

THE SCENT OF HISTORY

To celebrate their colourful history and mark a new chapter in their retail presence here, Parfums Christian Dior and Guerlain launched their exclusive ranges of "heritage" perfumes in Singapore recently.

The two join other luxury labels, Yves Saint Laurent and Chanel, in making available here their special portfolio of perfumes which are inspired by the brands' milestones. These so-called "heritage" perfumes are usually more expensive, partly because they often come in the form of an eau de parfum - a more concentrated scent made with 12 to 20 per cent of essential oils that can linger for up to eight hours in Singapore's weather.

These premium scents also tend to have unique smells and boast more depth and layers than regular ranges.

Guerlain, which is famous for perfumes that are fit for royalty (such as French emperor Napoleon III and his wife, empress Eugenie), has brought in five exclusive fragrance lines that were previously sold only in some Guerlain boutiques overseas, such as its flagship

store on Champs-Elysees in Paris. The move was to commemorate its new boutique, which opened last October in Tangs Beauty.

The lines are: Les Parisiennes and Les Parisiens (women and men's fragrances from Guerlain's archives dating from 1929); L'Art Et La Matière (scents based on ingredients such as gardenia and tonka); Les Elixirs Charnels (a range of floral and feminine scents); and One City One Fragrance (in honour of cities such as Moscow and Shanghai). Prices start from \$353 for 100ml.

Ms Nicole Tan, Guerlain's product manager, says the time is right to introduce the collection to Singapore. "Fragrance lovers here are now more discerning and they are often searching for new and rare scents," she says. "We also want our consumers to find out more about Guerlain, one of the few companies that has more than 180 years of history in beauty."

Parfums Christian Dior also launched its La Collection Privée perfumes last month in Tangs Beauty to mark its new boutique.

The 12 scents (\$285 each, eight of which are shown below) were created by Mr Francois Demachy, the brand's perfumer-creator and director of olfactory development of fragrances at the perfumes and cosmetics division of the Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton group.

Launched in 2004, each fragrance gives insights into the history of Christian Dior (see story on right). Unique ingredients used in the La

Collection range include pine absolute, iris absolute and an exclusive jasmine absolute harvested in Grasse, France. An absolute is an aromatic oil extracted with a solvent instead of by steam distillation.

On why heritage scents make the offerings at Tangs Beauty more exciting, beauty merchandising manager Stenifer Tan says: "Brands such as Dior and Guerlain have rich heritage and started off as perfumers. To carry these signature scents at Tangs Beauty serves as a way to differentiate ourselves and present shoppers with flagship beauty boutique experiences."

MARKING MILESTONES

Associate Professor Seshan Ramaswami of marketing education at Singapore Management University says "heritage" perfumes are more than mere gimmicks.

"They are a great way for these long-standing brands to distinguish themselves from the numerous newcomers," he says. "Connecting to a vintage time and place adds to the aura and cachet of these brands."

Perfumes, he adds, are like wines whose heritage, purity and exclusivity of the locale where they are concocted matter as much as the actual product.

Last May, Yves Saint Laurent Beauté also rolled out La Collection, a

limited-edition range of the brand's six most iconic perfumes. They came in new packaging to celebrate its 50th year in perfume-making and re-entry into the market here, after the French label exited in 2009.

The scents include Y (\$159), French couturier Yves Saint Laurent's first fragrance that he created in 1964; and In Love Again (\$159), the 1998 winner which marked the brand's 40th year in fashion.

Over at Chanel, its Les Exclusifs De Chanel range of 13 scents - with names such as Beige, one of Coco Chanel's favourite shades; and 31 Rue Cambon, which used to be her home and now serves as the brand's flagship fashion boutique - has always been available at its beauty boutiques here.

The first perfume from Les Exclusifs was No. 22 (\$230 for 75ml), which was made by noted perfumer Ernest Beaux in 1922. Mr Beaux was also the creator of Chanel No. 5.

The latest addition to the collection is Jersey (a material favoured by Chanel) by the brand's current perfumer Jacques Polge in 2011. Next month, the label will launch a new scent, 1932, to celebrate the 80th anniversary of its foray into fine jewellery.

Urban picks the star scents from the various brands.

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SNIFFING OUT SUCCESS

One could say Mr Francois Demachy (right), Parfums Christian Dior's perfumer-creator who creates its scents from start to finish, was born to be in the business.

Now 63, the Frenchman grew up in Grasse, which is widely considered the world's perfume capital as its main industrial activity is fragrance production.

His father ran a pharmacy where the elder Demachy created his own bergamot tanning oil and cologne, the Eau de Grasse Imperiale, which was mixed by Mr Demachy in the back room.

The pharmacy's clientele included the renowned French perfumer, Edmond Roudnitska, who created iconic scents such as Dior's Eau Sauvage and Diorella.

The elder Demachy had wanted his son to be a dentist but Mr Demachy was intrigued by fragrances.

So he gave up his studies in dentistry and spent his summers as a trainee in Grasse's perfume factories, workshops and warehouses, where he picked up the art of perfumery.

In 1971, he joined the famous Charabot perfume house and trained to be a perfumer. Six years later, he was hired by Chanel as a perfumer.

In 2006, Mr Demachy joined the fragrances department of the perfumes and cosmetics division at the Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton Group as director of olfactory development, a title he still holds today.

The father of four spends most of his time creating perfumes for Dior, and also provides guidance for the scents of other brands in the LVMH stable, such as Givenchy and Kenzo.

At Dior, he dreamt up the brand's premium La Collection Privée perfume line, and concocted perfumes such as the best-selling Miss Dior Blooming Bouquet, which he created for the Asian market.

