

Natural beauty made in Cyprus

Sharna Waid has been finding out how passionate producers in Cyprus are using the fruits of the land to create natural beautifying cosmetics

According to the ancient myth, Aphrodite – the goddess of love and beauty, pleasure and procreation – was born out of the waves off the coast of Cyprus. Aside from attracting three million tourists each year for this reason, the island's unique climate is home to the delights of natural raw materials including herbs, botanicals and essential oils used to create a host of authentic natural beauty products.

Cyprus is blessed with the finest pure ingredients, which optimize the archetype of Aphrodite herself. Many islanders have reaped the benefits of using these materials (with potent skincare properties) in their soaps, creams, scrubs and skincare products for years, all of which are now in high demand from ethical consumers outside Cyprus.

Apart from year-round Mediterranean sun, Cypriot producers have several advantages when it comes to producing natural cosmetics. Firstly, living off the land means Cypriots understand the correct cultivation methods to collect and prepare the raw materials – they make it their duty and their livelihood. Secondly many local islanders understand the healing properties of active ingredients for the skin, and have the vital knowledge of ancient recipes passed down for generations.

This has created a new generation of producers who are modifying Cypriot traditions to meet global demand. The results are top quality

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products at affordable prices – making natural beauty cosmetics from Cyprus a fast-growing market in Europe and beyond.

Costas Dafos, who is the Commercial Attaché at the Cyprus High Commission Trade Centre, says: “More consumers are seeking natural and organic alternatives in their cosmetics – particularly products that are kinder to the skin – and as producers in Cyprus have access to natural ingredients and the background knowledge of their skincare properties, they are well placed to meet this demand, especially in the international market.”

Liquid gold

Away from the tourist hot spots, Cyprus nurtures timeless villages, stunning scenery, and mountain trails that provide a model environment for top quality natural materials. Cyprus is known for its long tradition of using organic extra virgin olive oil – sometimes referred to as ‘liquid gold’ – as a natural essence for skincare hydration. Due to the favourable weather conditions, the olive tree has been able to thrive for thousands of years and has become a central part of the Mediterranean diet and a dedicated ingredient in natural cosmetics.

Chrystalla Avgousti, founder of Cyprus Fisika (www.cyprusfisika.com) creates handmade olive oil soaps blended with a variety of herbs grown locally in the mountainous village of Gourri. The result is a range of naturally scented cold-processed soaps, each with its own unique skincare benefit. Although the range now includes beeswax face balms, lip salves, and scrubs, Cyprus Fisika is particularly known for creating quality soaps that locals have loved for almost 12 years.

“Being specialized is very important,” says Avgousti, who explains that a large part of the company's sales come through word of mouth and reputation, but that the products are also sold in bio stores in the main cities, including Nicosia and Larnaca.

As well as ancient olive



trees, Cyprus is home to herbs and botanicals such as sage, eucalyptus, rosemary, lavender, calendula, poppies and chamomile – which thrive in the humid climate. Avgousti is dedicated to protecting these traditional seeds in her plantation. “You don't need a large area for soap production here – one calendula or lavender plant makes a lot of flowers!” she says.

Cyprus Fisika's products are handmade and the harvesting process never stops because different plants are available at different times of year, for example, when it rains in the cooler months, calendula and chamomile grow wild in the mountainous hills.

Botanicals like lemongrass are traditionally used as a natural toner, and chamomile is known for its anti-inflammatory and antiseptic properties.

As well as growing these for her products, Avgousti shares them with locals who use them for medicinal purposes.

To keep up with skincare trends, Avgousti has most recently used homemade kefir, charcoal and carob in her products. Known as the superfood of Cyprus, carob flour can be used to calm various skin diseases. Activated charcoal is known to draw bacteria, chemicals, dirt and other micro-particles to the surface of the skin to improve the complexion and fight acne – and is proving a popular choice with consumers.

“These soaps are very popular, and it's great to use home-grown carob in my range. I like to keep the Cypriot tradition whilst experimenting with new ingredients to create exciting new products,” she says.

Beard growers, we respect you!

In Cyprus, essential oils including petitgrain, juniper berry, sweet orange and black pepper are also being used in mens cosmetics. Aimed at the modern day man, Beardspect's beard oil (www.beardspect.com) - set up by Constantinos Loizou and Alex Solomon - uses base oils including sweet almond, avocado and castor oils along with vitamin E to nourish the skin and condition the beard.

Determined to give something back to their community, Solomon says that the high-end look and feel of the product is reflected by the individual artistry and passion that goes into making it.

“Our boxes are individually handmade by retired villagers on the island. They love doing it, and with

each box they get better and better. It's a great way for them to use their carpentry skills and earn a wage at the same time,” he explains.

