

A walk through Anya's Garden by the Non-Blonde

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Natural perfumes (when done right) have a raw, three-dimensional quality that makes them come alive on the wearer's skin. At their worst, natural perfumes are nothing but a crudely mixed essential oils you can buy at your local Whole Foods. But we're not talking about those. Anya McCoy, the perfumer behind the Anya's Garden brand knows what she's doing and has definitely got it right.

None of the five perfumes in the current line (two more, Starflower and Moondance, are about to be released soon) smells anything like what passes for perfumes at your typical department store. They don't smell freshly showered or clean laundry-like and you won't find a cotton candy accord to save your life. Instead, you are confronted by a bracing opening that leads the way to the scents' unfolding which reveals their true character, of which Anya's Garden perfumes have plenty.

Fairchild smells sweet out of the vial. On skin, you discover immediately that this is a larger-than-life lush floral with multiple personalities. Just when you think you've got it figured out and it's a salty citrus scent, you realize you've seen nothing yet: Congratulations, it's a chypre.

Temple is spicy cinnamon that turns into a mellow wood with a hint of medicinal smelling oud. It's the one scent in the range that feels less personal and more aromatherapeutic. I'd like to have my house smells of this. I have a feeling one can retain sanity through Temple.

Kaffir is a perfect example of Anya's artistry. It starts like the creamiest kaffir lime Thai curry (not to be confused with the Indian version), as true to life as I can tell from buying kaffir leaves at the supermarket. But it's not a light lime-like cologne, as you soon discover. Instead, the drydown is a leather scent, as elegant as they come. It's gorgeous.

Rivercali starts fresh. Probably too fresh for my taste. But the aggressive green florals fade away into a creamy vanilla-musk-sandalwood base that's as easy to wear as it sounds. Rivercali is probably the most modern in the bunch and can serve as a good introduction to the genre.

Pan is a dirty, dirty musk. If you like the more famous beasts in this category: MKK, Ferme Tes Yeux and CB Musk you need to smell this one. And probably own it. It will drive away unwanted guests, the evil eye and the occasional small animal. Anya Lists billy goat hair in the base notes and I fully believe her.

The samples I received are of the EDP concentration. I dabbed them, which is probably not the best way to assess sillage and longevity (unlike the case of a pure perfume), but still got a decent couple of hours wear even with the tiny amount I used each time. The packaging is adorable. True to Anya's sensibilities, the box has flower seeds embedded in it, which you're supposed to plant under a 1/2" layer of soil. I'm going to try it with mine, now that the weather has improved.