

# WHEN SCENT IS THE STAR

WHILE THE PERFUME SHELVES OVERFLOW WITH CELEBRITY FRAGRANCES, ONE COMPANY'S HOPING TO HAVE YOU SMELLING LIKE IT'S 1835

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**T**racing one's genealogy is always interesting. You could, for instance, find a relative you never knew you had or you could seek out answers to a pertinent medical problem.

Or, if you are Simon Brooke, you could find an idea for a brand new business. "When I first started searching, I was getting all these references to fragrances," says Brooke, a London-based property consultant who recently turned perfumer. "Then I dug deeper and the link became stronger and stronger."

Brooke, 57, eventually discovered that his great-great grandfather, John Grossmith, was the founder of a perfume house in 1835 – one of London's oldest perfumers. In fact, the company, J. Grossmith and Son, was so reputed that it was granted a Royal Warrant by Queen Alexandra in the 1900s – a mark of recognition to individuals or companies who have supplied goods and services for at least five years to the Queen of England.

"Once we established that, I checked with relatives and began collecting every bit of information we could," says Brooke, who says his wife has been his biggest supporter.

The company, they found, was family-run for three generations until 1924. Then in 1970, it went completely out of family ownership and ceased trading completely in 1980.

Various versions of the perfumes, some antiques, were still floating around on the internet and the Brookes immediately set about collecting them one by one.

But it was the discovery of the formula books, found buried in the basement of a cousin's house, that gave them the eventual push, says Brooke.

## 'NO-BRAINER'

"The opportunity presented itself and we knew we had to do something," he says of the books, written by John Lipscomb Grossmith, the founder's son, which contained the formulae of more than 300 products including perfumes, eau de toilette, colognes, oil blends and soaps.

"We sold off everything, including our flat in Devon. It was a no-brainer. We knew we wanted to do it," recalls the businessman.

Grossmith London was born in 2005. Tracing the footsteps of his ancestors,

Brooke employed the services of Grasse-based perfumery Robertet, which specialises in natural materials, to reproduce three classic fragrances, the original company's bestselling perfumes.

Roja Dove, a renowned fragrance expert who's trained with Guerlain – one of the world's oldest perfume companies – was brought in as consultant.

Along the way, Brooke also found an interesting nugget of information. "In 1919 the company ordered special flacons from Maison Baccarat and we wanted to recreate that. So I got in touch with the company who looked through their archives and found the original moulds," recalls Brooke.

French company Baccarat is renowned for its crystal glassware. Three reproduced Grossmith fragrances are now available in a special-edition Baccarat flacon while other versions inspired by the original design complete the range. The perfumes were officially launched in November last year.

"We had sleepless nights," recalls Brooke, about launching a high-end fragrance in the midst of a much battered economy.

"But somewhere we were comforted by the fact that the luxury market was resilient and we wanted to capitalise on our heritage."

The three perfumes – the Arabic-inspired Shem-el-Nessim, Phul-Nana from India and the Japanese Hasu-No-Hana – are now available, retailing between Dh1,000 and Dh3,000.

Brooke was in Dubai recently to announce the brand's availability at Saks Fifth Avenue in BurJuman.

"The Middle East, along with the US and Europe, will be our core markets for now," says Brooke, who says he will continue to expand the range of products, and hopefully move into fashion.

"We've been encouraged by the reception of the brand, especially here in the region."

The businessman is anti-celebrity when it comes to fragrances.

"We are bombarded by celebrity scents from everywhere. I think there is a falseness, a shallowness about it. I feel it's very contrived, very fake," he says.

"We want to take back people to the real cult of perfumery, where the perfume is the star."

## DID YOU KNOW?

One of the Grossmith perfumes with a royal connection was produced to celebrate the wedding in July 1893 of Princess May of Teck and Prince George (Prince of Wales and Duke of York). Prince George subsequently became King George V and Princess May became Queen Mary. They were the grandparents of Queen Elizabeth II.



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