



# Fragrance as a Reflection of Socio-economic and Cultural Condition

By Annette Golden,  
Revlon, Inc., New York City

In tracing the historical highlights of this 20th century, it becomes apparent that the social and economic happenings of each decade, those which shape the character and personality of each period, are clearly reflected in the consumer products popular in that time frame. Having the benefit of hindsight is clearly an advantage—only those products that pass the test of time are memorable because they are a cohesive part of the whole culture of their time.

As the creators and marketers of products intended to appeal to women of the 1990s, we best understand the relevant current social and economic trends forming the personality of the upcoming decade, the *culture* of that time, if you will.

To see what relevance the environment has had on product popularity since the early 20th century, I have traced those political, economic, technological and artistic happenings of each decade and suggested their influence on the fragrances of that same period. Obviously I have

only selected those critical influences that stand out from the rest.

Let's go back in time to the early 20th century after the Victorian era when modern woman, as we know her, was starting to emerge.

## Early 20th Century

● *The Environment.* In 1913, female emancipation was beginning as an organized movement around the world with suffragettes gaining the vote in many countries. The 1909-1910 Ballet Russe's performance of *Scheherazade* caused an uproar for its outlandish use of color—brilliant primary colors in unusual combos.

Two influential events of the 1910-1920 period which shaped the history of that time and were worldwide in scope were the sinking of the *Titanic* and World War I.

● *The Fashions.* 1911—Motoring, the new pastime, required a new wardrobe—dustproof, windproof, rainproof. By 1917 shorter, fuller



skirts revealing feet and ankles were seen for the first time with the advent of the first world war.

- *Cosmetics.* A New York store advertised a "motor box of cosmetics" intended to protect a woman's skin against the coarsening effects of the sun, wind and dust.

- *Fragrance.* A new family of fragrances known as the chypre group began. Originating with Coty's Chypre in 1917, a true reflection of the spirit of the times and the bold statement of freshness and richness with a very earthy quality symbolized women's first steps into emancipation. The chypres were a marked contrast to the sweet florals and delicate powdery scents popular until that time.

## The Twenties

- *The Environment.* A time of immorality and extravagance filled the front pages with prohibition and gangsters' speakeasies, flowing gin and whiskey. Wild youth and flappers danced to jazz—charleston, black bottom, dixieland.

However, progress was respected and admired by both young and old as "modern" inventions such as new machinery, automobiles, and airplanes held new fascination.

In art, cubism and German expressionism limned by Picasso and Klee excited and puzzled many. Intellectual ferment was teeming in the work of such writers as F. Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, Eugene O'Neill. The decade led up to the crash of '29.

- *The Fashions.* Skirts got shorter. A more boyish look became fashionable—boyish haircombs, dropped waists, straight chemise dresses. Shapeless clothes (no bust or hips).

- *Cosmetics.* The vamp look of Pola Negri, Theda Bara emphasized by heavy eye makeup, darkened lips, lots of mascara, plucked brows (nearly covered by hats), eyes rimmed with kohl, huge earrings and long cigarette holders.

- *Fragrance.* The fantasy world of the twenties with its fast-paced style was ripe for the appeal of a brand new fragrance type never before possible—the aldehydic notes. These man-made ingredients were reflective of the progress in the art of perfumery, not unlike giant steps in other technologies. The quality of radiation they imparted to the finished product was brighter and more brilliant than possible before. Who better represented the feminine self-willed attitude of

the time other than Chanel, both in the fragrance and the woman?

## The Thirties

- *The Environment.* Most of the decade shaped our tastes for glamorous escapes. The Van Gogh exhibit received startling attention, viewers were agog at "the mad painter's" colorations.

Annual vacations for employees were introduced.

In London, 1936, the 1st International Surrealist Exhibition caused an uproar and Schiaparelli was the catalyst who transformed the fantasies of the surrealists into fashion. She launched a vivid new color, "shocking pink", intended to startle.

The zipper was invented in 1936.

By 1939 synthetic fibers and mass production techniques made well-cut simple clothes affordable. Elasticized yarn made the one-piece maillot popular.

Vinyl was introduced.

