

Personal Perfume

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Jola Chudy takes notes on the art of creating a signature scent.

Ajmal stores emit a heavenly fragrance as you walk past, but as far as I was concerned, the perfumier was the preserve of elegant Arabian ladies who lunch. So when an invitation to mix my very own Ajmal perfume landed in my inbox with the kind of weighty 'ping' that only the best kind of invite makes, I was game for the scentsory challenge.

"There are five main groups of perfume," explained Abdulla Ajmal, gently lifting the chunky glass stoppers from each bottle and wafting them beneath my nose. Rows of perfume oils were lined up on gleaming shelves at the back of the store where you mix up your own, unique elixir. "There are woody, floral, Oriental and spicy oils; rose and jasmine are each considered a separate group," said Abdulla. "These are the main bases which we use to create an individual scent."

In business since 1951, Ajmal, meaning 'most beautiful' in Arabic, is a family company. Though oudh-based perfumes, deliciously pungent and smelling of burned wood, are popular, Ajmal also stock delicate fruity flavours, sweet sprays and modern, watery scents. The company has carved something of a niche for itself in the regional perfume industry. One of these innovative and fragrant niches is the 'My Inspiration' concept, which is surprisingly affordable. Prices range around the Dh\$100 mark for around 100ml of scent, or 34ml of oil.

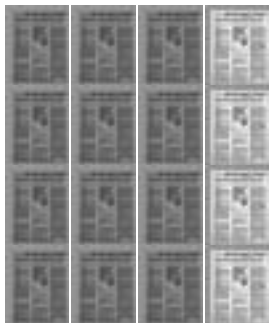
During the process, the different base oils are presented to the client, who can choose several they like. There are citrus, fruity and floral oils, as well as heady jasmine, sourced from India, pungent, locally produced oudh oil, and sweet vanilla, to which I immediately gravitated. "Vanilla is nice, but we don't want to use too much of it," advised Abdulla. "You don't want to end up smelling like cake."

For my own concoction, I chose seductive saffron, heady rose oil and the more-ish vanilla (just a drop!). Next, these were decanted into a single bottle, with proportions appropriate to the strength of each oil. Here is where the help of the experts comes in. Musk, a scent I would not have gone for, is commonly used in the greatest amount. "It helps to bind the scents together," explained Abdulla.

At their strongest concentration, the perfumes are always in oil form. The mixture can remain as oil, which can be beautifully packaged into an ornate bottle with a stopper. For those that prefer a lighter, all-over spray scent, the oil base can be mixed with an alcohol dilutant and packaged as a spray. And for those who lack inspiration, Ajmal has a comprehensive range of pre-created scents, which can be personalised with one of several pretty glass bottles.

■ My Inspiration, Ajmal. 100ml spray: Dh\$75-Dh\$100. 34ml oil: Dh\$75-Dh\$125. Mall of the Emirates. Tel: (04) 3414151

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