

Sense of a Woman

*The perfume maker **Jessica Dunne** embodies the charm of effortless femininity*

By Elisabeth Fourmont



Be the first of your friends to like this.



Dunne, who is expecting her second child in November, is wearing a cashmere J.Crew dress with a vintage belt and Jimmy Choo python pumps.

Halfway through my tour of Jessica Dunne's closet, her three-year-old daughter, Laine, wakes up from a nap. Soon Laine is playing with the hangers and nattering about her mother's pretty dresses. It seems appropriate to have two generations of Dunne women in the room as we talk about clothes. Dunne's fashion sense is strongly influenced by her grandmother Eleanor Dunne, a painter and art collector who lived in Washington, D.C., and who wore beautiful fitted dresses and heels her entire life. It is after this grandmother that Dunne, 33, named her perfume line, Ellie D., which launched in 2007 (with about \$100,000 of Dunne's own savings). Dunne sought out Michel Roudnitska, a famous perfumer in Cabris, France, to help her create the scent. This entrepreneurial, family-oriented tale seduced Henri Bendel in New York, which became the first store to stock Ellie D.; June Blaker now carries the perfume in Chicago.

Dunne grew up on Philadelphia's Main Line, a few miles away from Bryn Mawr College, where she would eventually be married in a Vera Wang dress. She cites Audrey Hepburn and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis as fashion inspirations. "I'm such a prep!" she says. Not quite. As we go through her closet, I find, mixed in with Main Line standbys like little blazers, an acid yellow Balenciaga top from Blake, a Vena Cava dress with silver studded straps, a silk Lanvin dress with raw edges, and a minimalist black tube dress from Jil Sander. Dunne explains that her edgier side developed when she lived in New York in her twenties, working briefly at Christie's and later at Berry-Hill Galleries. She feels she could have worked in the art world "forever," but her husband's finance job moved the couple to London in 2006. "Fate intervened," Dunne says. "I was in London with no job and decided to go for it and do the perfume."





[Take a look at some of Dunne's favorite things »](#)

Her Lake View home, where she moved with her husband when his work transferred him here in February 2008, has no bright colors or crazy prints, decorated as it is in variations of cream, beige, and gray. Dunne's closet is also mostly devoid of prints, although she does love a crisp striped sailor blouse. Seated on her beige velvet couch in a flowy cream Empire top, slim fitted jeans, and ballet flats, Dunne explains why her first love has always been perfume. "I love the utter fantasy and rite of passage of dabbing it on the body," she says. She has vivid memories of watching her mother get dressed for a night out, putting her perfume on with a stopper. (When Dunne designed the bottle for Ellie, an atomizer spray was out of the question—Ellie goes on with a stopper too.)

Her second love is jewelry. Dunne has inherited many pieces from her mother and grandmother. Dunne has two sisters, but, petite and fine boned, she is the only one whose wrists fit her grandmother's bracelets. Dunne's appreciation of heirlooms carries over to her vintage handbag collection. "I'm not someone who buys the latest 'it' bag," Dunne says. She is a junkie for small clutches, and her collection includes many beaded or wicker ones from the midcentury. She scours thrift stores and flea markets in Chicago, New York, and London and has found several bags at Broadway Antique Market in Chicago.

Ellie Nuit, her second perfume, was released last year. "I designed it to be layered with Ellie or worn alone. It's more sensual, while Ellie is cleaner," Dunne explains. (The company's website says that Ellie is "evocative of the French countryside.") "I wanted them both to be pretty and feminine and a little nostalgic." Which, come to think of it, sounds exactly like her approach to getting dressed.

Some of Her Favorite Things

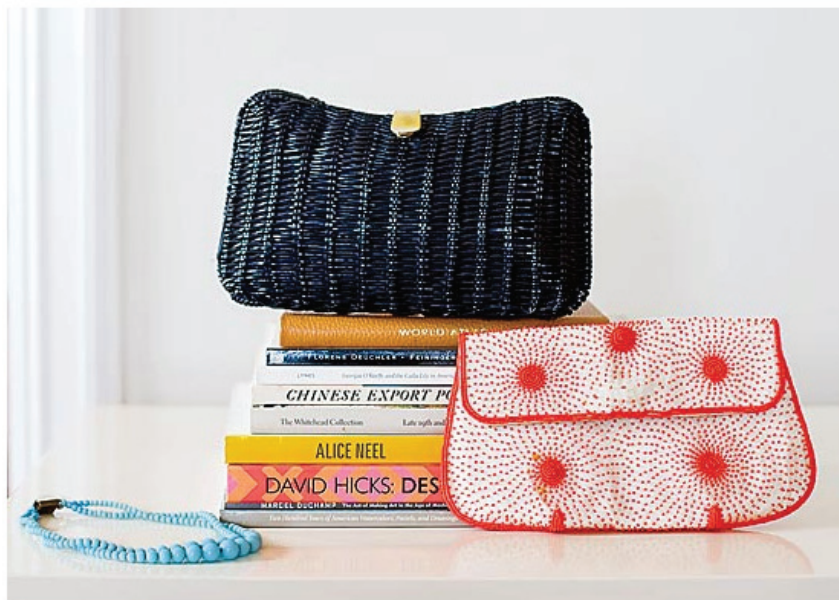
 Like  Be the first of your friends to like this.

(page 1 of 2)

[« Back to Sense of a Woman](#)



A top by Mason



Two vintage clutches



OLD AND NEW

Vintage Valentino jacket and floral-print satin heels by Jimmy Choo



THE MAKER'S MARK

Ellie perfume bottles with their faceted glass stoppers