

# A fine VINTAGE

With a regal pedigree and legacy of fine fragrances, Amouage is embracing the transformative power of time

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In the world of beauty, time finds itself villainised. But for independent Omani fragrance house Amouage and its trio of expertly aged Essences, time is treated with reverence. It's integral in layering depth and individuality into a fragrance; the passing of time is celebrated, not commemorated.

"[In perfumery], I always see notes and olfactory pyramids," says Amouage's chief creative officer Renaud Salmon, in reference to the way fragrances are created. "Yes, [the fragrance notes] are important but there are other parameters that we don't talk much about; one is ageing." This led the expert to one question: "Could we open new behaviours in the fragrances if we were to age [them] and influence the ageing with infusions?" The answer was the Amouage Essences and the three scents: Reasons, Lustre and Outlands.

What sets the collection apart from Amouage's existing extracts and eau de parfums is the process of double infusion. While fragrances are ordinarily diluted with ethanol to determine their concentration and longevity, the bioethanol for the Essences is first aged in oakwood barrels. Simultaneously, the perfume concentrate is steeped with chips of sandalwood harvested from decades-old trees in Australia's Western Desert. After six months, the two elements are combined to imbue the fragrances with smokey notes from the oakwood barrels and the creamy qualities of the sandalwood.

This eye for detail and expertise in opulence has been a signature of Amouage since it was founded in 1983 by Sayyid Hamad bin Hamoud Al Busaidi. With the blessing of then-Sultan Qaboos bin Said, its founder was tasked to create "the Gift of Kings" – fragrances that were gifted only to the Sultan's guests. That same year Amouage tapped renowned perfumer Guy Robert, the nose behind Hermès' Equipage and Christian Dior's Dioressence, to craft their debut offering, Gold. Opulent and unabashedly luxurious, Robert's creation represented the marriage of traditional Arabic perfumery and French *savoir*





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*faire* by featuring a trio of Omani ingredients – rose, ambergris and frankincense – which have become the house’s olfactory signature.

Now it’s the gift of time that is threaded throughout the new fragrance trio. The first Essence, Reasons, is an ode to the past crafted by Bertrand Duchaufour. At the heart is *davana*, a fern native to India with a tea-like scent, which brings a fresh and herbaceous accord to complement the subtly sweet *palo santo* and *myrrh* base notes. “What I like about [Reasons is] how you can create a fragrance that has character, but that is not overly loud,” reflects Salmon. “I find it very refined and nuanced.”

Perfumers Julien Rasquinet and Paul Guerlain of the storied French fragrance family set out to capture the present moment with *Lustre*. It’s a name that, for Salmon, evokes “the sheen of the moon on the sea at night”, while Rasquinet hoped to create “something quite joyful, a synonym of hope”. It’s a comforting, smooth composition, built around *orris*, *sandalwood* and *vanilla*, with the spice of *cardamom* sparkling like light across water.

The final scent is *Outlands*, conceived by long-time Amouage collaborator Cécile Zarokian. She set out to hero *patchouli*, the bold and charismatic workhorse of fragrances of the ’80s. With a modern take on the flower, the perfumer says her work is a study in contrasts. “To balance *patchouli*, I put in a lot of citrus, especially *lemon*,” creating “vibrant, very sparkling top notes,” reflects Zarokian. “*Outlands* is this big fragrance that evokes the unknown,” adds Salmon. “It’s quite a statement.”

The Essences’ flacons also represent a new chapter for Amouage, being the bottles’ first redesign in more than 15 years. Brought to life by Jérôme Faillant-Dumas, founder of Parisian creative and artistic studio L.O.V.E and

former art director for Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé, the refillable bottles are rich in symbolism. To the perceptive eye, the ridges in the ceramic casing evoke the deserts of Oman as seen from above, and nod to the solar sign that adorns the gates of Oman’s Al Alam Palace.

When it comes to finding a signature scent among the Essences, Salmon is loath to be too prescriptive about who should wear which and when and lets the scents speak for themselves. “To be frank, I think about the type of fragrance I want to create, not the person,” he says. Instead, the expert focuses on the perfume’s “behaviour”, be that “big, discreet [or] refined”, that a wearer might naturally gravitate towards. The result, notes Salmon, can be surprising. “A few years ago, I welcomed King [Philippe] of the Belgians to Amouage in Oman,” Salmon recalls. “He came to select a fragrance for himself and for Queen [Mathilde]. I was convinced that he would select a classic Amouage fragrance, like *Gold*. Something very refined, very classical.” Instead, the King chose *Purpose*, which Salmon characterises as “extremely bold; one of the more contemporary fragrances of the portfolio”. (For his wife, King Philippe selected the equally powerful *Portrayal Woman*.) “It shows that it’s important to be open-minded when you navigate fragrances,” says Salmon.

This exploration of the Essences has opened a broad horizon of creative possibilities for Salmon. “What if I change some of the parameters, like using *vanilla pods* instead of *sandalwood*? Or if I do one or three years [of infusion] instead of six months, how are those fragrances going to evolve?” asks Salmon, who is also pondering blending “vintages” of each fragrance to achieve different scent profiles. It seems the best could be yet to come for Amouage. HB