

Let. It. Burn. SoulCycle's Jonathan Adler Grapefruit Scented Candle.

Cody Musselman



Jonathan Adler, Grapefruit-scented Jonathan Adler candle at SoulCycle fitness studio, 2010s, Boston, photograph © Cody Musselman.



Jonathan Adler, Grapefruit-scented Jonathan Adler candle at SoulCycle fitness studio, 2010s, Boston, photograph © Cody Musselman.

- 1 “From the very beginning there were no accidents. We really labored over what the logo was going to look like, the fonts that we were going to use, what the voice sounded like, what the studio smelled like. There were no sensory details left unturned,” SoulCycle co-founder Julie Rice explained.¹ SoulCycle, the boutique fitness company, gained national recognition in the early 2000s as an exclusively priced, spiritually-inflected spin cycling experience with devout users. The experience is immersive and SoulCycle executives liken it to live theater, with an instructor both performing the movements and guiding the mood of the 45-minute class. The final objective of any class is not merely to count calories burned, but to achieve catharsis in what SoulCyclers call “[the breakthrough moment](#).”
- 2 While a stationary bike is the main conduit for the SoulCycle experience, perhaps no object plays a greater role in facilitating SoulCycle’s choreography of emotion than the brand’s signature grapefruit-scented candle. Stationed around the studio lobby, the scent greets you at the door. Long before you find yourself seated atop a stationary bike

in a cramped room of exercisers cycling to nowhere, the candle greets your senses when you step across the threshold into SoulCycle's self-care [sanctuary](#). Confronted with a signature scent, you, as a customer, "feel like you're already out of the mundane world" before the work of spiritual and physical transformation even begins.² Ritualists and scholars of religion have long noted how smell, more than other sensory cues, infiltrates the body. "Space only really 'possesses' minds by smell," Michel de Certeau observes. "Smell changes the surface of the things before you into a volume in which you are caught. . . . When you smell it, it means you are already in it, or more precisely, you are of it."³ Breathing in, you become in and of SoulCycle's highly curated brand.

- 3 The candles serve a ritual function as well. During class [four large candles](#) burn on the raised instructor's podium, shedding light in the otherwise dark fitness studio. Before the penultimate song instructors select an honored rider to blow out the candles and initiate the "soulful moment" portion of class in which riders pedal in darkness while instructors deliver [sermonic reflections](#) on self-worth, tenacity, and spiritual manifestation over the beats of soul-filled tunes.
- 4 In its final aromatic act, the bittersweet citrus-scented candle is a marker of status and division. The result of a partnership with celebrity designer Jonathan Adler, it bears the double imprint of luxury. For \$42 (\$6 more than a single SoulCycle class), you can buy the candle for use at home. Designed in NYC, manufactured in Canada, stored in a New York warehouse, and shipped to your doorstep, the candle will burn 40 hours (the equivalent of 53 SoulCycle classes) beckoning breakthroughs and serving as the material evidence of an elite spiritual economy.

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Notes

1. Julie Rice, “SoulCycle’s Founders Sweated the Details of Their Brand,” *Inc*, December 27, 2016, <https://www.inc.com/video/soulcycle/why-soulcycles-founders-sweated-the-details-of-their-brand.html>; Rina Raphael, “SoulCycle Just Launched a New Media Division,” *Fast Company*, June 20, 2018, <https://www.fastcompany.com/40587603/soulcycle-just-launched-a-new-media-division>.
2. PandoDaily, *A Fireside Chat with SoulCycle Co-Founders Elizabeth Cutler and Julie Rice* (New York City, 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zk3WP4XtWtw>.
3. Michel de Certeau, *The Possession at Loudon*, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 33-34.



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