

they've got flare


To the cognoscenti, a divine-smelling candle is no longer enough – now it's a multi-sensory objet d'art, says Karen Wheeler. Photographs by Michael James O'Brien.

When it comes to the please-all present, it's hard to beat a scented candle. There are few people who wouldn't be happy to find a waxed offering by Jo Malone or Diptyque in their Christmas stocking. But it's not just about a nicely packaged room scent any more. In the past year or so, candles have evolved to a new level of sophistication with designs that double as decorative "multi-sensory" objects and light sculptures, or that come with a fascinating history lesson attached, capturing, for example, the scent of the pre-revolution Palace of Versailles or the ambience of Napoleon's camp fire.

That said, it's not easy sorting the desirable from the déclassé, given the proliferation of brands in recent years. A stroll through the beauty hall of Bergdorf Goodman in New York, for example, reveals that anyone who is someone now has their own candle range, from interior designer Jonathan Adler, whose candles come in graphic 1970s-style packaging (from about £22), to fashion designer Oscar de la Renta, who, in a nod to his multi-home-owning clients, offers a City Candle, a Country Candle and an Island Candle (about £30 each) made by upmarket brand Vie Luxe.

Even Elton John has a range (about £32 and made by Slatkin, if you're interested).

Candles have become a connoisseur subject. It's not enough to know your Tocca from your Diptyque. Instead, you need to be clued up on who makes the best Casablanca Lily, or which brand has the best colour and consistency of wax, and whether it is vegetable or mineral, soy or paraffin. "It's not just about the candle or a nice smell any more," says Angela Creasey, head of beauty at Liberty. "The whole market is changing. Now a scented candle has to offer something more interesting. Customers have become



Candles, from left: Apothia's Wave has a grapefruit scent, from The Conran Shop, £30. Cire Trudon's Empire comes in a Vinci hand-blown glass jar, £45. Belle Fleur's Figue Noir from Space NK, £35.

much more switched on about the different scent delivery systems, for example. It's not just about fragrance but using candles as part of the decoration and setting a mood."

Top of the list of labels likely to appeal to wax connoisseurs is Cire Trudon, a French candle manufacturer with a history dating back to 1643 (Trudon was appointed official wax producer to the Court of Versailles in 1687 and continued to supply Marie-Antoinette and Louis XIV during captivity before going on to make candles for Napoleon). The brand recently launched a collection of 12 scented candles (£45 each), drawing inspiration from the brand's illustrious past.

Designed to conjure up certain eras in French history, the candles include Roi de Soleil, which reflects the decadence of Versailles under Louis XIV. To recreate the smell of the court of the Sun King, the perfumer sniffed the waxed wooden floors in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles and then reinvented it using a combination of "resinous trees and incense". The Trianon candle – a blend of hyacinth, white flowers and roses – boasts a floral scent based on the fragrances created for Marie-Antoinette by perfumer Jean-Louis Fargeon, while Empire (pictured on opening page) is a smoky, woody smell inspired by the idea of Napoleon's camp fire. Carmelite captures "the perfume of old family houses, cloisters and convents" and is a nod to the fact that Trudon has always supplied the Catholic churches of France.

But Cire Trudon has more than just a glittering history and fragrance concept going for it. "We wanted to do the best candle ever made," says creative director Ramdane Touhami. "Health is very important to us, so the wax used is of unparalleled quality – not only the whitest but also the purest. The exact recipe is a closely guarded secret but it is made from 100 per cent

Below left: Dayna Decker's Luminesse Sculpture Petite Aston in black/gold, about £351.
Below right: Donna Karan's Chaos has an aroma of fizzy cola with woody spices, £45.



vegetal substances, paraffin-free and devoid of any petrochemicals.”

“Trudon is not just another candle in a whisky glass,” says Creasey. “The aspect that Liberty customers love is that the candles have a handmade, artisanal feeling to them.” The deep green, irregular glass jars are hand-blown in Italy by Vinci, the gold label is produced by the oldest champagne label maker in France and even the wicks are made from the highest quality cotton in order to ensure clean and even combustion. “The amount of passion and energy and detail that has gone into the candles is really obvious,” says Creasey.

