

THE KIT

Winter Skin Spotlight: Yes, you need a cleansing oil.
Our beauty director found the very best one **PAGE 3**

Stepping up

Toronto designer Elle AyoubZadeh left the world of corporate finance
to follow her dream: crafting beautiful handmade shoes **PAGE 6**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUIS MORA

FRAME BLAZER, \$752, PANTS,
\$425, SHOPBOP.COM. ZVELLE
BOOTS, \$525, ZVELLE.COM. HAIR &
MAKEUP: CAROLINE LEVIN/PIM

FREE
THE
BREAST

As a girl, you dream about having breasts, but as soon as they show up, you realize that they come with a raft of expectations, scrutiny and constraint—of both the social and underwire kind. In this special report, we seek to get all that baggage off our chest.

Why do bras still do up in the back?

The lingerie biz has been wildly disrupted, as a new generation of brands is seeking to fill the lacy pink hole left by the implosion of Victoria's Secret. But, as **Kathryn Hudson** writes, women still deserve better

One morning, not long ago, I realized that doing up my bra was often the worst part of my day. I'd grumble and curse while grappling awkwardly behind my back, trying to snag the minuscule hooks into place. Performing tasks of dexterity before coffee felt like a punishment for some past-life crime, but I did it, because, well, what choice did I have? Of all the varied pressures in my life—finding my kid's precious lost blanket, crushing unreasonable work deadlines, remembering the login password for my Air Miles account—struggling to do up those tiny hooks was surely the smallest burden in both size and importance, but still, it broke me. As I fastened only one out of four (four!) hooks, huffing, “Good enough!” before pulling on my shirt, I caught my husband snickering.

If I could have burned him, along with my bra, right then and there, I would have. He, I reminded him in a tone that could have melted the metal of any underwire, was required to wrestle with no fucking hooks at all. “We can get a man into space, but we can't figure out a better bra?” I muttered to myself, storming past him to get on with my day.

This summer actually marked the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing, a monumental and historically significant achievement not only for rocket scientists and astronauts, but also, surprisingly, for bra makers. The space suit that carried Neil Armstrong safely onto the surface of the moon was made by Playtex, the popular bra manufacturer that brought women the beloved Cross Your Heart bra in 1965. That NASA, a bastion of IQ-veiled machismo, gave this critical contract to an undergarment brand was nothing short of jaw-dropping, but actually, it didn't have a choice. Playtex was the only organization able to create a prototype that could shield an astronaut from the rigours of space, while also allowing him dexterity. No other company even came close. “It was tough, reliable and almost

cuddly,” wrote Neil Armstrong in a letter of thanks to the team of skilled lingerie seamstresses who created, largely by hand, his space suit that is now preserved in the Smithsonian Museum. “Its true beauty, however, was that it worked.”

Despite the innovation displayed by a bra manufacturer in the name of the space race, very little changed for women's lingerie in the decades following Warner's invention of the cup and wire system in 1937. In fact, a man trotted across the surface of the moon before women had access to even a rudimentary sports bra—the earliest model was rigged out of jock straps in 1970. Some technological tweaks followed: Canadian company Wonderbra popularized the push-up bra in the '90s, a style that women dutifully purchased from brands like Victoria's Secret, which sold lingerie with a wink and a pat on the bottom.

“Have there really been no functional or innovative updates in decades?” questioned Michelle Lam, the Toronto-born founder of San-Francisco-based company True&Co. when she conceived her lingerie startup in 2012. After buying nearly 500 bras on her credit card and inviting 100 women into her living room to try them all on, she decided that, quite frankly, there hadn't been—so she set out to make some changes. The explosive popularity of wireless bra styles that have been pioneered in recent years by upstart brands like True&Co., Knix and ThirdLove suggests that, finally, the industry's atmosphere is beginning to shift. “The question more and more women are asking now,” says Lam, “is ‘Does every woman even need a cup and wire bra?’”

But, lately, I've actually been wondering: Why are we wearing bras at all?

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SILK'N TITAN SKIN TIGHTENING AND LIFTING DEVICE, \$299, SHOPPERSDRUGMART.CA



The Most Beautiful Time of the Year

We could all use a little extra pampering as the holiday whirl approaches, whether it's a skin-plumping treatment or at-home hair removal. Here's how to stay on top of your beauty game—and spread the joy to your loved ones—this holiday season.

THE BEAUTY EXPERT: **Liraz Jacoby**
THE FOCUS: **At-home laser hair removal**
THE HERO PRODUCT: **Silk'n Infinity**

How long have you been using Silk'n Infinity for and what were your initial impressions of it?
"I started using the Silk'n Infinity for about three months on my upper lip, underarms and forearms. I started seeing visible results after the second treatment. I have noticed that my hair stopped growing completely after the fourth treatment."

What should someone who's never tried a home laser hair removal device know before starting to use the Infinity? "The Infinity hair removal system is so easy to use, especially in the comfort of your home. It's cost effective compared to laser hair removal that can cost thousands of dollars. Best of all, it's pain-free and you see great results."

Who is it best for? "Anyone who is struggling with unwanted hair anywhere on their body. Anyone who has a busy life and doesn't have the time for regular hair removal treatments. Anyone who is on a budget and looking for a convenient solution in the privacy of their home."

What are some of your tips for using the device?
"I liked using it at nighttime. It is my me-time and I could do it while watching TV. I also added a reminder on my phone every two weeks so that I would remember to use it for upkeep."

Why is it especially important to keep up your hair removal regimen over the holiday period?
"Fall and winter are the best times of the year to take care of your unwanted hair and get your summer body ready and hair-free."

Why would the Infinity make a great holiday gift and who will you be gifting it to this year?
"I think the device would be a great idea for anyone who's dealing with unwanted hair. I find that every woman and man is struggling with this issue. This year, my sister will be enjoying the device since she is a busy mom with a toddler at home and has no time for herself."



SILK'N INFINITY PERMANENT HAIR REMOVAL, \$450, SHOPPERSDRUGMART.CA



ROTHKO VEST, \$89, SIMONS, CA. FAITH CONNEXION SHIRT, \$1,375, TNT FASHION, CA. TWIK PANTS, \$79, SIMONS, CA. JEFFREY CAMPBELL BOOTS, \$225, NORDSTROM.COM

Work it

Each issue, we’re taking a major fall trend for a spin. This week, our style editor, **Liz Guber**, tests out the high-fashion gone-fishing look

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KAYLA ROCCA

Some people love fashion—the drama, the subliminal message of a hem or a collar, the bubbling nature of a trend. Others just love clothes—buying them, living their lives in them and delighting in their aesthetic appeal as well as their functional qualities.

My dad is in the latter camp. He loves clothes in a way that’s pure and wonderful and comes from spending his youth in Eastern Europe, behind the Iron Curtain, buying contraband Levi’s. I indulge him with effusive approval whenever he returns from a shop, giddy like a kid, the proud new owner of a pair of Smurf-blue cargo shorts or yet another pair of jeans.

