



queen OF ROSES

FRAGRANCE
connoisseur
Barb Stegemann
makes SCENTS
for social change

ONE OF THE MOST iconic fragrance notes in the world, rose, is at the heart of beloved scents from Chanel N°5 to Lanvin's Arpège. France, Bulgaria and Morocco are well-known hotbeds for the roses that are transformed into the precious rose oil at the core of these perfumes. But thanks to Canadian author and fragrance maker Barb Stegemann, Afghanistan is becoming an abundant—albeit unexpected—source for this valuable essence. What's more, Stegemann is helping to change lives in the process. Her newest fragrance, The 7 Virtues Noble Rose of Afghanistan, \$70, is made from fair trade, organic rose oil produced in the war-torn country. Her goal: to provide farmers with alternatives to the illegal poppy crops that fuel the worldwide heroin industry.

"Beyond economic freedom, the legal crops give farmers their dignity," says the Halifax-based entrepreneur. "It goes against Islamic law to grow the poppy crop, so growing orange blossoms and roses doesn't compromise people's dignity."

Stegemann, an occasional motivational speaker with a contagious energy, wasn't always a perfume connoisseur. She grew up in poverty with her single mother and sister in rural Nova Scotia. Stegemann went on to earn degrees in sociology and journalism, and later moved to B.C., working in economic development for the city of Coquitlam. But it wasn't until her friend Trevor Greene, a Canadian Army captain, was severely injured while serving in Afghanistan in 2006 that Stegemann found her true calling. It inspired her to write the book *The 7 Virtues of a Philosopher Queen*, which urges women to spark social change by harnessing our buying power. Striving to find ways to support her friend's mission to liberate women in Afghanistan, Stegemann intuitively thought of fragrance as the solution. She discovered a movement for "perfume, not poppies" and connected with a Jalalabad-based company called Gulestan, which pays local farmers fair market wages to produce organically grown oils. Stegemann started with orange blossom oil and

enlisted Toronto-based luxury perfumer Susanne Langmuir to develop her first fragrance, Afghanistan Orange Blossom, \$70. Stegemann sold nearly half of her initial run of 1,000 bottles within two months, primarily from online sales.

Now, Stegemann has launched her second fragrance, Noble Rose of Afghanistan, also developed by Langmuir. Stegemann's brief for the perfume: to spotlight the high-quality, organic rose oil and to create something "joyous and light and happy." Noble Rose is a fresh yet spicy blend of organic rose, carnation, peppercorn and clove. Packaged in a box emblazoned with philosopher quotes, the scent casts a fresh light on Afghanistan's typically bleak landscape.

Building on the momentum of the first perfume, and hoping to expand her business further, Stegemann bravely presented The 7 Virtues on an episode of CBC's famed business pitch show, *Dragons' Den*, which aired in February. Beating out thousands of applicants to appear, Stegemann impressed entrepreneur W. Brett Wilson so much that he invested in the company. As a result, Stegemann landed a distribution deal with the Bay, bringing the line to major cities across Canada.

In the spirit of democracy, the rose fragrance was named by the public via Namethis.ca, a website and soon-to-be television show produced by History Television, dedicated to naming the next big thing.

Stegemann has grand plans for The 7 Virtues. She hopes to branch out into other beauty products, and also to expand the perfumes to include other countries. She plans to launch scents based on oils from the Middle East and Africa, as well as from Haiti—a unisex fragrance based on vetiver oil, made in the earthquake-afflicted country, is set to launch later this year. "Our purchase of their glorious vetiver will, in our own small way, contribute to the rebuilding of Haiti," she says. "We wish for other businesses to do this, to do trade with nations in strife. These are the kinds of things that ignite me. Building peace. The surname Gandhi means, literally, 'seller of perfumes'—I love that." —Kristen Vinakmens