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Burning bright

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With a fusion of French savoir-faire and Australian can-do attitude and creativity, Elise Pioch Balzac has built a global luxury candle business taking Australian native ingredients to the world. Maison Balzac employs indigenous botanicals and Australian soy waxes to create candles that burn bright on the international stage.

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Elise Pioch Balzac had one of the best jobs in the Paris fashion world when she decided to throw it all in and move to Australia on a whim. Over four years working for French luxury label Hermes, Pioch Balzac organised fashion shows, magazine editorials and interviews with then-designer Martin Margiela, before Margiela quit the brand in 2003.

“I was so fond of Margiela that I left Hermes when he left,” says Pioch Balzac.

On an impulse, she booked a flight to Melbourne the following year.

“I came to Australia without knowing one single person,” she says. “I didn't have a job waiting for me nor a place to live and in retrospect I think it demanded a lot of courage to do what I did, aged 27.”

The courage paid off. What was supposed to be a temporary dalliance turned into a permanent love affair – “the optimism, kindness and honesty of Australia made me decide to stay” – and the decision to found a luxury Australian candle company that is now one of world’s most coveted brands.

As the founder of Maison Balzac, Pioch Balzac creates exquisitely perfumed handmade candles stocked worldwide in stores such as The Conran Shop in Paris, Neiman Marcus in the USA, and Selfridges in London. Each candle is an ode to memories of her French childhood – it was a particularly strong bout of homesickness that convinced her to try to capture the olfactive experiences of her upbringing.

“They are like Proust’s madeleine for me,” she says of her candles. “I named the brand after my grandparents, Jeanine and André Balzac, who taught me a sense of style and balance.”

Where Proust employed words, Pioch Balzac deploys scent to create evocatively titled and scented candles such as *Le Soleil*, which recalls the orange juice her mother used to press for her each morning, *Le Bois*, which captures a walk in a pine forest, and *La Rose*, which is reminiscent of the rose petals her grand mother used to dry in the afternoon sun.



French flair, Australian fragrance

While the roots of the brand are inspired by its creator's idyllic childhood in the South of France, Pioch Balzac proudly uses Australian essential oils and soy waxes to create her candles, working with Australian makers and perfumers to tell a story through perfume. The result is a product that fuses French savoir-faire with the boundless creativity that comes of living in an optimistic, youthful nation.

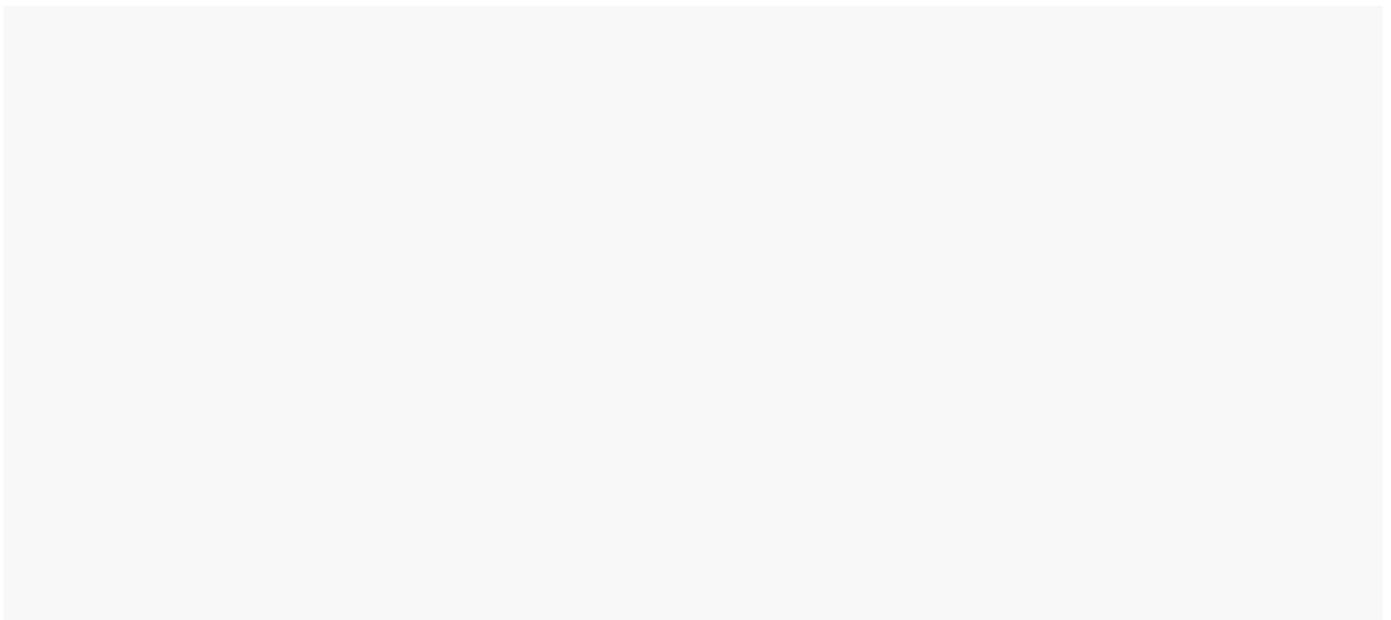
"I don't believe that starting Maison Balzac would have been possible in France as when I was in the early process of development my French friends and family tried to talk me out of it, saying it would be too hard and would never work," says Pioch Balzac. "But everybody I was sharing my idea with in Australia told me to do it right away and were even asking if they could do anything to help make it happen! The Australian appetite for new ideas, challenges and mateship is boundless. Creating my brand here was refreshing and powerful."

