

# ONE SCENT GOOD

## *seven scents better?*

In the Middle East, fragrance layering is a way of life. Thomas Dunckley sniffs out a trend starting to take off here – and comes up with some ‘recipes’ to try at home

To some, the idea of layering one perfume on top of another is nothing short of sacrilege – a blasphemous act that could land you with some serious time in perfume jail. (Or at the very least, an extended time out on the naughty step.) It’s not an unreasonable perspective; after all, perfumes are created to smell a certain way and there’s a sense of ‘messing with perfection’ when you start to add new facets to the composition. It’s hard to imagine that the esteemed perfumers of the world would be keen on the idea of every Tom, Dick and Harry fiddling around with their precious works. But by eschewing the art of layering altogether, are we missing out on an entirely new world of perfume magic?

It’s a tough question to answer, because the way we wear perfume comes solely down to personal preference. Bottom line: whatever the industry thinks and feels, there really is no right or wrong way to wear perfume, there’s only your way. Any manner in which you wish to apply a fragrance is entirely valid. And on the plus side, there’s definitely the argument that layering allows you to personalise the fragrances you wear – opening the door

- to a ‘bespoke’ scent of your own without dropping some serious currency.

• Mark Cramers, the man behind The Library of Fragrance, echoes this sentiment. ‘We live in a world where everything is personalised: the rivets on your jeans, your shoelaces, your Facebook home page. There’s nothing anymore that we don’t get personalised – and fragrance is the last unexplored territory.’ The fragrances in his ‘library’ are singular-note scents – olfactory time capsules of rain, dirt or maybe marshmallows that are linear enough to encourage endless experimentation, especially when it comes to layering.

• But what do we really mean by perfume layering? It’s a concept that stems from the Middle East. More recently, the idea has been popularised within mainstream perfumery in the West – along with other elements of Arabian perfumery, such as the unstoppable rise of the *oudh*. But it is in the East that the tradition of blending fragrances together started, with layering playing a key role in how people in the Middle East wear perfume.

- Perfume Blogger Persolaise – who grew ▶

“ Lovers of fragrance can blend perfumes with single-note oils, mixing Eastern and Western scents together ”

# Recipes to enhance



*YSL Opium*



*Serge Lutens  
Fleurs d'Oranger*

This combination intensifies the floral aspect of Opium, allowing the golden, shimmering Fleurs d'Oranger to tame the 'spice-block' with its heady blooms. The indolic funk of the Lutens also adds a pleasingly sweaty vibe to Opium's Oriental warmth. Together they create a transparency akin to iridescent satin undulating wildly on a hot desert breeze.



*Guerlain Shalimar*



*Penhaligon's  
Iris Prima*

I know what you're thinking - don't mess with Queen Shalimar, but trust me when I say that this combination works a treat because the two scents just melt into each other like suede and butter. Iris Prima, with its warm, auburn orris, amplifies Shalimar's powdery character while softening some of its smoky, animalic tendencies. Sublime.



*Mugler Alien*



*Dior J'Adore  
Touche de Parfum*

This layers an eau de parfum with a perfume oil. A dab of Dior's Touche de Parfum concentration of their resplendent J'Adore underneath Alien's intergalactic jasmine brings out a honeyed character in the Mugler fragrance's woody notes, simultaneously warming the floral notes so they sparkle and shimmer like glitter in the sun.

# Recipes to contrast



Tom Ford Oud Wood



Tom Ford Neroli Portofino

In terms of character, Oud Wood and Neroli Portofino are at opposite ends of the spectrum. One is a spicy essay on woods with a rubbery quality, while the other is a musky neroli evocative of the Amalfi coast. Together they create a refreshing oudh fragrance that dazzles just as much as it seduces.



Jo Malone London Mimosa & Cardamom



Comme des Garçons Blackpepper

There is something satisfying about the clash between the rough and the smooth - and this combination does exactly that. The creamy blooms of Mimosa & Cardamom create an exciting level of friction when doused with the crackling, metallic pepper of the CdG, whilst both scents share a soft, vanilla quality that keeps the roughness from taking over.



