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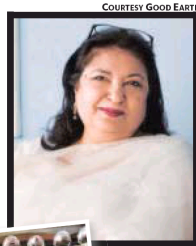
which the vapour, or rook, would travel. It took little remarkably rustic distillery for the manufacture of such a refined product, but as Gafoor explained, the simple machinery powered a manufacturing process that crystallized thousands of years of experience. For making *shamama*, for example, each family of distillers had their own secret combination of ingredients, which included licen, juniper berries, nutmeg, mace, turmeric, spikehead, oalmoss, cardamom, clove buds, laund berry, valerian and red sandalwood. After the different botanicals had been ground, the copper cauldron would be filled with around 40kg of water and the fires lit. At a certain temperature, the licen would be added and distilled for 14 hours into the *bhappa*. At the second distillation, 3kg of ingredients such as spikehead and valerian would be added. The third distillation would add unroasted ground spices; the fourth an aromatic crushed shell called *cham*. At each stage of distillation, a new layer of complexity would be added to the oil in the *bhappa*.

Different *ittars*, he explained, had to be made at different times of the day. As the jasmine's perfume was strongest at night, it had to be harvested before dawn, brought to the distillery no later than 4am, and the distillation begun before first light, when the perfume begins to disappear. The *ittar* of roses, in contrast, had to be distilled soon after dawn. For the *mitti* to mimic properly the scent of the monsoon, the fine-grained alluvial mud which formed the core of its structure had to be gathered just before the end of the summer heat.

After several weeks of distilling, the oil would be set aside to age. In due course, the *ittar* would be sold for a minimum of ₹1000 (around ₹83,000 now) a kilo. The problem, explained Gafoor, was that because many of the ingredients were either



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luxury product."

There are others who would beg to differ. Monika Ghurde, one of India's leading young perfumers, who trained in Thailand and Paris, and consulted for some of the top French brands, was convinced that there was much to be learned from traditional Indian perfumery. When she died tragically last year, she was researching the potential in adapting *ittar* for Western consumption in an alcohol-based form.

She had pointed out that there have been a few successful attempts at repackaging *ittars* and making them available at the Mehrauli Museum Shop, the store of the erstwhile maharaja of Jodhpur. This, she said, is what has happened in other countries. Dubai, for example, has managed to take the Arabian *ittars* into the modern mall and sell them as luxury items to the top tiers of UAE society.

or unobtainable—the trade in musk powder was banned in the 1970s, and that of sandalwood is now highly regulated—and because the users of *ittar* tended these days to be old and far from rich, certainly not from India's elite, who preferred imported Western scents, fewer and fewer *ittar* manufacturers were able to resist the temptation to substitute expensive botanicals for cheap chemicals. "I would guess as many as 80-90% now secretly adulterate their *ittar* with synthetics," he said. "The new generation know little about *ittar*. Few connoisseurs are left who can still appreciate the difference."

There are several impediments to growth. There is also a problem of fashion and perception: For many Indians, *ittar*

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DIVRINA DHINGRA

has come to be associated with grandmothers dabbing *ittar* behind their ears and bearded gentlemen in frock coats. Divrina Dhingra, a 35-year-old perfume researcher and writer, for example, Eschiated by the world of *ittar*, but sceptical if their oil-based scents can be marketed globally, or even to the Western-looking Indian middle class. "The scent of *ittar* is simply too rich and pungent," she says. "There are fashions in scent, as in everything, and today we've lost the appreciation of these strong and very potent traditional fragrances. Nowadays most *ittar* gets used to scent paan or tobacco. Very little is still bought by connoisseurs for use on the body. It's no longer really seen as a

(clockwise, from left) Anita Lal; traditional 'ittar' bottles; and a display by The Perfume Library at the Good Earth outlet in Colaba, Mumbai.

These connoisseurs like to layer their scents, to mix their rich, deep notes from traditional Middle-Eastern *ittar* with top notes from lighter Western perfumes.

Other entrepreneurs involved in the world of Indian aromatics are also waking up to the untapped potential of the *ittar* tradition. Anita Lal, who runs Good Earth, which has done a great deal to bring Indian aromatics to the market, is also determined to find a way to make *ittar* hip and accessible. She recently visited Kannauj to investigate the possibilities. "We haven't yet worked out the packaging, or how to apply the oil, but I feel strongly that we need to crack this. Good Earth recently passed 20 years and making *ittar* work in our market is my big 20th-year resolution." She pauses. "The tradition is still there, it's intact. It's time to rescue it."

