

The untold story of Jo Malone London's English Pear & Freesia Cologne #22566

By Amanda May | Published: 17-Mar-2025

Ingredients Fragrance

The Estée Lauder Companies-owned fragrance giant reveals how its 15-year-old chypre scent has become a category-defining item in Cosmetics Business' 'Untold Story' series



Thinking outside of the box has been the secret to Jo Malone London's reputation as a fragrance powerhouse, and English Pear & Freesia Cologne has been crucial to this success.

A bottle of the British lifestyle brand's 15-year-old hero sku sells every 26 seconds, which equates to more than 100,000 units shipped per month – and the popularity of the chypre fruity and floral scent shows no signs of slowing down.

"It is incredible to think that it all started with one pear and a few freesias on the table," says Céline Roux, VP Global Fragrance Development at Jo Malone London.

But, at the time, pear as a scent protagonist was not as common, so how did the Estée Lauder Companies-owned brand create the fragrance and turn it into a category-defining item that has stood the test of time?

And what happened when Jo Malone London tweaked this much-loved formula in 2023 to give it more "natural", switching the synthetic pear for its own natural pear ingredient?

Roux reveals all in the latest edition of Cosmetics Business' 'Untold Story' series, explaining how English Pear & Freesia Cologne became, and has remained, a beauty staple.

How Jo Malone London's English Pear & Freesia Cologne came to be...

Jo Malone London's English Pear & Freesia Cologne was created in 2010 with the aim to create a scent around fruit that was not too gourmand or sugary.

The mission was to create a chypre fragrance construction – where you have several fragrances in a delicate balance, usually built around a woody, mossy accord – which was inspired by English orchards, with the pear fruit as the main focus.

"Someone who works with me was like, 'Oh, actually, we have a beautiful patchouli that could be the story', and I was like, 'No, no, no, no, I want pear,'" explains Roux.

"I'm quite stubborn sometimes and, on this occasion, it was good that I was."

It is this constant evolution and, even more nerve-wrecking, this was the first fragrance I worked on for the brand

Roux and her team aimed to unite the scent of pear with the key smells of the orchard landscape – such as the flowers that would grow there and the impact of certain seasons on the surroundings – to achieve a delicate blend of floral and fruit.

"At Jo Malone London, we always think – what could be the angle or story – and for this we wanted to take customers to the world of the English orchard," she says.

"We came across a beautiful poem by English Poet John Keats, Ode to Autumn, and within it he refers to the end of summer and start of autumn.

"And it got me thinking about the cusp of an autumn afternoon in the orchard and the fruits being warm and plentiful, and this really helped with the inspiration.

"I knew we needed to add layers to the fragrance just like the layers in the story we were creating, so, it was about the pear, the orchard, John Keats – all of these elements helped."



Jo Malone London's English Pear & Freesia product range

Creating a new kind of scent

A chypre fragrance construction was chosen for the cologne because "it is a nice olfactive and brings the elegance", says Le Roux.

Plus, the brand did not have anything like it in its range at the time.

Although this type of construction allows a perfumer to "add more mystery", says Roux, it doesn't come without its challenges, which is why it took a few hundred iterations to get the cologne just right.

"It is about finding the balance. If it is too fruity, then it's not right; if it's too floral, you lose the d'oud; and if you have too much wood then it's going to be too heavy," says Roux.

"It is this constant evolution and, even more nerve-wrecking, this was the first fragrance I worked on for the brand."

The "just-ripe" William Pear fruit top note is wrapped in a delicate middle note of white freesias and enhanced with rose and patchouli – woody notes which act as the base and enhance the longevity of the fragrance.

