

# ENCHANTED LIVING



*The* **DECADENCE** *Issue*

ISSUE NO. 57 WINTER 2021

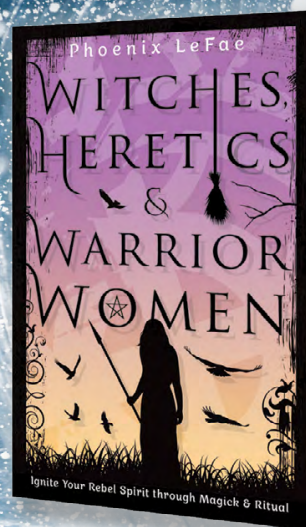
\$12.95 USA | \$14.95 CAN



0 74470 28145 0

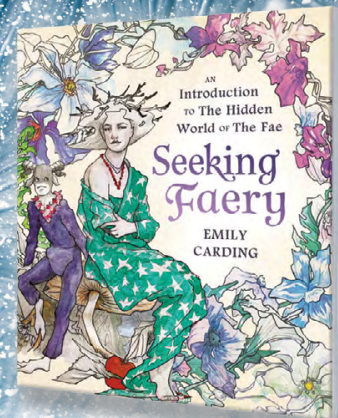
# Enchanting New Products

FROM LLEWELLYN



9780738767932 • \$17.99

An empowering spiritual exploration of women who stood up to oppression and inspired the world by their example.



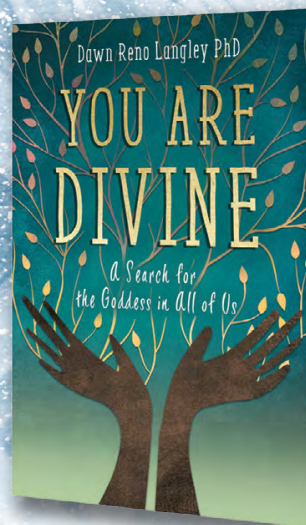
9780738766065 • \$18.99

A wonderfully illustrated guide to the world of Faery that includes fascinating insights into their folklore and history.



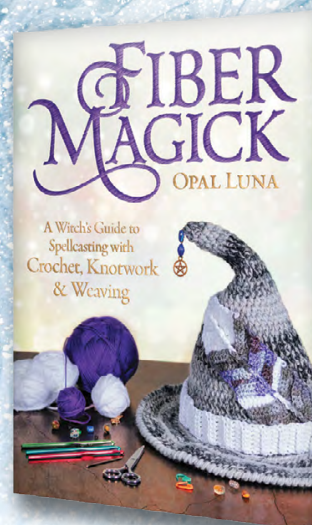
9780738764443 • \$17.99

Improve your connection to spirit and become a better reader with nearly 100 tarot-based rituals, spreads, and exercises.



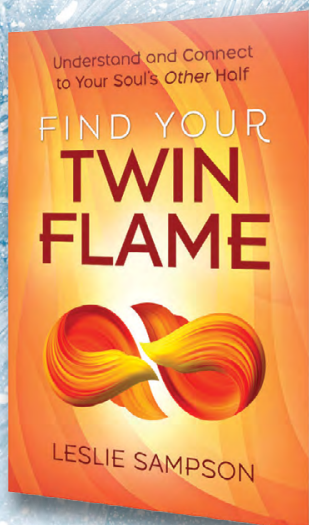
9780738768557 • \$17.99

A fabulous celebration of women from around the world and their journey to find their own inner divine.



9780738765426 • \$27.99

Spark your imagination and bring magick into your crafting. Includes 60 crochet, knotwork, and needlework projects.



9780738767918 • \$16.99

More than a soul mate, your twin flame shares your spiritual DNA. Find, connect with, and understand your twin flame.



Publishing for the Body, Mind, Spirit Since 1901

1-800-THE-MOON • www.Llewellyn.com • f t @

Nyx, Night Goddess (1880), Gustave Moreau



As we shift from wistful autumn to dazzling winter and end this strange year, we think an expanded chock-full issue devoted to decadence is in order. It is intended not only as an homage to that period at the end of the 19th century when the world burst open in lavish over-the-top ostentation and weirdness but also as a celebration of all things having to do with beauty, pleasure, opulence, and radical self-care. Maybe that means taking an afternoon to read this very issue with a mug of hot chocolate in hand. What could be more luxurious?

We've added extra pages and filled this issue with art and poetry, delicious food and rituals meant to make your life more ... extra. Our cover is a recreation of Ramon Casas i Carbó's classic decadent painting of an exhausted but sated (we imagine) woman who's been dancing all night and is now, in our version, holding a copy of Oscar Wilde's *Salome* illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley. This issue includes love letters to both Wilde and Beardsley, in all their excessive gorgeousness, while the pleasure-seeking woman from the painting animates every page. We may or may not be comfortable at this point going out on the town for the night, but we'd like this issue to be a magazine version of such a skirts-swirling-about-your-ankles eve.

Or, rather, and less exhaustingly, imagine this issue as a velvet chaise lounge in a Parisian flat littered with novels and books of poetry, lit by candles and the moon, scented with "tamarisk-odors that dreamily throng / The air and round my slumberous senses entwine" (as our boyfriend Baudelaire describes in *Les Fleurs du mal*, one of said books).

Love,

*Carolyn Turgeon*



# ENCHANTED LIVING

VOLUME 57 | Winter 2021

FOUNDER and PUBLISHER  
*Kim Cross*

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF  
*Carolyn Turgeon*

ART DIRECTOR  
*Lisa Gill*

PHOTO EDITOR  
*Steve Parke*

POETRY EDITOR  
*Mary McMyne*

TRAVEL EDITOR  
*Jill Gleeson*

COPY EDITOR  
*Robert Horning*

ADVERTISING SALES  
*Sara Vesely*  
sara@faeriemag.com

EDITORIAL CONSULTANT  
*Rona Berg*

### CONTRIBUTORS

*Sara Cleto, Susann Cokal, Monica Crosson, Gather Victoria, Theodora Goss, Alise Marie, Marisca Pichette, Sherry L. Ross, Tricia Saroya, Briana Saussy, Timothy Schaffert, Gina Spriggs, Susan Ilka Tuttle, Veronica Varlow, Nikki Verdecchia, Kris Waldherr, Kirsty Stonell Walker, Brittany Warman, The Wondersmith*

### ARTISTS and PHOTOGRAPHERS

*Yoann Lossel, Mark Shelby Perry, Inna Shnayder, Eilidh Sutherland, Tea & Morphine, Kira Vygriwach, The Witching Hour Photography*

### CONTACT US:

info@faeriemag.com  
Enchanted Living  
P.O. Box 26452  
Gwynn Oak, MD 21207

Faerie Magazine/Enchanted Living Copyright ©2021. No portion of *Enchanted Living* may be reproduced, duplicated, or reprinted without prior written permission from the Publisher. ISSN: 1554-9267, recorded with the U.S. Library of Congress. *Enchanted Living* is published in the United States of America.

# ISSUE 57 | Winter

### FICTION, POETRY & ESSAYS

**7 QUIZ: HOW DECADENT ARE YOU?** by *Susann Cokal*

**70 AT THE WEDDING OF DEATH AND TIME** by *Marisca Pichette*  
Photography by *Tea & Morphine*

**94 DIAMONDS, PEARLS, AND ORANGE-TREES: FAIRY TALES AND DECADENCE** by *Sara Cleto and Brittany Warman*



**100 MIRROR MASQUERADE: THE MAGIC OF MIRRORS** by *Monica Crosson*  
Photography by *The Witching Hour Photography*

**113 WHY DECADENCE NOW?** by *Rona Berg*  
Photography by *Steve Parke*

### HOME, FASHION & BEAUTY

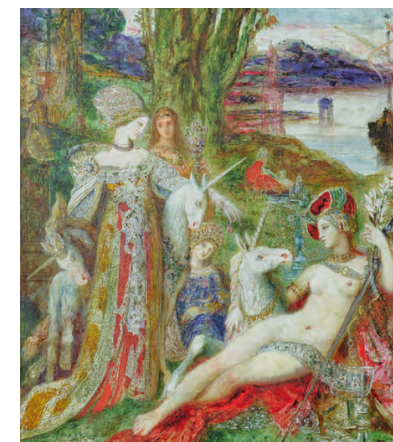
**20 GIBSON GIRL HAIR STYLE TUTORIAL** by *Nikki Verdecchia*  
Photos by *Avraham Bank*

**49 AT HOME: A DECADENT DECOR** by *Rona Berg*

**75 THINGS WE LOVE** Artistic Direction by *Theresa Fractale*  
Photography by *Kira Vygriwach*

**82 TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY GLÜHWEIN** by *Susan Ilka Tuttle*

**89 RITUAL DECADENCE** by *Alise Marie, The Beauty Witch™*



**21 ARE YOU READY FOR DECADENCE?** by *Susann Cokal*



**42 SCOTLAND'S COUTHY HOME** by *Jill Gleeson*



**34 WINTER HOLIDAY CROQUEMBOUCHE** by *Gather Victoria*

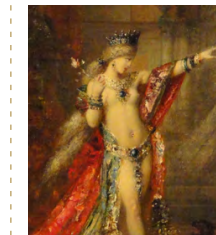
### SPECIAL FEATURES



**58 THE DECADENT, DANGEROUS MR. WILDE** by *Theodora Goss*

**62 THE ILLUMINATI BALL: THE WORLD'S MOST DECADENT SHOW** by *Jill Gleeson*  
Photography by *Mark Shelby Perry*

**68 DARK MOON DECADENCE** by *Briana Saussy*



**72 THE ETERNAL FEMININE OF THE DAMNED** by *Kris Waldherr*

**78 ON DECADENCE: A DISCUSSION WITH REBECCA ARIEL PORTE** by *Carolyn Turgeon*

**84 AUBREY BEARDSLEY AND THE WEIGHT OF DECADENCE** by *Kirsty Stonell Walker*

**96 EMBRACING YOUR SHADOW** by *Gina Spriggs*  
Photography by *Steve Parke*

### COLUMNS

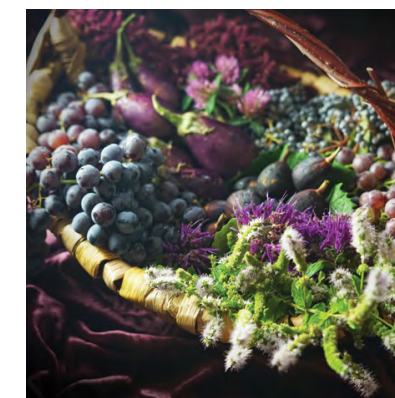
**76 AN ORGY OF CANDY GLUTTONY** by *Timothy Schaffert*

**88 LIFE OF A LOVE WITCH** by *Veronica Varlow*

**114 FROM OUR READERS**



**10 ON OUR COVER: BEFORE THE BALL** by *Susann Cokal*, Photography by *Steve Parke*



**50 THE DECADENCE OF PURPLE** by *The Wondersmith*



**104 A DECADENT COZY CORNER** Text by *Susann Cokal and Tricia Saroya*  
Photography by *Steve Parke and Tricia Saroya*

Subscribe, buy back issues, sign up for our weekly newsletter, and check out our latest selection of whimsical faerie jewelry and other sweet little gifts.

Visit us online at [enchantedlivingmag.com](http://enchantedlivingmag.com)

## CONTRIBUTORS

Enchanted Living's Decadence Issue



**Jill Andrews**

Jill Andrews created costumes for Broadway, film, television, and regional theater before launching her own custom-design business in Baltimore, Jill Andrews Gowns. She is a member of the Johns Hopkins team that engineered a safer, more empathetic protective suit for medical staff workers on the front lines of the Ebola epidemic. She's also designed several gowns for *Enchanted Living*, including the one on our cover. "My definition of decadence was always yards and yards of sumptuous silk," she says, "used in the most irreverent of ways. What's more decadent than a structured corset gown of black silk taffeta with a sweeping train?"



**Susann Cokal**

Susann Cokal is the author of four fantastical-historical novels, including the award-winning *Kingdom of Little Wounds*, *Mirabilis*, and her latest, *Merman Moon*. She also writes short fiction and essays about oddities and lives in a haunted farmhouse with cats, peacocks, spouse, and unseen beings who bump in the night. For this issue she writes all about decadence and even created a Victorian-style cozy corner in her own home. She loves to visit the era, she says, because it has all the elements of a dark fairy tale—"dazzling opulence, outrageous transgressions, quick turns of phrase, and canny escapes from hard times—if the tale turns out happily."



**Yoann Lossel**

Yoann Lossel is an award-winning French artist living in the legendary forest of Brocéliande. He is well known for his meticulous work combining graphite and gold leaf, a legacy of the iconography that he cherishes from the Italian Renaissance, the Symbolist, Pre-Raphaelite, Art Nouveau, and Arts & Crafts movements. His new art book, *Forgotten Gods*, is available worldwide. He's also a fan of Baudelaire. As he says in *Forgotten Gods*, "*Les Fleurs du mal* ... is the result of the diabolical accuracy and the sharp metrics of its clockmaker who ventured to create a masterpiece of beauty with a collection of sins, bitterness, and melancholy."



**Mark Shelby Perry**

Mark Shelby Perry is a photographer who has been capturing New York City's dance, theater, and nightlife performers for over a decade. Perry makes performer-centered pictures that embody his personal, subjective experience, and his photographs appear from time to time in New York City's newspapers and magazines. He isn't magical himself, but he often finds himself in the company of enchanted creatures. For this issue he shares his images of Cynthia von Buhler's Illuminati Ball, though he refuses to answer questions about the Illuminati or the Illuminati Ball, and his connection to the Illuminati is puzzling given his modest lifestyle and means.



**Nikki Verdecchia**

In over twenty years behind the chair, hair stylist Nikki Verdecchia has developed mad skills for creating dimensional hair color, short cuts, and cuts for curly hair. Her style can best be described as classic with an edge. A former Redken Performing Artist, she's been named one of Baltimore's top stylists by *Baltimore Magazine* and has worked on numerous photo shoots for *Enchanted Living*. For this issue she created the Gibson Girl up-do for our cover story. "After the past few years," she says, "it was so much fun to dabble in a little turn-of-the-century decadence and glamour. Working with *Enchanted Living* always brings joy—and enchantment—to my life and work."



**Kris Waldherr**

Kris Waldherr is the author of *Doomed Queens*, *The Book of Goddesses*, and the Gothic novel *The Lost History of Dreams*. Her upcoming books include *Unnatural Creatures*, a feminist reimagining of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. She says, "I've been fascinated with the dark decadence of the late Victorian era ever since I happened upon Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* when I was twelve." While she then didn't understand all the nuances of Wilde's novel, it was the start of a lifelong love for the Aesthetic and Pre-Raphaelite movements, both of which have inspired her own writing and art. Appropriately enough, she lives in an old Victorian house in Brooklyn with her family and two very vocal cats.

## QUIZ: HOW DECADENT ARE YOU?

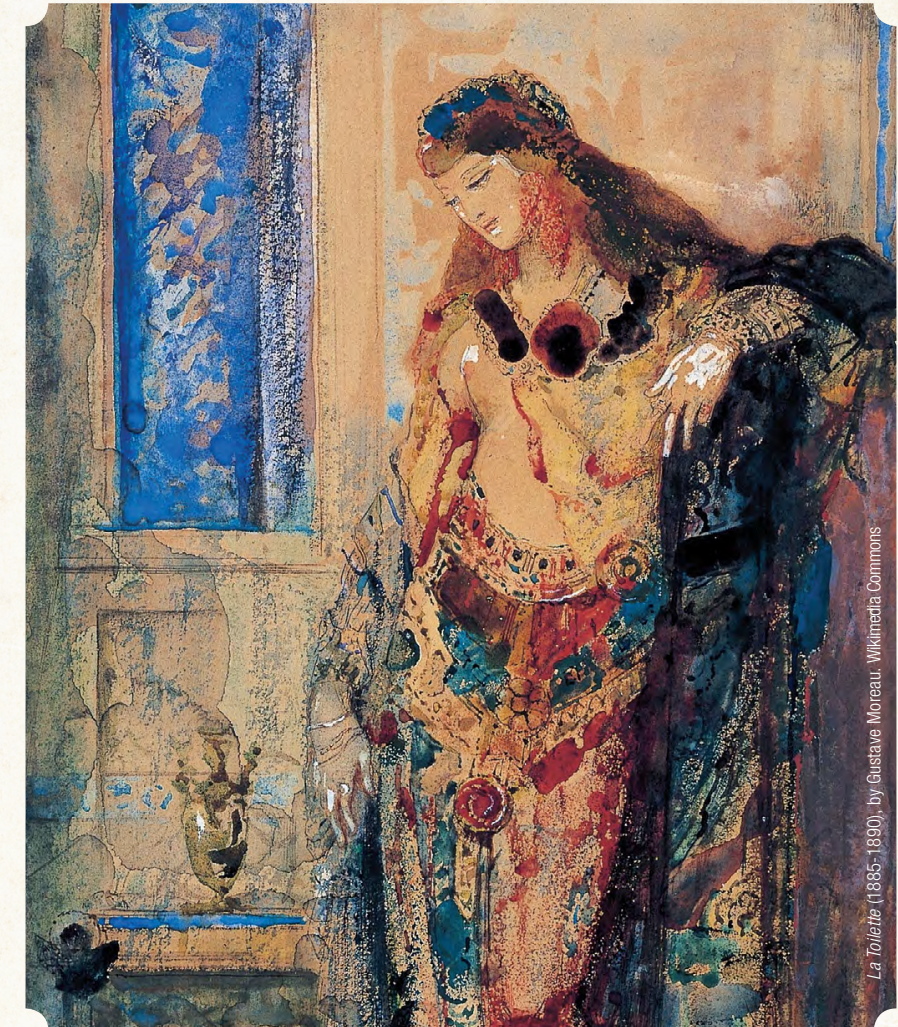
BY SUSANN COKAL

This is the season to celebrate decadence. We revel in it, luxuriate in it, and encourage it in ourselves and others. This is not just about indulgence—a certain amount of decadence is good for your body, soul, and mental health. Even the Romans (no strangers to decadence themselves) maintained that it was the individual's responsibility to take care of themselves for the good of the group.

So show some self-love. Make hard times a little easier; make good times that much better.

Take this quiz, for example. We invite you to curl up and reflect on your answers. Each time you say *yes* to one of our questions, give yourself a point. For every *no*, ask yourself, *Why not?*

Come back after a month and see how your score changes. Consider this a progress report.



Have you ever ...

- Tasted chocolate
- Worn yellow gloves
- Bought yourself a present and had it gift-wrapped
- Painted a room any color other than eggshell
- Felt bored in polite society
- Drunk wine
- Been drunk
- Had your portrait drawn or painted
- Acted in a play
- Been kissed on the lips
- Fallen in love with a sculptor
- Had your nails done
- Had groceries delivered
- Decided that whipped cream is just so worth it
- Spent a weekend in a country house
- Set your table with cloth napkins
- Worn velvet in daylight ... all day
- Listened to an opera all the way through
- Taken a boat trip to another country
- Made up a story about yourself to tell at a party

## Decadent Quiz

Susann Cokal

- Met a member of royalty
- Had a lover
- Had more than one lover in a day
- Called in sick so you could stay in bed reading
- Decided that your life should imitate art, or at least try to
- Started a zoo, in your own small way
- Spent too much on a signed work of art
- Had a fantasy about a *demimondaine*
- Posed for erotic photographs
- Sung an aria
- Decorated with peacock feathers
- Been to a bar
- Been to a brothel
- Considered that love might be mostly pain, but you're still on board
- Studied French
- Eaten something your parents would not have considered food
- Groomed parts of your body most people never see
- Swum naked at night
- Bought matching bath towels in rich jewel tones
- Eaten a *lot* of chocolate
- Spent Saturday morning organizing your copies of *Enchanted Living*
- Wandered through an ancient ruin
- Seriously considered moving to Venice
- Painted anything in your home gold
- Invested in a marble floor or tabletop ... or at least marbled paper
- Colored your hair
- Done performance art
- Splurged on fabric for curtains and pillows
- Tasted real Irish butter
- Bought a coffee-table book
- Worn earrings more than an inch long
- Put on more than three bracelets at a time
- Tried absinthe
- Smoked opium
- Slept in satin sheets
- Worn black lace underwear
- Earnestly debated the merits of Art Nouveau vs. the Arts and Crafts movement
- Read Baudelaire in translation
- Read Baudelaire in the original
- Attended a live performance of an Oscar Wilde play
- Painted your lips very dark red
- Had a crush on a nun or a priest
- Piled pillows in an odd corner of your home and curled up there to dream
- Danced all night
- Fought a duel
- Bought a book printed before 1900
- Read that copy—books *are* for reading, after all
- Turned up the lights so you could see ... everything ... better
- Dimmed the lights so you could *feel* everything better
- Taken a hot, scented bath all by yourself
- Kissed in the rain
- Dressed in the clothes of a gender other than the one in which you were raised
- Eaten gold flakes
- Mixed your own signature perfume
- Written a poem
- Written a novel ... longhand
- Grown poisonous plants on purpose
- Tried Turkish delight
- Bought a fresh set of paints mostly for that one special color you just can't get enough of
- Bought yourself flowers ... lots of flowers
- Slept during the day
- Danced in a church
- Fantasized about making love with a vampire
- Thought it might be more interesting to look ugly-pretty than pretty-pretty
- Truly believed that you can resist anything except temptation
- Laid a flower at Oscar Wilde's grave (or Jim Morrison's, nearby)
- Painted, written, sculpted, or otherwise crafted in the nude
- Sent a letter or email out of the blue to a writer or artist you admire
- Thought that if only you'd been hired to restore Versailles, the place really could have been something
- Turned off all the clocks in your house
- Had enough champagne ... almost
- Hunted down a banned work of literature or art
- Been consumed with jealousy
- Seen a ghost
- Committed a crime
- Told someone you love them
- Kept a journal
- Read somebody else's journal
- Counted the bones in a catacomb
- Decided *What the hell, I'll do it.*

### What your score says about you:

**1-25:** You need to say *yes* more often.

**26-50:** You know a good time when you feel one.

**51-75:** Dorian Gray can't wait to hang out.

**76-100:** Even a Frenchman is a little afraid of you.

Check back in a month or so and see if anything's changed ...

CANDLES INSPIRED BY  
FANTASY & MYTHOLOGY

EXPERIENCE THE

# ANCIENT YULE FESTIVAL

LIMITED EDITION WINTER COLLECTION



JOIN THE ADVENTURE AT

MYTHOLOGIECANDLES.COM



## Before the Ball

HOW OUR GIRL GOT READY

by SUSANN COKAL

Whatever nature has provided, humankind can improve on. That's not just the decadent ethos; it's humanity's defining drive. So even a fresh-faced young lady, like model Jamie Doney on our cover, undertakes a bit of grooming before a night out. For our faithful re-enactment of Ramon Casas i Carbó's painting *After the Ball* (also known as *A Decadent Girl*), she not only partied like it was 1899; she also primped that way.

True, in the late 1800s the beauty routines of "nice" girls were limited. Painting your face was bad, bad, bad, and coloring your hair—downright wicked. But there were ways to make subtle changes that telegraphed your dewy availability ... before, say, you danced till your face flushed pink and your hair tumbled out of its chignon, ruining your polished appearance and making you look, perhaps, ready for a tumble yourself.

So, to start off demurely and work your way *louche*-ward ...

Whatever your social class and sexual goals, your complexion said everything about you. Now we celebrate all shades of hair and skin, but in decadent-era Europe, sun-shielded pallor was highly prized. In fact, whatever your background, your lifestyle was your beauty regimen. You kept yourself well out of the elements—no chapping, no burning, no wrinkling. You wore big hats and long gloves. You carried a parasol. You sat in the shade. And if you ever felt the slightest bit *weathered*, you scrubbed your face with lemon juice—but carefully; you wouldn't want to irritate your skin and turn it shudder-red. Heaven help you if you'd been born with freckles. (For the record, we totally heart freckles!)

Very few cosmetics and preparations were available, much less acceptable. Lanolin was fine, if you didn't mind smelling slightly like a sheep. Various preparations known as "skinfood"



(a term recently revived, oddly enough, in high-end products) were available and usually bought on the sly. Some young ladies ingested poisons to reach the ideal: arsenic to whiten the complexion, belladonna to keep the eyes shiny-bright.

Yes, you knew these things were bad for you and potentially lethal. But even the youngest and most tender flesh is already decaying, and pleasure will always be as short-lived as youth, so why not help nature along a bit? You're only pretty once—unless you have a portrait somewhere that registers all the signs of your sins, leaving your flesh to carry on unblemished.

Now we're going to pause to disagree with the decadent aesthetic: We celebrate beauty at every age, in every complexion and shape ... There's nothing more decadent than seeing beauty absolutely everywhere.

But again, back in 1899: If you were getting set for a ball and perhaps on the hunt for a mate, thus conforming to one standard of beauty, choices were limited. It was acceptable, at least, to use powder. This was made of rice or oatmeal, applied either with a brush or a piece of paper coated with the finest dust. That way you kept your color even, your pores small, and your skin matte. Heaven forbid your nose or forehead should glisten ... almost as if you perspired during physical activity!

Your powder had to match your skin tone. Even into the early 1900s, girls who used pink on their cheeks were considered slightly wild. Your means of bringing "bloom" to your looks were perforce simple and perhaps therefore uncomfortable. If you really needed a bit of color in your cheeks, you pinched them. Again, not too hard or you might look like a floozie ... You bit your lips throughout the evening and tried not to draw blood. If you had tuberculosis, you had a head start—your cheeks were pink, even red, and your eyes bright with fever. However, there was a clear downside.

So, you lovely, living girl. It's time to turn your attention to your crowning glory, your hair. When you could get pure rainwater, you saved it up to wash your tresses (not really an advantage in large, polluted cities). You pretty much had the hair color you were born with, though once again a bit of lemon juice might lighten it. Like Laura Ingalls or Marcia Brady, you or your maid brushed it a hundred strokes a night to distribute the oils that kept it glossy and usually braided it before bed. But if you needed it arranged into a coiffure, rag curlers probably got involved, even a curling iron heated on the stove. Every time you cleaned your hairbrush or trimmed your ringlets, you put the harvest into an aptly named hair receiver—a porcelain box with a hole in the top—so that when you needed to get fancy, you could use the wad as the center of a chignon or pompadour. These bundles of old hair were sometimes lovingly called rats.

Once your locks were styled and pinned in place, you certainly wouldn't want them to slip and reveal your rat. So to keep your 'do done, you used a light solution of the starchy water left when rice grains were boiled. It worked, sort of, but you could expect to retire to a dressing room several times in a night (as Ms. Doney has done) to adjust pins and ornamental combs and

to moisten your hands lightly and run them over your locks to revivify the starch without losing the curl.

The style sported on our cover, also associated with the American Gibson Girl, *can* be achieved even if you haven't been building your own personal rat, but you'll need fairly long hair to do it. See Nikki Verdecchia's tutorial on page 20 to achieve this perfection for yourself—if only for a moment. Once you've mastered that look, you can try variations with rolls and puffs around the face and neck—even go a little crazy with multiple rats.

With or without the rice water combed in lightly for hold, flyaways and flop-downs will start happening right away. All this is perfectly normal. You'll notice that neither Casas's model nor ours remains perfectly coiffed—this is how you look *after* the ball. And, frankly, during it; maybe even before, unless you are *very* skilled in hair arts.

If only there were a respectable way to enhance your eyelashes! You would never dream of trying a cake of that newfangled black stuff that made them darker and thicker. You scraped it up on a moist brush or stick, then carefully applied the goo to your lashes ... where it probably caked up again. Or you might try using the char on the end of a matchstick—but no, your parents inevitably noticed, and so did other girls and chaperones and who knew who else, as it flaked off and made your eyes look ghoulishly haunted. In a way, that was also a decadent look ... It worked well onstage, at least, and on the dark corners where some girls did a brisk business in seduction.

Wouldn't it be a relief to let go of inhibition, to shop for the forbidden potions and creams and everything else that made staying nubile so conveniently easy? Weren't all these "natural" paths to beauty really a bigger sham than the cosmetics that stage actresses, dancers, prostitutes, and other demimondaines applied with abandon?

