

HOW TO SMELL EXPENSIVE (WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK)



Beauty Editor **TARA LEDDEN** investigates if you can really get great perfume on a budget

I'm a self-confessed scent snob. You might think it's easy for me to say that when I get sent them for free as part of my job, but truth be told, I still part with my own money to keep my favourites in stock. I don't enjoy smelling like other people, and I'm happy to splash the cash to find something special. When someone says I smell good, I want to tell them I'm wearing something they've never heard of.

However, in a world of rising prices and tightening purse strings, it's time we busted the taboo that cheap = nasty. I'm not talking dupes or knock-offs - they're a totally different, ethically dubious entity. But there are a whole host of brands creating bold fragrances that leave a big impression, but cost much less than you'd expect.

THE RISING COST OF PERFUME

In recent years, the iconic celebrity fragrances that we all used to fawn over have become less popular, as pricey boutique brands such as Byredo and Le Labo, which cost £180 a pop, became the perfumes to have on your dresser and in your Insta pics.

"Consumers are drawn to high-end perfumes because they are an accessible bit of luxury.

Unlike a designer piece of clothing, they don't cost thousands, there are no changing rooms to contend with and no disappointment in them not fitting or going out of style," explains Christina Kamester, head of fragrance at Scentology,

So...? and Icons. "This continued during the pandemic. While so much was off limits and the world closed down, perfume helped provide a little daily luxury when things like travel, dressing up and going out weren't options," says Karen Harris, The Perfume Shop's head of marketing.

Now - whether it's in response to the cost of living crisis, Y2K nostalgia, or a knock-on effect of the budget skincare explosion - more people are turning to cheaper fragrances again, with **Zara Red Temptation** ✓, £19.99 for 80ml EDP, repeatedly selling out thanks to a TikTok-fueled frenzy. And last year, The Fragrance Shop reported a 36% rise in sales of Ariana Grande's perfume, while Fragrance Direct saw the number of people buying Britney Spears' scents soar by 155%.

"There are some unique, great-quality fragrances coming on to the market that are more affordable," says Tara Singleton, head of beauty at Marks & Spencer.

THE QUALITY MYTH

When I asked the *Fabulous* office what put them off cheaper fragrances, the overwhelming response was that they weren't as high quality as expensive perfumes. "They don't last very long", "They all smell the same", and "I'm worried they'll give me a rash", were just a few of the replies that came my way. But it turns out, they were all wrong.

"While it's often believed the price of a perfume reflects its quality, that isn't always the case," explains Karen. Christina agrees: "All well-known brands are held to the same industry quality and safety guidelines, regardless of the cost of the fragrance. We follow the same standards as the expensive brands and use the same materials - we may just use them at a lower concentration or avoid the exorbitant marketing spend of a prestige brand."

In fact, many high-end perfumers are also behind more affordable lines. Famously, as well as

creating many scents in her eponymous brand, and more recently under the Jo Loves name, Jo Malone also makes an affordable line of perfumes for Zara. And she's not the only one - renowned nose Jérôme Epinette works closely with Floral Street founder Michelle Feeney to concoct its fragrances,

which start at £25, plus he has created others for the likes of Ariana Grande, & Other Stories, Atelier Cologne and Byredo. Meanwhile, Julie Massé creates Shay & Blue perfumes, which sell for around £30, as well as many of Giorgio Armani's. Astonishingly, there are only 600 perfumers in the world (fun fact: there are more astronauts than there are perfumers), so working across the board is the rule, rather than the exception.

LONG-LASTING SCENTS

If it's not price or expertise, what does determine the staying power of a perfume? "Having a higher level of oil ensures the scent lasts longer. But there is no industry legislation that dictates companies have to disclose how much is in their products. Some brands that charge a lot might only offer eau de cologne or toilette, which have low levels of oil. Parfum is the highest concentration and eau de parfum is usually 15-20%," explains Michelle.

"As well as the level of fragrance oil within the product, the longevity of a fragrance is dependent on the chosen notes," adds Tara.

But which ones should you look out for? Aside from personal preference, "citrus notes are notoriously light and ephemeral, whereas ambers, vanillas and woods can really last," advises Christina. The note choice doesn't have to impact price either. "There are some incredible synthetic ingredients, and drawing on these to make the fragrance oil can be a more affordable route without compromising quality. And when it comes to natural oils, you can use more readily available ones, rather than difficult-to-source oils that are more expensive," explains Tara. "Great-quality, affordable fragrances do exist, but they don't have the same visibility. However, we have seen that starting to change."

Turns out my scent snobbery is unfounded, and while smelling exclusive might make you feel great, nothing is better than the sweet smell of money saved. Dirt-cheap fragrances don't need to be a dirty little secret any longer. **F**

'Great-quality, affordable scents do exist'



Zara Energetically New York, £15.99 for 40ml EDP; Philosophy Pure Grace Nude Rose, £39 for 60ml EDT; Nuxe Prodigieux Floral Le Parfum, £45 for 50ml EDP

BEAUTY

THE AFFORDABLE EDIT

BEST... HIGH-STREET STAPLES
Marks & Spencer Apothecary Breathe ✓, £9.50 for 100ml EDP, contains lung-expanding eucalyptus alongside earthy vetiver for a fresh-smelling spritz. **Scentology Vanilla Latte & Velvet Woods**, £9.99 for 100ml EDP, has a comforting, creamy base that lasts longer than you'd expect.

BEST... CELEBRITY FRAGRANCES
Jennifer Lopez One, £23 for 30ml EDP, smells rich and opulent, like a more feminine Le Labo Santal 33. **Britney Spears Blissful Fantasy**, £23.50 for 30ml EDT, is an uplifting and breezy tropical scent that's not at all sickly.

BEST... FASHION-FORWARD SCENTS & Other Stories Neon Rush, £28 for 50ml EDT, is packed with mouth-watering gourmand notes like pink pepper, cherry and tonka bean - ideal for those with champagne tastes on a beer budget. **H&M Rain**, £4.99 for 20ml EDT, is minimalist, fresh and soapy, like clean skin.

BEST... NICHE NEWCOMERS
Floral Street Sunflower Pop ✓, £25 for 10ml EDP, evokes visions of sipping cocktails by the Med. **Shay & Blue Clementine Fragrance**, £30 for 30ml EDP, is sharp and crisp, thanks to the spring, watercress twist.

