



April 18–May 11, 2009

*Living*  
*Perfume*

THE NATURAL ALCHEMY *of*  
**MANDY AFTEL**



*Mandy Aftel*, the nose behind Aftelier Perfumes, is the author of three books on natural perfume. *Essence and Alchemy: the Natural History of Perfume*, translated into seven languages, won the 2001 Sense of Smell Institute's Richard B. Solomon Award, and has helped pioneer the trend toward using natural ingredients. *Aroma*, a cookbook co-authored with chef Daniel Patterson, focuses on the essential link between food and fragrance. *Scents and Sensibilities* guides the reader through the history and creation of solid perfumes. Dubbed the "angel of alchemy" by *Vanity Fair*, Aftel has designed custom blends for Hollywood stars, writers, and restaurants, as well as private labels. For each of her sumptuous, hand-crafted liquid and solid perfumes, she chooses from more than five hundred of the finest pure and natural essences in the world. She is passionate about helping the art of natural perfumery, once near extinction, to evolve and thrive. Her perfumes have won many awards.

*"Natural Perfume, created from natural materials and aromatics is a multi-layered phenomenon: In a breath, we are able to reconnect with the natural world and ourselves in new and profound ways."*

— Mandy Aftel

*"Mandy Aftel is a recognized authority in Natural Perfume and a true pioneer in the modern field of Naturals"*

— Rochelle Bloom, President,  
Fragrance Foundation

# Introduction

A new art form, ripe with beauty, is embodied in the work of Mandy Aftel, perfumer and owner of Aftelier Perfumes. Aftel stands assuredly at the threshold of the new art form of natural perfumery, adding a modern sensibility to the ancient art of blending pure and natural essences.

This exhibit presents Aftel's work: her perfumes and oils, research and writings, and her library of rare books and artifacts. These offer a unique view of the world of naturals.

We forget how much we rely on our senses to experience the world, the most powerful being sight and smell. But smell is different. As Aftel reminds us, "All other sensory information initially comes in through the thalamus. The sense of smell, however, is first processed in the limbic lobe, one of the oldest parts of the brain and the seat of sexual and emotional impulses. Before we know we are in contact with a smell, we have already received and reacted to it."

We hope this exhibit will be a catalyst for artists, architects, designers, educators, product developers, and innovators of all kinds to learn about the sensual world entered through natural scent. We hope it marks a turning point, and begins a new dialogue on the implications of this insight:

our sense of smell triggers an authentic relationship with the natural world.

As Aftel likes to say, "The golden age of naturals hasn't happened. Yet."

Julie Anixter

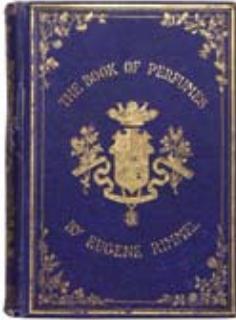
Brandimage, Desgrippes & Laga



**Frankincense**, found in the bark of various small trees of the genus *Boswellia*, has a soft, incense-like odor that has an elevating and soothing effect on the mind. In ancient times it was without a doubt the most important perfume substance. Recently an international team of scientists, including researchers from Johns Hopkins University and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, described how burning frankincense activates poorly understood ion channels in the brain to alleviate anxiety or depression. — MA

# Living Perfume

BY MANDY AFTEL



The gold-tooled cover of *The Book of Perfumes* (exhibit #503)

The first perfume book I found was *The Book of Perfumes*, by Eugene Rimmel, published in 1865. Discovering it, with its elaborate illustrations and royal blue and gold-tooled leather cover, was like finding a jewel. Mr. Rimmel was as much a frustrated hairdresser as a perfumer, giving nearly the same attention to the exotic hairdos of ancient civilizations and “uncivilized nations” as to their customs of perfumery. But my foraging didn’t really pick up steam until, in the back of Edward Saragrin’s 1945 *The Science and Art of Perfume*, I found an extensive bibliography of perfume books. I sent my “want list” to all the rare book dealers I knew and asked them to contact me if they came across these or other books on perfume. One by one the books arrived in the mail, and I began to fall in love. Gradually I assembled more than two hundred rare and antique books on perfumery, to my knowledge the finest existing collection in the world.

