

STYLE & BEAUTY

• A SEASONAL COMPENDIUM TO SARTORIAL FLAIR, ENCHANTING JEWELS AND HAUTE HORLOGERIE •



Scents of Identity

Tailored to the individual, meticulously created and exquisitely unique, a bespoke fragrance is an indulgence like no other. **Emma Hill** provides an insider's look into the world's top perfumers

Francis Kurkdjian has just completed a special order. It's possible he has signed a non-disclosure agreement so that his client has full privacy and not even he knows their identity. But in this case he hasn't, and he does, and to add an even more personal touch to the perfume he has created, at her request, encased its miniature bottle in soft kid leather. "The idea is that I will send multiples, in different colours, to wherever she is in the world," he says.

Kurkdjian's client has entered an exclusive world that remains one of the least exploited decadent delights: a

fragrance that is unique to its wearer, their tastes, memories and character – as singular as a portrait painting and as perfect a fit as couture. The process, during which maker and client exchange ideas and explore different scent ingredients, is for many perfumers an artistic one. "I create an olfactory sketch and can then work it up into a finished fragrance," says Lyn Harris, who has recently opened her second perfumery business, **Perfumer H** (perfumerh.com) in London.

Commissioning a bespoke scent is like picking a portrait painter or sculptor, so an understanding of the perfumer or perfume house's →



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approach is of paramount importance. Kurkdjian, who has created so many of today's designer fragrances, including Burberry, Narciso Rodriguez and Rick Owens, is something of a Swiss Army knife. The broad collection he has created for his own house, **Maison Francis Kurkdjian** (franciskurkdjian.com), shows that he can go from a fresh, clean take on rose to an oud-infused work with ease. Also expect modernity – even with classical origins (roses, say, or white flowers), his interpretation will feel contemporary. "This is going to be a perfume that catches one moment of your life," he says.

Fragrance du Bois (fragrancedubois.com), by contrast, whose third boutique recently opened in Singapore, is an oud specialist catering to lovers of the precious extract. The house's oud is sustainably sourced and worked into rich, intricate fragrances by its experts in Grasse, where clients come to a country home for scent-fittings.

Meeting perfumer Mathilde Laurent is part of the process at **Cartier** (cartier.com). She started out at Guerlain and the rapturously charming Frenchwoman's scents are highly regarded among critics. "I would go to Mathilde if I wanted something with an edge of quirkiness to it," says Dariush Alavi

Above, from left: Thierry Wasser, the celebrated perfumer at Guerlain; After the Rain from Frazer Parfum

Previous page, from left: London-based perfume-designer Azzi Glasser; the legendary nose Roja Dove

of scent blog Persolaïse. Laurent's custom-made creations are housed in a Baccarat crystal bottle that can be adorned with panthers, snakes, diamonds and gems – whatever the client wishes, in the spirit of how it was in perfumery's golden age.

For a classic perfume from the marque that defined that age, it has to be **Guerlain** (guerlain.com). Sylvaine Delacourte, the brand's fragrance evaluation and development manager, acts as olfactory mediator between client and Thierry Wasser, the house's renowned perfumer. Once created, the perfume's heirloom credentials are a surety: the formula is stored in the Guerlain safe at Chartres and can only be made up with the client's authorisation, joining a repertoire built on the house's greats, including Jacques Guerlain's Mitsouko (1919) and Shalimar (1925).

Another master working in the classical style, **Roja Dove** (rojaparfums.com) creates for those who love scent in all its beautiful, full-blown glory. "If you want to revisit the golden age of perfumery go to Roja Dove," says Alavi. His method for honing a client's likes and dislikes is simple: you smell blind. "If I start with the story of jasmine from Grasse, its legendary →

FRAZER PARFUM



LYN HARRIS



FRANCIS KURKDJIAN



CARTIER

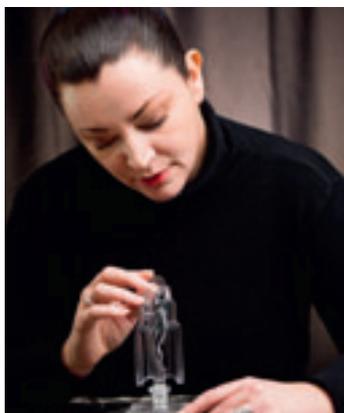




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Clockwise from above: Anastasia Brozler of London-based Creative Perfumers; Fleurage of Melbourne's Emma Leah; the versatile Parisian Francis Kurkdjian; Mandy Aftel of Aftelier in California



status, its value per kilo [£3,000], it would alter their perception," Dove says.

Rich, fresh and superbly indulgent: resinous scents are increasingly popular with women as well as men. Tammy Frazer of **Frazer Parfum** (frazerparfum.com) specialises in natural resins and plants from the Africa. Her bottles look like sculptural glass teardrops, handblown by a local artisan. Also working with resins is **Azzi Glasser** (contact through victoria@familythree.com), a perfumer-designer (she is one of a new breed: they come up with the design or idea and then direct a perfumer). Her work is heady, rich, smoky and she is a particular fan of vetiver. She has created bespoke scents for Jude Law, Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter – there is a distinct buzz around Glasser among London sybarites.

There is also about to be a new buzz around the aforementioned Lyn Harris. A Grasse-trained perfumer who co-founded noted London house Miller Harris in 2000, she will offer various levels of personalisation at her new London HQ. Her style is "quirky and a bit more daring", she says. In fact, her scents are complex but low key – English perfumery at its most appealing.

Equally characterful are the wares from Austrian-born Anastasia Brozler of **Creative Perfumers** (+44 207 629 8468), who works out of a Georgian town house behind London's Ritz hotel. She trained with eight master perfumers, creates fragrances for a wide-ranging international clientele, and her connections with a number of top people in Grasse (she is part perfumer, part director) mean that the possibilities for a client are limitless.

Sometimes, though, limits can be an advantage. Most perfumers work with upwards of 1,000 ingredients, but there are only 300 to 400 natural ones in perfumery, so if simplicity is a key driver, perhaps natural is the way to go. Californian **Mandy Aftel** (aftelier.com) is the go-to specialist for natural-based perfumes along the West Coast of America and fittingly draws an analogy between the ingredients she uses and vintage vino. "I have sandalwood, neroli and vetiver from the turn of the last century – they have aged like fine wine, so are multilayered and bring a special *sui generis* beauty to a perfume," she says. Another rising star as a naturals perfumer is Emma Leah on the other side of the globe at **Fleurage** (fleurage-natural-perfume.com.au), based in Melbourne.

On a completely different tack and to Brooklyn, New York. **I Hate Perfume** (cbihateperfume.com) is the brainchild of maverick Christopher Brosius. He once created a scent called Dirt (surprisingly good to smell, if not wear), and one of his bestselling fragrances is At The Beach: "It smells like old Coppertone sunscreen, salt water and sand," he says. He is often sought out by those with unusual requests – including the scent of roast beef (yes, really) – and is the perfect person to consult if seeking something really off the wall: not merely a scent no one has ever worn, but, as the world of bespoke fragrances underscores, one that no one has ever conceived. ●