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SAMURAI SHOPPER

Burn, Baby, Burn

BY S.S. FAIR

The Samurai Shopper, though steeped in ineffable ancient wisdom, sometimes falls asleep at the wheel. (The invention of the wheel? Totally missed that.) I wasn't around when Paleolithic mamas and papas created stunning polychromatic paintings in the Altamira caves. But I'd bet the farm that those Stone Agers burned mossy wicks in animal fat to light their way into prehistoric rock stardom. Since then, civilization has spent more time bathed in the haze of candlelight than not.

Where would religion be without candles? Or death? Or birthdays? How would pale heroines in disarray wend their way through creepy castle corridors and into the waiting teeth of tuxedoed vampires? More important, where would I be without great lighting to accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative? Candlelight is elemental [Botox](#), dissolving ceiling cracks and smoothing out lumpy walls ... so why not facial lines and other telltale signs of fading youth? In the theater of domesticity, your home is a stage and you are the star, and stars always look ethereal and marmoreal in strategic twinkles. Ready for my close-ups, Mr. DeMille? Just work that wick.

You could of course consider installing recessed lighting, but major renovations are considered in my house only when dentistry is involved. Plaster, dust, carnage and high expense seem extreme when \$80 candles can allay the violence of sunlight and distance your face from chronological age. Sadly, there's no one-stop candle shop in New York. [Candle Delirium in Los Angeles](#) boasts a zillion designer candles under one roof. Here, we have to trawl upscale and downtown. But some candles are worth it. Hard times call for soft lighting and exotic scents, not Glade and nasty plug-ins. Remember, a house is not a home — or a Home Depot either.

If you live Samurai Shopper-style, in décor best described as gonzo eclectic, then you're at home where everything hangs together with staple guns, thumbtacks and vintage textiles. But even gonzo eclectics have rules: no strawberry-scented cupcake candles; nothing that looks or smells like hot fudge, underwear, fresh paint or bug spray. It's shocking how many candles out there repel more than insects. Girlie scents belong on the nape of the neck, not in my living room, where they'd seriously compromise the gremolata sizzling in the osso buco pot and cancel out the aromatic 2005 pinot noir now decanting in a tower. I recently inhaled candles by Dayna Decker and came undone in the aggressive florals; only the Eighth Avenue subway

provided relief.

Always aspiring to *iki*, the Japanese notion of good taste, I head to the wonderfully scent-ric Aedes de Venustas, in the West Village, where Mizensir's Verveine Menthe throws off the crispest, cleanest wafts.

For sheer sculptural beauty, nothing tops a Marie Antoinette candle sitting alongside Napoleon — a match made on Christopher Street, both winter white and too beautiful to burn, except in the pits of hell where history consigns them. Cire Trudon, candle makers to Louis XIV, created both. (What, no Johnny Hallyday candle?)

Barneys New York's ninth floor carries some *iki* highlights: Lladró's white pots with Gardens of Valencia, which seduces the nose (not so coincidentally, a nose is carved into its porcelain holder); and D. L. & Company's Art Nouveau votives, wrapped in etched-in black lace to ramp up your postprandial Armagnacs. And while we're in the boudoir, Kiki de Montparnasse's tin-clad massage candle, available from its SoHo shop, is a must; light it, melt it, cool and drizzle on some willing flesh.

When I'm in disco inferno mode, Malin + Goetz's groovy frosted-glass candles add fuel to my fire. Made with 16 percent eau de toilette, its Mojito, Dark Rum and Cannabis are legal and addictive in a good way.

Belle Fleur in New York specializes in event design. Its all-brown Exotic Wood collection is hedonistic and terribly handsome. The Samurai pulls them out when the snob patrol (my mates) from Old Blighty show up in tweeds toting a 2003 Penfolds Grange shiraz and an '05 Château Palmer. The candles, redolent of cedar, balsam, Cacao Tabaq or Neroli Pine, vetiver and Seville orange, assuage this aristocratic crew of aesthetes, flâneurs and good-time Charlies.

Ladies' nights mean Altru, eco-impeccable copper-clad candles, exotically packaged in Harmony, Artistry and other sound-bite names. Try grapefruit/rosemary with aperitifs, and masala chai while throwing the I Ching.

Though soy-blend candles are enjoying their 15 minutes as alternatives to petroleum-based paraffin, either many European candle makers are unconvinced of soy's virtues or they keep their oil bases secret. Manuel Canovas's dreamy candles use "extra-pure nonallergenic" waxes. Ormonde Jayne candles fill London's Royal Arcade with incomparable smells: cardamom, juniper berry and hemlock, for example, but no soy.

"Soya carries its own odors and limits me fragrance-wise," says the owner, Linda Pilkington.

Acqua di Parma uses carnauba wax and natural essences in a saffron pillar embedded with dried oranges. The profumo is squisito, the design less kitschy than it sounds. Acqua di Parma's cube and cone candles in yellow, red, black and white get the Samurai blue ribbons for design.

My holiday wish list includes the über-cool hand candles from Atelier WM in Paris and crystal skull candles from Maui's Enchantress Boutique.

Take that, [Damien Hirst](#)! Laura Slatkin's Nest line demands down comforters and a good book. The Different Company's hole-punched aluminum candle conjures my cannabis-fueled plans to own the old Maritime Building, right after all the renovations on my skull. Further afield, Molton Brown's travel candles, blissfully sophisticated, remind me I'm not in Kansas anymore.

