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From The Magic Tree: Oud to Look Good, Smell Good & Feel Good (Fragrance & Perfume Part 3)

[Livingmsia](#) July 12, 2017 599 Views



Fragrance has indeed been fascinating since the dawn of time. Some of the rarest raw material gum resins such as Frankincense and Myrrh were used by the ancients as gifts to their Gods. But many did not understand how to use this precious raw material from the trees. Therefore, historically, there was the idea of burning them. Early users realised that if they burned the gum resin, the fragrance released through the smoke would ascend towards heaven. The word perfume itself comes for the Latin word “per fumus”, which means “through smoke”. This means that much of the fragrances of ancient times were incense-based.

Oud itself is one of the most remarkable raw materials to produce fragrance. Oud comes from the resinous portions of a tree called the Agarwood tree. The Agarwood could either be distilled to make Oud oil or small pieces of it could be broken on to glowing hot charcoal to release its scent. That is how incense originated. As the resin fell on the charcoal, it burned and released its precious fragrance through smoke.



Much of the fragrances of ancient times were incense-based. Pic from Ferminich Naturals Together

The Ritual of Bakhoor



A Middle Eastern man going through the

ritual of Bakhoor (Pic from Pinterest) **I**n the Middle East, when Oud was burned, it is called *bakhoor*. *Bakhoor* is literally a part of the everyday ritual culture of the Middle East. It is used to scent clothes, wardrobe, and homes. The scent is soft, yet it clings to fabric. In Islamic traditions, small pieces of Oud are often burnt to keep the interiors of homes smelling hygienic and aromatic.

Who would have thought that this ordinary looking wood would have such a long history of use as perfume! It has even been mentioned in the world's oldest written texts – *Sahih Muslim, the Sanskrit Vedas and the Testaments*, both old and new. With its past journey traced, the mythical perfumery ingredient – Oud oil, has travelled far and in this present day, has enjoyed an average growth rate of 50% a year due to overwhelming demand. It is no wonder that Oud is expected to boast a market value of over US\$25 billion this year!

An Amplifying and Enduring Perfume

Now, the most fascinating thing about this liquid gold is that when you mix another scent with it, you start to personalise your fragrance. That's because Oud oil has the ability to hold and sustain the other scent you mix with it – extending the “life” of the fragrance for days and days on your clothing and remaining as fresh as the day you applied it. This is one of the unusual qualities of Oud oil.



Customise your own perfume! Pic of all your choices from [Fragrance Du Bois](#).

Fragrance companies have discovered this amazing magic which is why some of them enable you to customise your own perfume to reveal the scent that is uniquely you. [Fragrance Du Bois](#) for example, will help to find an Oud scent from the Shades Du Bois collection closest to your personality. They do this by asking you some pertinent questions, and then you “tweak” and “finetune” by adding extra notes to make *your* perfume an even better “fit”.

Oud oil which comes from the process of distillation is by far the most costly raw material in the world and very often, the cost is many times the price of pure gold. But to capture the quality is another story altogether. Only a certain kind of people are able to determine its quality. Some specialists are so good at valuing Oud they will look at a piece and their eye will calculate its quality and value. However, some buyers are equipped with their own sensors too and are able to assess equally as accurately.



Here's some research on Oud oil

Perfumer Flavorist

The Holy Fragrance

On top of that, Oud oil is very much like wine, where the more it is aged, the more it becomes amazing in terms of flavour and aroma, and the more exquisite and expensive. Most of what you can find in Arab perfumery is between 10 to 20 years old. Sometimes you might be lucky to find Oud of 120 or 150 years old!

Perfume

OLD & AGED KALAKAS
 AGARWOOD OIL-120 YEARS

دھن عود کلا کاسی
 قرطیم

Zahras Perfume

Top Note
 Middle Note
 Base Note

Kalakas agarwood oil

120 years old agarwood oil

Kalakas agarwood oil

0% 20% 100%

kalakas agarwood oil

pure aged agarwood oil

Fragrance Description
 الوصف العطري

Fragrance Family (Ghalat):
 Woody

Fragrance Profile
 التركيب العطري

ABDUL SAMAD AL QURASHI عبد الصمد القرشي

Here's one such wonder. Zahras Perfume by [Abdul Samad Al Quraishi](#).
Not just a Middle Eastern Predilection



All these are instantly recognisable international brand names from the

Western world of perfumes. There is a common denominator if you've noticed: Oud.

