons were introduced. Coty was the man to introduce this concept with the help of the designers from Lalique. Unfortunately there are no visual records of this piece. In 1920 the parfumeurs Roger et Gallet created



Fig. 1.7

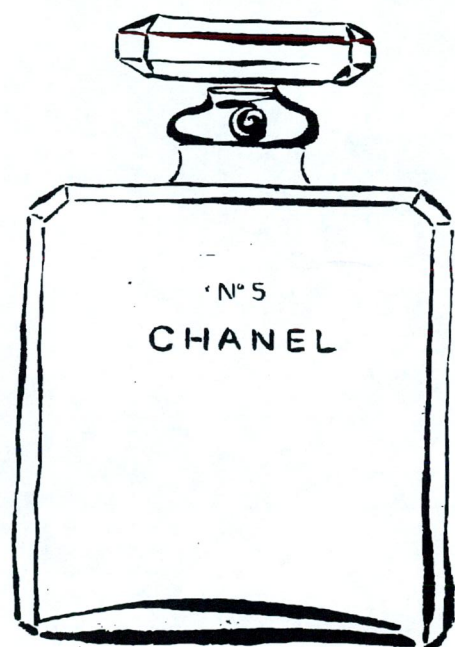


Fig. 1.8.a

what has now become the earliest surviving example of a cardboard box container for their fragrance "Le Jade" (Fig 1.7). The pattern on the box is based on Japanese woodcut print block patterns. The influence of the Japanese woodcut pattern most likely stemmed from the opening up of Japan to the West and the publication of pattern-books illustrating ornaments from around the world. Semi-abstract in appearance, it shows bird like images over a water lilly patterned background. This concept of using images from far away places was the first of many to appear in the years 1900 -1940. The flacon inside this box was modelled like a chinese snuff bottle and made in jade-green glass to emphasise the precious nature of its contents. (Dawes, 1986, p.61)

In 1920 one of the all time classics was to appear. This flacon has had very few changes made to its design and it looks nearly exactly the same today as it did in 1920. Ernst Beaux presented fashion designer, Coco Chanel, with ten fragrance compositions. The fifth fragrance composition was chosen and was named accordingly. The fragrance was and still is an aldehydic (chemical fragrance) one, which means it has a sparkling, fizzy quality, that no-one had ever smelt before. Trimming away the lace and flowers from fragrance bottles, Chanel introduced a pure geometry that was considered the forerunner of modern fragrance packaging (Fig. 1.8a). This Chanel No.5 is in my opinion a fascinating move. For Chanel to think in (design terms) along these stark design principles in the 1920s was brave especially considering that most other design mediums were being abstracted and ornamented all around her. This step forward with the use of Sans-Serif type on a sharp edged label on an equally sharp cut crystal flacon was quite unique. The typography is especially interesting as it rebels against the flourishes of the then



Fig. 1.8.b



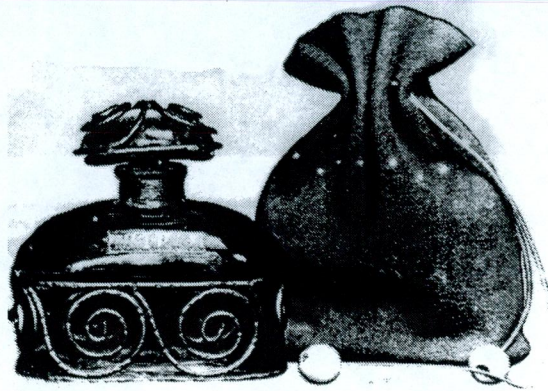
Fig. 1.9

more fashionable late Art Nouveau / Deco typefaces. Looking over at (Fig. 1.8b) you can see how even the cross bars are rebelling when they go below half the X-height in new Sans-Serif⁴ compared to the late Art Nouveau cross bar which is above half the X-height. The squareness of the letterforms in Chane's text also contrasts strongly with the elongated letterforms of its contemporaries. (Oliver, 1993, p.22)

In 1923 Baccarat got their opportunity to compete in this new trend of oriental images when perfumer Forest commissioned a design for their fragrance "*Ming Toy*" (Fig 1.9). The name itself is so nasty, it's obvious that they were exploiting possible sales based on the popularity of the oriental look. The flacon itself is modelled on a Chinese lady kneeling and fanning herself- the flacon is too representative of the subject and becomes terribly cheap looking. There is, however, one positive aspect to this piece, which is the typography or rather the positioning of the typography. This type arrangement is one of the earliest examples of type placed asymmetrically. The shape of the fan has been cleverly and bravely used for the background of the type. The letters themselves are of little interest as they are more of a hand script than a designed typeface making them difficult to date or compare.