Yes, a lady of the night might henna her hair, stain her lips with cochineal (a red dye made from ground-up beetles), and powder herself pink *all over*. The great actress Sarah Bernhardt daringly plied her lips with carmine in public, but *she was French* (*id est*, naughty by birth). Privately, women sometimes concocted a tinted lip salve by adding that cochineal powder to a bit of beeswax, castor oil, or tallow, but lip rouge wouldn't be fully accepted until the 1920s.

Perfume was both necessary and somewhat stigmatized. After all, Mary Magdalene was represented by a jar of perfume, the scent of which was there to cover up the aroma of her various forbidden activities. If you were planning to dance all night and still keep body odor to a minimum, your best option was perfume and lots of it (but not *too* much, lest billows of scent make people wonder what you were trying to hide). Bergamot, made from oranges, was an especially popular deodorant, splashed from a bottle and applied liberally under the arms.

Fortunately, advances in chemistry made stabilizing and standardizing perfumes much easier by the end of the 19th century—which, some historians will claim, meant that





advertising was created to persuade people that their perfectly ordinary secretions were a miasmatic problem to be combated with new products now available at any drugstore. Nope: Even back in Chaucer's day, there were complaints about body odor.

But on the whole, by 1910, cosmetics, and primping in general, were becoming more accepted and expected. Or (flip side) maybe we were all getting decadent. So we became colorful, beautiful, shiny in the right places and matte in others. We looked and smelled terrific. Beauty should appeal to every one of the senses, after all, and cast a spell that makes all flaws invisible, all sights, sounds, and smells pleasing. As to touch and taste—that might come later, After the Ball.

Speaking of that magical time when you'd worn yourself out with dancing: How you approached a sofa said everything about who you were. If you flung yourself horizontal, perhaps still in your dark outer garments, well, you were a wild girl indeed. A proper young lady would never let anyone see her in such a position, lest she appear to be issuing an invitation—lest she become, in a word, decadent. Like, say, a loose-moraled model

on the cover of *Pel & Ploma*, a literary and artistic magazine sponsored by a bar, for which Casas created an early version of this composition. The book in her hand may be a copy of that magazine or of one of the scandalous French novels that always came in yellow covers. Then again, it might be a dance card filled with her partners' names. Who are we to question our girl's morals or her reading matter?

We submit that there could be perhaps no self-portrait so attractive, in this day and age, as one in which the subject (that's you) lies down on their own sofa, with their hair however they like it, lipstick or powder or no, holding a copy of *Enchanted Living* in one languid hand. We are all caught up in the great dance of life; why not take a moment to read—and to admire yourself in these pages?

If there's one thing we've learned from the decadents, it is this: You are your own art.



Read an excerpt from Susann Cokal's latest novel, *Mermaid Moon*, at [enchantedlivingmagazine.com](http://enchantedlivingmagazine.com). Visit her online at [susanncokal.com](http://susanncokal.com).

---

Model: Jamie Doney Hair and Makeup: Nikki Verdecchia of NV Salon Collective  
Dress: Jill Andrews Accessories: from Susann Cokal's and Jill Andrews's collections



IF THERE'S ONE THING  
WE'VE LEARNED FROM THE  
DECADENTS, IT IS THIS:  
YOU ARE YOUR OWN ART.



# Gibson Girl HAIR STYLE TUTORIAL

by NIKKI VERDECCHIA

Photos by AVRAHAM BANK

## TOOLS:

- Teasing comb
- Small boar bristle brush
- Bungee elastic
- Bobby pins to match hair color
- Working hairspray, like Pulp Riot Los Angeles Tousle Finishing Spray
- Smoothing lotion, like Pulp Riot Munich Hair Serum



## STEPS:

1. Back-comb hair at the roots to create volume at the base.
2. Smooth the hair with a boar bristle brush as you gather it into a high ponytail at the crown of the head.
3. Secure the high ponytail with a bungee elastic.
4. Distribute smoothing lotion through hands and apply to hair from roots to base of ponytail.
5. Back-comb ponytail to create volume and base for bobby pins.
6. Smooth outside edges of ponytail with working hairspray.
7. Spray ponytail with working hairspray.
8. Wrap hair in ponytail into a loose bun and secure with bobby pins.
9. Spray hairstyle with working hairspray and allow to set.
10. Before heading out the door, pull loosely on the bun to create a tousled finish. Use more spray as needed—and then party like it's 1899!



See more of Nikki Verdecchia's work on Instagram @hairbynikki\_v.  
Find Avraham Bank on Instagram @avrahambank.



The Peacock Complaining to Juno (1881), by Gustave Moreau



## ARE YOU READY FOR Decadence? by Susann Cokal

Truth with a capital T is dead—let's get that carcass out of the way first. No one book or person holds the answer to the meaning of life; we're all just experimenting. Or we should be, because nothing deadens the spirit like an unquestioning devotion to established ideas.

This much, at least, has held from the decadent era of the late 19th century until today: We are all in search of personal little-t truths by which to live our lives. And as modern decadents, we live for the quest, because inspiration lurks in surprising spots: the overgrown garden of a Gothic country house, the cozy corner of a Parisian salon, the witty quips of a stage play, the whisper of a mythical peacock in your ear.

How will you find your truth? Any way that pleases you, because pleasure is your compass. Explore the world—

every aspect of the world—and let your senses be your teacher, not some old man in a suit. Experimentation is beauty; morals are limiting and nasty. Did Oscar Wilde fret over his louche reputation? Did Charles Baudelaire? Gustave Moreau certainly did not, and Renée Vivien reveled in hers.

So push yourself. In saying yes to new experiences you will find your own philosophy, or at least have some very good times. And probably some scary ones. You will, in short, become an Aesthete: a person who considers beauty and pleasure to be the purpose of life. Forget morals and ethics; you are a disruptor of culture, a sometimes paradoxically pessimistic sensualist, a Dorian Gray on a Grand Tour of the seamy side of life, hoping that somewhere there's an image that's aging so you don't have to.

## Are You Ready for Decadence?

Susann Cokal

In a word, you may decay inside—but you look fabulous.

The decadents didn't take time out to write a manifesto, and in fact they did not form an official movement. The name was largely slapped on by editors and journalists who needed a handy label for literature and art that were shaking the culture to the core. Some practitioners identified with the dream-laden Symbolist movement; some would have called themselves simply lovers of beauty and inevitably Aesthetes. They published together (sometimes reluctantly) in the magazines *Le Décadent* in France and *The Yellow Book* in England, and sometimes they were friends—but each was a rebel in their own way.

You too should feel free to make up your own terms. Only you can say when you've reached enlightenment—or how—or what enlightenment is. Meanwhile, prepare to shock and fascinate the world.

Are you ready? The experiment begins with a few easy questions.

### DO YOU LOVE BEAUTIFUL CLOTHES?

Who doesn't? In this sense, whatever your personal taste may be, we are all decadent. You don't have to dress up in head-to-toe velvet with a gold lace collar—but why *don't* you? It will feel fantastic.

Oscar Wilde was the quintessential decadent and dandy—as witty as he was well-dressed, gently born but hobnobbing with *déclassé* artists; prolific in poetry, plays, and one exquisite novel at the pinnacle of decadent prose. When he began writing at Oxford, he decorated his rooms with peacock feathers, blue-and-white china, and sunflowers, a style of décor lampooned by lesser souls in later anti-Aesthete farces. He also gave the subculture its own recognizable style with his long, wavy hair, plush suits, and Little Lord Fauntleroy cravats and knee pants.

When Wilde's ambitions were frustrated for a few years after he graduated in 1878, his 1882 tour through the United States, including the hard-drinking Wild (yes) West, is the stuff of legend. It was here that his first stage play, *Vera*, was performed, and here that he wrote archly for the *New York Tribune* that “fashion is merely a form of ugliness so absolutely unbearable that we have to alter it every six months.” Take that to the bank—then withdraw enough cash to go on a real spree. You are inventing yourself.

A mere six years later, Wilde would fashion himself into a beloved writer of modern fairy tales for magazines ... then, from 1890 to 1891, the deliciously outrageous *Picture of Dorian Gray* ... followed by a number of brightly mordant stage plays, from *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) to *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). After Wilde's arrest and prison sentence for homosexuality, his works took a dark turn into *De Profundis* and *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*—a less pretty sort of decay.

Wilde's oft-quoted line “Life imitates art more than art imitates life,” from *The Decay of Lying*, could be the dandy's motto, as

we dress to look like the paintings and costumes we admire.

He is also happily remembered for zingers such as “I can resist anything except temptation,” “When her third husband died, her hair turned quite gold from grief,” and “We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.” You'll find these genuine Wilde-isms and a slew of falsely attributed fakes now printed on T-shirts. *Caveat emptor!* Ask yourself, “Would Oscar ever have been caught wearing this?” Then neither should you.

The true dandy is also a true artist, wrote Max Beerbohm, who himself was both. Two of his offerings from the early 1890s, “The Incomparable Beauty of Modern Dress” and “In Defence of Cosmetics,” were published in his undergraduate lit mag and won him the friendship of the supreme Aesthete himself. It is no accident that Beerbohm's prose style, like his subject matter, bears a strong similarity to Wilde's, whom he called “the Master” and “the Divinity.” But whereas the Divinity suffered after his imprisonment and died at age forty-six, the apostle enjoyed a long career as a satirist and illustrator, author of *Zuleika Dobson*—and a dandy who sported a quintessential twisty mustache till his death at eighty-three.

Or perhaps you'd like to travel in the opposite direction, toward ugly-pretty and Aubrey Beardsley. He once declared, “If I am not grotesque, I am nothing.” Indeed, Wilde said the young man was rather peculiar in appearance, with “a face like a silver hatchet, and grass green hair”—but Beardsley was also a snazzy overdresser, fond of morning coats and yellow gloves. As an independent artist and as editor of *The Yellow Book*, his black-and-white illustrations helped define the look of the 1890s—just hunt for *Vera Historia*, a True Story of perverse events expressed in elegant lines, or for his simultaneously elegant and ribald edition of Wilde's *Salome*. He died in 1898, at age twenty-five; we can only wonder where else his imagination, and those yellow gloves, might have gone.

Whatever your tastes, your art truly begins on your body. Live like Dorian Gray (or his creator) in satin and brocade, with great hair products and skin care. Imagine yourself inside a sensual painting by Gustave Moreau or Gustav Klimt; spritz perfume everywhere. Your life must be a constant sensual treat.

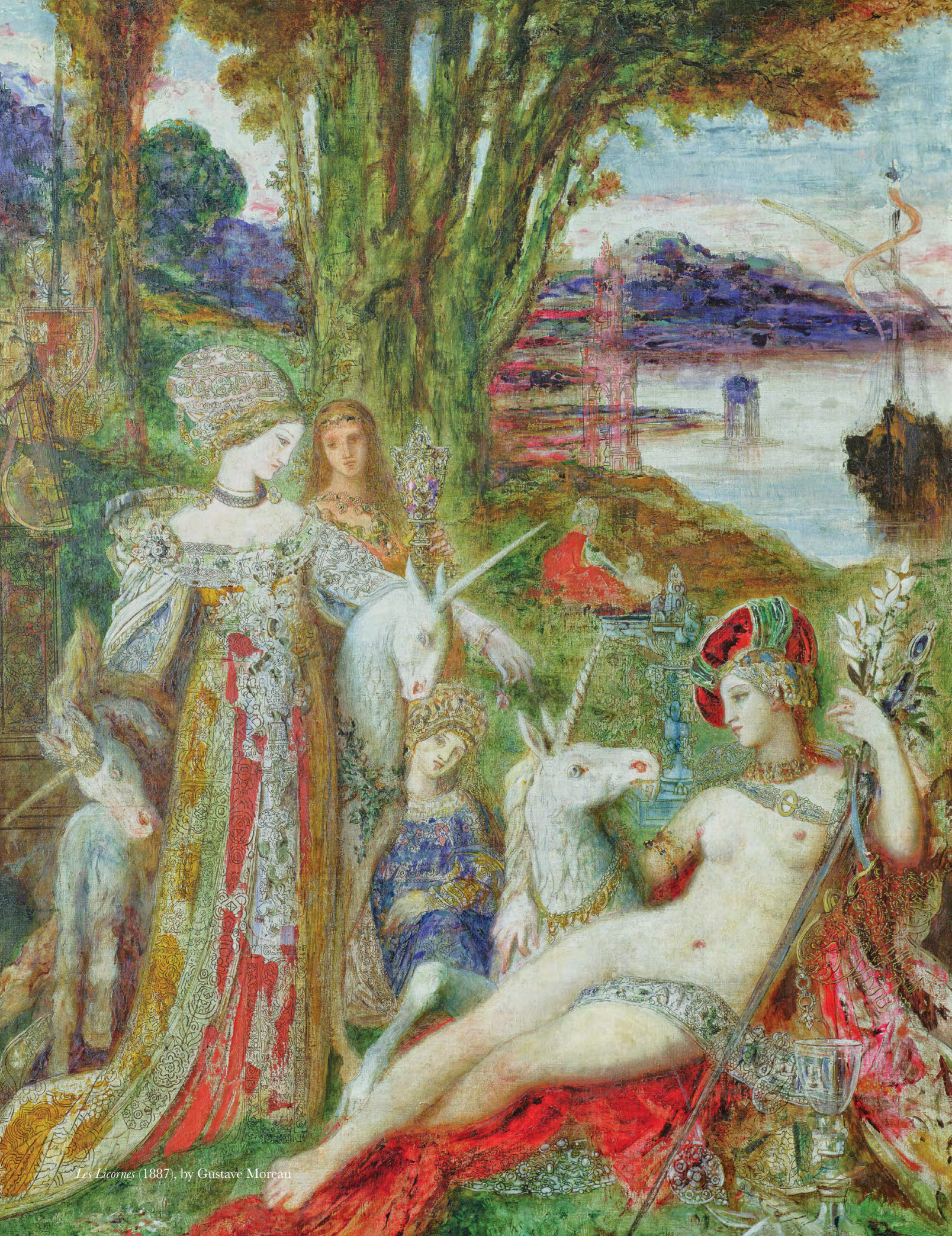
### WILL YOU TRUST YOUR SENSES?

If the clothes are tempting but you need a *Let's Go* to the lifestyle, begin with J.-K. Huysmans's 1884 novel, *A rebours*—translated as *Against the Grain* or *Against Nature*. You'll find a chapter-by-chapter exploration of the senses, instructive and inspiring to a generation of writers. *A rebours* is generally believed to be “the poisonous French book” that fascinates Dorian Gray. Like so many sensational French novels, it came in a yellow cover, and so yellow was to be one of the decadents' banner colors.

A desk jockey for the Ministry of the Interior by day, Huysmans exploded into notoriety when he set his shady



Marcelle Lender Dancing the Bolero in “Chilpéric” (1895–96), by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec



Les Licornes (1887), by Gustave Moreau

semi-autobiographical protagonist, Jean des Esseintes, against the grain of polite society: “soaring upward into a dream, seeking refuge in illusions of extravagant fantasy,” as Huysmans explained in a preface penned later. Of the novel itself he wrote, “each chapter ... became condensed into an essence of jewellery, perfumes, religious and secular literature, profane music, and plain-chant.”

Live that dream and sample the philosophy in the Goth country house to which des Esseintes has retreated. You’ll tend a garden of poisonous plants. Decorate the walls with pictures by Moreau and Odilon Redon. Sigh over the poems of Paul Verlaine and Charles Baudelaire. Kiss a cherry-lipped member of your own sex. You might even choose artificial flowers over real ones; a decadent is forever conscious that art can improve upon nature. But please, we beg you, do not implant jewels into the shell of a live turtle, as happens in one of the most infamous chapters; this is not good for the turtle or for your soul.

Maybe, amid all this experience, your soul will sicken toward pessimism. In that case, perhaps you’d like to return with des Esseintes to Paris, where you still have a lot to see and do.

Or skip over to Italy for a few hours with devil-may-care playboy Gabriele D’Annunzio, another admirer of Huysmans and Wilde. His 1889 novel *The Pleasure (Il Piacere)* suggested that fulfillment lies in loving first one married woman, then another, and then both—while seducing, say, seven more—dueling with one husband—and losing both lady loves in the end. Where to go after so much sheer event, not to mention a lot of rather preciously alliterative language? To *The Triumph of Death* and *The Flame of Life*, plus a series of plays so scandalous that the Vatican placed all of D’Annunzio’s works in the Index of Forbidden Books ... which, of course, ensured that they are high on the TBR lists of future decadents.

For an ultimate experience of the lifestyle, we’d pay a call on Eric Stenbock, the Swedish count who set up an indulgent household in London. An alcoholic, drug addict, and animal lover, he kept a small zoo in his back garden, and his bedroom was home to an assortment of snakes, salamanders, and other reptiles and amphibians. He traveled with a dog and a pet monkey—and a life-size doll he tended and referred to as his son, the Little Count. (He may actually have believed himself. As we shall see, hallucinations are part of decadence.) While his greatest art was his very odd life, he also wrote some morbidly fixated poetry and prose in English, including *Love, Sleep, and Dreams*; *The Shadow of Death*; and *Studies of Death*. (You can’t say *decadent* without *decay*.)

The decadents’ most beloved painter, Gustave Moreau, summed up the attitude: “I believe neither in what I touch nor in what I see, only in what I feel. My inner feeling alone appears to me eternal and unquestionably certain.” In true Symbolist style, he expressed that feeling prolifically in fantastical, lushly colored paintings that draw on dreams and visions as much fairy tales. In his seductively dreamy *Les Licornes* of around 1887, gorgeously jeweled ladies are entwined with two wide-eyed unicorns; another favorite is his sly *Peacock Complaining to Juno* of 1881.

Moreau, fittingly, liked his work much more than he liked other people, and in fact he largely chose to keep it for himself. He refused to sell much of it, so when he died in 1898, his collection numbered more than 1,200 paintings and 10,000 drawings. He ended up leaving them to France—making him paradoxically a misanthropic philanthropist (or at least a generous narcissist) and one of very few artists with his own Paris museum. Salvador Dalí, himself no stranger to sensual indulgence, used to recommend the Musée Gustave Moreau “to those I love,” saying that to visit is “to plunge into this twilight world where, risen from the gulf of erotic and scatological obsession, constellations of precious stones float like so many promises of archangelical redemption.” Share that gorgeousness with someone you love too—or take after Moreau and keep it all to yourself.

You know what to do. Your senses show you the way to follow your bliss. If you create your own kind of beauty, in time the world may come to you—but only if you let it.

#### HOW LONG CAN YOU STAY HIGH?

If a philosophical weekend in the country house of a madman sounds too much like a philosophical weekend in the country house of a madman, you could make a smaller commitment. Try a stimulant—whatever gives you a whirling out-of-body sensation.

Start with a poem.

For many decadents, there is nothing more intoxicating than *Les Fleurs du mal (The Flowers of Evil)*, the collection of Baudelaire’s early poems published from 1855 to 1857. This collection shocked the world and inspired the decadents with its feverish heightening of the senses, exaltation of the erotic, and fascination with death. And its brazen immorality: While Baudelaire predicted the torments of damnation for prostitutes, lesbians, vampires, and other transgressors of what was then *status quo*, he made clear that these were his soul mates. He, like Beardsley, also investigated the ugly-pretty as he busily went about tearing down polite notions of social life and the daily grind, seeking some sort of ideal world beyond this one.

The French government was not best pleased. Baudelaire and his publisher had to stand trial for “insult to public decency,” and six of the poems were banned until 1949. This, of course, only made Baudelaire more popular among the artsy folks who are the only ones who really matter. Poets Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, and Stéphane Mallarmé were exhilarated by the break with old-fashioned rhyming form as well as standard subject matter.

In 1869, Baudelaire published the closest thing to a creed the decadents would ever have, the prose poem “*Enivrez-vous*”—“Get Yourself Drunk”:

*You should always be drunk. That’s it, that’s everything, it’s the only way. So as not to feel the awful burden of Time that breaks your shoulders and drags you toward the ground, you must get drunk at once.*

*But on what? Wine, poetry, or talent—it’s your choice, but get yourself drunk!*

# Are You Ready for Decadence?

Susann Cokal

Copy out those lines and hang the page where your eyes will fall on it as soon as you wake. Then reach for your intoxicant of choice, from chocolate to a lover to poetry ... or your own journal and pen. You have your own *vertu*, your own talent and particular essence. Let it pour onto the page.

## DO YOU HALLUCINATE?

Perhaps the question is really, *Do you breathe?* To live is to be caught up in a dream, whether it be brought on by a generous muse or the pipe-bearing host of an opium den.

Or more decadent yet, take a glass of licorice-flavored absinthe. It's green, it's dangerous, it's expensive, and it's very highly addictive: What's not to love? Well, perhaps the alarming bouts of visions and madness, or the misguided euphoria that could make you take fatal risks. Fans of the green fairy included Poe, Baudelaire, Verlaine, Toulouse-Lautrec, Wilde, and many, many more. Most names have been lost to history because *this stuff can kill you*.

Even if you don't visit the green fairy on a regular basis—as in fact you probably should not—you might find room in your life for a vision or two. The über-Realist author Gustave Flaubert (you know him from *Madame Bovary*) worked for thirty years, on and off, to produce the wildly imaginative *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, in which the eponymous hermit fights off everything from naked women to an argumentative Sphinx and a giant vampire bat whose teats feed the Seven Deadly Sins. Published in 1874, the decidedly weird novel-cum-poem-cum-play was an *amuse-bouche* to what would become an international appetite for decadence, and it inspired painters from Félicien Rops to Odilon Redon.

Absinthe lover and poetic wunderkind Arthur Rimbaud identified as a dream-dwelling Symbolist, with a touch of the future Surrealist and a big dash of libertinism from a very young age. At just sixteen, he introduced himself to poet Paul Verlaine, thereby acquiring a lover as well as a mentor. Their relationship was tempestuous, dramatic, and sometimes abusive. Verlaine did not hesitate to tell Rimbaud that other people found him ill-groomed and rude; he barely hesitated, either, to shoot eighteen-year-old Rimbaud in the wrist while in a drunken fit, which effectively ended their affair (a breakup technique we do not recommend).

Rimbaud went on to many other lovers—and to feverish poetry that remade the world. His most famous piece, “*Le Bateau ivre*” (“The Drunken Boat”), describes a storm at sea, after which the speaker hallucinates:

... I was bathed in the Poem  
Of the sea, infused with stars, and giving forth milk,  
Devouring the green-azure into which, as a bit of flotsam  
pale  
And overcome with pleasure, a drowned man lost in dreams  
does sometimes sink ...

Poetry is life, and life is but a dream, so dream as much and as wildly as you can, pushing pleasure up to the last moment of your life. (But please, if you *must* try absinthe or opium, avoid boats and tempests.)

## DO YOU HAVE FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES?

The underworld, the demimonde, the fierce hedonism of exploration—this is the setting and stuff of your favorite writing and painting. Those fancy houses and the philosophical treatises penned in their libraries would be impossible without the release and inspiration of people of the night: dancers, models, and the men who sell the intoxicants.

In short, you're going to need some friends in low places.

Take a page from the sketchbook of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec: Start in a dance hall and wind up in a brothel. You will see desire at its most raw and focused, embodied in uninhibited poses by women who make a living from displaying their shapes. It will all be a delightful whirl of legs and petticoats and what lies beneath petticoats ... until the girls line up for the health inspector and have to prove they are not diseased. Well, that's decadent too.

There are low places and then there are lower places, where corruption is not such madcap fun. If you followed Octave Mirbeau from France to China in 1899, for example, his novel *The Torture Garden* would have led you through a prison with his lady friend Clara, a sadist aroused by the prisoners' suffering. As the writer known as Rachilde wrote in *Monsieur Vénus*, “All monsters have their fits of depression.”

We encourage you to maintain boundaries. *Make good choices.*

## HOW MUCH SEX CAN YOU HANDLE?

The answer must be *a lot*. You're letting pleasure be your guide, and what greater pleasure is there than ecstasy in a lover's arms? Perhaps especially when it's a little, um, twisted.

Algernon Charles Swinburne is known just as well for his amply advertised sexual daring as for his lush, gorgeous poems on taboo subjects such as sex, yes, and sex with animals, cannibalism, masochism, and the grave's irresistible pull. A small, pinchy man (standing five-foot-four), he liked to be flogged. But perhaps he liked it a little less than he said he did. Wilde judged Swinburne to be something of a poseur, “a braggart in matters of vice, who had done everything he could to convince his fellow citizens of his homosexuality and bestiality without being in the slightest degree a homosexual or a bestialiser.”

Wilde should probably know. But however Swinburne really took his pleasures, there's no denying that his poetry is mesmerizing. No one sums up the torments of erotic love better than he did in “Dolores”:

O lips full of lust and of laughter,  
Curled snakes that are fed from my breast,

Bite hard, lest remembrance come after  
And press with new lips where you pressed.  
For my heart too springs up at the pressure,  
Mine eyelids too moisten and burn;  
Ah, feed me and fill me with pleasure,  
Ere pain come in turn.

If a decadent ever contemplated the desirability of achieving John Milton's “calm of mind, all passion spent,” Swinburne and late entrants such as the Austrian painter Gustav Klimt brought sexy back with a vengeance. Like so many now wearing our favorite label, Klimt considered himself a Symbolist, but his brand of art nouveau was everything the decadents admired: shimmering expensively with gold leaf, popping sensually with bright colors, dwelling on female forms with a loving, bold brush. His life too was exemplary, at least for our friends. He painted commando, standing at the easel in a long smock with no underwear, all the better to release a little artistic tension in a romp with one of his models. Even after he settled down with costume designer Emilie Louise Flöge, he remained discreetly licentious, fathering at least fourteen children.

There's no denying that Klimt made allegory erotic and inviting. Those bare breasts, hooded eyes, and tempting gold still lure new acolytes in hopes that life will indeed imitate this art.

## CAN YOU TACKLE THE WOMAN QUESTION?

There are women, and then there is Woman. At the *fin de siècle*, perhaps *the* burning question was, How is a woman to live and work? Most people had no idea, or they had bad ones, even if they were female themselves. (This is one of those questions that just don't go away.)

Even in this literary demimonde, men portrayed women almost invariably as either femmes fatales or luminous innocents just waiting to be corrupted, then to corrupt in turn. Take, for example, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's early walk on the wild side: 1870's *Venus in Furs*, a slightly autobiographical story about a woman dominating a man who dreams of literary greatness. The protagonist begs his lady love to dominate him, often quite cruelly, to prove that his love is complete surrender. Love always says yes ... until his fair strumpet meets a man by whom *she* wants to be dominated instead, and the cycle that would come to be known as sadomasochism goes on.

But there were women ready to break the cycle. As rebellious New Women stepped out of the gilded frame and into their own lives, it is unsurprising that they refused to drink the absinthe-flavored Kool-Aid. They answered the Question with their own experiments and truths. Many of them did it with a *nom de plume* and men's clothes; quite a few hopped easily between beds too.

Rachilde is the one-word pseudonym of playwright and novelist Marguerite Vallette-Eymery, perhaps the best-known female figure in decadence. As soon as she arrived in Paris—with money that her country-bred father had made raising fancy dogs—she cropped her hair and started dressing like a man, and she continued to play with masculine and feminine roles in steamy erotic novels such as *La Marquise de Sade* and *Monsieur Vénus* in the 1880s, and *La Jongleuse* (*The Lady Juggler*) in 1900.



Top: Frontispiece for Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), by Félix Bracquemond. Bottom: *Abbé* (1896), by Aubrey Beardsley



*Les Fleurs du mal* (2014), by Yoann Lossel

## Are You Ready for Decadence?

Susann Cokal

In the 1890s, Rachilde's marriage (to a man) was perhaps her most shocking act. To please him, she grew out her hair and put on a dress—but in his opinion, she neglected their daughter in favor of her writing. What could be more traditionally masculine than placing art above parenthood? She mentored many younger literary women instead, including the great Colette, the pseudonymous popular novelist Georges de Peyrebrune (sometimes considered the most widely read woman in France), and the attractive American ex-pat Natalie Clifford Barney (more on her later).