Parts of this story were reported for a piece on Indian perfumery and sensuality for The Economist's 1843 magazine.

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New notes: a whiff of smoke, a hint of 'chai'

Armed with technical prowess and the zeal to experiment with cigarettes and 'chai', India's boutique fragrance houses are redefining scent-making as art

BY YASUDHARA

Cigarettes, 4.23 of them, with red lipstick on the stub. Some crushed angrily, others half smoked. That's the inspiration for Fūsun, a fragrance by The Perfume Library based on an installation in Orhan Pamuk's The Museum of Innocence in Istanbul, which displays objects from the book by the same name. In the book, the love-lorn Kemal saves every token of cousin Fūsun's presence—a salt shaker she used, a barrette, a cigarette.

The fragrance opens with a top note of peony with a smoky base. "Fūsun's cigarettes as seen in the museum have been the initial accord and the starting source of this fragrance, and it has evolved into its present form," says Jahnvi Dameron Nandan, founder, The Perfume Library, a four-year-old boutique perfume company based in Delhi. The scent is especially bold in these times when cigarettes are taboo. It just goes to show one thing, that fragrance-making was, and always will be, a work of art.

Walking down the streets in India, one cannot ignore the smells. *Madhnamalti*, *naarai rani*, and *harsingar* fill the senses with their creamy, sharp scents. At the other end of the spectrum are the strong odours: spices, cow dung and fish. Given this variety, it's not surprising that India has become famous for iconic perfumes. There's Guerlain Shalimar, Bourjois Jaijur, Hermès Un Jardin Après La Mousse, and, more recently, Byredo Flowerhead, which is inspired by the sweet-smelling flowers of an Indian wedding.

THE NEW SUPPLY CHAIN

The fragrance market in India is booming, with multiple outlets of Parcos and Jo Malone's entry into the country this year. In addition, we have our own contemporary fragrance industry. Scions of estates who supplied raw materials to perfume houses around the world now have the opportunity to harness these precious ingredients, with Western technique and Indian sensibility.

The House of Uma in Chhattisgarh is one such estate that would supply essential oils to beauty giants such as Estée Lauder, Tom Ford and Givaudan (the manufacturer of some of the world's most premium fragrances, including Thierry Mugler Angel). "These companies have come to trust us not only because we make some of the most rare and precious organic essential oils (such as rose), but



SACHIN SONI

also because our company has always operated with the highest levels of ethical integrity and technical prowess," says Shrankha Holavek, founder, Uma Oils. Today, her brand makes some of the most luxurious aromatherapy face, hair and body oils that are popular with Hollywood celebrities and supermodels alike—fans include actors Ameetha and Mollie Sims. The range—now available on Net-a-Porter—utilizes centuries of knowledge that has been passed down a family of royal Ayurvedic physicians.

Manan Gandhi of Bombay Perfumery also comes from a family that has been supplying ingredients for decades to fragrance houses such as Chanel and Guerlain. Gandhi worked at the family business in Grasse, before launching his own brand, Bombay Perfumery, in 2015. "In 2016, Euromonitor has pegged fragrance sales in India at \$298 million (around ₹2,000 crore), driven by easier accessibility to international brands and the growth of the online shopping medium," he says.

As the Indian customer becomes more discerning, she wants both Western technique (clean, light), and the uniqueness of Indian notes. "We're dealing with a consumer who is informed, ready to experiment and not afraid to challenge the traditionally accepted norms of what constitutes luxury." Chai Musk by Bombay Perfumery is a great example of this experimental aesthetic. It opens with the sweet, creamy notes of masala chai, which are soon taken over by the sharpness of tea, lemongrass and ginger.

