

Aromatic Arabia

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After years of catering to the GCC region, with heavy oil-based perfumes, niche perfume makers are finally expanding into the international market with new Eau de Toilette formulations, body creams and bath lines. Are traditional Arabian perfumes the world's next big thing?

Unlike in the past when we saw limited new fragrance launches, and we found ourselves loyal to one brand, today we have several annual launches and a plethora of choices. Given this reality many of us now crave the next best thing. Luxury brands such as Chanel and Dior have become billion dollar businesses due to our desire to consume more, so they keep creating new fragrance offerings. With these and other luxury European brands dominating the global fragrance market, houses in the Middle East find themselves in a unique position. Consumers seem bored with the cluttered market offerings and are therefore keen to find unique scents, which deliver both on exclusivity and originality. Arabian brands such as Amouage, Ajmal and Nyaomi have realised this, the fact that they could have sweet formulas, which could translate their businesses into the global billion-dollar entities.

Amouage

Amouage for example has a rich 25 years of history creating original spicy luxury scents favoured by most of the royal house of the GCC. The brain child of the late Sayyid Hamad bin Hamoud Al Busaidi on the request of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, (the ruler of the Sultanate of Oman) the brand has become one of the sort after fragrances in this region. Legend says when the brand was created, the Sultan wanted a scent that would reflect his heritage and traditions. He wanted to give this fragrance as a gift to honoured guests who wanted to remember him and their time in Oman. So the ingredients had to be from Oman, so he asked for frankincense from Dhofar in the south of the country and rock rose from the

Jebel Akhdar mountain range, which towers over the Sultanate's beautiful capital, Muscat were used in the perfume.

Today, several years since its establishment, Amouage wants to take its unique authenticity as a Arabian perfume house to the international market. The current CEO of the brand, David Crickmore, shared his aspiration to introduce the fragrance line into the luxury segmentation in the stores of New York, Paris, London and Asia. "We are an exclusive brand and we want to retain this aspect as well launch our product lines internationally," he said. Clarifying their position he adds: "We do not see ourselves as an Arabian brand, rather we see ourselves as an international brand

Rasasi Tasmeen - Tasmeen comes with delightful floral top notes including jasmine, and rose, with a woody woody drydown - perfect for all day wear for the confident woman. In another delightful twist, Rasasi offers up Darin, with its notes of lavender and citrus, and base notes of amber to create that rare oriental mystique.



Rasasi Attar Al Mahabba - Rasasi Attar Al Mahabba has a flowery, woody and musky notes and symbolises innocence, portrays femininity and evokes the magical moments of love. The perfume opens with notes of bergamot and neroli with a touch of jasmine and ylang extract that will take you through a romantic voyage. The base note wraps up with musk, sandalwood and styrax that leaves an irresistible and invigorating trail of passion and pleasure.

TRADITIONAL ARABIAN PERFUMES



Ajmal Ghalla - is the persona of a woman with beautiful eyes, who aspires beyond the normal. The oriental fragrance is coherent to the modern woman of today, exuding self-confidence. Ghalla offers the modern woman an element of individuality and passion for the one who is self-reliant, aspiring the finer things in life. Designed for the sophisticated, glamorous and intelligent woman, this Eau de Parfum captures the mind, heart and soul.

Ajmal Khallab - Blended with natural oils and ingredients, this oriental fragrance is an alluring appearance of chic and style. Suggesting fascination and attraction, Khallab appeals to the traditionally rooted yet modern individuals. The bold brassy bottle with the rich scent is a symbol of sophistication influencing those who aspire for finer things in life. The oriental concentrate emanates a feel good factor offering the modern man and woman a fresh yet spicy flavor with a touch of floral and woody tones.



Amouage Jubilation 25 for Women - this fragrance commences with rare and unusual top notes of rose, ylang ylang, lemon and farragen. Rose rose and frankincense - the most celebrated of Omani fragrances - characterise the heart notes, and combine harmoniously with additional floral notes of rose and darana. The fragrance is given depth and warmth in the base notes, through the harmonious use of amber, musk, vetiver, patchouli and yprsh



Dia Body Cream with Box



Gold Body Cream

that uses ingredients, ideas and marketing angles from this part of the world and that is what makes us different."