The books were charming, beautiful, and eccentric. I felt the thrill of being the first one into a cave that harbored the relics of a lost civilization—the unsullied pottery and intact arrowheads. In the stories of perfume, you could see the world being discovered, people searching for spices and learning to extract aromatic oils from the exotic plants they were finding in faraway places. In intricate woodcuts and engravings, old distilling apparatuses looked like a cross between lab equipment and implements of witchcraft. It wasn’t just information about ingredients and processes in which I was submerging myself; it was a whole lost world. This world—sensual, rich, and deep, bringing with it the history of peoples and eccentric individuals, secrets of seduction and spirituality, medicine and folkways—made sense to me on an almost primal level.

Sometimes just understanding the history of an essence in civilization after civilization brought it to life in my hands. Soon I was buying essential oils on my own, getting to know them and experimenting with them. The materials were simply too inviting, too insistent to resist. The names

themselves seduced—ambergris and costus, ylang ylang concrete, choya loban, orange flower, boronia, civet, tonka bean, cham-paca. Even those I recognized—jasmine, sandalwood, frankincense, myrrh, bitter orange, vetiver—conjured up ancient civilizations and exotic customs, long journeys and sensual torpor. The endless variations on each theme fanned my obsession. Once I discovered rose absolute, I had to try not only the Bulgarian version but the Russian, Moroccan, Turkish, Indian, and Egyptian as well.

My reading often suggested experiment-ing with a new oil or way of combining ingredients. Every time I came upon a passage in one of my books that introduced a new essence to me, I had to track it down and start working with it. I loved the com-plicated histories of the materials, and their complex characters—at once delicate and harsh, fresh and decaying, floral and fecal—which made the perfumer’s palette so intense. I literally had to get my hands on them. The sweet, the foul, the spicy, and the putrid — I found them all alluring. I loved the way they smelled and the way they looked, some like liquid rubies or emeralds in the light, some thick and pasty, others light and thin.

Plants have an inherent beauty that is reflected in their aromatic component. Natural aromas are richer and more nuanced precisely because they are real. For example, the natural essence of rose is made up of many different components, some of them



Ambergris comes from the sperm whale (exhibit #207)

mere traces, whereas synthetic rose is a distillation of only a few of the dominant elements. When you smell a real rose essence, you experience a layering of aromas as one fragrance note deepens and evolves into the next, providing texture and depth to the aromatic experience. This complexity accounts for the nearly inexplicable emotional intensity evoked by authentic smell and the memories it sparks and creates. A natural fragrance is a living, changing thing. It smells different on each person who wears it, interacting with individual body chemistry to create a scent as unique as a fingerprint. It grows deeper and more complex over time, then gradually fades away. Natural fragrances do not announce their arrival, nor do they remain after their wearer has departed; they cling closely to the skin, subtly radiating outward.

Until the 1880s all perfumes and fragrances were created from plant—and some animal—materials. The displacement of natural essences by synthetic materials in commercially produced fragrances began at



Workers sorting roses, hand-tinted antique French postcard (exhibit #205)

the turn of the century. Unlike the natural essences, synthetic fragrances were cheap, colorless, stable, and consistent, and these qualities—and their “modernness”—made them irresistible. Eventually synthetics were used almost exclusively, and the demand for the naturals dwindled.

Yet while synthetic essences approximate the odors of natural ingredients, they have never attained the complexity, mystery or emotional resonance of the natural materials. Commercial fragrance houses well understand the appeal of the “natural.” They know that perfume is about the desire to capture what is elusive, bound up intimately with the way all species—flowers and insects, animals and man—use scent for seduction. Everything points back to nature—*must* point back to nature, even when the affiliation is phony—which is why every commercial perfume launch alludes wildly to the world of natural essences in its advertisements, and in the press releases magazines quote from so liberally. There is no romance in perfume without its close relationship to nature;

unfortunately, there is little left of the actual relationship except nostalgia.