These types of Oud oil are incredibly rare. Hence, the Middle East has always cultivated an intense relationship with the sense of smell. You can see a variety of branded perfumes based on essential Oud oil in Western Asia, namely *Ajmal*, *Arabian Oud*, *Al-Haramain*, *Yas Perfume*, *Swiss Arabian* and many more.

[Read Part 1 of the Magic Tree series: From The Magic Tree: The Miracle of Oud Oil \(Essential Oils for Healing Part 1\)](#)



Pic from [Al-Haramain Perfumes](#).

As compared to the Middle East, most people in the West have no point of reference for Oud. But when the Gulf opened as a destination for travel, holiday and business, they started to smell this very strange and exotic, animalic scent. Westerners were certainly intrigued and got their noses scenting out Oud. Aslan Gulcicek of MG Gulcicek International Fragrance Company, Turkey once said “It is no doubt that the Middle East is establishing itself as a global hub of trendsetting perfume creations”.

How true that is! When French brands like D&G, Armani, Dior and others came rushing on the scene with their range of niche Oud fragrances, Gulcicek’s words became prophecy.



This smouldering print ad got a whole lot of eye balls popping when it first came out. It was unmistakable in its message. And it featured Oud for the first time for the Western market.

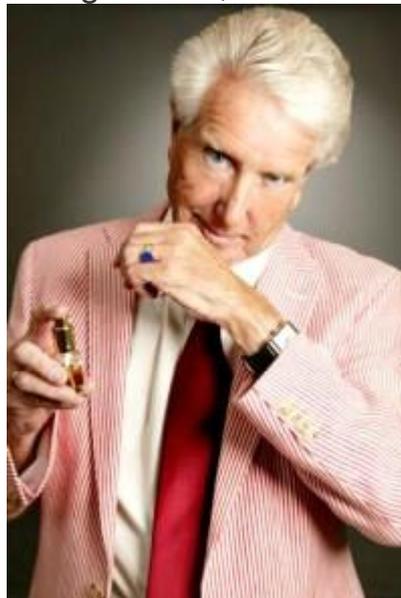
Oud in the Western World

Few people will ever forget this ad when they saw it emblazoned across newspapers and magazines: YSL's M7 for men featuring musky, intense Oud as one of its fragrance notes trailblazed the way for Oud fragrances in the Western world. It was the first of its kind in the Western market. Of course, the provocative ad helped to make its point – that this fragrance is unmistakably male. YSL launched M7 in 2002 under the direction of Tom Ford who later created his own line of Oud perfumes. M7 – featuring Agarwood as its middle notes, with amber, musk and mandrake root as its base – was created by Jacques Cavalier and Alberto Morillas.

“It is no doubt that the Middle East is establishing itself as a global hub of trendsetting perfume creations”. – Aslan Gulcicek



The scents are appropriately named William and Catherine and come in respectively sleek black and white atomisers. Prince William's scent is a combination of Norfolk lavender and Agarwood, with the top-note affected



by bergamot. Pic by [Lacey Gattis](#). Fragrance expert John Bailey loves to give lectures on Roses, Oud and the way perfumes should be recognized and presented. Pic from The Perfume Magazine.

More recently, famous perfumist [Kim Weisswange](#) with clients like Madonna, Pierce Brosnan, Vivienne Westwood and even Prince Charles, was asked to create a fragrance masterpiece for Prince William and Kate Middleton on the occasion of the royal marriage. Weisswange chose Agarwood (or Gaharu) as one of the main fragrance's notes. Read the article: "[Gaharu Oil For Prince William Perfume](#)".

On top of that, the famous fragrance expert, John Bailey expanded Oud by opening more flagship perfumeries in London and Paris by collaborating with Sheikh Al Jasser, the founder of Riyadh-based Arabian Oudh Group of the early 2000s.

Here is a quote from *The Perfume Magazine* from where this picture comes: "John Bailey's 'Queen of Sheba', is one of the first Oudh perfumes made by a Western niche perfumer", it says. Read the interview – [The Art and Passion of John Bailey – A Rare Interview](#) in its entirety here.