Across the Channel in England, Annie Sophie Cory experimented under several pen names. As Victoria Cross, her novels featured cross-dressing, interracial love affairs, mixed-up gender roles, and a future in which women might govern England in more than just name. She published in *The Yellow Book*, as did Charlotte Mew—who fell in love with its female assistant editor and suffered one of a string of romantic rejections from her. In the early 20th century, Virginia Woolf would call Ms. Mew “the greatest living poetess.”

Zinaida Nikolayevna Gippius was proof that being beautiful and stylish did not doom a lady to victimhood. The Russian lady often dressed in Wilde style, wearing ascots and knee pants. She wrote Symbolist poems, dubbed “little prayers,” whose hallmarks were eroticism, gender fluidity, and narcissism. We might perhaps call her the spiritual love child of Baudelaire and Huysmans, especially since she ended up trying to revamp Russia's old religion into a New Church. Her reform movement didn't quite pan out, and her last written words were her personal truth: “Low is my price ... and wise is God.” In a way, it doesn't get more decadent than that.

And what could be more decadent now—in the revolutionary sense—than digging up these lost female writers and spending some nights with each of them? Whether you read them in a black satin gown or a velvet waistcoat, draped over an absinthe-green chaise lounge or soaking in a perfumed bubble bath, consider it an *experience*.

### ARE YOU DOWN WITH YOUR OWN GENDER?

Wilde—famously. Rimbaud—violently. Natalie Clifford Barney—prolifically. And they're just the beginning. Revolutionary artists are also sexual rebels.

Without Charles Ricketts and his partner, Charles Shannon, the 1890s would have looked very different. Collectors, publishers, and designers, Charles and Charles met in art school and stayed together for life (though Shannon occasionally experimented with women). In 1891, the two founded the Vale Press, for which Ricketts designed many typefaces associated with art nouveau, as well as illustrations. They published a couple of their friend Oscar's books, and Ricketts also designed sets for his plays. When a fire devoured Vale's store of woodcuts, Charles and Charles threw the surviving metal type into a

river—destroying their work in an act of decadent defiance—and focused on painting and sculpture.

The ladies of decadence were perhaps even more inclined to roll to the other side of the blanket. Late in the 19th century, Sappho's popularity hit an all-time high. In England, readers had just rediscovered her, thanks to new translations made (albeit by a man) in 1885. Women writers everywhere turned to her for inspiration as artists and as lovers. And women writers were also more popular than ever ... though sometimes unbeknownst to the public as such, as so many wrote under male pseudonyms.

The most famous Sapphist in France (yes, this was a category of fame) almost didn't make it into the scene. When Pauline Marie Tarn was young, her mother tried to have her declared mad, more because Maman Tarn wanted to get her mitts on the sizable legacy that Papa had left to the girl than because she regarded her daughter's sexuality as a mark of insanity. When Maman's scheme failed, Pauline re-created herself as Renée Vivien (loosely meaning Reborn Alive, with a nod to the nymph who seduced and trapped Merlin in a crystal cave).

In 1899, Vivien moved to Paris, launching into a devastating chain of crushes and relationships. Her partners were congenitally unfaithful, but Vivien established herself as a bard of female empowerment in forceful works such as “Amazon,” celebrating a proud warrior queen who “loves lovers who make her drunk / With animal agony and proud death.” She and Rachilde's protégée Natalie Clifford Barney fell in love at first sight, but it was a rocky sort of love. They studied Greek together so as to read Sappho in the original, and both of them wrote plays about Sappho's life. Perhaps that was a mistake; their relationship came to a fitful, will-they-won't-they sort of end.

Love's animal agony eventually broke Vivien's spirit and led to a not-so-proud death. She turned to drink and drugs, paralyzed herself in a laudanum-fueled suicide attempt, and then stopped eating till she wasted away. We believe her life is ripe for novelization; perhaps you would like to try your own hand at writing decadence?

Natalie Barney, however, did all right. Opposed to monogamy, she was involved with many of the era's most gifted women—including the painter Romaine Brooks, with whom she had a relationship that lasted for half a century, and Dolly Wilde, Oscar's niece. (In one of those fateful twists, Barney had happened to meet Oscar on an American beach when she was a child.) She also ran a mixed-gender, female-forward salon for six decades, enabling lesbian hookups and hosting everyone from Colette to Isadora Duncan and Gertrude Stein. One memorable guest was Mata Hari, who rode into Barney's garden (un)dressed as Lady Godiva on a white horse. Barney also founded a literary prize, and she gave support and inspiration to writers from Radclyffe Hall to Truman Capote.

Yes, sometimes decadents could be overall ... happy.

One happy couple, Katharine Harris Bradley and her niece,



Danae (1907-1908), by Gustav Klimt

Edith Emma Cooper, published in England under the joint name Michael Field. Together the two of them wrote forty plays and books of poetry in Aesthete mode; they even co-authored their private diary, writing, “Love is as hard as gold ... What is more beautiful than the mellowness of a human love?”\* They are best remembered now for poems on subjects such as “A Girl,” whose soul is “a deep-waved pearl / Dim, lucent of all lovely mysteries.”

They were as good as married—they shared the name, and friends referred to them as the Michaels or the Fields. And yes, this was all very shocking, given the blood relationship.

*But that is decadence*, at least for a handful of people. Fun fact: Beardsley probably had an affair with his older sister.

It's up to you how far you wish to take this experiment. No means no.

### ARE YOU SQUEAMISH?

Perhaps you (understandably) like your dose of corruption to come in a capsule of fantasy. In that case, you will revel in the supernatural stories dear to some decadent hearts.

That bizarre Swedish count, Stenbock, wrote many of the strangest, including a number of tales about vampires. In fact,

the world-weary but still lusty undead were all the rage, from Sheridan Le Fanu's Sapphic *Carmilla*, debuting in 1872, to Bram Stoker's history-making *Dracula* of 1897. Would Dorian Gray's picture have been possible without the vampiric tradition? Again, love—and art—and life—are a matter of saying yes up to the utmost boundary.

As a vampire lover, *Carmilla* is just a bit smothering. She sums up her feelings for her as-yet-not-entirely-understanding sweetheart, Laura: “You will think me cruel, very selfish, but love is always selfish; the more ardent the more selfish. How jealous I am you cannot know. You must come with me, loving me, to death; or else hate me and still come with me, and *hating* me through death and after.”

That's coming on a bit too strong, even for us.

Laura sticks a pin in her friend's extravagant affections: “Now, *Carmilla*, you are going to talk your wild nonsense again,” she says. But savor the slow narrative reveal as Laura grows weak—with sweet love? Or with a mysterious loss of blood?—and a pair of older gentlemen lead her (surprise!) into *Carmilla*'s tomb, where she must watch a stake being driven through her still beautiful friend's heart. It is terrifically macabre—and exquisite—and doomed. Bram Stoker could not help borrowing



Portrait of Charles Baudelaire (1844), by Émile Deroy

## Get Yourself Drunk

by Charles Baudelaire

Translation by Susann Cokal

You should always be drunk. That's it, that's everything, it's the only way. So as not to feel the awful burden of Time that breaks your shoulders and drags you toward the ground, you must get drunk at once.

But on what? Wine, poetry, or talent—it's your choice, but get yourself drunk!

And if sometimes—on the steps of a palace, on the green grass of a ditch, in the bleak solitude of your own room—you wake with your drunkenness already fading or gone, then ask the wind, the wave, the star, the bird, the clock, everything fleeting, everything groaning, everything that rolls and everything that speaks: Ask what time it is, and the wind, the wave, the star, the bird, the clock will answer you: "It is time to get drunk! So as not to be the sacrificial slaves of Time, get drunk—get drunk without stopping! On wine, on poetry, on talent—it's your own choice."



The Wise and Foolish Virgins (1913), by Charles Ricketts

just a bit for his masterwork.

Alongside those well-known stories came tales of ghostly possession by writers such as Vernon Lee. That was the *nom de plume* of Violet Paget, a feminist Aesthete and author of forty-seven books, who also dressed like a boy (but resisted the word *lesbian*). Under titles such as *A Phantom Lover* and *Euphion*, she explored heart-thumping eroticism through spiritual possession. Her theory of art paralleled the possessions of her fiction; when we connect with something exquisite, she wrote, our posture and breathing change, and we are alive in a new way.

Oh yes. Yes, we are.

### ARE YOU WEARY OF LIFE: OR, DO YOU OFTEN CONTEMPLATE DEATH?

Thus does art, like love, overtake the body. When we have grown drunk with one or both of them uncomfortably long, where are we to go next? Only that site of the gravest decay, from which springs much decadent inspiration—that is, the grave itself.

The exhaustion of dissipation, drunkenness, sex, creation—and getting up to do it all over again—were a frequent topic for Swinburne, as in "Ave atque Vale" ("Hail and Farewell"):

*A spirit sick with perfume and sweet night  
And love's tired eyes and hands and barren bosom.*

*There is no help for these things; none to mend  
And none to mar; not all our songs, O friend,  
Will make death clear or make life durable.*

Death is both the end to all the pleasures and another experience to be tried out. Many decadent artists died young; many more wished to. The rest perhaps peered into the grave rather longer than was good for their physical or spiritual health; they were already goths at heart.

Where else can you turn when your passions have exhausted you? To *the Passion*, it seems, like many of your models here. From Huysmans to Beardsley, Rimbaud to Wilde, they flirted with or even converted to Catholicism. It is after all the fanciest of European religions and the one with the prettiest funerals.

So on a search for a personal truth, it seems there is one inevitable Truth after all. But until your decadent body is laid to rest, whether you expire as a young Aubrey or an elderly Natalie, let yourself live—with abandon and pleasure and joy.

Are you ready?  
*Enivrez-vous.*

\*Journal entry accessed via the Michael Field Diary Archive, *Victorian Lives and Letters Consortium* (Center for Digital Humanities, University of South Carolina): Michael Field Diary



Visit Susann Cokal online at [susanncokal.net](http://susanncokal.net).



# Winter Holiday Croquembouche

What could be more decadent than a lofty spire of cream puffs magically held together with caramelized sugar and studded with rose fondant, white chocolate truffles, marzipan stars, and gleaming sugar pearls? Inspired by the adage “art for art’s sake,” this croquembouche is in the tradition of the grand desserts once served in the glittering salons and aristocratic banquet halls of 19th century Paris. French chefs painstakingly crafted towering centerpieces of confectionery art known as *pièces montés* (mounted pieces) from individual pastries and candied sugar. The inventor of the croquembouche, the great chef Antonin Carême, believed architecture to be the most noble of the arts and pastry the highest form of architecture. Adorned with sugar-coated fruits, almonds, flowers, fondant, and spun sugar, these elaborate creations were meant more to be marveled at than consumed.

The croquembouche is still a starring cake at many French special occasions—most especially weddings—but unlike its predecessors it is definitely meant to be eaten and enjoyed. I’m French on my father’s side, and at my wedding a chef in a tall white hat with a twirling Hercule Poirot moustache created and unveiled a towering classic croquembouche. While the guests weren’t quite sure what it was, all gasped in awe as it glowed and shimmered in a traditional golden cloud of spun sugar. The croquembouche is generally broken up, and guests are invited to help themselves. In some wedding traditions, the top of the croquembouche is dramatically broken off with a silver mallet or a champagne bottle, while bridesmaids hold up the corners of the table cloth to catch the pieces.

RECIPE AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
DANIELE PROHOM OLSON (A.K.A. GATHER VICTORIA)



Despite its extravagant exterior, the croquembouche is at heart a simple sensual pleasure. Classic French *chou à la crème* (pastries or éclair puffs filled with sweet cream) are topped with the delightful crunch of caramelized sugar. This is how the croquembouche got its literal name: “crunch in the mouth.” And it’s best eaten one *chou* at a time with your fingers; that way the cream will explode in your mouth and not be wasted on the plate.

Today the croquembouche comes in countless variations, like chocolate truffle and brandy croquembouche; chestnut, fig, and ginger croquembouche; orange-anise croquembouche; rose and white chocolate croquembouche, to name but a few.

If you think a croquembouche is too much work, this quick version is an easy and fun way to create a spectacular holiday dessert. No need to make cream puffs from scratch—all you need is a big tub of frozen profiteroles from the grocery store. Profiteroles are the American version of *chou à la crème*, and while you may not experience the exquisite culinary pleasures of a croquembouche created fresh by a French pastry chef, it still tastes delicious! Plus, choux pastries are best left to the experts. Better store-bought in my case than a homemade disaster.

“All shimmering and purple and gold” is how the French writer Paul Verlaine described the word *decadent*. So for my

winter croquembouche I headed over to the baking aisle and stocked up on shimmery sugar sprinkles, sparkly little stars, golden and ivory sugar pearls, and glittering sanding sugars. Then from the confectionary section I added white chocolate truffles, pretty shiny sweets, and fondant white roses. At home, I raided my holiday boxes for ornaments and wintery decorations.

Once I had all the components assembled, I began by making the caramel syrup. Simmering sugar and water on a mid-boil until it turned a thick golden brown, this was the glue I used to stick the profiteroles together and to dip in the glittering toppings. I decided to skip the candied halo spun sugar that traditionally surrounds the croquembouche. Flinging searing hot syrup around with a whisk or a fork is another activity best left to the experts.

Dipping and building, I set to work, but when it came to decorating, I allowed the muses of decadence to guide the way. Just a little more—everything! Carême would be disappointed in my architectural pastry skills, but I think the final bejeweled result has a certain lopsided *je ne sais quoi*. And while I didn’t plan it, my croquembouche decorated with lights, flowers, stars, and ornaments shimmers like a seasonal tree in the wintry dark. It may be far from pastry perfection, but I love how the spirit of the holiday season shines right through.



# RECIPE FOR WINTER HOLIDAY CROQUEMBOUCHE

by Gather Victoria



## DIRECTIONS

Remove your tub of profiteroles from the freezer about a half hour before beginning. You don't want them completely frozen or completely defrosted—somewhere in between.

### To Make Caramel Glaze:

While many modern recipes call for corn syrup I made mine the traditional way, with just sugar and water. I used a pastry brush dipped in lemon to wash the sides of the mixture to prevent sugar crystals from developing. Depending on the size of your croquembouche you may need to make two batches of glaze.

Mix the sugar with water in a heavy saucepan. Add corn syrup if you wish.

Place the saucepan over medium flame and bring to a gentle boil. *Do not stir.*

As the mixture thickens and turns into a syrup, take a pastry brush dipped in lemon juice (or cold water) and wash the sides of the saucepan. Cook the sugar syrup until it's golden and thick. Remove from heat and let it cool a few minutes before assembling your croquembouche.

## ASSEMBLY

### Part One:

Start by dipping the bottoms of your profiteroles in the syrup and attach them to a cake plate or round serving dish. Depending on the size of your profiteroles and your plate, you will use from 10 to 14. Arrange in the form of a circle and fill it in with more puffs until you have the round base to build upon.

### Part Two:

Once your base is laid down, begin dipping your puffs in the caramel, then dip them in your assorted candy decorations. These will be your glittery tops. Place on a large sheet of parchment or wax paper and let dry and harden.

### Part Three:

By this time, you will need to gently rewarm your syrup, which will have hardened. Keep the heat low: From this point on, the sugar will begin to darken and burn easily.

Once melted, dip the bottoms of your decorated profiteroles into the caramel

### Ingredients

- 1 large tub of frozen profiteroles (2.2 lbs)
- 10 ounces white granulated sugar
- 4 ounces water
- 2 tablespoons corn syrup (optional)
- ½ teaspoon lemon juice
- Assortment of sprinkles and candy decorations of your choice
- Glitter—how much is up to you, but I used nearly ¾ cup total to adorn my croquembouche.
- Assortment of confectioneries of your choice: chocolate, candied almonds, fondant flowers, sugared fruits and berries, etc. Again, the amount used is up to you.

and place on top of your base layer. Think of it as a cone (wide at the bottom and narrowing at its top). If you start with a base of 12 puffs, keep adding fewer puffs as you build—i.e., the next layer will be 11, the next 10, and so on. Pair the puffs by size, using the bigger puffs at the bottom and reserving the smaller ones for the top.

### Part Four:

Once your croquembouche is built, it's time to decorate it. You should have just enough caramel left over to attach the rest of your goodies, chocolate, candied almonds, fondant flowers, marzipan—whatever you've chosen.

The croquembouche is best made the day of your celebration and served fresh because the spun sugar and caramel can absorb moisture and begin to soften and melt, as I discovered when taking these pictures. If you look carefully, you can see places where the puffs have fallen right out!



*Danielle Prohom Olson weaves together ancestral food wisdom, herbal folklore, and goddess mythology while making a culinary pilgrimage through the seasonal celebrations of the wheel of the year. See more of her work at [gathervictoria.com](http://gathervictoria.com).*



# FALLING THROUGH TIME

The Newest Book by Sherry L. Ross



## FROM SHERRY L. ROSS

This collection of poetry is about time and consciousness. In one way, time is merely a human construct that does not exist except as we have imagined it, so that we can function in our daily lives. In another way, time is omnipresent, a super-reality, existing and permeating everything. It weaves in between the vastness of space and in between the vast spaces of our minds and it makes us a whole: the universe and each of us as individuals. Time encompasses everything, all of the past, present, and future. Time, then, is truly timeless. This other kind of time, for me, has become synonymous with consciousness, the consciousness of this universe, which holds in it all that has been, is, and will be. It is the great author, the teller of all stories and all histories simultaneously.

These poems are a composite of a small amount of consciousness: mine. It is me falling through my time here on earth. I hope they will resonate with you and your own exquisitely unique and universal consciousness.

“Sherry Ross is an authentic Gothic dream landscapist, a nostalgic story-winder, a cosmic-conscious adept, and a faery conjuror. Certainly, she must be a ‘sensitive’ and a ‘prescient’ whose life is balanced between the rigors of a normal life and what seems, to this author’s understanding, one also in touch with the ‘twilight world.’ By this I mean the cosmos, faeries, gardens, fireflies, the dark wood, dusk, wetness after a rain or dew, slipperiness, moist dirt, autumn leaves, damp grass, remembrances, the lives of her family and herself—that mysterious intersection with its very sheer veil.”

—Dr. Vern G. Swanson, author and editor of over 20 books on art, culture, and religion

## COSMIC TOUR

When I die  
I want the cosmic tour;  
to break gravity,  
pass GO  
and swing out into the  
stars, where  
galaxies scatter like  
so much salt on a  
hearty meal.  
I’ll taste eternity,  
sip from time and  
feast till full.

## THE FAERIE ENCOUNTER

“I’m not your friend,” the faery firmly claimed  
and scraped her thistle crown against my chin,  
red droplets formed for which she took the blame;  
she said to be my friend would be a sin.

“But still I leave you with a Faerie’s Mark,  
for times when you are feeling lost or low.  
So here upon your chin I’ve etched a spark,  
a star that in the dark will pulse and glow.

Forever now you are in faeries’ debt.  
Whether or not you use the Elven star,  
I’ve bound you to our realm in time’s deep net  
made from all there is both near and far.”

With no more explanation she was gone.  
The nighttime forest encircled me alone.  
I wandered dazed until I reached the pond,  
which meant somehow I’d finally made it home.

And now my life has never been the same,  
for deer and even bear will walk with me,  
and squirrels tease and act completely tame,  
sharing nuts and drinking from my tea.

My friends and family treat me like I’m mad  
and ask me where I got my tattooed star.  
They say the glow must come from something bad,  
a poisonous dye that’s made me odd and marred.

I spend my days and nights within the woods,  
and forage what I need from what is there.  
I know all herbs and mushrooms, which are good,  
and learned to balance all with love and care.

I live in two worlds now; belong to none,  
and when I’m feeling sad, I touch the star —  
sweet faerie songs then come and comfort some,  
but the mark is both a blessed-curse and scar.

And now until my days are truly done,  
I have no choice but wait to really know,  
by both great portals will I now be shunned?  
To which dear realm will then I finally go?



AVAILABLE NOW ON AMAZON

“*Falling Through Time* is a masterful collection of poems, which could have been written only by a poet at the height of their powers. There is a sense that the boundaries of time—almost life itself—are there to be pushed at, broken down, a deep yearning to break free and understand what is beyond.

“The poems in this deeply personal volume move from the sharp, detailed vignettes of remembered moments to a more abstract, transcendental finale, reminiscent of the Northumbrian poet Kathleen Raine.”

—Steve Griffin, poet and author of *The Things We Thought Were Beautiful*, *Up in the Air*, *The Boy in the Burgundy Hood*, *The Girl in the Ivory Dress*, and the *Tirthas* series.

OTHER BOOKS BY SHERRY: SEEDS OF THE POMEGRANATE | THE VINETROPE ADVENTURES, BOOK 1

VISIT HER @THEVINETROPEADVENTURES



# SCOTLAND'S COUTHY HOME

*An Exercise in Marvelous, Decadent Excess*

BY JILL GLEESON

**I**t sits grandly in the ancient and mysterious highlands of Scotland, its stalwart exterior refusing to give hint of the shiny, sexy glamour of its over-the-top interior.

Once known as Loch Lann House, now more commonly called Couthy Home, the structure is located on what its owner, Eilidh Sutherland, calls “the fringes” of Culloden Wood. History buffs—and *Outlander* fans—will recall the forest as a slice of the site of the infamous Battle of Culloden, re-enacted in the season-three opener of the hit Starz series. The bloody final confrontation between government troops and the Jacobite army of Bonnie Prince Charlie, it was the last battle to be fought on British soil.

The original section of Couthy Home, a round tower that is more than three centuries old, is said to have housed a secret Jacobite escape tunnel dating to before the battle. Three octagonal rooms just off the tower are nearly as old, but it is not the history of the house, as enticing as it is, that has Sutherland’s 25,000 Instagram followers clamoring to see photographs of it. It is what she describes as Couthy Home’s “maximalist eclectic” aesthetic. The house and its acre of grounds, all of it designed by Sutherland, are quite simply stuffed to the rafters with decadent fabulousness.

Sumptuous and quirky, funky and stunning, this is the sort of place where chandeliers drip from ceilings in room after room, feathers are a design motif, and a faux zebra with wings in a top hat leaps from a purple-hued wall. Then there is the gold soaking tub, one of Sutherland’s favorite pieces, which sits under a glinting disco ball beneath a gilded mirror hanging on an ebony-colored wall. The tub, Sutherland will tell you if you ask, “was from an antique dealer who salvaged it from a Parisian hotel. I source items from everywhere, the internet, salvage, antique and junk shops. Facebook Marketplace is my new best friend.”

Sutherland bought Couthy Home with her husband, Rory, eighteen years ago, while pregnant with the couple’s sixth child. The family spent years living in the original house before receiving permission from the cultural preservation agency Historic Scotland to build an addition connecting it to the gardens. After a long decade of planning and building, the project—which includes a curved-glass extension leading to an open-plan living room, dining area, and kitchen and the couple’s new en suite bedroom—is now complete.

Among the new construction’s many delights is the Sutherland’s private bathroom. Decorated with leopard-print wallpaper and what Sutherland identifies as discontinued tiles, it features the washstand from the 1967 spy parody film, *Casino*

*Royale*, sourced from Sutherland’s favorite salvage yard. “It was designed with the least amount of thought,” she says, “but it’s one of my favorite rooms in the house.”

Another favorite space is the snug in the older part of the house, which offers a cozy purple velvet couch and is, Sutherland says, “just the most charming room to sit in on a Sunday afternoon with the papers and copious cups of tea.” But she just might be most thrilled by the new extension, which finally lets enough light into the house to allow plants to thrive. “I love plants, and before the extension was built we couldn’t keep them alive,” she explains. “Now in the new glass corridor, it’s a jungle. I firmly believe for a room to feel grounded it needs flowers and foliage, real or faux.”

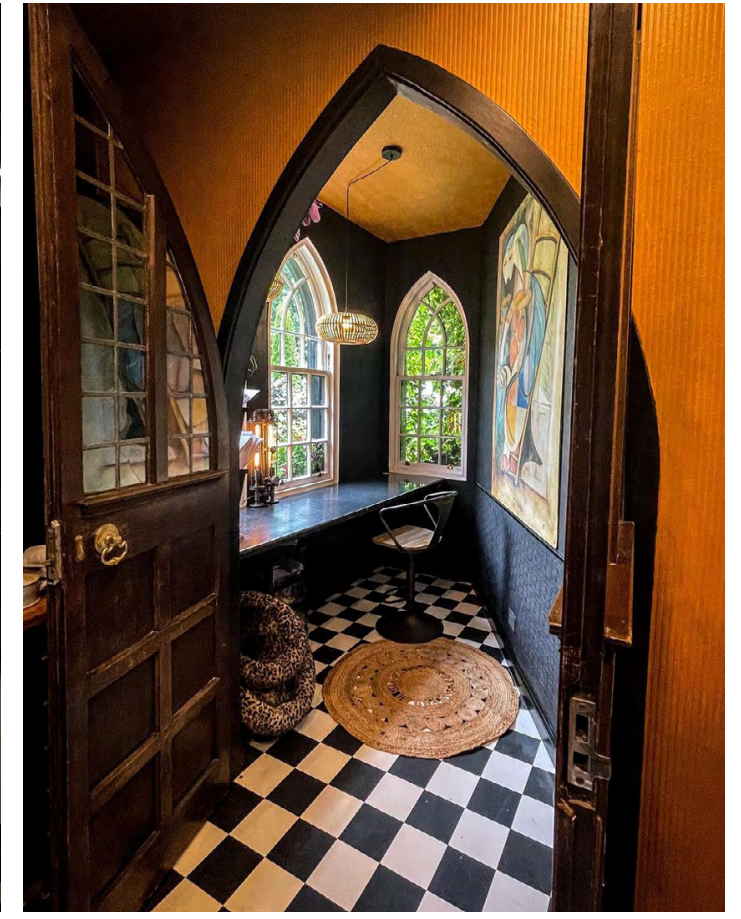
Outside the home, Sutherland’s love of greenery also becomes obvious. Along with outbuildings that include two greenhouses, a barbecue hut, and a Japanese gazebo, the property boasts a series of themed garden “rooms” divided into a cottage garden, a natural garden, a Japanese garden, and a white garden. There are also five ponds and a new woodland walk and lawns, all of it presided over by a half-dozen or so ridiculously adorable French bulldogs, who frequently make appearances in her Instagram feed. “Yes, all the Frenchies are ours,” Sutherland says with what seems to be typical good humor. “As our children grow up and leave home, they’re replaced with a Frenchie!”

Couthy Home in all its perfect, decadent splendor may now be, at last, finally, finally finished. But it most likely will forever be a work in progress. Sutherland—who studied art and interior design in college but counts no great design influence, simply doing whatever takes her “fancy”—says her home is “constantly changing.” The older part of the house, she explains, was designed around the requirements of accommodating six children, and the new extension will likely be subject to further evolutions.

“We want to be surrounded by things we love and cherish,” Sutherland says. “I think this quote by William Morris should be the mantra for anyone who wants an individual look: ‘Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.’”

For more images of Couthy Home, visit Instagram @couthyhome.

*Jill Gleeson is a travel journalist and memoirist whose work has been published in Woman’s Day, Good Housekeeping, Gothamist, Washingtonian, Canadian Traveller and other delightful publications and websites. She is also Enchanted Living’s travel editor. Find her at [gleesonreboots.com](http://gleesonreboots.com).*







# AT HOME: A DECADENT DECOR

by Rona Berg

When I think about decadence and decor, an image springs to mind of the Chelsea Hotel in its heyday. I remember the red velvet chairs, dark wood, crystal and glass chandeliers, huge abstract paintings on the walls, staircases that seemed to wind around forever and lead to nowhere.

The Victorian Gothic building on 23rd Street and Seventh Avenue, in the neighborhood known as Chelsea on the West Side of Manhattan, was built in 1883 and owned by impresario Stanley Bard for fifty-plus years, starting in 1957. Bard created a forgiving environment for some of the most famous (and infamous) artists, writers, photographers, drag queens, and musicians of the 20th century.

The Chelsea was the place where Jack Kerouac wrote *On the Road*, Bob Dylan wrote “Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands,” Madonna photographed her *Sex* book, where Sid Vicious is alleged to have murdered Nancy Spungen, and Edie Sedgwick set her bed on fire. In her memoir *Just Kids*, Patti Smith wrote about the hotel’s “guitar bums and stoned-out beauties in Victorian dresses, junkie poets, playwrights, broke-down filmmakers and French actors.” Smith lived there too in the 1970s, with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe.