Think of the fun of swing/big bands—Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Glen Miller—or the Broadway musicals of Cole Porter and George Gershwin!

- *The Fashions.* Women reacted optimistically with a return to femininity—longer hair and dressing to show the curves of the female figure (perhaps in an effort to boost male morale) in slinky dresses, halters, one-shoulder looks and slimmer silhouettes. But this clothing was well-cut and affordable.

The "mad painters" colorations appeared in dress fabrics in stark yellow, greens, blues and browns and the combinations of these colors were unique (cocoa brown with hyacinth blue; prune with turquoise; mustard with grey).

With annual vacations, suntans became essential and to enhance it, white swimsuits and evening gowns became important.

- *Cosmetics.* Inspiration for cosmetics came from the film stars like Joan Crawford, Jean Harlow and Greta Garbo. However black and white film needed facial definition so brows were plucked and darkened with pencil, strong lip color, heavy mascara, and stiff permanents.

Loose face powder was invented and there was the beginning of a full range of lip and nail shades.

- *Fragrance.* What fragrance family would better suit the feminine attitude and fashion of the 30s than the oriental? Fragrances that were intensely female and warm, such as Schiaparelli's



Shocking. It was, also, a time for rich and expensive florals, such as Patou's Joy.

### The Forties

● *The Environment.* World War II had many influences. It brought a shift to products made in America. Textiles and dyestuff were rationed. Strong dark colors used up too much dye, so pastels were prevalent—dusty lime, cherry red, tulip pink and orchid mauve, shrill peacock blue, much yellow, much gray.

A government decree allowed only three yards of fabric for women's suits, two yards for jackets, one yard for skirts.

Nylon stockings, though developed in 1940, were not available for mass market until after the war.

Keeping up appearances meant keeping up morale, however, and the British Ministry of Supply issued a special allowance of high-grade face powder and foundation to its female munitions workers in 1942.

Does anyone remember the "pin-up girls" Lana Turner, Betty Grable and Jane Russell?

The baby boom began as the war ended.

● *The Fashions.* World War II greatly influenced the fashions. Silhouettes were shorter and slimmer. Military styling required brass buttons braids trim, square shoulders and Eisenhower jackets. Silk for hosiery was in short supply. Women used leg makeup and even eyebrow pencil to draw on seams.

The Coty awards, 1943, honored *American Design* creativity.

Hollywood's impact was seen again in Dorothy Lamour's two-piece swimsuit, Loretta Young's elegance and Ginger Rogers and her white-collared "working girl" dress.

After the war and its fabric restriction, Paris showed a "new look"—long, full skirts, snug bodices and jackets. Glamorous American hemlines dropped as well. There were, also, fashions geared to teenagers—bobby socks, saddle shoes, Sloppy Joe sweaters and oversized shirts.

● *Cosmetics.* Aircraft "dope" was used as nail enamel. Americanism was very evident as Revlon's big sellers in 1941 were Cherry Coke and Hot Dog. Matte finish makeup lightly powdered, was accented with deep red lips; eyes were lightly brushed with mascara.

● *Fragrance.* The early part of the decade found us deeply immersed in World War II, the environment was largely formed by the primary

demands of war, and probably, availability dictated the trends. However, as goods became more available and women could act like women again, they opted for softer, prettier scents. The floral family types like L'Air Du Temps, White Shoulders and Fracas were born.

### The Fifties

● *The Environment.* The World War II period of austerity led to a more optimistic note for the early 50s. Primary colors became the hallmark of modernism. After years of separation, young marrieds focused on togetherness, children, comforts of home, and the country watched the rise of suburbia with housing developments and shopping malls. Autos replaced trains. Jet plane passenger service began in 1958. The space age took off with Sputnik I in 1957.

Instead of pin-up girls we had sex symbols—Bridget Bardot and Marilyn Monroe.

TV was starting to become a major influence in most households, creating new heroes and heroines. Rock 'n roll was in full swing.

The schools were starting to teach sex education. Youth rebellion erupted in music with rock 'n roll, Elvis Presley, tight pants, DA haircuts and sideburns. In like manner James Dean and Marlon Brando popularized t-shirts and leather jackets.

