



THE GREEN, GREEN GRASSE

JAN MASTERS loses her senses in Grasse, the perfume capital of the world, where she meets the founder of Matière Première, a perfumer taking 'grow-your-own' to heart

Aurélien Guichard's May Rose
fragrance fields in Grasse

It's evening. I'm blindfolded and being driven by car over a bumpy track. The vehicle comes to a halt and the door is opened. I'm led by the hand to a chair and asked to sit. Don't worry. I'm not being kidnapped. But I am being seduced. By a heady floral scent that suffuses the air.

I'm in the fragrance capital of the world – Grasse. It's the end of summer in the South of France and while the weather is hot, it's now humid, with sunny days hunted by the shadow of moody storms. I can still see nothing. My senses are focused on the scent.

At last, I'm allowed to remove the satin scarf covering my eyes. And there it is, spread before me. A field of tuberose. Shimmering flowers like white-hot fireflies, hovering on long, slender stems. Utterly mesmerising.

The field is owned by the fragrance house and the reason I have been blindfolded – as have other guests at this evening of celebration – is now clear. At the reveal, when the scent marries with the scene, it's a moment to savour, especially as these flowers only release their fragrance at night.

'I wanted to recreate this smell – one that in the olden days of Grasse, young people were warned to stay away from for fear they would not be able to resist its erotic temptation,' says Aurélien Guichard, perfumer and co-founder of Matière Première, delighted his introductory drama has played out so well. For tuberose is the star of his creation French Flower, launched earlier this year, a monofloral bouquet, highly dosed with tuberose absolute, a powerful extraction from the flowers that flourish at the organic farm he founded in 2016.

A seventh-generation perfumer, Guichard started Matière Première (it means raw material) in 2019 with two co-founders, and the brand has achieved rapid global renown, now selling in luxury retailers in more than 40 countries. What sets it apart is how each fragrance prioritises and pivots around one central raw ingredient of exceptional quality, used in no-expense-spared quantities.

For instance, he tells me one kilo of iris absolute, one of perfumery's most precious ingredients, can cost about €70-80,000; high-quality tuberose, by contrast, comes in at €250,000. French Flower combines the absolute with a tuberose enfleurage, a traditional extraction that captures the scent of the flowers in wax, adding a layer of softer sensuality. This radiant white floral is simply supported by the brightness of ginger



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Aurélien Guichard in his laboratory; a tuberose 'cadre d'enfleurage'; team gathering the May Roses in traditional sacks; tuberose fragrance fields at night; French Flower and Radical Rose eau de parfums



oil and the vegetal stalkiness of green tea leaf oil and a green agave accord. C'est ça.

The house also grows its own roses, the central focus of its Radical Rose perfume, which has the highest possible concentration of Rosa Centifolia from Grasse that meets industry standards. It is unfussy. Un-fussy. Clear, contemporary and genderless. It's wonderful to see a perfumer growing his own ingredients. 'We have a deep respect for the nature and local know-how,' adds Guichard.

The perfumer has previously earned his scented stripes with big names such as Gucci, Versace and Narciso Rodriguez. But he wanted to establish a more intimate relationship with the ingredients he uses, ensuring a complete, authentic and holistic creative process unlike that enjoyed by most perfumers.

This approach is inextricably linked with sustainability. 'By definition, our craft is deeply linked with nature,' he says. 'My conviction is that sustainability is a mindset that drives us at every step. It's in our philosophy to preserve what inspires us and provides us with our ingredients.'

The flowers he harvests are organically grown, with the accent on preserving soil fertility and enhancing biodiversity. When it comes to other ingredients produced outside Grasse, he only sources those obtained through collaboration with partners who share and demonstrate the same sustainable

and ethical values.

As an example, the Australian sandalwood he uses in his Santal Austral is 51 percent owned by Aboriginal Australians, who plant 20 new trees for every one they cut. And in his new-for-winter Crystal Saffron, he uses the highest quality saffron grown by a cooperative in the Kozani region in Greece.

The fragrances as a whole contain 85-92 percent natural ingredients and are also vegan and phthalate-free, the colour of each fragrance determined only by the raw materials themselves. And using fewer ingredients reduces wastage while increasing artisanal excellence.

Guichard likens his minimalist approach to a kind of 'sobriety', which by implication dovetails with sustainability – something is only incorporated if it plays a vital part in the composition. Just be wary though. Because you can easily get drunk on French Flower. And who knows what may happen in a tuberose field at night.

French Flower, £195. All fragrances are also available in 6ml bottles (£30) providing up to 100 sprays, ideal for discovering the collection and travel. matiere-premiere.com

MAKING SUSTAINABLE SCENTS

There are numerous aspects that help make a fragrance more sustainable, from eschewing over-farming and huge production runs to reducing waste and CO2 emissions. Eco-friendly packaging is also key, which means considering whether it's refillable, recyclable, reusable or genuinely biodegradable. And of course, ethically, social responsibility is vital too. Here's a trio of perfume creators, doing their bit while producing sublime scents.



1 FLORAL STREET
Sustainable from its inception, this independent British fragrance brand has been a beacon for change. As part of its commitment to the environment, it uses sustainable ingredients traceable to source or those that are lab-created when these prove more planet-supportive. With its award-winning biodegradable pulp carton and refillable bottles, Floral Street walks a worthy path. Sunflower Pop, £64. floralstreet.com



2 AESOP
Eidesis is the new eau de parfum from Aesop, a gorgeous warm, woody scent for winter, thanks to a mingling of black pepper, frankincense, cedar, sandalwood and vetiver. Aesop is a certified B Corporation, joining a growing number of companies pursuing purpose as well as profit. B Corp is one of the most respected certifications, because it sets rigorous social and environmental criteria. Eidesis, £140. aesop.com



3 FFERN
Handmaking small-batch organic eau de parfum in Somerset, Ffern releases four perfumes a year at the turn of each season – the next release is on the winter solstice. Instead of a plastic cap, it uses a kraft paper tube. Working with Magical Mushroom Company, the brand has developed a mycelium bottle tray derived from organic waste and mushroom roots, meaning the tray is 100 per cent home compostable. Winter 23, £79. ffern.co