

# THE SHEIKH OF SCENT

A KUWAITI ROYAL (AND TOM FORD PAL)  
COOKS UP HIS OWN COLLECTION  
OF ELIXIRS WITH AN ARABIAN TWIST



BY ALDVI AKTER

**F**OR Sheikh Majed Al-Sabah, a member of Kuwait's ruling dynasty, fragrance is both a family affair and a heady Middle Eastern cultural value dating back centuries. His beloved grandmother showed him how to blend precious oils purchased at Kuwait City's old Souk Al-Mubarakiya, using recipes passed down through the generations.

"It's something that I was always brought up with," says Al-Sabah, who is introducing his brand, TFK, a perfumery with more than 50 scents, to Bergdorf Goodman next week. "In the midst of my teenager moments, I started to make them myself. I always resisted using mass-produced products."

Al-Sabah, 47, is a pioneer in the field of Middle Eastern fashion and beauty. He defied family tradition in 1992 to found Villa Moda, a luxury emporium in Kuwait City carrying the hottest runway looks from labels like Dolce & Gabbana, Tobi's and Calvin Klein. (He rolled out his designer-bazaar concept to other Middle Eastern countries before leaving the company in 2009.)

When his longtime friend Tom Ford decided to open a boutique at Villa Moda in 2008, Al-Sabah worked closely with the designer to develop "Arabian Wood," an exclusive eau de parfum for the shop. His success inspired Al-Sabah to launch his TFK fragrance house in 2012.

The sheikh mixes his scents by hand at home, then sends the winning formulas to Grasse, France, where they are reproduced by perfumers.

His three daughters and many nieces and nephews help coin catchy names for his creations, like the best-selling "War of the Roses" and "Arab Spring." Relatives and friends serve as a focus group for his constant stream of new juices.

TFK itself consists of four groupings: Exclusive, the core of the line; My Collection, Al-Sabah's personal scent wardrobe; Tribute, an ode to his favorite cities; and Modern Heritage, an olfactory celebration of the Arab world today.

"People don't know who we are — if we still live in the desert and ride camels," Al-Sabah, a nephew of Kuwait's emir, tells Alexa. "This [line] brings attention to who we are."

Indeed, the men and women of the Persian Gulf are among the world's greatest consumers of scent in all forms, from smoldering Arabian incense and exotic "attars," or oils, to homemade and designer perfumes. They layer, collect and gift fragrance in lavish proportions.

But Al-Sabah created "Rose With a View," with a rose, bergamot and sandalwood bouquet, specifically with his Bergdorf Goodman customers in mind. "I wanted to really bring in the romance of rose to the very concrete, fast lifestyle of New York City," he explains. That rose from Saudi Arabia is one of his favorite ingredients, as is oud, the intense, woody resin from the tropical agar tree, from Laos.

"There's a deep tradition and heritage in the Middle East that nobody knows about," says Al-Sabah. Now we will, thanks to the best-smelling man in fashion's front row.



TFK perfumes (100 ml. each, from left): "Rose With a View" (out in April), \$120; "War of the Roses," \$125; and "Arab Spring," \$125, all at Bergdorf Goodman, 754 Fifth Ave.

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