It is at this point in history that the marriage of fragrance and fashion occurs and Paul Poiret was the man to take the first step from couture to perfume. Rosine perfumes had just come into being, with Poiret as their manager, in charge of bottling, fragrances, packaging and presentation. Poiret, in my opinion was the first to develop fragrances into a marketing package. He was one of the first people to create a range of toiletries, scented soaps, powder, lotion, beauty cream and talc as well as eyeshadow, rouge, foundation cream and nail varnish. One of his first marketing schemes was to send out scented

4. Sans Serif is the name given to a typeface with square endings as opposed to traditional wedged shaped finishing strokes e.g. N as opposed to N



1.10

cards with his invitations. In 1925 he commissioned the painter Rousin to design some fans to be handed out to the ladies who came to his fashion shows. The fans were each given a scent and marked with a little coloured disc to identify which of Poiret's perfumes was given off by each fan.

Poiret's classic and most remembered packaging concept was for his fragrance "*My Grandmothers Perfume*". This seems a strange partnership, to relate a fragrance with an elderly lady as a selling tool? Unfortunately there is no visual record of this remarkably named fragrance. It was apparently wrapped in a check handkerchief inside its case, to protect it during transport remembering that Europe was still feeling the effects of war at the time of its launch.

It's refreshing to look back and see that a man with no background in glass design or production went ahead and designed and produced flacons that were commercially successful. In my opinion Poiret's fresh approach definitely worked. The interplay of names of fragrances and flacon design was imaginative and typical of Poiret's work. Take, for example, the stalk of an apple coming out of the stopper of "*Fruit Défendu*", *forbidden fruit*. A personal favourite of mine is entitled "*Le Balcon*". This small dome shaped flacon, (Fig 1.10), has an unusual spiral steel cage surrounding the base and the stopper. But the most fascinating part of the design is the use of a plain soft cloth purse with a leather strap attached for closing. This concept of using a cloth bag instead of a cardboard box was very innovative and practical as it can also be used for an alternative use afterwards. (Fox, 1982, p.231)

Moving into the early part of the 1930s, flacon design began to develop its own characteristics. It was no longer a design necessity to replicate in glass styles or fashion trends from other areas of

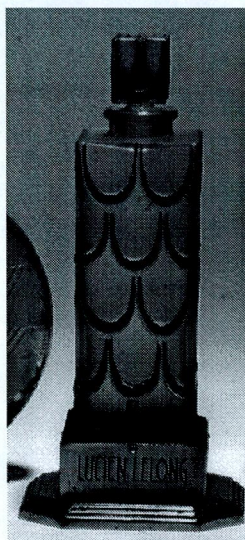


Fig. 1.11

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
 abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
 1234567890

Fig. 1.12

design. The flacon itself was developing a simpler, cleaner, more mature style of its own. And hence, the birth of what we now perceive of as a typically contemporary example of a fragrance flacon. There are very few examples in the years to come that simply look like reduced figurines with stoppers in their heads functioning as fragrance flacons. An early example of this independent style would be the fragrance by, and named after, "*Lucien Lelong*" (Fig 1.11). This flacon for Lucien Lelong was designed by Lalique. Its steel base with its art Deco style typography acts as a plinth for a modern rectangular elegantly styled flacon. There is an interesting fish scale pattern on the sides and stopper of the flacon which gives it a draped look, like flowing water. The positioning of this logotype on Lucien Lelong is one of the finest examples of typography positioning, in my opinion, up to this point in history. This use of an elongated typeface shows a great understanding or compassion to the flacon.

It would appear that at the turn of the 1930s the glass manufacturers/designers were very much behind in respect to design development. If one takes the typography on the flacon "*Lucien Lelong*" and compares it to any of the then contemporary typefaces like Monotypes Gill Sans⁵ (Fig 1.12) it's a strong indication that the glass manufacturers/designers were not concerned with keeping up to date with the developments of the typographers. Gill Sans is extremely versatile and could have been used on "*Lucien Lelong*" to give it more of the modern feel to which it seems to aspire to.

