

Power SPRITZING

*The launch of Chanel's Le Lion proves that it's your
scent that makes you a force to be reckoned with*

Words by FIONA EMBLETON

Perfume inevitably falls into two camps. First, there are those that evaporate dainty puffs, leaving a flicker of cotton-fresh laundry in their wake. Then there are fragrances that make your presence felt. The type that, like magical, invisible ink, amplify your emotions to make you feel the most self-assured version of yourself. So it is with Le Lion, the latest addition to the Les Exclusifs de Chanel collection, which serves up just the strength we need right now in its afterglow.

While the name completes the mental picture, don't confuse Le Lion with a return to the walloping fragrances of old — scents that smell strong in a literal sense and arrive in a room before you do. The bolder the scent, the bolder the statement no longer applies.

"Scent and power can sometimes be discreet," says Olivier Polge, Perfumer-Creator for the House of Chanel. "Power doesn't need to be expressed to be felt. An interesting parallel can be drawn with scents. They are not visible but it is about the aura they create around you. There is an important interaction between your personality and the scent that you wear — the combination of the two is what makes the real difference."

So rather than roar and overwhelm, Le Lion is more like the soft brush of the big cat's tail as it weaves past your ankles. A huddle of deep oriental notes whispers its message of empowerment through wafts of warm, leather-like labdanum and musky patchouli. These are combined with bright lemon and bergamot before drying down to the creamy comfort of vanilla and sandalwood. It's a quiet word to oneself, not a shout out to the world.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Undeniably elegant, Le Lion is nothing less than what you would expect of the Les Exclusifs stable, which "often takes apart Gabrielle Chanel's life or experiences [for inspiration]," Olivier explains.



Les Exclusifs de Chanel
Le Lion

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In the case of Le Lion, Olivier dipped back into Gabrielle Chanel's obsession with her birth sign. A Leo through and through, the lion became her totem animal and a symbol of luck for the superstitious designer. Leonine objects filled her apartment at 31 Rue Cambon and the symbol was engraved on everything from tweed suit buttons to the clasps of bags.

Now, the lion is making its first foray into the world of Chanel fragrances. "Leo is one of the strongest symbols of Chanel, so right away I thought it was an idea for a scent," explains Olivier. "It is not about the animal in the wilderness, but this Leo that we see at Chanel — a Leo made out of gold."

To that end, only the finest absolutes and essences were used in its creation. "Les Exclusifs is the more experimental family of Chanel fragrances," he continues. "There is a lot of freedom. Because they are smaller lines, you can try new ingredients. In our factory we can shape crude oils to our aesthetic. If I know it is for the Les Exclusifs line, I choose smaller quantities and certain rare ingredients."

When it comes to the creative process itself, Olivier is characteristically bashful. He took over for his father, Jacques, as Chanel's resident nose in 2013, so it is fair to say that he has enflourage in his veins.

"My father told me the most important thing to becoming a perfumer is to always be curious about everything that surrounds you," he reflects. "I think that's the key for creativity in general."

SAY IT WITH SCENT

Le Lion certainly keeps your olfactory interest piqued. It is catnip for those who love astrology and those in need of a confidence-boosting eau.

Fragrance, after all, triggers a release of hormones from the brain, which in turn affects our mood. It can make you powerful — at least it can, when you find the right one.

"The perfect perfume is the perfume you love,"

Olivier explains. "It's the perfume that expresses something of you. If you feel comfortable with a scent, it will empower you somehow."

Le Lion isn't for everyone, nor is it meant to be. The nature of Les Exclusifs is that the fragrances fly under the radar, rather than becoming the signature scent you can recognise on everyone. Le Lion is deeply personal and, as a new, more empowered mood blows in, it will make us memorable for all the right reasons. ■

Gabrielle Chanel in her
apartment at 31 Rue Cambon,
next to a desk with her most-
beloved symbol on it: the lion