

THE ALCHEMIST

There's a beautiful symmetry to Tiffany Jeans' business, with her passions and personal history all woven into the tale, says Philippa Prentice



teachings of her grandmothers, aunts and mother, craftswomen who raised her in the Maori culture; the wisdom of her uncle, an expert bone carver; memories of candlelit family dinner parties; recollections of her mother's signature perfumes. "I'm really attracted to old-fashioned craft," says the mother of three. "Nobody makes hand-blown glass the way we do; we're still using old wooden moulds... each piece of glass is different. And that's what people who like our brand enjoy about it, that they're receiving something unique."

As Curio Noir's creative force, Tiffany contracts production to a team of skilled artisans. The candles are made using biodegradable botanical wax sourced from a sustainable plantation, contain lead-free cotton wicks and the glass is shaped to enable future use as vases. The scents are concocted with the help of French perfumers using fragrances created in Grasse; there's meaning behind each one. "A candle can sometimes take years to develop. I'm not just whipping up some fig and pomegranate and chucking it in a jar. It's not something I want to be on-trend with. The candles are a first voice for what I'd like to create, rather than thinking, 'this is what's right now'."

The development of Curio Noir has deliberately been slow burn, with products stocked only in New Zealand and Australia. This year, however, a flagship store will open in Ponsonby, designed by interior architect Rufus Knight, the mind behind Lonely's Auckland boutique. "We're expanding with more products, extending our range beyond candles and enhancing our perfumery section. I want it to be a whole experience."

Part of this experience is Curio Film (curionoir.com), a collaboration with Andy. As a former drummer, music is a big part of

There are scented candles, and then there are scented candles. Tiffany Jeans' Curio Noir creations are emphatically the latter, a captivating alchemy of exquisite fragrances blended with memories, dreams and emotions. Perhaps what makes them truly special is the beguiling balance of light and dark - it's a kind of magic.

As singular a beauty as each of her pieces, Tiffany takes a seat wearing black silk Miss Crabb, make-up free bar a sweep of matte pink lipstick, her tresses tumbling to her waist. As she explains how she seeks to make each of her scents akin to "a piece of silk that envelopes you", she seems the embodiment of her goal in more ways than one.

Old flame, burning desire - there's an undeniable romance to a flickering candle. Indeed, Curio Noir is an enterprise born of love. Set to marry drummer-turned-film-

The Vetyver Bouquet candle combines orange flower, cypress, jasmine and vetyver.



director Andy Morton, their wedding theme 'Till death do us part' led then-stylist Tiffany to create miniature skull candles for guests, drawing on her sculpting skills. Tulle-wrapped and paired with hand-written notes, these were no ordinary bomboniere.

"I remember thinking, 'I could turn this into something'," she says. "But for me it was more than just making someone a candle, it was about gifting my time. And that's what I feel the whole essence of the brand is - a gift of pure time, energy, care and appreciation."

Sensing an opportunity, friend and fashion designer Kristine Crabb suggested Tiffany sell her creations at her Miss Crabb boutique in Ponsonby, Auckland. "I wasn't thinking commercially at all back then, but I realised that people wanted something else," says Tiffany.

The 'Lilith Doll' candle was just that. "One night I woke up and said to Andy, 'I've just

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had a dream that this doll appeared in front of me'. As I'd collected porcelain dolls for years, I decided to cast different dolls to see what worked best."

Founded in 2011 and named Curio Noir for the curios Tiffany began making at night as her children slept, the venture is hugely influenced by her heritage: the



their lives, and essential to these cinematic artworks are the soundtracks, devised by the couple and composer Milon Williams. Tiffany enthuses about her and Andy’s creative partnership. “He visualises things in such a different way – he can make things come to life.”

Instrumental to Tiffany’s success are three business partners: two are mentors she meets with weekly, while the third, based overseas, is an invaluable sounding board. “As long as you stick with like-minded people who continue to lift you and your brand, your experience [in business] will be positive... it’s staying true to what you believe and visualise, and working very hard to make it happen.

“What makes it all worthwhile is when people enjoy the gift. I love hearing people’s take on what they feel when they smell the scent or hold the glass, and where they put it in their home. One lovely customer took his Lilith Doll on a trip around the world with him for a year, so the scent permeated wherever he was. That, for me, is everything.”

Also a yoga and Pilates instructor and an ambassador for skincare brand Dermalogica, Tiffany hopes to one day pass the Curio Noir torch to her own children and beyond. “A friend of mine has been in Rwanda with a

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charity that works with teenagers... we’ve talked about me going over there because I’d love to teach girls how to make candles so they can start their own businesses. We currently sponsor the Sepilok Orangutan Sanctuary in Borneo, so I’m ethically conscious, but my business isn’t quite at the point when I can give as much as I’m aiming to. We’re young, but I feel good about the direction we’re heading.” ■

PIECE BY PIECE: A FEW OF HER FAVOURITE CURIOS



“My ‘Lilith Doll’ earrings by Zora Bell Boyd Jewellery, the most thoughtful gift.”

“My amazing Alexander McQueen pumps – a gift from my husband.”

“My original Lanvin perfume bottles, which were handed down to me. They’re a huge source of inspiration; one still has perfume inside it.”

“The black amethyst crystal that sits in our lounge. Black amethyst enables us to have the strength to face our inner darkness and find it beautiful, helping us understand there’s always balance to be found and that good and evil are by no means absolute.”

“A kete woven by my cousin Tahlia. I use it as a clutch.”

“The wood carving my cousin Randall made for me. This Maori chief protects our home from bad spirits.”

“My ‘Humility’ ring by Jessica McCormack, which my husband bought for me when I was pregnant with our youngest child.”