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Spa Spotlight:
ManCave Atlanta

STORIES OF SUCCESS...

Skin Inc. (SI): How did you get started in this industry?

Janel Luu (JL): Being Korean, I've always been obsessed with skin care routines. I started in the industry by identifying a lot of skin care problems my relatives and friends were having, and the skin care products they were using were not giving any relief. I had a friend who had years of suffering due to inflammation, another friend with chronic dryness and another with deep wrinkles, even though she was only in her 30s. I started developing formulas to share with family and friends to relieve their skin conditions and to make their skin healthier and more beautiful.

SI: What is the process of becoming a skin care supplier?

JL: First, you need a vision, passion and goals. Then you carry through to create a product. For the esthetic market, you need to decide how many SKUs you want, build the product out and present it through logistics, sales distribution, online and trade shows. You educate people on the product efficacy. I am the formulator and the manufacturer, so I do everything under one roof. It is running a company—not just developing product, but having distributors, educators, logistics, HR, management, staff, etc., like most companies.

SI: What was your vision for the company?

JL: My vision for the company was to change one person's skin at a time. I wanted to help estheticians be successful by providing them with prestige brand formulas, with exceptional ingredients. I love independent entrepreneurs and that is why I started with the professional estheticians. Even though I have been approached by large retailers, I try very hard to



Luu working with a client at a tradeshow booth

stay true to the estheticians because I love seeing a person grow from being an esthetician to being a businessperson.

SI: What hurdles have you run into along the way?

JL: Besides COVID-19, another big hurdle is how people are oversold on marketing messages and the placebo effect. Skin cannot communicate directly to us, so it has taken a while for consumers and professional estheticians to understand that there is a way to improve skin instead of inflicting chronic inflammation on the skin. Another hurdle is that sometimes clients do not know that it is not the number of ingredients that really counts—rather, it is the effective level of actives in a product that make the difference. The biggest hurdle is that most people do not like to change. How can you get them to try a new product that could make the biggest difference with their skin?

SI: What has been the most rewarding thing about running Le Mieux so far?

JL: The most rewarding thing about running Le Mieux has been all the friends I have made in the professional industry. Meeting estheticians for the first time, seeing them fall in love with our product, and knowing they are making an impact on skin is the

most rewarding. Estheticians are very open-minded to new things. It is like having a long-term partner, and I am proud that Le Mieux can be a great business partner for estheticians. We have a high level of customer retention, and I think it is because I offered a tool for estheticians to build a better business. The by-product is that I have great friends.

SI: What does education mean to you?

JL: Education is everything. It is the core of everything we do, since technology is constantly changing every day at every moment. The world is an open market for beauty, and we now have access to understanding a global approach to beauty, rather than just being satisfied with the status quo.

SI: How do you keep your knowledge fresh?

JL: I obsessively study skin cells, delivery systems, ingredient technology, bio-fermentation, extraction methodology and encapsulation. Education leads to abandoning the status quo and embracing experimentation. Education and experiments create fuel for positive change.

SI: What recent advancements have been made in anti-aging cellular technology?

JL: There have been many important recent advancements in anti-aging cellular technology. Delivery vehicles, delivery technology and encapsulation technology lead to different ways of targeting skin cells and skin layers, all the way to the mitochondria within the skin cell. We have growth factors that are not animal-based.

There are advancements not just in the ingredient itself, but how



Luu teaching gua sha methods at a tradeshow

it is processed and delivered into the skin, like growth factors. We use bio-fermentation technology to transform ingredients. We also have sonic technology for extracting botanical ingredients, so natural products are becoming more effective. There is a merging of medical, cosmeceutical and natural, so products have become a lot more high-tech and science based—and more effective.

SI: Can you walk me through the process of creating a skin care product?

JL: First, I identify the need and figure out some new ways of impacting that need. I select the vehicle to deliver or encapsulate. Almost like cooking, I choose the base first, then I layer the actives. I also identify whether I want the product to be more cosmeceutical or more natural, and then I start

formulating. I choose different methods of mixing the product and deciding the maximum percentage of the active. I also use a FTIR spectroscopy machine to test for the activity of ingredients. Next, I put the product through a stability test and a pressurized test to see how the environment can affect the product. Finally, decisions are made about design, packaging and marketing.



