



FLAME OF *TRUDON*

Supplier of candles to kings and emperors across the centuries, Trudon is a brand dedicated to exceptional quality when crafting its exquisite products. GRACE CAIN visits the factory and laboratory of this French icon

CIGAR SMOKE AND DARK RUM hanging around the hotel bars of revolutionary Havana. Pine parasols and the zing of citrus permeating the sun-soaked gardens of the Villa Cygnos, the Côte d'Azur residence of Empress Eugenie. The flowers that filled the grounds of Versailles under the supervision of Marie Antoinette. There are scented candles, and then there are scented candles that conjure stories from the air. "Scent can be a time machine," says Julien Pruvost, creative director of Trudon. "We love to set the dial to the specific moments in history that Trudon traversed as a manufacturer." >



Above, from left: Wax is carefully poured into the Italian-made glass vessels Trudon uses for its scented candles; a worker straightens the wicks by hand. Previous page: The gold emblem emblazoned on the candles bears the brand's motto, 'Deo Regique Laborant' – 'They [the bees] work for God and the King'



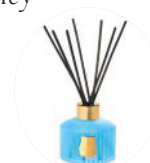
Scents and sensibility



Trudon Versailles candle 270g, £98



Trudon Versailles candle 2.8kg, £520



Trudon Versailles diffuser 300ml, £180

He has plenty to choose from. Trudon is considered the world's oldest operational candlemaker, having started life just over 380 years ago as Claude Trudon's local store on rue Saint Honoré in Paris. Over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, Trudon's taper candles (which you can still buy today) graduated from lighting ordinary Parisian homes to illuminating the country's most prominent churches and cathedrals – not to mention the French Royal Court. Trudon's Royale tapers were not only a fixture of the King's apartments at the Château de Versailles, but they also made up some of the 3,000 candles that lit the Palace's Opéra Royal every single day.

In honour of this entangled history, Trudon's latest collection sets the dial to an opulent celebration (take your pick) at the Court of Versailles under the reign of Louis XIV. The fragrance transporting us is floral and refreshing, an olfactory snapshot of French gardens in spring that's been created by perfumer Emilie Bouge. "We wanted to take a step away from the Palace and try to represent how certain areas in the gardens of Versailles might have smelled during great festive moments," Pruvost explains.

As you may imagine, crafting a complex, multilayered scent worthy of the Trudon name is not a simple matter. "The process can be extremely long or extremely short,"

says Pruvost. "It all depends how much care and effort you put into it – we like to take the long route as we love details and rich, authentic content." Typically, Pruvost will work with a fragrance house or independent perfumer (like Bouge) to develop his initial ideas into a finished product. "Most perfumers like to create shortly after the brief, while the information is still fresh – it usually takes them a couple of weeks," he says. "Arriving to the final mod[ification] is another story, as it is possible to have many modifications."

That's where the laboratory comes in. Located in Trudon's factory in Mortagne-au-Perche (a small village in Normandy that is undoubtedly the dream of chocolate-box painters around the world), the lab tests each formula against a wide range of criteria that you probably don't think about when you light a candle: the size of the flame; whether there is smoke; how much dust is produced after burning. Then, of course, every test must be conducted for each of Trudon's four scented-candle sizes, as well as for its diffusers. Once the lab is satisfied, production can begin in the factory next door.

You know the feeling when you step out of a plane and the shock of warm air catches the breath in your throat? Walking through the doors of the Trudon factory is a similar experience, except instead of heat, you're hit with a heady >

cloud of flowers and oud. The space is filled with the various stages of candle creation: from the heavy metal vats where perfume is thoroughly mixed into melted wax, to the conveyor belt where wicks are placed precisely into the bottom of Trudon's Italian-made glass vessels. It's a meticulous process involving many tasks that must be completed by hand. "There is simply no other way to guarantee quality," says Pruvost. "In some cases, a machine would create more problems than solutions – typically, when it comes to straightening the wicks."

