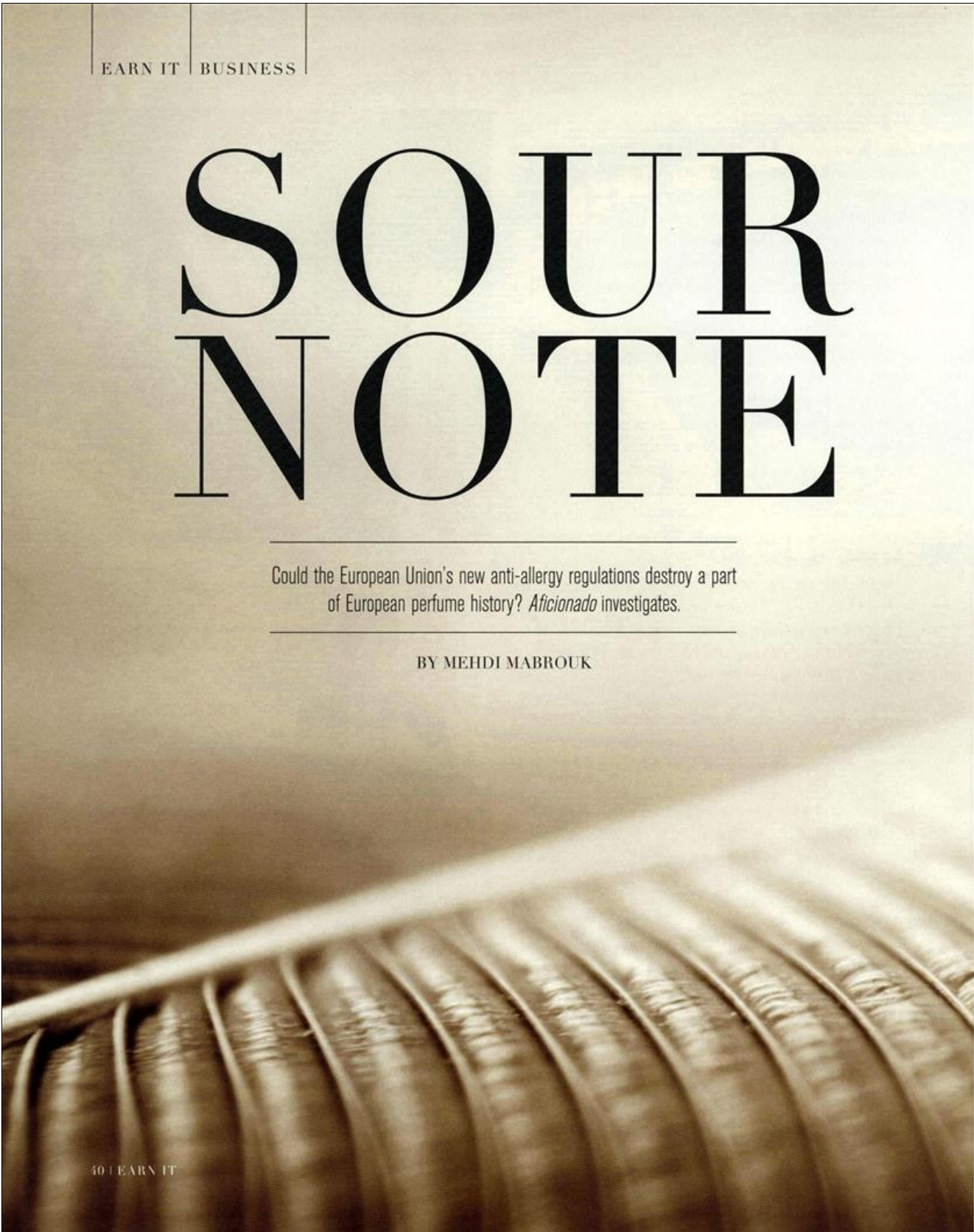


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SOUR NOTE

Could the European Union's new anti-allergy regulations destroy a part of European perfume history? *Aficionado* investigates.

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European perfume makers may soon have to change their fragrance composition due to new EU guidelines aiming to clamp down on the use of certain ingredients in January 2015.

Seaweed and oak mosses, which are found in the original versions of Chanel N°5 and Miss Dior, have made it on the banned substances list. The EU will also be banning certain synthetic scents such as lylal, which is allegedly used in some leading fragrances.