The essences of artisan natural perfumery are expensive, seasonal, and non-repeatable, and their nature varies with climate, growing conditions, and the humans who cultivate, harvest, and distill them. The finished perfume bears the imprint of all of these factors, along with the artistry of its creator. It is further distinguished by its interaction with the skin of the wearer. To create with essence is to encounter the deepest nature of a thing, which is in some sense greater than the thing itself. Working with essences, you dive deep in order to touch the universal. Irreducible and narcotic, they transport you into the polymorphous intensity of the present, in all its inchoate sensuality. Essences are at once specific and collective, earthly and otherworldly. This holistic character helps to explain why we feel in them the effect of beauty, even though we cannot put our finger on just what it is that pleases us so much.

What drew me to perfumery was its creative aspects—falling in love with a new essence, wanting to see what would happen when it was paired with something other and beautiful, following my instincts. Instead of working from a “brief,” I take my cues from the ingredients themselves, and the combinations they suggest to me as I come to know them deeply. I have in my collection more than five hundred of the finest natural

essences found anywhere in the world, including antique, organic, and wild-crafted ones. Working as an artisan, I enjoy the freedom to use not just one or two but several in a blend, irrespective of expense.

Music is the best metaphor for capturing the way great perfume is created. Individual essences are in fact called notes and are blended together to form chords. The place where I compose my perfumes is called a perfumer's organ: a unit consisting of a semi-circular series of stepped shelves lined with hundreds of bottles of raw perfume materials arranged by scent category. Sitting at the organ, the perfumer can construct fragrance creations in much the same way that a musician chooses musical notes and composes chords. The musical scale serves as an analogy to the perfumer's palette precisely because its tones do not all fit together in easy consonance, but embody discord of various degrees. The same is true of the idiosyncratic traits and competing intensities of the essences. Musical concepts like *tone*, *vibration*, and *harmony* resonate in perfumery as well, where the relationship between essences structures a blend just as musical structure depends largely on the relationship between tones. Each element, whether it plays a major or minor role in the final blend, modifies the character of the others. A fragrance of perfect balance and harmony—rich and mellow, smooth and perfectly toned—is called round.

Music also captures the way scent is



Mandy Aftel composing at her perfume organ

experienced—not all at once but unfolding over time—a quality that in perfume is referred to as duration. In this unfolding lies that unparalleled power of these arts over memory and emotion. Music and scent can calm us, or they can arouse our passions—and in our ecstasies, exalt us. They seize us, they transport us to the highest realms, feeding a desire for intoxication. They alter our consciousness in a way that symbolic systems like language cannot, nor can their most transcendent effects be fully expressed by language. They are ineffable.

I create perfume—and people wear it—because beauty and art are a vacation from the daily grind and takes us into what really matters. Beauty brings about a morally valuable state in the mind of the beholder. A well-proportioned and beautiful perfume can make those who smell it long to enter a realm of such beauty and perfect proportion. The power of beauty may derive from its ability to minister to this longing. The beautiful object creates in the mind of those who attend to it the spiritual home that reality does not provide. Beauty sustains an inner life. It feeds us.

# Deconstructing Parfum de Maroc

We invite you to experience, perhaps for the first time, the complete set of individual essences that make up a perfume.

Much like music, perfume is composed of notes—base notes, middle notes, top notes—that are blended into chords. Top notes are the most fleeting, establishing the scent’s initial impact, whereas middle notes give body to blends, imparting warmth and fullness. Finally, bass notes articulate the perfume’s lasting character, its final perceptive note after the others have evaporated. It is the structure of the chords that give a perfume its innate character and complexity.

Tucked into the drawers beneath the bottles of Parfum de Maroc, you may start by smelling and touching the raw botanical materials from which the essences are created. Then you should smell separately each of the perfume’s individual essences, followed by the individual top, middle and

base chords of the perfume, and finally smell the perfume itself.

Olfactory fatigue can set in after you smell too many scents in a row. The easiest way to refresh the olfactory palate is to inhale deeply three times through a piece of wool, which revitalizes your sense of smell.