On a more further reaching comparison some very radical looking flacon designs could have been created around the 1930s, if compared to book cover designs of that time. Both have a similar design brief/criteria; to protect the contents and inform the potential customer through a visual sugges-

5. Gill Sans was designed by Eric Gill in 1929

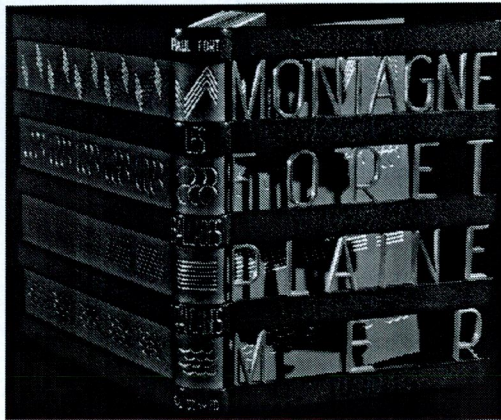


Fig. 1.13

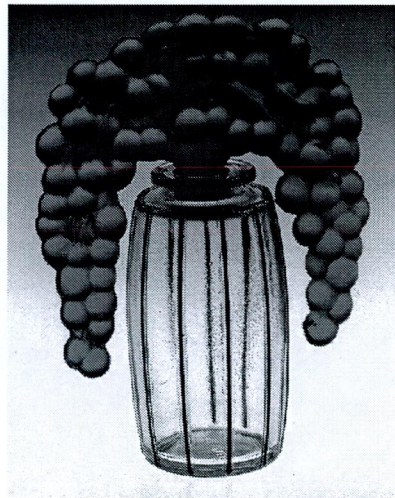


Fig. 1.14

tion of what the contents may hold. We can see very exciting forms during this period such as Paul Bonet's book jacket design (Fig 1.13). This does not reflect an average book cover of that period but can give us an insight into the progress of typography in other fields of design.

This is an amazing piece of design, even sixty years on. This book cover has inlays of leather, gold-tooling, palladium, and pierced and lacquered duralumin. We must remember that the materials for the book are different from the crystal flacons must be taken into consideration, but the fact still remains that this concept or design style could have easily been carried over to glass. I do not know if there was much of a difference in production numbers, and as a result cost per unit decreases the higher the production number. My only theory on the design differentiation therefore is that the fragrances were sold to a more traditional buyer than the books, which might have had a more radical audience. (Cornish, 1977, p.43)

Meanwhile, Lalique was further developing a late Art Nouveau style with the production of new flacons with glorious, cascading, crescent-like stoppers of bouquets. Their overflowing sprays and branches were presented not in a very typical Art Nouveau style but in a later development of this style. There was a more solid mass to the limbs, stems, flowers and berries against solid glass backgrounds. These flacons were named after their bouchons or stoppers for example Bouchon Cassis, Bouchon Fleurs de pommier, Bouchon eucalyptus. Their bodies were generally cylindrically shaped, but gently tapered at both top and bottom to conform with the horseshoe shape of the stoppers (Fig. 1.14).

Lalique did, however, develop flacons in the early 1930s that were not so Art Nouveau in



Fig. 1.15

appearance. A typical example of this would be the "Telline" flacon, 1930, (Fig. 1.15). In this piece we see a cleaner more modern approach to the design which is based on a scallop shell. The shape of the scallop shell adapts well to this squat flacon that is only four inches in height. Note how the stopper on "Telline" is a miniature scallop shell, echoing the shape of the flacon itself. Similar to Laliques "Jade" one finds that no typography is used on this particular flacon either.

1930 was also the year that Paul Poiret was to wake up to financial disaster when Rosines perfumes, owned by Poiret, literally disappeared overnight. But from that era Poiret instigated and gave to us forever the relationship of couturier and fragrance.

It was not until 1945 that people reflected back on the genius of Paul Poiret when Edmond Roudniska launched a fragrance called "Femme" , and at the opening of the launch paid tribute to the man he called "a true medium of modern art". In Roudniska's⁶ catalogue of the launch he is quoted as saying "No couturier before him had thought of linking perfumes and dresses...As for his perfumes, it seems they were the sumptuous dreams of a poet", and "each bottle was a work of art, carefully fashioned so as to have complete affinity and be in deep harmony with the perfume it contained."

