

BRIT ECCENTRICITY WAFTS IN

Penhaligon's opens a new standalone store here and the beauty brand's CEO shares the quirky origins of its cult fragrances. KAREN TEE reports

Sipping a gin and tonic is a quintessentially British way to while away a hot summer's evening.

Pouring it over yourself however, would be madness – unless it were a gin-inspired perfume from quirky British beauty brand Penhaligon's.

Ms Sarah Rotheram (below), chief executive officer of the brand, which opened its first standalone store in Asia at Ion Orchard last week, recounts how



gin became the unlikely source of inspiration for the brand's newest perfume, Juniper Sling, which will be launched in October.

The 37-year-old, who was in town for the opening, told Urban: "I was drinking gin in a

bar in London when a chap next to me, who had no idea who I was, ordered 12 different gins for me to taste and smell.

"As this gin buff was talking me through the gins, I realised just how remarkable the aromatic notes were in each gin and thought to myself: 'How is it that I never noticed?'"

The story of the birth of the scent and its crisp notes of juniper berry (the main ingredient in gin), orange berry and vetiver, are fairly typical of the perfumes created by this brand founded in 1870.

William Penhaligon was a barber and, back then, barbers also created lotions and potions for their customers.

Mr Penhaligon's first perfume, Hammam (from \$153), which is still sold today, was inspired by the smells of the hammams, or public bath houses, that were frequented by those in high society.

This quirky sensibility still permeates today's creations, thanks to Ms Rotheram.

She joined Penhaligon's as its general manager in 2007, after seven years at another bath and body brand, Molton Brown.

Under her direction, the brand, which was stagnating as a quaint old-fashioned business, took a whiff of smelling salts and revived.

In 2009, she was promoted to CEO.



PHOTOS: PENHALIGON'S

Says Ms Rotheram: "We want to keep the same eccentric spirit of Mr Penhaligon and all perfumes that are created are still inspired by people, places or experiences that are reminiscent of London."

For instance, its unisex perfume Sartorial (from \$153), which it launched last year, was inspired by the smell of the workshops found on Saville Row and its bespoke tailors.

A selection of Penhaligon's best-selling perfumes and body care products can be found at multi-label beauty boutique Escentials.

But the brand decided to open a standalone boutique (above) which stocked all 34 unisex perfumes and over 150 auxiliary products, such as body lotions, candles and shaving creams, as it wanted to give customers the full Penhaligon's experience.

The store is designed to resemble a traditional British apothecary and the tiled flooring in the entrance is custom-made in England.

A vintage sink has been turned into a display rack for unguents and potions.

Customers can sign up for a free fragrance profiling session with an expert, who will recommend perfumes based on their tastes in scents.

Explaining the company's choice of Singapore, Ms Rotheram says it is an easy country to do business in and it also provides a gateway to the rest of Asia.

Also, in Singapore, fragrances make up about 40 per cent of the beauty market with over \$170 million in sales last year, according to the Singapore Association of Perfumes and Cosmetics Distributors.

Here, as with the rest of the world, customers are increasingly looking for niche scents for themselves.

Correspondingly, Penhaligon's has seen a "double digit growth" over the last three years, says Ms Rotheram.

Today, Penhaligon's has 18 standalone stores and about 50 counters in top department stores

and speciality beauty emporiums in 40 countries, including Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City and Harrods in London.

Even if you are not inclined to slather scent all over yourself, you might want to check out the store for "lifestyle items" such as crystal perfume decanters, leather accessories holders and even costume jewellery.

"We commission other pieces to coincide with the launch of our perfumes to help tell the stories of the perfumes," says Ms Rotheram.

"For example, we worked with London jewellery brand Tatty Devine to create moustache jewellery for the launch of Sartorial, to convey the idea of a dapper gentleman."

Cocktail lovers should drop by next month for the launch of Juniper Sling, as the brand intends to sell hand-blown crystal martini glasses in the store.

Cheers, mate.

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Penhaligon's fragrance expert and scent profiler Richard Clayforth, who is the manager of the brand's Covent Garden boutique in London, shares a cheat sheet on fragrance terms you must know to be a scent connoisseur.

Aldehyde

An aldehyde is a naturally derived synthetic note.

The effect of an aldehyde on a fragrance is hard to describe, as it depends on the other oils it is combined with, but it can often give a sharp, sparkling or almost metallic note to a fragrance.

One of the most famous aldehyde fragrances is Chanel's No 5.

SNIFF OUT THESE TERMS

Chypre

A chypre – pronounced sheepr – refers to a family of perfumes characterised by citrus top notes, a floral heart and a base containing oak moss and musks. Such a perfume often has a powdery smell.

An example is Penhaligon's Jubilee Bouquet.

Dry down

A dry down refers to how a scent develops and smells on your skin over time. This smell varies from person to person and depends on the individual's

body temperature, hormones and lifestyle.

Heliotrope

This is a highly fragrant, ancient flower that is native to Peru.

It gives off a sweet scent reminiscent of almonds and cherries and is often found in glamorous, feminine compositions such as Penhaligon's Cornubia.

Oriental

An Oriental scent is a warm and sensual

perfume which is known to have an intense, long-lasting aroma.

The opulent bouquet of an Oriental can include ingredients such as musk, vanilla, resins and wood and is often accompanied by exotic flowers and spices such as Turkish rose, ylang ylang, cumin and cinnamon.

Some Oriental scents include Penhaligon's Hammam, Endymion and Elixir.

Soliflore

This is a perfume whose blend of ingredients has been carefully crafted to replicate the scent of a single flower.

Some examples of soliflores include Penhaligon's Gardenia, Orange Blossom and Lily of the Valley.