Solomon is keen to continue growing the brand - particularly in the UK gift market - whilst utilising the traditional skills of Cypriot people. Like many other contemporary companies, Beardspect primarily promotes their brand via social media - helping them to reach beard enthusiasts around the world.



Aromatic healing herbs

Located close to the mountainous countryside, Cypriot producers are making the most of the natural materials in the surrounding area. Nurturing dry herbs with specialized processes helps to create a wide range of medicinal and cosmetic products both eco-friendly and kind to the skin. Ranging from herbal tea blends to natural cosmetics, many of these products are made exclusively from essential oils and home grown herbal extracts. Dr Katsos, founder of Arrisandra Cosmetics Ltd (www.facebook.com/DrKatsosBotanikaRophemata) and a qualified herbalist, provides 20 natural skincare formulations, including serums, anti-ageing creams, face masks, sham-poops, oils and cosmetics, under the Dr Katsos brand.

“Many people come to me with various skin conditions, so I make specialized formulas for my patients too,” he says. His scientific grounding in the properties and attributes of aromatic herbs – and their cultural context – offers the assurance of products that are high in quality with medicinal value. The blends contain 70% active ingredients (chosen depending on the health issue), and 30% holistic ingredients.

These high volumes of quality raw materials can be cultivated early in the season, which gives Cyprus an advantage with their exports.

“We have the best herbs here because of the climate. They are stronger, and are grown completely naturally – free from pollution and pesticides,” says Katsos.

Using various tools to aid the cultivation and separation methods on site, the herbs are collected in summer and then cleaned, dried and used throughout the rest of the year. Whilst Katsos experiments with creating the best natural cosmetics in the lab, his son, Nicolas (an agricultural technologist) takes care of the three separate growing areas on their land – home to 50-60 species of herbs.

“To get quality herbs

every time, we choose the best bloomer as the mother plant. We then replicate it by replanting its seeds with our hands,” says Nicolas.

Meticulous care and attention is taken at every stage of the process, and although the harvesting season has passed, the smell is aromatic

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across the large stretch of land. The Dr Katsos range is rapidly expanding, and many new products in development will be ready for wider scale production in the coming year, notably using Natural & Organic Products Europe in London in April as their launch platform in the UK.

A new-found tradition

Further inland, some producers in Cyprus have discovered a new way of combining their home-grown materials with breakthrough ingredients sourced from surrounding countries. Cyprus’ location makes it ideal for importation, and many producers have taken advantage of this to formulate innovative cosmetics for modern consumers.

In 2014 Handy Spa (www.handyspacyprus.com) was founded by Andreas Ioannou, who decided to make natural

soaps after finding that other products were too harsh for his sensitive skin. To set his products apart, Ioannou produces a line of cosmetics that combine traditional Cypriot herbal remedies with various imported products including camel and goat milk, coconut oil, mint, clementine, argan oil, and most recently hemp oil. The company’s soaps, which are all Ecocert, ICEA and PETA certified, are now sold in pharmacies and organic stores around Cyprus.

“This is a new Cyprus tradition,” says Ioannou, who explains that his company reaps the benefits of home-grown natural resources, but also has easy access to raw materials in Europe and surrounding countries.

“Our main target is to promote our unique certified products, especially our new range of hemp oil cosmetics, including our first ever hemp oil soap, to distributors outside of Cyprus.”

Ioannou explains how the company’s range is popular with consumers looking for the next breakthrough in skincare, and his bestselling ‘peeling soap’, made from natural exfoliating poppy seeds, is central to this success.

Many young advocates of organic are passionate about building a cutting-edge natural brand that appeals to a European audience and also supports local producers. Hermann Gourmet Cosmetics (www.hermanncosmetics.com) is an exclusive line of ethical handmade ‘gourmet’ beauty products based on ancient recipes.



Founder Philio Hermann wanted to create a line of handmade cosmetics ‘to protect beauty from the harmful consequences of the modern way of life,’ targeting contemporary consumers who value high-end quality at affordable prices. Using her grandmother as her inspiration, the ‘fusion of elegance and vintage flair’ with the latest beauty technology is what makes this brand fresh and innovative. The new Miss Series luxury range of soaps, body creams and perfumes emulates the beauty of a traditional Cypriot woman from a bygone era, giving Cypriot tradition a modern twist.

“I have used my grandmother’s photo on some of the products because she represents the ancient herbal recipes used in my cosmetics. My vision was to create an ethical ‘boutique’ Cypriot brand for the modern day woman, whilst still supporting local producers in Cyprus. I’ve achieved this with endless hours of research and trials using top quality raw materials sourced in Cyprus and Europe which combine the latest beauty technology and the ancient wisdom of nature.”