I get my untiring love of shopping from my dad. So when I was pulling together this look, which echoed the high-fashion functionality seen on the runways of Prada, Sacai and R13, I couldn’t help but feel like I was raiding the aisles of one of Dad’s favourite stores: Bass Pro. The fact that functional details like abundant pockets, warming fleece and military-inspired

preparedness is even a trend at all is...mildly laughable. We should be well past the point of celebrating pockets by now, right? But if nothing else, the plentiful cargo pants, overalls and worker coats on the Fall 2019 runways are a reminder that clothes can make us feel good by virtue of helping us get things done. And it’s not like the sense of fantasy or frivolity has been lost. Far from it! The flannel I’m wearing underneath my fishing vest costs four figures (my dad would never) and the Dickie’s coveralls seen on the R13 runway this past New York Fashion Week likely bear a similar price tag. This season, functionality has been taken to extremes.

So how did it feel to dress like I was going fly-fishing with the one per cent? Pretty good, as you can probably tell by my smirk. I’ll be taking this trend into my real life, too. I’ll be living in Dickie’s worker pants I found for \$10 at a second-hand shop and maybe seeing about borrowing my dad’s fishing vest.



R13



STELLA MCCARTNEY

SACAI



BLISS & MISCHIEF BOILER SUIT, \$516, BLISSANDMISCHIEF.COM. EVERLANE PANTS, \$84, EVERLANE.COM. SSONE PONCHO, \$1,490, SSONE.COM. MYAR JACKET, \$375, MATCHESFASHION.COM. DR. MARTENS BOOTS, \$240, DRMARTENS.COM

If you only buy one

Beauty director **Katherine Lalancette** adopts a “kill them with kindness” approach to dirt and makeup as she searches for the very best cleansing oil

PHOTOGRAPHY BY OANA CAZAN



A long time ago, back when I was a break-out-wary teenager, I’d end every day by rubbing a now infamous fruity scrub all over my face. Both palms would shuffle about furiously, up and down and back and forth, until I’d emerge scarlet and satisfied, convinced a nightly sanding was the best way to keep my skin clear.

I look back and cringe in horror. (The sound of crushed shells scratching my skin will forever haunt me.) Now, of course, I know that physical exfoliants, especially those with jagged particles, can cause microscopic tears. (This tidbit even led to a lawsuit against my former scrub of choice. It was thrown out of court, but the damage was, quite literally, done). I know that those tears can lead to inflammation and accelerated aging, not to mention

infection. And I know that cleanliness is *not* directly proportional to pain.

Call it skincare PTSD, but my current regimen consists of only the most coddling textures applied with light, fluttering fingertips. Instead of the abrasive face washes of my youth, I’m now an avid user of cleansing oils. I massage the slippery formulas onto my dry face to trap impurities, splash some water to produce a milky lather, then rinse everything away without ever stripping my skin. Teenage me would shudder at the thought of putting oil on her combination skin, but as we’ve already established, teenage me didn’t know jack. Older and wiser, I recently set out to find the best cleansing oil on the market so that no dermis would ever again have to suffer. Here is what I found.



IF YOU ONLY BUY ONE CLEANSING OIL, GO FOR...

A single pump is all it takes to melt away makeup (even the water-proof kind) with no rubbing at all. But why stop there? The silky formula goes beyond the call of duty, boosting moisture and radiance with green tea and ginseng root, so skin is left clean, fresh and totally Zen.

AMOREPACIFIC TREATMENT CLEANSING OIL FACE & EYES, \$65, SEPHORA.CA



IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A DEAL

Meet a true drugstore gem. It's 100 per cent natural and packed with nourishing coconut and argan oils, so you never get that tight, post-cleanse feeling.

BURT'S BEES FACIAL CLEANSING OIL WITH COCONUT & ARGAN OILS, \$18, SHOPPERSDRUGMART.CA



IF YOU'RE ON THE SENSITIVE SIDE

A welcome relief for dryness and itchiness, this calming cleanser helps repair skin's moisture barrier while ever so gently removing impurities.

AVÈNE XERACALM CLEANSING OIL, \$28, WELL.CA



IF YOU WANT TO STOP THE CLOCK

Blending bakuchiol, a natural alternative to retinol, and antioxidant-rich Swiss Alpine rose, this clean formula fights both debris and aging.

BEAUTYCOUNTER COUNTERTIME LIPID DEFENSE CLEANSING OIL, \$66, BEAUTYCOUNTER.COM



IF YOU LOVE A CLASSIC

It's the perfect first step in a double-cleansing routine. The bestseller dissolves any buildup on skin's surface, allowing your traditional cleanser to go deep.

DERMALOGICA PRECLEANSE, \$63, DERMALOGICA.CA

THE KIT X AVON

K-Beauty All-Stars

K-Beauty has made a major impact globally, and for good reason: Its cutting-edge technology makes for best-in-class products that are worth the hype. Avon's new collaboration with Korean brand The Face Shop makes it easier to shop these beauty must-haves than ever. We asked influencers Chloe Zhang and Vivienne Gliesche to put the products to the test, with seriously glowy results.



The influencer: **Chloe Zhang**

Which K-Beauty products can you simply not live without?

“The cushion products. I just love how they feel on the skin—they’re lightweight and moisturizing.”

How much time does it take you to get ready in the morning?

“It takes me around 15 minutes to get ready every morning.”

Are you a lipstick or gloss girl or... both?

“I’m a little bit of both. Sometimes I like the matte or satin lipstick look, but sometimes I like to add a little gloss so my lips look extra full and moisturized.”

Which Avon X The Face Shop product is your favourite?

“The Foundation Cushion. It’s extremely hydrating and the perfect shade for my skin tone, which is a lifesaver because I always find it hard to find a cushion that matches me. It’s easy to apply and means I don’t have to buy beauty blenders. I also find it’s more of a natural look on skin compared to a lot of liquid foundations, which can be more heavy. And it gives your skin the perfect glowy, dewy look!”



INK LASTING CUSHION FOUNDATION SLIM FIT, \$38, FLAT VELVET LIPSTICK, \$16



The influencer: **Vivienne Gliesche**

How have you incorporated K-Beauty into your routine?

“I love K-Beauty products, especially skincare. Hydrated and glowing skin is the best base for any makeup. I always make sure my skin is nourished, which means that I can apply less foundation.”

What's your advice for those who want to start trying K-Beauty products?

“Try a rich moisturizer, see how you like it and go from there. Too many different products all at once might be overwhelming and confuse your skin.”

Are you into highlighter?

“Oh, yes! Some might say it is the thing I am most passionate about. I love glowing, healthy-looking skin and will never go without highlighter when I do my makeup. I love placing it on my cheeks, browbone, inner corner of my eyes, and a tiny bit on the nose and forehead.”

Which Avon X The Face Shop product is your favourite?

“It’s hard to choose, but the Oil Blending Cream for skincare and the Ink Serum Lip Tint for makeup. Both products are so hydrating and will make you glow!”



THE THERAPY OIL BLENDING CREAM, \$58, INK SERUM LIP TINT, \$20

All products available at [Avon.ca](https://www.avon.ca)

Why do bras still do up in the back?