The European Commission, which was approached in 2012 by the Scientific Committee on Consumer Safety (SCCS), stating that certain substances used in perfumes were allergenic, proposes to ban atranol and chloroatranol, molecules present in extracts of foams trees, as well as their synthetic counterpart. It will not go as far as the SCCS requested, which wanted to simply ban the use of foams and certain woody notes that are found in perfumes as timeless as N°5 by Chanel or Miss Dior. Twenty six substances will be banned or reduced first, followed by 100 other allergenic components as part of those regulations.

According to the European Commission, manufacturers will have two to five years for their products to comply with the new standards by either changing the formula of their fragrances or removing them from the market.

It is not only the perfume manufacturers who will suffer, since they will have to change the formulas of the perfumes using the banned ingredients, but the organic cosmetics industry could be affected as well, because of its heavy use of natural essences, such as seaweed.

Industry feedback. By banning certain synthetic and natural ingredients, the European Commission is making perfume manufacturers' job even more difficult. "Once you change an ingredient or two, it can be very difficult to keep the scent absolutely intact, especially if those ingredients played an important role in defining the scent," says

Maurice Roucel, who created fragrances such as L'Instant for Guerlain and 24 Faubourg for Hermès, in a statement.

Perfume makers are definitely in a tough spot, with some of their iconic scents facing extinction or reformulation. "Many perfumes had to be reformulated, even though they were considered masterpieces, due to changing legislation," says Olivier Maure, head of Accords et Parfums, a perfume supplier of major brands, including Dior, in a statement.

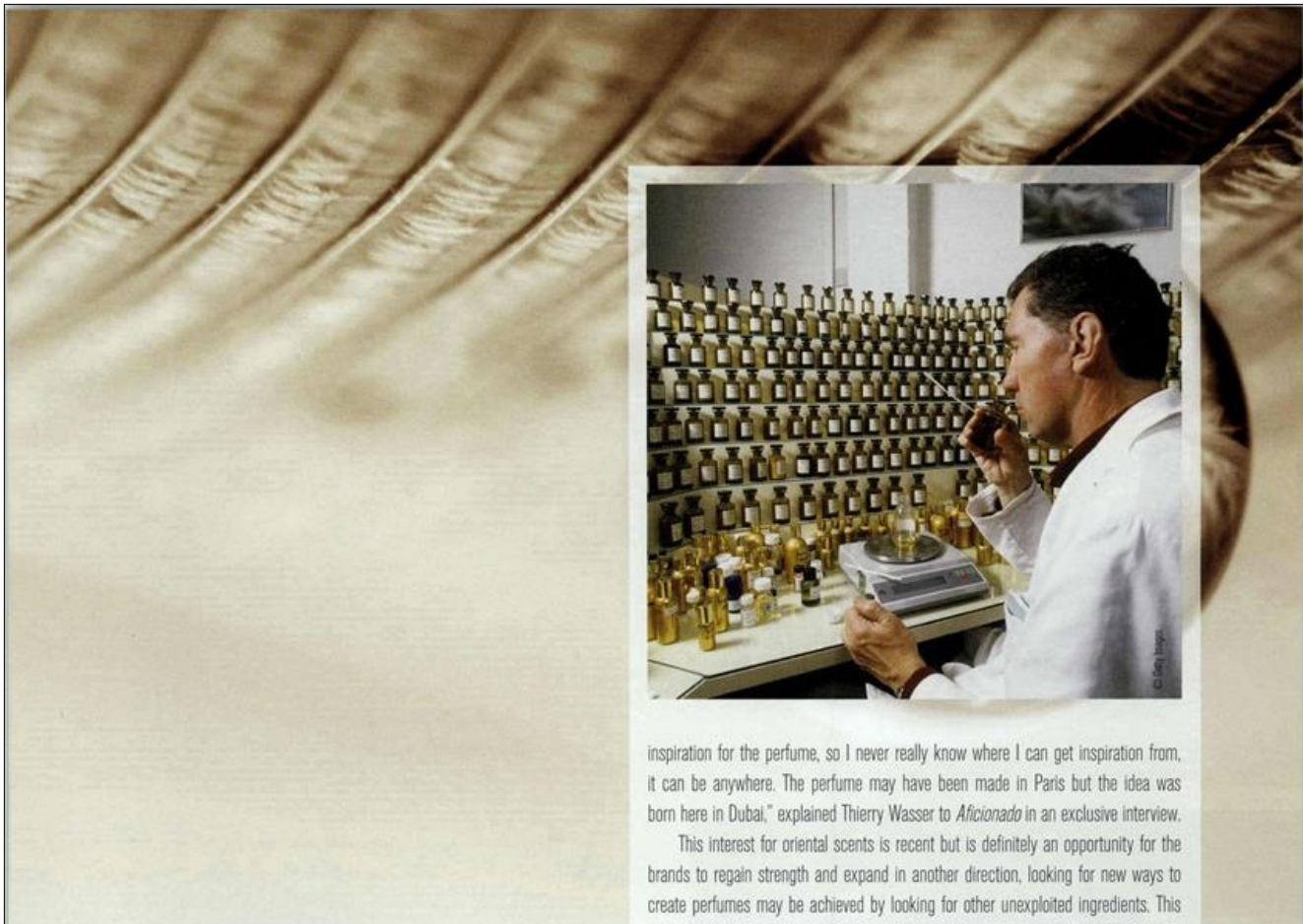
"I spend most of my time travelling, from India to Africa to find the best woods and plants for my perfumes and it is the most difficult part of my job," explained Thierry Wasser, Guerlain's fragrance expert or 'nose' during his last visit in Dubai, where he emphasised on the difficulty of sourcing good-quality ingredients for fragrances.

