



Sandra's Perfume Bottle Passion

BY BELINDA HOGAN

For most of us, a perfume bottle is something practical or something we might look at and say, 'isn't that beautiful?'. But for Sandra Black, collecting perfume bottles is a sweet scented passion.

This lady is a self-confessed bowerbird, and Sandra's perfume bottle collection is a diversity of colour, material and design. Starting in 1995, Sandra now has five cabinets full of exquisite non-commercial bottles. Sandra

was given a small blue bottle with a decorative base for her birthday by her then three-year-old grandson, which she says sparked something in her.

"I had always liked small bottles and decided to buy some more so that I could have a display of them,"

she says. "From those beginnings a most interesting and joyous obsession began."

Artistic by nature, the mother of three and grandmother of two has always dabbled in craft and collecting since she was a young girl.



An antique scent bottle

"Since I was nine years old, I have been a knitter; I do beading and I paint," she says. "I started off doing oil paintings, but now love using acrylics."

Sandra also sculpts in clay.

"I recently have been working on decorating masks and attaching them to canvasses," she says. "I intend trying to sell my mask paintings, as we are getting pushed out of house and home with my works everywhere."

As a child, Sandra collected stamps and coins, and loved repairing old pieces of jewellery. Now she collects fans, wool and Christmas decorations.

"My husband has threatened me with divorce if I buy another ornament," she laughs. "So it was expected that once I became interested in perfume bottles I would be unstoppable."

Perfume was first made by ancient civilisations.

"There have been clay containers found made for perfume in Egyptian tombs, and China has a history of small containers for perfume," Sandra explains.

Gradually, perfume made an appearance in Europe around the 14th century. From there, a variety of fragrances started to be developed; as did the different types of bottles housing the scents. Basically, they can be categorised simply into four groups: Perfume, toilet water, cologne and scent.

Scents are very concentrated and the bottles are very small. Traditionally they were used to revive a person; or by women when they went out (because they could conceal them easily).

Perfumes, colognes and toilet waters vary in consistency and the bottles also vary in size. Perfume is the most concentrated out of the three – therefore bottles tended to be a little smaller than those for the colognes.

"Toilet water bottles are collectibles in their own right," Sandra explains. "Perfume bottles also come in every



A cabinet displaying some novelty bottles



One of Sandra's cabinets

shape, size and colour of the rainbow. There can be bottles that stand up and others that lie down, and they are made of every conceivable material you can think of. I have bottles made out of things such as amber, amethyst, jade, metal, porcelain, coral, and even malachite.”

Perfume bottles started to become very popular in the early 1800s, where some of Sandra’s collection comes from.

“I have six ended antique bottles and some have engraved silver ends and some are just plain,” Sandra explains. “One end is for perfume and the other was mostly filled with smelling salts to be used by genteel ladies who had the tendency to swoon.”

Sandra says one of these is very special. “It is hinged in the centre and when open the two ends resemble a pair of opera glasses with pearls and coral as decoration on the stoppers.”

Sandra also has five Chatelaine bottles, which are quite rare. These bottles are usually metal and have a chain that is used to attach them to a chatelaine, which was a belt worn by women. This held objects such as scissors, keys, fans and sewing implements – all the necessary implements a 19th century lady would need. One of the more unusual bottles from this time period is one shaped like a woman’s leg with a small garter made out of material on top of the thigh. Sandra’s collection also boasts bottles made out of ivory, shell, wood, and the thinnest of glass – from this period.

The rest of Sandra’s collection is extremely varied, with the majority from last century.

“I collect art glass bottles, figural, wood, cranberry glass, crystal and novelty bottles,” she says. “I have an early Mickey Mouse bottle and a



An art deco piece

wooden piano with the keys being two perfume bottles.”

Although Sandra finds it hard to name an actual favourite, she does love her bottles from the art deco era.



Another antique bottle

“Like many people, I love the shapes and designs that are connected with the art deco period,” Sandra says. “You can’t mistake a proper art deco designed bottle – they are unique and stand on their own.”



An art deco bottle

Bottles made by prominent Australian glass artists also feature significantly in Sandra’s collection. Her love of this type of artistry goes back to when she first started collecting.



A figurine bottle



A clown figurine perfume bottle

“The first time I collected a bottle, I went to a jewellery and glass shop in Double Bay in Sydney,” she recalls. “It had a wonderful collection of Australian glass artists’ perfume bottles and I ended up purchasing many.”

Over the years, Sandra has added some wonderful pieces to her collection by renowned artists such as Tasmania’s Tony Trivett and Richard Clements.

“I have some bottles shaped like teapots and fish by Richard, and Tony has made me some shaped like toadstools and mushrooms. We have many wonderful glass artists in this country.”

Sandra has also collected bottles from her travels overseas.

“When we visited Great Britain, I found more than 30 bottles,” she says. “We stumbled across a wonderful shop in York that sold only perfume bottles ... I thought all

my Christmases had come at once. I spent hours deciding which ones to buy as I had been given strict instructions not to buy any more – but I still managed to slip another six into my luggage.”

Loving the feeling of discovering new and rare pieces, Sandra has also found bottles on her Australian travels, at antique fairs and on the Internet.

However, there was one bottle she missed getting her hands on.

“I missed out on the only triple ended bottle I have ever seen, which had the normal two stoppers but the top of one had another lid which was a vinaigrette,” she says. “I could not afford it at the time and it stays in my memory forever as the one that got away.”

Sandra now says she has run out of room for any more perfume bottles; and she stopped buying two years ago. However, this has been very difficult for her.

“I have to stop myself every day in every way,” she explains. “When you are a serious collector, the hunt is a wonderful experience; and if you are lucky enough to find something special, the high you experience is better than any drug.”

Because this was her first serious collection, Sandra has invested much time and money into her passion. “The pieces are visually colourful and beautiful, they are unusual and varied, which all satisfies me on an artistic level ... they are small and tactile and infinite with their shapes, colours and designs, which satisfies me on a collecting level,” Sandra explains.

“Most people when they see my collection say they never understood how wonderful they all were until they actually saw them! Describing them is not enough. This is a collection you really need to actually see, in order to appreciate it.” 🌈



A cabinet housing Sandra's collection