The Chelsea was also home to a particular and pervasive smell: “the smell of creativity, decay, and *decadence*,” said one resident. “The smell of home.”

## Here Comes the Sun

The Scully and Scully Sun Double Mirror is quite over the top, but its sunburst design does dazzle with no less than a double layer of alternating rays of sunshine, in an antique gold leaf and sterling silver leaf finish. The eye is pulled into the center of the piece, and a viewer cannot help but admire the radiant mirror, sunburst design, and, of course, oneself. [scullyandscully.com](http://scullyandscully.com)

## Undulating Velvet Chair

A lush, plush, low-lying undulating chair that works on its own or with several placed side by side to form a couch, the House of Hackney Castle Plain Velvet Chair (above), in burnt tobacco orange, is evocative of medieval turrets from the castle of Trematon. For each sold, House of Hackney, in partnership with the World Land Trust, protects forest land, endangered ecosystems, and threatened habitats. [houseofhackney.com](http://houseofhackney.com)



## Over the Top

The Female Totem art print from Cocorrina—yellow and gold on a black background—features four nudes in an astral setting, with stars, suns, moons, and messages exhorting female strength. [cocorrina.com](http://cocorrina.com)

## Ancient Celtic Festival Calendar Cushions

From the new House of Hackney Super Nature collection, the Wheel of the Year Medium Velvet Fringed Cushion, Artemis Blush is a soft fringed velvet cushion featuring the ancient Celtic calendar, revolving around eight festivals that indicate a shift in seasons, and the natural world. A jumble of patterning, color, and texture, it is hard to look away. [houseofhackney.com](http://houseofhackney.com)



Follow Rona Berg on Instagram @ronaberg

# The Decadence of Purple

## ROME'S DARK SIDE



By THE WONDERSMITH

Today you most often hear *decadent* as a mouthwatering adjective for a rich dessert or perhaps a holiday feast. It conjures up lavish, indulgent foods—often expensive, extravagant, or prolific. Picture an ancient Roman feast hall, filled with purple-clad generals and emperors dining on exotic and aromatic foods served from glittering golden platters or highly decorated ceramic dishes. The air is heavy with the scent of fresh rose petals and saffron, and the table is piled high with more food than you and the other dinner guests could possibly eat, and absolutely dripping with gem-like fresh fruit. The wine keeps flowing as you indulge in the sensual feast laid before you well into the night ...

It may sound like a beautiful daydream, but such decadence has a dark side. The clue lies within the word's etymology; it comes from the same root as *decay*, and the other definition of decadence is the decay or degeneration of society or morals, usually due to affluence or gluttony. According to the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary:

*At some point, this word that described the excesses associated with social and moral decay ("a decadent society") came to refer more to the excess than to the decay. This slight shift in meaning gave decadent the use defined as "characterized by self-indulgence," which is how treating yourself to that piece of chocolate cake came to seem less like decaying and more like luxury.*

Perhaps decadence as we know it today carries with it a warning: Indulge and enjoy, but be cautious not to let the temptation of sensual pleasures divide you from your scruples. Let's look to ancient Rome as a cautionary tale. As Diane Ackerman writes in *A Natural History of the Senses*:

*Romans adored the voluptuous feel of food: the sting of pepper, the pleasure-pain of sweet-and-sour dishes, the smoldering sexiness of curries, the piquancy of delicate and rare animals, whose exotic lives they could contemplate as they devoured them, sauces that reminded them of the smells and tastes of lovemaking. It was a time of fabulous, fattening wealth and dangerous, killing poverty... the Romans amused themselves with the lavishness of a people completely untainted by annoying notions of guilt. In their culture, pleasure glistened as a good in itself, a positive achievement, nothing to repent.*

There is a reason that ancient Roman art is a huge part of Western art history; the sheer wealth of the upper classes afforded the luxury of art, among other sensual pleasures. Roman society was also likely the source of our cultural association of the color purple with royalty and riches. Tyrian purple, a sort of dark purple-red, was a popular color for the togas of the most wealthy. Can't you just picture their extravagant feasts now? Perhaps Ackerman can assist your imagination once again:

*Romans staged all-night dinner parties and vied with one another in the creation of unusual and ingenious dishes. ... Mechanical devices might lower acrobats from the ceiling along with the next course ... Slaves brought garlands of flowers to drape over the diners, and rubbed their bodies with perfumed unguents to relax them. The floor might be knee-deep in rose petals ... Slaves blew exotic scents through pipes into the room,*

*and sprinkled the diners with heavy, musky animal perfumes like civet and ambergris. Sometimes the food itself squirted saffron or rose water or some other delicacy into the diner's face, or birds flew out of it, or it turned out to be inedible (because it was made of pure gold.)*

When I first read this passage, I was entranced: such sensual creativity! What a delight it would be to wade through a hallway of rose petals up to my knee, or to taste luxurious perfumed sweets that were full of strange surprises! In the margin, I jotted a note: "Oh, to be in ancient Rome!" Then the reality of the utter decadence of that society struck me and I followed it up on the next page with an "Okay, maybe not..." as I considered just how many slaves it would take to fill up a hall with knee-deep roses for an evening, or learned of the Romans' penchant for forcing those below them to perform sexually for their amusement, or even fight each other to the death right on the dinner table. Even that beautiful Tyrian purple came with a shocking discovery: The reason only those of the highest status could afford it was because the dye came from a couple of species of sea snails in the murex family, which had to be hand-extracted. It took tens of thousands of snails to dye just one toga.

Delight in the sensual pleasures described above soon turned to disgust at the sheer disparity in wealth and morality. In fact, many believe that it was this decadent lifestyle that led to the downfall of the Roman empire. As Ackerman continues, "*Small wonder Christianity arose as a slave-class movement, emphasizing self-denial, restraint, the poor inheriting the earth, a rich and free life after death, and the ultimate punishment of the luxury-loving rich in the external tortures of hell.*"

The pleasures of the body were vilified, all temptations seen as a road for the damned. As the pendulum swung in the opposite direction, the denial of pleasure became an integral part of the Christian creed of salvation. It's an understandable reaction, to be sure. And yet, let us remember that pleasure itself is not the sign of a societal downfall, nor is it something to deny ourselves completely.

Filling our lives with sensual pleasures is part of what makes life so delightful! It's why we are drawn to chewy breads or silky sauces, the bright pops of rich red and purple foods that subconsciously whisper of ripeness and fertility, the many varied flavors of spices from near and far, the fragrance of something delicious baking, even the sizzle of fresh fruit baking into a sweet end to a lavish meal. Today when we don our responsibly sourced purple gowns and cook up a feast to enjoy with friends, it need not be a selfish exploitation of others; it can simply be a celebration, taking joy in enjoying the decadence of good food in the company of friends. The gorgeous purple tones in the vegetarian delights that follow were obtained naturally from the earth, no snails needed.

Perhaps you'd like to join me for a decadent feast loosely inspired by ancient Roman recipes but modernized to be not only absolutely delicious but in line with the values of generosity and respect. Don your purple garb, my dears, and let us reclaim the delightful decadence of this feast together!



“Roman society was also likely the source of our cultural association of the color purple with royalty and riches. Tyrian purple, a sort of dark purple-red, was a popular color for the togas of the most wealthy.”

## GILDED MINI EGGPLANTS WITH BLACK GARLIC, CILANTRO, AND WILD HERBS

Eggplants come in such a beautiful array of amethyst shades, from the deepest plum purples to light lavenders. I love using whole mini eggplants for this recipe, but you can also just slice a large eggplant into half-inch slices and proceed. I've decorated mine with edible gold leaf; an embellishment that makes them extra festive, but is entirely optional. This recipe is also easily made vegan! Adapted from a recipe by Yotam Ottolenghi. Makes about 16 mini eggplants to serve 8 as a side.

*16 mini eggplants (or 2 medium-large)*  
*4 tablespoons olive oil, divided*  
*2 cloves garlic, minced*  
*¼ teaspoon salt*  
*¼ teaspoon freshly cracked black pepper*  
*Pinch dried and ground cumin*  
*Pinch dried and ground cinnamon*  
*2 red chilies, sliced thinly*  
*1 cup mixed fresh herbs—wild fennel, wild mint, and cilantro are my favorites!*  
*Edible gold leaf, optional*

### Sauce:

*¼ teaspoon salt*  
*1 tablespoon olive oil*  
*1/2 cup vegan yogurt*  
*4 to 6 cloves black garlic*  
*2 teaspoons lemon juice*

### Directions:

Wash the eggplants, then pat dry. Slit them lengthwise into 4 or 6 wedge-shaped segments, cutting from the bottom and stopping before you reach the stalk so the pieces don't separate completely.

Mix the minced garlic with 2 tablespoons olive oil, salt, pepper, cumin, and cinnamon. Rub this mixture gently on the insides of the eggplants.

Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a frying pan over medium heat, then add the eggplant. Turn the heat to low and put a lid on the pan. Continue cooking, gently turning the eggplants every few minutes so they cook evenly. Once they are soft but not mushy, remove them from the pan and move to a plate. Heat the pan back up to medium heat and cook the red chili slices until they are crispy, then drain on a paper towel.

Add the sauce ingredients to a food processor and blend until smooth.

Holding the top of one of the cooked eggplants in one hand, add a spoonful of sauce to the very middle between the wedges. Tuck in the red chilies and fresh herbs, then lay on the platter.

Fill and decorate each mini eggplant, then garnish with edible gold leaf.

## MINI GLUTEN-FREE FOCACCIA WITH HERBS, GRAPES, OLIVES, AND PINE NUTS

While the ancient Romans certainly weren't baking with xanthan gum and gluten-free flours, they sure did love their flatbreads, often studded with fresh herbs and fruits or vegetables. These mini breads carry the same delicious flavor as traditional focaccia, with the added bonus of being safe for anyone with a gluten sensitivity or allergy. The dough is spiced with yarrow, coriander seeds, and a bit of thyme, then studded with sweet roasted grapes and briny olives. A drizzle of olive oil and a dusting of sumac give the dough a rich flavor and just a touch of tart brightness, while pine nuts add a pleasant crunch. A couple of tricks for getting lighter gluten-free breads while retaining that lovely yeasted flavor: I add a little bit of baking powder to help leaven the breads while baking. I also add a couple of eggs to increase the rise. Finally, I keep the dough fairly wet and sticky; if it is too dense, it won't be able to rise properly. Working with gluten-free bread dough is very different from regular bread dough, but just follow the instructions and you'll do great! This is loosely adapted from a recipe in *Gluten-Free Artisan Bread in Five Minutes a Day*. Makes six mini focaccia.

*2 cups white rice flour*  
*1 cup sorghum flour*  
*⅔ cup tapioca starch*  
*½ cup potato starch*  
*2 tablespoons xanthan gum*  
*1 tablespoon active dry yeast*  
*1 teaspoon baking powder*  
*1 teaspoon fresh yarrow, finely chopped*  
*1 teaspoon coriander seeds, toasted and ground*  
*1 teaspoon fresh thyme, chopped*  
*2 tablespoons honey*  
*2 teaspoons flaky sea salt, plus extra*

*2 cups lukewarm water*  
*2 eggs*  
*¼ cup olive oil, plus extra*  
*Fine cornmeal*  
*Fresh grapes, red or purple*  
*Olives, red or black*  
*½ cup pine nuts*  
*2 tablespoons sumac, optional*

### Directions:

Whisk together the flours, baking powder, and yeast in the bowl of a stand mixer until very evenly distributed. Add the herbs and whisk in.

Dissolve the salt and honey in the lukewarm water and add it along with the eggs. Add the olive oil.

Mix with the paddle attachment on medium speed for 10 minutes. The dough should be soft and sticky; the long mixing time helps get air bubbles in it while also activating the xanthan gum to allow for a good risen texture!

Cover the bowl with a damp kitchen towel and allow to rise at room temperature for about 2 hours or until the dough is soft and fluffy.

You can shape and use it right away, or very gently transfer to an airtight container and store in the fridge for up to 4 days.

Sprinkle some of the fine cornmeal on a nonstick baking mat on a large baking tray. Divide the dough into 6 portions, handling it gently with damp hands to prevent it sticking.

Gently pat each piece into a ball, then flatten into an oval disk on the baking sheet, keeping them all spaced out evenly. Gently smooth the surface with a little water if needed. The dough should be a half-inch thick.

Press the grapes and olives into the surface of the dough, spaced about 1 or 2 centimeters apart. Drizzle each bread with a little more olive oil and sprinkle with pine nuts, flaked sea salt, and sumac powder. Let rest on the baking sheet for 20 to 30 minutes (or 1 hour if using refrigerated dough) while you preheat the oven to 425°F.

Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until the crust is golden. Remove from the oven and let cool on a baking rack.

## GILDED MINI EGGPLANTS

*With Black Garlic, Cilantro, and Wild Herbs*



## MINI GLUTEN-FREE FOCACCIA

*With Herbs, Grapes, Olives, and Pine Nuts*



## ANCIENT CHEESECAKES WITH BAY, ELDERBERRY, AND HONEYED FIGS

According to archaeologists, some of the very first cakes ever made were simple concoctions of soft goat cheese, honey, and sometimes a little bit of grain. These cheesecake tarts are my homage to those ancient cakes. The flaky pastry crust gets a nutty flavor from buckwheat flour but has also been adapted to be gluten-free. The filling is an aromatic mixture of homemade bay-leaf-infused goat cheese and honey. A gorgeous topping of elderberry honey sauce really dresses these up, and a roasted fig with honey is the perfect complement to the richness of the cheesecake below. This makes 18 2½-inch tarts.

### *Pastry Crust:*

*1 cup white rice flour  
1 cup tapioca starch  
½ cup buckwheat flour  
½ cup sorghum flour  
¾ teaspoon xanthan gum  
½ teaspoon fine sea salt  
¾ cup vegetable shortening  
1 teaspoon white vinegar  
1 egg  
Cold water*

### *Homemade Cheese Filling:*

*2 quarts whole goat milk  
1 or 2 fresh bay leaves  
¼ teaspoon salt  
3 tablespoons lemon juice  
¾ cup honey*

### *Elderberry Glaze:*

*1 cup ripe elderberries (or blueberries)  
½ cup water  
½ cup honey  
1 teaspoon cornstarch*

### *Roasted Figs:*

*18 small figs*

### *Directions:*

First, prepare the pastry crust. Whisk together the flours, xanthan gum, and salt.



Cut in the shortening until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs.

Add the egg to a cup measure and beat it with the vinegar. Add ice water until you have a cup of liquid.

Stirring the flour mixture with a fork, add the water mixture a tiny bit at a time until your dough just comes together. (It should be soft, but not sticky.) You'll have liquid left over, just discard it. Press the dough into your tart shells and refrigerate or freeze them while you work on the filling.

Line a colander with a large piece of dampened cheesecloth folded over 4 times. Place it over a bowl so it is ready when it is time to strain the cheese. Add the goat milk, salt, and bay leaf to a heavy-bottomed saucepan. Heat over medium-low heat until you reach 185°F, then remove from heat. Add the lemon juice and stir 5 times, then let it sit for 5 minutes, untouched. This will allow the curds to form!

Remove the bay leaf, then pour the mixture into the lined colander and allow it to drain. You'll want a fairly thick cheese, so let it drain for at least 30 minutes and longer if necessary. It should

be relatively the same texture as store-bought ricotta.

Mix 2 cups of the homemade cheese with the honey, then spoon into the pastry shells. Bake at 350°F until golden brown, 30 to 40 minutes. Remove and let cool while you make the elderberry honey glaze and roasted figs.

To roast the figs, just place them upright on a lined baking sheet and bake in the preheated oven for 10 minutes. They should be gently soft.

To make the glaze, combine the fresh elderberries and water in a medium saucepan. Bring to a simmer, using the back of a spoon to smush the berries as they cook. Once the mixture is bubbling and the berries have broken down, pass it through a fine sieve to remove the skins and seeds. Add that back to the saucepan with the honey. Make a slurry with the cornstarch and 2 teaspoons of water and add it. Cook over medium heat until it has thickened into a glaze.

Top each cooked tart with some elderberry honey glaze and a whole roasted fig, with some more elderberry honey drizzled over the top. Serve at room temperature.

*Miss Wondersmith loves to share wonder in any way she can, from fantastical recipes to artful ceramics, inspiring writings, and even buried treasure! Follow the magic at [thewondersmith.com](http://thewondersmith.com) or on Instagram @misswondersmith or Facebook @thewondersmith.*

# THE DECADENT, DANGEROUS MR. WILDE

by Theodora Goss



If we were in Paris (we really should be in Paris!), I would say, “Let’s buy cups of steaming hot chocolate and flaky, buttery croissants at our neighborhood café, then take métro line 2 to the 20th arrondissement and visit Père Lachaise cemetery.” There we would find the tombs of famous writers, artists, and musicians like Molière, Eugene Delacroix, Frédéric Chopin, Georges Seurat, Marcel Proust, Colette, Edith Piaf, Gertrude Stein, Max Ernst, and Jim Morrison. But the most magnificent tomb belongs to the Irish writer Oscar Wilde.

The tombstone is decorated with a winged angel, in a modern style inspired by the Assyrian statues in the British Museum. Since 2011 it’s been surrounded by a glass wall to keep visitors from kissing the stone and leaving lipstick marks. Before the glass wall was erected, so many visitors would come and kiss the stone or write messages on it like “Wilde child we remember you” and “Keep looking at the stars,” that it started to disintegrate.

Who was Oscar Wilde, and why does he inspire such devotion a hundred years after he died, desperately ill and penniless, in a Paris hotel room? During his lifetime, he was alternately mocked, fêted, lampooned, and called one of the most dangerous men of the age, a harbinger of modern degeneration. He was the author of some of the most celebrated plays ever written, including *The Importance of Being Earnest* and the symbolist extravaganza *Salome*, considered so scandalous at the time that it could not be performed in England. Instead, it premiered in France and became the basis for the Richard Strauss opera. He also wrote lyrical, poignant fairy tales like “The Happy Prince” and “The Nightingale and the Rose.” But it was his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that most scandalized 19th century British society and brought about his downfall. It also ensured his literary immortality.

Wilde was born in Dublin to the famous eye and ear surgeon Sir William Wilde and his wife, Lady Jane Wilde, who was a passionate Irish nationalist and wrote on political topics for pro-independence newspapers under the name Speranza, Italian for “hope.” Both she and her husband were interested in native Irish folklore and literature; when William treated poor patients who could not pay his fees, he would ask them to pay in stories. After his death, Lady Wilde published *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland*, with a final chapter by her husband, which is still available in a Dover edition. Politics, literature, and the scientific issues of the day were all discussed at the Wilde dinner table. The young Oscar grew up in this intellectual and literary milieu, excelling at school and eventually going on to Trinity College. He won a scholarship to study classics at Oxford, and that is where his unusual ideas about art and society first gained attention.

Imagine a young man walking toward you on one of the hallowed paths of the oldest and most prestigious university in England. His long hair is blowing in the wind. He is not yet dressed in the Aesthetic fashion he would later recommend, but his head is filled with subversive ideas. He has been reading the art criticism of Walter Pater, especially the final chapter of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, in which Pater tells his readers to experience everything—to burn with a “hard, gemlike flame” because we are all too soon snuffed out. This was not the sort of philosophy that staid, respectable Victorian society looked upon with approval. Pater removed the conclusion in the second edition because he thought it might mislead his readers, and then reinstated it in the third edition. But the most important message of his book was the idea that art should exist for its own sake—*l’art pour l’art*, in the words of French Aesthetes like Théophile Gautier. Art did not need to serve a moral purpose, as Victorian society assumed. It could exist simply on its own terms, for the sheer sensory pleasure it gave us. Wilde was influenced both by Pater’s philosophy and the teachings of John Ruskin, who was associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and espoused radical ideas like education for the working classes. If you stopped Wilde in his perambulations, the long-haired young man might invite you back to his rooms, decorated with *objets d’art*, peacock feathers, lilies, and blue porcelain imported from China. He reportedly once told a friend, “I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china,” and the phrase was satirized in the popular magazine *Punch*, which was beginning to mock what it considered effeminate Aesthete young men and their counterparts, masculine New Women who agitated for rights such as the ability to ride bicycles or attend college.

Wilde graduated from Oxford with honors but did not get the fellowship he applied for, and the woman he loved, Florence Balcombe, married fellow Irishman Bram Stoker, who would later write *Dracula*. Determined to make a name for himself, he moved to London and embarked on a literary career. Living on money from a family inheritance, he began to publish poems and started writing his first play, *Vera; or, the Nihilists*. Then, unexpectedly, he was invited to go on a lecture tour in the United States. Lectures were a popular form of entertainment in the 19th century—Charles Dickens had made a small fortune on such a tour, and Wilde was eager to follow his example. The subject of his lectures was to be Aestheticism, popularized by the satirical Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *Patience*. Wilde arrived in the U.S. as a living embodiment of the Aesthetic movement. The *New York World* described his appearance on his arrival in 1882:



IanDagnall Computing / Alamy Stock Photo

Portrait of Oscar Wilde (1882), by Napoleon Sarony

Mr. Wilde is fully six feet three inches in height, straight as an arrow, and with broad shoulders and long arms, indicating considerable strength. His outer garment was a long ulster trimmed with two kinds of fur, which reached almost to his feet. He wore patent-leather shoes, a smoking-cap or turban, and his shirt might be termed ultra-Byronic, or perhaps—décolleté. A sky-blue cravat of the sailor style hung well down upon the chest. His hair flowed over his shoulders in dark-brown waves, curling slightly upwards at the ends. His eyes were of a deep blue, but without that faraway expression that is popularly attributed to poets.

The young man from Oxford had become a fully formed, appropriately dressed Aesthete. Although the newspapers caricatured him mercilessly, sometimes in anti-Irish terms, the lectures were wildly popular. He spoke to Americans on subjects such as home decoration and artistic dress, arguing for the importance of art and urging them to beautify their surroundings. Critics worried his radical ideas would unduly influence—and potentially corrupt—the populace.

Unfortunately, *Vera* was a flop, but back in London, Wilde continued writing plays. He also met and married Constance Lloyd, the daughter of a prominent barrister. The next ten years were a whirlwind of writing, social events, and family life. The Wildes had two children, Vyvyan and Cyril, and Oscar's plays found large audiences. *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *A Woman of No Importance*, and *An Ideal Husband* were all popular hits. He continued to court controversy with his articles and essays, which argued for liberal social causes as well as new ways of looking at art and the responsibilities of the artist. He and his wife entertained lavishly, inviting important artists and intellectuals to their house at 16 Tite Street, including his close friend James McNeill Whistler. Whistler had been experimenting with exactly the sort of art for art's sake that the Aesthetes valued. His painting *The White Girl*, of a red-haired young woman in a white gauze dress standing on an animal pelt, had been rejected by the Paris Salon because it was too radical a departure from conventional techniques. It did not help that the model, Joanna Hiffernan, was his mistress. Later, he renamed the painting *Symphony in White, No. 1* to emphasize that viewers were supposed to look at the painting as a painting, not a representation of the model.

At the same time, Wilde was living a secret life. His friend Robert Ross had become his first male lover, and Wilde had started to explore his own sexuality. Then, in 1891, he met Lord Alfred Douglas, known as Bosie. It is ironic that Wilde did not meet Bosie until after *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published in 1890, because Bosie was Dorian brought to life—young and beautiful, although without Dorian's initial innocence. Even if you have not read the novel, you probably know what it's about: a young man who wishes that he could always stay the same age, and his portrait, which ages instead of him. When we first meet Dorian, he is in a perfect Aesthetic interior, the studio of artist Basil Hallward. There, among the "rich odor of roses" and "heavy scent of the lilac," we meet the charming and seductive Lord Henry Wotton:

From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs; and now and then the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long tussore-silk curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid jade-faced painters of Tokio who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion.

Here we see the hallmarks of the 19th century Aesthetic movement: everything is richly textured and no doubt very expensive but ultimately transient. The flamelike beauty of the laburnums echoes Pater's famous line. The Japanese details reflect the importance of *Japonisme*, an appreciation for and exoticization of all things Japanese in the second half of the 19th century. We later find out that the cigarettes Lord Henry is smoking are laced with opium.

Lord Henry convinces Dorian to wish for unaging immortality so that he in effect becomes a work of art and leads Dorian down a path that starts with Paterian Aesthetic appreciation but ends in murder. He tells Dorian, "I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream," then the world would gain "a fresh impulse of joy." Dorian does just that. He starts innocently enough by collecting jewels, sumptuous fabrics, rare perfumes, and musical instruments, but eventually causes the woman he loves to commit suicide and leads other young men into corruption and disgrace. Meanwhile, he remains young and beautiful while the portrait hidden upstairs grows old and hideous with his crimes. It may seem paradoxical that a proponent of Aestheticism like Oscar Wilde wrote a novel in which the pursuit of beauty leads the protagonist astray. But in an essay titled "The Truth of Masks," Wilde stated that "in art there is no such thing as a universal truth. A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true." Throughout *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry speaks in paradoxes, and we are told that "the way of paradoxes is the way of truth." This contradictoriness is also part of Aestheticism. The preface to the novel is a series of epigrams in which Wilde lays out his Aesthetic philosophy. It ends, "All art is quite useless." But that doesn't mean art is *useless*, as in having no value. Wilde means that art doesn't have the sort of value Victorian society wanted it to have—it won't teach anyone morality, patriotism, or any other 19th century virtue. It exists for its own sake. *L'art pour l'art*.

The preface also tells us, "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all." This attitude is, of course, what got Wilde into trouble. When Bosie's father, the Marquess of Queensberry, found out that his son was having an affair with the notorious Oscar Wilde, he accused Wilde of homosexuality—a serious charge at that time. Through a complicated series of trials, Wilde was ultimately found guilty of "gross indecency" and sentenced to

two years of hard labor in prison. But the trial did not focus on Wilde's relationship with Bosie—instead, it focused on what he had written in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Parts of the novel were read in the courtroom, and Wilde was asked whether he thought his words might corrupt the young men of England. Wilde defended himself both wittily and valiantly, but to no avail. By the time he was released from prison in 1897, his health had broken down. His wife and sons had changed their names and left England to escape the scandal. He was bankrupt, and Bosie had deserted him. Robert Ross was at his side as he lay dying in Paris. Among his last words was a complaint about the décor: "This wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. Either it goes or I do."

In 1892 and 1893, the German philosopher Max Nordau published a two-volume treatise called *Degeneration* in which he railed against what he called the decadent, degenerate art of the late 19th century, identifying movements such as Impressionism and Symbolism as symptoms of a cultural disease that was infecting Europe. Nordau's book sounds ridiculous to a modern reader—among other things, he claimed that degenerate artists could be identified by unusual physical attributes, like pointed ears and hairy palms. But he was taken seriously at the time.

There was a genuine fear that society was somehow going in the wrong direction, devolving into lower forms. Oscar Wilde was still at the height of his fame and came in for Nordau's especial ire. What made Wilde such a dangerous figure to Nordau and conservative Victorian society? Probably the same thing that makes him such an important and beloved writer today. Wilde stood up for the freedom of the artist to create, the freedom of the individual to enjoy and experience. He thought society should be kinder, more compassionate. From his cell in Reading Gaol, he wrote about the need for prison reform. He cared about beauty and truth—which may be why he relentlessly skewered Victorian hypocrisy. The society he criticized eventually destroyed him, but we still have his words and a tomb in the form of a winged angel that has to be protected from passionate admirers.

Wilde was famous for his epigrammatic sayings. "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars," says one of the characters in *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Hopefully, the dangerous Mr. Wilde is up there somewhere, looking back down at us, probably with a witty paradox on his lips.



Theodora Goss is the *World Fantasy*, *Locus*, and *Mythopoeic Award*-winning author or editor of nine books, including the short-story and poetry collection *Snow White Learns Witchcraft* and her trilogy that began with *The Strange Case of the Alchemist's Daughter* and ended with *The Sinister Mystery of the Mesmerizing Girl*. Follow her on Instagram @theodoragoss.

# MEMENTO MORI

A MODERN RETELLING OF THE  
PRE-RAPHAELITE BROTHERHOOD  
OF ARTISTS AND THEIR MUSES

"A stunning debut!"