6. Roudniska married Marcel Rochas and was a prominent man in the Business of fragrances

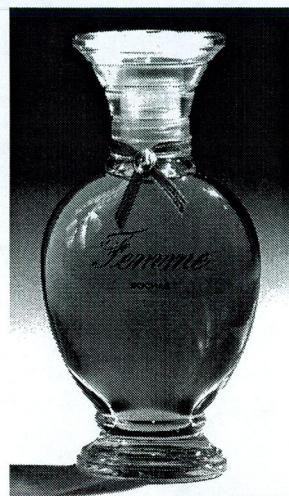


Fig. 1.1

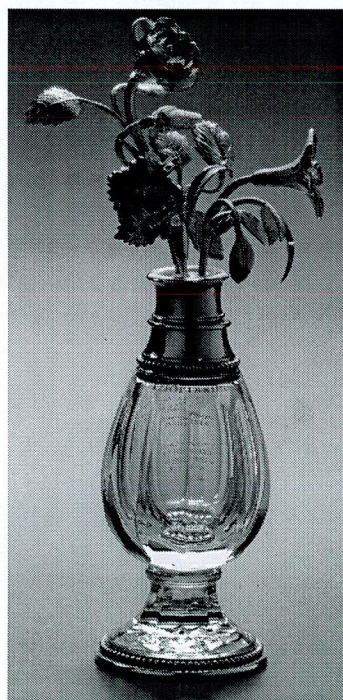


Fig. 1.2

Chapter Three

The Quiet Years: 1940-1970

With world war II stemming from 1938-45 fragrance production and development as with many other luxury item, was left dormant in the back of everyones mind. However some of the great parfumeurs took this time to work away on new fragrances in their workshops. The first successful launch in this period was due to what Roudnitska did half a century ago when, as a parfumeur of the French fragrance house of de Laire, he came up with the fragrance called "Femme" (Fig. 1.1), for Marcel Rochas. The special methylionone variant, never used before, was discovered during the wartime occupation of France. Since new shipments of raw materials were at the time unobtainable, Roudnitska was nosing¹ through the contents of several hundred drums of fragrance leftovers and by-products in the backyard of the de Laire plant, on the outskirts of Paris. Through these so called leftovers came the birth of "Femme", a fragrance which stood the test of time and therefore must be considered a classic as it is still available fifty years later. "Femme" was one of the first flacons to use a script typeface for it's logotype. Script typefaces had been available since the early part of the nineteenth-century but none were to look as refined as "Femme". Again the manufacturers name appears in all capitals set in a sans serif approximately twenty percent the size of the fragrance name similar to "Jicky" (Fig. 1.3 Chap.2). It was during this period stemming from the forties until the late fifties that the previously popular Art Nouveau type-

1. A term used reffering to the smelling of fragrances

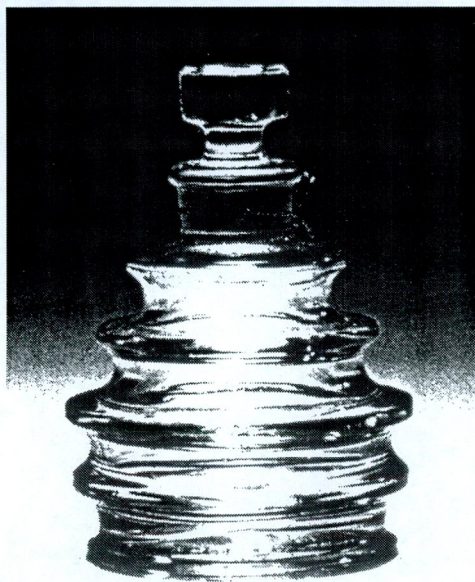


Fig. 1.3



Fig. 1.4

faces were finally laid to rest. In studying the new flacons of this age with Baccarat and Lalique, considerable similarities can be noted. Both "Diorissimo" (Fig. 1.2) and "Femme" manufactured by Baccarat and Lalique respectively have an uncanny resemblance to one another. However "Femme" was manufactured ten years prior to "Diorissimo". For several reasons I believe that "Femme" was before its time; for example, the fact that Lalique disregarded the use of an elaborate stopper, I believe was a conscious design decision. I feel that Lalique did not see it necessary to develop the previously abstracted forms of nature to a now natural looking form as Baccarat did in "Diorissimo". Baccarat created an excellent rendering of what appears to be dandolines on the stopper of "Diorissimo". Was this type of style still in fashion? I cant say for definite but my research would lead me to believe it was not. As far as one can see it was the last of these overly developed stoppers, to emerge at that time.

Between the development of "Femme" and "Diorissimo" came "Imprudence" (Fig. 1.3) in 1952. This flacon was designed by Lalique for The House of Worth. Worth's "Imprudence" was available in a starkly modern, clear glass flacon consisting of a set of graduated discs and ending in a matching stopper. I believe "Imprudence" to mark a significant design development, in the sense that this abstracted shape seems to have come from the designers own concept and was not developed for the convenience of the glass production techniques, like the many rectangular flacons that appeared previously (which are too bland and conformist to merit in comparison to the many interesting flacons produced). (McClinton, 1975, p.68)

It was in 1945 that the fragrance house of Schiaparelli commissioned the surrealist artist



Fig. 1.5



Fig. 1.6

Salvador Dali to design a flacon for their fragrance called "Le Roi Soleil" (Fig. 1.4). This piece broke even further people's perception of what a fragrance flacon should look like. The stopper, in a similar way to Laliques "Bouchon Cassis", grabs the attention of our eyes first leading us down to look at the rippled surface of the flacon. The asymmetrical shape of the sun is the design feature which I feel captivates the attention. Secondary to this is the typical characteristic of Dalis work which is to use objects out of our usual perception and reuse them to form a completely different picture. In this case Dali has used birds to form a face on the sun, whereas looking at it from another perspective it could well be birds flying in the sky with the sun behind them creating silhouettes.