Continued from cover

ALL ILLUSTRATIONS BY MADISON VAN RIJN

EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE

Bras, of course, have always been branded as near-medical necessities; slings for lame body parts that can't support themselves. We believe they improve posture and reduce back pain. (Though, as large-breasted women know, an ill-fitting garment can actually accentuate these grievances and create painful trenches under the straps.) But ask a woman why she reaches for a bra every day and she is likely to utter the word "discomfort." I heard it, again and again, from my B-cup colleagues, from my C-cup friends, from my too-polite-to-say mother-in-law. The word discomfort, at its core hints just as much at feelings of anxiety as it does at physical pain. Even my E-cup friend admits that, jogging aside, her breasts don't actually hurt when she doesn't wear a bra: She just feels incredibly uncomfortable.

Most women, including me, have been wearing a bra since we were basically children. The feeling of adult breasts moving freely, swaying as you walk, is as awkward a feeling as trying to wear your purse on the other side. There is some relief in being trussed up; there's an orderly sense that everything is neatly tucked away where it should be, a calm akin to opening a carefully organized drawer. "Wearing a bra can be psychological," says Lam. "In my case, could I get away with not wearing one?

12. "It was a training bra, really: a band of pink nylon meant to protect my very slightly raised nipples from the fabric of my clothing," she wrote in *The New Yorker*. "Or maybe it was meant to protect the girl who shared my school-bus seat and wondered aloud where my bra might be—summoning a shame I hadn't felt since last wetting the bed—from the faint contour of my nipples. Who could tell?" When Brenhouse stopped wearing a bra in 2016, she explained, "It wasn't a political decision, except insofar as everything a woman does with her body that isn't letting someone else dictate what she ought to do with it is a political decision."

Never was the political debate more storied than after feminists protested the 1968 Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, a year before the moon landing. The first protest of its kind featured a "freedom trash can" into which women could throw away the objects that oppressed them, from bras to eyelash curlers. The next day, newspapers reported that women had set fire to their undergarments in anger, birthing the now-iconic image of the angry feminist, free-chested and wild-eyed. It was humorist (and misogynist) Art Buchwald who wrote that "tragic" women had burned their bras, arguing that, "If the average American female gave up all her beauty products she would look like Tiny Tim and there would be no reason for the American male to have anything to do with her at all."

But the truth is that this historic bra burning never happened. The women, reasonable and educated protesters with witty signs in hand (featuring jabs like "Welcome to the Miss America Cattle Auction"), merely expressed their discontent with an event they considered capitalistic, racist and sexist. "It's sexy to think about women removing their bras and burning them, just as it's salacious to think women were stupid enough to get

dominating the intimates industry. "At that time, the Angels had opinions and personalities and smoked cigars," says Lam of True&Co. "They were the embodiment of what women wanted to be, of showing up to work and being sexy. That sexiness was a part of life was revolutionary."

The message resonated with customers who, by the early 1990s, were eagerly spending US\$1 billion at the retailer's hundreds of stores. "Even five years ago, I thought Victoria's Secret was a castle that was impossible to destroy," says Roberge. His business was backed into a corner when Victoria's Secret rolled into town in 2007: No one, he thought, could beat it at the game of selling hot-pink-coloured sex, the kind that hits about as subtly as a stilettoed kick to the groin. So he pivoted toward a more mature customer; a 35-year-old woman who prized work, family and comfort.

La Vie en Rose's shift proved prescient of the massive ideological swing that would come to define our current decade: the omnipresence of in-your-face sexuality had quickly become suffocating. By the time the #MeToo movement urged us, in 2017, to reconsider our cultural comfort with disturbing abuses of male power, Victoria's Secret's castle was crumbling. Its market share had plummeted to 28.8 per cent. Recently, it announced the closure of 53 stores and shelved its glitzy runway show after then CMO Ed Razek said in a *Vogue* interview that the brand wouldn't hire a transgender model because the show, as he saw it, was an exercise in fantasy. The public outcry was swift, brutal and justifiable. (Victoria's Secret declined to comment for this story.)

Heidi Zak, who founded challenger brand ThirdLove in 2014, took out a full-page ad in *The New York Times* to publicize her displeasure. "I've read and re-read the interview at least 20 times, and each time I read it I'm even angrier. How in 2018 can the CMO of any public company—let alone one that claims to be for women—make such shocking, derogatory statements?" she wrote. "You market to men and sell a male fantasy to women."

FEMINISM SELLS

Today, ThirdLove is one of the loudest in the cacophony of voices that make up the \$93 billion lingerie market, selling the sexiest of all female fantasies: Hey girl, we understand you. "We're absolute individuals/Originals/One of a kinds/If we're really all created equal/Why are we so unique, uncommon" preaches ThirdLove on its site, like a blush-toned beat poet hellbent on mass-market empowerment.

Every woman with a social media account—which is to say, almost every woman—has been flooded with waves of targeted ads from direct-to-consumer companies to make sure she knows that, even in her most private moments (scrolling her feed while peeing, lying sleepless at 3 a.m.) she is not actually alone.

These newer businesses tout body acceptance and self-love as modern alternatives to the lacquered sex appeal that defined Victoria's Secret and La Senza. Brands like ThirdLove and True&Co., which are recording huge growth, opt to show their wares on more representative bodies, putting an end to the "endemic male gaze," as Lam says, and "expanding the vocabulary of models." Brands like Toronto-based Knix, which was founded by entrepreneur Joanna Griffiths in 2013, take things one step further, eschewing professional models altogether and inviting customers to take centre stage as campaign stars. Knix currently sells a product every 10 seconds.