#1 *New York Times* Bestselling  
author Helen Hardt



"An escapist's dream read full  
of art, history, and sexiness!"

*New York Times* Bestselling  
author Laurel Paige

"Tragically beautiful. I couldn't  
turn the pages fast enough!"

*USA Today* Bestselling  
author Ivy Smoak

Photo by Dorota Gorecka



*Text by* JILL GLEESON

*Photography by* MARK SHELBY PERRY

*The*  
**ILLUMINATI**  
**BALL** *The World's Most Decadent Show*

Imagine if you will: You arrive from New York City, blindfolded, at a country manse on a wooded lake somewhere in upstate New York. Your hostess is artist Cynthia von Buhler, as well known for her imaginative theatrical stagings as her lauded graphic novels, children's books, and illustrations.

The bindings over your eyes are removed and there before you stands Pig King, a man wearing an elaborate three-sided mask, the center of which is porcine in nature. There is a strange, fantastical dance with other masked creatures—a mouse, a cow, a monkey, and more—and then you and the twenty or so people who arrived with you are led inside to the dining room. As an opera singer tucked between the tables starts serenading you, aerialists wrapped in crimson-colored silks descend like exquisite spiders, slowly and soundlessly, from the ceiling.

You've been here at this provocative, deeply alluring affair for less than ten minutes, but already you recognize that this could turn out to be one of the most memorable nights of your life.

So began the original incarnation of *The Illuminati Ball*, an immersive theatrical experience conceived of and made reality by von Buhler, one of the country's busiest and most inventive Renaissance women. In addition to producing graphic novels, children's books, illustrations, and paintings, von Buhler has staged a half-dozen successful productions of her own works, including *The Girl Who Handcuffed Houdini* and *Speakeasy Dollhouse: The Bloody Beginning*. But *The Illuminati Ball*, which ran for more than three years in von Buhler's own home and later in secret locations in New York City, may be considered her greatest achievement thus far.

Von Buhler drew her inspiration for *The Illuminati Ball* from a somewhat peculiar source, the surrealist ball Baron and Baroness Rothschild held at their French chateau in 1972. "My choreographer sent me pictures of it," von Buhler says. "And they were so intense—people were wearing these animal masks, and even Salvador Dalí attended, and Audrey Hepburn, who wore a birdcage on her head. They dubbed it an Illuminati party because everyone always said the Rothschilds were the Illuminati, but that was really tongue-in-cheek. I saw a picture of Marie-Hélène de Rothschild wearing a stag head with diamond tears and it made me think about the plight of animals who are adversely affected by the human race on this planet. I had been wanting to do a project about animal rights so I merged the two themes."

Potential guests applied online to attend *The Illuminati Ball*, where, the story went, they would be inducted into the centuries-old secret society formed to oppose religious influence over



everyday life. Depending on their deepest desires, guests at the original event at von Buhler's home were grouped into cabals led by half-animal half-humans who had escaped from a laboratory and pretended to be the Illuminati in order to obtain power over humans.

They were given masks corresponding to their animal kinship and then, as von Buhler describes, "all of the kinships broke into groups and did different things on the property and experienced different parts of the storyline. There were morality tests that were written into the night, and the people who made the correct choices were given a key. They received special privileges and were able to experience certain things that others might not get to experience."

Throughout the evening the alcohol flowed freely and sublime vegan food, created to mimic meat-based courses like duck, were served. There were esoteric rituals completed and visits from fire performers and burlesque dancers, as well as an appearance from von Buhler's pig, Persephone, who arrived in a baby carriage and performed mind-reading tricks. Some guests bathed with von Buhler or shucked their clothes and swam naked in the lake with actors portraying mermaids.

"It was very intense, and we became very close with each other because of the storylines," von Buhler, who is vegan, says. "Part of the point of it was to make people have an emotional reaction to the plight of these animals. Some people said it was the best night of their lives, that's the kind of night it was, but there was also a message involved about animals and human nature written into the storyline. So it wasn't just having fun. There were so many different levels to it, and I've even had people tell me that they became vegan after going to the show and that was really amazing."

While *The Illuminati Ball* took its last bow around the time Covid-19 struck the United States, there are ways for those who missed it to experience at least a version of it. A gorgeously illustrated graphic novel by von Buhler based on the show is currently available on Amazon and in bookstores.

And she continues to pitch a *The Illuminati Ball* reality series, which would put contestants through a series of morality tests much as the show's guests were. But no matter whether the television program materializes or not, *The Illuminati Ball* remains a singular theatrical event that pushed boundaries as much as buttons and was, von Buhler concludes happily, "really special for everyone who was involved."

Connect with Cynthia on Twitter @cynthwonbuhler or Instagram/Facebook at @cynthiavonbuhler.

Find Jill Gleeson at [gleesonreboots.com](http://gleesonreboots.com).





# Dark Moon Decadence

by Briana Saussy

You can tell a new tale from an old one by the lack of pause, the lack of a sacred taking in of breath. In the old tales a curse was broken, and then there was a foray into the wild, into the weird, into the uncanny before the journey was resumed. Not today. Too many of our newer stories are patterned on our modern lives—where we experience a momentous idea or heart-busting truth that decisively breaks whatever curse we might be laboring under and then we go right back to doom scrolling or watching cat videos. In these newer tales there is no moment between the breaking of a curse or the liberating of an idea or the catching sight of a pattern that no longer serves and doggedly following it to its root, no moment that allows for time and space and strangeness to settle around like a fine and silky mist. I would say it like this: There are too few dark moon moments—in our stories and in our lives. Getting acquainted with those moments, claiming them for ourselves ... now that is the deepest form of decadence I know.

The moon changes its face and in so doing gives us a celestial rhythm to live by. Hunters and fishermen, hares and deer, those of us who bleed and give birth—we all know these rhythms on some level, even if the culture at large has tried to forget about them. The waning moon—that time when in the velvet night sky the moon grows smaller and smaller after triumphing in its fullness—is the traditional time for releasing, banishing, and breaking curses. It is the monthly period when whatever tangles we have gotten ourselves into or whatever snares we have fallen into that others had set for us can be loosened, undone, and taken apart. It is not the worst way to look at modern life, to see it as a story of falling into curses that have various origin points and then learning how to break and undo those curses. So this is the work of the waning moon.

The dark moon is not a phase, not really; it is a single event, a solo line in the lunar choir. The dark moon occurs the night before the new moon—not on the same night and not two nights before. One night before the new moon—precisely. It occurs on a monthly basis for the most part and for the most part only occurs once a month. The dark moon is not the time for breaking curses; that work of unwinding has already been finished. The dark moon is the moment between the rupture of the curse, the release of the burden, the utterance of the sacred *no* and the beginning of the next part of the journey that is always signified by the presence of the new moon.

This is why the dark moon is the most decadent night of each month. For it makes a demand of us to take time and take space for reflection, for going within, for peering in the smoky glass mirror of our soul soil and taking care. When I think of decadence as we traditionally understand it, I think of *Les Fleurs du mal*, claret velvet, burgundy wine in a good green bottle, a

bleary-eyed morning walking the French Quarter after a night of excess. But these are not the decadence of the dark moon. While each can be alluring in its own way, I'd put down good money that they really only scratch the surface of true indulgence ... which is being allowed to go ever deeper.

When we stride across the pitch black plains, arroyos, and mesas of the dark moon, we enter into a realm of the unexpected pleasure of taking care of ourselves and our stories. All too often, rich fabrics, richer foods, and flowers dripping with evil cover up the truth—that there has been a wound or a shock or a hurt that we are just now recognizing, just now recovering from, just now coming to terms with. It refuses to be covered over or hidden away by this or that distraction. Think of it in this way: Our ability to break a curse does not keep us from being marked by the curse. The dark moon gives us the time to grieve that truth as well as the space to apply the needed medicine, which, interestingly enough in our day and age, often feels like an indulgence. To find and apply the needed medicine often feels like something extravagant and deeply decadent as opposed to what it is, which is necessary.

The medicines are different for different people. It might be a bite of sweet chocolate to soothe away the bitter aftertaste of a departed lover. Or a cluster of black grapes alongside a sliver of Point Reyes blue that has a drizzle of local honey snaking over it ... because these are the foods that truly leave you feeling nourished. Or the medicines might be more subtle and find you sinking into a natural hot spring under a festival of stars or stepping into the salty waters of your own bathtub as you finally give yourself the gift of a moment away from your schedule. The medicine might be a single blessed night of sleeping in the complete dark without one gadget in the room with you.

The full moon would have us celebrate all we have accomplished and all that we now can see—and so we should. The new moon would have us begin the journey, the next chapter, the story, the initiation. The waxing moon has us busy with building, and the waning moon invites us to dismantle and take apart. But the dark moon asks us to be. That's all. To practice attending and caring. It is here in this moon-limned pause between all of the ending and beginning that we can experience the deepest decadence, the deepest privilege of all, calling ourselves back to ourselves. Baudelaire's insight into decadence, which is echoed by many of the Romantics, is that it is paradoxical. It seems that decadence is all about feeling good, feeling pleasure, having our senses intoxicated and delighted. And that is a part of it. But underneath those tableaux is a truth as gritty as the sleep in your eye when you first wake, which is that true pleasure does not come easily or cheaply. It is a gift of the gods, just like wisdom, just like strength, and so you better

be prepared to make an offering of something in order to gain it. The dark moon tells us what that might be: your time, your attention, your willingness to show up for yourself, to stand in witness of all that you have done, to look ahead to all that shall come, and to take in and give out that holy breath. There is no greater indulgence than that.

## Make Magic

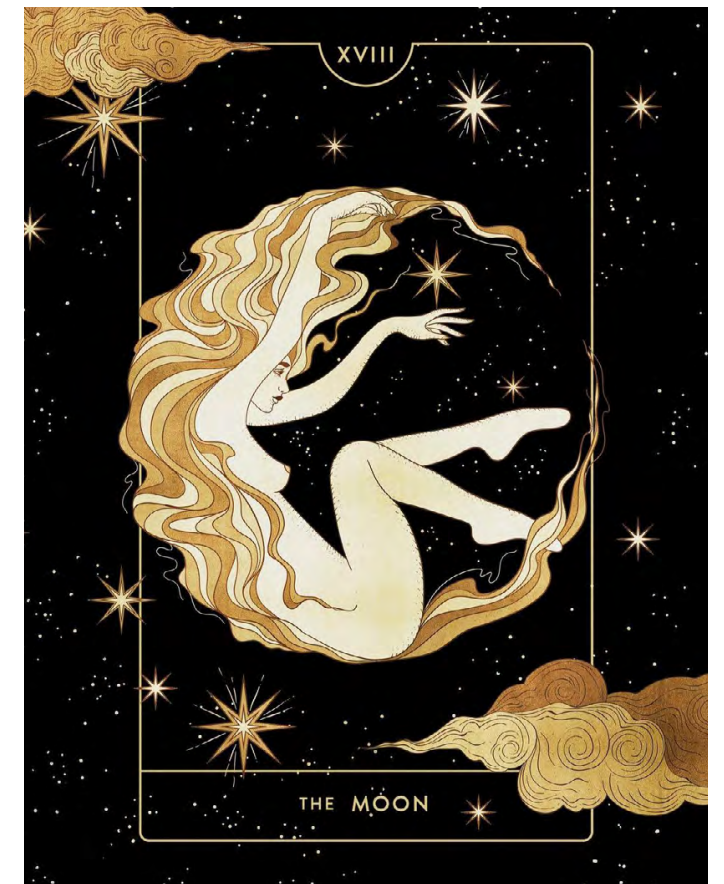
- Look to the skies or look to your calendar and decipher for yourself when the next dark moon occurs.
- Take time before that day and night to do a little thinking and feeling into what curses you have recently laid to rest, what ventures to come will call upon your attention and energy. Pay some attention to where you have been and where you might go next.
- And then ask yourself this question: *What marks have been left upon me and what medicines might speak best to them?*
- This is magical, oracular work. It would be unusual for the answers to come to you in logical words and forms right after asking the question.
- Instead, you wait.
- You listen. You watch.
- You notice what patterns emerge, what words or sounds or colors or tones call at you again and again. There's your medicine. You notice what gifts you receive over this period of time, what is given in object, word, effort, or affection.
- And you notice too what might be withheld.
- This all has information for you.
- (This is why, by the way, it is wise to give yourself time before the dark moon for this ceremony.)

On the day of the dark moon, you begin your ceremony by taking a salt bath—any kind of salt in your bath or added to your shower. When you step out, put on clean clothes and cense yourself in a sacred and aromatic smoke: frankincense, copal, myrrh, cedar, juniper, bay leaf, or pine. Then you call in your medicines. If it is going for a walk in the woods, you go for a walk in the woods. If it is prayer, then you pray. If it is feasting, then feast. Take the time you can: an hour, three hours, ten minutes ... but for however long you are able to take, be fully present. No excuses and no distractions. End your ceremony by drinking a full glass of sweet water and make time to go out under the night sky and say thank you in whatever words wing straight from your heart.

And then ... do it again in a month.



Briana Saussy is an author, storyteller, teacher, spiritual counselor, and founder of the Sacred Arts Academy, where she teaches magic, divination, ceremony and other sacred arts for everyday life. She is the author of *Making Magic: Weaving Together the Everyday and the Extraordinary*, and *Star Child: Joyful Parenting Through Astrology*. See more at [brianasaussy.com](http://brianasaussy.com).



"The Moon" from the Divine Feminine Tarot by Corina Nika.  
[www.cocorrina.com](http://www.cocorrina.com)

## WAY OF THE WITCH: Witchcraft 101

A Comprehensive 1-1 'Year-And-A-Day' Online Training and Coaching Program in the Spiritual, Magickal and Esoteric Practices of Eclectic Witchcraft

Change Your Life in Just a Year!



Develop your very own bespoke, highly effective, and magickally-charged Witchcraft practice! Learn the art and science of harnessing your power so you can live a life that is...

Empowered, Sovereign, and Totally Magickal!



The Magickal Path School of Witchcraft  
[www.TheMagickalPath.com/witchcraft-101](http://www.TheMagickalPath.com/witchcraft-101)

AT THE  
WEDDING  
*of* DEATH *and*  
TIME

*by Marisca Pichette*

We toast our futures and our pasts.  
The marquee stands atop a barrow.  
Sunlight warms our faces and we cry  
for the possibilities we see reflected  
in ice and candle wax.

She wears a gown of cobwebs, her face  
veiled in moss. Flower girls drop  
toadstools in her path—her bouquet  
holds white lilies and nightshade.

He is robed in leaf litter, his hair  
a crown of seeds.  
His groomsmen pour wine onto their feet.

The festivities last a month and a day  
We watch the moon wax and wane,  
their vows taken under a gibbous  
they dance illuminated by a fading crescent.

No invitations were sent and none  
received. All guests remembered  
when the moss bloomed and seeds  
cracked free of their shells—  
the wedding was complete.

We shared a single pomegranate,  
sweet and bitter soaking our tongues  
as they departed into the dark  
of a new moon.

---

*Marisca Pichette is a lover of moss and monsters, living in Western Massachusetts. Her debut novel, Broken, is forthcoming in August 2022 with Heroic Books. She is on Instagram as @marisca\_write and Twitter as @mariscapichette.*

---





Madonna (1895–1902), by Edvard Munch

## THE ETERNAL *Feminine* OF THE DAMNED

by Kris Waldherr

Imagine this: A nubile dancer named Salome struts before a lustful king. She wields her bejeweled half-dressed body like a weapon. Her desire? To gain the head of John the Baptist, which floats before her as a glowing apparition.

Imagine also this: A strong-jawed sphinx bearing the head of a woman and the spotted body of a leopard. Her eyes are slits of ecstatic pleasure as her claws stretch for a rather androgynous-looking bare-chested male. Will she embrace him? Or eat him?

Finally, this: A bare-breasted Madonna floats in a sea of red and black, appearing more vampiric than maternal. In one corner, a fetus cowers as though fearing her destructive might.

All three of these women appear in paintings that herald from the Age of Decadence. All three appear like something from a dream ... or a nightmare. In contrast to the life-bringing triple goddess archetypes of maiden, mother, and crone, the feminine archetypes presented in these works of art serve up damnation and death, their main victims men too weak to resist their siren allure. In them, the aesthetics of decadence turns its gaze from the cycle of life toward oblivion through eroticism. After all, there is no good or evil, only sensation.

These women are beauty. They are danger. They are all-powerful with hypnotic eyes and squared jaws—all the better to sever your carotid vein in a moment of passion. Even more terrifying: They are representatives of the New Woman, a feminist archetype first described in 1894 by writer Sarah Grand in reaction to her unhappy marriage. The New Woman movement reflected the suffragettes in that it encouraged women to yearn for independence, equality between the sexes, and other scandalous notions that triggered male anxieties.

These femme fatales arrive from a different stock than the languid medieval maidens of Pre-Raphaelite art, whose allure was too often tied to their passivity: Think of the Lady of Shalott on her barge, Marianna in her moated grange, Sleeping Beauty surrounded by thorny roses. Edward Burne-Jones's famed 1874 description of a picture as "a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will—in a light better than any light that ever shone, in a land no one can define or remember, only desire" encapsulates the yearning Romanticism of this earlier era. Interestingly, Burne-Jones's son Philip, who followed



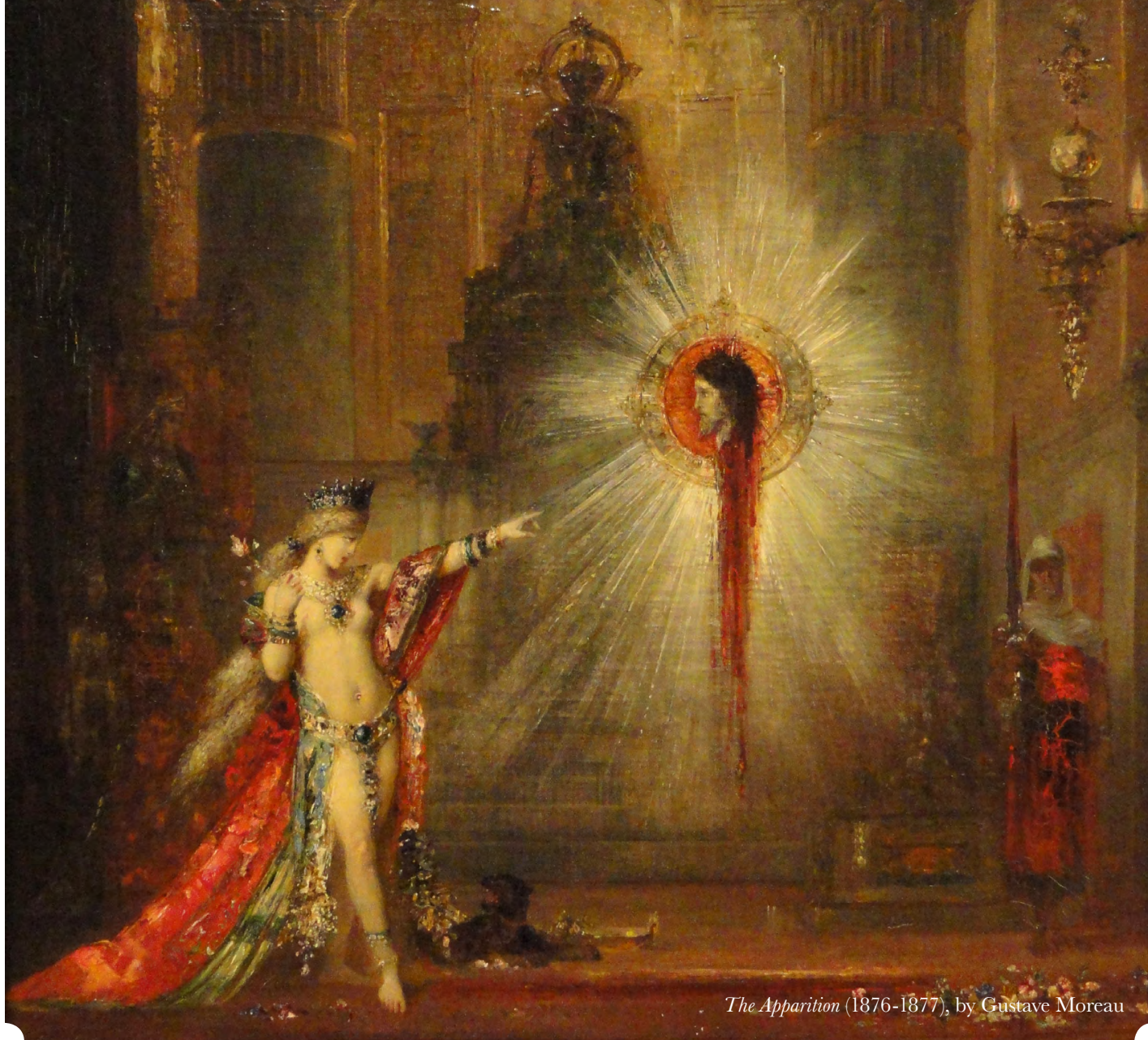
his father to become an artist himself, created one of the most indelible images of destructive femininity.

"The Vampire," his 1897 painting, depicts a female creature of the night reclining over her deceased male victim across a rumpled bed. The composition suggests they've wrestled beneath the sheets—and she's emerged the victor. Though the vampire's coy face bears the dark eyes and strong jawline reminiscent of an Edward Burne-Jones princess, her expression in Philip's painting reveals an erotic satisfaction never depicted in his father's art. The implication is clear: Sex equals death. Philip's painting was influential enough to have inspired Rudyard Kipling, a distant relative of the Burne-Jones family, to pen a poem also entitled "The Vampire":

*Oh, the years we waste and the tears we waste  
And the work of our head and hand  
Belong to the woman who did not know  
(And now we know that she never could know)  
And did not understand!*

The first appearance of a vampire in published literature is ascribed to Dr. John Polidori's *The Vampyre*, a narrative inspired by the author's obsession with his most famous patient, Lord Byron. Initially Byron was incorrectly credited as author. Polidori's vampire story was written as a result of the infamous 1816 Villa Diodati ghost-story challenge, which more famously led to the creation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Polidori's vampire resembles Lord Byron himself: mysterious, alluring, sexually depraved. However, in 1836, Théophile Gautier would write of a *very* different type of vampire.

Gautier's *La Morte amoureuse*—"The Dead Woman in Love"—is better known in English under the title of "Clarimonde," which also serves as the name of the mysterious woman at the center of his short story. Before becoming a vampire, Clarimonde is a courtesan who meets her death at the close of an "infernally splendid" orgy that lasted eight days and nights. Gautier writes, "There have always been very strange stories told of this Clarimonde, and all her lovers came to a violent or miserable end. They used to say that she was a ghou, a female vampire; but I believe she was none other than Beelzebub himself."



*The Apparition (1876-1877), by Gustave Moreau*

The main plot of “Clarimonde” involves a priest named Romuald falling desperately in love with Clarimonde on the day of his ordination. Unaware of her unnatural origins, Romuald’s obsession with Clarimonde reaches a high point when he allows her to drink blood from his cut finger. Though Romuald realizes at this point that his beloved is a vampire, he’s unable to turn away. Alas, Clarimonde is vanquished forever when another priest pours holy water on her undead body; Romuald yearns for his unholy love for the remainder of his life.

As the 19th century rolled on, the vampire appeared as agent of seductive danger in other published works. Irish author Sheridan Le Fanu’s 1872 novella *Carmilla* presents a female vampire who prefers the sexual and sanguinary attentions of women. (After all, what’s more threatening to a man than a woman who doesn’t desire him?) Twenty-five years later, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* presents the titular character’s brides—women “turned” by the count into vampires—as depraved monsters eager to drain the blood of an innocent child.

Bram Dijkstra’s book *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil*

*in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* posits that by 1900 the female vampire “had come to represent woman as the personification of everything negative that linked sex, ownership, and money.” In other words, all the unwelcome qualities that the New Woman suggested to a nervous patriarchal society—an Eternal Feminine of the Damned, if you will.

Whether this Eternal Feminine of the Damned is represented in the unclad form of Salome dancing for the head of John the Baptist, a seductively beclawed sphinx, or Clarimonde lapping blood from her lover’s fingers, her singular goal remains the same: to lure you into exchanging your life for a moment of ecstasy. Will you succumb?



*Kris Waldherr is the author and illustrator of several books that explore women’s history and archetypes. Her upcoming books include Unnatural Creatures, a feminist reimagining of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein told from the point of view of the Frankenstein women. Learn more at kriswaldherrbooks.com.*



*Artistic Director and Model*  
THERESA FRACTALE  
*Photography by* KIRA VYGRIVACH  
*Designer* APHIA SAKYI  
*Earrings* SINU CREATION  
*Lenses* MELON COLOR  
*Makeup* MARIE-LUCE GOLNEZ  
*Retoucher* ELENA SKULLOVA

# THE ECCENTRICITIES OF GENTLEMEN

EPHEMERA AND APOCRYPHA FROM THE NOTES OF TIMOTHY SCHAFFERT, ESQ.

## “AN ORGY OF CANDY GLUTTONY”

*The sweet decadence and decay of candy and chocolate*



*A Cup of Chocolate* (1844), by Charles Beranger

*At nine o'clock the next morning his servant came in with a cup of chocolate on a tray, and opened the shutters. Dorian was sleeping quite peacefully, lying on his right side, with one hand underneath his cheek. He looked like a boy who had been tired out with play, or study.*

—*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by Oscar Wilde

The decadence movement, coincidentally or not, coincided with “the great chocolate boom,” when chocolate consumption, production, and import rose dramatically in the West. Visiting the American frontier as part of his lecture tour in 1882, Wilde inspired his hotel manager in Iowa to serve him his hot chocolate in a cup as thin as the “tender petal of a white rose.”

But after the great boom made chocolate widely available, people became far less delicate about their candy consumption. The frenzy led to a 1920 proposal put to the English Parliament that would prohibit the sale of candy in theaters at night, in a “sugar-saving” move. A drama critic in London protested that “chocolate is the foundation of our drama.” In an article in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* on the subject, an American journalist wrote dismissively of the excessive candy eating of London theatergoers: “Men alone, women alone,

children, whiskered aged men, women with teeth, and without ’em, chew, and lick, and gulp in a fashion unapproached in America. Once in the blackness of the theater the grim, reserved Britisher throws aside his restraint and abandons himself to an orgy of candy gluttony.”

That same year, an Australian critic wrote in *The Age* that “perhaps the chief purpose of the modern theatre is to be an eating house where chocolate is served in the stalls and ice cream in the galleries . . . It is not outside the bounds of possibility that the control of the theaters will very soon pass out of the hands of those who still make some pretense to provide dramatic entertainment and pass into the hands of those who provide lollipops.”

As usual, Paris was decades ahead in such decadence. In *Bizarre: An Original Literary Gazette* (1855), Carl Benson wrote of the Folies-Nouvelles of Paris, a “pantomime theater” that had become a place where “people eat sugar candy.” He goes on to write that “said candy (*sucre d’orge a l’absinthe*) is atrociously bad stuff, by the way, tasting like tansy tea coagulated, but it is the *chic* to eat, or rather suck it.”

Decadence aside, apostles of temperance pushed chocolate as a salubrious substitution for liquor. But rest assured, delinquents grew quickly deft at corrupting candy, creating an eternal friction between the childlike nature of sweets and the naughty potential for moral and dental decay.

“Give the children plenty of pure sugar—and they will not have need of cod-liver oil.” This was part of a treatise for the moral foundation of candy making, as represented by the industry itself, in the article “How to Sell Confectionary” by a representative of the National Candy Company in 1910. He also celebrated the role of candy in the military: “The United States government buys pure candy by the tons and ships it to the Philippines to be sold at cost to the soldiers. All men crave it in the tropics, and the more they get of it the less

whisky they want.”

And the industry provided in other humanitarian ways too, he insisted. “It may be a jocose estimate,” the candy man said, “but it is said that there are fifty thousand widows in England who get a living by conducting small confectionary stores.”

