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## Fragrance is the new make-up: Nosing into the pandemic perfume boom



One brand under Amaris' stable that is gaining popularity is niche Parisian perfume house Ex Nihilo. PHOTO: COURTESY OF EX NIHILO



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PUBLISHED 40 MINS AGO

**SINGAPORE -** What would you wear to smell rich?

Perfume fans have the answer: Baccarat Rouge 540 by French perfumer Maison Francis Kurkdjian.

The pricey elixir (which starts at \$220 for 35ml) shot to fame in 2021, engulfing TikTok and Instagram with its heady notes of amber, musk and florals and promising to make the wearer smell effortlessly wealthy.

It is just one of many discussed in countless videos under the hashtag #perfumetiktok, which have clocked a combined 1.9 billion views on the social media platform.

Fragrance is having its moment. A combination of mask mandates (with beauty lovers switching from lipstick to fragrance), new mainstream interest in aromatherapy and the search for novel experiences in an experience-starved pandemic has set the global fragrance market soaring.

According to global research firm Statista, revenue in the prestige fragrances segment in Asia is set to total US\$3.177 billion (S\$4.3 billion) in 2022.

In Singapore, revenue in the fragrances segment currently amounts to US\$142.4 million and is expected to grow annually at a compound annual growth rate of 2.41 per cent in the next four years.

Market research firm The NPD Group found that global perfume sales increased by 45 per cent in 2021 from the previous year. Vice-president Larissa Jensen said the surge was unlike any other she had seen in her career.

Retailers in Singapore report the same glowing demand.

Fragrance distributor Aura Prestige has seen its niche fragrance category grow by more than 15 per cent year on year. The group owns Amaris, a multi-brand concept store at Paragon curating niche labels and recently opened a second branch at VivoCity.

General manager Edouard Dorize has observed more fragrance lovers looking for personalised and intimate experiences in the last four to five years. "There was also an increase in interest in niche fragrance brands due to social media and from pre-Covid-19 travels. At that time, some niche brands made their debut in Singapore."

Amaris Paragon opened in December 2018 carrying 11 international brands. This has grown to about 30 - including the likes of Paris' Juliette Has A Gun and Ex Nihilo, as well as Roja Parfums from Britain.



acfragrance01 - Maison Francis Kurkdjian store at Takashimaya Shopping Centre\_photo courtesy of Luxasia PHOTO: Courtesy of Luxasia

Aura Prestige also launched a boutique for commercial fragrance brand Maison Margiela at Takashimaya Shopping Centre in January, and is set to open a new multi-brand fragrance concept store under a new name next door.

Mr Dorize declined to reveal details, but the hoarding outside the store suggests that Ex Nihilo, Roja Parfums and new-to-market Atelier Cologne will be carried there.

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Meanwhile, luxury beauty distributor Luxasia observes a high double-digit growth in fragrance sales - for perfumes and home fragrance products - in the past 18 months.

The home-grown company owns multi-brand retailer Escentials, which has three stores here and which has brought in global brands such as Byredo and Maison Francis Kurkdjian. Both brands got standalone stores in basement one of Takashimaya - which has become an official beauty and fragrance floor in the mall - in October 2020 and September 2021 respectively.

Escentials also manages Parisian brand Diptyque's store on the same floor.



acfragrance01 - Amaris Paragon\_photo courtesy of Aura Prestige PHOTO: courtesy of Aura Prestige

Fragrance had already been doing well among younger consumers - "fuelled by a growing middle-class population, increasing consumer sophistication and a greater desire to differentiate oneself", says Ms Karen Ong, Luxasia's chief commercial officer.

But the pandemic pushed demand over the edge.

"Many consumers found life to be more monotonous due to travel restrictions. The olfactory experience from a spritz of perfume has the power to bring back desirable memories or invoke the imagination, creating an immediate feel-good effect and a welcome respite from the dread of the pandemic," she says.

Business is booming such that the group opened a standalone boutique for Italian brand Acqua di Parma at Raffles City Shopping Centre on March 30, and is planning spaces for two undisclosed brands in the second half of the year.

Marketing executive Amanda Goh has bought six or seven new perfumes since the pandemic began - from Diptyque, Gucci, Zara and Aerin.

Scents make her happy and "trigger different memories", says the 25-year-old. "I couldn't go overseas, so I spent more money on collecting perfumes."

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## Green, niche, gender-neutral scents in trend

Retailers interviewed point to the rise of niche brands, sustainable packaging and gender-neutrality as key trends in the industry.

The pool of niche fragrance lovers here is growing rapidly, notes Luxasia's Ms Ong.

"The category is thriving as many consumers become more discerning.

"We see consumers purchase and experiment with multiple brands at one go. This could also be the result of them learning how to layer scents as they research more about fragrance use," she adds.

Aura Prestige's Mr Dorize agrees. He says consumers used to play it safe with "classic brands", but a "younger, more adventurous and discerning" Generation Z has nudged demand in a different direction.

"They regard fragrances by popular luxury brands as too commercialised and are seeking something unique that can express their style. They also tend to gravitate towards non-gender-specific scents."

In a segment of the beauty market that historically marketed "for him and for her" offerings, gender-neutral products are a breath of fresh air.

Tom Ford Beauty's fragrances, widely marketed as unisex, are some of the best-performing globally. In February, ahead of Valentine's Day, the brand launched a trio of rose perfumes fronted by its regional ambassador, South Korean actor Hyun Bin.

Mr Dorize says: "Fragrances are no longer bound by genders or ingredients. Men can very much enjoy a floral scent while women can opt for an opulent ambery scent."

