

Cutting edge



Client: Madonna



Endorsement: John Travolta



Seal of approval: Kate Moss

IN the midst of an International Beauty Expo, among hundreds of stands peddling lotions and potions, a small crowd begins to gather.

Half a dozen women in white laboratory coats are twittering like so many seagulls; "Dr Des is on his way." "Dr Des will be here soon." Word spreads and within minutes about 30 delegates, clutching showbags groaning with beauty booty, have flocked to the Environ stand. We are waiting for Des Fernandes. "Everyone wants to marry him," gushes one of the white coats. "Dr Des makes you feel so special; it's like he knows what you are thinking."

Dr Des is not a rock or film star. He is a



g edge of beauty



South African plastic surgeon and, through his Environ skincare range, the founding father of the fastest-growing — and most lucrative — beauty trend in the world today: doctor-developed formulas, otherwise known as cosmeceuticals.

Cosmeceuticals fall somewhere between cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. They contain high levels of active ingredients such as retinal, hydroxyl acids and vitamins yet are readily available over the counter. No prescription or specialist appointment is required.

Fernandes was the first in the world to introduce vitamin A in high doses to skincare products after founding Environ in 1990 following the death of two young patients who suffered from melanoma. "These people were such dynamic young people, it made me think what I could do to help others like them," says Fernandes. "We knew that cure of melanoma is very difficult, but the prevention I hoped might be easier."

Fernandes began using vitamin A, or retinal palmitate, to treat skin cancer patients, who found that following treatment the skin around their melanomas appeared softer, clearer and younger. "We are still quietly seeing whether or not it can reduce the incidence of melanomas, but the one thing I can say is that when you are supplying the [skin] cells with vitamin A you are making positive changes to the skin," says Fernandes.

When Fernandes finally arrives at his Environ stand (aged 64 yet looking 20 years younger, probably due to slathering his face with no fewer than five of his products each morning) women shamelessly whip out their digital cameras and jostle to have their picture taken with him.

Forget the blind devotion of yore to witchdoctors, shaman and soothsayers, in today's image-obsessed society it is the skin doctor who is god. "It is a bit bewildering, but I do get this also in Japan," offers Fernandes as he poses with his constituency.

He is accustomed to the attention. Kate Moss, Sadie Frost and John Travolta are among a slew of celebrities who have publicly endorsed his range, which comprises more than 50 products produced at the rate of two million a month.

Not surprisingly, countless other plastic surgeons, dermatologists and aestheticians are jumping on the same beauty bandwagon, peddling high-concentrate products at equally high prices.

Walk into any department store or skincare emporium and you will be confronted by a cornucopia of concoctions attesting their mix of polypeptides, protein molecules, vitamins and other ingredients will deliver a "Laser in a Bottle", "Microdermabrasion in a Jar" or a face "LiftFusion" according to just three product names.

"There is significant consumer demand,

Dr feel good: South African plastic surgeon Des Fernandes enjoys almost rock-star adulation. "It is a bit be

*Exorbitantly priced skincare products formulated by p
backed by celebrities, are the latest cosmetic fad, reveal*

\$4800 for a fresh face

WHEN I visit the Heber Davis Skin Clinic for an analysis using its visia machine — a kind of computer that takes digital photographs of the face then uses a software program to map its characteristics — there is sobering news.

According to my Patient Treatment Program, I require two shots of Botox (minimum \$350 a pop), a couple of collagen (\$500 a pop) and either a course of laser therapy (\$2500) or peels (\$2400).

That's a serious blow to a 30-something woman reasonably comfortable in her skin. But that's not all.

not only for the latest technologies but for the assurance of a doctor," says Mecca Cosmetics founder Jo Horgan, who recently added the international doctor brands MD Skincare, ReVive, N.V. Perricone, Dr Brandt and Dr Sebahg to the shelves of her stores across Australia.

Local beauty brand ModelCo became the latest to debut a cosmeceutical product when it recruited model Elle Macpherson to launch its "Erase Those Fine Lines" anti-ageing serum in Sydney earlier this month.

Like almost all cosmeceuticals, Erase Those Fine Lines claims to be "the most advanced skincare serum in the world", one that "offers surgery results without the syringe".

"Doctor brands bring the latest patented technologies, they are targeted to particular concerns such as pigmentation and they actually provide analysis of ingredients and what they can do for cells and cellular structure," says Horgan. In other words, hope in a bottle is no longer enough.