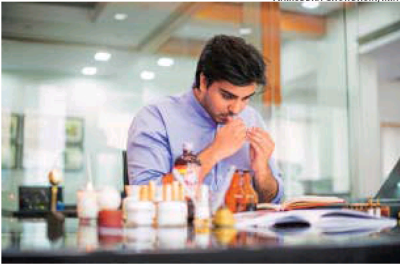
BOUQUET OF IDEAS

Home is a likely inspiration for most Indian fragrance houses. At Good Earth, founder Anita Lal looks at her own back-

(from above) Jahnvi Dameron Nandan of The Perfume Library; The Perfume Library uses bold bases in its fragrances; and Manan Gandhi of Bombay Perfumery.



yard. "Everything at Good Earth starts with a natural curiosity, she says. "I've had a passion for scent my entire life, and my indulgence is that I have fresh tuberoses every day for my home almost through the year." She explains that she's always thinking about the scents in her garden, and applies this curiosity to composing Good Earth's *Amaritan* line. "Nothing gives me greater pleasure than when my nose tells me that it's just right." Right now she is geared for the launch of a mountain forest blend with cedar and oakmoss for Good Earth's *Van Vaidhan* collection, to be launched on 21 September. When asked about her favourite modern Indian fragrances, she names Aptoorti by The Perfume Library, Vivek Sahni, founder, Kama Ayurveda, loves unusual,



ANURUDDHA CHOWDHURY/MINT

FRAGRANCES AT A GLANCE

Moiré by Bombay Perfumery
Founded by Manan Gandhi in 2015. An East-meets-West mix with leather and tuberose



Love & Joy by All Good Scents
Founded by Rajiv Sheth in 2015. This powdery floral combines the freshness of peony and litchi with lily of the valley, amber and white musk



This Space In Between You & Me by The Perfume Library
Founded by Jahnvi Dameron Nandan in 2013. Fresh, green, grassy notes with 'talsi' and vetiver



Arecé Cocoa Cream range by Ally Matthan Creations
Founded by Ahalya Matthan in 2004. Formulated for very dry skin with the goodness of cocoa butter and coconut cream

earthly perfumes. Among his international favourites are Molecule 02 by Escentric Molecules, which is a molecule that bumps on your skin to make you smell like a better version of yourself, and Avignon from Comme des Garçons' Incease series.

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Indian perfumers are working in ways that could soon help them compete with international fragrance houses. From packaging to ingredients, everything is thought through and deliberate. Moving on from the cut-glass titans of the past, perfumes today are encased in tidy containers like Bombay Perfumery's stout bottles, designed by The Firehouse in Delhi. The vintage-looking bottles at The Perfume Library, designed by Dameron herself, take you back in time with old-fashioned labels, typewriter font and pieces of twine.

The ingredients are becoming more complex. When I last spoke to the perfumers of Bombay Perfumery, Pierre Kurzeme (creator of 1020) counted the spicy, woody Cashmeran among his favourite notes, while Alexandra Carlin (creator of Chai Musk) contemplated making a fragrance out of custard apple. In fact, Gandhi is known for making trips to Haiti for vetiver, which he combines with Indian jasmine, tuberoses, pepper and lemongrass.

Ahalya Matthan, founder of Ally Matthan Creations, is one of India's first modern perfumers, who launched in 2004. She comes from a family of incense makers. "With my background, I knew from a very young age that I would be a perfumer," she says. When her mother insisted that she get a formal degree, she enrolled at ISIPCA, a school for postgraduate study in fragrances, food flavouring and cosmetics, in Paris. One of her favourite creations is the citrus and turmeric blend for Arecé, her own bath and body range launched in 2010, because the ingredients smell modern, yet encapsulate Indian tradition.

Rajiv Sheth of All Good Scents also comes from a fragrance background. "My grandfather had exported essential oils to Africa and Europe." In Africa, these oils were especially blended for henna application, and other local rituals, while in Europe, she says, they were used for haute parfumerie. As a young boy, Sheth loved smelling these oils; eventually, he joined the ISIPCA in Paris. He worked for 20 years under some of the best noses in France before returning to launch his own line of fragrances. Not only are his fragrances highly rated on Fragrantica.com, the bottles are designed by Firsa Mehta.

The Indian perfume industry might be at a nascent stage, but it hasn't stopped the perfumers from boldly channeling notes such as leather, masala chai, turmeric, even cigarettes. Because of India's sharp, sweet odours, they are exposed to a wide range of unexpected notes. Add to that family legacy, history, international exposure and modern sensibility, and you have a community that is building its own unique style of modern perfumery.

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