● *The Fashions.* Women's fashions were dictated in those days with full skirts, matching ensembles, sweater sets, mother-daughter dresses, baby doll pajamas, dressmaker suits and stiletto heels, capri pants, bermuda shorts and flat shoes.

In 1951 the first colorfast turquoise dye for cotton became available. Pink shirts became fashionable for men in 1955 and the following year the movie *Funny Face* with Audrey Hepburn and Fred Astaire boosted the craze for hot pink.

● *Cosmetics.* In an effort to bring back veils, heavy eye makeup and strongly marked brows became fashionable. The veils flopped but doe-eyes with curved corners caught on. Eyes were emphasized with a growing range of eye shadows.

● *Fragrance.* The fifties were a very optimistic time for America with a new affluence, the selection of more typical male/female roles. Interestingly, although we see both chypre and oriental fragrances gain popularity, it's the first time that American fragrances enjoyed such popular success as in Youth Due, Intimate and Royal Secret.



Noticeably, all had a common bond in their aggressive natures and gave credibility to fashion dictates of the very female shape in fashion, possibly a natural evolution of the forced understatement of the 1940s.

### The Sixties

- *The Environment.* The Tumultuous sixties gave the youth culture determined the fashion trends. Primarily due to the baby boom, the number of teenagers in the sixties made them extremely powerful and influential. The attitudes of this youth culture was anti-establishment, as evidenced by their music and their clothes. London was the site of many new attitudes in music, design, fashion and decoration. The Beatles, drugs, hippies, communes, the pill—the sixties were truly a time of change.

- *The Fashions.* Courrage introduced the mini skirt in Paris in 1964. Mini skirts arrived in New York in 1964 complete with lacey pantyhose and white leather boots.

1966 brought pop art, geometrics and Sasson haircuts. Paco Robanne designed space age, futuristic mini dresses in geometric shapes with metal, leather and plastic trim.

Flower power was in full bloom.

Later in the decade, hippy/ethnic looks predominated—Afghan dresses, African caftans, Indonesian batik shirts, Peruvian peasant costumes with dangling pierced earrings (and the absence of makeup).

The rock artists set the fashion trends of Levis, sneakers, second-hand clothes and long hair.

In 1968, the Beatles and their *Yellow Submarine* epitomized the new color consciousness, which stemmed from the hippy movement and psychedelic drugs, and was displayed in psychedelic colors on long, multi-colored dresses and contrasting prints. Going from minis and micro minis to midis caused great confusion, driving women to pants and pants suits, then unisex clothes and, finally, the ubiquitous jeans.

- *Cosmetics.* Lip color was pale and primarily frosted and lip gloss became important.

Eye makeup was heavy with lots of liner, false lashes and painted “Twiggy” lashes. Eyeshadow colors were bright with turquoise becoming the most popular shade.

- *Fragrance.* This decade clearly belonged to the young as they revolutionized our standards of beauty, music, art and politics. Starting as a total rebellion of all that the fifties symbolized, they

became directional for the balance of society by the time the decade ended. There were clearly two parallel life patterns co-existing throughout the decade—the continuum of the fifties culture of high spirited, high-profile Americans, as embodied by John Kennedy, and the new rebellion’s young who mistrusted anyone over thirty. Obviously, very different fragrance preferences were evident amongst the young who opted for musk and incense versus more traditional types. The more classic fragrances of popularity were the flowery types as in Fidji and Norell.

### The Seventies

- *The Environment.* For the first time in history, way to a quieter time with the ending of the Vietnam war, the economy in recession and impeachment in the White House following Watergate.

The ERA and the women’s movement were symbolic of the sentiment of the seventies. Germaine Greer’s *Female Eunuch* sold 70,000 copies and names like Gloria Steinem, Betty Freidan and Jacqueline Susanne became household words.

Labeled as the “me” generation, there was a great move towards body consciousness and hot tubs, jogging and tennis. Bottled spring water, health foods started to become popular after a small cult following.

Discos were born in this decade.