Take your time. Let your senses respond and remember as you move from note to note and experience the beautifully complex natural essences that make up Parfum de Maroc. Finally, listen to the song that Donovan has paired with it especially for this exhibit.

*“Dark Eyed Blue Jean Angel” is written for my muse and wife Linda. . . “My love she’s a flower, perfuming the air where’er she blooms.” The melody is like the composition of the Parfum de Maroc. . . evocative and exotic.”*

— Donovan Leitch

## Parfum de Maroc

TOP NOTES	Bitter Orange + Fresh Ginger + Galangal + Saffron + Black Pepper = TOP CHORD
MIDDLE NOTES	Nutmeg + Jasmine + Rose + Cinnamon = MIDDLE CHORD
BASE NOTES	Cardamom + Myrrh + Labdanum = BASE CHORD

# Living Perfume Exhibit Items

## Outside

*Cleanwell Soaps* fragranced by Mandy Aftel

*Cleanwell Hand Sanitizers* fragranced by Mandy Aftel

*Hand-tinted perfume postcard, "Gathering Roses,"* Bruno Court Perfumes, Grasse, France

*Map of Europe* by Lucien Boucher from *The Antoine Chiris Establishments Throughout the World*, 1931

## Deconstruction

### The Deconstruction of Parfum de Maroc:

*Inspired by the traditional Moroccan spice recipe ras el hanout, this balanced blend of spices centers around a heart of roses.*

*Top notes are the most fleeting, establishing the scent's initial impact.*

**100** *Top Note: Bitter orange essential oil*

**101** *Top Note: Galangal essential oil. A popular ingredient in the foods of Southeast Asia*

**102** *Top Note: Saffron absolute*

**103** *Top Note: Black pepper essential oil*

**104** *Top Note: Fresh ginger essential oil*

**105** *Top Note Comparison: Dried Ginger Essential Oil. A comparison of the fresh ginger and the dried demonstrates the enormous range in character and qualities within the universe of natural essences.*

**106** *Top Chord. Each essence from this level is blended in a specific proportion to compose the top chord.*

*Middle notes give body to blends, imparting warmth and fullness.*

**107** *Middle Note: Nutmeg absolute*

**108** *Middle Note: Cinnamon essential oil*

**109** *Middle Note: Jasmine Absolute*

**110** *Middle Note Comparison: Synthetic Jasmine. A synthetic jasmine to compare to the natural jasmine absolute*

**111** *Middle Note: Turkish rose absolute.*

**112** *Middle Note Comparison: Synthetic Rose. A synthetic rose to compare to the natural Turkish rose absolute*

**113** *Middle Chord. Each essence from this level is blended in a specific proportion to compose the middle chord.*

*Base notes articulate the perfume's lasting character, its final perceptible note after the others have evaporated.*

**114** *Base Note: Labdanum absolute. An amber aroma from the rockrose plant*

**115** *Base Note: Myrrh essential oil. This gum resin was an ancient incense ingredient*

**116** *Base Note: Cardamom absolute*

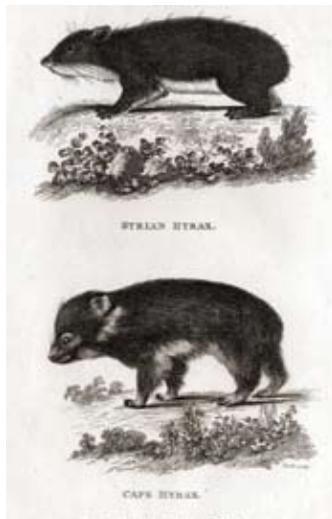
**117** *Base Chord. Each essence from this level is blended in a specific proportion to compose the base chord.*

**118** *Composed Maroc. The three chords are blended in an equal proportion to compose the completed perfume.*

**119** *Music by Donovan*



200



201



202

- 120 Botanical: Orange Rind
- 121 Botanical: Galangal Root
- 122 Botanical: Saffron
- 123 Botanical: Black Pepper
- 124 Botanical: Ginger
- 125 Botanical: Nutmeg
- 126 Botanical: Cinnamon
- 127 Botanical: Jasmine
- 128 Botanical: Rose
- 129 Botanical: Labdanum
- 130 Botanical: Myrrh
- 131 Botanical: Cardamom