No wonder that perfume industry cognoscenti describe Oud as the "fragrance of the 21st century".

Some of these fragrances have extended their range to include aftershave, beard care, soap, deodorant stick, body spray and so on and so forth.



Top: Atkinsons 'Oud Save the Queen'. Bottom Left: TOM FORD: The Attack of the Ouds with the new addition of Oud Fleur. Pic from [Koch-parfumerier](#). Bottom Right: The extended Oud collection now includes the

entire range of a new body spray; deodorant stick and hard-milled soap bar. Pic from [Style Syndicate](#).

No wonder that perfume industry cognoscenti describe Oud as the “fragrance of the 21st century”

The Downside of Demand

And so this means that desire is in abundance for Oud oil, be it natural or synthetic. It actually takes an expert to distinguish between pure Oud oil and adulterated Oud oil. It is disheartening though that over-harvesting and illegal smuggling in the wild has further depleted the scarce supply of this precious essential oil. Imagine when more than 90 out of every 100 of Aquilaria trees felled will simply be discarded and left to rot! This totally accelerates the extinction of Agarwood trees worldwide! All because of the value of Agarwood in perfumery, now much prized by European perfume manufacturers for mixing their best grade scents.



Left: The source of Oud oil is from the resinous centre of the Agarwood or Aquilaria tree. Pic from by [Ecozine](#). Right: The title of this translated (presumably from Chinese) article where the picture and news comes from, reads: “117 Aquilaria trees illegally logged in three years” Pic from [Shenzhen Daily News via Top News](#).

Thus, companies like [Treedom](#), [Asia Plantation Capital](#), and [Ajmal India](#) are tirelessly striving for sustainability in Oud oil supply through efficient plantation management. The most interesting part is that they are socially focused on the rural community as well. Not only do they immediately re-plant after harvesting the Agarwood tree, they also provide employment and income to the local people. On our end, the Malaysian Timber Industry Board (MTIB) and Malaysian Forest Research Institute (FRIM) have taken a huge initiative in coming up with an action plan for the development of our Malaysian Agarwood plantation industry. Kudos to them!



Left: An Agarwood tree plantation. Right: Agarwood trees being inoculated. Interestingly, the Aquilaria tree has to be wounded and infected by a certain type of mould before they produce the resin in the heart of the tree. Pic from the Treedom Group.

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Catering to a Fragrance-Captivated Market

Demand and its extremely high price has led to the emergence of synthetic Oud oil which provides a solution of sorts to the dilemma in the market. Nowadays, to cater to customers on a budget, many of these “Oud” fragrances contain synthetic materials that replicate the natural Oud

scent quite accurately. The inexperienced nose is not so finicky so long as it is affordable. But replication has its upside too. A combination of synthetic and natural Oud blends well to create a great perfume. It will actually tone down the overpowering smell of Oud for some. In some places in India, various grades of distilled Agarwood are blended to produce the final “attar”. This water-based perfume called *minyak attar* is very popular among Muslims as it is used to lace their prayer clothes during prayer. In fact it is widely used here in Malaysia and you can easily find it in your nearest Mydin stores!

“A fragrance is all that it takes to travel through time, such is the bond between memory and smell.” – Founder and the late Haji Ajmal Ali of Ajmal India



Take your pick. Affordable minyak attar. Pic from Mydin.

The bouquet of Oud-based perfumes indeed heightens one’s transcendence towards the divine. Oud is so popular in Malaysia, you can

see an abundance of Oud shops in Bukit Bintang which is also known as the Middle Eastern tourism centre in Kuala Lumpur.



Busy, busy, busy fragrance street Bukit Bintang. Pic from [Gogonesia](#).

With a scent so complex, so strong, so deep, so musky, so mystical, so stirring and so sensual, its evocative fragrance has the ability to transport the human senses to places it has never been with one whiff. And now available in so many forms, use it in all its ways to look good, smell good and feel good.

[Read Part 2 of the Magic Tree series: From The Magic Tree: The Wonders of Agarwood Leaves \(Beverages for Healing Part 2\)](#)

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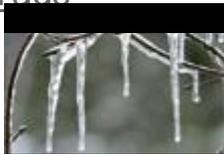
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