- *The Fashions.* The biggest fashion news of the seventies was the *pants suit*. Body consciousness brought tight knits, maillots and jogging suits. Jumpsuits, pants suits and tight jeans became a way of life. Unisex clothing, unisex hair salons and clothing boutiques became prevalent largely due to feminist movement and more and more women entering the work force.

The new conservatism popularized earthtones.

- *Cosmetics.* New conservatism also became apparent in cosmetics. Makeup became more subdued and natural looking. Brown eyeshadow was a must. Foundation became beigier and we saw more colorless lipgloss. Lips and nails moved to brown and terracotta. Natural ingredients were the rage.

- *Fragrance.* Perhaps this decade did not produce a new family of fragrances; it certainly produced a whole new character of fragrance, consistent with the way women were feeling about themselves. This age of strident women, liberated from the bonds of homemaking, was ex-



pressed by the assertive fragrance messages. Although the popular fragrance types were floral and green types, as in Chloe, Jontue and Alliage, the runaway winner was Charlie—the personification of this “me” generation of women, strong, determined and ready to be heard. The seventies, interestingly enough, was a time of great dichotomy when many sub-groups were leading their own battles and there was little unity on many fronts. Despite it all, one overwhelmingly powerful social attitude converted into a creative concept and product captured broad interest.

### The Eighties

- *The Environment.* With a conservative administration and a tight economy, consumer purchases will lean toward classic, timeless purchases, reflecting quality rather than quantity.

The baby boomers have finally come of age, many struggling to achieve what their parents had at the same age. Better educated, marrying later and having children after starting a career are all earmarks of the new values these young adults bring to the eighties.

The many lifestyle options available today are apparent in the emergence of specialty boutiques, special interest magazines and short-lived product lifecycles. The health food cults of the seventies have become mainstream in the eighties, with great marketing successes in the food/nutrition and body fitness arenas.

Certainly, the “born in America” craze is evident in every product category we are exposed to and seems to trigger the imaginations of the “we” generation.

- *The Fashions.* Most prominent are *investment clothing, quality vs. quantity, comfort as a way of life, knit dressing, soft dressing*—softer fabrics, softer tailoring, softer colorations. Clothes provide more movement and fluidity. Directionally, daytime attire is more feminine as the decade progresses.

- *Cosmetics.* News is in options where there is a product for every occasion and every way of life.

The wines/purples emerge as classics in cosmetics, where we see balanced makeup looks for day and fantasy makeup looks for night.

- *Fragrance.* Although certain decades seem to simulate earlier times, as the eighties have been compared to the fifties in terms of attitude, conservatism, traditional values, patriotism and sharing, there are as many differences as similarities, making this a complex time. Women like the choices that their new-found feminism

allows them. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the man-tailored business suit is being amended to more feminine attire and makeup. If she presents herself in more conservative trappings, her mentality may be appealed to in fantasy messages. Although, popular scents have ranged from the florizontals, as in Oscar and Vanderbilt, to the orientals, as in Opium and Obsession, most have a fantasy appeal. Perhaps, as an expression of our times, the messages are complex versus singular. Is Vanderbilt appealing to status/designer or to the promise of ultimate release and escape? Is Obsession appealing to the ultimate sexual fantasy or does Calvin Klein give it a respectable designer aura? In this time of great personal pressure for so many, is the ultimate role of fragrance to satisfy the most profound emotional release of total escape? Because our world is so full of product messages, reaching out to us from so many places, TV, print, radio, billboards, personal interception, it is incredibly difficult today to reach a consumer without sensationalism. For the moment, the successes of the eighties have employed very dramatic techniques to be heard, either as part of the “we” generation with the contagious appeal of Americanism, as in the Pepsi generation, the Chevy commercial, or the Stetson success; or as part of the “me” mentality, expressed in Obsession and Poison. These two attitudes will probably continue to co-exist for a while. Our real job as fragrance creators and marketers is to ferret out the niches of the future.

### The Future

If the future holds greater diversity, in more alternative lifestyles, more segmentation, more specialization, the opportunity for fragrance growth will follow.

However, this will require a broader reach for both marketers and perfumers. Not only is the field ripe for new positionings and new kinds of marketing appeals, but for exploration of new fragrance blends as well.

