

Perfume Area Book Review
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Published in Cura Magazine

“Another SL to love—if you’re into skanky armpits and groin, sweaty-thighs after the gym, with yes, a bit of barnyard.” writes user shiva-woman on [fragrantica.com](http://www.fragrantica.com). shiva-woman is referring to the perfume Muscs Koublai Khan by Serge Lutens. Muscs Koublai Kahn is a perfume that produces descriptions like “Smells like a trash bag filled with dirty unwashed sexual organs” says user ShaverX. Descriptions of terrible smells are intriguing. They make you want to know what all the fuss is about. And of course, you can’t know until you smell it yourself. A fragrance is defined by these descriptions, a firsthand account of its consumption. When the association is bad it spreads like a rumour. Perfume descriptions authored by the perfume company completely overstate the narrative within the scent, when the scent often ends up smelling like generic perfume, of a generic memory. Everyone knows smell is connected to memory.

Somewhere between a ‘so-sincere-that-you-could-be-a-troll’ contributor to a perfume forum and a narrative constructed by a memory of a hypothetical experience, is where Perfume Area exists. The perfume reviews authored by Sydney Shen & Laurel Schwulst in their recent publication with Ambient Press, are an experiment with the perfume description form. Perfume Area, started as a blog which has more reviews posted here: <http://perfume-area.com/>.

A very short impression of the reviews is that they are hyper accurate and very subjective. Many of the perfumes described fall into the semi-niche category with manufactures such as Comme des Garçons, Issey Miyake and Diptyque etc. Most likely these are perfumes which your artist or arts administration friends might wear, or fashion friends who are into minimalist Scandinavian capsule collections. (The ones with Diptyque candles on their work desk)

The inside cover of the book is a map of areas which are mentioned within the perfume descriptions, such as Planet Fitness, IKEA and Froyo Shop. The descriptions are divided by times of the day: Morning, Afternoon, Evening, and Night—presumably times in which they can imagined to be experienced, or coincide with. Because you can’t really wear a extrovert fragrance that reminds you of going out and being social when you are introvertedly reading quietly on a sunny afternoon. A small flower icon is used to rate each perfume’s memory sillage. One flower signifies memorable and five flowers signifies memorable. Somewhere in between is forgettable. So if you remember the smell instantly it’s memorable, or if you like REALLY REMEMBER, it’s definitely memorable. Or if you really like it, it’s memorable and if you really hate it, it’s also memorable. If it fails to do either it’s pretty forgettable.

The review format is pretty faithful to the considerations of niche perfume lovers— seasons or occasions most appropriate to wear, specificity and change in ‘notes’ and the potential for compliments from others. Yet, all of these considerations are expanded to create vague unmeasurable criteria which surprisingly work very well to structure the narrative premise of the reviews and the overall visual design of the book. What brings the book together is the accompanying map which plots out places recalled in the fragrance reviews. This additional element made me think about how fragrances can be understood spatially—a combination of how a city can be mapped out smell wise and the construction of a location by its smell. In a few of the reviews a portal like aspect appears. Strung together, such suggestive snippets make it seem as if a secret narrative floats throughout. Where exactly is perfume area anyway, is it inhabitable and how can we get there?