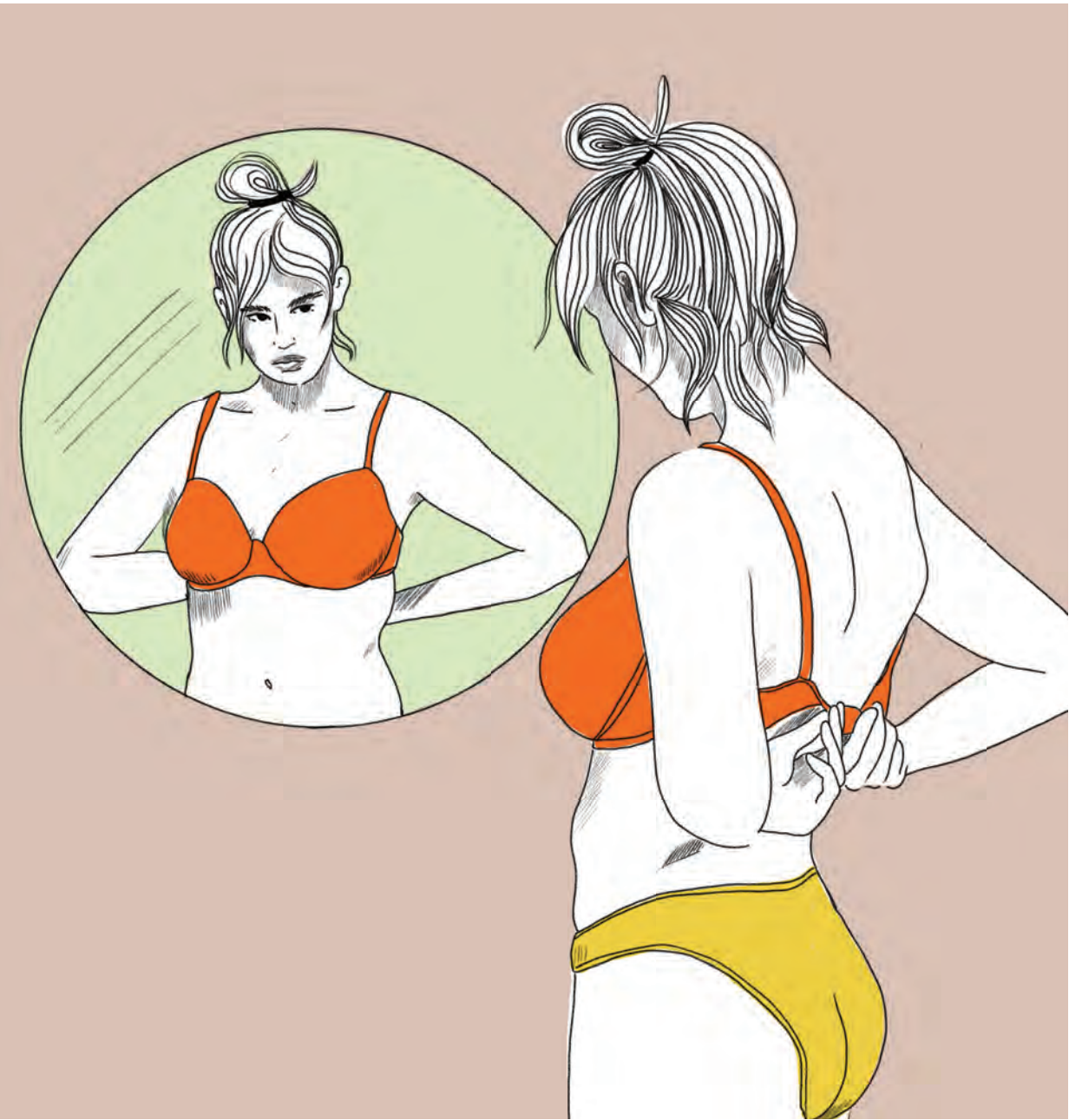
It's feminism, but it's also capitalism.

Companies having been using feminism to sell products to women since before Dove launched its groundbreaking "real beauty" campaign in 2004, but the rise of social media, which simultaneously gives everyone a platform and reduces the depth of any message down to a few sentences, has created an environment where our individuality is packaged and sold back to us—a disorienting hall of mirrors in which your personal story is both corporate product and promotional tool.

If anyone understands the web of web-based marketing, it's Griffiths. In her downtown Toronto office, there are orange Post-Its stuck on the wall, scrawled with Sharpied thought snippets like "I wear this because." She famously raised funding for the first run of Knix bras through Kickstarter; she'd hoped to scrape together enough to produce 1,000 bras—and ended up generating \$1.5 million. "About three years ago, around the #MeToo movement, there was a pivot where female empowerment became a sexy way to market a brand," says Griffiths. "But if you're doing it to make a quick buck, then ultimately, you're going to get caught for it."

Last year, after suffering a miscarriage, Griffiths spearheaded a #Facesoffertility campaign and launched a podcast, inviting women to share their experiences with miscarriage, infertility and pregnancy. It's a deeply personal and particularly triggering subject matter for an underwear brand to hashtag. "If you look at our Instagram feed, there was a shift about two years ago, to talk less about the products and to tell the stories of the women who are wearing them," explains Griffiths, who says we should focus on the fact that these vital conversations are finally happening; we shouldn't worry about whether it's ideal if they are hosted in a corporate space. "Changing the way women feel about their bodies is my life's purpose," she says.

Griffiths explains her perspective with obvious passion, but it's hard for me to trust any capitalist enterprise with my secrets and my wounds, no matter how amicable and trustworthy it seems—and no matter how many times they like my Instagram photos. But maybe, in the privacy-eroding age of social media, we can't have secrets anymore. Maybe most women don't even want to anymore.



Probably—but I would miss it. I would miss that container underneath my clothes that keeps everything polished."

There is also, of course, the age-old threat that not wearing a bra will leave you with sagging, unsightly breasts. It's often cited that the ligament in the fleshy middle of the breast will stretch out over time if not properly supported. "That is a myth," says Dr. Toni Zhong flatly when I raise the concern. She's been working hands-on with breasts for decades as a prominent surgeon and the clinical and research director of the University Health Network Breast Reconstruction Program, which makes her one of the country's premiere specialists.

"From what I've observed in my practice, having what we call ptotic breasts, which is a dropping of the breasts, is largely genetically determined," she explains, adding that weight loss and gain can also play a role, as can other lifestyle choices, like whether you've breastfed a baby. "It's completely not true that wearing a supportive bra can prevent stretch marks or sagging over time. Unfortunately, that's just going to happen; aging happens everywhere. If there were some kind of garment that people could wear to prevent aging, we'd all be wearing it as a mask."

The inarguable truth is that, for many women, our relationship with our bras becomes yet another stick we beat ourselves with when the inevitabilities of aging set in. "Patients are upset when they come into my office," says Zhong. "They ask me if it's because they didn't wear a 'proper' bra during development. I tell my patients, like I'm telling you, that there is nothing you could have done." I hope she's right. I often look down at my slack breasts and wonder if the cheap strapless bras I wore under my university-era going-out tops are to blame, just as I look at the lines setting in between my brows and kick myself for falling into bed without serum most nights. It's easier and more delightfully self-castigating to blame the blurry late nights in flimsy bras than to rethink the decision I made to breastfeed two babies.

Though women's breasts have evolved for a reason—function over form, as it were—their sexualization is omnipresent, a reality as plain as a full moon in the night sky. Girls learn that lesson early. Writer Hillary Brenhouse, for example, started wearing a bra at age

ribs removed in order to wear corsets, which also never happened," explains Alanna McKnight who researched the historical implications of corsetry at Ryerson University and will be publishing a book on the subject. "Those stories survive because they are just that: good stories."

Around that time of social unrest, my mother was a 17-year-old hippie living in Montreal. That year, she watched a man land on the moon and held down a summer job at the button factory that employed her mother and aunt. Like many of her friends, she listened to Simon & Garfunkel, tucked flowers behind her ears and often didn't wear a bra, despite her conservative mother's impassioned warnings that she'd suffer a saggy bosom. Just recently, my mom confided that, one hot afternoon, the middle-aged factory owner called her into his office and grabbed her right breast, fondling her while cooing obscenities. She never told anyone. My mother has spent the last 50 years wondering if it was her fault for not wearing a bra.

Today, even with a thin layer of nylon and foam creating a boundary between her breasts and the world, that memory still hurts.

THE COMPLICATED LEGACY OF VICTORIA'S SECRET

In 1996, The Spice Girls, clad in shimmering sports bras and halter tops, invaded the world with their debut song, which challenged women to "tell me what you want, what you really, really want." That same year, Francois Roberge bought what was then a failing chain of 26 Ontario stores called La Vie en Rose. The Canadian lingerie landscape was controlled by a handful of conservative department stores, which meant that the experience of bra shopping was dull and functional with only beige, black and white bras lined up on hangers. It was closer to the experience of buying a war-era girdle than to the vibrant imagery women were falling for with a zigzag-ah. "It simply wasn't a fashion market," Roberge explains today from his office in Montreal.