We, as an industry, cannot and will not grow unless we are willing to try some new things. If we are to again reach a new level of unit growth, we must excite the consumer to use fragrance more often and to use more of it. Time may be on our side. With cost of entry being at an all-time high for a fast fragrance hit, the opportunity to introduce more innovative marketing positions, with more original scents in the bottle, may be upon us. If we are willing to launch more of these ideas, without the bankrupting advertising and promotional support of recent years, we just may



find an industry with several modest success stories each year versus the few major hits and multitude of failures. Some will survive the test of time and endure as classics, others may have a two to three-year lifecycle. The major difference in this kind of approach is that by minimizing the financial risk of a new entry, we can encourage our managements to take a chance on an original concept. Ironically, the consumer will not be difficult to lead to the altar. The more difficult party to convince will be the retailer who has become spoiled by the exaggerated over-spending against the category to create instant sales success with zero profitability.

I contend the future strength of the fragrance industry is dependent upon the level of creativity we foster and support. Creators must be encouraged to practice their craft at the highest level of originality. This means without the shackles of too much practicality and compromise.

Great ideas are not easy to come by—throw out twenty for every one with potential. But first, initiate, develop and present the idea. There will be plenty of opportunity to manage an idea into practicality if it has feet.

Examine every statistic, trend and social happening that could affect the way women will be thinking in the nineties. One may be the core of an important new idea, or perhaps the future will hold a series of marketing concepts directed at small sub-segment or special interest groups.

The labor department estimates that by 1990, 57 million women will be in work force or 58% adult women vs. 1980, when 45 million women were in work force or 51% adult women.

Is it possible that a true "dress for success" fragrance designed specifically to complement working attire and working environments is appropriate?

As the baby boomers will be reaching the 45+ age ranges in the 1990s, is it possible that scents directed at their life cycle will be pertinent? Is it worth exploring whether hormonal changes in the body affect scent preferences?

Perhaps Matt Dennis' immortal song lyric, "Violets for Your Furs" will become a reality as the popularity of fur coats for everyday use is enjoying startling success. Will women realize that certain fragrances designed for that purpose smell beautiful on fur?

The idea of physical fitness as part of our lifestyles is here to stay. This means more outdoor time, swimming, walking, cycling, jogging and hiking. Alas, a fragrance that smells better as it mixes with the bodily scents and, meanwhile truly repels the insects would be a dream come true.

As Japanese society is becoming more westernized almost daily, is the time ripe to aggressively explode that fragrance market with the young who are less subject to the deep-rooted cultural habits toward fragrance usage.

Consider the significant role that animals are playing in our households today. There are over 34 million cats living in 24% of American households. The cat population has increased 55% in the past decade. There are kitty playgrounds, rocking horses and water beds. What about fascinating fragrances for fabulous felines?

The age of electronics, the role of machinery and computers has permeated every aspect of our existence from the kitchen to the entertainment center to the office. Might not a response to all this mechanization be a quest for personalized products which allow for individual hand-crafted creativity? Perhaps the time is right for fragrance kits to create one-of-a-kind signature scents.

Could it be that as women intuitively respond to colors and change their lipstick to match their clothing, they will now change their fragrances to match their colors. Clearly, this could put fragrance purchases in the ever-changing impulse category, coded to color usage.

One day soon all the seeds that have been planted for the emergence of aromatherapy will blossom. Just perhaps credibility for the concept will have to be accompanied by a dramatic move like ingestable potions.

The possibilities could be endless for new ideas, but will the products be as far reaching? How can we move outside the limits of existing perfumery for new fragrance types? How could it be that in this age of genetic engineering, we have not started a new family of fragrance notes in over fifty years that did not already fit into an existing lineage? Why isn't there:

- a fruit family?
- a metal family?
- a nut family?
- an animal family?
- a musk family?

Perhaps together, marketers and perfumers, we can mold the future, shape its happenings. Let us start by breaking the boundaries we have set for ourselves and lead the consumer into new horizons.

The future begins today!

Address correspondence to Annette Golden, Executive Vice-President, Creative Marketing Beauty Group, Revlon, Inc. 767 Fifth Avenue, 46th Floor, New York, NY 10153.

