

Beauty

+ Add to myFT

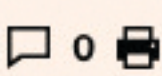
## Follow your nose – the brand taking fragrance back to basics

The London-based start-up Ostens aims to demystify the world of perfume



© Etienne Giffillan

Grace Cook NOVEMBER 30, 2018



The corner of 62 Blandford Street in London is awash with a fluorescent pink glow. Among Marylebone’s four-storey town houses is a gallery-like space covered in floor-to-ceiling strips of neon lights. The room is empty, save for a plain white pillar in the centre furnished with one tiny 9ml bottle of scent — a vial of Rose Oil Isparta, one of five debut fragrance oils from the newly launched brand [Ostens](#).

Ostens aims to be a disrupter — and not just in retail. For Ostens is a fragrance brand whose primary product is not perfume per se, but rather, *préparations* — the raw materials found in premium fragrances. The brainchild of Laurent Delafon and Christopher Yu, founders of United Perfumes (a fragrance licensee which develops scents for luxury brands), Ostens is the duo’s first own brand. “We’re launching with five *préparations*,” says Yu, of the oils which are priced from £35. “We have cedarwood from Virginia, jasmine from Egypt, patchouli from Indonesia, rose from Turkey and the artificial molecule cashmeran velvet.”

Sourced from IFF-LMR Naturals — the US company that supplies the perfume industry with its raw materials — these oils are exactly those used by the major brands. “Our Rose Oil Isparta (£65) is the same as what’s used in Chanel No5, as well as Jo Malone Red Roses; our jasmine is what’s used in [Dior’s] J’Adore,” says Yu.

Ostens is taking fragrance back to basics, following the trajectory of other industries where provenance and simplicity are valued. “What Ostens is doing is quite revolutionary,” says Judith Gross, vice-president of creation and design for IFF-LMR. “Customers can play sorcerer’s apprentice, by layering jasmine or patchouli over other fragrances. It [will make them] more hungry to discover the ingredients that make up the fragrances they buy.”



Laurent Delafon, creative director Mark Wilkie, and Christopher Yu of Ostens © Etienne Giffillan

By offering the scents as standalones, the first time this has ever been done, Ostens is stripping the product back to the bare bones. “The perfume industry has for so long needed to sell magic. Spend £3m and get Nicole Kidman and Baz Luhrmann to make an advert and no question that is magic,” says Yu. “But I don’t need that any more. It’s about going back to the juice and saying, what’s in the bottle is enough.”

None of the *préparations* have product names. “Words like Intensity or Obsession are romantic marketing, designed to trick you into feeling a certain way about a scent,” says Delafon. The “dry, scientific labelling” on an Ostens bottle is designed to “focus your mind on what you are really smelling.”

“  
**A £3m perfume ad is magical. But we’re about going back to the juice and saying, what’s in the bottle is enough**

They hope it will help consumers engage with scent, to develop confidence in their own tastes. “People don’t know how to talk about scent, as children we aren’t taught how to converse with the language of it,” says Yu. To most people, a rose smells like a rose, without distinction. But IFF-LMR produces eight different types of rose; in Ostens’ 9ml preparation are 450 full roses from Isparta in Turkey, a city famed for cultivating the flower.

If Ostens were to wholesale the Préparation Rose Oil Isparta, it would cost “in the region of £380,” says Yu. “It would be inaccessible.” Instead, each preparation is priced according to the cost of the raw materials: the patchouli, cashmeran velvet and cedarwood heart are £35; the jasmine is £50. Even the Impressions — the six perfumes created from the oils to offer something for the traditional fragrance shopper — are priced accordingly (from £85). “They have different amounts of the ingredients in there,” says Yu. “We haven’t standardised the prices for standardisation’s sake.”

Delafon and Yu hope this new approach to scent — and the beams of neon light — will pique customers’ curiosity. “If people see the store and want to come in and sniff all the perfumes, totally be our guest,” says Yu. “We want to slow it down and say, just look. Because no one needs another bottle of perfume. Just fall in love with the idea of something again. Discover the joy of that very first sniff.”

### Follow the topics in this article

Beauty

+ Add to myFT

Grace Cook

+ Add to myFT