

# Find Your Niche

*Rachel Read* uncovers the newest artisanal fragrances—perfect for any gender

**I**F BUYING the newest scent that's emblazoned with Justin Bieber or Jennifer Lopez doesn't appeal to you, don't worry, you're not alone—in fact, the rise of niche fragrance brands has been one of the biggest trends to hit the perfume worlds in years.

Characterised by higher-quality ingredients, lower production numbers, an independent spirit and a non-conformist approach to scent, niche fragrance brands are growing in popularity. “The trend towards niche perfumery is driven by the customer—they're becoming more discerning and educated about fragrance, looking for high-quality products and interesting stories,” says Lance Patterson, CEO of heritage English perfume house Penhaligon's. “These customers are seeking something different—something that they feel they have discovered themselves and that reflects them more personally than mass perfumes.”



By refusing to follow trends, these artisanal perfume houses have become the trend themselves—including an unorthodox approach to fragrance creation that means their most popular scents are unisex. “Niche fragrance brands are not tied down by boundaries; like artists, they are focused on creating a scent that is both innovative and doesn't follow trends,” says Pauline Lau, managing director of Hong Kong-based independent perfume boutique Parfumerie Trésor. “Many designer brands have focused on marketing single perfumes for a certain demographic and gender to drive sales. But as we are exposed to more knowledge, we begin to learn that there are no rules to finding a perfume. By calling a scent unisex, an individual's options are not restricted; they are instead looking for a scent they like, rather than a scent that has been labelled as right for them.”

These days, there is definitely much more to perfume than the latest celebrity endorsement or designer tie-in, as these unisex fragrances prove.



**Spring in Bloom**

Forget the idea that floral has to equate to femininity. “People are more comfortable choosing what they like, rather than having that dictated to them,” says Patterson, as evidenced by Penhaligon’s most recent unisex scent, *Blasted Bloom*. Inspired by the wild flora on Britain’s coast, it features notes of eglantine rose, hawthorn, wild berries and green leaves tinted with pink pepper, moss and an aquatic accord for a free-spirited, exhilarating fragrance.

Byredo, led by the enigmatic Ben Gorham (a former basketball player who has no formal training in fragrance), also brings on the blooms for spring with the *Night Veils* collection—concoctions so intense that just a single drop is needed to envelop the senses. Try *Casablanca Lily* for a



mysterious and evocative blend of black plum, wild gardenia, carnation, tuberose and honey. Meanwhile, *Histoires de Parfums’ Édition Rare* collection (available at *Parfumerie Trésor*) features *Rosam*—an ode to the rose that’s anything but your traditional cloyingly sweet floral. Boasting a bouquet of velvety rose petals and saffron flower amplified by deep oud and rich incense, this is a darkly mystical aroma full of Eastern promise.

**Summer Nights**

“We like to call our colognes chameleons, meaning they appeal to both sexes—their exceptional freshness and longevity makes them universal,” explains Sylvie Ganter, co-founder of *Atelier Cologne*. All of the brand’s fragrances are based on citrus fruits, and its newest addition, *Bergamote Soleil*, is no exception. Opening with Calabrian bergamot and bitter orange from the Ivory Coast, it also features accents of Egyptian jasmine

and Haitian vetiver—a bright summery scent celebrating friendship and travel. One of the biggest names in the niche fragrance world, Frédéric Malle’s latest *Éditions de Parfums* creation also features citrus at its heart. *Cologne Indélébile* (available at *Joyce Beauty*) mixes modern musk oils with orange flower, neroli, lemon, bergamot and narcissus—creating a thoroughly contemporary take on cologne that combines a clean freshness with raw sex appeal.



**Into the Woods**

Woody fragrances are a perennial unisex favourite, as embraced by British brand *Jo Malone’s Incense & Cedrat Cologne Intense*. “We wanted a fragrance that played with the brightness of incense and its natural freshness, while embracing its inherent warmth and woodiness; my challenge was to accentuate its many qualities and tame its dark character,” says master perfumer Marie Salamagne, the nose behind the creation. Using the most precious incense in the world, Omani, enriched with the amber-like labdanum, sweet benzoin and peppery elemi, this is a dark autumnal scent perfect for both sexes.

Cult New York brand *Le Labo’s* artisanal ethos sees it formulate all its scents by hand and to order. Launching an average of only one perfume each year, its latest creation *Thé Noir 29* is inspired by tea, and boasts a fittingly woody yet fruity fragrance. Combining the lightness of fig and bay leaf with the depth of vetiver and cedarwood, plus an extraction of black tea itself, this is a gorgeously smoky yet sensual scent.

Parisian fragrance house *Maison Francis Kurkdjian’s* most recent composition, *Baccarat Rouge 540* (available at *Joyce Beauty*), is also a woody affair. Interlacing facets of jasmine, saffron, amberwood, fir resin and cedar, this collaboration with the renowned fine crystal manufacturer *Baccarat* is a heady scent with a tangible sense of luxury. ❶