Perfume houses are now in a sticky situation, banning certain ingredients might be a challenge for expansion with new markets such as Asia and Russia looking for the authentic luxury fragrances they have been exposed to for so long.

It also complicates the production and the distribution, the question is, will companies set up production units in different markets or will they produce different versions of the same perfume for different markets?

For the time being, all the concerned perfumes are still on shelves in Europe, and with the holiday season around the corner, they will surely sell.

The Middle Eastern alternative. The region is known for its love of fragrances, and brands are aware of this phenomenon. "In the Middle East region, Saudi Arabia is, for us, the best-performing market, followed by Qatar. When I look at our rankings, they are the best in those two markets," explained Alain Lorenzo, CEO of fragrance brands at LVMH, earlier this year to *Aficionada*. "We know there is this tradition of [buying] oud-based fragrances in the region, which is why, over the past four to five



years, we have taken some of our best fragrances and launched their oud-based versions. However, I did not expect them to do so well."

The Middle East might be an opportunity for perfume makers. Customers in the region are, of course, interested in the luxury houses' classics, but enjoy the traditional perfumes they create as well. "We heard about the [large interest] from one of the Chalhoub Group's representatives who conducted research and told us about this amazing number, which really took me by surprise," adds Lorenzo.

Oud-based fragrances might be a way to disperse customers' attention by offering them iconic perfumes with a local twist, and brands are already following the trend.

"There are some things not defined by gender, but by mood. Gucci Oud is one of these. I wanted to create a fragrance that would evoke the sense you get when in a mysterious, captivating and unfamiliar land – when you are seduced by a curious experience, and dream of it afterwards," said Frida Giannini, creative director at Gucci, regarding the brand's oud version, Gucci Oud, of their flagship fragrance, Gucci by Gucci.

Fragrance makers are fascinated by the Middle East and they often get inspired by the local scents to create their latest fragrances.

"Trips here [in the Middle East] indeed make you learn, whether you go the souk or to those shops that only carry pure oud. They are Eden for me. For example, I looked at their lime and it felt different from the lime you get in Europe. That texture is now an



inspiration for the perfume, so I never really know where I can get inspiration from, it can be anywhere. The perfume may have been made in Paris but the idea was born here in Dubai," explained Thierry Wasser to *Aficionado* in an exclusive interview.

This interest for oriental scents is recent but is definitely an opportunity for the brands to regain strength and expand in another direction, looking for new ways to create perfumes may be achieved by looking for other unexploited ingredients. This trend is likely to pick up in Europe where oud, for instance, is unknown and not mentioned in the European Commission's regulations.

"There is what I call 'Oud Mania', everybody is doing oud, from people who don't know anything about it to oud professionals. In the past two years, there were probably more oud launches than our industry has done in the past decade. It is a name brands are using to attract customers. GCC customers are not fooled by this, but they are definitely attracted by the occidental interpretation of 'oudy' fragrances," says Abdulla A. Ajmal, general manager at Ajmal Perfumes, while talking about European perfume makers venturing into the oud market.

The perfume industry is starting to understand, but remains sceptical on the potential of traditional fragrances such as oud. "We used to develop these products primarily with the Middle East region in mind, but now, we have decided to introduce them in some European department stores, such as the Harrods in London and Galleries Lafayette in Paris. They are selling quite well in those markets, although they may not reflect a local interest since a lot of tourists from the Middle East region shop there. However, oud-based products are best sellers there as well," explained Lorenzo.

The year 2015 will be a difficult year for the perfume industry in Europe due to these regulations; however, this challenge might encourage the brands to innovate and go beyond their limits to create unique fragrances. The only sad note is that after almost a century, classic fragrances might have to be reformulated. ■