Their fragrance lines follow Arabic traditional themes, which ensures their tag line make complete sense. Known as the 'Gift of Kings,' they recently celebrated their 25th Anniversary and created a new product line to celebrate their royal heritage. A winning formula by the recent sales figures, which he shared surpassed expectations. They also enjoyed the highest sales figures of their entire 25 year history which is commendable. "I think these figures can be attributed to the fact that we can guarantee that our products are of the highest quality. That is what the luxury customers is looking for in their brand, Crickmore explains.

To fulfill their international launch aspirations, Crickmore hired Christopher Wong as Amouage's new Creative Director. Wong's background is in classical music not perfumery, which makes for an interesting appointment. Crickmore deliberately chose someone outside the industry so that person could bring

new influences to their brand. So for the 25th Anniversary celebrations of Amouage, Wong created Jubilation 25 for women.

Wong worked with the best noses in Paris and the south of France to get the scent just right. They create several trial scents, then shortlisted what he thought would evoke the best emotions of their inspiration. To go with this new line Amouage also launched a new bath and body line. A move which can be interpreted as following the concept of western brands which have long extended their own perfume lines into bath and body lines. "No, we don't think we're diluting the brand by following this route," clarifies Crickmore. "It's something that our customers have been asking for, for quite some time. We feel that it's a natural progression for very successful fragrances like Gold and Dia. It's following the whole layering concept perfected in the West. You use the shower gel in the bath, then you put on the cream, wash your hands with the soap and later on put on the fragrance. You've layered your body with different levels of the fragrance. And some

people don't want to use the fragrance because they find it too strong. So layering enables these ladies who want something a little lighter to just put on the cream, or use the shower gel."

Amouage has achieved success in Russia even Vladimir Putin, the president, wears Dia, one of their classic scents. In Ukraine, they have managed to achieve the number one status among niche brands. In that country they are rated 10th and this against international brands such as Christian Dior and Chanel.

Ajmal
Another traditional perfume house which like Amouage has a rich regional history is Ajmal Perfumes. The brand name means 'most beautiful' in Arabic. With over 55 years of experience, it has specialised in traditional perfumes and carved a niche market for itself, and now wants to take its range globally. Ajmal known in the regional perfume industry as an innovator and pioneer in the way they market original perfume products to the Arab and Western markets. Founded by Ajmal Al in the early 1950's, Ajmal Perfumes has grown into one of the region's most trusted brand. It is a family-owned business currently steered by the passion of the second and third-generation Ajmals, who now play key roles in the brand's development.

One of them is Abdullah Ajmal, the first among the third generation of his family to go into the business. After working in the United Kingdom, Abdulla returned to Dubai where he further developed the French aligned fragrance line within Ajmal Perfumes and succeeded in diversifying Ajmal's clientele through an effective brand-positioning strategy. His mission is to introduce Ajmal Perfumes to more countries in the region as well as abroad and to create a broader range of products for them to evolve into a lifestyle brand.

Bambi Ranga - The Bambi fragrance is a celebration of femininity. Vibrant yet complex the fragrance is for the confident woman of today. With top notes of lemon, bergamot, black pepper and raspberry, the fragrance deepens which instantly embrace the senses followed by a heady mix of tuberose, wisteria, violet leaves, ylang ylang, rose and lily of the valley and finally settling with the delicate smells of sandalwood, patchouli, musk and vanilla.



BEAUTY STORY



Orient - A distinct fragrance, orient encapsulates the romance and delicate beauty of the region. Subtle yet provocative, orient offers a seductive blend of bergamot, saffron, blackcurrant and nutmeg which instantly tantalises the senses, followed by heart notes of ylang and a subtle bouquet of geranium, ylang



Gold Bath and Shower Gel



Dia Body Cream with Box



Gold Hand Cream

"About 10 years ago, we'd realised that as a fragrance house, our specialisation should not be for only one community. Our perfumes transcend cultural barriers and that is why we included our Rouh Al Khaleej and Muhuja in the Dubai International Film Festival gift bags," shares Abdullah. "We believe that celebrities will be drawn to their individuality. In the International market, large brands create trends and others follow. Whereas here, we create the trend for our region and export that to others. The beauty and fashion industries in the West today are cynical, and want to create perfumes that are more earthy and oriental and that's is what we specialise in. How ironic is that?" he adds.