L'Artisan Parfumeur Bois Farine



Acqua di Parma Rosa Nobile

Easily my favourite of my experimental combinations, this one sees the pretty matched with - well, the pretty unusual. The dewy nature of Rosa Nobile's freshly-cut rose heads transforms the nutty wood of the L'Artisan into a beautifully powdery floral. Watch as Bois Farine goes from bread flour to high-end make-up powder in a matter of seconds.



“If you start out with smells you love,  
chances are you’re going to love the combination”

MARK CRAMES

up in the UAE – says that layering fragrances there is the norm, observing that in the Arab world, ‘the very practice of perfume application is what we in the West might consider layering. It isn’t seen as something different from applying one perfume; it’s merely another way of wearing perfume.’ Here, we might spritz a single *eau de parfum*. There, it’s the norm to layer – and layer, and layer.

Indeed, in the Middle East, layering is a truly expansive concept that transcends all methods of scent application. Lovers of fragrance can blend perfumes with single-note oils, mix Eastern and Western scents together and even wear a perfume in conjunction with *bukhoor* incense, the art of scenting your clothes with an incense burner. (See *The Scented Letter* Issue 18.) There’s no specific guidance on how fragrance can be layered, leaving the wearer in the position of creating their very own bespoke olfactory signature. As Persolaise puts it, ‘there are no rules’.

How many scents are we talking about? In a public forum at the Pitti Fragranze show in Florence, *The Scented Letter*’s editor Jo Fairley asked the head of The Fragrance Foundation Middle East if he could confirm that people in the Emirates regularly wore up to five fragrances, as she’d heard rumoured. ‘No,’ he shook his head. Cue smirks from her neighbours in the audience, at this ridiculous notion. ‘Up to seven; maybe five on the body and two on the clothes...’ Those smirks rapidly faded.

But while we’re now starting to embrace layering in the West, with the idea growing considerably in recent years, it seems to be an entirely more prescriptive practice here. The initial concept was always pretty restrictive, with perfume lovers being encouraged to layer their favourite *eau de parfum* with its accompanying body products, making for a more intense experience of that chosen scent. Nowadays, many perfume houses are splicing the concept of layering into the very DNA of their brand.

One brand in particular that has played a key role in the rise of layering in the west is Jo Malone London. Each of their fragrances is created with the idea of layering in mind – or as they call it, ‘fragrance combining’. They go so

far as to refer to it as a ‘philosophy’. The brand’s Fragrance Director, Céline Roux, believes that layering ‘is a bit like adding accessories to an outfit’ – in the sense that it allows the wearer to make something bespoke out of a perfume that others may also be wearing.

But it’s not only about personalising a fragrance; Roux also sees layering as ‘the best way to create depth in a scent and enhance longevity on the skin.’ Other brands are taking the concept of layering to entirely new heights: Miller Harris – more recent adopters of the trend – recommend layering scents in unconventional ways, encouraging customers to buy one fragrance for day and one for night, with the potential of wearing the two together. They even suggest that couples might like to wear a Miller Harris fragrance each, so that ‘when they entwine, they create the perfect scent...’

With so many ways to layer, the goal is to achieve one of two things: to enhance a facet you love in a favourite scent, or to add contrast to create something entirely new altogether. But is all the fuss truly justified? Does it actually bring anything new to the experience of wearing fragrance? In the spirit of experimentation, I stuck my nose deep into my collection to pick out some combinations that either enhanced or contrasted my favourite fragrances. The results were surprising – and in some cases astounding, resulting in new compositions that either teased out a new aspect of a fragrance, shining a new light, or provided enough of a stark contrast to create something entirely new altogether – a composition that is greater than the sum of its parts.

So I leave you with six of my favourite recipes: three to contrast and three to enhance, but all to smell absolutely fabulous and to provide a touch of the bespoke to your fragrance wardrobe. Just remember: there is no right and wrong way to wear perfume. So my advice is to experiment and have fun with it – and as Mark Crames observes: ‘If you start out with smells you love, chances are you’re going to love the combination. And if you don’t like the result, you scrub it off with soap and water, and you start again...’