Perfumery: Provence rose the emblem of proximity sourcing

By Sarah Ahssen  
3 May 2022

On Monday May 2, Parfums Christian Dior launched Miss Dior Rose Essence, a unique vintage fragrance made using the entire annual harvest of Provence rose (rosa centifolia) from the Domaine de Manon estate, a fragrance flower producer that has thrived for four generations in the Grasse area in Provence, France.

Since 2006, LVMH-owned Dior has established a presence in the Grasse area, the land of perfume, building partnerships with local farmers and flower growers. “In Grasse, the 15-hectare flower plantations reserved for Dior employ thirteen people the whole year round, and up to 50 seasonal workers to harvest the plants at peak flowering time. This activity has helped revitalize the Grasse area’s economy, acting as a model for other flower growers that have settled there subsequently,” said Dior in a press release.

For 16 years, under the aegis of Dior’s fragrance designer François Demachy, the Domaine de Manon estate, run by Carole Biancalana, reserves for Dior the entire harvest from the three hectares of Provence rose and Royal jasmine (jasminum grandiflorum) grown on the estate. This year, for the first time, the entire Provence rose crop has been used to produce a single perfume: Miss Dior Rose Essence.

The rosa centifolia is carefully harvested from May to mid-June exclusively in the morning, when it has freshly bloomed and is at its most fragrant. Distillation, the step that converts fresh flowers into essential oil, must then be carried out quickly, to avoid loss of quality. Year after year, the vintage Miss Dior Rose Essence perfume, retailing at €170, will reflect the singularity of each crop.
In April, Lancôme instead launched a new version of its flagship fragrance, La Vie Est Belle, called La Vie Est Belle Domaine de la Rose (the 30 ml bottle is priced €99). The new perfume, designed by Dominique Ropion and Anne Flipo of IFF, who developed the original scent, uses as its main ingredient the Provence roses cultivated in the Domaine de la Rose, a four-hectare Ecocert-certified estate bought by Lancôme in 2020.

In this estate, recently inaugurated officially and located in the Grasse region, Lancôme organically grows several species of roses and other fragrance flowers.

“An exceptional showcase for [Lancôme’s] signature flower, the Domaine de la Rose Lancôme aims to use every part of the rose bush, from flowers to petals to stems and even roots, in order to develop new active ingredients and to achieve a zero-waste objective,” Lancôme, part of the L’Oréal group’s luxury division, stated in a press release.

On May 9, Lancôme will also launch the Mille et Une Roses perfume (the 100 ml bottle is priced €188). It is hailed as Lancôme’s first natural fragrance, 97% made using natural ingredients. The fragrance has been designed by Louise Turner, and notably features the Provence rose grown at Lancôme’s Domaine de la Rose.
As for Chanel, to produce among others its iconic N°5 perfume, the luxury label has been working for over 40 years with the Mul family, flower growers that have been established in Pégomas for five generations.

“What is special about the Mul plantation in the Grasse region is that it’s the only farm that encompasses the whole supply chain, in other words from flowers to perfumes: [it cultivates] 20 hectares of fragrance flower plantations (Provence rose, Grasse jasmine, iris, tuberose and geranium) and has an extraction plant at the heart of the farm. The flowers are therefore processed in real time to prevent them from suffering from oxidative stress, losing their olfactory properties during the treatment,” said Chanel.

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