

Heaven Scent

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The glamorous adventures of Miss Intrepid

HEAVEN SCENT

She'd always been able to sniff out the very best. But nothing could prepare her for meeting the 'nose of the Middle East' — the region's leading perfume man.

Well there's not too many places I haven't been, let me tell you. But I've always had a good 'nose' for places worth visiting. This month saw me park my Louis Vuitton latest season cases at the Ajmal perfume factory — a rather dusty looking building set within the entirely unglamorous surroundings of Al Quoz industrial estate in Dubai. But hear me out.

After dusting off my chinos, I was welcomed into a private room at the behest of the company's deputy chairman, Abdulla Ajmal. A very dashing man, indeed — and a good friend of mine, of course.

He holds the distinction of being the first of the third generation to join the family business. His mission is to introduce Ajmal Perfumes to more countries worldwide and to create a broader range of products.

"The perfume bottle is critical," Mr Ajmal tells me in his sumptuous, silky confident tones. "The container makes up 80% of the first purchase decision. But for the second purchase it's the juice alone that sells my products."

By 'juice', he means the wonderful aromas cooked up in his factory — a mix of contemporary and oriental scents. "The promise for us is always in the juice," he continues.

I ask whether the exotic perfumes are cooked up in cauldrons, stirred up with twigs by skinny old men in togas. Ajmal laughs in my face.



"Things have moved on a bit since then," he says, looking at me like I am a bit weird. But how am I supposed to know these things? I mean, I'm on a private jet most of the time.

Finally it's time for the tour — I've been so excited by the prospect of being surrounded entirely by expensive perfumes that I've barely slept a wink. "Making fragrances is still an art — most perfumes still contain up to 200 ingredients," the charismatic factory director continues. A little later, and we bump into the 'best nose in the Middle East', he's the man

employed by Ajmal Perfumes purely to dream up scents and he's been in the business of 'smelling' for decades. He seems like a very put-upon man. "Are you okay?" I ask him. "It must be really great to be able to smell everything — I can't smell much at all," I tell him.

He looks at me forlornly. "You have no idea how blessed you are. This nose for me is sometimes a curse. I smell everything — from someone who is dirty from metres away, to whether someone is happy or sad."

"Oh, that's not good," I say, "But I guess it makes your living?"

"Yes," he says. "All of my houses, my Bentleys — these are all from my nose."

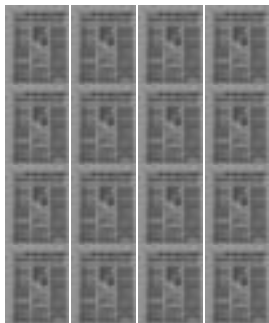
What a poor man. Figuratively, of course. Anyway I want to smell some more yummy perfumes. Mr Ajmal takes me through to the production rooms. It's like Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, rows upon rows of alluring scents boiling up in engorged test tubes. "I lament mass production, but this is the way the world is going," says Ajmal.

He shows me one small tank of oud oil, which is worth US\$120,000 alone. In the other rooms, he demonstrates how various concentrates are mixed together on-site and macerated for around six weeks, creating a unique scent. But some of the incense potions imbibe the wood for up to four months, creating a heady, intoxicating scent.

And finally in the bottling room, he shows me where up to 50,000 bottles of its signature 'Sacrifice' scent are being filled today. And that's another thing, the names of the perfumes are beautiful — 'Chemistry', 'Distraction', 'Innerspace' — and Ajmal says he just picks up the names as he goes along. "A friend will mention something and it'll stick in my head."

As Mr Ajmal takes his leave after taking me on the most enjoyable, magical mystery tour of perfumes, I wonder whether, one day, in the not too distant future, he'll name a bottle of fragrance after my favourite method of travel: *First Class*. ■

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