Another factor influencing doctor demand is the increasing lust for cosmetic surgery that has seen many dermatologists and plastic surgeons formulate their own skincare solutions to help speed up the healing process after surgery or other procedures. "If people have a peel and do nothing afterwards their skin will go back to what it was before, but with therapeutic skincare people can now

I also require, according to my Homecare Treatment Program, more than \$600 of product, including two serums, a vitamin C cream, an eye cream, a lip cream, two different moisturisers, a sunblock and a cleanser. It's not negotiable.

"What people apply every day to their skins really counts. It's the foundation of preventing and reversing skin ageing," owner Geoffrey Heber tells me.

I choose to not have any of the treatments recommended. I'm not perfect, but I'm happy with who I am.

Georgina Safe



Home remedy: Geoffrey

maintain those results at home," says Sydney cosmetic physician Geoffrey Heber.

The ReVive range came about when New York plastic surgeon Gregory Bays Brown used Epidermal Growth Factor — a protein that occurs naturally in skin, stimulating cell renewal — in a treatment to help wound healing. Brown's bottled version sells for \$495 for a 0.5 ounce (about 14 grams) vitamin C serum and \$620 for a two-ounce jar of ReVive Intense Creme Lustre. Both are a snip compared with the \$900 you will pay for the Neuropeptide Facial Conformer by N.V. Perricone.

Heber, who began importing cosmeceuticals in 1991, founded his own Ultraceuticals line in 1999. The brand is stocked nationally by David Jones and also in the Heber Davis Skin Clinic, which Heber established in 1988 with his wife Deborah Davis.

"I fully disclose I have a financial interest in the company, there is a sign to that effect next to the product display," says Heber. "Since 2001 we have grown on average about 40 per cent each year."

Heber's operation is small compared with New York-based Frederic Brandt, the high-profile cosmetic dermatologist known as the Baron of Botox. In the course of perfecting more than 40 patients a day Brandt, who is said to use more Botox than anyone else in the world, found time to create a skincare line.

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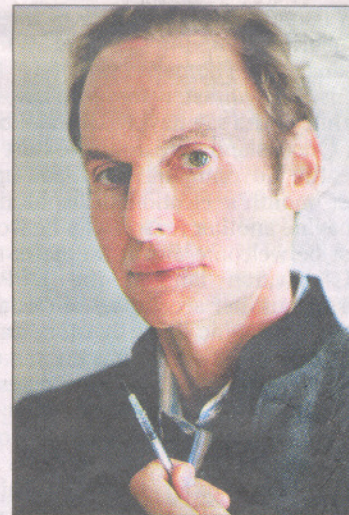
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Frederic Brandt, cosmetic dermatologist



Baron of Botox: Frederic Brandt

"I'm always honest and say that there's no cream that's going to get results as dramatic as Botox," says Brandt, whose products include Laser in a Bottle and Microdermabrasion in a Jar. "But by using the products on a regular basis you are going to see a real difference. No matter who you are, you can always improve your skin."

That includes Madonna, who along with Lenny Kravitz, is one of Brandt's higher profile clients. "I trust Dr Brandt, I don't leave the house without his Lineless Eye Cream [\$98]," enthuses the Material Girl.

A celebrity endorsement and a skincare line are a cosmetic surgeon's best accessories. Regulars at Jean-Louis Sebah's London practice include pop stars and supermodels, who flock to the petite French doctor, whose waiting list often eclipses the five-month mark.

If you can't nab an appointment, you can pick up one of his new eponymous line of high-strength formulations.

"If a cream could do my job I'd be out of work," admits Sebah, who says there are three layers to the face, the deepest being the muscles, and only the magic jab can halt their wrinkle-causing contractions. It is only the skin's surface, the epidermis, that responds to creams.

Department store darwinism will determine which of the doctor-derived products

survive. "If the consumer doesn't see the upside to it, if they don't look in the mirror and see some level of benefit, they are going to become disenchanted and walk away from it," says US toxicologist Joe Dinardo, who has spent 18 years developing and evaluating products for companies such as Revlon and Almay.

"We're not talking about buying a \$5 or \$10 product any more. We are talking about making a serious investment, so it's got to be more than buyer beware."

Dinardo is particularly sceptical of the new-wave oral skin treatments, essentially common vitamin pills repackaged and resold at much higher prices.

Ultraceuticals, for example, sells its Ultra Active C oral skin treatment for \$29 a jar: a bottle of the same vitamin C tablets sells for less than \$10 in the supermarket or chemist.

"If you have a balanced diet, I don't see the reason for supplements," says Dinardo. "I think lifestyle is a little bit more important. If you have a healthy lifestyle and look after yourself, those simple things are what's really important."

Dinardo, who has helped devise countless luxury products and potions, confides his own skincare secret: "soap and water".

Georgina Safe is *The Australian's* fashion editor.