Looking on another eight years we see the rebirth of the unappealing flacon, similar to "Ming Toy", In 1963 there was the launch of a fragrance called "Smoking" (Fig. 1.5) which collected a packaging award from Graphis, a highly regarded design publications company. In my opinion this flacon must be one of the most undesirable flacons ever produced. It's name, shape and typography bear no conscious relationship to one another.

Another award winning fragrance package called "12 Bore" (Fig. 1.6), referring to the size of a shotgun cartridge, was launched in 1968. Again it is novelty market material and would leave me to believe that it received awards for the material used in its construction and not for its appearance.

The Baccarat works at this point in time was suffering badly and recorded employment figures as low as 300 whereas in 1910 it was around 2000. Was this due to the advances in manufacturing technology producing cheaper glass flacons for the mass market? It was in this year that Baccarat produced

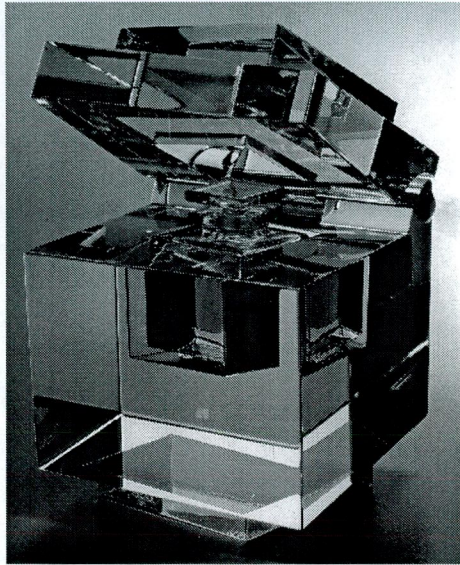


Fig. 1.7

what I believe to be one of the most incredible looking flacons for Versace (Fig.1.7). There is no name for this fragrance other than "Versace" and no information is available about its development. It has one unique feature that no other fragrance flacon had before or after. This feature is the glass box which the simple flacon comes in. This shape uses the qualities of the crystal to carry light like no other flacon.

Chapter 4

The New Breed Of Designers: 1970 - present

In this age 80%¹ of fragrances are bought as a direct result of their physical appearance. Their size, shape, colouring and packaging, are designed to appeal to the eye, and conjour images in the mind. 80% may seem a very high figure but we as a society depend on visual signals for nearly every purchasing decision. These fragrance flacons give out far more signals than we would like to imagine. When the customers approach the fragrance counter they are blinded with arrays of appealing brands and packages. The less secure a purchaser is, the more he or she depends on the package signals to tell him /her who they should be associated with and offers them the opportunity to buy into a lifestyle i.e. Chanel offers a chic sophisticated image.

The three most dominant men, today, in the area of creating distinctive shelf personalities, are Pierre Dinand, Serge Mansou and Joel Desgrippes, and they are all based in Paris, still regarded as the home of haute perfume. The question that must be asked about the work of these contemporary designers is how has their work developed or progressed from the early masters such as Baccarat and Lalique. New manufacturing techniques and materials obviously play a large role in the technical design differences between the years of 1900 and 1990. First let us consider the backgrounds of these popular

1. *Looks* magazine, Dec 1993, London, P22.