## Raw Materials

- 200 Engraving of a beaver which produces castoreum, an essence for perfumery
- 201 Engraving of Syrian Hyrax and Cape Hyrax which produce Africa stone, an essence for perfumery
- 202 Engraving of a musk deer which produces musk, an essence for perfumery
- 203 Hand-tinted perfume postcard, "Sorting Violets," Bruno Court Perfumes, Grasse, France



203



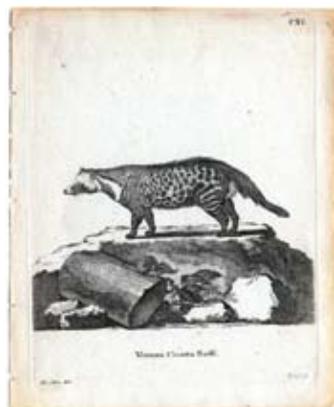
204

204 Hand-tinted perfume postcard, "Sorting Tuberoso Flowers," Bruno Court Perfumes, Grasse, France

205 Hand-tinted perfume postcard, "Sorting Roses," Bruno Court Perfumes, Grasse, France

206 Hand-tinted perfume postcard, "Gathering Orange Flowers," Bruno Court Perfumes, Grasse, France

207 Chromolithograph print of sperm whale. Ambergris, one of the most beautiful perfume ingredients, is produced in the digestive system of the sperm whale, 1880



208

**208** Engraving of a civet cat which produces civet, an essence for perfumery

**209** Flower engraving from *Flowers: Their Origin, Shapes, Perfumes & Colours* by J.E. Taylor, 1906

**210** Watercolor illustration of a person returning from Grasse, France with baskets of flowers. Note the sentence: "One of the most remarkable achievements of the House of Pinaud ... is its continued refusal to adulterate its perfumes with synthetic bases." From *Toujours de L'Avant* published by Pinaud Perfumes, 1928

**211** Two pieces of ambergris, the legendary perfume ingredient from the sperm whale

**212** Various civet cats and castoreum from beavers from *Manuel de Parfumerie* by Lazennec, 1922

**213** *Boswellia sacra*, the finest wild-harvested howjary frankincense resin from Oman is characterised by a warm, woody balsamic fragrance so sublime as to be otherworldly. Frankincense is often burned as incense and was given to baby Jesus as a gift.

## Distilling

**300** Aboriginal distillers from Queensland, Australia

**301** Distilling apparatus from *The Volatile Oils* by Guildemeister & Hoffman, 1900

**302** Chinese still for cassia oil from Schimmel & Co. semi-annual report, 1895

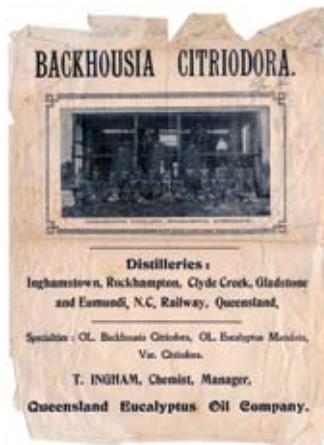
**303** A distilling apparatus from *The Factories of Schimmel & Co., Leipzig-Prag and Fritzsche Brothers*, 1894

**304** Cassia oil from Fritzsche Brothers

**305** Unopened cassia oil from Fritzsche Brothers

**306** Flask for distilling from *Chimie Des Parfums* by Septimus Piesse, 1987

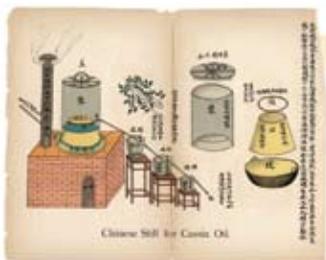
**307** Paperweight from 1946 commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Fritzsche Brothers, purveyors of essential oils