It’s perhaps this line of thought that led to *Candy Medication*, a guide published in 1915 by Bernard Fantus, M.D., who claimed to have experimented with cod-liver-oil chocolate cream. But such experiments led to more successful marriages of candy and pills, and he offered among his recipes “sweet tablets of opium.” In his introduction, Fantus explained that “it is the author’s hope that this booklet may be instrumental in robbing childhood of one of its terrors, namely, nasty medicine; that it may lessen the difficulties experienced by nurse and mother in giving medicament to the sick child; and help to make the doctor more popular with the little ones.”

Meanwhile, other doctors were offering dire warnings about such candy-coated contentment. In his *Second Book on Physiology and Hygiene* (1894), J.H. Kellogg warned of sweets spiked with booze: “Children have been found in a state of partial intoxication as the result of eating freely of such candies.”

Candy injected with whiskey or brandy came to be called “wink drops,” according to an article in a Kentucky newspaper in 1896. In what may have been a warning or a celebration, the paper noted that “the very latest phase of social wickedness is the bonbon with the little ‘jag’ concealed beneath its sugary exterior.”

So the temperance movement was quick to revise its advice. Under the subheading “Ways to Drunkenness,” *New Catholic World* (1899) depicted the drunken woman as someone who “as a matinee girl . . . fills her bonbonniere with the brandy-drops and absinthe candies sold so freely in the up-to-date candy-shops. Or it may be that she takes

paregoric or peppermint frequently when she doesn’t feel well, and Jamaica ginger at the slightest excuse.”

It stands to reason, then, that the candy industry has had a long history of peddling adult indulgences in sweet facsimiles, from candy cigarettes to candy lipstick. (“Put it on, eat it off,” the package encouraged.)

The mayor of Elizabeth, New Jersey, in 1968, called for a ban on the “Hippy Sippy” novelty candy, which critics said too closely resembled a drug addict’s hypodermic needle. The narcotics commission and local parents complained that “the novelty is as unsuitable for children’s play as toy rat poison.” To make matters worse (or, perhaps, better for the candy dealer), Hippy Sippy was sold with lapel buttons promoting the candy with lines like “I’ll try anything” and “We sell happiness.”

Sippy Powered Candy (no relation to Hippy Sippy, as far as I know) and Mini-Cola Candy, both sold with straws, sent Clair-Mel City, Florida, into a tizzy in 1989, according to the *Tampa Tribune*. The stuff was as snow white and powdery as nose candy, and the kids at school were snorting it, cocaine-style. “I plan to take the candy off the shelves because kids seven years old can’t handle this,” a convenience store manager said. He hadn’t done it yet, though, because of its popularity.

But candy makers have gotten in trouble even when their tainted candy hasn’t intoxicated. In France in 1974, Michel Ricoud sold candy that he promoted as aphrodisiacal, but a court testimony found the sweets contained no such potential for arousal. “I offered hope,” he pleaded with the court. “I brought illusions, I created a psychological effect which made my clients happy.”



*Timothy Schaffert’s latest novel, The Perfume Thief, is available now at most booksellers. Learn more at [timothyschaffert.com](http://timothyschaffert.com).*

# ON DECADENCE

*A Discussion with Rebecca Ariel Porte*

Last spring, the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research offered an online course entitled “On Decadence: Aesthetics, Culture, and Decline” that quickly—and sadly, for our *Enchanted Living* editors—sold out. How could it not with a description that began “From stories of Roman emperors drowning their dinner guests in roses to the reveries of Baudelaire’s *Flowers of Evil*, tropes of decadence—decay, decline, decomposition—have flourished in modern times.” So we sat down and asked instructor and decadence expert Rebecca Ariel Porte all about it.

## **Enchanted Living: How would you define decadence, in short?**

**Rebecca Ariel Porte:** Decadence in brief! A true decadent speaks at length or remains silent. But decadence also has a funny relationship to “truth” (and I am no true decadent!), so I am happy to strive for brevity. I will fail. But also I am happy to be a happy failure.

Decadence is a concept with many faces. The simplest, broadest definition might be something like “decadence involves a narrative of decline.” The English word borrows from Latin *decadere*, meaning to fall away or decay from a state of health or vitality. “Decadent” can be leveled as a charge against people or practices that seem to deviate from a “healthy” norm or ideal, whether it’s in the realm of art, aesthetics, politics, economics, social forms, morality, or desires of the body. So it’s always important to ask who is crying “decadent” and whom they are speaking about. Those who have been called decadent are a disparate lot: artists and intellectuals, people of color, Jews, queers, gender outlaws, sex workers, those who are ill or disabled, communists, capitalists, working-class people who cannot or simply refuse to work, aristocrats and emperors, people hacking out a demimonde at the fringes of a constricted bourgeois society, at the end of an empire or some other form of life that seems to be guttering out like an aging candle. And many so-called decadents have reclaimed the word for themselves as an act of defiance or subversion, not always successful.

When we use *decadence* in ordinary conversation, we often mean something that seems excessive and magnetic at the same time, and at least slightly transgressive—a slice of Death by Chocolate, a sexual practice, an act of immorality or amorality, a fabric with a hand so luxurious it barely seems real, an opulent dwelling (and its price tag), a painting chased in gold, intoxicants, parties that last from dusk to dawn. In the contemporary vernacular, *decadence* often expresses a wish for a maximalist antidote to resource scarcity, economic austerity, and prevailing minimalist styles ranging from design without ornament to normcore fashion to stripped-down poetry and prose.

But even this regular, casual talk of decadence is often ambiguous. Decadence may be a protest against privation or it may be used to create desires for things you don’t need

and sell you on a style of life that always promises more than it delivers. When you call something or someone (including yourself) decadent, you might be lodging a protest against an intolerable state of affairs—but you might also, deliberately or not, be dredging up all the fraught, moralizing, sometimes brutalizing history of decadence in its wake. As with so many of our great, flawed concepts, it can be hard to do one without doing the other. Sometimes decadence is neither accusation nor reclamation but diagnosis without prognosis.

One of my favorite images of the ambivalence of decadence is painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema’s *The Roses of Heliogabalus* (1888), which pictures one of our oldest and most persistent scenes of decadence, drawn from a history of the late Roman empire (often considered a particularly decadent period). It depicts the mad emperor Elagabalus, supine, caressed by golden silk, as he drops tons of scented petals on his guests. The history says “violets and other flowers.” The artist painted roses. A few of the revelers appear to be enjoying the extravagant festival. Others are swimming fatalities, carving through the sea of petals in which they are about to drown. I change my mind about whether I think this painting is a good painting. I am almost certain this death is not a good death.

## **EL: Why did you decide to teach a class on decadence at the Brooklyn Institute?**

**RAP:** Decadence made it into the curriculum in part because I had become increasingly fascinated by the stories contemporary culture tells about decadence and partly because of student demand. Our current visions of decadence owe a lot to modernism’s ideas about decay, decline, and beauty rotting from the inside. In trying to grapple with rapid social, political, and technical changes, the 19th and early 20th centuries looked back in turn to Romantic poetry and philosophy—and 18th century history, which looked back, in *its* turn to remainders of Greece and Rome. When history seems composed of crisis after crisis and uncertainty about what comes next (as history often does), attempts to describe what’s happening often borrow the old Classical trope of descent from an age of gold to an age of iron—an age of decadence—which might or might not spark a struggle toward a new golden age, depending on your attitude toward providence and events in the Ancient Mediterranean. For example, Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall*



*The Roses of Heliogabalus* (1888), by Lawrence Alma-Tadema

*of the Roman Empire* wears its charge of decadence on its sleeve, which is to say in its title.

To understand why our current narratives of decadence are so prevalent (and whom they serve), I thought it would be good to get back to basics and talk them through with a group of dazzling and witty students. (They delivered.) Basics took the form of art, theory, music, material culture, and a range of literature: the poetry of Charles Baudelaire (and Walter Benjamin’s massive, decadent scholarly romance, which turns on Baudelaire’s work), writing by J.K. Huysmans, Friedrich Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde, Marcel Proust, Henry James, Vernon Lee, Rosa Luxemburg, Vladimir Lenin, and Djuna Barnes. It was also a chance to redraw the boundaries of the category of decadence to include figures like Jeanne Duval (a Haitian-born Creole dancer and Baudelaire’s muse and mistress for much of her life; see Robin Mitchell’s *Vénus Noire*) and the Biblical Salome (see Jonathan Freedman’s *Jewish Decadence*). An object of fascination for Moreau and Klimt in art and Wilde in theater, Salome was closely associated with Jewishness and perversion; she was played by Jewish actresses on stage and film, including Sarah Bernhardt, Theda Bara, and Alla Nazimova. The syllabus also asks if we should think about some of the writers of the Harlem Renaissance as decadents: Richard Bruce Nugent, whose “Smoke, Lilies and Jade” is an unabashed exploration of queer desire, and Nella Larsen, whose lyrical novels embrace a decadent sensuousness and also criticize its potential for racist exoticism.

Because I’m not all critical high-mindedness, I admit I wanted to dwell in decadence as a *style*, in its weirdness and ostentation, which are not always pleasant places to be, in its drunkenness,

in perfumes so ripe they have a whiff of the grave about them, in the lushest poetry, the most grotesque prose, in colors so dark and vivid they ask the eye for a form of second sight, in forms chipped at the corners, in heady wines and soiled brocades, in strawberries soaked in ether, in squalid urban interiors and city streets, in a second nature more natural than a first nature, in acts against nature, in acts of creation that have nothing to do with biological reproduction, in loves that dare not speak their names, in smoky films that dig their fingers into the crevices of glass arcades lit by the newfangled arc lamps (which some call Yablochkov candles) and shadows more substantial than the things that cast them, the alleys of life where it is amoral to meet another’s gaze and immoral to laugh and never win and vaguely extra-moral to love without hope.

## **EL: What did your students say they got out of it? What did they learn?**

**RAP:** One of the loveliest responses to the class (shared with her permission) came from a student who had expected to leave the course either “pro-” or “anti-” decadence. Instead, she said what she had come to was that, for her, decadence was more like a stethoscope you could hold over someone’s heart so you could listen for the strangeness of its rhythms—and how that fitful gallop was nonetheless keeping body and soul together. It was a lens to look through to understand something that beats at the heart of the world we know. She also said she was shocked to find she adored Baudelaire!

## **EL: What makes decadence relevant today?**

**RAP:** The story of decadence right now is also the story of

how decadence is endlessly modern. Certain moments in history seem to call out to one another across the years. Like the moderns at the turn of the 20th century, give or take a few decades in the past or future, we are grappling with ongoing crises of wealth divergence, social inequity, political stagnation, technological acceleration, environmental degradation, mass illness, mass fatalities, and scarcity in many arenas of life. And like Belle Époque Europe and Rome before it was sacked by the Visigoths, American empire, wrong from the start, is aging badly, violently, king of a rainy country, to steal a phrase from Baudelaire. It's not a perfect analogy, of course. But in such a life, it makes sense to me that we would reach—to our credit, to our despair—for our own versions of decadence, like and unlike older ones, to explain our own sense of broken things that will not easily be mended, if at all, and to invent new forms of life among the ruins. Even there—even here—I suspect we will still be as fierce in our joys as in our sorrows. There's this Hal Hartley film from the late 1990s, *Henry Fool*. It's got a gorgeous, harrowing, practically Shakespearean line, which rings out athwart some of the more workaday dialogue. It is delivered by a failed novelist: "We know we have fallen, for we know who we are." I've always thought that this is a good description of the best-case-scenario motive for decadence.

Many uses of decadence are about kicking people when they're down. Others are about making the most you can of badly damaged materials. As an aesthetic, as an attitude toward the world, the second kind of decadence can often seem strangely hopeful: a defiant embrace of the underbelly, the underclass, the underworld. Decadence is yellow, yellow, yellow, the yellow of *The Yellow Review* and the gold, gold, gold of Klimt's golden phase. It's Wilde's hothouse flowers and Proust's epic similes, the queer lavishness of Jean Genet's perfervid autofiction or the trans doctor in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*, whose soliloquies drip honey and acid. It's the languor of Walter Benjamin on hashish. It's the feathered, saturated, sequined whirlwind, glued together with blood and sweat, of a Derek Jarman film, or the wolf-wild hair of the undead in Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive*, floating over a lute or a quill or lifted on the wind as the vampires indulge in a bit of ruin pornography in the abandoned monuments of Detroit. It's the electropop camp through which the musician speeds like a Roman candle in a Lil Nas X music video. It's Shola Von Reinhold's *Lote*, which invents an early 20th century Black Scottish queer woman decadent precisely because she should have existed.

**EL: To you, what is most important or alluring about decadence?**

**RAP:** An interesting and difficult question! I think my answer for the present might be that decadence refuses to die. And like so many talented undead things, it mesmerizes the living. Why won't decadence, always rotting, decaying, eroding, die? What is it to us that we should want to live or die through its pleasures

and pains, save or kill through its force? Why do we keep resurrecting it, transforming it?

**EL: How would you suggest someone begin to explore decadence (outside of reading this issue)?**

**RAP:** This issue will be an excellent start! To the many writers and artists I've named above, I'll add Jane Desmarais, a scholar of decadence who writes beautifully and accessibly. Try *Monsters Under Glass: A Cultural History of Hothouse Flowers From 1850 to the Present*. And the volume she edited with Alice Condé, *Decadence and the Senses*, is a fine introduction to decadent style and experiments in sensation. (Readers should be wary of trying some of these experiments at home!). Keep an eye out too for the work of a rising scholar, Cherrie Kwok, who is thinking ambitiously and expansively about decadence and race, gender, and anti-imperialism.

If fashion and visual media are more your style, consult digital or material archives (the Met and the museum at FIT have digitized portions of their collections) or haunt vintage clothing stores, bazaars, or conventions (my very favorite is the Manhattan Vintage Clothing Show, which is a total swoon). So far as clothing and interior design go, elements of decadent style can be found in many places, from mid-19th century Parisian gowns and hand-painted wallpaper to the Black dandies of Harlem (see Monica L. Miller's *Slaves to Fashion*) to Luisa Casati's (literally and figuratively) electric costumes in the 1920s. (One, a suit of armor pierced by arrows, shocked her so hard she flipped, and then there were the live snakes and the peacock feathers.) Silent film—the Theda Bara *Salomé* and Pabst's *Pandora's Box*, starring Louise Brooks, Lang's *Metropolis*—all these works get at decadence's desolation and *jouissance*, which can't be disentangled. As for decadent music, the label often gets applied to any music that sounds new or alien to the audience or threatening in some way (morally, erotically, politically): jazz and the blues, for instance, were often condemned as decadent by white critics for their uniquely Black, American invention as well as their radical, improvisatory sounds. Try some Bessie Smith or Fats Waller? But late Richard Strauss and the atonal music of Schoenberg have also been called decadent, as has Brecht and Weill's marvelous *Threepenny Opera*. And I can't resist recommending some contemporary decadent musicians: Lacy Rose and her Starling Quartet.

**EL: Were women a significant part of decadence—and, if so, in what ways?**

**RAP:** Yes! Although scholarship is still catching up in many ways. Decadent women were writers (Vernon Lee, Rachilde, Renée Vivien, Colette), dancers, performers, polymath models-lovers-muses-managers-mothers-maids-of-all-work (Jeanne Duval to Baudelaire, Wally Neuzil to Egon Schiele, Emile Louise Flöge to Klimt) and much more besides. Those who didn't paint or write themselves were often involved in promoting or publishing decadent work—or else making it possible for artists

to paint and writers to write by taking care of all the daily business of social reproduction—care work, paying bills, begging for money to pay bills, cooking, cleaning, and all the rest. The canonical decadent position rests on an enormous, invisible foundation of unwaged labor and material privileges. Decadent women were also courtesans and salonnières. And many were deeply involved in theater—the Salome actresses mentioned above, for instance. In a way, the difficult art for many of these women was world making in decadent conditions and against steep odds. Some challenges are still with us, even if they're played in a different key, even if we, the players, are different too.

**EL: How might one of our readers incorporate the spirit of decadence into their everyday life? How do you, if you do?**

**RAP:** If you choose to call yourself a decadent, you might try your hand at nurturing your own louche and luxurious demimonde—though a decadent never works *too* hard—nevertheless, insist on exploring the full range of your capacities; revel in the messy, horrible wonders of the body and of human connection, human alienation; refuse to despair and refuse to refuse to despair; demand opulence; be generous; be prodigal; be irresistible; be immovable in the face of pallid convention; burn the day for the night. Do something delicious and indulgent for yourself without trying to justify the pleasure in any way, including self-care, wellness, or sanctimony. Have I missed anything? Oh—be suspicious of anyone who calls you decadent—and call no one good, including yourself.

As for me, well, I am that tiresome thing, a critic. This means I always have one foot out the door and I sleep with my eyes open where decadence is concerned, where most things are



Tilda Swinton in *Only Lovers Left Alive*

concerned. These are not endearing qualities. Like all things, like people, decadence is made of its contradictions. I can't see what decadence can do *for* us without seeing what it can do *to* us. I mean, the spirit of decadence is with me whether I like it or not. It is not always a happy haunting. But the ghost tells very good jokes on occasion.

Have I a decadent lifestyle to reveal? Apart from being haunted? Apart from feeling myself most awake at dawn and twilight, the most equivocal passages of the day? Well, I can't let you pluck out the whole heart of my mystery! But as an unrepentant lazy hedonist, I suppose I share the decadent's penchant for aesthetic pleasures, sensuous pleasures—though mine are more secret


and profound than spectacular—and the decadent's need for ornament in dress, design, and architecture, in poetry and music. They loved yellow. And they loved gold—partly for its terrible, magniloquent history, partly because it glitters and that is a form of beauty, partly because it is a bloody substance, partly because it is a yellow metal and rare. My experience of gold has been largely unhappy, and I generally avoid the real thing (or it avoids me). I have no desire to possess it. Still, I love its glimmer in the eye, which is a sweetness close to pain: in a picture frame or a gold-ground painting or an image in a poem. It quivers, that glimmer, as if it were alive and flirtatious, alive and poised to bolt. I have to ration meetings between my eyes and that gleaming, which is like a visitor fallen from some distant planet whose name we don't know.



*Rebecca Ariel Porte is a member of the Core Faculty at the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research. She is at work on a book about Paradise, Arcadia, and the Golden Age. See more at thebrooklyninstitute.com.*

# TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY GLÜHWEIN

BY SUSAN ILKA TUTTLE

elebrating the beauty and magic of the holidays involves rich indulgence of scrumptious, mouthwatering dishes, decadent desserts, and festive drink. Not only is the gastronomic experience of consuming them luxurious, but so is enjoying their decorative display against the backdrop of fragrant evergreens, glittering baubles, velvety red bows, and the soft yuletide glow of flickering candles and twinkling lights.

Heartwarming, spicy drinks are commonly served this time of year to ward off the cold of winter. One of my favorites is German glühwein, which translates to “glowing wine.” It’s a decadent hot mulled wine that is popular at Christmastime in German-speaking countries and in the Alsace region of France. It’s referred to as glühwein because of how it makes you feel inside when you sip it.

## RECIPE

### Ingredients:

This warm, spicy holiday drink is traditionally made with a fine red wine and ingredients like orange and lemon slices, crystallized ginger, cinnamon sticks, whole cloves, allspice, cardamom pods, star anise, bay leaf, rose hips, and white sugar. I add my own personal touch with additions of fresh wild cranberries, brown sugar, a dash of black pepper, a bit of cranberry juice, some Cointreau, and a vanilla pod. Some folks add rum. My wine of choice is a pinot noir, which has delicious notes of cherry, raspberry, mushroom and the forest floor, and vanilla and baking spice when aged in French oak. A cabernet sauvignon or a shiraz would also be fitting for this drink.

### Instructions:

Pour the entire bottle of wine into a pot and let it come to a gentle boil on the stove. Add ingredients (I go by feel and taste so I don’t have exact amounts to share) and simmer on low for 20 minutes. You can either strain out the ingredients or serve as is. Cheers!

*Susan Ilka Tuttle, a.k.a. Whisper in the Wood, is a green hedge witch, herbalist, spirit medium, and artist from Maine. She is the author of the new book Green Witch Magick published by Fair Winds Press. Visit her on Instagram @whisper\_in\_the\_wood, stop by her botanicals shop [inthewoodbotanicals.com](http://inthewoodbotanicals.com), and learn more about her mediumship offerings at [susantuttlespiritmessenger.com](http://susantuttlespiritmessenger.com).*



*The Peacock Skirt* (1893), by Aubrey Beardsley

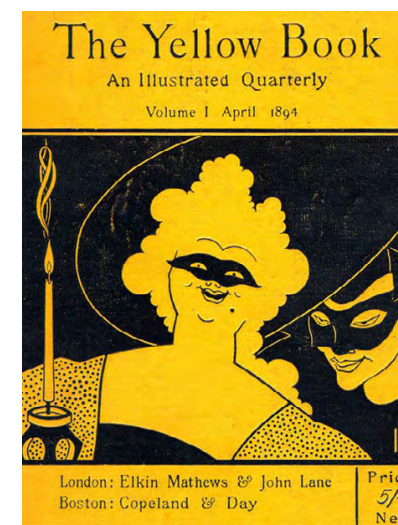
# AUBREY BEARDSLEY

and the WEIGHT OF DECADENCE by Kirsty Stonell Walker

If you're anything like me, you might have increased in mass over the past eighteen months. While the frightening reality of a pandemic raged, one little comfort we could indulge in was eating delicious food, and that got many of us through some difficult moments. However, I am left with a little more padding than I had in spring 2020, and recently I have seen many articles on how to lose the lockdown weight as if it is not compatible with a shame-free, post-pandemic life. Health issues aside, an awful lot of our attitude toward weight seems to be aesthetic, as if trim is more desirable than plush. In search of a bit of counterpropaganda, I have turned to the decadence of Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898), a brief reed of a man who understood a bit about decadent flesh.

Beardsley was a precocious young illustrator who is famous now for his pen-and-ink illustrations of risqué scenes. In his brief and difficult life, Beardsley created a style that defines our ideas of all that is sophisticatedly saucy, simultaneously austere in form and smutty in content. Young Aubrey did not have a very luxurious start in life; he was born into a rather well-to-do family, but shame and scandal soon saw the family fall on hard times. His father was forced to sell land from which their income was drawn to pay off another woman who claimed he had jilted her. Not only that, but what the family lacked in money, they made up for in tuberculosis. Aubrey's grandfather and father were both riddled with it, and it wasn't long before little Aubrey also succumbed. Consumption would gnaw at him for the rest of his short life. He was often ill, but even while laid low with the terrible disease, he could still draw. What he chose to draw was enthusiastic, plentiful flesh.

If you consider who Beardsley's influences are, his choices are a little puzzling at first glance. He was guided into art in 1891 by Edward Burne-Jones, a second-generation Pre-Raphaelite who adored androgyny. Burne-Jones ridiculed fat women in cartoons, and his father had a morbid fear of plump women. Burne-Jones's influence over the career of Beardsley can be seen in the subject matter: Both artists tackled romantic, Arthurian subjects. But Beardsley's subsequent trip to Paris in 1892 added a dynamic edge to his figures. The poster art of Toulouse-Lautrec, filled with salacious ladies and grateful gentlemen, moved Beardsley from the noble, knightly pursuits toward less



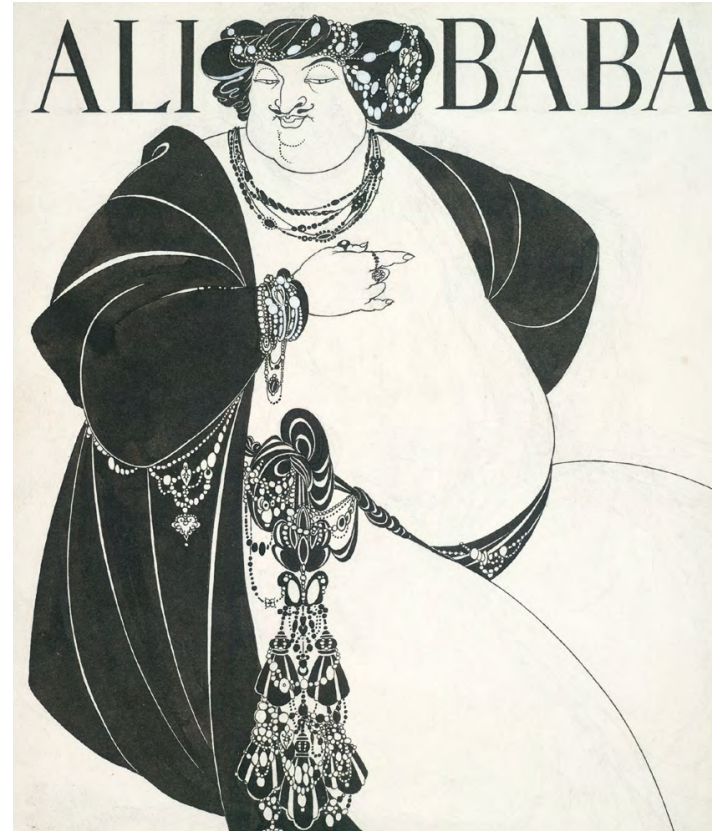
noble, nightly pursuits. If his body wasn't up to chasing women, then his art certainly made up for that.

The most obvious tributes that Beardsley made to fleshly women are both from 1894. *The Fat Woman* shows a voluptuous white creature dazzling in the middle of a dark and sullen café, her black gloves curving around a comically small glass. Behind her, reflected in the mirror, seems to be a chaos of shadow and abstract form, but the woman is solid and real, looking altogether smug and self-possessed. She has that bottle all to herself and she will enjoy it, tiny glass by tiny glass. Beardsley had intended his *Fat Woman*, allegedly a caricature of Beatrice Whistler,

wife of the famous artist, to appear in the first edition of the notorious journal *The Yellow Book*, for which Beardsley was the art editor. However, the publisher refused to include it, worried that it would offend the influential Whistler. Instead, Beardsley had to be content with *The Yellow Book's* cover girl in April 1894. In black and yellow, this lady is attending a masquerade ball, her joyous form topped with a cloudlike puff of hair and wide black halo hat. She holds a perilously thin candle as she faces her viewers with a jolly expression on her dimpled face. There is no doubt that she is up for a good time, but the smoke curling from the candle makes us wonder: Is all that decadence burning us out? Are we wasting away? Our host looks jolly enough, but what of her companion, slightly bowed behind her? Should we trust this seemingly bubbly woman or are we about to be debauched? Do we mind? I can barely remember the last time I had a good debauch. Obviously, we'd all have to wear masks—you can't be too careful.

It isn't just women that Beardsley depicted as fat, as shown in his 1897 illustration of Ali Baba for *The Forty Thieves*. The princely gent is shown cascading with flesh and jewels, the very personification of richness. He is quite rightly smug, as he is obviously doing very well for himself and there is a sense of wealth through physical form. This portly chap is not wasting away any time soon. His sense of otherness is multifaceted. He is obviously of some unspecified Eastern origin, an exaggeration of a sultan, dripping in treasure. He is lucky and prosperous, the complete reverse of his creator, the unlucky, willow-like Beardsley, despite sharing the same initials: AB.

Looking more at Beardsley's depictions of flesh, it isn't simply



Above: *The Fat Woman* (1894); *Ali Baba* for *The Forty Thieves* (1897); and next page *Withered Spring* (1891), by Aubrey Beardsley

a case of excess but of control. Both the fat lady and the masked lady are dressed and in control of their Rubenesque bodies, but delving into Beardsley's more extreme depictions of flesh, there is a case for bodily rebellion. Where clothes imprison the form, all is safe and peaceful. In his depiction of Guinevere from Arthurian legend, engulfed in a nun's habit from which only her tiny face peeps, you know that full governance has been gained over passions. However, with his illustrations for Oscar Wilde's *Salome* the same cannot be said. *Salome* herself erupts from her clothing, a swirling mass of body and passion, wrecking and undoing as she goes. She is not rotund, but her flesh is powerful, revealed in the "stomach dance" and rising into the air to grasp the head of John the Baptist. In the drawing *Enter Herodias*, her body defies gravity, her breasts moving up from the bed of fabric that tries to contain her while grotesque lumpen figures creep around the ground. In a giant step away from his origins under Burne-Jones's tutelage, Beardsley rejected androgyny and a certain sexless safety in favor of intersex gods with both very definite male and female characteristics, not to mention some threatening additions with eyes for nipples, watching us as we try to comprehend the vastness of desire.