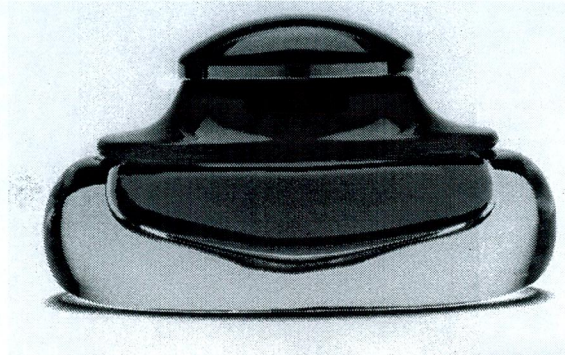


Fig. 1.1

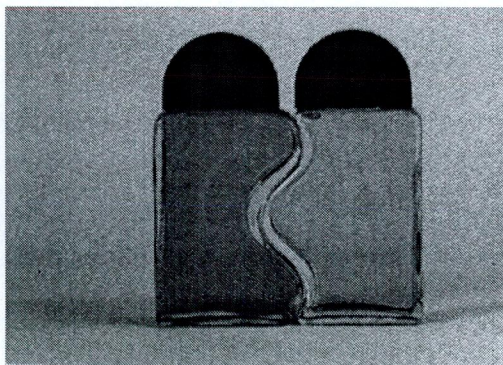


Fig. 1.2

and contemporary flacon designers, where a radical difference is evident, in the education and experience of these people, compared to the earlier designers. The word craft has almost totally left the curriculum vitae of these designers. Is this change for the good or the bad, and how did it evolve? To answer this we must first of all look at their backgrounds.

The first of these package designers is Pierre Dinand, whose background is in architecture. This is what gives Dinand's work a highly structured and spatial quality. His expertise is evident in his work on the fragrances Opium, Invoire de Balmain, Azzarro, Von Cleef & Arpels, Moschino and Paco Rabanne. In 1968 Dinand excelled with his innovation by being the first designer to mix glass with plastic in one bottle. He did this in the creation of Paco Rabanne's Calandir (Fig. 1.3)

Dinand's contemporary work has taken a more serious approach in so far that he has managed to evoke erogenous zones through his bottle design without being too crude or obvious. According to Dinand, "the form must never be explicit...but the flacon must shock". Probably the two most popular examples of this somewhat provocative style can be seen in his designs of "Obsession" (Fig. 1.1) by Calvin Klein and "Man and Woman" (Fig. 1.2) by claud Montana. "Man and Woman" would have been Dinand's most witty of creations. The visual combination of the male and female fragrance flacons standing side by side is a very novel and unique approach to packaging fragrances. Dinand allows these flacons to speak for themselves as no typography is used on either flacon to differentiate between male and female. I would have to agree with Dinand in this particular case as the flacons are quite clear in their depictions of the male and female. Another feature that I find of great interest here is that this



Fig. 1.3

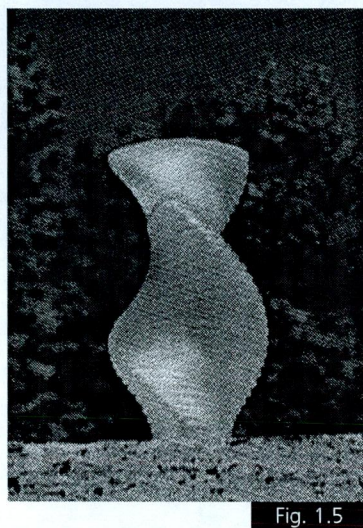
OBSESSION

Fig. 1.4

design adds greatly to the ergonomics of the flacon i.e. it wouldn't slide out of your wet hand in the bathroom too easily. This design was created in 1983 and to me it shows a steady progression of innovation from his earlier "Calandir" (Fig. 1.3)

"Obsession" is more in keeping with Dinands philosophy of "never being explicit". The interesting combinations of subtle curves on this flacon can be seen as suggestive of parts of the female body. I believe that these thoughts would vary largely from viewer to viewer. There is no doubt in my opinion that it is an excellently designed flacon, and the contrast between the bulky glass base and the quality plastic top gives it an interestingly unbalanced feel when it is in your hand. The inspiration for both the male and female "Obsession" came from Calvin Kleins private collection of Indian prayer stones, which a worn and smooth quality. Both the male and female flacons indeed achieve this same quality, and can be rolled between your hands like a well worn stone from the beach. These flacons show how moving away from the traditional square edged and rectangular flacons can be successful in creating a new look. The typography for the actual "Obsession" logotype (Fig. 1.4) is a light body serif. It is set in small caps, meaning that after the capital the following letters are capitals that only go up to the X-height. I do not feel that the flacon shape was considered when the typography was placed onto the flacon front facade. It is however minute on the female "Obsession" and in my opinion this subtle approach works better.

Outside the design business however, it is the coutouries who get the credit for his work, Dinand argues "my job is a professional one, the public does not have to know about me, I am a translator, putting into three-dimensional for the spirit of a couturier. It's like translating chinese into English".



Serge Mansau purports that "for me, perfume and its packaging are an art, though others would consider it the inevitable outcome of a marketing objective. Still one must have the right temperament to translate that market objective - it takes someone who is totally devoted to creation".

