

Natural Charms

Reviews of Fairchild, Kaffir and MoonDance from Notes on Shoes, Cake and Perfume by Qwendy

<http://qwendy.typepad.com/shoescakeperfume/2009/10/natural-charms.html>

Honestly, I am a complete Eurosnob when it comes to aesthetics, and up until the last year or two, natural perfumer's efforts didn't seem terribly interesting to me. I am a fan of Mandy Aftel's book *Essence and Alchemy*, but sadly the first scents in her line weren't suited at all to my own chemistry, which was disappointing from the start. I was able to tweak her amber formula and get something I liked very much, but *Loving Hands at Home* does not turn out fabulous scents for years! Natural Perfumery has developed and grown lately so that there are quite a few perfumer's lines to choose from, with varying degrees of complexity, naturally I am most interested by the most skillful and sophisticated of the offerings. I suppose that like all aesthetic movements, Natural Perfumery took a while to grow up, and it now seems to have come into a moment of its own, with several proponents standing out above the rest, as always.



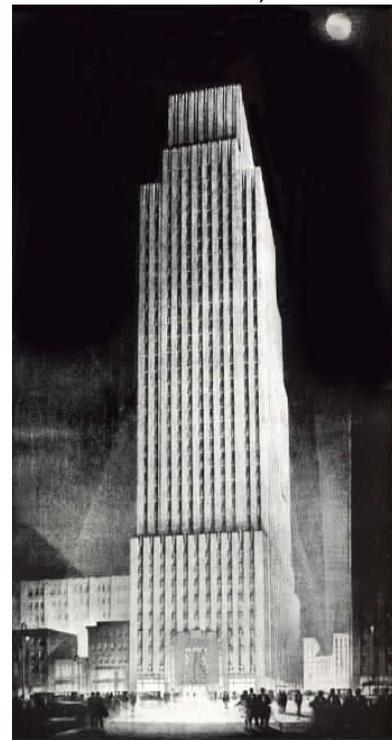
Natural Perfume strikes me as a rather American form of expression, that old "Well they do it their way over there, we do it our way over here" American thing, which at its best has a kind of freshness and immediacy, gratifying in a way that one doesn't have to have any previous knowledge to appreciate. At its best, it is not uncomplicated, but it is a

bit more direct and seems rather concrete and imaginable in a way that, say, Vol de Nuit isn't (and I love that about it!). Although this sensibility is not my natural inclination, I can truly appreciate its appeal, probably more so since I've been watching lots of American History DVD's!

Anya McCoy of [Anya's Garden](#), whom I have known (virtually) since Luca Turin's exciting blog [Perfume Notes](#) was active sometime in 2005, generously shared samples of her scents with me way back in the Spring, and I have been terribly remiss in not saying anything about them! I've actually gone through several cycles of sniffage, not really having the nose or heart to sniff lots of perfume during this scalding summer. I only really had the taste for a few aromatic green scents, which included her uplifting Kaffir Cologne to the unfair exclusion of the others. Happily, my nose has come back full force and I have been delighted to be able to sniff her whole line, which includes two new offerings as of this month.

She suggests ordering the sniffage of her scents (and others too I'm sure) in order of strength, from lighter and subtler Sauvignon Blancs, through the Chardonnays, into the Merlots, and up to the big Pinot Noirs. I like this idea, as I have often had the experience when sampling a number of scents in a short time, of being blasted by something intense and not being able to properly appreciate a subsequently more delicate number.

I feel that I understand Anya's scents in a way I don't usually grasp Classic European Perfumery, which is perhaps a consequence of more identifiable natural ingredients, but it seems that she composes scent the way I cook, balancing richness with freshness, soft and hard, sweet with bitter or sour, using acid to bring ingredients to life, and cream or butter to soften, enrich or emulsify them. That said, I do not have the sense at all that I could just pull these together at home, there is clearly an intention with each scent as well as the overall sense that there is a very particular sensibility at work, throughout this diverse group of scents.





Fairchild is my favorite, and ironically, it is the scent I couldn't smell properly at all when I first tried it -- there must be some ingredient within that occasionally short circuits my delicate nose -- but I have found it quite mesmerizing on subsequent sniffings! It has a kind of aromatic desert aspect, reminding me of the huge inedible purple sage bush we have growing in our yard, a scent that I find at once intoxicating and comforting. I often sniff sage spices and oils, trying to find something that approximates it, and I've never found anything close to the way it smells at night in my yard, and this has a similar spirit, like it's better to breathe it in than plain old air.

Anya has named Fairchild after a botanical garden in Florida (although it sounds like one of those androgynous family names popular for children these days ;) and its dominant characteristics seem to be a kind of magnetic pull between citrus and tropical floral aspects. The Middle Notes reflect that well -- 3 jasmynes, 2 champacas, ylang ylang, citrus leaves rinds and flowers! The unusual underpinnings of make it all the more enticing to me, although I'll be dashed if I can understand how they work, dig those cool basenotes! Notes -- Top: pandanus and rare tropical flowers, Middle: jasmine grandiflorum, jasmine sambac and jasmine ariculatum, white and gold champacas, ylang ylang, citrus leaves and rinds and flowers, Base: seaweed, ambergris, smoked sea shells, oakmoss, oh my!

Kaffir was the standout for me when I tried it during one of our heat spells this summer. It was like diving into a pool of that amazing Kaffir Lime exotic sharp green clarity. I discovered Kaffir Lime leaves while cooking from Donna Hay's fantastic cookbook called Flavors, which is divided into chapters focusing on pivotal ingredients, and it must be in the Citrus section. I was so happy when she identified for me the hitherto mysterious sharp green green green taste in Thai food, and now I use it at will -- we have an Asian Market nearby. I loved the idea of a scent based on it, but I can't smell anything else but Kaffir in this blend, and I'd really like to, as they are quite intriguing! It must be a vagary



of my nose again, let's try it on Pierre -- ah, there we go, it's much more fleshed out on him, yum! All of that greenness of the Kaffir supported by more green, tarragon and galbanum, tempered by florals, and deepened by yummy basenotes of agarwood, musk seed and leather, finally surfacing on me as well, after much more time than on Pierre ;)

MoonDance is one of the brand new offerings, and it is truly beautiful! This resinous floral absolutely reeks of natural ingredients, not in that health food store way, more like walking into Liberty Naturals in Portland, which is absolutely luscious. I'm wondering why this is recommended as the second sniff in Anya's perfume flight, as it is very heady for me, with floral notes of Tuberose, Jasmine Sambac and Rose de Mai, it makes me swoon a bit, where's my fan?



The classic rich florals are beautifully balanced by Chamomile, Opoponax and Sandalwood which give it a wonderful bittersweet quality, which is one of my favorite features of many vintage scents, and one rarely finds in contemporary ones of any ilk. This is a Tuberose and Jasmine scent for non-Tuberose or Jasmine lovers like myself, as neither of those notes take over in this wonderfully blended scent. The creamy drydown completely alluring, and wafts up to me from the back of my hand as I type. This must be Anya's most expensive scent, judging by the ingredients. And it actually smells expensive, in the best possible way, and it lasts for ages.

Notes -- Top: American Violet Flower Isolate, Indian Water Mint, Middle: French Process Tuberose, Chinese Jasmine Sambac, French Rose de Mai, American Apple-scented Chamomile, Base: African Opoponax absolute, Carolina Ambergris, Haitian Sandalwood, Sustainable White Sandalwood, South African Hyrax.

These three are my favorites, and I'll post the other four later in the week.... XXX