

FROM TOP: VIKTOR & ROLF FLOWERBOMB BLOOM (\$160); JEAN PAUL GAULTIER CLASSIQUE ESSENCE DE PARFUM SPRAY (\$138); EB FLORALS BY ERIC BUTERBAUGH KINGSTON OSMANTHUS (\$450)

of *Scent in Everyday Life*. “One of the things they noticed is that it goes to two places. The first is the amygdala, which is an area that does very rapid processing of emotional content,” he says. “So even before you recognize a smell or can name it, you’re [thinking] ‘I like it’ or ‘That’s bad’—you make that decision in literally 10 milliseconds.” The other part of the brain it travels to—the hippocampus—is responsible for new memory formation. This explains the moments, places and people that flood back with 4K clarity when we encounter fragrances associated with them, no matter how many years later.

While our eyes are fixed on the screens in front of us, our noses are working 24-7, too—we just don’t realize it. To use an analog analogy, our olfactory hardware is not unlike a boom box making a mixtape of our life. “We

don’t remember trying to remember smell because our brain is always recording,” says Gilbert. It’s documenting everything from “background noise,” like the cloud of industrial cleaning supplies infiltrating your office lobby, to positive scent memories, like a loved one’s shampoo.

The fragrance industry does an excellent job playing up the emotional aspect of scent, despite the fact that perfume advertising has the tough task of persuading consumers to purchase a bottle without knowing what it smells like (the IRL exception being scent strips that run in magazines). Recently, brands like Prada, Serge Lutens and Charlotte Tilbury have attempted to find a way around that obstacle by launching virtual reality campaigns that offer an immersive and interactive experience. The idea is that enlisting the other senses by using different textures, sights and sounds will help fill in those fragrance blanks. And soon, perhaps those very fragrance brands will take a page from Montreal’s Élixir Marketing Olfactif, an agency that created bus shelter billboards that release the aroma of orange trees when sensors detect commuters are standing in front of its ad for OJ, in the hopes that their subconscious will instruct them to buy a carton the next time they’re at the grocery store.

While Silicon Valley is hard at work on technologies that will bring scent into the VR world, Herz has doubts that any will be successful “because of a variety of basic logistical things about how our sense of smell works,” she says. So until someone figures out a way for us to smell through our Kindle or cellphone, our noses could remain the last bastion of experiences you need to have IRL. □

SAY MY NAME

“When I first started at Guerlain, I smelled my mother everywhere,” says Isabelle Artus, editorial director at GUERLAIN. She is making a reference to the 90-year-old Shalimar, the iconic fragrance that liberated women wore in the 1960s and ’70s. At Guerlain’s perfume factory 40 minutes outside of Paris, the company is unveiling Mon Guerlain (\$119), which the brand hopes will have the same kind of impact. The spokesperson for Mon Guerlain is Angelina Jolie, and she remembers her late mother wearing a “fancy” Guerlain powder. The company sent Jolie every powder it made, which she inhaled until she found “the one” and allegedly broke into a huge smile. It’s not a flight of fancy that perfume can transport us through time and space: Smell is the only sense that has a direct passage-way to the limbic system of the brain, where memory and emotions are stored. The new perfume’s quadrilobe bottle, adapted from one in the archives from 1908, is fire polished in Burma so that it gleams. The scent seems to say “I’ve arrived,” in both the physical and metaphorical sense.

Perfume cannot be digitized because it is too ritualistic, too personal, says Thierry Wasser, Guerlain’s master perfumer. The name Mon Guerlain was chosen for this reason. He sees the scent’s formula as a portrait of a woman, as the pillar of society, fighting for her convictions and balancing her roles. The lavender represents her empathy and truth, vanilla her generous and maternal side, jasmine her passion and sandalwood her strength and resilience. “There are a thousand different ways of wearing perfume and a million motivations,” he continues, and chief among them is self-expression. “Perfume is a social medium. It’s how a woman communicates with her environment.” And what might this new scent say? “Women fought to be equal,” says Wasser. “It says ‘We’re going to fight for it.’” —Sarah Bancroft



JOLIE IS DONATING HER ENTIRE SALARY FROM GUERLAIN TO CHARITY.



PHOTOGRAPHY: BOTTLES BY CARLO MENDOZA; ROSE PETALS BY ISABELLE CHAPUIS ET ALEXIS PICHOT