

Camille Goutal, daughter of legendary perfumer Annick Goutal, tells RACHEL READ why her mother was a true pioneer

CAMILLE GOUTAL NEVER expected her life to be dedicated to fragrance – but then again, neither did her mother, Annick, creator of the Parisian perfume house that bears her name.

Annick started her career as a pianist before being scouted in London by photographer David Bailey. After a decade spent modelling but with a desire to “use her mind” (as Camille puts it), she returned to Paris to open an antiques shop, then finally a skincare shop with her daughter’s godmother in 1981. While the dermatologist-developed creams were effective, Annick found their strange scent off-putting, and so she travelled to Grasse in southern France to find a new perfume to add to her lotions. The rest, as they say, is history.

Although scent played a leading role in Goutal’s early life – “You think it’s normal that your mother makes you smell your tea, your food, your flowers, the newspaper, everything!” she recalls. “It was like training without even noticing” – she originally embarked on a career in photography. She only became involved in the family brand after her mother died in 1999.



SWEET MEMORIES

“I knew that Isabelle Doyen, my mother’s long-time assistant, was very good at creating fragrances, but needed someone to help her. I thought if it was someone else, it might change the spirit of the brand, so I started to work with her and learn how to create fragrances,” says Camille. “I knew her for such a long time, so we got on well – now we are almost the same nose!”

What was different about Annick was how she developed her scents, a legacy upheld by her daughter to this day. “She used her emotions, feelings and memories to create; she just put what she loved into fragrance, regardless of markets and trends,” Goutal explains. “Nowadays, brands say they have stories behind their fragrances, but it’s really in our DNA and what we have been doing since the start. She was one of the first to do what we now call a niche brand, but at the time it was just a brand doing things differently. She really was a pioneer.”

Annick was also responsible for another of the brand’s most beloved elements: its distinctive ribbed glass bottles tied with a ribbon. “When my mother started, she had no money, so she needed to find something for the packaging that already existed but that no other brands had used before,” Goutal says. “She went to the glassmakers, searched all their ancient boxes and when she found this one, knew she wanted it immediately. She thought it fitted in the hand well, and was very feminine and elegant, and now it’s our signature! It’s funny how when you have nothing, you can create something that becomes so special.”

Nevertheless, Annick Goutal has still evolved over the years; its latest creation, Rose Pompon, is something of a departure for the brand, as it has involved collaborating with another perfumer from outside the company, Philippine Courtière. “We had done so many rose fragrances before and wanted to have a younger, fresher approach – and Philippine is much younger than me!” Goutal laughs. “It’s rose but fruity, with blackcurrant, raspberry, patchouli and musk, sweet but not too sweet. It’s nice because it’s something a bit

different from what we do usually, but it still fits into our range.”

Rose is at the forefront of many of the house’s signature scents, including Ce Soir Ou Jamais (Annick’s “perfect rose” that took 10 years to create) and their bestseller Petite Chérie, a perfume inspired by Goutal herself. “It’s funny because my mother didn’t ask me what I wanted – it was more an evocation of what I was like and the image she had of me at the time, when I was about 20 years old,” Goutal remembers. “When you’re 20, you just want to have fun, you’re pretty without having to do anything because you’re young; it’s a very refreshing, happy, joyful scent – rose mixed with pear and peach. Whereas Rose Pompon seems more for now, this one is timeless.”

Goutal isn’t sure if further collaborations lie ahead. “I have a lot of ideas with Isabelle and a lot we still want to do,” she explains. Another perfume launch is already scheduled for later this year, “with different packaging, but I can’t tell you much more about it”. Having recently opened two stores in New York City, Goutal hopes to launch more boutiques around the world, perhaps expanding the range into home fragrances, too.

So what’s the secret behind Annick Goutal’s enduring appeal? “It’s funny – our brand seems classic but the fragrances themselves are unusual,” Goutal muses. “Maybe it’s pretentious to say, but it’s almost like an artistic creation.”

One sniff of an Annick Goutal scent and you’ll understand exactly what she means. **P**

