Can India build a luxury perfume brand that challenges global giants?

India supplies prized ingredients to the world's most elite fragrance houses. But why hasn't it built a prestige label as famous as the names on those bottles?



Raja Palaniswamy, a director at the Jasmine Concrete Exports Private Limited, smells Jasmine flowers at his factory in Dindigul. The valuable scent of the flowers is snapped up as an essential ingredient for global perfumes. File photo/AFP

Murali K Menon | Nov 01, 2026, 09:25:06 IST

In a world saturated with mainstream designer scents, true luxury lies in the unseen and the unrepeatable. While thousands might routinely spritz global bestsellers by Dior or Chanel, a discerning new class of Indian connoisseurs is looking to smell entirely unlike anyone else.

Enter Scentido, a specialist fragrance purveyor stocking around 40 elite, niche perfume houses across its boutiques in India, where bottles command anywhere from Rs 10,000 to a cool lakh. Situating themselves several rungs

above mass-market designer lines, these olfactory creations compete alongside ultra-exclusive private reserves like Armani Privé and Tom Ford Private Blend. Often founder-led and boasting higher concentrations of pure perfume oil, they promise total sensory distinction. In other words, while a thousand people might be wearing Dior's Sauvage, only a select few will carry the rare, complex aura of an Amouage or a Nishane.

This craving for exclusivity is transforming the domestic retail landscape. The Indian market for niche perfumes is growing, says Scentido founder Shishir Mehta, though rising import prices have pushed buyers towards less expensive bottles. "The sweet spot is $100 to $250 (Rs 9,400 to Rs 23,700)," he says. About 70 per cent of Scentido's sales fall in that range.

Scentido is not the only player shaking up the luxury domain. Several coveted niche houses are expanding their footprints in India with dedicated standalone boutiques – including Creed and Maison Francis Kurkdjian in New Delhi, Diptyque in Bengaluru and Delhi, Amouage in Bengaluru, and Byredo in Mumbai.



Fragrances like Amouage are rare.

The rapid retail expansion underscores a compelling shift in global scent geography.

European houses have long dominated luxury perfumery, often working behind the scenes with fragrance creators such as Givaudan, dsm-firmenich, and Robertet. Yet, the last two decades have witnessed a democratisation in the world of olfactory art, with internationally recognised perfume houses emerging elsewhere from Turkey and Sweden to South Korea and Australia.

And so, we come to the obvious question: What is stopping India, with its ancient fragrance tradition and unparalleled wealth of raw ingredients, from building a comparable presence?

Supplying the scent

India, after all, is the silent engine of the global perfume trade, supplying some of its most prized raw materials like jasmine, tuberose, rose, and sandalwood. According to dsm-firmenich, India accounts for 80 per cent of global production of jasmine sambac concrete and about 40 per cent of jasmine grandiflorum concrete, concentrated flower extracts used in perfumery. Both Dior and Guerlain have long relied on jasmine extracts from Madurai; rose oil from Damask roses grown in Kashmir can reportedly fetch as much as Rs 10 lakh a kilo internationally.

The country is not only a botanical hub, but also a creative muse. For over a century, master perfumers have travelled to India for inspiration. Guerlain’s Shalimar, created in 1925, celebrates the love story of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal. Today, ultra-niche houses like Memo Paris rely on India to command top-tier luxury pricing. Their fragrance Madurai doesn’t just use jasmine and turmeric; it packages the sensory opulence of the southern city into a status symbol.



Perfume giants Dior and Guerlain have long relied on jasmine extracts from Madurai. File photo/AFP

None of this, however, has translated into an established Indian global fragrance house. The case in point is Ajmal Perfumes. Founded in Assam in 1951 by Haji Ajmal Ali, the brand built an international business empire of oud and attars. But it has now pivoted its operations and is headquartered in Dubai.

It is not just the loss of the luxury narrative but also a big economic compromise. As Visalakshi Kannan of Madurai Malli Fragrances, part of the Thiagarajar Group, notes, India has created scale lower down by providing the raw materials, “while the West has created scale higher up the value chain”.