As if the frankly terrifying form of *Salome* weren't enough, Beardsley set about producing illustrations for the Ancient Greek comedy *Lysistrata*, where the titular character convinces

the women of two warring cities to withhold sexual favors from the men in order to end the conflict. With scenes of humorous frustration and extraordinary levels of nudity, Beardsley shows bodies both tantalizing and out of control. Penises grow to fantastical sizes, women flash and fart in rebellion against the desperate men, and seemingly no one's flesh can be controlled or covered. Lack of physical control, while both dangerous and sexy in his art, might reflect the way Beardsley's own body rebelled against him through illness. His bodily experience is more reflective of his early drawing *Withered Spring*, where a wan figure shelters from the spring breezes that bluster above them. Beardsley might have been alluding to the illness that battered him, lessening him like the shaken trees, without the energy or bodily strength to resist or join in.

The exuberant bodies of Beardsley's imagination live in an otherness of decadence that he could only dream of as tuberculosis wasted him away. In his drawing *The Wagnerites* (1894), the physicality and sensual qualities of the Wagnerian operas are viewed by a sea of bare-backed women all turned from the artist, tantalizingly within reach but untouchable. Even within this sea of flesh, some women find their dresses have slipped more than is possibly acceptable, with bare shoulders and arms glowing in white against the deep, dark Indian ink. In Beardsley's art, flesh cannot be controlled; it betrays and reveals

us all. In Beardsley's fantasies, if we are strong, we can enjoy the ride that our willful bodies take us on, but it should be acknowledged that bodies in decadent flow can diminish like a candle. Those bodies that flaunt and flourish are the absolute other for Beardsley and are so often women, sexual and plush.

The poverty of his youth combined with the ravages of his illness must have made the feverish Beardsley fantasize about pillowy mountains of welcoming bodies, knowing that his own pale candle was being burned into nothing. On his death bed at only twenty-five years old, he feared the punishment all those obscene drawings would bring to his heavenly body and so converted to Catholicism, begging his friends to destroy his obscene drawings and recanting his dreams of flesh. Luckily for us, his friends saved the drawings from the flames, so we still escape to the decadent imaginings of a feverish young man.



*Kirsty Stonell Walker is a writer and researcher whose passion is bringing forward the stories of women who might have otherwise vanished in history. In 2020 she published Light and Love, a biography of the remarkable relationship between pioneering Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron and her maid Mary Hillier, who between them created wonderful images of beauty. Visit her on Instagram @kstonellwalker.*



Gift naturally,  
with nurturing  
artisan bath products.



**THREE SISTERS APOTHECARY**  
Petaluma, CA • 707-888-5659 • www.soapcauldron.com



# VERONICA VARLOW

## *Life of a Love Witch*

Deep in the forest, we erected our own temporary temple for the new moon. Sumptuous red velvet draping created a tent structure connected to two mighty oak trees in the forest. A wash of red silk as our carpet covered the forest floor. Thirteen plush pillows of hand-stitched silver moon embroidery sat in a circle. Twinkling strands of fairy lights cast their luminous glow upon our ritual.

This was our secret appointed night of Witch Camp to perform what my Grandma Helen called the Ritual of Red Roses. Her Bohemian mother, Anna, believed that my grandma was conceived on a night after she did the Ritual of Red Roses, and that's why my grandmother was named Helen Rose. It is also the reason my great-grandmother held her newborn child in her arms in the 1930s and whispered to Helen Rose that her life's mission and her magic power was love.

I perform the Ritual of Red Roses at least two times each year, passed down from the women in my family, as I now pass it on to you. The Ritual of Red Roses will amplify your own love vibrations as it opens your heart, reconnecting with your purpose and your own power. It's a delicious ceremony that reignites your own inner goddess or god of love!

On the evening of our ceremony at Witch Camp, the moon was new to allow the stars to shine brightly over the night sky stretching above us. Ruby Vanessa made each one of us pretty little red velvet capes with hoods reminiscent of Red Riding Hood from the fairy tale books. We walked single file down the forest path, holding the red carved candles adorned with golden glitter in each of our hands. Silently we walked to the red velvet temple, listening to the symphony of the forest around us, the call of the owl, the

night crickets, and the soothing song of the creek. Above us, the curving arms of the birch, the oak, and hemlock stretched across the starry night to welcome us.

Once we arrive to the fairy-lit temple, we each duck under the draped folds of red velvet to enter our ceremony space. My Grandma Helen's Victorian tea set sat in the middle of the red silk floor of our makeshift forest temple to invite us in. Over the past few months, Contessa of Floating Root has harvested wild rosehips, dried them, powdered them, and transformed them into a powerful love potion tea. Before each one of the embroidered pillows is a handmade clay drinking vessel that curves into the palms of our hands. Contessa glides around our circle of red candlelight and puts a drop of her custom rose honey on each of our tongues before we begin. The sweet honey fills my throat with warmth and vibrance. I close my eyes with the ecstasy of being gifted this sweet treasure from nature and Contessa's magic. She pours the rosehip dust tea into our drinking vessels and we toast to love, to our sisterhood, and to the magic that brought us all together again.

As we imbibe the rosehip's powerful love potion medicine, we all feel the deep enchantment of the roses. This temple in the forest becomes more vivid, luminous, and spectacular. One by one, we stand and call out what it is we want to manifest with love in our lives. Each woman holds her hands together, making a cup with them in front of their hearts. I weave around the temple with a golden basket bursting with red rose petals and sprinkle the petals into each woman's awaiting palms. We take a moment to cup these rose petals like a love letter to our secret soul, our very own enchanted hearts. In the symphony of night around us, in the beaming of the stars, in the flickering of

the candlelight, the love vibration was rising. My Grandma Helen said that the stories of our lives are in the lines of our palms, and therefore when you hold those petals in your palms with intention, you are blessing the story of your life. When you cup your palms together with roses against your heart, you deliver that love letter to your soul.

An owl hoots out in the distance and we open our eyes. We hold our palms filled with roses up toward the sky, to the red velvet ceiling of our temporary temple. We sent this love out to all of you who need it right now. We do this every time. Our circle of sisterhood at Witch Camp boosts the power to all the people around the world who need this love and this good energy right now. May it circle around you and hold you like a warm hug that reminds you of how beautiful you really are. And then lastly, as always with the Ritual of Red Roses, we hold our palms high above our own heads then and let the rose petals shower down upon us in a blessing of love.



Photo by Inna Shnayder

Veronica Varlow's Bohemian Magick is in stores now. See more on [lovewitch.com](http://lovewitch.com) and find her on Instagram @veronicavarlow.

The Picture Art Collection / Alamy Stock Photo

# RITUAL *Decadence*

BY ALISE MARIE,  
THE BEAUTY WITCH™

When the season of giving entwines with the season of extravagance, I see only one path: the shimmering promenade that leads to the altar of beauty rituals. Is there anything more delightful than sensuality? Think about it for a millisecond. *Non!* To be in conversation with your senses is to experience pure, unequalled joy in the present moment and in the petite pleasures of the flesh that nature and beauty continually conspire to reveal, particularly when we have become somehow disengaged from our weary bodies, our harried spirits, and in the process have forgotten the truth of love. Yes, love. An immense outpouring from the goddesses that is there for us to see, to embrace, and to pass along: Beauty is inner love made external—the fine art of ritual that empowers and shows others by example exactly how we are to be treated. *This is pure confidence.* What could be more restorative and more bewitching? A high vibration of who you are, what you need, and what you can offer all wrapped in silky, glowing, perfumed skin ... *la force de la nature.*

Salome (1876), by Gustave Moreau



Étoile Polonaise

**ÉTOILE POLONAISE**

Body Exfoliant and Bath Soak

*Conjures 2-3 treatments*

1 cup Himalayan pink salt, fine

¼ cup champagne

1 tablespoon sweet almond oil

6 drops pure vanilla essential oil

3 drops wild orange essential oil

*\*If you do not wish to use champagne, a sparkling mineral water works beautifully.*

In a beautiful bowl, combine the pink salt and sweet almond oil until well blended. Add each essential oil, one at a time, then blend again. Pour in the champagne, and watch with delight as it bubbles. Give it a stir, then glide gracefully into your bath area and apply to damp skin, massaging in circular motions. If you have a bathtub, sink down in, allowing the potion to act as a bath soak, adding more as you desire. When you emerge, your skin will glow like the galaxy, with the tactile sensuality of silk.

**Himalayan Pink Salt** is an excellent base that sloughs away old skin, providing mineral riches and earth power.

**Champagne** The “wine of kings” is actually quite the beauty secret. It is loaded with antioxidants, helps promote even skin tone, and cleanses with natural antibacterial powers.

**Sweet Almond Oil** Soothing and nutritive, almond softens and heals skin with natural vitamin E, which has the ability to regenerate cells and repair damaged skin. It also carries the magic of healing energy.

**Vanilla** This gorgeous, lusty vine is rich in copper to promote collagen and elastin production and has noted aphrodisiac powers.

**Orange** supports collagen production and cellular renewal while bringing forth love and prosperity.

Next, revel in the lush ritual of treating your face to a most exquisite indulgence: the intoxicating scent of chocolate in a rich coconut crème ambrosia that gently cleanses and detoxifies without you even knowing a thing! Why? Because, *mes amies*, you will be much too taken with the voluptuous nature of this creamy, thick potion that deeply moisturizes, leaving a positively edible scent to linger and enchant.

**TRÉSOR DE CHOCOLAT**

Facial Masque

*Conjures 3-6 treatments*

1 fresh fig, or two dried figs

1 teaspoon horse chestnut flour

1 teaspoon raw cacao

1 teaspoon unsweetened coconut cream

*\*If you are using dried figs, soak them for a minimum of one hour prior to potion making*

In another gorgeous bowl, whisk the horse chestnut flour with the cacao until well blended. Slice the figs in half, then scoop out the flesh, and add it to the mixture. When it is well combined, add the coconut cream, mixing well with a fork until smooth. It will seem very

thick, but once it hits your skin it will melt upon meeting your body warmth and become easy to massage. Apply in this manner to clean skin, let it rest for at least 15 minutes while you do something interesting, then rinse well.

**Fig** Ruled by passionate fire and lucky Jupiter, this lusty fruit of creativity brings strength, abundance, and lusty adventures. Rich in beautifying vitamins, minerals, and fiber, figs also contain Jing life-force energy.

**Chestnut** Fiery chestnut is ruled by abundant Jupiter and known for attracting love. It promotes cellular regeneration and rich moisture on the skin.

**Cacao** is a fire-ruled beauty food that enhances mood and stirs sexual desire, and is rich in skin-saving antioxidants.

**Coconut** Ruled by the moon and water, coconut heightens your intuition and psychic abilities as it provides beauty fats for supple skin.

**Beauty Witch Secret:** This recipe makes enough for a full-body treatment! How about *that* for decadence?

And last but not never least, *beautés*, I have a very succulent treat for you: a perfume that invites pleasure seeking by way of *la pâtisserie*! Think of yuletide sweets in all their warmth and debauched satisfaction but without the beauty-busting sugars and calories ... now *that* is fabulous. Your pencil dress will thank you.



Trésor de Chocolat



Parfum de Dessert

## PARFUM DE DESSERT

Perfume

Conjures approximately 1 ounce

Essential oils:

20 drops vanilla

5 drops clove

6 drops nutmeg

8 drops bitter almond

4 drops wild orange

Pure spring water

In a one-ounce bottle, combine essential oils, one at a time, taking a moment to breathe each one in, connecting to its energy. Fill the bottle to the top with spring water, but leave a little space to breathe below the cap, stopper, or sprayer. Swirl it all together in a clockwise motion until mingled. Use wherever and whenever you desire a bit of heaven on earth.

Dancing with **vanilla, almond,** and **orange** are a beloved pair of seasonal magic makers:

**Clove** Decadently spicy, Jupiter-ruled clove oil kills bacteria and clarifies skin while conjuring love, money, and protection magic.

**Nutmeg** Fiery, Jupiter-ruled nutmeg is an excellent anti-inflammatory for skin that can have a reaction to the changing seasons. It is also highly valued for its ability to open up our psychic awareness.

**Beauty Witch Secret:** Parfum de Dessert makes a luxurious house fragrance too! Mist rooms, carpets, draperies, and clothing as you desire, taking care to shake well first, and spray at least 6 to 8 inches away from fabric.

Alise Marie is the author of *The Beauty Witch's Secrets: Recipes and Rituals for the Modern Goddess* (Llewellyn, April 2022) available for pre-order now on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Find her at [thebeautywitch.com](https://thebeautywitch.com) and on Instagram @thebeautywitchofficial.

"I wonder if the snow loves the trees and fields that it kisses them so gently? And then it covers them up so snug, you know, with a white quilt, and perhaps it says, 'Go to sleep, darlings, 'til the summer comes again.'" —Lewis Carroll

In the spirit of the holiday season, it's natural to indulge ourselves and be drawn to rich—and decadent—ingredients: a bubbly champagne toast, a delectable chocolate dessert, a wild orange and vanilla truffle cake.

Beauty craves a bit more indulgence this time of year, too: astringent champagne, antioxidant-rich chocolate, wild orange and vanilla that feed and nourish the skin. Here are some divinely decadent beauty indulgences.

### CHAMPAGNE

Champagne is a great toner. It helps promote clear skin, reduces redness, brightens and exfoliates skin—and smells expensive!

#### Prai Champagne Caviar Skin Renewal Serum

This luxury serum delivers with peptides for skin renewal, elasticity, and hydration; white truffle extract with amino acids and minerals to restore bounce to the skin; and Prai oil to help make skin softer and more supple.

#### Fafco Champagne True Liquid Soap and Reparative Hand Cream

Made in Italy with champagne, extra virgin olive oil, lactic acid, and rice proteins to soften even the most reptilian hands!

#### Bathe House Pink Champagne Bath Salts

Handmade in Great Britain with magnesium

and sea salts, these festive bath salts will make you feel like a million bucks! Spike your bath with leftover champagne—and bubbles.

### CHOCOLATE

Chocolate is not only a delicious treat; it is packed with skin-loving polyphenols and antioxidants to help ease signs of aging, inflammation, and even breakouts. Chocolate can calm sensitive and irritated skin, and the smell, of course, is always enticing and uplifting!

#### Fresh Cocoa Body Exfoliant

A gentle scrub that sloughs off dry skin to reveal the radiance beneath. Chocolate leaves a deliciously intoxicating scent on the body.

#### Eminence Organics Skincare Mousse Hydration Mask

This light and fluffy mask offers deep hydration and feeds delicious nutrients to the skin. Enjoy once or twice per week and feel like a goddess.

### WILD ORANGE

Loaded with potent antioxidants, orange essential oil helps stimulate the circulation. It enhances radiance and clarity and eases acne. Aromatherapeutic properties include uplifting and energizing the mood.

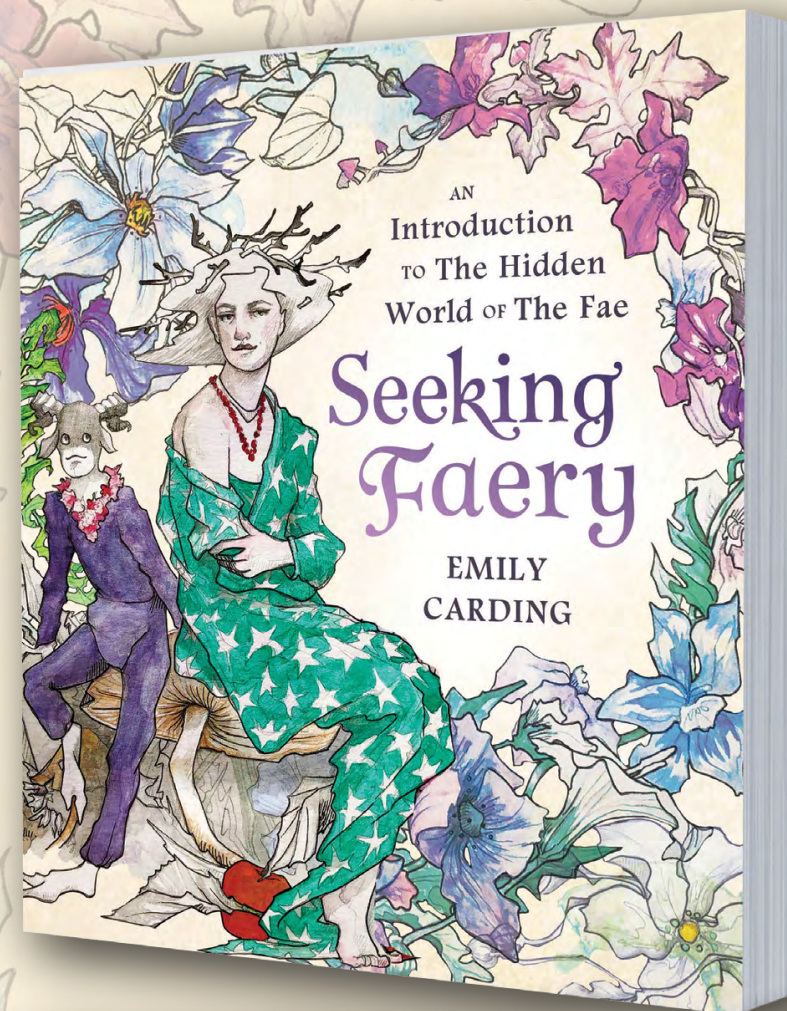
#### Almond Orange Zum Scrub

This sweet, zesty re-energizing scrub will become a regular part of your shower ritual; it's a morning wakeup call!

#### Brooklyn Grooming Matte Cream in Wild Orange + Cedarwood Pomade

A hand-crafted vegan recipe with woody, citrus, and vanilla notes—and shea butter—to style and hydrate the hair and give it a subtle shine.

—Rosie Shannon



# Seeking Faery

9780738766065 • \$18.99

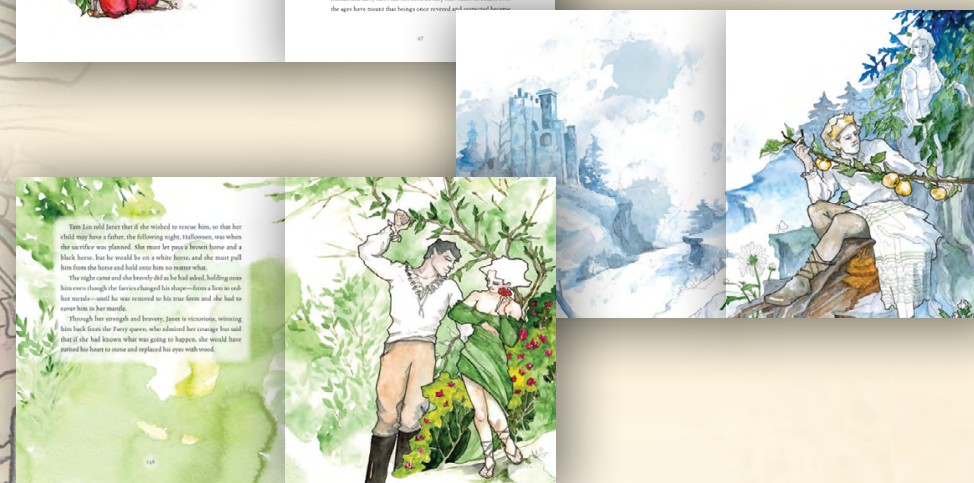
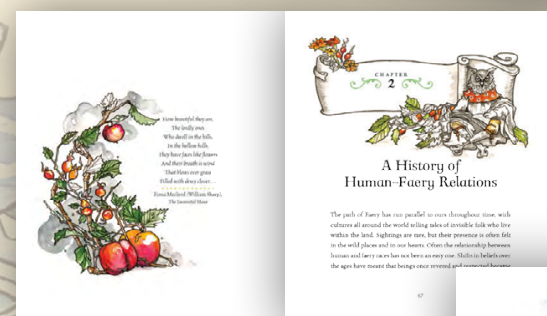
This lovely guide to the world of Faery will bring you face-to-face with pixies, will o' wisps, the tall and noble Sidhe, and so much more.

Author Emily Carding shares fascinating insights into the folklore and history of these magical beings and helps you deepen your connection with them.

This beautiful guide also features exquisite watercolor illustrations by Siolo Thompson.



Book by  
Emily Carding



Illustrated by  
Siolo Thompson

**LLEWELLYN**

Publishing for the Body, Mind, Spirit Since 1901

1-800-THE-MOON • [www.Llewellyn.com](https://www.Llewellyn.com) • [f](https://www.facebook.com/Llewellyn) [i](https://www.instagram.com/Llewellyn) [y](https://www.youtube.com/Llewellyn) [p](https://www.pinterest.com/Llewellyn)

# DIAMONDS, PEARLS, AND ORANGE-TREES

## *Fairy Tales and Decadence*

BY SARA CLETO AND BRITTANY WARMAN

Despite their reputation for being short, sweet, and simple, fairy tales can be magnificently enchanting, even decadent. Their lavish descriptions and beguiling atmospheres stay with you, informing your aspirations and understanding of luxury well into adulthood. We've put together a list of some of the most decadent tales out there, plus some of our favorite passages to give you a taste.

**“The White Cat” by Madame d’Aulnoy** – Madame d’Aulnoy is famous for her unbridled descriptions of beautiful rooms, beautiful clothes, and beautiful people. The Grimm brothers,

who believed that fairy tales should be sparse, flat, and simplistic and who notably do not appear on this list, dismissed her tales out of hand for their extravagant wordiness. This, of course, makes them prime examples of what decadent fairy tales can be. For this list, we've chosen the tale “The White Cat,” a story that not only features several of d’Aulnoy’s loveliest passages, but also invites us into a world where cats live in the lap of luxury. Here, for example, is the description of a prince’s first sight of their castle: “Guided by the light he came to the gate of the most magnificent castle that could ever be imagined. This gate was of gold covered with carbuncles, the pure and vivid light of which illuminated all the neighborhood. It was this light which the Prince had perceived at a great distance. The walls were of transparent porcelain, of several colors, on which were



represented the histories of all the Fairies from the beginning of the world to that day.” How gorgeous does that sound?

**“Beauty and the Beast” by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve** – The most famous versions of “Beauty and the Beast” (Madame Beaumont, and later Disney) provide only a glimpse of the glitz, glamour, and opulence on display in the oldest literary version, written by French novelist Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve in 1740. In Villeneuve’s tale, we get intricate descriptions of the Beast’s castle, otherworldly cabaret entertainments, and the extravagant fashion

of the time. When Beauty and her father arrive at the Beast’s castle, they “found themselves in an avenue of orange trees. At the moment that they entered it the fireworks ceased. The illumination was, however, continued by all the statues having in their hands lighted torches. Besides these, lamps without number covered the front of the palace, symmetrically arranged in forms of true-lover’s knots and crowned cyphers, consisting of double LL’s and double BB’s. On entering the court they were received by a salute of artillery, which, added to the sound of a thousand instruments of various kinds, some soft, some warlike, had a fine effect.” Orange trees! An artillery salute! Excess! It’s *much* longer and more elaborate than what we usually expect from fairy tales nowadays, but that’s part of what makes it so enticing and decadent.

**“The Fairies” by Charles Perrault** – This fairy tale, also known as “Diamonds and Toads,” is so decadent that “with every word [the kind girl] speaks, a flower or a precious stone shall fall from [her] mouth”! Also decadent? The tale’s obsession with morality. Decadence is often understood as a kind of decline, an excess or aesthetic with a moral dimension, and “The Fairies” is all about evaluating a pair of sisters for their morality... and rewarding or punishing them accordingly! The kind, helpful sister is rewarded for her good deeds with an abundance of diamonds, while the rude, lazy sister is fated to have vipers and toads fall from her lips whenever she speaks for the rest of her life.

**“The Birthday of the Infanta” by Oscar Wilde** – We couldn’t possibly write this list without including a tale from the master of decadence, Oscar Wilde. While any of his tales could probably make this list, consider this description of the sumptuous outfit of the Infanta herself in his tale “The Birthday of the Infanta”: “Her robe was of gray satin, the skirt and the wide puffed sleeves heavily embroidered with silver, and the stiff corset studded with rows of fine pearls. Two tiny slippers with big pink rosettes peeped out beneath her dress as she walked. Pink and pearl was her great gauze fan, and in her hair, which like an aureole of faded gold stood out stiffly round her pale little face, she had a beautiful white rose.” Pure opulence! The Infanta’s elegance, of course, conceals a heartless nature the reader only truly understands at the end of the story.

**“The Nightingale” by Hans Christian Andersen** – Andersen’s tales are typically well known for their grim tragedies, not their decadence, but we think his story “The Nightingale” deserves a spot on this list. In the story, a wealthy emperor, with all the riches he can imagine, becomes enamored with the song of the simple nightingale. Instead of being happy with what he has, however, his attention shifts to a mechanical nightingale, “an artificial nightingale most like the real one except that it was encrusted with diamonds, rubies, and sapphires.” Believing the fancy version to be far superior to the original, the emperor realizes his mistake only on his deathbed—an example of the dangers of decadence gone too far!

And one last recommendation:

**The Bloody Chamber by Angela Carter** – The fairy-tale retellings in Angela Carter’s collection *The Bloody Chamber* are the most truly decadent fairy tales we know. They are awash with an overripe luxury that has already begun to crumble and decline, yet still holds a spellbinding power. In “The Tiger’s Bride,” a retelling of “Beauty and the Beast,” the unnamed narrator describes arriving in the south after a life spent in the chilly north, saying, “Everything flowers; no harsh wind stirs

the voluptuous air. The sun spills fruit for you. And the deathly, sensual lethargy of the sweet South infects the starved brain; it gasps: ‘Luxury! more luxury!’ But then the snow comes, you cannot escape it.” In her “Sleeping Beauty” tale, “The Lady of the House of Love,” the vampiric sleeping maiden lives in a ruined chateau whose decaying splendor only enhances the maiden’s unnatural beauty. These fairy tales are a gorgeous, entrancing exploration of decadence, so grab a copy and a goblet, curl up by a warm fire, and prepare to lose yourself in their magic.

What tales do you think are the most decadent? Are there any lavish descriptions that have taken root permanently in your imagination?



Illustration: *The Nightingale* from *Tales* by Hans Christian Andersen (1911), by Heinrich Lefler and Joseph Urban

Sara Cleto and Brittany Warman are folklorists, authors, and teachers, as well as co-founders of *The Carterhaugh School of Folklore and the Fantastic*, which you can read more about at [carterhaughschool.com](http://carterhaughschool.com).

## FINDING ELFRIDA

A bit of fact - A bit of fiction - And a whole lot of wicked



BY ROSEMARIE MARTIN

True history, magic, and the supernatural  
all rolled into one

<https://NewPages.Etsy.Com>

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE PARKE



# EMBRACING YOUR SHADOW



BY GINA SPRIGGS

**M**any of us try to avoid our dark side completely, but the truth is our light would not exist without our darkness. Even the most spiritually advanced of us experiences anger, bitterness, hate, and fear. The tiny space we allocate to our negative emotions ends up being storage for aspects of ourselves we don't accept, our shadow selves. What could be more decadent than loving ourselves totally—embracing all the experience the world offers to us, in all our gorgeous light and dark, and allowing ourselves the ultimate decadence: *self-love*?

Our dark feelings are part of our whole experience in life. Just as we were invited to experience birth and will experience death, we're also invited to experience all aspects of our light

and dark emotions, even our demons. The good news? With brutal honesty and confidence, your demons can become your friends—and a great source of power.

When you're casting any kind of spell, directing your emotions may be your most important ingredient. Emotions are powerful conduits of energy, so powerful that magic performed without them isn't effective at all. Yes, you may set up your spell and chant or read some script, but you must add a poly-sensorial aspect (feeling, sensing, and imagining). Thoughts and emotions are energy. In quantum physics, the "observer effect" indicates that energy changes form upon observation. All emotions, even negative ones, are the fans that fuel the fire of change.

## HERE ARE A FEW WAYS WE CAN ADD YOUR DARKER EMOTIONS TO YOUR RITUALS:

**ANGER:** This powerful energy can be used in bindings, protection magic, and reversal spells. It is also a powerful ingredient to add to your darker magical powders and oils. Pouring this energy into your magic will make it more effective. When creating these spells, gather all your rage and hate—then release it into your work.