Luu formulating a new product in Le Mieux's lab

SL: How did your interest in skin care develop?

JL: I wanted to change how skin care formulas are developed. Decades ago, skin care technology was not going through advancements like computer technology does today. At that time, I wanted to disrupt the norm—I wanted to develop products in a different way.

SL: What is your niche within the skin care industry?

JL: I believe in a science-based

approach to working with how skin is built, all the way down to the mitochondria impacting the skin cell, not just focusing on texture and instant lifting of the skin. Le Mieux focused on adding serums to a regular skin care routine. Skin care in the United States has been more based on cleansing and moisturizing, so I was passionate about introducing layers of serums and also using minerals to impact the skin recovery cycle. Le Mieux products are created to repair and nourish the skin, cushioning it from within.

Le Mieux created multi-molecular weights of hyaluronic acid to target different layers of the skin. Le Mieux also uses gua sha tools to delay visible skin aging.

We have a holistic approach to skin—like a 360-degree view of anti-aging. I have a Korean background, and in Korea, skin care is a big thing for women. So, I bring the Asian philosophy to my products—bridging the East with its gua sha meridian techniques, and the West with its skin care technology and combining the best of all cultures into skin care.

SL: Can you describe what it takes to be a researcher/formulator within the skin care industry?

JL: As a researcher and formulator in the skin care industry, I find that it is important to not look at formulas as a single ingredient-driven product. A formulator is like a chef in the kitchen—finding multiple ingredients that work perfectly together to make an impact on the skin. As a formulator, I always think outside the box. I have very high expectations for my products. Tradition is important, but innovation is more important. I am not a “me too” kind of formulator. As a formulator, I am constantly researching, because I’m not satisfied with yesterday’s concepts or the status quo. I also have an absolute passion for nourishing and feeding the skin, not just creating a beautiful, feel-good texture.

SL: Why did you start Le Mieux?

JL: Life is a series of experiments, and Le Mieux was an experiment to be “the best.” Le Mieux means “the best” in French, and that is the goal of the brand. I wanted to prove that women and men can really tell the difference between products that truly perform, versus marketing messages and the placebo effect. That’s why we have a cult following.

Le Mieux was really positioned for people that were looking for more from skin care, those who may be confused about what product on the market will really work for them, and what would be the best program for them. I am always upgrading and recreating. I started by doing research and development, then started manufacturing, then started educating people. For me, the product is just one component of good skin; lifestyle and the actual skin care formulation are also components. It is important for a product to feel good, smell good and look good in the packaging, but I wanted to create skin care that did even more. Every drop needs to perform, so my benchmark is to be the best. It is easy for a company to make a very diluted product, but I wanted to push the boundaries of how a product can truly perform.

SL: What ingredients/products do you see being popular in 2021?

JL: There is more and more proof that blue light, or HEV light, from tech devices like cell phones and computer screens really can damage skin. So, I think products that prevent or repair damage from HEV light from tech devices will be big in 2021. Different molecular weights of ingredients like hyaluronic acid will be popular in 2021, now that there are ways of expanding and reducing the sizes of molecules. Different retinols are being replaced with less inflammatory ingredients with a similar function, like bakuchiol and other natural extracts. Mitochondria-impacting ingredients are also being introduced into products, in order to impact skin on a molecular level.

SL: Any advice for future skin care suppliers?

JL: 1. Realize that it takes time. There is no magic wand. You need a passion to make a change in the skin or in your client's lifestyle. 2. You need to honor your client. Don't



Luu and actor Daniel Dae Kim pose at the Unforgettable Gala at Beverly Hilton.

look at your spa as only a finance-oriented business. Don't be frugal with ingredients. Allow yourself to spend more money on formulations that will truly impact the skin and make your clients happy. 3. Have patience and integrity. Build something great, without copying or being a "me-too" in your business. 4. Understand the psychology of a customer. How do customers decide to change what

products they are using? -I'm still trying to figure out the psychology behind the reason they make that purchase decision. It is up to you, the esthetician, to also be a "skin care coach." You have the special role of educating your customers as you recommend products in a daily and nightly regimen that works for their unique skin concerns... to truly transform skin. ✂