

Perfectly Perfumed *with Roja Dove*

On daring, and the scent of tenderness
By Laura Elliott

He had me at olfactive perfection. I have a serious perfume problem. It's not 12-step bad, but close. So when the only man in the world able to discern 800 different fragrances agreed to share his inspirations, I had no idea where it would lead. Especially that his journey would begin in his mother's arms with the scent of tenderness.

Can you share what inspired the journey of discovering your own personal scent?
It came about in a very natural way. There are those that change their scent every day and those that stay committed to one for years or even decades. I am the latter. After I had experimented with fragrance while growing up and discovering the industry—as well as my personal style—I ended up wearing Mitsouko from Guerlain for 30 years. I absolutely adored it—it was me. Then one day, the formula had changed and it just wasn't the same. Eventually, I just made something for myself and have remained committed to that scent since.

How did this discovery change your life?
I was incredibly lucky in that I had the capabilities to create a scent for myself. I worked on it for a while, using all the materials I loved the most and was able to create something that to my tastes was the ultimate in olfactive perfection. It goes simply by the name ROJA and includes a little luxury mixed with a little sense of humour, as the gold floating in the formula is actually a cheeky nod to the quality of the raw materials that make up the scent. The gold is the cheapest ingredient in the liquid. After years of people asking me what I wear and where they can get it, I was convinced by my Business Partner to release a small quantity of it to the world. It is touching that people respond well to my own personal smell.



While growing up, did your mom wear perfume? Where did your love of scent come from?
Without any question, my earliest memory of an odour is the scent of face powder and perfume. When I was a small boy, around six or seven, my mother was dressed up to go out to a cocktail party. My ordinary mother was transformed by her gold lamé dress and the scent of her perfume and when she gave me a kiss goodnight, it was the first time I had stopped to think about smell and association. It was a very soft, powdery smell that seemed to be the micro encapsulation of femininity. It was the scent of tenderness. The goodnight kiss she gave me left me spellbound and put me on this path that I was destined to walk as a Perfumer.

When I take big trips, I pick a perfume at Duty-Free to take with me to wear on my travels and when I return home it serves as a joyful reminder of my experiences. Can you talk about how you collect perfume memories?
That's a nice thing to do—it's a bit like ending up with an olfactive postcard of lands that you've visited. I would say that there is nothing more luxurious than having a scent for a holiday. I feel that we are a slightly different version of ourselves when we go on vacation and it's lovely to have a new perfume chosen specifically to fit that trip, to help transform your experience into something as sensory and enjoyable as possible. Something that works really well in this sense is to think of the quintessential notes and styles of that region you are going to and find a scent that embodies that style. Like if you are going on a relaxing Mediterranean getaway, embrace notes of Bergamot, Fig, Neroli and the like. It really enhances your experience in an authentic way.



*Fragrant
Destinations*
Grasse
Italian Riviera
Salalah, Oman
Middle East
Mysore, India



What is the most fantastic or surprising story you can relate around creating unique scents for clients, perhaps an unexpected twist in the story of the creation?
There are two sides to my business—I make bespoke creations for private individuals as well as having my own commercial brand, Roja Parfums. The bespoke service is where I create directly with a client and it is something I treat with the utmost confidentiality. It is a very intimate process where the clients reveal a lot of their innermost thoughts and feelings. One time three different examples of one raw material went like this—one person recalled a damp countryside and tweed jackets, whilst another recalled cheap cleaning products, whilst another was transported to their childhood in an African mud hut. This material? Jasmine from Grasse, which costs £34,000 per kilo.

Can you share your top five favourite, fragrant luxury travel destinations?
I love Grasse, of course. Located in Provence, Grasse is the centre of the Perfumery world and where some of the best quality raw materials come from. My favourite place on earth is the Italian Riviera, where life is simple yet fine, just like the food. I also love Salalah in Oman for its Frankincense; The Middle East for its Aoud; and Mysore, in India for its legendary Sandalwood.

Can you share your most unique job title with us?
One journalist once referred to me as The Pornographer of Perfumery. I always remember that one as it really tickled me and I quite liked it. The scents that I make are incredibly sexy and they certainly do not shy away, so I thought it was actually a rather apt moniker to receive. Why not be daring with perfume, after all?