Mansau began his career as a sculptor in Paris. Unfortunately after some years of few commissions he became disheartened with the financial side of his chosen career. It was during this time that he accepted an offer to design a flacon, and since then parfumeurs have been requesting his designs since then. Mansau has worked with many of the top houses including J'ai Osen, ô de Lancôme, Montana, Diorella, Oscar, Storm, Choc, Ruffles, Paradoxe and his most recent L'Insolent for Charles Jourdan.

Mansau like most designers enjoyed spending much time sketching experimental ideas such as geometric crystals, and creating fantasies of light and movement, which were his preliminary inspirations. One fact that Mansau pays great attention to is the difference between mass-market production techniques and limited-edition pieces. In limited edition techniques so much money is spent on the quality of the materials that only a tiny part of the budget is left for specialist moulding and tooling techniques. With this principle in mind it is easy to see how Mansau came up with (Fig. 1.5) a spiralling stairway to heaven for Montana's aptly named fragrance, "Sculpture". Its frosted glass bottle topped by a plastic stopper gracefully continues the sculptured curve. The slightly squatter perfume bottle features a frosted glass top.

Desgrippes is the youngest of these famous fragrance bottle designers. His background is in creative advertising, and as a result he uses the storyboard technique to sell fragrances, in the sense that



Fig. 1.6



Fig. 1.7

they need a story/mood relating to them. After fifteen years in creative advertising, he was asked to work on his first fragrance bottle, where he let his romantic streak loose. Desgrippes dream, wrapped up in an award winning design for the new fragrance "French Line" (Fig. 1.6) (Hill, 1987, p.60-63) , which depicts a journey on a first class voyage, on a luxury ocean liner. The luxury of the voyage is reflected in the bottles which are encased in neat ribbed rubber sleeves, similar in appearance to the Samsonite brand of suitcases (This range of travel accessories are advertised as of being synonymous with luxury travel). This ribbed rubber sleeve snugly fitting the black glass bottle was indeed a clever and novel concept, while the typography is reminiscent of the post Art Nouveau faces described in Chapter two. The typical characteristic of this 1920s face is the extremely high cross bars, especially on the "N". Whereas in Chapter two this style was displaying a modern feel it is now being used totally on the contrary to bring us back in time.

Launched seven years ago "French Line" has already won a handful of packaging and design awards. "If the design for a perfume bottle is good" says Desgrippes, "the dream inside should last forever". However I feel that Desgrippes dream is a questionable one, as I feel that this flacon offers no major innovations. "French Line" has some good features but nothing amazing. I would be very interested to see the standard of the competition that year (1986) when Desgrippes won his awards?

Good design can conquer cost in most cases. Taking the new fragrance launched by Next and designed by Lewis Moberly² (Fig. 1.7). Its design, scent and packaging has managed to make a big perfume statement without following the trends of the current market, ie. forms suggestive of natural ori-

2. Lewis Moberly are a contemporary British Graphic Design Consultancy.



1st Lalique



Saphari

Fig. 1.8

gins, floral tributes of a kind, overtly erotic bottle shapes that could be use as sex toys. The name "Sempre" is the Italian for "always" and was dreamt up by the designer. Both the design and the name are synonymous with being simple.

The Lewis Maberly design team headed by Mary Lewis responded to a brief that aimed to attract the typical Next shopper; she is female, aged 24 - 30, the aspirational 19-23 year olds, and independent and feminine, not a slave to fashion. The team were given a limited budget and sales of the fragrance were to concentrate on the packaging and flacon design primarily. Point of sale display material was another option with which they had to work.

A powerful individual package was needed, yet it also had to be quiet and smooth enough to promote a sale with its less than extrovert potential target customer. The project had to be completed in time for the run up to Christmas, a time limitation which forced them to only consider the use of existing flacon forms already available pre-manufactured. The bow used in the packaging is a common packaging element, but more usually as a final flourish on a box of chocolates. Lewis Maberly's design skill is demonstrated in the dynamic combination of such a gesture with a simple package. The move is carried on the package by blind embossing, the package and bow are in cream and the box itself is made of unravelled chinese paperstring, sometimes seen in gift shops or in use as paper carrier bag handles. The typeface used for "SEMPRE" is Gill Sans (Bold) which is a solid sans serif typeface, good for embossing. It is important to note that serif typefaces don't emboss well because the fine points on the serifs often get lost during this process.