Her mother, Dr Uma Kannan, set up the company in 2023 to produce high-value extracts from locally grown jasmine and tuberose. Madurai Malli’s clients are mostly overseas buyers. About 1000 kg of jasmine sambac flowers yield one kilogram of absolute, a concentrated extract used in perfumes. Madurai jasmine has a geographical indication (GI) tag, but its reputation does not necessarily guarantee the farmer or extract-maker a higher price. “I think where the value has been created is on the brand side,” Kannan says,

with perfume houses able to tell customers where they sourced their jasmine and build a story around it.



Dr Uma Kannan set up Madurai Malli Fragrances, which produces high-value extracts from jasmine and tuberose.

The booming domestic market

Meanwhile, domestic consumers are laying the groundwork to turn India into a fragrance powerhouse. According to an internal estimate by Titan's fragrance brand Skinn, the domestic organised perfume market is worth about Rs 4,500 crore and growing at 13 to 15 per cent annually by value. Perfumes priced between Rs 1,000 and Rs 3,000 per 100 ml account for 55 per cent of sales value. Both Skinn and luxury Ayurveda brand Forest Essentials, now owned by American beauty brand Estee Lauder, offer perfumes priced around Rs 4,500. Forest Essentials' executive director Samrath Bedi says fragrance remains smaller than its established skincare and wellness categories, but is growing faster than the overall business. It contributes a mid-teens share of online revenue.

Much of the action in the domestic perfume market might be at the affordable end, but digital-first brands like Neesh are aiming higher. Founded in 2019, Neesh works with international perfumers such as Christophe

Raynaud (Paco Rabanne 1 Million, Lancôme La Nuit Trésor) and prices its flagship products around Rs 8,000.

Founder Rishi Verma says it sells around 30,000 bottles a year. Most sales come online, and Verma hopes expanding into physical retail and duty-free stores will reduce the need for discounting. Verma, though, is quick to admit that Indian perfumes still have some way to go before they can compete with their international counterparts. “We really need to pick up our game in terms of positioning, in terms of PR, in terms of the juices that we are producing,” he believes.



Shishir Mehta of Scentido says the Indian market for niche perfumes is growing.

To build global repute, a label must secure shelf space at the world’s premium boutiques. Scentido’s Mehta says that an unfamiliar Indian

challenger has to not just win over the retailer, but negotiate entrenched stereotypes. “A lot of brands want to see our brand list... They will ask why you are selling some local brand in your store.”

A debut in Milan

Yet, the blueprint to break these barriers exists. Chennai-based Sasva is already finding space in specialist perfume stores internationally. Founder Sriman Subramanian, whose family is in construction and luxury hospitality, launched Sasva in Milan in December 2022. Today, the brand’s perfumes sell for about Rs 19,000, and it works with perfumers such as Dominique Ropion, Julien Rasquinet, and Hamid Merati-Kashani.

Subramanian says Sasva’s perfumes are made in India using natural ingredients sourced within the country. “The whole project was to create a global luxury brand made out of India that doesn’t just go to, let’s say, Indian diasporic pockets in the UK or the US, but also has an international audience… The idea was to take India towards people who don’t necessarily have the inherent cultural affinity with the country.”



The Esxence Artisanal Perfume Fair in Milan. Chennai-based Sasva was launched in Milan in 2022.

Sasva's olfactory map reads like a travelogue of contemporary India. In Forbidden Words Bombay Gourmand, the house bottles the electric pulse of Mumbai's Bandra nightlife with decadent notes of oud, salted caramel, and vanilla. Shanthi, from the Le Notti di Goa collection, combines mango, pineapple, and marine notes to evoke the Goan coast.

According to Subramanian, Sasva sells about 45,000 bottles annually, mostly in Italy, the wider European market, the Gulf and South America. The European retailers, he adds, have been more welcoming than those in India and Asia. "Once the West adopts a brand from India, we tend to look at it more favourably," he says.

Yet, creating a perfume legacy can take years, even if a viral campaign sparks curiosity online, retail experts warn. "Establishing a credible brand in any category takes a minimum of three to five years", believes Devangshu Dutta, founder of retail consultancy Rhird Eyesight. It takes repeat purchases and the ability to withstand competition from established giants. "You can spend millions in getting your message out. But that's only one part of the story," Dutta emphasises.

So far, India's role in this story has largely been to supply ingredients. But as local creators reclaim the narrative and force up the doors of global retail, the axis is shifting. Will the next chapter belong to an Indian perfume house the world knows by name?