### A Sample Protection Spell Using Anger

Anger is often the emotional residue from violated boundaries. What better way to use the emotion of anger than by creating a protective witch bottle? Protective witch bottles can include rusty nails, some of your hair, and your urine. While making it, imagine what makes you angry. Then simply bury the bottle in your yard or a potted plant in the front of your home for protection.

**FEAR:** The root of many visceral emotions (like jealousy, animosity, and shame) is fear. Whether we fear we are not good enough or fear that someone will get something (or someone) we desire, this emotion is one that digs into our soul, making us act in ways that harm ourselves as much as others, if not more.

This emotion is best worked on from the inside out. Fear is not about anyone but you—so for this emotion, healing and corrective magic will be performed *on yourself* for your growth. Personally, I like to burn, bury, or wash away my fears. Here are a few healing rituals, based on your preferred element.

- List your fears on paper on a Saturday or waning moon and burn it.
- List your fears on a large leaf (or a few!) and then bury them. As the

leaf decomposes and disintegrates, so will your fears.

- Nothing is more powerful than a spiritual bath. Water alone is a powerful healer, and when used with intention and Epsom salts, it will support you physically, mentally, and spiritually. Simply list your fears, and after a cleansing shower, get in the tub and speak aloud what you are ready to release. At the end, I always add, “And all of these fears I know and any unknown.”
- Take your list of fears, burn it, and then combine the ashes with very fine salt. On a windy day, blow this mixture into the wind.

**SADNESS:** If you’ve ever been depressed, you know the energy of this emotion keeps you stuck. You even *feel* lethargic. Sadness is a dense, heavy, slow, and low vibration. Using this energy in the right kind of spells is powerful.

I suggest reserving this energy for revenge by way of reversal. Conjuring all the sadness from an experience can be a cathartic part of this work, but you may want to make an oil, a water, or a powder that includes “original tears” of sadness, so you don’t have to keep revisiting the event.

In time, as you heal, there will be no sadness left—so, as a curio, your potion will be most potent if made fresh.

Send sadness (and other unwanted feelings) back to sender with this simple spell.

### Materials Needed

Container

Water

3 rusty iron nails

Your tears

**Step 1:** Place water, iron nails, and

tears into a large sealable container.

**Step 2:** Seal loosely and let sit for a week, until there is rust sediment on the bottom.

**Step 3:** Wash the front of your home (stoop, entrance, or foyer) using this water.

With this spell, *any* unwanted energies sent your way will return to sender.

**DISGUST:** Using the emotion of disgust supports the creation of potions that facilitate the magic of personal change. If you need extra help giving up alcohol, cigarettes, or an old lover, dress a black candle with death oil, which is easily made with olive or jojoba oil and dead flies, roaches, and other bugs (and most potent when made during a dark moon phase). This spell helps you find whatever (or whoever) you once found alluring as repulsive as the very repulsive ingredients.

**SHAME OR GUILT:** These emotions essentially block your blessings. To remove them and create change, simply take a bath with hyssop and lemongrass.

To find the blessings hidden in these different emotions, try this two-step method of journaling:

- Identify any events where you felt these emotions.
- Next, journal these three things:
  - What lessons did you learn?
  - What opportunities came from each event?
  - What power did you gain?

Being able to identify and dwell on *these* points allows you to shift the energy, inviting you to discover your greatest sources of strength.

**Remember, the greatest decadence of all is self-love. And this dish is best served whole.**

Photos at right are just some of the magical tools and objects offered in Gina Spriggs’s brick-and-mortar store, Curio, Craft & Conjure, located in Charlotte, North Carolina. Learn more at [curiocharlotte.com](http://curiocharlotte.com) and find Spriggs online at [ginaspriggs.guru](http://ginaspriggs.guru).



# Mirror Masquerade

THE MAGIC OF MIRRORS BY MONICA CROSSON

She was raised knowing what decadence was. It surrounded her in the form of beautiful things—satin sheets and silk drapes and couches covered with brocade, gowns designed especially for her and jewels that sparkled like so many stars around her neck. As she gazed upon her reflection in a gold-framed mirror that hung in her room, she tucked a stray curl back into place and smiled. The mirror reflected a life of ease, and reminded her of what beauty was.

Every year on her birthday, a ball was held in her honor. Presents wrapped in ribbons and glittering paper lay in heaps on the floor while her favorite cakes and custards shone from lavish banquet tables. Guests held their glasses filled with champagne high as they toasted the girl who was more beautiful than any other in their midst. And she knew it to be true because the mirror, which hung in the grand ballroom and reflected the grandeur of the affair, told her so.

It was tradition for the girl, on the eve of her birthday, once the guests had departed, to walk the manicured grounds of her home and reflect upon the perfection that was her world. She was in no hurry. Winter's chill was never a bother since she could afford a warm cloak that protected her from the uncomfortable realities of nature. She stood for a moment as the breeze began to stir and admired the land she knew she deserved. And as she pulled from her pocket a compact with a tortoiseshell case to smooth a falling curl back into place, its tiny mirror reflected the flickering glow of the manor house, and she knew that hope was a provincial emotion only experienced by those who did not have it all—the mirror showed her that.

But as she tucked the compact back into her pocket, she heard a sound like a tinkle of a bell that was far too enticing to be ignored from within the neighboring

wood. She did something she had never done before—she stepped away from the safety of her manicured ground and found herself in untamed land. The forest in winter is full of impish spirits waiting to take advantage of passersby. But the child that sat cross-legged against the trunk of an ancient tree did not seem to be a threat.

“Happy Birthday.” The child-like spirit smiled.

The girl nodded and a smile played at her lips. People like her rarely engaged in conversation with the creatures known to inhabit trees.

“Don't you talk?” the imp asked.

The girl cleared her throat and spoke in a manner suiting one of her status. “Of course, I can talk,” she said. “What is it that you want of me?”

“Nothing more than to give you a gift.” The impish sprite giggled and held up a gift wrapped in moss and tied neatly with stalks of long field grass. “You like presents, don't you?”

It was true that she loved to receive gifts. And even though she already had everything her heart desired, maybe it was because she loved to be the center of attention that she reached out her hands.

The spirit that inhabited the forest pulled the present away. “Before I give you my gift, you must agree to one thing, my dear.”

The girl rolled her eyes. “And what could you give me that is so grand that you would have me bargain for it?”

“A gift more valuable than gold, my dear.”

She was curious. “What is it that you would have me agree to?”

The spirit smiled, looking more mischievous than it had before. “An exchange. You must give me your pretty little compact with the tortoiseshell case.”

That was easy enough. She had many compacts far more opulent than the one she carried in her pocket. *Silly, impish spirit,*

she thought as she nodded.

She pulled the delicate compact from her pocket and handed it to the spirit of the wood, whose face softened as it surrendered the simply wrapped gift.

She tore the wrap and tossed it on the mossy forest floor—anger flickered behind her eyes as she examined what seemed to be just another mirror. “You tricked me,” she said. “It's just a mirror, far less opulent than any I have. Plus,” she said, noticing that the reflective surface was black, “it doesn't reflect anything.” She tossed the mirror to the ground and crossed her arms. “I should have known better than to trust an imp.”

“Most mirrors lie,” the spirit said. “They only show us what we want to see. But the mirror of black tells only truth.” The spirit motioned to the discarded gift. “Go ahead, take a look.”

The girl reluctantly picked up the mirror and gazed into its darkened surface. “I see nothing,” she said, impatiently.

“You must look with the eyes of your soul, silly human,” the spirit shot back. “Look harder.”

To the girl's amazement the mirror's dark reflection seemed to become fluid. Images began to form within the movement. But they did not reflect back to her the beauty of her perfectly decadent world but that of a girl much like her who was humble and thankful for the simple pleasures life offered up. This girl in the black mirror smiled at passersby and found joy in her work. She enjoyed her garden and the simple meals it provided. She shifted her focus to the childlike spirit who smiled gently and then said, “Dear girl, don't you know that mirrors with their silver sheen bind you to a fantasy ideal?” The spirit of the wood crumbled the compact within its hand and motioned for her to once again look into the black mirror. “You are so much more than that of a mirror's silver masquerade.”



Photography by

THE WITCHING HOUR PHOTOGRAPHY

Model: Kassi Stein  
Gown: El Costurero Real



On those deliciously decadent nights of winter, blanketed with a dark velvety sky spattered with stars, light a few candles and turn out the lights. This is the perfect time to look deep within your soul by use of a scrying mirror. What does the mirror have to say to you?

You will need:

- An inexpensive picture frame (round is nice, but pick one that calls to you)
- 1 or 2 cans of black matte spray paint (depending on your frame size)

Remove the glass from the frame and clean both sides of the glass thoroughly. When dry, spray one side only of your glass carefully—holding the can approximately 12 inches from the glass and moving side to side. Do this in thin layers, allowing each layer to dry before starting the next until you can no longer see light through the glass. If you want to paint the frame, do so while waiting for the glass to dry.

Put the glass back into the frame. Make sure that the unpainted side of the glass is facing toward you. Before using your scrying mirror, cleanse it with water steeped in a little mugwort (for psychic abilities). Remember, only use your scrying mirror for your own personal divinatory practices.

She looked deep into the mirror's black depths as images of herself as an old woman staring into a silver mirror was revealed. In the vision, she sat in a chair surrounded by the crumbling remains of a tiny cottage, as the mirror reflected back her fantasy of youth and opulence.

The girl gasped. "Is it too late?" She put her hands to her face to reassure herself of the plumpness of her cheeks and smoothness of her skin.

The imp laughed. "Do not worry, you have not yet wasted your years. Now go. Go back and rediscover the decadence of simple things—the wind against your face, birds singing before dawn, the taste of honey on bread. And most of all, the beauty within you." The childlike spirit pointed to the girl's heart.

The girl nodded, then pulled tight her cloak that was mended and worn and walked to the edge of the woods where the flickering flames of candles danced along her cottage's windowpanes. And within her burned hope: The world offered so much more beauty than what was reflected in her mirror.

### Mirror, Mirror

"Mirror, mirror, in my hand, who's the fairest in the land?" Our fascination with mirrors came not only because of a mirror's practical use but also because of the deeply ingrained belief that a mirror's reflection can reveal to us what is in our soul.

Many popular myths and stories about mirrors are cautionary tales about vanity. From the Brothers Grimm tale of Snow White, where the evil queen uses a mirror to communicate with a spirit that can never lie and finds herself willing to take the life of her stepdaughter out of envy, to the ancient Greek myth

of Narcissus, who became enamored with his own image reflected in a pool of water, these tales of the power of reflection are relatable because in one way or another, we are all drawn to the image of ourselves captured in silver or water or glass. But as the saying goes, "Mirrors cannot be trusted." The reflection is a reversal of our own true image, never really revealing to us the truth of how others see us.

But not all mirror tales are allegories for narcissism. Some reflect the mirror's history as a tool for seeing what might be. In Egyptian mythology, the goddess Hathor carried a shield that could reflect back all things in their true light. From this shield, it is said, she fashioned the first magic mirror to see. Nostradamus is believed to have employed a small bowl of water as a scrying tool into which he gazed and received images of future events. In older versions of "Beauty and the Beast," Beauty uses a mirror to watch over her family, and Lewis Carroll used a mirror as a magical portal in his novel *Through the Looking Glass*.

Scrying is a form of divination using transparent or light-catching surfaces and has been practiced since ancient times to penetrate the veil between worlds, talk to the dead, reveal the future, and unveil the truth. But black mirror scrying (typically polished obsidian) is by far the most used historically and is still used by many modern seers and magical practitioners. You can easily find an obsidian mirror online or in many metaphysical shops, but making your own black mirror is not only inexpensive but imbues your divinatory tool with your own personal power.



Monica Crosson's latest book is *Wild Magical Soul: Untame Your Spirit & Connect to Nature's Wisdom*. Follow her on Instagram @monicacrosson.

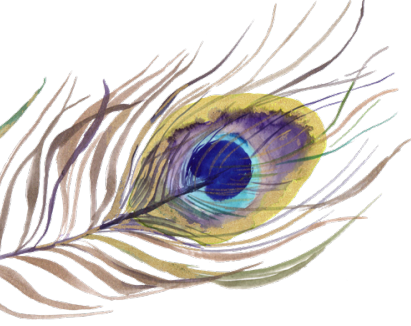
Joy Marshall is a fantasy portrait photographer making fairy tales for everyone. Find her on Instagram @thewitchinghourphotography or visit her website thewitchinghourphoto.com.

MAGIC HOUR  
ORGANIC CEREMONIAL TEAS MADE WITH LOVE



Magical Teas for Magical People

Use Code Faerie15 for 15% off your next purchase at Clubmagichour.com



# A Decadent COZY CORNER

by Susann Cokal

**A** beautiful room is like a long, luscious drink of whatever restores you. Your home should both delight your body and spark your imagination—it brings you pleasure in the moment, plus inspiration that reaches beyond the walls and into the dreamy world of art.

If your taste is decadent, the drink is absinthe and the room is all about lush textures and foreign lands. Back in the day, walking through a decadent's home was like taking a world tour. Aesthetes and artists particularly leaned toward home decor that evoked other cultures, particularly those of Asia and the Middle East. If they traveled, they collected decorative objects from every stop on their journeys; if they couldn't go abroad themselves, they bought what was available locally. In Oscar Wilde's rooms at Oxford, for example, an abundance of blue-and-white Chinese vases (holding towering sunflower bouquets) helped define the aesthetic which Wilde would tout in his often-presented lecture "The House Beautiful." In his 1885 London drawing room, the glint of black lacquer evoked Japan, and a window's unattractive view was covered with a panel of wood pierced and carved in a copy of a pattern seen in Cairo. His son, Vivyan Holland, noted that walls were peculiarly covered in a William Morris paper. But we're talking about the divine Oscar; in our eyes, his choices were never wrong. To wit: The ceiling was designed by Whistler and inlaid with peacock feathers—another of Wilde's signature touches.

Turkey, Algeria, Morocco, and the Moorish-designed Alhambra were big sources of inspiration for all Aesthetes. Painter Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant filled his studio with what Shirley Fox, one frequent visitor, described as "a choice collection of Moorish rugs and curtains and ornaments of all sorts"—all mixed with suits of armor and comfy easy chairs, hanging lanterns, Syrian tables, and brass vases. Fox wrote that he "had transformed the place into quite a suggestion of the Alhambra itself." Another artist, Anna Alma-Tadema, painted on canvas the "Gold Room" in her famous father's house; that room was lacquered and gilded within an inch of its creator's



life, hung with brocade silk curtains, furnished with a long, low blue divan—an expansive version of the prim European settee—and finished off with an enormous bird cage suspended from a mosaic ceiling.

Of course, not everyone had access to rooms on such a large scale, or budgets to match. But even the most averagely middle-class home or grotty Bohemian hideaway had the means to establish that most distinctively *fin de siècle* element of decor, the cozy corner.

In the Victorian era, when every parlor was overstuffed, there likely wasn't much room for a divan (and it would have been rather scandalous if the average person had added one).

But for a cozy corner, all you needed, yes, was a corner—and some fabric with which to make it a curtained space apart. Carpets were important, if you had them. You might hang a Turkish rug on a wall like a tapestry or drape one over an ottoman or table. Whether or not you were fond of Wilde, you probably set out blue-and-white china, peacock feathers, and fresh flowers in season (beaded or silk ones in winter). Brass candlesticks gleamed everywhere, and so did scraps of brocade and velvet from which you could cover cushion after cushion—because the goal of a cozy corner was to bury yourself in the textures, the glints of metal and mother-of-pearl, perhaps a whiff of perfume or even (gasp!) imported incense.

A modern decadent can make their own cozy corner in less than a day, on virtually any budget. See the example at right, from my own lair. Thrift stores, flea markets, import shops, and even online behemoths can provide what you'll need. Perhaps start by hooking up some mosquito netting, now trendy for wedding tents and bed canopies; you'll create an instant sense of separate, specialized space. You can also use the set's hoop and hooks for heavier fabric of your own choice—an assortment of silks, rayon challis, satin, jacquard. Moroccan-inspired lamps can be found at any import store (and that includes online retailers); you'll enjoy scouring estate sales and thrift stores for brass trays and coffee sets, maybe an old silver tea service. You might even find a prize inlaid box or table to add. And feathers! You are, after all, a proud peacock feathering your nest.

Photograph by  
STEVE PARKE



Traditional colors and fabrics are the reds and blues of antique carpets, the cobalt and white of old china, the turquoise of Turkish tiles, the black of ebony and lacquer. But this is *your* sanctuary—if you like pink chintz and sequins, do your corner in pink chintz and sequins! Bring in that glorious elephant statue you inherited from your granny; hang up that painting of Klimt's *Kiss*. If you prefer apple juice to absinthe, well, we encourage healthy choices, and it will look just as gorgeous in your glassware.

Lighting is easy to regulate now. If you don't want real candles burning amid all that lush fabric, inexpensive LED tea lights or strings of fairy lights will do the trick, casting luscious colors and intriguing webs of shadow over your *sanctum sanctorum*. You can even fill a colored goblet with tiny balloon lights for a small, glowing surprise.

This is your private space for dreams. If you close your curtain, no one else needs to see. In the end, decadence is whatever makes *you* happy, whatever restores you, whatever sends your imagination on new flights of fancy.

**Another idea is to take the cozy corner outside, as shown in this luxurious vignette by Tricia Saroya.**

## MAKE A COZY CORNER *in the Garden*

by Tricia Saroya

Since my entire home reads like an ode to a trader on the silk route, creating a decadent cozy corner felt a bit redundant. I also know that people with families squeezed into small spaces might not be able to spare even a corner for luxury, so I decided that another option would be to create a decadent “room” outside in the garden. Gardens are magical places full of possibility—and an exotic space for a quiet evening cup of tea or an afternoon pick-me-up.

I started with an open area under a tree and proceeded to hang fabric from the branches. I have a collection of Indian saris that were perfectly long and in a rich burgundy color, which set the mood beautifully. Any fabric that is long enough will work, even bedsheets. You could easily drape fabric over a fence, from a balcony, over a tree branch, or over a market umbrella. The idea is to form a cozy designated space much like the blanket forts we used to make as kids. It does not have to be outdoor friendly over the long term, as this is temporary. But if you want to go permanent, an over-the-top gazebo draped with rich colorful outdoor fabric is like adding a room to your home. If you prefer a neutral palette, then mosquito netting or creamy gauze sets a beautifully romantic stage.



Photography by TRICIA SAROYA





I believe you can transform anything with the right lighting, and twinkle lights are as close to magic as a wand from Hogwarts, so I draped a ton of them from the branches along with a strand of bistro lights I had lying about and added in a few beautiful lanterns from Morocco and Turkey.

I also brought out my low brass table and Middle Eastern pillows and poufs. If you don't happen to be like me with such goodies already tucked away in your caravan, then the local thrift store generally has an array of different colored throw pillows and area rugs you can layer without breaking the bank. You might also lay out your repast on a tray or tablecloth set on the ground. It is fairly simple as well to set up a small table with plywood over cinder blocks and then just cover it with fabric. You don't have to spend a fortune to create this look. Start with what you have and build on it. Pick a color story that will help unite all the elements and then go from there. Your most important items are the twinkle lights and lanterns, draped fabric, and piles of cushions. Anything you add to that will be

icing on the cake, even if it is just a simple mug of tea or a glass of wine and music.

As a dedicated tea fanatic, I happily caved to the desire to hold a Turkish tea. I found a traditional Turkish teapot and gold embossed cups on Facebook Marketplace and even discovered a local baker who made baklava and Turkish delight, which added the final decadent touch. Having been a florist for many years, I had to have an abundance of flowers. I found these in the discount section of Costco—beyond their prime but perfect for my needs. I also wanted mounds of beautiful fruits and nuts heaped in with the sweets and, of course, lots and lots of candles. I used some Moroccan tea glasses with votive candles for a magical sparkle. You can also use mismatched colorful glasses from the thrift store. Whatever you choose, think layers and layers of beauty heaped with even more layers, lots of textures, rich colors, soft lighting, and exotic touches for your own cocoon of decadent beauty that might have emerged straight from Scheherazade's Arabian Nights.

---

*Tricia Saroya calls herself a "creatix," an out-of-the-box artist that imagineers beauty in a multitude of mediums. For more creative magic, follow her on Instagram @triciasaroya or visit her webpage at triciasaroya.com.*





# WHY DECADENCE NOW?

BY RONA BERG

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is the importance of taking good care of ourselves.

And we have been good. Buzzwords like wellness, self-love, self-care—and the rituals associated with them—are everywhere now, as it quickly became clear that maintaining health and managing stress gives you an edge in fighting the disease.

Supplement sales skyrocketed as we looked for ways to build up our immune systems with elderberry and oil of oregano. Online meditation rooms were packed with people needing help with stress and anxiety. Candles and diffusers became irresistible as we tried to bring light, balance, and good smells into our dark, musty, sequestered lives.

Many embraced alternative therapies to help with holistic healing. The traditional Chinese medicine practice of ear seeding—placing tiny seeds along the ear, which is considered a mini road map of the entire body—went viral. Ear seeding is said to stimulate different parts of the body and ease stress, improve digestion, build immunity, and balance hormones. Reflexology, which is built on the similar concept that acupressure points on the soles of the feet correspond to organ systems in the body, also emerged as one of the most popular spa treatments. Applying gentle pressure to those points is said to stimulate blood flow and bring healing to the corresponding organs. And during a pandemic, restricting touch to the feet, with a body's length between a spa guest and therapist, is a good thing to do.

But not everyone was able to stay on track. According to an American Psychological Association survey released early this year, nearly one in four adults said they managed pandemic isolation and anxiety by drinking too much. On the other hand, health concerns reinforced by the pandemic led many to stop drinking entirely and ushered in a new age of “mocktail mixology,” “sober bars,” and booze-free wine, beer, and craft cocktails.

As things perhaps begin to ease up, that time of isolation, fear, loneliness, and pent-up frustration has led many of us to want to bust loose. Is a new decadence soon to follow? Are we heading back to the late 19th century, when artists like Oscar Wilde, Théophile Gautier, Aubrey Beardsley, and Charles Baudelaire embodied a new mode of sexual, sensual, artistic, and political freedom—some would say excess—that disrupted the prevailing Victorian mores of the time?

Or, better yet, a new Roaring Twenties, a hundred years later?



If history is an indicator, then yes. The flu epidemic of 1918 killed more than 50 million people around the world, including 675,000 Americans, along with my great-grandparents—compared with the 746,000 Americans who have, thus far, succumbed to Covid-19. The Twenties ushered in an era of liberation—what F. Scott Fitzgerald called “the most expensive orgy in history.” It was a time of newfound freedom for women, symbolized by cigarette smoking, dark painted lips, short bob hairstyles, fringed dresses that skimmed the knee, drinking alcohol in jazz clubs, and dancing the risqué Charleston.

There was a dark side. Then, as now, the U.S. experienced a period of particularly extreme racial violence (the Tulsa Massacre), discrimination against immigrants (the Immigration Act of 1924), and economic inequality. History repeats itself, again and again.

As we begin to see the light at the end of this very long pandemic tunnel, there is a longing, perhaps a nostalgia, to do more, see more, become more engaged in making the world a better place. And we've learned that loving ourselves—and practicing rituals of self-care—can be over the top, even decadent, but in a good way. What we call decadence is purely indulgence. It's generous self-love, with the pursuit of behaviors that bring us pleasure: soft, beautiful clothes in deep, rich colors that feel good against the body. Lovely food and drink. Intoxicating smells, sensuous bubble baths, splurging on luxurious treats for ourselves.

Emerging slowly like beautiful butterflies, we bring with us a newfound appreciation of joy, pleasure, and the beauty in life. Travel is up. Truffles are back on the menu. Getting dressed to go out dancing, dining at expensive restaurants, ordering buckets of champagne, sipping absinthe (and maybe channeling decadent poets Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine?), checking items off the bucket list, and enjoying the pleasure of spending some of the money no one's had an outlet for. To paraphrase Baudelaire, we are ready to get drunk on life: “You should always be drunk ... But on what? Wine, poetry, or talent—it's your choice, but get yourself drunk!”

Even though we are by no means out of the woods yet, we are hovering on the precipice, ready to start living life more beautifully. What we need is to go out, celebrate, listen to music, wear beautiful clothes, enjoy good food and drink—and each other. With caution, not abandon. With respect, not insult. With love, not hate. In moderation, with respect for individual choices and the greater good. Who wouldn't raise a glass to that?



# FROM OUR READERS



For this issue we asked our readers:  
What does decadence mean to you?

For me it's about plunging fully and freely into your favorite indulgences. Allowing yourself to luxuriate in that which brings pleasure, a pleasure that feels like an extravagance. It's throwing moderation out the window and letting your fingertips slowly glide over silken velvet, deeply breathing in the heady perfume of a flower that blooms triumphantly before dying, feeling with every cell the ebb and flow of ocean waves washing over you. Decadence is savoring a luxury, whether that be for a lifetime or even just a moment where any troubles and limitations of the world gently fade away while you dance in the shadows, swooning to the intoxicating strains of an ancient melody.  
—*Kambriel*

Lounging in my favorite green velvet smoking jacket, listening to *Carmina Burana* while drinking absinthe and being hand-fed strawberries dipped in a dark chocolate fountain by a veiled belly dancer. I could go on, but I'm in danger of oversharing.  
—*Sean Von Frankenstein*

Succumbing to and embracing an over-the-top indulgence. Chocolate, wine, mind-blowing love, desserts, rich and delicious foods, luxurious baths, I could go on but I think you get the point ...  
—*Holly Reanne*

The wafting scent of roses, rich dark chocolates, and a glass of silky red wine wrapped in rich velvet kisses. —*Ambika Devi*

While associated with luxury, decadence is more about the simple things for me: It's being cozy in a soft blanket on a cold night, the warm fuzzy feeling you get when around loved ones, a soft kiss with someone you're falling for, the smell of a hearty home-cooked meal or a delicious dessert. —*@simplyshelbs16*

For me it's letters, cable phone, an elegant glass used only for juice. Everything ends, everything dies. The memory of the past times is a beautiful feeling with a shade of sadness on the end of my tongue.  
—*@magiaziemi*

A good makeup job, a fabulous outfit, and some fun jewelry. —*@miss\_plagued*

It's opening that bottle of chilled champagne you've been saving for a special occasion, pouring it into a crystal flute, taking some just-popped popcorn with butter and parm, and watching your favorite movie. It's all about what makes your senses purr.  
—*@giselle\_my\_belle\_shasta\_marie*

Immersing yourself completely in something that brings you joy but is not needed at all to survive. —*Robin Bamburg*

For me it's bittersweet. It's that luxury, splendor, and glamour that you know is doomed. The last dinner on the *Titanic*. The last days of a glorious Roman empire. The last vivacious outburst of crimson red on a tree before the leaves inevitably have to fall. —*@mermaid.on.fire*

Decadence for touch is soft linen sheets and a cozy quilt on a snowy night. Decadence for scent is an herb garden and old-fashioned roses. Decadence for sight is a Van Gogh painting. Decadence for sound is the wind in the waves on a January day with an undertone of cello music (preferably Zoë Keating). Decadence for taste is layers of chocolate with fresh raspberries and vanilla whipped cream. I live simply but decadently. I splurged on the linen sheets. Usually my cat shares them with me. He's a bit spoiled. —*@greenmoonmonday*

A glass of wine with lunch.  
—*@bronwynschramm*

An extra helping, extra time to sleep in, spending more money on something that makes my heart flutter, or simply an escape to a place I normally can't afford or have the time to visit. Indulgence.  
—*Kristin Reimer*

The complete immersion in beauty.  
—*Sue Ellen Armstrong*



Free bookbag with autographed and numbered collectable trilogy

Photo credit @darkfaerietales\_

# THE TYARRI CHRONICLES

A FORGOTTEN RACE. A FORBIDDEN CHILD.

Aurelia must unveil the shrouded circumstances of her birth and evade a death sentence handed down a millennia ago. It's up to her to harness the powers of her forbidden blood before they tear her body, her heart, and the Tyarri in two.

melissalynnherold.com