The decade in which girls learned that having it all should be glamorous also spawned the legendary Victoria's Secret Angels, women like Tyra Banks and Gisele Bündchen who accessorized their perfectly sculpted bodies with the brand's lacy push-up bras and thongs,

Thank you for your service

Leah Rumack salutes her 40-something breasts. As she writes, they’ve served her well—and it’s only downhill from here

I never had strong feelings about my boobs. They were a reasonably pert B-cup and they were, you know, fine. Then I had a baby in my late 30s, and that’s when things got real. When rapper Cardi B posted an Instagram video about how the birth of her daughter “did me filthy” and her plans to re-up immediately on her breast implants—I believe the phrase was “titty renovation”—I felt her pain.

The only time my breasts had those fantastical bowling-ball, porn-star proportions was when I was nursing, but the downside was that when milk power hour was over, they deflated to #sadface searchlights, endlessly scanning the ground for their lost will to live. (For those who think that it’s just breastfeeding that deflates formerly valiant breasts, think again: Pregnancy itself changes their composition.) Add 10 years and 30 pounds, and what I have now amounts to pudding poured into dingy C cups.

As a teenage dancer, a 20-something yoga cliché and a 30-something power dater, I always obsessed over my body’s supposed faults. Ridiculously, in retrospect, I actually had a so-called “good” body—firm, strong, flexible, pain-free, with nipples that saluted the sun. I curse all the energy I wasted obsessing over calories and dimming bedroom lights rather than being grateful for what I had. What I wouldn’t do to have that body now!

It occurs to me that in 10 years, I’ll be saying the same thing about my current body, my current breasts. This late-40s vessel that I spend so much time lamenting is going to look bloody gorgeous to late-50s me. Not to mention, I’ve reached a point on the mortal coil when breasts have started to become liabilities. I already have one friend who has had breast cancer and a double mastectomy, and another who is about to have a preventative double mastectomy because breast and ovarian cancers have stalked every female in her family.

I’ve never been one for, you know, feelings, especially positive ones about myself (gross!), but I’ve decided it’s time to try to be nicer about my aging bod because, honey, this train is only going one way. My boobs have been pretty good to me, after all—they fed my son, they still come out swinging for The Sex With The Husband, and, best of all, they haven’t tried to kill me. All in all a good result, even if they aren’t as jaunty as they once were.

But I haven’t been treating them very well. I don’t gaze at them in the mirror with love (unless saying “Ugh!” counts as a sweet nothing) and I never dress them up anymore. It doesn’t help that I work from home, which means I’ve been sliding down the slippery “soft bra” slope. Lately I’ve been favouring a certain oh-so-comfy wireless style that turns my bust into a compact, un-enticing rectangle—sort of like a Harry Potter book with teats. (Tasting note: Pair with grey sweatpants!)

So I decide to get my girls a present to cheer all of us up. I take them to a purveyor of tasteful, oh-so-European lingerie called Brava Boutique and sit on a tufted sofa as the store’s owner, Christine Lackan Ory, brings over

a frothy armful of sheer, delicately embroidered magenta, teal and navy bras from French brand Simone Pérèle. They’re a far cry from their utilitarian cousins that I’ve been unceremoniously shovelling into my cart at the grocery store, though at a starting price of around \$135—which is actually cheap for a “proper” bra—they’re definitely more expensive. They’re also lovelier than any bra I’ve ever owned. I settle on the Lumineuse demi-cup style in blue-green lace—it’s as if my breasts are perched on an ornate balcony, waving at their admirers. My pudding looks…pretty?! I send my husband a change-room pic, just to be sure.

The sales assistant wraps up my prize in a glossy box. I take it home and open it carefully. Then I pull my ratty T-shirt over my head and announce ceremoniously: “Girls, I have a thank-you gift for you.”

They like it. They really, really do.



“Six years ago, the concept of taking a picture of yourself in your underwear and sharing it on social media was insane,” says Griffiths. In 2013, when she was organizing her first Knix photo shoot, she couldn’t get volunteers to sign on as models for the campaign. “It was impossible,” she explains. “It ended up being mainly my friends, and we only showed their bodies because they were really wary about the concept of being in an underwear shoot.”

Now, Griffiths can’t keep up with the list of women who want to be featured, to share their stories, connect with women in their community, and maybe even get famous. One of the women they often feature is Canadian “mother/writer/content creator” Sarah Nicole Landry, who gained more than 400,000 social media followers in the past year. “Social media is this place where people can come and often feel small, less, insignificant or alone. Or, it can be this place of being built up, seen, heard,” Landry wrote in a recent post, captioning a photo of the stretch marks striping her breasts. “We just forget sometimes that we have a choice.”

FORECASTING THE FUTURE

Choice, of course, is always at the heart of both feminism and open market capitalism. “Wearing a bra is sort of a form of body modification,” says McKnight. “There are different extremes, but if you can be a feminist and have your ears pierced, then you can certainly be a feminist and wear a corset or a bra.” You can also increasingly direct the market with the purchasing decisions you make. Lam, a self-proclaimed “algorithm nerd,” believes that successful businesses are those that are able to truly understand women. When True&Co. noticed customer demand for underwire bras plummeting in the first three months of 2015, for example, it rushed to bring out a wire-free option that same year.

It traditionally takes at least 18 months to get a bra to market because of the product testing and raw material innovation required. (It took about the same amount of time to craft the space suit prototypes.) “Bras are a feat of engineering; you’re defying gravity with a garment,” says Lam. They can have as many as 35 components. In 2013, Lam and her designer sent a schematic for a new hook-and-eye system to their overseas manufacturer. They scoffed: Those seemingly simple little hooks are churned out by the millions on an endless production line. If they couldn’t redesign it, reasoned Lam, they would just opt out: True&Co.’s bestselling bra, the True Body, is formed out of bonded fabric and has a smooth back. Women pull it over their head like a shirt. It’s an innovation borne out of being backed into a production corner but one that signals a change in the game.

The power of big data, which True&Co. carefully collects, Lam argues, is that it gives innovators the ability to “listen to women at home” and then act to address their desires. But what if women decide to stop talking? Or more frightening still, what if we decide to stop buying?

“What scares me a bit with millennials is that, maybe one day, they will realize: Do I need to buy 10 pairs of jeans a year?” muses Roberge. “The industry is built on fast fashion: People buy and sell, buy and sell again. But one day, maybe that will stop.” His youngest daughter recently went on a six-month shopping hiatus. Imagine, he says, if all young Canadians decided to stop buying? “It would change retail.”

Roberge is pragmatic about what happens next: “Right now, 90 per cent of our company’s profit is in

Canada, so I would like to go outside the country to have a backup.” In August, La Vie en Rose unveiled its first international corporate store: a sprawling flagship in Guangzhou. “We’re going to China to try to find the recipe for the future,” he explains. After all, despite the mission statements and the positive mantras of acceptance, selling bras is a business. “In Canada, people smoke less, but if you go to China, they smoke five times more than us. If you go to India, they smoke, too. Maybe, one day, in Canada we will decide that we won’t put bras on anymore—but in other countries, they will continue to wear them.”

