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Scent of a woman

French master perfumer **Bertrand Duchaufour** on the scent that counts

He's at lunch, deconstructing the chutney. He says it could trigger his next perfume. Just like the soup served at Bal Samand Lake Palace in Jodhpur, the night before. "It was so incredible! The combination of tomatoes, apple and cinnamon in the soup..." says master perfumer Bertrand Duchaufour, in Jodhpur to launch his latest fragrance, Vaara by Penhaligon's (the legendary British perfume company). He's been in the fragrance business for 27 years but insists he's "just beginning". Penhaligon's CEO Sarah Rotheram joins the chat. "He's fantastic in interpreting journeys," she says.



Duchaufour's latest project Vaara was commissioned by Maharaja Gaj Singh II of Jodhpur, dedicated to his granddaughter Vaara. His previous stint was at Savile Row, London's iconic tailoring address, where Duchaufour spent days smelling the oils of sewing machines, inhaling the steam of the iron and soaking in the fragrance of the fabrics. A **t2** chat with the Paris-based perfumer...

What's the first smell that left a mark on your memory?

One of the first smells that impacted me was at my granny's. I was a kid when she used to make this vinegar syrup. The acidic vinegar combined with the fullness of raspberry, it was so wonderful. Years later, in the lab, I came back to this memory through aldehyde C-20 or raspberry aldehyde.

What are some of the basic skills a perfumer needs?

No skills! It's just a question of passion and character — you have to be patient. You have to be ambitious in the beginning and skills don't matter. To be an expert you need 15 to 20 years of experience. Typically, there are 30 to 50 raw materials and to control that kind of mixture you need experience. It's a tough fight against other perfumers,

colleagues, evaluators and also your own personality. You have to respect your own idea and wait for the best opportunity, be very inspired and work hard. You have to make your own memory bank by cultivating it, so your memory is your best friend.

What is the correct process of finding your signature scent?

It's a question of feeling — follow your own. Find out what's most meaningful to you. It's like wearing a dress that you don't feel. Find a perfume that corresponds to your soul. A fragrance is a part of your personality. Keep in mind that it has to work with your skin which already has its own identity, like a pH and an acidic effect. Perfumes react with your skin to get a new identity, leading to a unique alchemy. So a scent can't be your signature if your best friend wears it or if you love the bottle or the celebrity who markets it. Even I can't advise anyone on which perfume to wear.

After years of obsessing over a certain perfume, sometimes we suddenly get over it. Why is it so?

That can be put down to a change of mind, change of personality and change of your body molecules. We are always mutating and evolving.

How can you tell if a perfume just doesn't work for you?

It won't be long-lasting on you. It will stick to your skin, not effuse. But the first reaction is a bad smell. Hopefully your friends will point that out!

Any perfume do and don't?

I advise wearing perfume on the veins on your wrist, they are the warm parts of your skin. But don't rub your wrists hard, this eats the perfume and destroys the molecules.... Maybe some on your neck. Perfume on your dress won't lead to any alchemy, so you have to spray on your skin to give your perfume a new identity. Also, be generous. It's nice for the perfume to arrive before you do.

Finally, what was the greatest challenge of creating Vaara?

To mix rose with champaca and get a new combination. I didn't want Vaara to be an obvious rose.

PENHALIGON'S: THE PERFUME LADY DIANA LOVED

- Founded by Englishman William Penhaligon in 1870, the company has been “entertaining England's nostrils” since.
- Their first scent, Hammam Bouquet, was created by William in 1872, inspired by the aromas of Turkish baths on Jermyn Street, Piccadilly, near his barber shop.
- Princess Diana was a Penhaligon's fan. There was a special spa for her use.
- Their signature bottle is made of clear glass with a ribbon-wrapped stopper.
- Artemisia created in 2002 is their best-seller. Other notable fragrances include Blenheim Bouquet and Juniper Sling, inspired by the London Dry Gin! Coming up: a fragrance inspired by English ballet dancers.

Vaara comes in a package inspired by the dome of Umaid Bhawan Palace. “I wanted to link different cultures and at the same time be very faithful to Indian ingredients. We wanted Vaara to smell like the spirit of Jodhpur, not directly of Jodhpur — let's say we wanted it to smell like a painting of Jodhpur. It's colourful, airy, like a fairy tale and totally India,” says its creator Duchaufour.



DECODING VAARA

Head notes (excites the heart note): Saffron, rosewater, carrot seed, coriander seed and quince.

Heart notes (the main note): Moroccan rose absolute, Bulgarian rose oil, freesia, Indian magnolia (champaca), peony and iris.

Base notes (it's the magnifying note): Honey, white musk, cedarwood, sandalwood, benzoin resin and tonka bean.

SHRADHA AGARWAL