Hermann believes the brand has a unique circumstance and explains that while many people her age go on

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took over the company from his father in 1987, he built newer installations to improve the methods of gathering and processing the one kilo of rose petals grown on their bushes. Aside from attracting thousands of tourists from around the world to help with the harvest, the company sells a range of rosewater and rose oil-based face and body bio cosmetics, which have proven to be popular additives in natural skincare.

“People call me the rose man! This company has been in my family for three generations. We attract around 35,000 tourists a year to our premises, and for 25 years customers have always come to me asking for the best rosewater cosmetics,” explains Tsolakis.

He says that although some of the company’s sales are made online, a large number of sales are also made on site when tourists visit, and that product promotion is generated largely through word of mouth.

Another company taking advantage of tourism is Golden Donkeys Farm (www.goldendonkeys.com), which was built to promote and sustain Cyprus traditions, whilst preserving the heritage of donkeys – which for

many years helped to serve Cypriots in the cultivation of olives as well as transport. Home to 170 donkeys, the farm produces a variety of cosmetics including body and hand creams, masks and serums made from donkey milk – which has been shown to have an antibacterial and anti-ageing effects on the skin.

The farm welcomes an influx of tourists throughout the year, and the products are familiar to Cypriots who have been using donkey milk for generations. To tourists, however, the products are excitingly unique, only made more appealing by the experience they gain whilst visiting the farm – which gives these producers a unique advantage in the market.

Both companies have the advantage of being able to attract a wide range of consumers from all around the world who wish to understand more about the ingredients that go into the products, by witnessing first-hand the cultivation methods involved. This is also a beneficial way for consumers to try before they buy, instead of relying on other forms of promotion. Although much of their demand comes from tourists, both ranges of cosmetics are also sold online and in a variety of health stores around Cyprus.

Information regarding Cypriot products can be obtained from the Cyprus High Commission Trade Centre in London. Visit www.cyprustrade.com.



to work outside of Cyprus, her mission is to support the Cypriot economy, using local resources combined with a creative brand image.

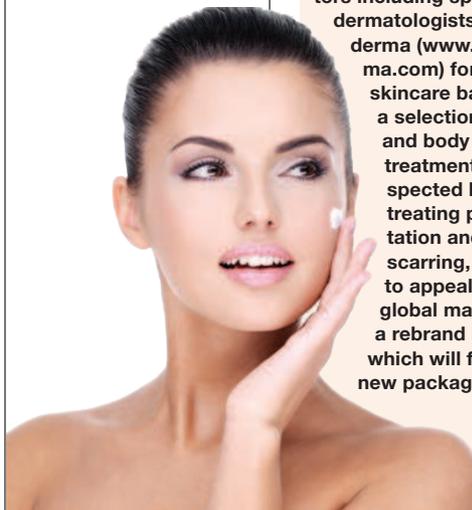
“We wanted to stay in our country and start a business which is popular inside and outside Cyprus. We have a raw passion to succeed and work hard every day to promote ethical beauty that uses home-grown active ingredients, whilst educating people to say no to big brands,” she says.

Tourist hot spots

Although many cosmetic producers in Cyprus sell their products through online stores and distributors, another way to encourage demand is through tourism. Set away from the central town, the beautiful mountainous region is a hot spot for tourists hoping to see a traditional way of life.

The village of Agros is home to one of the largest rose farms in the country and has been owned by the Tsolakis family since 1948. Venus Rose Cosmetics (www.venus-rose.com) invites tourists to join in the cultivation of their pink roses in May or to view the facilities during the rest of the year.

Since Christakis Tsolakis



High-end Cypriot products gain international appeal

Many emerging Cypriot natural brands now have the tools and business acumen to compete in the global market. Selling to the higher end distributors including spas and dermatologists, Neoderma (www.neoderma.com) formulates skincare based on a selection of face and body salon treatments. A respected leader in treating pigmentation and acne scarring, it plans to appeal to the global market with a rebrand in 2017, which will feature new packaging and

formulations. Brand CEO Andreas Loizou, explains the trust it has built with consumers is very important. “We produce a safe product in a factory on our own premises using natural actives sourced from producers in Cyprus. For 22 years we have done this, and we want to continue building this concept. Natural is the way.”

Loizou is keen to educate customers about his products, which are used for both medicinal and cosmetic purposes. “We want to be honest with consumers about what they put onto their skin and we educate them about the active ingredients in our products.”

Like Neoderma, Cypriot natural skincare products

now have a high-end look and feel which targets global consumers seeking trustworthy skincare products. Entrepreneurs in Cyprus are discovering innovative ways to appeal to millennials who care about brand image and product content. By producing carefully thought out packaging and formulations, many brands are now creating natural products which have a similar look and feel to global mainstream cosmetics.

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