

May 19, 2016

House of Matriarch Arrives at Nordstrom

By RACHEL BROWN



House of Matriarch

Nordstrom has rolled out the welcome mat for House of Matriarch.

The Bellevue, Wash.-based fine fragrance purveyor brings natural perfumes to a department store assortment in which they are rare, and demonstrates an increasing interest in natural alternatives to conventional scents. Nordstrom carries nine of House of Matriarch's fragrances in 10 doors, four that were newly created and five previous bestsellers. Each fragrance is priced at \$330 for 1.7 ounces.

House of Matriarch founder and master perfumer Christi Meshell called entering Nordstrom epic for a small natural fragrance specialist. "We are indie. I'm not classically trained. I don't speak French, and I don't have backing," she said. "To be sitting next to the Tom Ford's and Creed's that are hard to compete with because those molecules are so big and pleasing to the nose, that was quite an accomplishment. It has meant a lot to the artisan perfume community."

Meshell describes her approach as high perfumery, and emphasized she seeks to create potent and dramatic fragrances without negative impacts on the people wearing them or the earth. She blends the perfumes herself, frequently tinctures, relies on organic alcohol that is distilled locally, and often selects ingredients emblematic of the environment of the Pacific Northwest. She marks the perfumes with their vintage years and underscored they

continue to develop in the bottles.

“I’m not going to be using synthetic musk that isn’t good for us. I am not using anything that is remotely dangerous. I make sure I am getting ingredients that are as natural as they can be,” asserted Meshell. “It takes 80 percent of what is on the organ at any other house off the table.”

Brand strategist Tim Girvin, who worked with Meshell to fortify House of Matriarch’s design and messaging, said she’s steeped in mysticism that distinguishes her perfumes from the array of choices at department stores. Meshell studies astrology and tarot, and considers her perfumery part of a larger spiritual journey that informs her pursuit of pure ingredients.

“She has a mystical, goddesslike orientation, and the mystical characteristic is important to the scents. People might buy a perfume for its fruitiness, gourmand character or basic wood notes, but hers are more complex,” said Girvin. “People are looking for scents that are not the commonly accessible scents that you find.”

One of House of Matriarch’s popular fragrances is Albatross, an ode to the ocean where it meets the sky that contains notes of cork, pinion pine, poplar, charred oak, sea fennel and balsams. “There is a range of notes that you normally find in an aquatic marine fragrance, and I didn’t use any of those,” said Meshell. “It has the quality of being very electrically charged. When you spray it, it has a salty fizziness to it.”

Another standout fragrance is Madrona. Inspired by a Madrona tree growing in a San Juan Islands lavender field, the fragrance features the notes lavender, vetiver, guaiac wood and orris. “The bark peels off the Madrona trees in long curls that expose chartreuse green underneath. They are just incredible,” said Meshell. “This is how I imagine the Madrona tree would smell if the bark produced a fragrance. It is a fantasy scent.”

House of Matriarch’s bottles are topped with copper caps and include cobalt blue glass to protect the fragrances inside. Their tapered shapes evoke lachrymatory bottles or tear catchers. “The bottles look like a tear catcher because of the emotional aspect of perfume and the fact that it is liquid emotion,” said Meshell. “The layering of symbolism goes really, really deep.”

A former real estate broker, Meshell explored scents on the side before launching her first fragrance six years ago. “I had achieved everything I wanted to achieve in real estate, and I asked myself, ‘Do I want to keep doing this?’ The answer was, ‘Hell, no,’” recounted Meshell. She’s released about 40 fragrances, but estimated she has conceived of several hundreds she hasn’t released. “I can make a few per week. I’m not working within the confines of a corporately owned perfume house,” she said. “I don’t wait for a brief. I just make them.”

To free her time to concentrate on perfumes, Meshell hopes to hire a chief executive officer. “We are bringing on people to help me survive and flourish in retail,” she said. “That’s going to allow me to live a more normal life.” Generally, Meshell suggested she doesn’t overthink her business model. “If somebody told me 10 years ago, ‘You are going to develop a perfumery, and it will be in Nordstrom,’ I would have said, ‘Are you talking about me?’” she remarked. “I couldn’t have planned this, so I try not to do that too much.”

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