

GETTING TO THE ESSENCE

IF YOU WANT TO USE ONLY TRULY NATURAL PRODUCTS ON YOUR BODY, THEN READ THE LABELS BEFORE YOU BUY.



The cosmetics industry is believed to be worth in excess of US\$20 billion a year worldwide. That's scary, but even more alarming is that the bulk of those cosmetics contain a vast array of synthetic ingredients, including toxic chemicals.

Educating the public about the dangers of these ingredients, and helping pioneer truly natural replacement products, is a driving force for Narelle Chenery, founding director of ONE Group, the company behind the Miessence™ range of personal care products.

Narelle has used the words of Gandhi as motivation for developing the brand. Gandhi said: "Non-cooperation with evil is a sacred duty."

Although there are many interpretations of what is 'evil', and although the evil Gandhi was countering was profound, Narelle is nevertheless dealing with one of the most insidious problems of modern life – the proliferation of environmental and health-damaging products. She says many personal care products are labelled 'natural' or 'healing' when they still contain synthetic ingredients.

Narelle believes that in the face of ever-increasing misinformation, consumers have little choice but to take personal responsibility for what they buy. To do that, they need information and choices.

Narelle says she not only wanted to help educate the public, but to create a range of fully certified-organic skin, hair and



Above: The Miessence team.

personal care products.

"Our desire was to produce products that many considered impossible – containing only 100 per cent natural and organic ingredients."

To obtain organic certification for a product, a minimum of 95 per cent of all ingredients of agricultural origin must be certified organic. The remaining 5 per cent are bound by strict guidelines, including a ban on synthetic chemicals and artificially processed ingredients. The Miessence range is certified by the Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA).

There are many other personal care and skin care products on the market using the organic label, but none, according to Narelle, that are organic from "seed to bottle" like her range.

"When I decided to do my own mini-survey of 'natural' products, I found the advice to 'read labels carefully' was certainly warranted. I've been upset for some time with major commercial brands jumping on the bandwagon and using the words 'organic' and 'natural' when their products have barely a skerrick of plant matter in them. However, I was surprised by the number of brands I found at my health food store that were promoted as 'organic' but which didn't bare any certifying logo – the only real proof for Australian consumers that they are organic. Just as bad are products clearly promoted as 'natural' which still contain synthetic, sometimes toxic ingredients."

Truth-in-labelling is vital to Narelle, but also fundamental to her work is getting toxic ingredients and chemicals out of anything we put on our bodies. This work began while she was completing a Bachelor of Applied Science in Information Management in 1992, and a friend introduced her to a natural skin care range that was new on the market. Narelle says the company prided itself on producing the best products from "science and nature", mentioning the good ingredients and claiming there were no bad ingredients at all.

"One day, soon after I began selling this 'natural' skin care range to my friends and family, a cosmetic ingredient dictionary 'jumped' out at me while I was browsing through a health food store," Narelle said.

"In the dictionary I discovered the potentially harmful properties of the ingredients in the products I was using.

"I was disillusioned, and quite annoyed! I felt that I had been deceived and that's when I began a search for truly natural products.

"My mother-in-law gave me some books on aromatherapy, herbal remedies, and how to make your own skin care out of natural ingredients. Surprisingly, even these books recommended the use of toxic preservatives, which I wasn't going to touch, so I started experimenting with some skin creams and giving them away as gifts."

Narelle realised there was great demand for information on the toxins used in skin care (see box). She began writing articles for major magazines, and her hobby of producing handmade products turned into a home-based business – Intelligence Cosmetics.

Eighteen months later, Narelle was at her stall at a natural products expo when she was approached by Alf Orpen (now co-founding director of ONE Group) who challenged her to create certified-organic products. Although she had been eating organic food since her first pregnancy in 1994, and believed wholeheartedly in the organic philosophy, Narelle realised making the business fully organic was the next step – and from that step came Miessence.

Narelle says ONE Group (Organic and Natural Enterprise Group) has plans for a whole range of certified organic lifestyle products including household cleaners and garden products. Some have already been released but for now the concentration is on the personal care products.

WHAT'S IN A CREAM?

Narelle Cheney and ONE Group have produced a number of articles to demystify cosmetic ingredients and reveal their true nature. In particular, Narelle points to the many creams, including those labelled 'natural', containing only a fraction of the promoted main ingredient and filled with synthetic and toxic constituents. For example, Narelle says among the ingredients for a purported natural apricot cream are:

- Cetareth 12, a synthetic emulsifier that may contain dangerous levels of ethylene oxide and dioxane, both known carcinogens.
- Cetyl Alcohol, which may be natural or synthetic and has been shown to cause contact eczema in some people.
- Methylparaben, one of a number of toxic and allergenic preservatives.
- Sodium Hydroxide, otherwise known as caustic soda and is extremely alkaline and corrosive.



Narelle has made these with the aim of "restoring harmony and balance to the skin". They have been designed to suit four skin profiles and needs – balancing (normal skin), rejuvenating (dry/mature skin), purifying (oily/problem skin), and soothing (sensitive skin). Australian ingredients are sourced wherever possible, and include plants such as:

- Organic Blue Mallee Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus polybractea*)
- Organic Lemon Scented Tea Tree (*Leptospermum petersonii*)
- Australian Sandalwood (*Santalum spicatum*)

Among the personal care products in Narelle's range are:

Rejuvenessence Facial Serum

(tired, stressed, aging skin)

A powerful blend of organic rosehip seed, avocado and jojoba oil with rose, calendula and carrot to revitalise and

boost tired and stressed skin. Highly concentrated with natural essential fatty acids (EFAs) – renowned for their effectiveness in wound healing, scar reduction, aging and sun damage.

Rejuvenating Moisturiser (dry/mature skin)

Formulated with plant phospholipids, organic herbs, organic nut and seed oils and butters, and organic flower extracts to nourish and revitalise the skin. Contains organic avocado, rosehip seed oil, olive leaf and echinacea with the beautiful aroma of organic geranium and Moroccan rose essential oil.

Purifying Mineral Mask (oily/problem skin)

Contains natural green clay minerals and organic herbs to draw out toxins and reduce inflammation with the antibacterial properties of organic lavender from the Dandenong Ranges, lemon myrtle from country Queensland, and tea tree from the forests in northern New South Wales. The organic lemon myrtle essential oil (*Backhousia citriodora*) comes from leaves and twigs and is a potent antibacterial and antiseptic – excellent for acne conditions and oily skin.

MORE INFORMATION

• For more details of Miessence products, phone ONE Group on: 07 5539 2011, or visit the website at: www.miessence.com

• A great booklet that lists all food additives and cosmetic ingredients is *The Chemical Maze*, available from:

POSSIBILITY.COM, PO Box 789, Ringwood VIC 3134; email: bill@possibilitytoz.com; web: www.thechemicalmaze.com