

L'Heure Bleue at 100

Société Française des Parfumeurs celebrates the continuing influence of Jacques Guerlain's classic fragrance

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According to Guerlain's archives, Jacques Guerlain was inspired to create *L'Heure Bleue* in 1912 during a walk along the Seine when he noticed the vivid blue color of the sky as dusk fell over the city. "I felt something so intense, I could only express it in a perfume," he later wrote in his notes.

On Sept. 20, 2012, Société Française des Parfumeurs (SFP), the society of French perfumers, celebrated Guerlain *L'Heure Bleue*'s 100th anniversary. Patrick Saint-Yves, the president of the SFP, chaired the event and highlighted the enormous influence of the fragrance in the history of modern perfumery. For many perfumers, *L'Heure Bleue* is not simply a successful fragrance that survived two World Wars; it is also a work of technical and artistic genius.

The evolution of the idea of *L'Heure Bleue* can be understood through Guerlain's earlier creations. Carole Aymé, a training manager for Guerlain in France, highlighted *Après l'Ondée* (1906), a delicate composition dominated by iris and heliotrope. She likened it to a watercolor drawing in contrast to the image of an oil painting evoked by *L'Heure Bleue*.

Like its predecessor, *Coty L'Origan* (1905), *L'Heure Bleue* explores the floral oriental theme, fusing the opulence of orange flower and iris with the sensual richness of sandalwood, vanilla and balsamic notes. Embellished by citrus, thyme and the gourmand sweetness of heliotropin, the effect of *L'Heure Bleue* is nuanced and multifaceted. Perfumer Jean Kerléo, the creator of fragrances like *Jean Patou 1000* and *Sublime*, mentions it as an example of a fragrance with an impeccable *sillage*.

"It is the universal symbol of the word powdery in perfumes," adds perfumer Patricia de Nicolai, the president of the Osmothèque perfume conservatory. "It is for me a masterpiece of our industry."

Sophia Grojsman, the author of Yves Saint Laurent *Paris*, Calvin Klein *Eternity* and Estée Lauder *White Linen*, considers it a fragrance with beautiful structure and development. Her *Vanderbilt* (1981), a successful American classic, is based on the same intriguing contrast between fresh citrus and orange blossom top notes and the methyl ionone, heliotropin and vanillin dominated drydown.



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From left, Norbert Bijaoui, perfumer and former SFP president; presenter Carole Aymé (Guerlain); and current SFP president Patrick Saint-Yves



Pierre Nuyens, vice president of the SFP, and Patrick Saint-Yves, president of the SFP

To mark the anniversary, Guerlain's in-house perfumer, Thierry Wasser, created a new interpretation of the classical fragrance in three different concentrations which were presented at the conference. Aymé explained that the fragrances are based on the accords found in the original, but that each formula was worked in a luminous, airy manner to appeal to consumers who might be intimidated by the rich aura of *L'Heure Bleue*. *L'Aurore Eau de Toilette*, the most sparkling of the trio, focuses on citrus and orange blossom. *Le Zénith Eau de Parfum* wraps orange blossom and iris into a warm oriental accord. *Le Crépuscule Parfum* emphasizes the velvety base notes. The trio is packaged into a sumptuous *coffret* created in collaboration with Baccarat and Gripoux. Aymé noted that the *coffret* is meant as a limited edition, but Wasser's interpretation will join Guerlain's *Les Parisiennes* collection in 2013.

L'Heure Bleue remains an influential fragrance within the perfume industry. Even 100 years after its birth, this iconic fragrance still inspires new trends and captures the imagination.

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