Despite recent technical and social advancements, we are now, at the heart of it, trying to express our individuality through an industry built on economies of scale. No matter how much a bra brand seems to be speaking directly to you, the garment was likely produced in a factory that made the bra your co-worker is wearing, and your sister’s and that girl’s on the bus. We’re all the same in that we believe ourselves to be unique; and the myth of individuality helps obscure our mass market world, like an eclipse we can’t look at directly. The irony, for instance, that a female astronaut couldn’t go into space last year because there was no suit on hand to fit her is almost too much to swallow.

The moon keeps circling around the Earth, and with every couple of hundred rotations, we like to comfort

A man trotted across the surface of the moon before women had access to even a rudimentary sports bra

ourselves with the thought that we’re better off today than before: We don’t have to wear corsets anymore, after all. “In a hundred years, people will look back and think we all had breast implants and wore six-inch heels every day,” says McKnight. “‘Oh, those poor women,’ they’ll say. ‘Look what they did to their bodies.’”

Some women, says Zhong, are choosing to free themselves from bras, regardless of what history will think of them, as a tiny upside to a long battle with cancer. “A lot of women feel quite liberated after breast cancer reconstruction because, with implants, there is no need to hold anything up,” Zhong explains. After hours-long surgery to remove the natural tissue and nipples, most women are left with a scar over each new breast. “I always ask my patients if they want nipple reconstruction to cover it, but now some women are saying, ‘No, I don’t want to have to have anything that’s going to make me have to wear a bra.’” So these women leave her office to rejoin their lives with perfectly smooth, orb-like breasts that sit high and happy under a T-shirt, always appropriate yet never bound. In some ways, this is the bra that futurists would have predicted back in the days of the space race: one that is so weightless, it’s part of your body; one that frees you from the constraints of a garment, but not from those of society.

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“We’re interested in the idea of elegance and curiosity and inspiring people and showing them beauty,” says designer Elle AyoubZadeh. These are a few of our favourite Fall 2019 Zvelle pieces.

FROM LEFT: ZVELLE BAG, \$695; BOOTS, \$495; TOTE, \$655; BOOTS, \$525. ZVELLE.COM



Modern luxury

Accessories designer Elle AyoubZadeh tells **Liz Guber** why she believes in the power of beautiful things

When Elle AyoubZadeh left the world of corporate finance, she joked to her mom that if things didn’t work out she could always work at a shoe store. That claim turned out to be more than a little prophetic, as AyoubZadeh now runs a shoe company. That shoe company is Zvelle, a luxury label that produces suede and leather boots, pumps and sandals in Italy with a focus on sleek, feminine and timeless silhouettes. But AyoubZadeh didn’t quit her job in asset management to start a shoe line—at least, not at first. Before launching Zvelle, AyoubZadeh (who was born in Iran and grew up in Australia) headed up an angel investment firm and then opened a concept shop in Toronto called Prologue that combined retail with a spa and a wine bar. It was while running the store that AyoubZadeh realized she wanted to focus on her own product. “I always came back to accessories. I love them because you can really show the quality.”

To AyoubZadeh, Zvelle is more than a shoe brand. “When I left my job, I had this urge that I wanted to create this company. It wasn’t just about making product. We’re interested in the idea of elegance and curiosity and inspiring people and showing them beauty.” Many pieces are named after iconic women, from Anaïs Nin to Zaha Hadid.

This fall, Zvelle released its first line of bags—structured, minimal carryalls that are designed around functionality. There’s the boxy, compact tote rendered in blush pink calf leather and a slouchier, roomier number with an asymmetrical strap and a playful circular pocket. Along with the new product line, Zvelle just opened a pop-up shop in Toronto’s Yorkville Village—a (temporary) shoe store of her very own.

Biggest challenge “In the beginning, the challenge is convincing factories to work with you before you have a product. It’s about making a strong enough connection with a factory that they’re willing to take a risk and work with you. I didn’t come from a fashion family, I didn’t have list of phone numbers to call. I had to follow lead after lead, going to countries where I did not speak the language.”

feld], but getting our shoes on celebrities is not a focus of ours. We want to develop conversations with our customers.”

Favourite pair “I can’t choose favourites, but I love our Rayna flat. It’s the first style that we made. You can wear it with anything, from everyday jeans to dressy skirts.”

Day to night “I’m not one of those people that carries around a canvas tote with a

risks. It was self-funded. Right now, every dollar we make is invested back into the company. I will give myself to the company as long as it’s needed. We’re not venture backed, so we don’t have to give quarterly returns to one investor.”

Morning routine “Italy is six hours ahead, so I wake up between 5 and 6 a.m. Sometimes I have to wake up at 3 a.m. and talk to the design team. On a

“I didn’t come from a fashion family, I didn’t have a list of phone numbers to call. I had to follow lead after lead.”

Going offline “During production, a single pair of shoes is touched by 200 pairs of hands. You’re not building those relationships through email. You go to the factory, you break bread with them.”

Famous faces “We’ve been very fortunate to have some of the most stylish women in the world wear our shoes [Bella Hadid, Ciara and Hailee Stein-

change of shoes in it. I like one shoe for the whole day, and every pair [of Zvelle shoes] is designed with that in mind. These are shoes you can wear from 9 a.m. until 9 p.m., when you’re standing with a glass of rosé or scotch in your hand.”

Long haul “When I launched, I knew that it would take 10 years to build this brand. I believed in it so much that I took all the

good day, I will meditate in the sauna and then get on Skype with the factory.”

Time out “I have the most beautiful American cocker spaniel named Toby. I’ll take him for a walk and he stops every two seconds; it slows me down and I love that. My ideal way of winding down at the end of the day is having a scotch on my balcony with my husband.”

PHOTOGRAPHY: LUIS MORA

THE KIT X NEOSTRATA

The Science of Skin

Behind the scenes at the lab that’s inventing your next skincare holy grail

Some of the most legendary and trusted skincare ingredients debuted decades ago, like alpha-hydroxy acids (AHAs such as glycolic acid and lactic acid), retinol and collagen. But in the capable hands of NEOSTRATA’s scientists, they just keep getting better with age—which is also what they help your skin do!

For a first-hand peek at how these holy grail ingredients are being used in new and improved ways, we travel to the headquarters of NEOSTRATA, the brand that pioneered AHAs for anti-aging. The red-brick lab is in Princeton, New Jersey, tucked in a treelined hub of research facilities just minutes from Princeton University.

NEOSTRATA’s original skin breakthrough dates back to 1974, when the founders discovered AHAs in their quest to treat ichthyosis, a skin disorder that causes severe dryness and scaling. They soon clued into the then-unrecognized cosmetic powers of AHAs: The naturally occurring acids excel at ungluing surface-level dead skin cells, prompting them to flake off and reveal fresh skin underneath.

“At that time, truly functional, high-performing ingredients were new,” explains Barbara Green, head of research and development, who joined NEOSTRATA Inc. in its startup years. After all, this was the era of fairly low-tech cold creams. “Now there was a way to actually deliver an anti-aging or exfoliation effect to the skin,” Green adds. The company became the first to launch AHAs in lunchtime peels (so-called because the treatments are speedy, with no downtime).