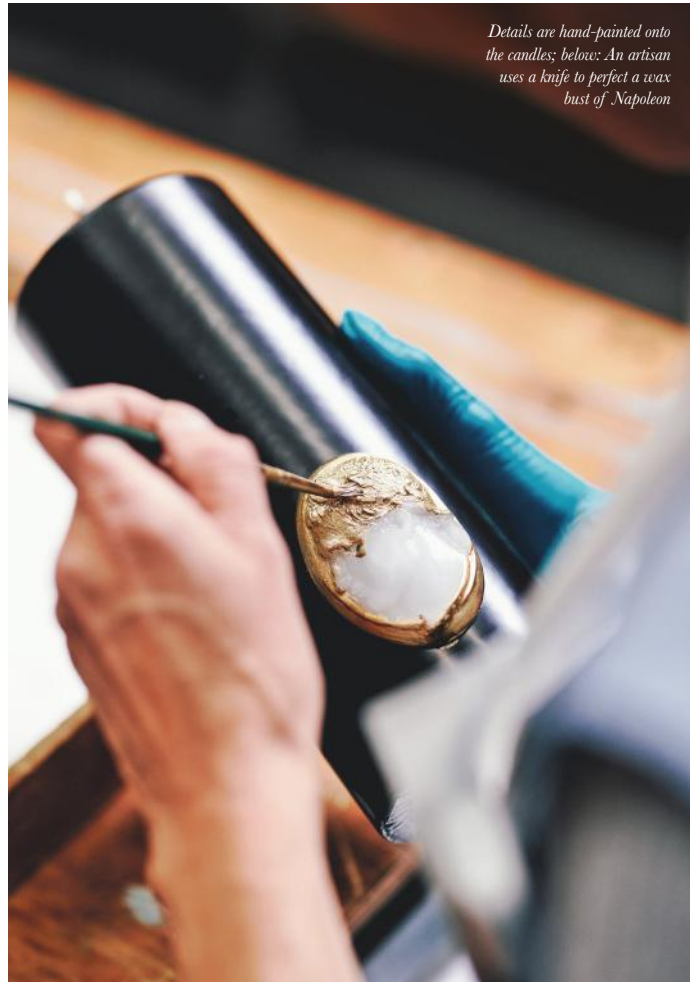
Yes, you read that correctly: every Trudon wick must be straightened by hand as the wax solidifies, to ensure a clean, effective burn. This is even more impressive when you consider that the larger scented candles have more than one wick – the 2.8kg Great Candle, for instance, has five. At a long wooden table in the centre of the factory, Élodie Gravelle – one of Trudon's workers – is pouring melted wax into one of the Great vessels. After this first pour has set, she will have to drill into it to locate and fill any air bubbles, then follow up with a third pour to ensure a smooth and even surface. Until this point, each of the five wicks will have been tied carefully to the sides to prevent them from getting lost; now, however, they will be straightened and trimmed to a uniform length.

"A Trudon candle remains in great part an artisanal item that has only relatively evolved through time," says Pruvost. "I believe that authentic, historical items that require highly skilled labour are particularly relevant in a high-speed, ever-changing environment where things are quickly obsolete." This sentiment rings particularly true in the factory's moulding room, where wax-carved eyes keep watch over Sylvia Bernal as she polishes a pensive Napoleon. Bernal is one of only two people who bring all Trudon's decorative wax busts to life, from Marie Antoinette to Louis XIV. Notice a theme? The brand has worked closely with the French National Museum Council to accurately reproduce significant figures from the nation's cultural consciousness – or, as Pruvost would say, the "history Trudon traversed as a manufacturer".

By now, it will come as no surprise to hear that Pruvost considers Trudon's heritage to be central to the brand's contemporary success. "It appears physically on most of our products," he says, referring to the gold emblem emblazoned on each of Trudon's scented candles. Drawn from a bas-relief found at the old Royal Wax Manufacture (which once belonged to the Trudon family), it bears the brand's motto, 'Deo Regique Laborant' – 'They [the bees] work for God and the King'. "Interestingly, this very representation of our heritage has become a highly recognisable modern symbol," says Pruvost. "We carry our past through the present and into the future." Scented time machines, indeed. □



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Details are hand-painted onto the candles; below: An artisan uses a knife to perfect a wax bust of Napoleon

“EVERY TRUDON WICK IS STRAIGHTENED BY HAND AS THE WAX SOLIDIFIES”

