



*Worn by ROYALTY and ROCKSTARS alike, HOUSE OF CREED has been creating SOUGHT-AFTER scents since 1781. The launch of CARMINA heralds a NEW ERA for its FEMININE fragrance portfolio*

Words by JANE CORNWELL

In a mirrored room in central London, a digital projection is streaming a woman of larger-than-life-size proportions sashaying along a lonely pink sand dune, swishing the hem of her pink chiffon dress and unleashing a riot of colour. *Whoosh!* goes a palette of red, lilac and magenta across the walls and ceiling as string music swells, the reflective floor seems to tilt and we are enveloped in clouds of an exquisite, distinctive scent: Carmina.

Creed's latest feminine fragrance has the sort of explosive personality that befits a visionary launch such as this one, held at Frameless, Britain's largest immersive art experience. Four rooms that usually contain *son et lumière*-style renditions of artworks, including those by Salvador Dalí to Claude Monet, have been turned into scented nirvanas; portals into dreamworlds with top notes of saffron, black cherry and pink pepper, heart notes of violet, peony and May rose, and base notes of cashmere wood, amber and musk. Our senses loaded, we inhale and swoon.

Neatly timed to coincide with the start of London Fashion Week, this grand Carmina launch event has the capital's movers and shakers out in force: posing for photos while lounging on a slowly rotating sculptural pink window. Sipping black cherry Carmina cocktails topped with dramatic liquid nitrogen smoke-bubbles to watch British soul-pop sensation Grace Carter, sparkling in diamanté-covered white, perform a languorous cover of Chris Isaak's sultry *Wicked Game*.

"We're a fragrance house that behaves like a fashion house," says Sarah Rotheram, who has been CEO of Creed Fragrances since 2020. "We are also a heritage brand that happens to be quite cool."

The House of Creed was a tailoring company founded in 1760 by James Henry Creed, whose entrepreneurial verve saw him supplying bespoke clothes and scented leather gloves to the young King George III at the then Buckingham House. Creed, the person, created artisanal fragrances for private clients (as did his son, Henry), and he produced House of Creed's first official fragrance, Royal English Leather, for the same King George in 1781. Control of the company continued to pass from father to son. The brand expanded in Europe, winning the patronage of Napoleon III and his wife, Empress Eugénie. In 1854, Henry Creed II relocated Creed's headquarters to the swanky 16th arrondissement in Paris, from where he continued supplying royalty, aristocrats and assorted *haut monde* with signature tact and discretion.

"There is so much history to the brand that we have a professional archivist who has helped unearth all sorts of fascinating insights," says Rotheram, who has perused sketchbooks ordinarily tucked away in the Creed family archive. "There are all these luxurious, voluminous dresses in so many beautiful colours," she says. "They evoke a bold, passionate woman with a love of adventure." The Carmina woman, in fact. That spirit of pioneering glamour — as drawn nearly 200 years ago — has been deftly bottled for the 21st century. "We wanted to capture that essence with Carmina, and we have."

Creed has long been a brand traditionally bought by men. Timeless male fragrances including Aventus, Silver Mountain Water and Green Irish Tweed are still the company's bestsellers, worn by everyone from King Charles and Frank Sinatra to David Beckham and the late David Bowie. Not that Rotheram is boasting. "We don't make a noise about the celebrities who shop with us. It's a bit crass. But when you get people together" — she looks around the space, which feels not unlike stepping into a giant Carmina screen-saver — "you see how diverse our customer base is. We joke that we go from the club to the boardroom."

Courtesy of House of Creed



A handful of Creed women's fragrances — 2005's Love in White, 2016's Aventus for Her, 2021's Wind Flowers — have helped elevate the brand's feminine side. But Carmina is set to be a game-changer. "People are already getting quite addicted to this perfume," Rotheram says. "We're making sure it feels very feminine to contrast with the perception of the brand as very masculine, but we aim to be much more gender fluid going forward."

While the House of Creed has been run until recently by sixth-generation family member Olivier Creed and his motor-racing son Erwin, the recent acquisition of the brand by French luxury conglomerate Kering Beauté looks set to take the it forward. Kering is the parent of fashion brands including Balenciaga, Bottega Veneta and Alexander McQueen, whose chiffon gown features in the Carmina campaign. Kering's new luxury beauty division intends to expand Creed's international reach as well as its feminine fragrance portfolio. This will only underpin the foundations of the House of Creed, says Rotheram, whose experience in managing luxury and premium bands informs responses such as, "My job is to polish this wonderful brand so it shines," as well as her ability to think outside the box (the Frameless launch was her idea).

"It's still The House of Creed, and we have a team of evaluators that includes Olivier and Erwin. It is different to the past," she says, "but we are looking to the future, and we will continue to uphold the principles that make the Creed brand great."

"Unlike most other fragrance houses, for example, we buy quality natural raw ingredients direct from growers and suppliers around the world, some of which have been working with us for years," Rotheram continues. "We weigh, mix and macerate everything, mostly by hand, in our small artisanal factory in Fontainebleau outside Paris. Sustainability is a priority; we're constantly looking to challenge ourselves with new technology and new ingredients. It's amazing — it's like finding flowers."

Flowers on a pink sand dune inside a perfumed cloud? She flashes a smile. "Creed is a brand you need to come and experience," she says.