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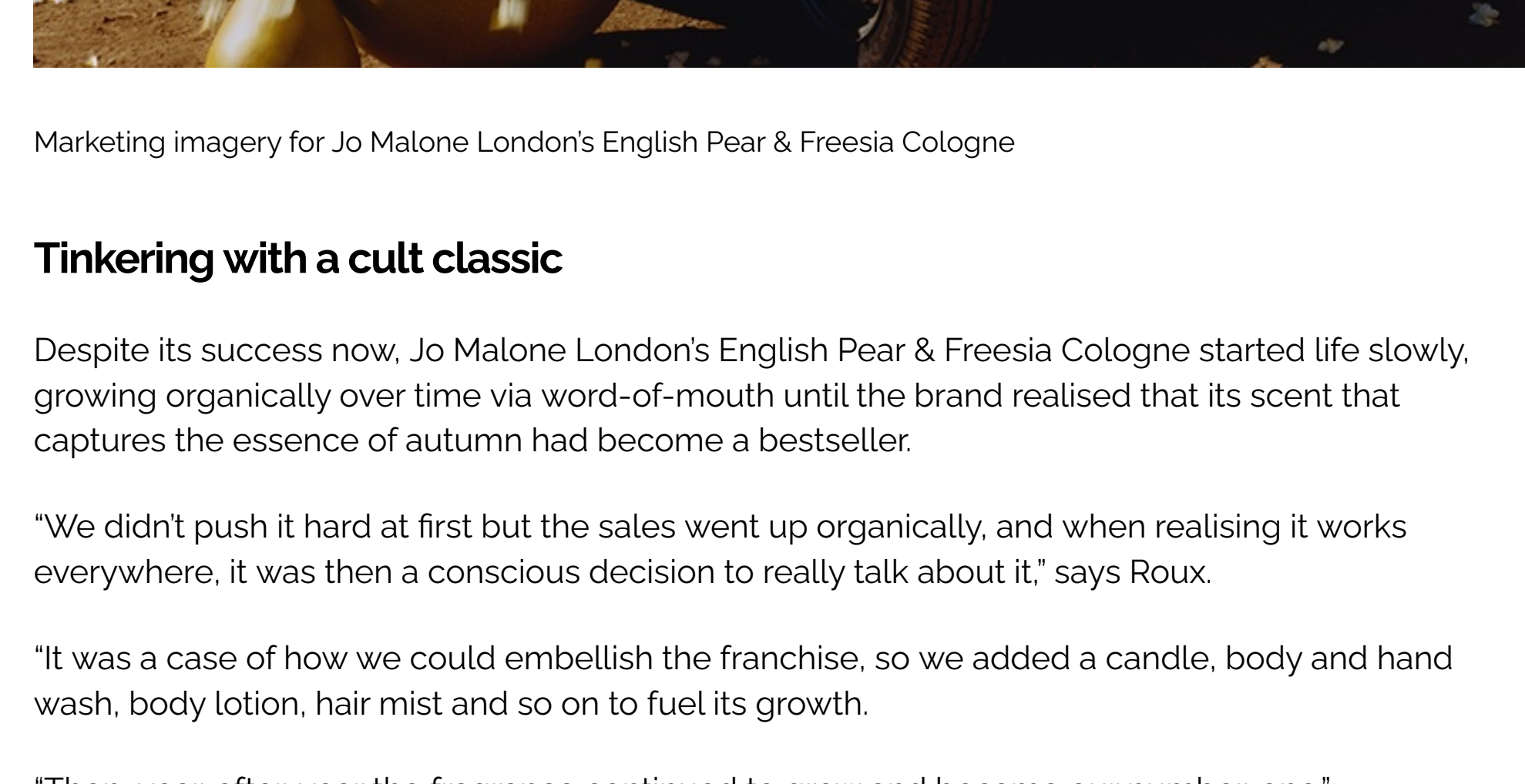
Although patchouli is not the star ingredient, it has been used because it "belongs to the earth – to the soil," says Roux, while the floral element of freesia brings sophistication.

"We looked at the different flowers that are grown in orchards in England. We had sweetpea at first but then we ruled it out because the UK has a lot of freesias," explains Roux.

"Freesias have this elegance – long, straight stems that are quite architectural – while the petals are thick, and I like the idea that they sort of hold themselves."

The company also decided to name the fragrance by its ingredient to follow its overarching style "because it is much more, I say, readable," says Roux.

It also added 'English' in front of pear on the label to really celebrate the brand's Britishness. "and, all of a sudden, it seems a little bit more romantic," she adds.



Marketing imagery for Jo Malone London's English Pear & Freesia Cologne

Tinkering with a cult classic

Despite its success now, Jo Malone London's English Pear & Freesia Cologne started life slowly, growing organically over time via word-of-mouth until the brand realised that its scent that captures the essence of autumn had become a bestseller.

"We didn't push it hard at first but the sales went up organically, and when realising it works everywhere, it was then a conscious decision to really talk about it," says Roux.

"It was a case of how we could embellish the franchise, so we added a candle, body and hand wash, body lotion, hair mist and so on to fuel its growth.

"Then, year-after-year the fragrance continued to grow and became our number-one."

In 2023, Roux and her team then did something no one expected – they tweaked the original formula, but for good reason.

The pear water is concentrated multiple times to achieve the final extract, where there is now the equivalent of one pear in every bottle of cologne

"In general, I'm like – we shouldn't change anything – but for this one it really bothered me that we had pears in the formulation which were not natural," explains Roux.