Native Australian ingredients were a key part of that process, with lemongrass, eucalyptus, lemon myrtle, cedarwood and native ginger among the essential oils and botanicals used in Maison Balzac candles.

"Some of the best essential oils come from Australia and there is something very recognisable in the pure botanicals grown here," says Pioch Balzac. "They have that clean, strong and wild aspect that you identify after you have travelled in the bush once in your life. You never forget these perfumes."

Maison Balzac's distinctive opaque white glass packaging with simple, brightly coloured lettering reflects the branding and marketing skills she learned first at Hermes, then later at the Belinda, Marni, and Corner Shop boutiques where she worked as a buyer in Sydney from 2007 before founding Maison Balzac in 2013.

"I first learnt how to create and drive a genuine brand identity (at Hermes) then I learnt how to sell and finance a strong brand at Belinda," she says. "I always thought that if I was going to offer my personal story in each product, they had to come in a very personal, unique box too and we are proud that they stand out in the best boutiques around the world."





A post shared by PARFUMS D'IDEES (@maisonbalzac) on Mar 27, 2017 at 1:5...

Designed to shine

Pioch Balzac now expresses her love of design and style through candle collaborations with Australian creatives, including Sydney fashion brand Romance Was Born (*La Romance*), Sydney floral artist and philosopher Dr Lisa Cooper (1642) and New York-based Australian swimwear brand Matteau (*La Plage*).

The brand's most quintessentially Australian candles are *L'Etrangeté* and *L'Obscurité*, a collaboration with Australian artist duo Lyn & Tony, which were used to scent the Australian Pavilion of the 2016 Venice Biennale of Architecture.

"Each fragrance narrates opposite aspects of this country," says Pioch Balzac.

While *L'Etrangeté* is about the freshness of a morning in Byron Bay with notes of native ginger, hemp and lemon myrtle, *L'Obscurité* captures the darkness of an evening in the bush with notes of red cedar, burnt wood and smoke.

"It's only when you burn both candles together that you get a complete understanding of what Australia is about," she says.

In the past four years business has doubled each year and Pioch Balzac now employs an in-house team of five as well as contracting 20 companies to help produce products that from the very beginning were designed with a global market in mind.

"I always had an international vision for the collection, simply because I belong to two countries myself," she says.

"On a creative level, being in Australia taught me to believe everything is possible and being so far away from where I grew up, gave me the objectivity to look at (my idea) with fresh eyes and isolate what really mattered

to me.”

Find out more about [Maison Balzac](#).

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