

Crafting a successful future in fragrances

As far as Nazir Ajmal is concerned, there is no competition. When it comes to perfumery, he believes there are no other Made-in-Dubai brands that have the reach, the heritage or the unique selling proposition of Ajmal, his 58-year-old company. Nazir's company has just launched a Dh50 million campaign to give its stores spread across the GCC a retail makeover. The three-year campaign, titled 'Crafting Memories' will see all 120 Ajmal outlets with a completely modern retail ambience, says Nazir. Unveiled at the Ajmal outlet in BurJuman recently, Nazir says three more shop makeovers are scheduled to be completed this year, 12 by next year, with the others to follow suit.

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Crafting a successful future in fragrances

Local brand Ajmal is undergoing a major retail makeover to stay ahead of the competition

DUBAI David Tusing

As far as Nazir Ajmal is concerned, there is no competition. When it comes to perfumery, he believes there are no other Made-in-Dubai brands that have the reach, the heritage or the unique selling proposition of Ajmal, his 58-year-old company.

"I don't know of any other perfume company that has the local expertise, our international presence and the uniqueness of our story," says the chief perfumer and COO.

Nazir's family comes from a long line of perfumers originating from the North East Indian state of Assam, from where Arabian traders are believed to have brought the first samples of oudh as we now popularly know it.

But despite the assertion that competition barely exists, it seems even rich traditions need a bit of a tweak sometimes. Nazir's company has just launched a Dh50 million campaign to give its stores spread across the GCC a retail makeover.

The three-year campaign, titled 'Crafting Memories' will see all 120 Ajmal outlets with a completely modern retail ambience, says Nazir.

Ethnicity is an important part of our brand identity

Nazir Ajmal, COO



"While ethnicity is an important part of our brand identity, it can also denote being old. What we really want to be is ethnic chic. We want to stress on our heritage but at the same time showcase it within a stylish and contemporary environment," he says.

Unveiled at the Ajmal outlet in BurJuman recently, Nazir says three more shop makeovers are scheduled to be completed this year, 12 by next year, with the others to follow suit.

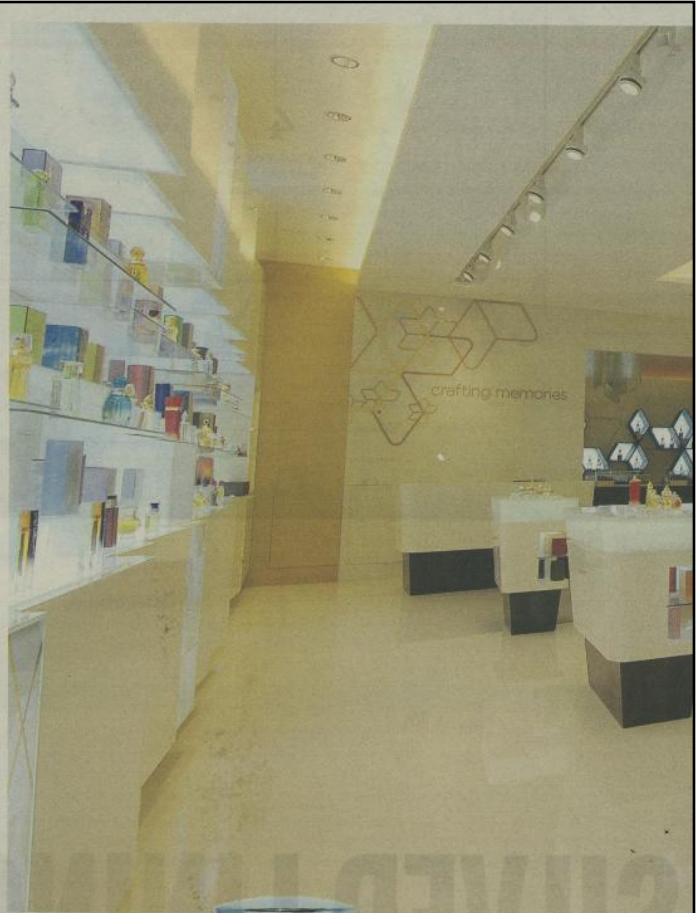
"We've been planning it for a long time and wanted to do it now when no one was doing anything and stalling their plans," he adds.

While sales have admittedly depleted, thanks to the economy, Nazir says growth has been steady for Ajmal, which recorded an annual turnover of \$200m (Dh724m) last year.

"Perfumes are non-essential items, so it will be easy to assume that the industry would suffer as a result. But the Middle East has a cultural requirement for perfumery and we continue to capitalise on that," he says.

"In other words, the threat is also the strength."

Ajmal is not just traditional scents and oils though.



Ever since it opened its Dubai manufacturing facility in 2004, a range of oriental and western fragrances have also been marketed under the brand.

Nazir, who trained under perfumers in France, says his company has successfully given traditional fragrances "a modern twist". He says he also works closely with leading western perfume houses, advising them on how to incorporate natural and oriental ingredients in their fragrance lines.

The company is also the only regional perfume manufacturer authorised to issue Quality Certificates on behalf of SASO, the Saudi



The new retail concept was introduced recently at the Ajmal store in BurJuman, Dubai



Arabian Standards Organisation – the authority for setting up and ensuring International Quality Standards in the region.

Ajmal was founded by Nazir's father, Haji Ajmal Ali in Assam, where Arabian travellers are believed to have first discovered the scent, derived from the Aquilaria tree common in the region. In the early 1950's, he started a trading house in Mumbai dealing in burgeoning oudh industry.

The company soon became one of the largest suppliers of oudh to the Middle East and quickly grew.

In 1994, it set up an R&D wing in Dubai with an initial capital of \$1m. And then in 2004, a 150,000sq ft manufacturing facility was opened in Al Quoz, built at a cost of \$10m.

The facility, which also houses the R&D department and key processes such as blending, filling and packaging, has the capacity to produce up to 50,000 bottles of fragrances per day, says Nazir.

"We are one of the few companies here who do everything from manufac-

turing, packaging to retail," he says. "I think that has also played an important part in how we maintain quality, keep prices in control and are able to further the brand."

The next step now, he says, is to go further afield, beyond the GCC.

"But I'd rather be in a market, which has a tradition of fragrances and understands it. For instance, I would prefer to go to France than the United States. We would like to capture Asia better too."

A Dubai brand is now well received anywhere, he adds.

"But we want to go steady. I am in no hurry."

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