



Scent HORIZON

In the intensely competitive fragrance industry, perfume oils are quietly making their mark.

By MISHAL CAZMI

PHOTOGRAPHY: STOCKSY

F SPRAY-ON PERFUMES ARE the extroverts of the beauty world, with their eye-catching bottles, showy spritz and lingering sillage, perfume oils are the wallflowers, offering a more reserved, intimate and tactile olfactory experience.

For perfume aficionados, oils are just another avenue for exploration; but for those who have always shied away from this traditional form of scent, now is the time to discover all that this exciting—and expanding—world has to offer.

“Perfume oils are a blend of a carrier oil, such as safflower or jojoba, and fragrance oils, which can be either essential oils, synthetic oils or a combination of the two,” explains Barbara Stegemann, founder of Canadian vegan fragrance brand The 7 Virtues, which launched perfume oils earlier this year. The carrier oil replaces the alcohol that’s found in traditional perfumes, making perfume oils a less drying option. They also often boast a higher amount of fragrance oil than their eau de parfum counterparts. “While the higher concentration doesn’t necessarily equal longer staying power, certain natural oils, like vanilla, sandalwood and vetiver, adhere better to the skin since they’re natural fixatives—which is also why they’re more commonly used in perfume oils,” explains Stegemann.

Perfume oils might seem novel in North America, but they were actually the world’s first traditional form of fragrance. “Tapputi was the first perfumer in Babylonian Mesopotamia; she’s said to have found a way to distill the essence of plants and flowers to create perfume, taking note of everything she made,” says Dana El Masri, a Montreal-based perfumer and founder of Jazmin Saraï. They were also used by the Ancient Egyptians

and eventually made their way into different cultures around the world, often as a unisex staple.

Today, increasing consumer interest in clean beauty, aromatherapy and self-care has seen the perfume-oil category flourish. Brands like Maison Louis Marie, By Rosie Jane and (Malin+Goetz) are now carried at major beauty retailers like Sephora, and a number of new—and Canadian—companies are also making their mark. Ariel Gough and Edwina Govindsamy, co-founders of Halifax-based Bailly, were inspired to launch a line of vegan and hypoallergenic perfume oils, in part to provide an alternative for people with fragrance sensitivities. They found that alcohol is one of the culprits, triggering headaches in those who are more reactive to scent. Their solution? A base of coconut oil, which offers five hours of wear compared to the typical three hours of an alcohol-based perfume. Their clean and sustainable ethos, with phthalate-, paraben-, sulphate- and formaldehyde-free formulas, is the new norm for emerging brands.

Stegemann also believes that perfume oils reflect a move toward self-care, as they offer the benefits of both aromatherapy and a moisturizer. The 7 Virtues’ line of perfume oils, which were inspired by its bestselling fragrances, are made with an organic jojoba-oil base and outfitted with a gemstone roller. “Aromatherapy really supports our need to feel centred, grounded and inspired right now,” she says.

In a world where fragrances can often be considered loud or flashy, the gentle intimacy of perfume oils may just be the welcome reprieve we’ve been looking for. ■



1. Nemat Amber Perfume Oil (\$17.50, nematperfumes.com). 2. (Malin+Goetz) Dark Rum Perfume Oil (\$65, sephora.ca). 3. Maison Louis Marie No.12 Bousval Perfume Oil (\$75, sephora.ca). 4. Lohn Jura Perfume Oil (\$55, shoplohn.com). 5. The 7 Virtues Santal Vanille Perfume Oil (\$89, sephora.ca). 6. Bailly Fragrance Soar Roll-on Perfume Oil (\$35, bailly.co).