

Ode to Organic in Ojai : New skin care line features natural ingredients

MARILYN McMAHON, NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

May 16, 2011

Nagging by her daughter and husband led Gaelle Lehrer Kennedy of Ojai to start her own skin care line that is made from wild-harvested and organic ingredients, formulated specifically for dry skin.

There is a reason Gaelle Organic has only four products—Soap Supreme Moisturizing Cleanser, Toner Superieure Natural Facial Toner, Creme Superieure Organic Moisturizer and Reborn Exfoliant.

“There just isn’t a need for anything more. With moisturizers, you don’t need different products for different areas of your face and neck. A moisturizer should be good for all over your face, neck and under your eyes,” said the 65-year-old former model whose luminous complexion belies her age.

It was her daughter, Sabrina Kennedy, now 19, who challenged her mother to start making her own organic facial products two years ago.

“I used to go through Sabrina’s drawers and throw out her cosmetics, lotions and deodorants that had chemicals in them,” admitted Mrs. Kennedy during an interview in her home with a bright yellow exterior near downtown Ojai. “Finally, Sabrina said, ‘Why don’t you start your own business if you know so much?’ “I told her I was too old, but when she got my husband, Paul, to nag, too, I decided to give it serious thought,” she said.

The first thing Mrs. Kennedy did was research the Internet for the best organic oils, butters and salts in the world.

“If you want to do something right, you have to educate yourself, and I tested them on myself first,” she said.

Among the oils she found that worked best were sesame, calendula, olive, jojoba, apricot kernel, primrose, pomegranate, virgin coconut and almond.

“I use wild-harvested shea butter that is collected by women in Ghana and fair traded. It is completely pure and unadulterated,” said Mrs. Kennedy, who also discovered a number of other interesting facts such as:

- Coconut oil is one of the healthiest products for skin, reducing liver spots, helping heal wounds and protecting against bacterial and fungal infections.
- Olive oil, preferably extra virgin, slows aging of the skin, cleanses pores and is rich in polyphenols, plant chemicals with strong anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.
- Pomegranate seed oil preserves and rebuilds collagen, stimulates



Gaelle Lehrer Kennedy of Ojai, whose radiant complexion belies her 65 years, is a testament to her skin care regimen, using products in her new line she calls Gaelle Organic.

skin cell production and adds moisture to deep layers of skin.

- Shea butter is packed with oils, vitamins, plant sterols and minerals vital for healthy, glowing skin. It comes from the center of the dark brown fruit grown on trees in West Africa.

Once she was satisfied with the results, she formulated a regenerative moisturizer and gave it to “20 of my fussiest friends who were using the most expensive, well-known creams. One of them paid \$650 for one of her creams.”

If 80 percent of the women, who lived in places like Israel, New York City and Ojai, thought her cream was as good as the ones they were using, she would start making the products.

“When 100 percent told me it was the best moisturizer they had ever used, I knew I was in business,” said Mrs. Kennedy, adding happily that she now works at it 24/7.



Reborn Exfoliant is designed to clear, smooth and moisturize dry skin, leaving it luminous.

She and two assistants make the products in a studio in Ojai. They range in price from \$12 for a 5-ounce bar of Soap Supreme to \$74 for 1.75 ounces of Creme Superieure Organic Moisturizer. The Toner Superieure costs \$35 for 4 ounces and the Reborn Exfoliant \$47 for 1.75 ounces.

Mrs. Kennedy said her interest in skin care began as a teen who had acne while growing up in New York City, where she graduated from Sheepshead Bay High School, attended Brooklyn College in Brooklyn and dropped out of Kings County School of Nursing in Brooklyn when she caught hepatitis from one of the patients.

“I couldn’t get rid of the acne. I broke out from everything. I had very sensitive skin. I began to experiment with oils and butters to find out what worked and what didn’t,” she said. So successful were her efforts that she landed a job as a model until the age of 30 for lingerie and beauty products in Israel, Germany and France.

“I was too short to be a model—only 5 feet 5 inches tall—but I wore very high heels to look as if I was 5 feet 7 inches,” said Mrs. Kennedy.



Creme Superieure Organic Moisturizer, at left, nurtures and rejuvenates dry skin, while Reborn Exfoliant cleans pores.

In 1973, she moved from New York City to Los Angeles and pondered what to do next since “I was over the hill for a model.”

A friend suggested she meet Aida Grey, the “grande dame” of skin care who owned a high-end beauty salon at the corner of Rodeo Drive and Wilshire Boulevard in Beverly Hills.

“Aida was then in her 70s and had beautiful skin,” recalled Mrs. Kennedy. “With my experience as a model, she hired me on the spot as an esthetician and makeup artist.”

Although the late Miss Grey “knew how to charm everybody and at every age,” she and her new employee had a prickly relationship.

“Aida was a piece of work. We fought all the time because I would stand up to her. She wanted to know why I wasn’t selling more eye cream or more neck cream, and I would tell her because it is a bunch of crap. If a cream is good enough for the eyes, it’s good enough for the face, neck and decollete,” said Mrs. Kennedy, adding that Miss Grey fired her at least three times.

“But she had to hire me back because of customer demand. My cli-

ents didn’t believe the BS. The beauty business is a billion dollar industry. The more companies can convince you that their products produce eternal youth and the more products they can convince you to use, the more money they make. It’s that simple,” she said.

Mrs. Kennedy said she was fired once when she advised a client to go to a plastic surgeon rather than use a mask product sold by Miss Grey. “Masks don’t work. Some, like the French clays, are beneficial for large pores, but most masks that promise to tighten your skin just pull it for 20 to 30 minutes. It’s tight at first, but in the long run, they don’t work.”

Asked her thoughts about plastic surgery, Mrs. Kennedy said, “If it makes you feel good about yourself, go for it, but make sure you find a good—emphasis on good—plastic surgeon. Ask to see at least a dozen of the same procedure you want that he or she has done on different women, so you don’t come out looking artificial and ridiculous.”

She had her eyelids done 10 years ago, and another surgery is in order, she said.

“But I’m not going to do it. My eyelids bothered me at 55, but now that I’m 65, I don’t care,” said Mrs. Kennedy, suddenly remembering she also had liposuction on her stomach after the birth of her daughter.

“I was told I would have to do 1,000 sit-ups a day to get my shape back. I chose liposuction,” she said with a laugh. Other than lipstick and eyeliner, she wears no makeup.

If Mrs. Kennedy didn’t dye her hair a natural-looking reddish blonde, she would be a “white fox,” and if she does decide to have “a little work” on her neck, which she is considering, it will be “because I want to look good at 65 and not because I’m trying to look 30 or 40.”

Besides her skin care products, Mrs. Kennedy attributes her youthful appearance to her regimen as a vegetarian and yoga enthusiast.

“I believe that what you put in your body is just as important as what you put on it. I eat organic food—lots of salads and plenty of cabbage and kale. I drink good water, and I do yoga, which is good for the face and body. The rest comes from being happy—happy, healthy and loving, especially to yourself.”



Symbolizing love and beauty, a painting by Zivana Gojanovic, a Ventura artist, is used as the logo for Gaelle Organic.

Gaelle Organic products range in price from \$12 for a 5-ounce bar of Soap Supreme Moisturizing Cleanser to \$74 for 1.75 ounces of Creme Superieure Organic Moisturizer. They can be purchased online at www.gaelleorganic.com and at Busy Babes, 306 E. Ojai Ave. in Ojai. Other shops in Southern California are listed on the website. For more information, call 805-640-5286.