

DESIGN HOMEWARES

Keepers of the flame

French maison Trudon has been making candles for 380 years, writes Jane Cornwell.



Trudon creative director Julien Pruvost speaks at the launch of its Tuileries collection at Paris's National Archives Museum, left, an event which included dancers in period dress, above.

us past workers pouring batches of vegetal wax and natural fragrance into partially recycled glasses; past conveyor belts where air bubbles are eliminated and wicks are straightened and straightened again to ensure an even burn ("A candle without a straight wick is like a Ferrari without a steering wheel"); past an odourless laboratory in which scents are tested in airtight 'fragrance cabins' and sustainable materials prioritised.

"Sourcing beeswax is not up to our standards any more," he continues. "It takes enormous energy for one bee to produce a single gram of wax. Bees have always been at the heart of Trudon's history, but now our priority is to protect biodiversity. So, we have moved into ethical beekeeping."

In 2018, Trudon partnered with the Orne Dark Bee Conservatory inside Perche Nature Park, a 12-hive enterprise tucked behind a barrier at the end of an unmade road lined with hedgerows. This being Trudon, we arrive at the conservatory on an open-top carriage pulled by two giant Percheron horses with apple rumps and feathered hooves, then don white beekeeping suits to meet Raymond Daman, the head beekeeper. We're told that the European dark bee, an endemic species, is an essential link in the region's biodiversity food chain but is threatened by intensive agriculture and industrial beekeeping practices.

Nonetheless, they're tough. "The dark bee has been around for thousands of years," says Pruvost from behind his mesh face covering, as the robust Daman – his head uncovered – pulls honeycombed shelves crawling with noisy life from cute wooden hives marked with the Trudon logo. "The challenges from climate change means we are going to need this highly adaptive, extremely resistant pollinator in the future," he says.

"The conservatory tries to maintain this DNA quality, keeping out cross-breeding by arranging the hives in concentric circles with the main hive in the middle."

Four per cent of all sales of the Maison's classic Cire candle – head notes of bergamot and honey, heart notes of sandalwood and beeswax absolute (a brass bee candle topper and/or a brass bee pedestal can be purchased separately) – go toward the saving of the Orne Dark Bees.

In a factory in Mortagne-au-Perche, a town on a hill in Normandy, northwestern France, a wax bust of Napoleon is having its underside smoothed on a hotplate, its bicorn blasted with an air gun. Watching from shelves are several Marie Antoinettes in shades of pink, grey and ivory, and a navy-blue Louis XIV, his periwig curling past his shoulders, a cotton wick protruding from his head.

"These decorative pieces speak to our history in the courts of French kings and queens," says Julien Pruvost, creative director of artisan candle maker Trudon, the oldest wax manufacturer in the world. "They symbolise our status as a living heritage company, the modern expression of centuries-old know how."

Trudon has been in business for a remarkable 380 years now, supplying everyone from the Sun King to humorist and author David Sedaris ("You have to be really careful about scented candles," the latter has said. "There are really only two kinds worth having ... Diptyque or Trudon").

It's the day before the launch of Trudon's new Tuileries collection, at a soirée in Paris's marvellous National Archives Museum, where it has co-sponsored an exhibition about the French Revolution. There will also be an assignation with Pruvost in Trudon's rue de Seine boutique, where candles are displayed under fine glass domes and packaged in customised boxes.

But today we're two hours from the capital, being walked through the steps necessary to make a Trudon candle. Outside the window, beyond yellow rapeseed fields, is the sprawling 1800 kilometre Perche



Nature Park, where Trudon finances a bee conservatory, having long swapped beeswax in favour of sustainable alternatives. The air inside the workshop smells divine, as well it might; Trudon invites respected perfumers to provide scented interpretations of the historical names it gives to its candles, each of which has a story.

There's the dreamy floral garden scent of Joséphine, a candle named for Napoleon's green-thumbed first wife. Notes of cedarwood, orange and eucalyptus float from Solis Rex, redolent of the wooden parquet floor that Louis XIV commissioned for the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles. Spiritus Sancti has a blend of incense and lily-of-the-valley intended to calm, enlighten and smell like the church.

Once upon a time the great churches of



Inside the Normandy factory, above; beekeeper Raymond Daman at the Orne Dark Bee Conservatory, top left; a decorative wax bust of Louis XIV, top right.

Paris were filled with the bleached white beeswax candles made by Claude Trudon, who in 1643 founded a candle-making business in a Paris shop and with his son Jacques – subsequently appointed apothecary to the Court of Versailles – turned it into the largest wax manufacturer in France.

Today, Maison Trudon is synonymous with handmade craftsmanship and the sort of high-end price tags – from \$65 for a 70-gram La Petite Bougie to \$1295 for a 3kg La Grande Bougie – that accompany glass vessels inspired by champagne buckets and handblown in Italy; each glass container has Trudon's original beehive emblem and Latin motto ('Deo regique laborant') affixed by hand to their side.

"Our motto means 'They [the bees] work for God and the King'," says Pruvost, leading

How to wear it | Presentation dressing

I get stage fright, but I regularly need to speak on panels, present seminars and deliver updates for my work. Please help me find some smart, polished and fun garments that make me look more confident than I feel. – Faking It

There are few things that strike fear into the heart like an upcoming public speaking engagement. In fact, some studies contend that as many as 75 per cent of people fear public speaking more than death.

That's pretty dramatic.

Even so, a good outfit can go a long way to calming those nerves, says stylist Carol Sae-Yang.

The first rule is to dress like yourself. Don't try to be someone else on stage, you'll just distract yourself, and this goes for men and women, she says.

Vimal Gor, chief investment officer at digital asset manager Trovio, chose to inject some personality into his on-stage outfit at *The Australian Financial Review's* recent Alpha Live summit by having his children pick his brooch for the day.

For women, says Sae-Yang, think about dressing in block colours, especially if a large audience is present.

"I always think it's best to wear one colour head-to-toe. My preference is neutral, but others love a bold colour, which means you stand out on stage. And if you're far away, people can still see you."

Plus, if you're on a panel with a number of people and a busy screen behind you, wearing one colour or a neutral, tonal look will deliver instant elegance on stage, she says. You'll stand out – in a good way.

When it comes to materials, look to crêpe and Italian wool – they're less inclined to crease, and no one wants to go on stage looking like they rolled out of bed. With that in mind, steer well clear of crush-happy linen and shiny satin.

Beare Park and Viktoria & Woods offer an edgier look on tailored pieces. Pair Beare Park's wool boxy blazer in tan with relaxed pleat trousers for a sharp, oversized look.

It's also hard to go past Australian suiting staple Scanlan Theodore. Opt for its 100 per cent wool Barathea jacket in red with



Trovio's Vimal Gor, above, sports a cute brooch; Beare Park's wool blazer in tan, right; the *AFR's* Vesna Poljak, far right, opts for Saba in coral.

matching trousers to make a statement.

Or do as *The Australian Financial Review's* companies editor and emcee Vesna Poljak does, and look to warm corals to cut a classy figure on stage.



Check out Saba's Celeste wool double-breasted blazer and matching tapered suit pant to emulate the look.

When it comes to blazers, wear them unbuttoned, advises Sae-Yang. Buttoning up means you run the risk of it puckering