Fig. 1.9

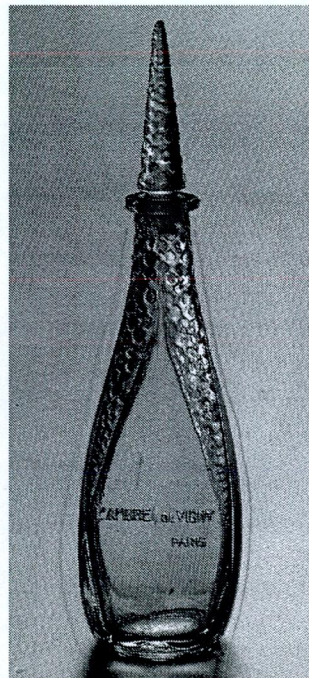


Fig. 1.10

The packaging reflects the clothes and image a Next buyer seeks - it is classic, simple, non-extravagant and a little indulgent. "Sempre" is therefore a fine example of how good design need not necessarily cost the earth, although undoubtedly good design costs a little. (Wyatt, 1993, p.43)

It is at this point in time that one sees similarities in design recurring. The most obvious finding for me to come across was the similarities between Ralph Lauren's "Safari" and Laliques first ever fragrance flacon (Fig. 1.8). According to the sales material accompanying "Safari" it describes the packaging as reminiscent of traditional English-Style Pewter. The swash capitals on the facade of "Safari" set in gold look well in contrast to the detailed facade and ornamented stopper. Maybe it was a good idea to produce something so detailed at this present time with so many sleek looking flacons on the shelves. Another contemporary flacon which seems to have developed from an earlier flacon is the fragrance called "Venezia" (Fig. 1.9) from Laura Biagiotti. Its cone shaped stopper, similar to roof tops on the bell towers of St. Peter's square in Venice, are very much the same as Laliques "L'ambre de Vigny" (Fig. 1.10) produced in 1924. Here again we see the flacon adopting social trends or fashions. In both these cases they reflect scenes of foreign travel and maybe adventure.

Typography played a stronger role in the last decade or two, from about 1970 till the present, as it was only then that production technology could adhere the type onto the facade of the flacons at a level that equalled that of printed paper. It is interesting to note that "Jicky" and "No.5" both had printed labels which looked much more refined than the moulded typography on their contemporaries. Was it the professional quality of the printed labels in comparison to the jagged moulded typography that



Fig. 1.11

attracted peoples attention and enhanced the sales.

One of the most talked about new releases last year has to be Jean Paul Gaultiers fragrance (Fig. 1.11). Here a designer has taken very literally the concept of packaging for protection and returned the fragrance to the customer in the ultimate of containers the tin can. Upon pulling the base from the can we see an incredible steel bust of a woman clad in a simplified corset, or the second version in the set of two has a steel corset on a glass flaçon. The typography is stamped across the outside of the can in a typeface known as stencil. This typeface is an ugly everyday face used for very mundane markings on crates and cardboard boxes. But here Gaultier has put it where we have until now seen traditional serif faces.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

While researching the development of the fragrance flacon for this thesis, it became apparent that the flacon designs of the early part of this century were derived from a crafts orientated perspective. The early designers paid great attention to minute details in texture and pattern. This is particularly true of the work of Baccarat and Lalique. This work is in strong contrast to our contemporary flacon designers with their clean geometric forms such as "Obsession" designed by Pierre Dinand.

The primary difference in the designers of 1900 and 1990 is in their training. Lalique and Baccarat produced many ornate glass objects including lamp shades, paperweights and decanters. Glass and crystal was the medium with which they learnt their craft. In contrast to this we have our contemporary flacon design leaders, who interestingly come from the same country, who have backgrounds in advertising, sculpture and even architecture. As one would expect they all seem to approach the challenge of a new design in much the same way as they would any challenge in their respective careers. For example Mansau began as a sculptor and created Montanas aptly named fragrance "Sculpture". Desgrippes with his background in creative advertising created a story for "French Line" and based the flacon design around the concept of a luxury French cruise.

So how can one rate the success of any one flacon? Perhaps its surviving the test of time i.e. "No.5" by Chanel being an all time favourite. Or is it by the numerous awards given out by design groups or societies such as the Graphis Design Awards¹. However, these competitions tend to reward

1. These are annual awards given to all areas of print by a design publication company called Graphis

technical achievement and innovative use of materials rather than inherent aesthetic qualities- thereby in many cases rewarding the use of "gimmicks" in place of design led creations.

The ultimate test of a flacons success is found in the length of its commercial life. If a flacon design can successfully sell a fragrance, which appeals in scent as well as appearance to its user, then sales figures will justify the continued production of that fragrance.

It is with thanks to people like François Coty, Gabriella Chanel and Paul Poiret that we have such an interesting array of fragrance flacons, as these were the people who demanded that little bit extra from themselves or their designers. The flacons from these people have stood the test of time because they successfully combine unique fragrances with innovative flacon designs.

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