He spoke to Urban when he was in town last month for the opening of the Parfums Christian Dior boutique at Tangs Beauty, where he also launched La Collection Privée.

The 12 fragrances in the range are inspired by icons and significant moments in the house of Christian Dior.

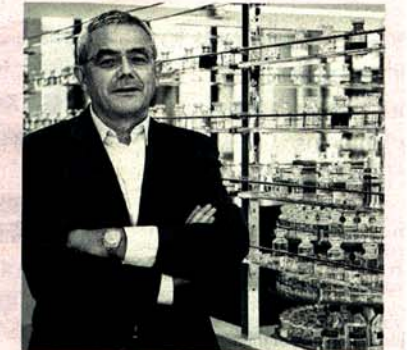
For instance, New Look 1947 references Dior's first fashion show on Feb 12, 1947, where Harper's Bazaar's then-editor, Ms Carmel Snow, famously proclaimed that the colourful collection was a "New Look".

There is also Grand Bal, inspired by Dior's beautiful ball gowns; and Mitzah, a tribute to Dior muse Mitzah Bricard.

The fragrances cost \$285 each.

Why did you start La Collection Privée?

The line allows me to express myself, with no rules, limits nor briefs from the marketing team - just my ideas.



I created the first scent in the line, Eau Noire, in 2004. The fragrance has notes of lavender and vanilla and was inspired by the atmosphere at Chateau de la Colle Noire, Christian Dior's residence in Provence.

What is your style of working when creating fragrances?
 I do everything myself when it comes to translating my ideas and fantasies into scents. I select the ingredients and all that. But I do seek the advice of perfumer friends and I always ask my wife how she feels about a scent. If she does not like it, I will tweak the formula again and, often, she is right.

What makes a good fragrance?
 There is no specific recipe. But, as in cooking, it all starts with good ingredients. After that it is all about "savoir faire" (the ability to adapt and be adroit) and technical know-how. Of course, the woman who is wearing the perfume matters too. Just as a dress should complement a woman and not just hang on her, a good perfume is warm and alive on her body and skin.

What makes a good perfumer?
 Humility and curiosity, because you can never possess the artistry of perfumery completely. Sometimes, you forget certain processes and you have to re-learn them. Or the natural ingredient changes - to me, the jasmine note always smells a little different each time I use it and that can change a blend.

And one has to be open-minded to the fact that there are no bad notes or scents.

What is the worst part of your job?
 You never know for sure when a perfume will be complete. Sometimes it takes a year or two, and sometimes, you never succeed because you don't reach the target you have in mind.

What is the best way to wear perfumes in humid weather?
 Fragrances do not last very long in humid weather. If you want a perfume to last longer, you need the scented molecules to be sprayed on a cream base first.

So put a small amount of unscented cream on your skin first and then spritz the fragrance on it.

SIGNATURE NOTES

These luxurious one-of-a-kind fragrances are some of the finest creations from established and niche perfume brands

THE CLASSIC BRANDS

No. 22 from Les Exclusifs de Chanel
 \$230 for 75ml, available at Chanel beauty counters and boutiques
 Based on the tuberose, this fragrance was created in 1922 by the same man behind the iconic Chanel No. 5, Mr Ernest Beaux.



New Look 1947 from La Collection Privée
 \$285, available at Parfums Christian Dior counters and boutiques
 Created to commemorate Christian Dior's first fashion show in 1947, it is composed of Indian tuberose, Turkish rose and Sambac jasmine on a base of vanilla from Madagascar.



In Love Again from La Collection
 \$159, available at Yves Saint Laurent Beauté boutiques
 Made in 1998 to celebrate the label's 40th year in fashion, the refreshing floral-fruity scent contains sweet notes of blackcurrant, mandarin, muscat grape, rose peony and blackberry.

Cruel Gardenia from L'Art Et La Matière
 \$364, available at the Guerlain boutique at Tangs Beauty
 Blended to pay homage to the intoxicating gardenia, one of Guerlain's star perfume ingredients throughout its centuries-old history of making fragrances.



THE NEW SCHOOLS

Portrait Of A Lady by Dominique Ropion from Frederic Malle Editions De Parfums
 \$530 for 100ml, available at Malmaison by The Hour Glass, 01-01 Knightsbridge
 Dreamt up by renowned French perfumers Dominique Ropion and Frederic Malle in 2010, this unique eau de parfum marks the 10th anniversary of Editions de Parfums. The voluptuous Oriental scent is composed of rose essence from Turkey, blackcurrant, cinnamon, clove, rose, patchouli, sandalwood and incense.



Noir de Noir from the Tom Ford Private Blend Collection
 \$320 for 50ml, available at the Tom Ford Beauty boutique at Tangs Beauty
 An Oriental chypre that blends florals with earthy notes of black truffle, patchouli, oud wood and tree moss, this unisex perfume can be layered over the other 14 scents in the range for a truly unique fragrance.



Epic Woman and Epic Man from Amouage
 \$345 for 100ml of Epic Woman, \$320 for 100ml of Epic Man, available at Essentials at 03-02 Paragon and Tangs Beauty
 Founded more than 30 years ago by the Sultanate of Oman, Amouage scents are literally fit for royalty. These two scents from the fragrance house are inspired by the Silk Road and made with a unique blend of damascene rose, patchouli, cumin, frankincense and musk.



PHOTOS: AMOUAGE, CHANEL, CHRISTIAN DIOR, FREDERIC MALLE, GUERLAIN, TOM FORD, YVES SAINT LAURENT