

LIFE & CULTURE | November 27, 2012, 6:43 p.m. ET

This Season, Arrive Bearing Luxury Candles

By ANNE MARIE CHAKER

"Carmélite" conjures up the "old, mossy stonewalls of church convents." "Baroque" is a blend of "oudh and agar wood oils from Northern India." And "Black Vetyver Café" suggests the "bitter character of the coffee bean . . . steeped in earthy notes of vetiver and temple incense."



Nest Fragrances

Designer Touch: Jason Wu's Orchid Rain (\$48) is a fruit-floral blend with notes of wood and pink pepper.



What's driving the high-end candle craze, where prices of \$100 to \$400 per candle are becoming more common? Anne Marie Chaker explains on The News Hub. Photo: Nest Fragrances.

These aren't fine wines, tobaccos or perfumes. They are candles—and with complicated fragrances and prices that can approach \$500, they are a long way from your mother's vanilla.

Sales of "luxury" candles are on fire. Swaddled inside gilded boxes that open up to release wafts of heady perfume, high-end candles make a popular holiday gift—especially for oneself.

Some consumers may not be up for splurging on a vacation or new car but many can rationalize the treat of a \$65 candle. And then there's the way a scent can tip the scale in favor of an impulse purchase.

Michele Devulder, a 42-year-old medical assistant in Los Angeles, uses candles to create a relaxing ambience in her home after work. She lights one in the living room and another in the master bathroom.

"They just smell very classy," Ms. Devulder says. She estimates she spends about \$200 a month on candles like Diptyque's "Feuille de Lavande"

(\$60) or Cire Trudon's "Solis Rex" (\$85), which the company says captures the fragrance of the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, with "vapours of wax, candelabras and palace."

Anthony Carro says sales of the \$25-to-\$85 candles he sells at Candle Delirium, his West Hollywood, Calif., store, have grown 10% to 15% a year for the past five years. One reason may be that people are staying home more, he says. "Candles," he says, are "kind of an



Nest Fragrances

For Night Owls: Nest Fragrances' After Midnight candle trio (\$32 each) features Oriental Orchid, Italian Leather and Exotic Woods scents, meant to be burned in succession.

antidepressant."

December is show time in the candle business, when companies roll out limited-edition scents and boxed sets. Laura Slatkin, chief executive of Nest Fragrances, says her company rings up 40% of its sales from October to December. "People burn more candles in the winter," she says.

Nest candles, with scents including Wasabi Pear and Moroccan Amber, retail at Neiman Marcus and other stores for \$32 for a "classic" size and \$58 for a large, three-wick version. The "Holiday" candle blending pomegranate, clove

and cinnamon outsells any other scent in her collection.



Cire Trudon

Fit for a King?: Cire Trudon's Melchior (\$98) blends myrrh, musk, resin and other scents.

Earlier this month, Nest launched the "After Midnight" collection, three different scents meant to be burned successively into the wee hours. One O'Clock is an Oriental Orchid scent, Two O'Clock is Italian Leather and Three O'Clock is Exotic Woods.

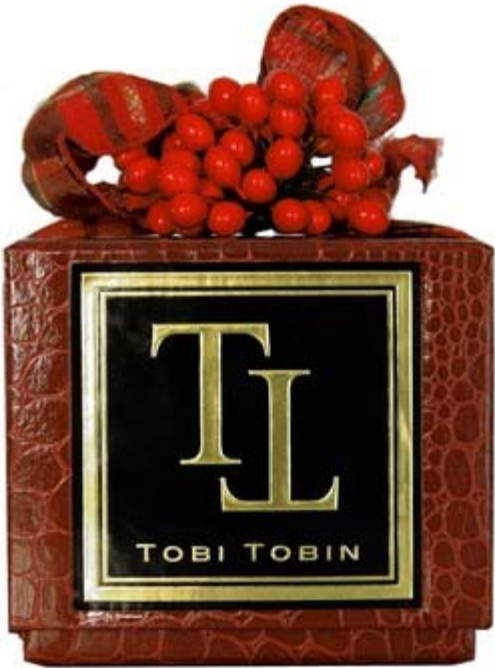
The trio (\$32 each) filled the need for a "sexy, seductive, alluring scent" in her line, Ms. Slatkin says, adding, "I have no idea what people are doing after midnight, but these are the fragrances you'd want to burn."