With the trends changing, specially with younger Arabs exposed to other cultures and international influences their taste have evolved. "We started noticing that when more international brands came into the market and younger customers wanted variety. We started noticing that consumer tastes were changing," Abdulla shares. "Of course, in the past people were always travelling abroad, but their traditions were rooted firmly in Arabia. Today our customers are more modern and classified amongst the chicest crowd, yet they still want to retain their culture. So in the last two to three years we have positioned ourselves as an ethnic chic brand. When we go global, this will always be our positioning. For example, we're available in Sephora where you have other international brands, so how can we not stand out? We needed to have a look and ethnicity is going to keep our identity secure. We are also doing well in Duty Freees and airlines are among our biggest customers. Travellers want to take home with them something which reflects sophistication, authenticity and of course which is ethnically Arabian."

When it comes to the creative process, the main nose for the company is Abdullah's uncle Nazir Ajmal, who also serves as a consultant in western companies researching the use

of oriental fragrances. They also work with different noses globally to maintain variety of scents within their collection. Aside from that, there are also two panels that work on the scents to make sure that they get the taste of the consumer. The first panel is Abdullah and his team who shortlists the scents created by their noses and technicians. The scent are then sent to the second panel which is composed of consumers which gives them the consumer perspective.

Currently, Ajmal Perfumes have 107 retailers in the region and they intend to double this number within the next two to three years. They are looking into setting up new stores within the GCC and beyond. They have also taken on an international design firm to revamp the whole look of the store to make it more inviting and less intimidating as part of their foray into the international market. When it comes to the preference of their market, they have perfected the system. "Local clientele usually want something new but with expatriates, if they like a product, they will stick with it. They will try something else but they will always come back. In our current lines, I think 'Shadow' and its Arabic counterpart 'Teyf', which also means 'Shadow' will do phenomenally. It's two different references. Shadow is for the male while Teyf is a floral fragrance, it's more oriental and floral. These two are very popular even with the expatriate crowds."

In the meantime, if clients are looking for more classical and traditional sent, then Moattaq would be the scent for them. Currently, 60 percent for their clients are Arabs and 40 percent are a mix of Asians, Westerners and Expat Arabs who like the contemporary range. "Marketing is the key," Abdullah stresses. "We don't target tourists as much because we don't want to be seen as the store you go to when you go to the souq. We are a luxurious experience, not the dune bashing. We are a lifestyle, not a souvenir. Now, wherever we are available we are part

of a person's lifestyle, and where we are not there yet, we will be in the near future."

Watch this space

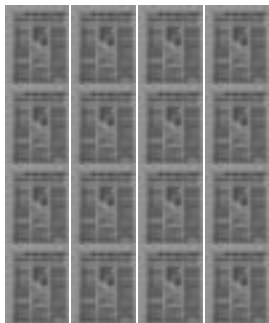
Although not as big as the Amouage or Ajmal brand, Rasasi is yet another brand keen to sell traditional scents to the West. Formed in 1979 in Dubai and run as a family enterprise, their maiden labels was the 'Blue Lady' which has remained the company's highest earner of their Western range. In 2007, they successfully launched deodorant products and opened five new stores in Saudi Arabia, announcing their regional and eventually international plans.

Another little known, that seem to look to inspiration from the US-based international brand Victoria Secrets, why re-invent the wheel afterall. The KSA-based lingerie company, Nayomi, launched their own signature perfume in 2002. It was an immediate hit, and Shaza became a widely appreciated fragrance by both local and expat customers. So when they expanded their lines to also include body and bath lines, home accessories, scent cushions and candles it was a natural assumption that they would become as successful as the Victoria Secrets ranges. In total the brand has to date launches 12 EDTs and over 60 beauty products including oils, fragrances and home accessories. Not bad for a little lingerie company from the Gulf.

Fatima - reflects the trendy and confident 21st century woman. Stylish and romantic, it combines top notes of soft bergamot, mandarin and tea combining the senses, followed by heart notes of peonias and orchid



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