

A tribute to oriental scent

In the world of Arabic perfumes, the oud fragrance is one of the most popular, with its distinct wooden aroma. For Ajmal Perfumes, the secret lies in the distillation. In its limited edition perfume, only the most precious oud has been used, making just one millilitre of the perfume more expensive than a 50 millilitre bottle of Chanel No 5, at Dh416 per millilitre. The limited edition is part of the Dahn Al Oudh collection and is one of the most expensive perfumes on the market. A 12ml bottle retails at Dh5,000, making the cost of one litre about Dh416,000. Meanwhile, the Omani perfume house Amouage is also renowned for its beautiful packaging.

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THE BEST OF THE BEST: PERFUMES

A tribute to oriental fragrance

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With perfume such a big seller internationally, it is attracting more and more prestigious names. Kilian Hennessy, the heir to the Hennessy Cognac family and grandson of the founder of the Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy (LVMH) Group, switched from a career in marketing for perfume houses to creating his own line of perfume. His perfumes, named by Kilian, retail at about \$2,500 (Dh9,000) for one litre. They can be found in exclusive stores such as Bergdorf Goodman in New York.

Ajmal Perfumes was founded by Ajmal Ali in the 1950s in Assam, India and branched out to the UAE in 1976. The brand means "most beautiful" in Arabic. It creates perfumes and beauty products, as well as high-quality traditional Arabic fragrance products for the body and home. It has 36 stores in the UAE and 106 across the GCC, as well as dealerships around the world.

The limited edition was released two years ago and only 2,500 bottles were made to coincide with the year 2005. To date, only about 1,000 have been sold.

According to Nazir Ajmal, chief operating officer and chief perfumer at Ajmal, the product is designed as a tribute to oriental fragrances and sales revenue is only secondary to that. "It is a collector's item designed for connoisseurs of fine oriental fragrances and such items don't really add to the overall sales figures. It is a product for our valued consumers to cherish for a lifetime."

The perfume is marketed to both men and women, although about 70 per cent of buyers are women.

The price is driven by the key ingredient oud, which is becoming a rare oil.

Oud comes from agarwood. Also known as aloeswood, heartwood, or eaglewood, agarwood is not actually wood but forms as a resinous substance deep inside some kinds of trees from Southeast Asia. The aromatic resin is sticky and malleable and forms within Aquilaria trees.

Overharvesting of Aquilaria trees has made oud more precious. The trees are protected in most countries and it is illegal to collect agarwood from natural forests. To ensure the survival of these trees, international agreements such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora have been introduced.

For the limited edition, Ajmal sources its oud from Assam in India and the oud has been aged for more than a decade. Like any perfume house, Ajmal has a perfumer, or "nose", who creates the fragrance. Without revealing the company's trade secrets, Nazir Ajmal explained the process.

"Dahn Al Oudh is a precious essence that varies in flavour depending on its origin. The design aspect comes in only if you decide to mix two different qualities of Dahn Al Oudh or create a mix with other precious ingredients like rose for example."

The scents made good sense in the business world, making Ajmal a multi-million dollar family-owned business. Its divisions, such as essential oils, are always looking to innovate and Ajmal has invested in technology to meet this challenge. The company invested more than Dh36 million in a new 150,000 square foot facility in Dubai, which offers a high-tech automated production unit, including a state-of-the-art research wing. The bottle is just as important as the fragrance when it comes to marketing perfumes. The limited edition is beautifully presented in a handcrafted, crystal bottle. The bottle features a gold-plated collar and tip.

The Omani perfume house Amouage is also renowned for its beautiful packaging. Amouage's distinctive bottles were created by British luxury lifestyle house Asprey.

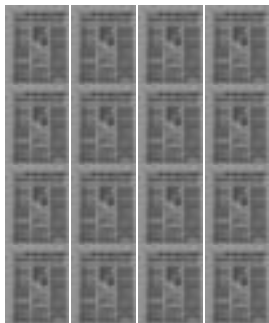
Amouage was founded 25 years ago by the Omani Royal family to keep the tradition of Arabian perfumery alive. Today, the perfumes are available in retail outlets such as Paris Gallery, but were traditionally offered as gifts by Omani royalty and senior ministers to heads of state on official visits to Oman.

The perfumes have also caught the eye of celebrities such as actors Pierce Brosnan and Benjamin Bratt.

The bottle is as important as the fragrance when it comes to marketing

The Dahn Al Oudh's price is driven by the oud used, which is a rare oil

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