300



301



302



303



406



408

308 *Pine cone distilling* from Schimmel & Co. semi-annual report, 1911

309 *Palmarosa distilling in India* from Schimmel & Co. semi-annual report, 1910

310 *Lavender distilling* from Schimmel & Co. semi-annual report, 1912

311 *Lemongrass distilling in India* from Schimmel & Co. semi-annual report, 1910

## Essences

400 *Jasmine* from Roure  
Betrand Fils

401 *Rose otto* from Ungerer

402 *East Indian vetivert oil* from Dodge and Olcott

403 *Nutmeg oil* from Lehn and Fink

404 *Tincture of ambergris* from Fritzsche Brothers

405 *Tincture of tonquin musk* from Fritzsche Brothers

406 *Mace oil* from Lehn & Fink

407 *Coriander seed* from Antoine Chiris

408 *Patchouly* from Lubin

409 *Map of the world* by Lucien Boucher from *The Antoine Chiris Establishments Throughout the World*, 1931

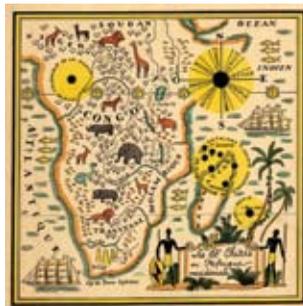
410 *Map of Africa* by Lucien Boucher from *The Antoine Chiris Establishments Throughout the World*, 1931

411 *Map of Asia* by Lucien Boucher from *The Antoine Chiris Establishments Throughout the World*, 1931

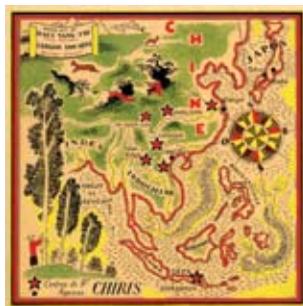
412 *Map of North and South America* by Lucien Boucher from *The Antoine Chiris Establishments Throughout the World*, 1931



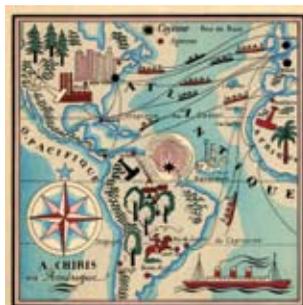
409



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412



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413 Invoice for perfume supplies, 1891

414 Indian sandalwood oil from Dodge & Olcott bottle

415 Clove oil from George Lueders & Co.

416 East Indian sandalwood oil from Magnus, Mabee & Reynard

## Composing

500 Unknown perfumer's notebook

501 Various perfume recipes from *Complete Treatise on Perfumery* by Dussauce, Philadelphia, 1864

502 Hand-written book with recipes, 1838

503 *The Book of Perfumes* by Eugene Rimmel, one of the most famous early books on perfume, London, 1865

504 *Gamut of Odors* from *The Art of Perfumery*, by G.W. Septimus Piesse, 1867



602



602

505 *The British Perfumer* by Charles Lillie, one of the earliest perfume books in England, London, 1822

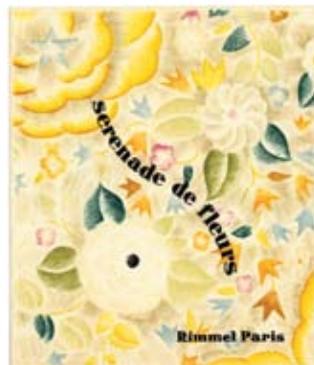
506 *Bates Dispensatory* by William Salmon contains recipes for tinctures and elixirs, 1720

## Perfumes

600 Cover from *A Romance of Perfume Lands* or *The Search for Captain Jacob Cole*, 1881

601 Old advertisement from *Practical Perfumery*, 1892

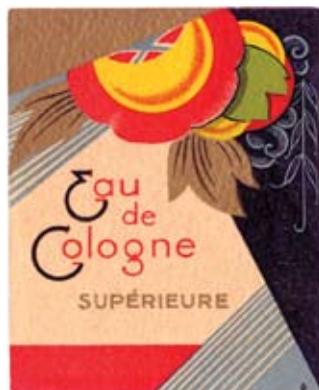
602 Four die-cut perfume cards from D.S. Brown and Co., a well-known New York perfumer, 1880 (two shown)