Consumers have also become more green-conscious, he adds, paying attention to the use of eco-friendly ingredients and packaging.

One brand under Amaris' stable that is gaining popularity is niche Parisian perfume house Ex Nihilo, which offers recyclable packaging.

Its artisanal perfumes - including its newest launch, a powdery floral called Iris Porcelana (\$330 to \$440) - come boxed in black recycled foam and recycled paper.





acfragrance01 - Ex Nihilo at Amaris Paragon\_photo courtesy of Aura Prestige PHOTO: courtesy of Aura Prestige

Founded in 2013 by three young professionals - Mr Benoit Verdier, Mr Olivier Royere and Ms Sylvie Loday - the brand aims to do away with the codes of traditional high perfumery. It offers personalised perfume consultation as part of an immersive olfactory experience, and has in the works a fourth store at Takashimaya.

Sustainability has been a continuous effort, Mr Verdier says, "since the inception of the house, with strict sourcing of raw materials like vanilla from Madagascar and vetiver from Haiti".

Consumers today are spoiled for choice and over-exposed to a lot of brands and messages, not to mention green-washing, he adds.

"But I think they have the same persuasions: the need for exclusivity and limited editions, and the love of personalised experiences they can share on social media. Ultimately, our aim is to create a sustainable and luxurious experience."

Self-professed fragrance lover Letitia Tandean, 30, has splashed out about \$1,200 on six new perfumes in the last two years.

The senior public relations manager, who gravitates towards stereotypically "masculine" fragrances, says she has become more adventurous in her scent choices since the pandemic.



acfragrance01 - Esentials at TANGS\_photo courtesy of Luxasia PHOTO: Courtesy of Luxasia

The newest additions to her collection include Brooklyn label D.S. & Durga's Debaseur, French brand Memo Paris' Irish Leather - both available at Esentials - and a "compose your own set" of travel-sized scents from Hermes.

Ms Tandean adds: "I have some staples I will buy over and over again, and then experiment with a few new scents or brands. I keep tabs on boutique or artisanal brands from websites like Paris-based Nose to see if they come to Singapore."

Her latest purchase is the Hermes Eau des Merveilles EDT, which she has been using for close to 10 years.

"I love it because a lot of people say that when they smell it, they immediately think of me - a testament to how powerful the olfactory senses are when conjuring memories."

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## Spritz tips

Mr Benoit Verdier, co-founder of Parisian fragrance house Ex Nihilo, shares tips on how to store and wear your favourite scents.

1. Keep the perfume away from heat and sunlight or anything that can destroy its properties. Light exposure may change its colour as it consists of natural materials.
2. After the first spray, a perfume's lifespan lasts three to five years due to the presence of oxygen.

3. Moisturise your skin before fragrance application to make it last longer. Or spritz onto clothing, which holds scent better.

4. Apply the fragrance on the pulse points, such as the neck and wrists. Wait until it dries and never rub it into your skin.

### New scents to try

1. Dior Homme Sport, \$130 (75ml) to \$180 (125ml), available at all Dior Beauty boutiques and counters



acfragrance01 - Dior Homme Sport, \$130 (75ml) to \$180 (125ml)\_photo courtesy of Dior Beauty PHOTO: Courtesy of DIOR Beauty

It may have been developed for men, but the citrus notes in this juicy fragrance will appeal to women who like a little musk in their perfume. Warm amber, woods and frankincense lend mystery and depth.

2. Ex Nihilo Iris Porcelana, \$300 (50ml) to \$440 (110ml), available at Amaris Paragon and VivoCity, and Isetan Scotts





acfragrance01 - Ex Nihilo\_photo courtesy of Aura Prestige PHOTO: courtesy of Aura Prestige

A contemporary take on the *Iris pallida*, this second-skin perfume blends top notes of violet leaf accord, iris and rose heart notes, as well as base notes of sandalwood, musks and cedarwood.

3. Tom Ford Rose Trilogy Collection, \$375 for 50ml, available at Tom Ford counters and [sephora.sg](https://www.sephora.sg)



acfragrance01 - Tom Ford Rose Trilogy Collection, \$375 (50ml) each\_photo courtesy of Tom Ford Beauty PHOTO: courtesy of Tom Ford Beauty

This trio, Rose D'Amalfi, Rose De Chine, Rose De Russie, share a rose note - expanding on it with an increasingly heavy touch by layering with Italian bergamot, Chinese yellow peony and Russian black leather respectively.

4. Burberry Her Eau de Toilette, \$140 for 50ml, available at sephora.sg, Sephora Ion Orchard and BHG Bugis Junction



acfragrance01 - Burberry Her Eau de Toilette, \$140 for 50ml.

Photo courtesy of Burberry Beauty PHOTO: BURBERRY BEAUTY

Fresh and with just the right amount of sweet, the newest addition to the Burberry Her collection has notes of bloomy peony, green pear, honeysuckle and rose, grounded by a woody base.

5. Kenzo Homme Eau de Toilette Intense, from \$83 for 40ml, available at Sephora stores, Metro stores and BHG Bugis Junction



With responsibly sourced Haitian vetiver and Australian sandalwood, this marine-woody men's fragrance re-energises with top notes of pink pepper and Calypsona. The bamboo plant packaging is also sustainably made, using 10 per cent recycled glass and a cap design that saves 34 per cent of plastic.

6. Zara x Jo Malone Vibrant Cities, from \$14.90 for 10ml, available at Zara stores



In its second collaboration with British perfumer Jo Malone, the Spanish fast-fashion retailer created a set of eight scents inspired by fashion-forward cities. Many of them, like Elegantly New York and Fashionably London, are said to be dupes for popular high-end scents.

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