Staying true to its heritage, NEOSTRATA is still all about clinical skincare with results. One of its latest innovations stars retinol—another hall-of-fame ingredient—but delivers it in a clever new way.

Retinol, a vitamin A derivative, is name-checked by virtually all dermatologists as the gold standard for anti-aging: It targets collagen, reduces visible lines and wrinkles and helps unclog pores. The hitch? Retinol can make skin (especially the sensitive type) dry, flaky and annoyed, which is why the most potent retinoids are reserved for use by prescription from a dermatologist.

But the new NEOSTRATA Retinol 0.3% Overnight Peel packs a powerful dose of retinol into a product gentle enough to use at home. “It is the highest strength we can sell at retail globally,” says Green, noting that it features 0.3 per cent retinol, whereas most over-the-counter retinol creams contain 0.1 per cent or less.

Designed to minimize visible wrinkles and smooth and firm skin, the peels come as individually wrapped, pre-soaked pads (which keeps the notoriously finicky retinol stable). To use, just swipe over your clean, dry face before applying your nightly moisturizer, once a week.

The retinol is able to penetrate the skin’s surface pronto and get to work fast because the delivery system is alcohol-based. That’s why you only need to use the peel once-weekly, as a booster to your everyday routine.

Another buzzy new launch is the NEOSTRATA Firming Collagen Booster. Collagen is also a classic, trusted ingredient: It’s what gives skin its structure and firmness—but it’s also a large molecule, making it tricky to deliver into the skin. The solution: “We went with a material that can actually penetrate into skin’s surface: a low-molecular-weight hydrolyzed collagen,” explains Dr. Ashley Taylor, a scientist who worked on devel-



NEOSTRATA HEADQUARTERS IN PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

NEOSTRATA’S RETINOL 0.3% OVERNIGHT PEEL



NEOSTRATA FIRMING COLLAGEN BOOSTER, \$75, AND RETINOL 0.3% OVERNIGHT PEEL, \$80 FOR THREE-MONTH SUPPLY, VISIT NEOSTRATA.CA FOR RETAILERS

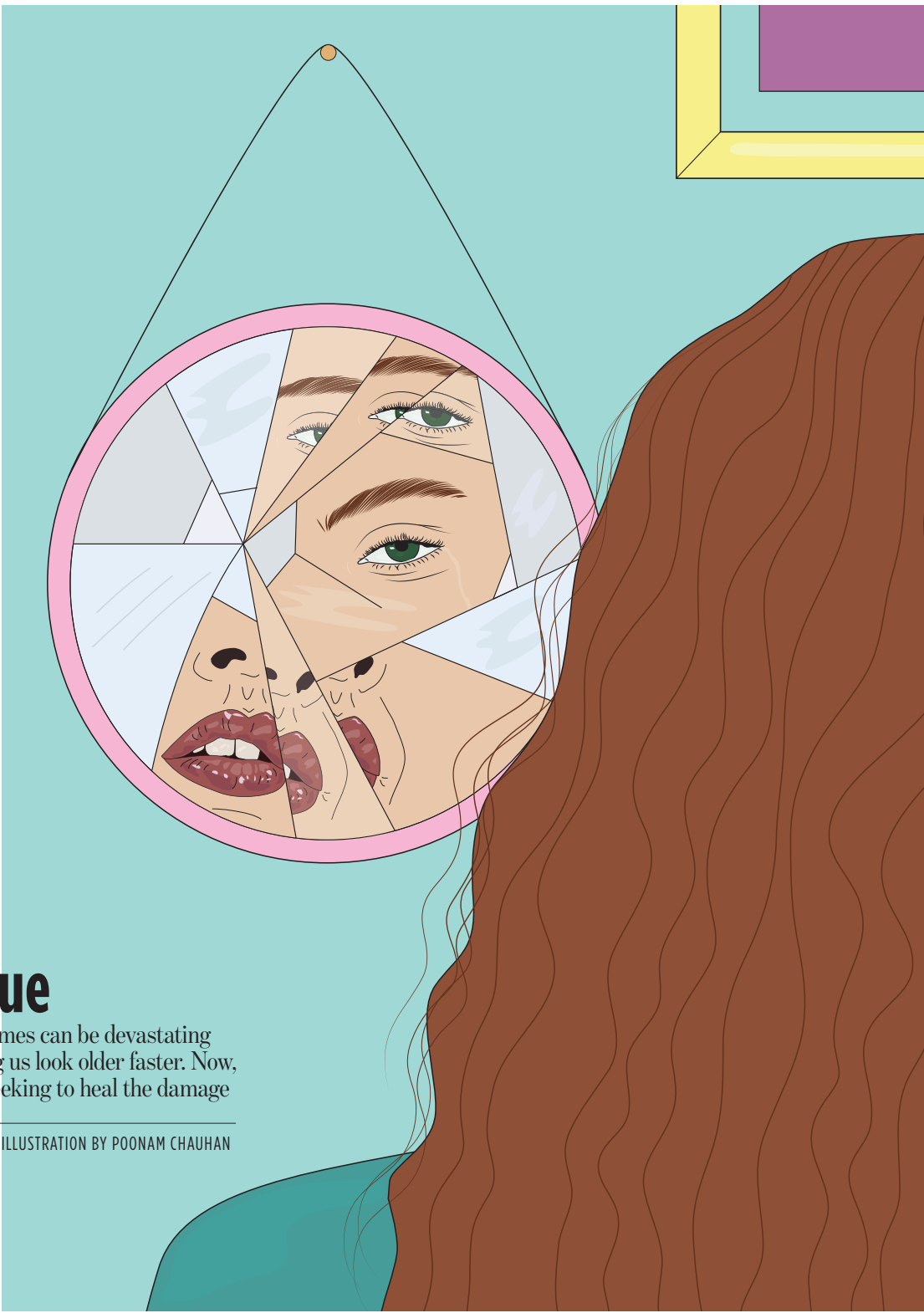
oping the new serum. During testing, the brand found that after one month of use, 92 per cent of people said their skin was rejuvenated and appeared firmer.

Before we depart, we get to see where all the lab magic happens. Shelves are stocked with raw materials for mixing, and cosmetic scientists tell us about how they’re dreaming up the skincare miracles they’re excited for everyone to try next. If there are star ingredients that can be made even better, you can bet the beauty brains here are already on the case.

Scar tissue

Life’s most trying times can be devastating for our skin, making us look older faster. Now, new products are seeking to heal the damage

BY KATHERINE LALANCETTE | ILLUSTRATION BY POONAM CHAUHAN



“Jackie shows the signs of the awful experiences of the last four years. Her white skin has shadows and creases, as if underneath the surface something had broken...”

That’s how photographer Cecil Beaton described Jackie Kennedy in his journal after escorting her to the ballet in February 1968. It had been five years since it happened—her husband getting shot beside her in the back of an open-top Lincoln; Jackie climbing onto the trunk, presumably to catch pieces of his skull—but it was all still there on her face. Indelible, like the blood stains on her pink Chanel suit.

Sometimes, life has a way of leaving stains on our face like that. There’s a name for it: abrupt or accelerated aging.

“It’s when you experience a life shock, whether it’s a loss or an illness or a period of acute stress, and you find yourself suddenly looking much older,” says Janie Lelièvre, national trainer and expert for Lierac, a French skincare line.