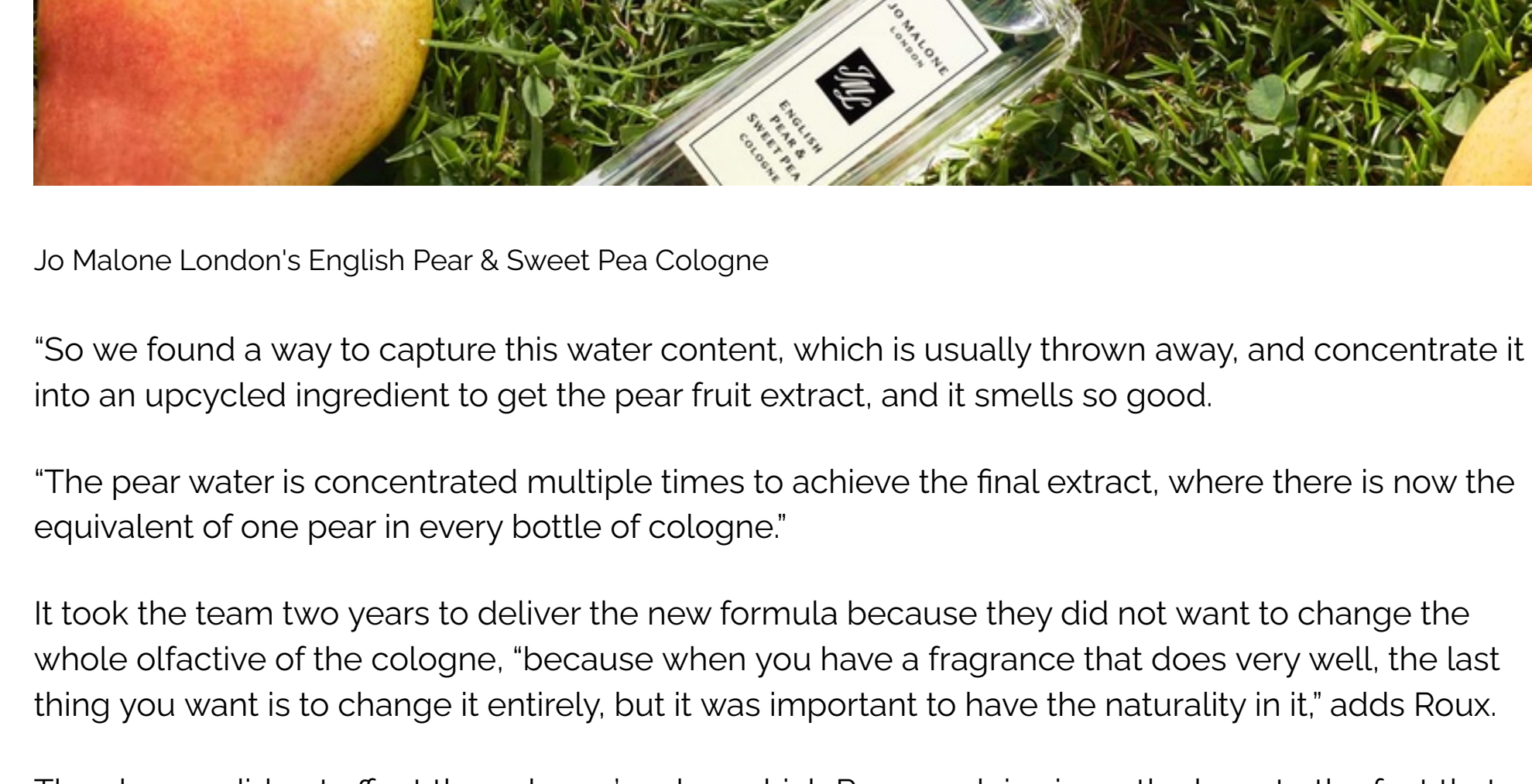
"Fruits in general [in fragrances] are synthetic because it is very hard to extract them because of their water content, but I wanted to have a natural pear and I was determined to find a way.

"When we first created English Pear & Freesia Cologne, it is important to note that Jo Malone London was a much smaller company, so our leverage with the fragrance houses was more limited.

"At that time, they said pears are not natural, and we were like, 'okay', we accepted that."

Roux undertook a journey with the fragrance house to find a natural pear ingredient and was told they don't have one – "basically that it doesn't exist in perfumery," she says – so the Jo Malone London team looked further afield and found the answer in an unlikely place.

"We looked at the food industry, where pears are stemmed for fruit juice and they have this steam occur, and the water from that steam contains all the molecules from the fruit," explains Roux.



Jo Malone London's English Pear & Sweet Pea Cologne

"So we found a way to capture this water content, which is usually thrown away, and concentrate it into an upcycled ingredient to get the pear fruit extract, and it smells so good.

"The pear water is concentrated multiple times to achieve the final extract, where there is now the equivalent of one pear in every bottle of cologne."

It took the team two years to deliver the new formula because they did not want to change the whole olfactive of the cologne, "because when you have a fragrance that does very well, the last thing you want is to change it entirely, but it was important to have the naturalness in it," adds Roux.

The change did not affect the cologne's sales, which Roux explains is partly down to the fact that people are now more concerned about the provenance and sourcing of a fragrance and want to know about eco-friendly processes.

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A sister fragrance to English Pear & Freesia was then added to Jo Malone London's portfolio in 2023 to help continue the pear and orchard story – English Pear & Sweet Pea Cologne.

The aim was for the two fragrances to complement one another in scent and in sales.

"I was thinking about what else could happen in the orchard and because we now had this natural pear it made sense to do something with it," says Roux.

"So we made another fragrance with it but played with a different flower, and that is where sweetpea came in – we returned to it.

"Sweetpea is so different – the colours and the petals, they are a bit flimsy and flirty – and they work with pear beautifully."

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