If Trudon evokes French churches and the Palace of Versailles, candles by cult LA beauty boutique Apothia (£30) evoke a light and airy LA-style ambience – polished wood floors, sheer curtains and a Malibu breeze. Now available in the UK, they have subtle, clean smells likely to appeal to American sensibilities, such as Casa (based on the fragrance of Casablanca lilies “with cut grass and fresh air”) and Wave (pictured on opening page), a white grapefruit scent redolent of beach houses. “I like to think of them as swirls in the air. They are not cloying or heavy,” says Apothia founder Ron Robinson. The wax, or “illuminating cream” as Robinson likes to call it, is very high quality and burns evenly without the usual crater effect in the middle. The silicone band around each candle, meanwhile, not only insulates against heat but refracts the light of the candle, diffusing it to create a halo effect. “The photographic packaging is contemporary and the smell of the candles is very fresh and modern,” says Polly Dickens, creative director of The

Conran Shop. “We stock eight Apothia fragrances, including the exotically named Velvet Rope (vanilla martini spiked with absolute jasmine and a twist of grapefruit) and the new Verde, which is fresh and grassy.” Demand for scented candles continues to grow, according to Dickens.

The Donna Karan Collection Candles, meanwhile, are also guaranteed to impress scent snobs. The four recently launched limited edition candles (£45 each) come in chic black glass pots and are based on four perfumes from Donna Karan The Collection, including Signature and Wenge, a dark, sensual fragrance based on the wood of the same name. However, Chaos (pictured on previous

One LA-based maker describes her design as “not so much a candle as a lighting and fragrance concept”.

page) – a blend of spicy, exotic woods and herbs that has been described as smelling “like fizzy cola with extra spices and wood” – is the one to get, since the scent has built up a truly fanatical following since its demise over a decade ago; its surprise reintroduction in September was a source of unmitigated joy among fragrance buffs and perfume bloggers. The Chaos candle – which, despite its name, is said to promote serenity – is likely to be a similarly hot commodity.

That candles are now as much about visual as olfactory effect is demonstrated by DayNa Decker’s designs (for to call them mere candles is an injustice). The LA-based former model describes her Chandel (coined from the French word for candle) as “not so much a candle as a lighting and

fragrance concept”. With several ranges to choose from, her Chandels appeal to the senses of sight, sound and smell, and are unlikely to flicker away unnoticed on the Noguchi coffee table. The eco-friendly range of Botanika Chandels (£38), in completely clear gel wax with a wick made from a slice of “eco wood”, are both beautiful and unusual. Even people who don’t usually like scented candles will appreciate the decorative effects of these designs made from a blend of natural oils and resins. The DayNa Decker Couture Chandel (£52), which comes in an elegant hand-blown black glass vessel, makes a perfect gift, sumptuously wrapped in a black box with black

ribbons. For those with money to burn, meanwhile, there are her top-of-the-range Luminesse Sculptures made from perfumed oils and sustainable wood in graphic columns and cylindrical shapes (prices range from about £210; the Petite Aston pictured on previous page costs about £351).

“It’s small details – the quality of the wax, the heavy weight of the glass, the fact that the candles crackle like a fireplace, that sets DayNa Decker candles apart,” says Nicky Kinnaird of Space NK.

Another brand that, according to Kinnaird, sends out the right signals is Belle Fleur, whose Exotic Wood Collection was launched in the UK this autumn by Space NK (Figue Noir pictured on opening page). Created by the mother and daughter proprietors of Fifth

Avenue florist Belle Fleur, much favoured by Manhattan socialites and the fashion world, the wood-scented candles (£35) include exotic combinations of ingredients. Cacao Tabaz for example, contains cocoa, tobacco leaf and ebony “with a touch of roasted espresso” and smells like bitter chocolate when burning. “People are really working on candles as if they were design objects now. At the same time, the fragrances are becoming more sophisticated. We’ve been through the single-note phase; now it’s about blends. The fragrances for the Space NK range of candles, for example, were created by Christopher Sheldrake [one of the world’s top perfumers] in collaboration with me.”

So remember, it’s not just a candle that you’re giving this Christmas but a multi-sensory product, an aesthetic and aromatic masterpiece – a subtle message in a heavy-weight, hand-blown glass jar. ♦

LEADING LIGHTS

Apothia, see the Conran Shop, Liberty and Harvey Nichols. **Belle Fleur**, www.bellefleurny.com and see Space NK. **Bergdorf Goodman**, 754 Fifth Avenue, New York 10019 (+1212-753 7300). **Cire Trudon**, see Liberty and Roja Dove Haute Parfumerie at Harrods. **The Conran Shop**, 81 Fulham Road, London SW3 (020-7589 7401; www.conranshop.co.uk) and branch. **DayNa Decker**, www.daynadecker.com and see Liberty. **Donna Karan Collection Candles**, see Harrods. **Harrods**, 87-135 Brompton Road, London SW1 (020-7730 1234). **Harvey Nichols**, 109-125 Knightsbridge, London SW1 (020-7235 5000) and branches. **Liberty**, 210-220 Regent Street, London W1 (020-7734 1234; www.liberty.co.uk). **Space NK**, 020-8740 2085; www.spacenk.co.uk.