Emotional stress is the latest frontier in skincare, with brands like Lierac launching products designed to mitigate its ravages. Biologically, abrupt aging affects skin very differently than the natural, chronological kind. Rather than a slow decline in cell regeneration, accelerated aging prompts cells to produce enzymes that destroy collagen and elastin. Simply put: Something really does break beneath the surface.

That’s what happened to Alice* after she experienced a devastating miscarriage last year. “I noticed lines I’d never noticed before; I saw that the circles under my eyes were darker,” she says. “I felt older and I looked it.”

On New Year’s Day, Alice had found out she was pregnant with her second child. She and her husband had been trying for a while and at 38, she was starting to feel like time was running out. In the months that followed the positive test, Alice woke up smiling. On the subway, instead of scrolling through Instagram, she scrolled through lists of baby names. Then, one morning, she started bleeding.

“One of the worst things about the kind of miscarriage I had is that you have to expel the tissue yourself,” she recalls. “That happened the next night, around 2 a.m., at home. I can barely allow myself to remember it, because it hurts so much. I do remember that after it happened, I lay on the living room floor, barely breathing, until dawn. My husband discovered me there and lay down beside me.”

During her pregnancies, Alice took immaculate care of herself. She drank her eight glasses of water and switched to more natural makeup and skin products, obsessively studying ingredient lists in the crowded aisles of Sephora. But after the miscarriage, she quit all semblance of self-care. At work, she kept up the surface of being just fine. At home, until her three-year-old went to bed, she kept up the surface of being just fine. After that, she’d pass out with her makeup still on.

“The neglect showed on my skin. It just looked duller, which felt commensurate with my state of mind. Then the pimples started, on my forehead, my chin, even my neck. In a weird way, it was comforting, like my skin was acknowledging the loss.”

The relationship between our skin and our mind is a deep, intimate one. It’s a connection that goes back to the womb, where our nervous system and skin tissue are created in the same embryonic layer, the ectoderm.

“That makes them part of a complex system called the neuro-immuno-cutaneous-endocrine network,” explains dermatologist Samantha Gontijo Guerra, who is originally from Brazil and is pursuing a PhD at the University of Sherbrooke, in Quebec. The focus of her research is psychodermatology, a relatively new discipline that addresses the interaction between mind and skin.

“As a clinician in Brazil, I worked with many different kinds of patients and saw in my daily practice the many links between skin issues and emotional or psychological factors,” says Gontijo Guerra. “Since coming to Canada, I’ve had the opportunity to research these links, and seeking to understand them has become my passion.”

Those links are manifold, but one of the main actors in the process is often cortisol, the stress hormone. An evolutionary response to life-threatening situations, cortisol redirects energy toward vital organs and away from the skin to give us the boost we need to escape immediate danger.

“The stress we experience has changed—we don’t encounter woolly mammoths anymore—but our biological reaction to it hasn’t,” says Lelièvre. “Our stress tends to be prolonged and cumulative, so we secrete cortisol for longer

periods of time, which leads to a lot of long-term damage.”

That damage is the target of Lierac’s Premium The Cure, a new 28-day emergency treatment. To measure the efficacy of its star ingredient, an extract from the baobab tree, scientists injected ex vivo skin samples with cortisol to mimic the effects of stress. The active was found to stimulate GDF11, a protein in skin that acts on the production of collagen and hyaluronic acid and makesskin denser and more “youthful-looking.

Other brands are also taking a closer look at our psyche’s impact on our skin. Dermalogica’s new Phyto-Nature Firming Serum is meant to be paired with a virtual advisor that uses artificial intelligence and augmented reality to diagnose our skin condition *and* emotional state, and then guides us through a personalized acupuncture application technique.

The relationship between our skin and our mind is a deep, intimate one. It’s a connection that goes back to the womb

And Estée Lauder recently launched Intense Reset Concentrate, the newest member of its bestselling Advanced Night Repair franchise. Also billed as an emergency treatment, it’s designed to help us “power through life’s high-intensity moments beautifully” by curbing inflammation.

“We’re living more stressful lives in every way imaginable—at work, in big cities, trying to take care of many things,” says Dr. Nadine Pernodet, vice-president of skin biology and bioactives at the Estée Lauder Companies. “Skin gets overwhelmed, and that causes inflammation, and you need to stop that inflammation as soon as possible because it’s the biggest enemy when it comes to aging.”

When left untreated, inflammation activates collagenase and elastase, the enzymes that deteriorate collagen and elastin. “It basically destroys your

dermis,” says Pernodet. To put an end to the chain reaction and clear out the damage, Pernodet and her team patented Chronolux SOS, a technology that optimizes skin’s nightly repair.

This last part is key because instances of acute stress or emotional trauma usually come with sleepless nights or poor sleep quality. We can’t seem to turn off the noise—the whys and the what-could-have-beens and the it’s-all-my-faults—and that prevents us from getting the deep rest we so desperately need.

Following Jack’s death, Jackie Kennedy was haunted by recurring nightmares, often waking up to the sounds of her own screams. For months after Alice lost her baby, she could only sleep for an hour or two at a time.

“If, for a few weeks, you work too much and you’re very tired and your complexion is looking lacklustre, you can take some time off, get some rest and get your glow back,” says Lelièvre. “But if the episode of stress is drawn out too long, signs of fatigue that should be temporary can become permanent damage, and that’s what we want to avoid.”

Of course, fancy serums can’t mend a grieving mother’s heart, make the trauma of death go away or cure chronic anxiety. But sometimes, they can help.

“Ideally, you need to work on both fronts, skin and mind, simultaneously because the issues are happening simultaneously,” says Gontijo Guerra. “One product can’t fix everything, but it can help because it means you’re taking care of yourself. And if a product does improve the condition of the skin, that can improve your outlook and your self-esteem.”

The opposite is also true. Neglecting to tackle the effects of psychological turmoil on skin can negatively impact our perception of ourselves and actually perpetuate stress. It’s as though the shadows and creases on our face constantly recall the awful experiences that broke through the surface.

“It can create a vicious cycle,” Gontijo Guerra explains. “It’s like, ‘I have this mark on my skin that reminds me of what I went through and makes me feel scared I’ll go through it again.’”

Months after almost revelling in the fact that her skin was reflecting her pain, Alice finally felt ready to work on healing it. She returned to the crowded aisles of Sephora and spent hundreds of dollars, stocking up on cleansers, serums, clay masks and eye creams. “The heavy shopping bag felt like hope,” she says.

At night, after tucking in her son and kissing him goodnight, she unpacked the products and lined them up in the bathroom. She dampened a washcloth with warm water, slowly smoothed it over her face, and massaged in each cream, gel and oil with near reverent strokes.

“It sounds silly, but that experience—watching myself in the mirror while I did something nice for myself—was so special. I was watching as I forgave myself for losing the baby.”

Alice says she’s back from the brink now, and so is her skin, but she hasn’t abandoned her nightly skincare ritual. She’s kept it going and even started booking in for regular facials.

“They’re expensive, but they’re worth it,” she says. “It took me a while to come back to the place where I felt like I was worth anything. It feels so good to be here.”

**Name has been changed*

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