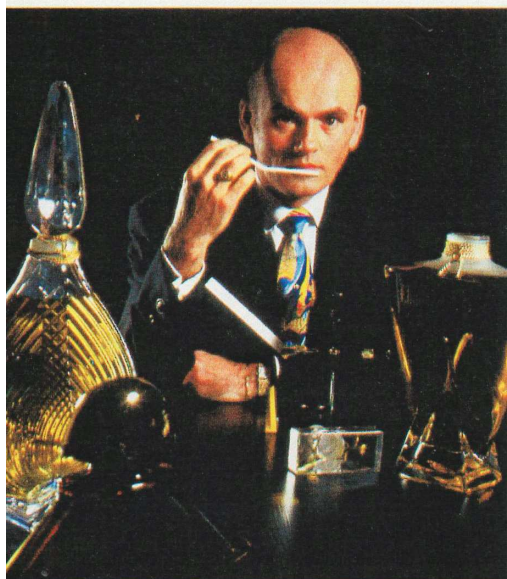




NOSE JOB

Sali Hughes meets the connoisseur of smell and discovers perfume is not to be sniffed at. Welcome to **Guerlain**, the finest fragrance house in the world



a Roja Dove gives good nose. As Professeur des Parfums at legendary fragrance house Guerlain, it is Roja's job to eat, sleep and quite literally, breathe perfume. It's a labour of love that comes naturally to a man who prizes the sense of smell over all others. "Perfumes, literally in an instant, can return you to a person or a place. Within a second you can be wrapped in someone's arms". He's right. Think of your grandmother, your school bag, your first love. You will more than likely remember their smells to the last note, long after you have forgotten the minutiae of their appearance. It is this magically evocative quality that has led Roja Dove to follow his heart and his nose throughout his 20 years at Guerlain.

The fact that this connoisseur of smell chose the house of Guerlain as his home is, predictably, no coincidence. The French perfumery is thought widely

to be the finest in the world, sourcing all its own raw ingredients, producing all of its highest grade essential oils, and most importantly, creating its own fragrances in-house by master perfumer Jean-Paul Guerlain, grandson of the great Jacques Guerlain. It is an uncompromising formula that has produced some of the finest men's and women's perfumes in the history of the craft – Vetiver, Habit Rouge, Héritage and the most expensive men's fragrance in the world, the deliciously decadent *Mouchoir de Monsieur*. "There is nothing to touch a Guerlain perfume," emphasises Dave, "Nothing," though he also respectfully admires the houses of Caron, Chanel and Patou.

Dove's famed training courses are lessons in olfactory enlightenment, replacing textbooks and flipcharts with over 300 fragrances and ingredients from across the industry. You simply don't know

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modern perfume until Roja has asked you to blind test a high fashion, cutting-edge scent *du jour* alongside a tried and tested granny's favourite, allowing you to realise for yourself that they are one and the same. It is an experience which opens both your nose and your eyes to just how little to do with smell the mass-market perfume business has become. "Perfumes are now sold way before the customer smells the fragrance. By the time he gets to the counter he's seen the TV ad, looked at the billboards, identified with the poster boy and looked at the bottle. The smell is often the very last consideration", bemoans Dove. He points out that, after all, "we spent a large part of the 90s buying perfumes designed to smell like water". Dove himself is uninterested in the hype, and spends a great deal of his time holding court in department stores, quietly using his "fragrance profiling" technique to help each

customer to discover his or her signature Guerlain fragrance, one from which they will seldom stray.

Dove's technique begins by identifying a customer's 'fragrance family', choosing from Oriental, Floral or Chypre. He then divides the chosen family into different strains and whittles down and down until he and his subject find the perfect fragrance together. It is a more special gift than you might imagine.

"A friend of mine once said to me, 'I am so happy that you helped me discover Jicky, because I cannot imagine my life without it' and that's how personal perfume becomes," Dove says with noticeable pride. Even in my case – a fickle beauty journalist who has never bought the same lipstick twice – 30 minutes with Roja Dove has meant that I now happily smell of the same thing each and every day. Mitsouko (also Dove's own perfume) has become part of me, my relationship, my house, my clothes. And it seems I was a textbook candidate for a Chypre blend all along. "Chypre wearers are very black and white and uncompromising. They have extreme personalities, yet they hate showiness. For example, they're far more likely to wear one piece of jewellery than five", and so he reels on. He pinpoints every intricacy of my character with such laughably precise perception that I'm left thinking that Sigmund Freud could've done with a trip to the Guerlain counter.

The knowledge that he has learnt all that he came to learn, along with his frustration with the current

industry has led Roja Dove to resign from his post at his beloved Guerlain (though he will remain as a special consultant). It is a move that has shocked the entire industry, and left more than a few wondering what on earth Roja Dove will do without the position he was born to hold. Among several other projects, Dove is to set up his own consultancy business, and create a one-off bespoke perfume as a auction lot for the Terrence Higgins Trust, a cause personally very close to his heart. He is excited about his plans, "I have been extremely privileged in my life, and I have always trusted my own instincts. I know this is right". So as Roja Dove finally leaves Guerlain in a cloud of Mitsouko, so perfumery to a large extent loses one of its most precious raw ingredients: Dove's pure, and often subversive, passion for scent. And that, thankfully, is an essence that cannot be bottled, labelled and sold with a free bathrobe. ☺