

Clockwise from top:  
Perfumer H Rose Oil  
eau de parfum, £450.  
Elemental Herbology  
Harmonising Cleanse  
Facial Cleansing Oil, \$29.  
Guy Morgan Dagger  
Rose Face Oil, £40.  
Penhaligon's Heartless  
Helen eau de parfum,  
£192. Charlotte Mensah  
Manketti Hair Oil, \$48

# GREAT BRITISH BEAUTY

*From remote mountains to multicultural cities, Kathleen Baird-Murray looks at the rise and rise of our beauty industry. Photograph by Image Group*

Like many of us, Robert Wynn's best ideas come on the walk to work. But unlike most of us, his walk is via the Dee Valley with views of the Berwyn Mountains. As the seasons change, so do the flowers; snowdrops replaced by primroses, then bluebells, gorse, heather, elderflower and hawthorn. All of which explains why Wynn (better known as Lord Newborough) has created his brand, Wild Beauty, using sustainable ingredients from his organic farm in north Wales. "Using beneficial produce from the estate was a challenge," explains Wynn, "but it was important that we had security of provenance. We've worked with the same foragers for some time – they know where to go on the estate to find ingredients – and our quantities are small, so we can keep each product unpolluted and sustainable. It's daunting entering the beauty industry, but we're proud of what we've created."

It may be daunting, but his timing couldn't be better – the British beauty industry is in full swing. Yardley London is celebrating 250 years, and Elemis was sold in 2019 for \$900 million to the French group L'Occitane. Meanwhile, Charlotte Tilbury has clocked up sales of £145 million; Pat McGrath Labs was valued at close to a billion dollars; hair colourist Josh Wood received \$6.5 million in funding for his at-home colour line; and the cult Hair by Sam McKnight continues to flourish, with new products launching later this year.

Although beauty behemoths Estée Lauder and L'Oréal Paris still dominate the international market, the true strength of Brit beauty lies in individuality and nuance. According to a survey by CEW Mintel, Britain does particularly well at innovative sustainable beauty, with 21 per cent of all "clean" colour cosmetics launches in 2018 originating in the UK, while one-in-five vegan haircare launches – a huge area for growth, no pun intended – also came out of Britain in the same year. Naturals, in other words, are second nature, hardly surprising when we have success stories such as The Body Shop, Lush and Neal's Yard as the forebears of newer natural brands Wildsmith Skin, Neom and Slow Ageing Essentials.

So, what fosters this hotbed of creativity? "Britain has always led the way with trends," says Sebastian James, CEO of the 171-year-old retail giant Boots. "From punk to professional to sustainable, we need to make sure we keep on doing this if we are to remain relevant in the global industry." In line with our British sensibility, we look for humour and originality in the things we purchase, and spent in the region of £27.2 billion last year on beauty products and services. "British beauty is definitely about real women," says James. "We don't want to see overly airbrushed unrealistic imagery. There's no one view of beauty either – the UK is increasingly inclusive and covers the waterfront between the *Love Island* look and the 'no make-up make-up' look."

"There's a cottage industry feel about British beauty, even though some brands go on to sell millions," says Millie Kendall, who co-founded the British Beauty Council to help promote the industry, following a stellar career in beauty PR and the success of her much-

loved make-up brand Ruby & Millie. "Look at Lush. Its head office is still above its original shop in Poole, Dorset."

Most importantly, our diversity has helped us grow. "We're a multicultural nation and I feel our beauty industry embraces that. I look at some of the smaller haircare brands specifically designed for certain hair textures, and this stems from the frustration of not having what we need, but equally sparks creativity. So it really is a melting pot of creative talent."

Alexia Inge, co-founder of the hugely successful e-commerce beauty site Cultbeauty.co.uk (whose bestselling British brands include Charlotte Tilbury, The Inkey List, Ren and Escentric Molecules), agrees with the "melting pot" analogy. "Except, we're a melting pot that has actually melted," she adds. "Rather than having static 'chunks' of communities existing next to each other. This allows a distillation of the best of cultures, ideas and philosophies. Eccentricity, creativity and a sense of 'other' are celebrated and held up as inspirational."

It's when these magic ingredients are combined that you hit the sweet spot, as Blink Brow Bar founder Vanita Parti found when she drew on her British-Indian heritage to build an eyebrow-threading business. The practice was so normal within the Indian community that the threaders she first employed couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. "I'd travel down to the suburbs of Southall and Wembley, and persuade the women there – many of whom spoke Hindi, Urdu or Gujarati and limited English – that their skills would be celebrated outside what was essentially a closed community." Since 2004, when she first opened in Fenwick, her employees have now threaded more than 20 million brows.

Perhaps a sense of trust and belief in community is the secret to success. "This part of Wales isn't an area that has a lot to offer anyone wanting stable and long-term employment," says Wynn. "I hope we're securing jobs for people who want to stay here." Inge, who saw a growth in net sales of 31 per cent last year at Cult Beauty, agrees that authenticity is key. "If you start a brand with the sole intention of making money, today's consumer will see through it in a second and you won't achieve your goal," she says. Her tip for making it work? "As Brits, we sometimes have a propensity for thinking too small. It's what makes us so characterful and eclectic, but it doesn't lead to world domination. In actual fact, when we do think bigger, we end up creating incredible things such as the chocolate bar or the World Wide Web – and Escentric Molecules Molecule 01 or Charlotte Tilbury's Hollywood Flawless Filter." Long live Brit beauty. ■