



fancy a snifter?

Absinthe, rum, whisky, cigars, even “wacky baccy”... These fragrances seem to have been launched with the clubroom in mind, says Karen Wheeler. Illustration by Mick Brownfield.

Why would a man want to smell like a mojito? That's the question that springs to mind when reading the ingredients in the latest male fragrance launches. The news that Guerlain's latest offering, Guerlain Homme (£29, 30ml eau de toilette), for example, was inspired by the minty Cuban cocktail – with notes of peppermint, rum and sugar cane – has not gone down well with scent snobs. “A mojito accord?” scoffs

one unimpressed reviewer on the blog site NowSmellThis. “Dear God, what next... Sex on the Beach or lychee martini?”

While there is no sign of either (yet), several of the latest fragrances appear to have been conceived with cocktail hour in mind. Mirror of Vanities (£93.50, 50ml), from the new Thierry Mugler Mirror Collection of five fragrances, contains citrus and quinine, the bitter note more commonly associated with tonic water – and yes, it does bring to mind a gin and tonic – while the brand is

also working on a new limited edition fragrance A*Men Pure Malt, incorporating a malt whisky accord. Rapper Sean John also sought inspiration in alcohol for his first fragrance, Unforgivable (£35, 75ml), which opens with a “champagne accord” inspired, no doubt, by the his love of Roederer Cristal (to underscore the theme, the fragrance even comes packaged in a champagne case for Christmas). Niche perfume Absolument Absinthe (£75, 100ml), meanwhile, has gone one louche step

further, blending notes of the once-illegal liquor absinthe with cannabis.

Some might sniff a trend here, others a gimmick. After all, the ante has recently been upped in the male fragrance sector with a significant increase in the number of launches this year, including new offerings from Dior, Prada, Versace, Armani and Givenchy. Over the past couple of years, male fragrance has outperformed women's in terms of growth, according to Karen Grant, vice-president of global beauty at NPD market research agency in New York, and the bestselling prestige fragrance overall is a men's one, Acqua Di Gio. So it's hardly surprising if big brands are approaching the male fragrance market with renewed vigour. And adding a little alcoholic kick or the hint of an illegal substance is certainly one way to make your product stand out. As esteemed perfume critic Luca Turin writes of Mugler's *Mirror of The Vanities* in *Perfumes: The Guide* (£20, Profile Books): "It's not every day one comes across a truly novel accord in perfumery and this one had me puzzled for a while until I figured out what it reminded me of – Campari Soda, served with a slice of lemon – and sure enough, the list of materials includes bark from the cinchona tree from which quinine was derived, as well as citrus peel." The idea, he concludes, is "original and euphoric" and he predicts that Alexis Dadier, the young perfumer who created it, "will be widely imitated".

But despite the decadence suggested by the drugs and alcohol theme, sniff a little deeper and there is something very different – and altogether more wholesome – lurking underneath. "No one wants to smell exactly like a mojito," admits Thierry Wasser, Guerlain's recently appointed in-house perfumer and creator of *Guerlain Homme* (£29, 30ml eau de toilette). The fragrance, he says, "was first and foremost designed to create a sensation of freshness". Sylvaine Delacourte, the brand's directrice of fragrance evaluation and creation, had the idea of a mojito accord while on holiday in Cuba "and kept the idea in the back of her mind, in case one day we wanted to make something very fresh". Delacourte, incidentally, was not the first to spot the potential in the minty cocktail: Czech & Speake's owner, Frank Sawkins, was similarly inspired by cigar-buying trips to create the 2002 fragrance *Cuba* (£65, 100ml eau de cologne), containing top notes of lime, peppermint and rum, layered over tobacco.

"What I really wanted was to express something green," continues Wasser, for whom green notes – the fresh aromas of herbs, plants and forest – are something of a signature. In order to create "a freshness that was almost endless", he also added notes of green tea and green rhubarb – "very tart but very lush" – to the mojito mix. The result is an elegant, refreshing fragrance, where the real story is not the Cuban cocktail but the blast of fresh green notes. It is the latter that gives the fragrance an interesting twist. Guerlain has billed *Homme* as the olfactory equivalent "of a cool, refreshing drink that sends a shiver down the spine", while the print advertising, which features a man in a jungle-style setting, gives a further clue to the desired effect. "Men's fragrances are evolving into something a little more natural," says Wasser. "And green notes play very well with this."

Similarly, anyone expecting Absolutment Absinthe to smell like a smoky Left Bank

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dive is likely to be disappointed. Absinthe has, over the years, been associated with depression, madness and even death – it was, after all, the favourite tippie of several unhinged artists. But Absolutment Absinthe, created by a perfumer in Grasse, is described by its maker, MV Production Perfume, as "fortifying and fresh". "The idea came from a fourth-generation member of a family of absinthe makers," explains Terence Pearce of UK distributor Luxe360.net. "There was always a wonderful smell of absinthe flowers in the distillery, so he consulted a perfumer to see if it was possible to capture it in a fragrance. The perfumer pushed the envelope a little bit further by adding cannabis top notes to the absinthe heart, along with a blend of 49 other ingredients." Despite the deadly associations with the green liquor and plant that inspired it, the scent's personality owes more to the clean effervescence of tea, with bergamot notes and the sharp, aromatic greenness of galbanum (which smells like freshly shelled peas) than the smell of 110 proof excess.