603

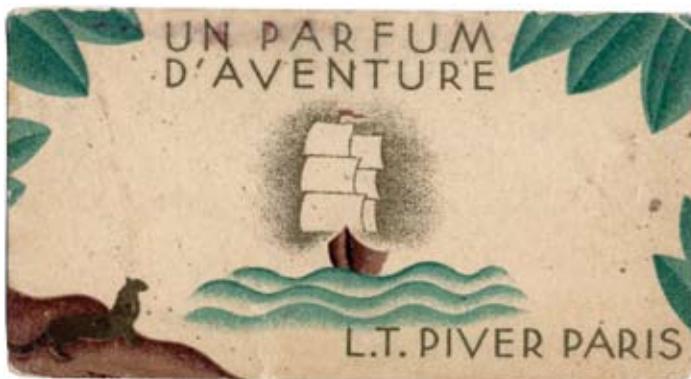
603 *Serenade de Fleurs*, Rimmel Paris, perfume label marked as 12-color printing, 1925

604 *Eau de Cologne Supérieure* Giraud Fils, Paris perfume label



605

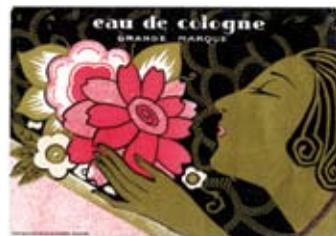
605 Old label for cologne *Supérieure*



606



606



607

**606** *Un Parfum d'Aventure*, L.T. Piver Paris, calendar on back 1932-33. Perfume card with civet cat

**607** *Eau de Cologne Grand Marque* perfume label

**608** *Old label for Cologne au Printemps*, Paris

**609** *Perfume bottles from Christmas Novelties*, 1886

**610** *Perfume label mold for Lilas*, 1919

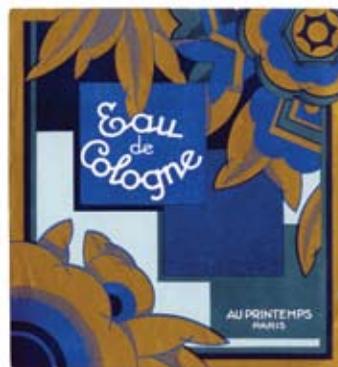
**611** *Perfume label mold for Rose Darline*, Paris

**612** *Perfume label mold for Le Parfum de Gabrielle Dorziat*, Volnay, Paris, 1925

**613** *Perfume label mold for Du Chevrefeuille* Volnay, Paris

**614** *Small Volnay logo stamp*

**615** *Fountain finger-ring* from *Art of Perfumery* by Septimus Piesse, 1987



608

**616** *Title page from The Romance of Perfumes* by Richard Le Gallienne, 1928

**617** *Bronze plaque for Perfumes Fontanis* by Lalique

**618** *Antique silver box with morning glories, leaves and bug*

**619** *Coin silver watch case with green & rose gold basket of flowers*, 1880s

**620** *Antique French niello watch case with swirls and stripe*

**621** *Antique silver French watch case with rose and green gold*

**622** *Antique silver locket with chrysanthemums*

**623** *Antique silver watch case filled with solid perfume*

**624** *Antique silver watch case filled with solid perfume*

*Kudos to Mandy Aftel*  
and her commitment to Naturals,  
her artistic passion and generosity  
in sharing perfume's rich and layered history!

**Cenveo and Aftelier:**  
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*The Natural Perfumers Guild congratulates its Founder Mandy Aftel on her  
Living Perfume exhibit and the beauty of natural aromatics that it celebrates.*



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— FRAGRANCES —



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# Living Perfume

THE NATURAL ALCHEMY OF  
MANDY AFTEL

Mandy

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Here's to creativity.

Here's to believing,

that nature has so much to give,

for as long as we respect her.

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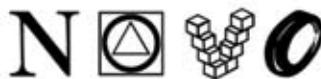


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