Cire Trudon, of France, whose candles range in price from \$85 to \$450, introduced a new holiday candle this year, Melchior, named for one of the Three Wise Men. Enrobed in a crackled gold-leaf vessel which glows with the candlelight, the \$98 candle scent is "an inviting mix of Myrrh, Cistus flower, Benzoin resin and musk," the company says.

Cire Trudon says its lofty prices reflect the painstaking effort that goes into each candle, as well as the brand's heritage. The company says the House of Trudon dates back to the 17th century when it produced candles for Louis XIV. "This is the brand of kings," says Kim-Van Dang, North American brand manager.

Its candles are made of a "vegetal wax" blend, including soy and copra (the dried kernel of coconut), which leads to a "clean burn," free of black smoke ("until you blow it out," Ms. Dang says).

Soy-based wax has been popular in recent years



Tobi Tobin

Gift-able: Tobi Tobin's Chalet candle (\$95) blends cedar, eucalyptus and holiday spices.

as a plant-based alternative to paraffin wax, a petroleum derivative. Some experts, though, note that candles made entirely of soy can emit a slight "doughnut odor," and for this reason a soy-paraffin combination is often used, says Erica Schultz, senior fragrance evaluator at the global air care division of [Symrise](#) AG, a German fragrance and flavorings supplier, in Teterboro, N.J.

Beeswax candles tend to be difficult to source because of reduced honeybee colonies, says Barbara Miller, spokeswoman for the National Candle Association. Beeswax, which has its own scent, isn't typically used in scented candles.

High-end candles contain more, and often pricier, fragrance. Wax and fragrance have to be compatible and correctly blended, or the perfume oils will "leach" unattractively at the sides, says Karen Solari, vice president of marketing at Symrise.

"For a mass-market candle, we might have \$6 or \$7 a pound to spend on fragrance," says Ms. Solari. "For an upscale candle, it might be upward of \$20," she says.

"It's not to say that a more expensive fragrance makes for a better scent experience," Ms. Solari says, "but it makes for a great story."

New at French candle company Diptyque is the "Amber Oud" holiday fragrance. Oud is "a rare wood that comes from the Agar tree," says Eduardo Valadez, Diptyque sales manager for the East Coast and Canada. The spicy, complex fragrance was used in ancient religious ceremonies, he says, and "in the last two years it has become extremely popular in personal fragrances."

Packaging of luxury brands can make up as much as 50% of the cost of production, says Naji Absi, president of Unique Candles, a Northridge, Calif., manufacturer. "The candle is actually the cheapest part," he says. "The minute you walk into the store, what attracts you is the packaging."

A candle from fashion designer Jason Wu, launched last spring, comes tucked in a miniature shoe box nestled in foam, wrapped in tissue, and topped with a golden lid. "I wanted it to feel expensive, to feel precious," Mr. Wu says, of his \$48 Orchid Rain candle. "That came down to every aspect of the packaging."

Surging interest in home fragrance has set the stage for the celebrity candle. Sir Elton John's "Holiday" candle debuted last year, followed earlier this year by "Woodside Garden,"



Diptyque Paris

Diptyque says its Oliban holiday candle (\$68) is a 'tribute' to frankincense blended with scents including notes of lemon, myrrh and vetiver.



Nest Fragrances

Sir Elton John and Laura Slatkin, Nest Fragrances' founder and chief executive.

a floral blend inspired by his own gardens.

"Everybody wants to do a candle, and they wind up in a price range from \$50 to \$80," says Mr. Carro of Candle Delirium. "That's a tough price point to be in if you're someone that nobody knows."

Part of Nest's business is designing and developing candles for celebrity designers including Mr. Wu, Tory Burch and Jonathan Adler, as well as Estée Lauder Cos.' Aerin Lauder. Ms. Slatkin says she started this "private label" portion of her business in 2005 with five clients and now has 85. "A lot of them we turn away now," she says.

Tobi Tobin, an interior designer whose Los Angeles "luxury lifestyle" store sells a \$6,400 black patent-leather wingback chair and \$575 sets of Antique French Washed linens, has a collection of 10 candles priced at \$85 each. The candles, which are said to be "hand poured" into shiny black-glass vessels, are a strategic offering in the store, Ms. Tobin says. They allow customers to "buy into the brand" with a less expensive product.

Ms. Miller, of the candle association, says no one type of candle is safer than another. More than 15,000 candle fires are reported each year, she says. Never burn a candle out of sight or use it as a night light. And rather than burning it down to the bottom, leave a safety margin of 0.5-to-2 inches.

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