

From Dominique Ropion to Mona Kattan — Eight Fragrance Makers Tell the Inspirations Behind Your Favorite Scents

How a trip to Turkey catalyzed Ropion's now-iconic Portrait of a Lady scent for Editions de Parfums Frederic Malle, the drink that ended Rodrigo Flores-Roux's perfumer's block and more.

By **Noor Lobad**
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Dominique Ropion, Mona Kattan and **Jérôme Epinette**. COURTESY PHOTOS

Few know better than a **perfumer** that inspiration can come from anywhere.

Whether it's a walk through a centuries-old orangery in the North of France, or a summertime sip with friends at an Italian restaurant on New York's 54th Street, some of today's most celebrated fragrances have been the result of seemingly unsuspecting experiences and encounters.

To peel back the curtain on the perfume-making creative process, **Beauty** Inc asked eight powerhouse perfumers and **fragrance** makers — from **Dominique Ropion** to Mona Kattan — about the most unexpected places from which they've derived creative inspiration. Here's what they had to say.

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1. Dominique Ropion

Master perfumer, International Flavors & Fragrances




Dominique Ropion COURTESY

“Once in Isparta, Turkey, I was standing beside a traditional copper alembic distilling rose oil. When the very first notes of the distillation — the most volatile ones — emerged, I was struck by the olfactory explosion of red fruits and zests. It became the spark for Portrait of a Lady. I wanted to express the rose’s bold and sensual character in a form that feels contemporary, and leaves a lasting impression.”



Editions de Parfums Frederic Malle Portrait of a Lady COURTESY

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2. Mona Kattan

Founder and chief executive officer, Kayali



Mona Kattan VAUGHAN TREYVELLAN

“Through the inner work I underwent during my therapy journey, I realized I had been blocking my feminine energy for years — something that was quietly limiting both my self-expression and my creativity. Once I started reconnecting with that part of myself, everything began to shift. That breakthrough led me to create Sweet Diamond Pink Pepper | 25, our sixth **fragrance**, and what I truly consider the rebirth of **Kayali**. It was the first time I fully stepped into my power, owned my story and embraced the **beauty** of feminine energy. The fragrance is soft and sweet, but also strong, like a diamond. Pink Pepper, one of the hero notes, is said to evoke the feeling of falling in love and, to me, that captures the essence of divine femininity. Sweet Diamond will always hold a special place in my heart — it marked a turning point not just in my brand, but my personal journey, too.”



Kayali Sweet Diamond Pink Pepper | 25 COURTESY

3. Frank Voelkl

Principal perfumer, DSM-Firmenich



Frank Voelkl COURTESY

“The Marlboro cigarette advertisements of the 1980s and '90s — featuring the iconic, rugged cowboy riding off into the sunset — evoked a profound sense of independence and adventure in me. I’ve drawn inspiration not from the cigarettes themselves, but from the ambiance of these visuals. For me, they conjure notes of leather; almost animalic in nature, yet warm and comforting, reflecting a life of freedom and feeling grounded and in sync with nature. To me, this man was a symbol of embracing life with vigor and authenticity.”



Marlboro Cigarettes "Marlboro Man" on a Sunset Boulevard billboard in Los Angeles, 1995. GETTY IMAGES

4. Nicole Mancini

Principal perfumer, DSM-Firmenich



Nicole Mancini COURTESY

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“After a 37-hour labor, holding my newborn son in those early postpartum moments inspired me in a way that I was not expecting; I wanted to capture the essence of the unique and unbreakable bond between mother and child — but the question was, what does that invisible bond smell like? I began by recreating the subtle scent of the top of his head with orris, then layered in white florals and a hint of sweet vanilla to evoke the warmth, tenderness and strength of a mother’s embrace. The result was a scent that was a true labor of love — it transformed my very personal moment into a shared experience, and that scent is now Graff’s Lesedi La Rona VII.”



Graff’s Lesedi La Rona VII COURTESY

5. Jérôme Epinette

Senior perfumer, *Robertet*



Jérôme Epinette COURTESY

“A recent trip of mine to Oman was deeply inspiring — it stayed with me long after I returned. The air was rich with incense and spice, and everywhere I looked, there was a powerful sense of history and beauty. Moved by the depth of the culture and the landscape, I created a new take on a gourmand fragrance that will launch next year. It’s a bold contrasting scent; warm, indulgent notes are wrapped in layers of smoky incense and spice, honoring the essence of Oman in an unexpected, modern way.”

6. Maya Njie

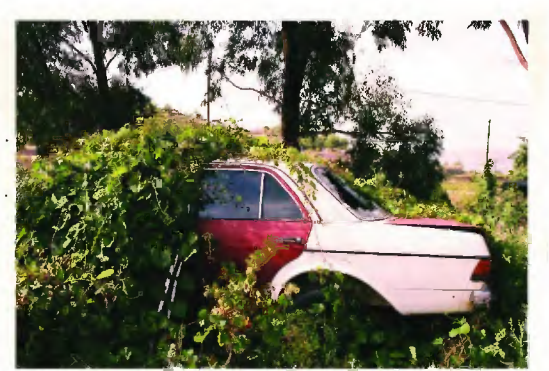
Perfumer and founder of Maya Njie



Maya Njie SHERION MULLINGS

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“Fifteen years ago during a trip to Spain, I shot a photo on film while walking around the area where my family live in Pedramala. I didn’t think much of it at the time — this was before I became a perfumer — but years later, I came across the negative again and decided to scan it. I loved the colors, the composition, the atmosphere — it captured a moment of stillness and lush, overgrown greenery, with heat in the air. It became the catalyst for Voyeur Verde. I wanted to capture the feeling of watching [nature] take over the abandoned Mercedes. It’s a scent that’s herbal and resinous, with depth and submission. Sometimes inspiration doesn’t strike in the moment, but when you come back to it with different eyes — and newfound nose.”



The photo that inspired Maya Njie's Voyeur Verde. COURTESY



Voyeur Verde COURTESY

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7. Rodrigo Flores-Roux

Senior perfumer, Givaudan



Rodrigo Flores-Roux

“I was trying to find an edge for this vetiver-violet perfume I was working on for **Thom Browne**, but it wasn’t getting there. One day, I was with my cousin and a friend eating at Il Gattopardo in New York and I ordered an Italian digestif, Amaro Montenegro, and it comes on the rocks with a little slab of orange. I’m smelling it — is has mint, geranium, orange, vermouth, a bit of rosiness — and I’m just like, ‘this smells amazing.’ I called Thom and told him that if we put some Montenegro with the violet, we are going to get somewhere interesting. He agreed to try it, and boom — magic happened.”



Thom Browne 09.27.65.08 Vetiver & Violet COURTESY

8. Anne Flipo

Master perfumer, IFF



Anne Flipo JULIEN MIGNOT

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“When I was fifteen, I went to an orange-tree orangery at a 17th-century manor in the North of France. The orange flowers were in full bloom, and their olfactive impression became engraved in my brain forever. Since the beginning of my perfumery career, I have continuously returned to that experience, revisiting it always with a different spin, creating new memories from that original one. You will find my orange flower impression as a red thread in many of my creations, though they all smell different: Fleur d’Oranger for L’Artisan Parfumeur; Chloé Love Story; Libre for YSL Beauty, Neroli Botanica for Essential Parfums.”



YSL Beauty's Libre, one of many perfumes informed by Flipo's orangery encounter. COURTESY