Traditionally, male perfumery has lacked the innovation of women's but now, it seems, perfumers are adding a shot of excitement. What we are seeing, according to Marigay McKee, fashion and beauty director of Harrods, "is a more daring and controversial approach to male scent" with "notes that surprise and intrigue – including vigorous green notes such as mint in Cartier Roadster [£37.50, 50ml eau de toilette], lime and mint in Guerlain Homme

and sharp ginger in Dior Homme Sport [£48, 100ml eau de toilette]."

"By using ingredients such as cannabis it's possible that perfumers are trying to conjure up an exciting, edgy memory in their consumers' minds," says Fiona Rauh, director of Liquidrock, an agency that translates consumer behaviour and forecasts beauty trends. "But it's also possible that consumers are looking for a sense of eco-purity and perfumers are trying to create this by including these particular green, herbal notes in their fragrance compositions." (It's probably also no coincidence that many of these "juices" are pale green in colour.) Another explanation for the sudden surge of green notes is that with women's perfumery moving into the traditionally male territory of woody notes, perfumers are trying to differentiate male fragrance and move it in a different direction with fresh herbal green notes. According to Erwin Creed, perfumer and owner of the Creed perfume dynasty, "green notes such as basil, fennel, galbanum, rosemary and fern are very classical and have long been a favourite in male perfumery. But by playing around with the proportions and pushing [the quantity of] green notes, you can create something more interesting."

Niche brands have gone particularly big on the green theme. L'Artisan Parfumeur's new fragrance *Fleur de Liane* (£50, 50ml eau de toilette) is built around a tropical rainforest note, while the Swedish brand Byredo has launched a fragrance called *Green* (£90, 100ml eau de parfum) which contains

an overdose of green notes including violet leaves, pungent sage and green orange rind. It was inspired by the kind of cognes founder and perfumer Ben Gorman's father wore in the 1970s but smells refreshingly modern. "Certainly, green notes tap into the subconscious and suggest a more natural fragrance," says Gorman.

Peppermint, in particular, seems to be having a moment, as demonstrated by the new Cartier men's fragrance *Roadster*. Named after the Cartier watch, it contains a megadose of mint which, according to Cartier's in-house perfumer Mathilde Laurent, creates "a feeling of speed, of freshness and a blast of air on the face". Many fragrances contain mint, according to Laurent, "but it is not an easy ingredient for perfumery because many people associate it with air freshener or chewing gum. In *Roadster* you can smell the mint perfectly, it's in the opening notes. But I tried to create a very natural mint, as if you are crushing a mint leaf in your fingers and putting it under your nose. I also worked it with other green notes such as galbanum and cut grass so that the mix is very natural." However, the addition of vanilla seems to take the edge off the clean, aromatic impact of the mint.

But if mint and mojitos are this year's flavour, Thierry Mugler's *A*Men Pure Malt*, a limited edition fragrance to be launched next summer, suggests that perfumers are progressing to sterner stuff. According to Pierre Aulas, Mugler's olfactive artistic director (yes, such a job exists), this is the continuation of a theme started last year with *A*Men Pure Coffee* (£30, 50ml eau de toilette), a fragrance infused with notes of Arabic coffee. "It was a great success, so we have decided to have a little more fun and create an alcoholic malt whisky accord," he says. "Just like whisky, we have macerated the juice in an oak barrel, which enhances the woody aspect and we've added a specific malt extract, which is very expensive." He and his colleagues, it seems, had fun testing different whiskies before choosing Laphroaig, a single malt from Islay, Scotland. "We chose this because it smells of peat and turf and brings something different to the mix," he explains.

But what is there to find attractive in the scent of Scotch? For some men, the point of cologne is to disguise stale whisky fumes, not leave them in your wake. Aulas is nonetheless confident of its appeal. "Good whisky costs money and has luxury connotations. It smells expensive and is a very reassuring aroma for men," he says. "It also creates a mood, so you can imagine you are in a very nice club with a roaring fire in the fireplace. It is comforting." Aulas also points out that whisky, like absinthe and rum, is a very masculine smell, "though obviously, *A*Men Pure Malt* does not smell exactly like whisky – just a hint of it". That's the spirit. ♦

A DROP OF THE HARD STUFF

Absolutment Absinthe, 01892-783 040; www.absolutment.net. **L'Artisan Parfumeur**, 17 Cale St, London SW3 (020-7352 4196; www.laboutique.delartisanparfumeur.com). **Byredo**, see Les Senteurs. **Cartier Roadster**, 020-3147 4850. **Czech & Speake**, 39c Jermyn Street, London SW1 (020-7439 0216; www.czechandspeake.com) and stockists. **Guerlain**, 01932-233 887. **Harrods**, 87-135 Brompton Rd, London SW1 (020-7730 1234). **Thierry Mugler**, see Harrods. **Sean John**, 0870-034 2566. **Les Senteurs**, 71 Elizabeth St, London SW1 (020-7730 2322; www.lessenteurs.com).



Below: the aroma of Thierry Mugler's *Mirror of Vanities* (£93.50, 50ml) brings to mind a stiff gin and tonic.