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Buckinghamshire Life

and Berkshire Life

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Inspirational Women

PLUS 12 great choices for ladies who lunch
AND secrets of some very special handbags

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**ARE YOU ON COURSE FOR
 SUMMER FUN?**



Nature's beauty *transformed with care*

Gerlinde Seeley creates a little magic using plants from her garden near Aylesbury.
Sandra Smith visited to discover some of the secrets of her success

Beauty is only skin deep may be an oft repeated saying, yet its familiarity barely reflects the care and cost women invest in maintaining their outer layer. Our complexions, after all, are a key aspect of our appearance and daily routine. In fact, such is the importance of maintaining a youthful glow that this remains high on every woman's list of priorities, regardless of age, hence the hundreds of pounds annually spent by each of us in the pursuit of flawless skin.

So the opportunity to meet a creative entrepreneur of an artisan business formulating botanical products for a unique, natural skincare range was one not to be missed.

The first thing that strikes me about Gerlinde Seeley is her radiance. It isn't just that, at 52, she is enviably beautiful. Nor that her soft Austrian accent is as charming as her welcome. There is something infinitely more tangible at work here and it doesn't take me long to appreciate that this is down to her unblemished skin, surely a testament to her own products.

"I had an interest in nature instilled in me at a young age by my father in Baden, near Vienna, where I was born," she shares when I arrive at her home in a quiet road just north



Smiling Gerlinde has a radiant complexion

"So many people kept asking me for my creams, I had to make myself legal. The first item I sold went to a lady in Finland. She gave me fantastic feedback which I lived off for weeks"

of Aylesbury. "I used to dry plants then draw them to show my biology teacher. I continued to collect plants during my years in office work."

Administrative roles may have sidetracked her, but it was during this time the seeds of a thriving business were sown.

"I mixed plant matter such as marigold leaves with almond oil, macerated them into an extract with coconut oil, then tried it on myself. It was trial and error, but I started to make my first concoctions then handed out little pots to friends and colleagues."

Gerlinde's knowledge of plants and herbs soon enabled her to develop a range of skincare products. Yet even with a loyal following, for a decade this remained a hobby. So what made her take the plunge and set up her own business?

"So many people kept asking me for my creams, I had to make myself legal. The first item I sold went to a lady in Finland. She gave me fantastic feedback which I lived off for weeks. Now I'm finally fulfilling my ambitions and at the same time making people happy. I have a worldwide customer base and do everything myself, from marketing to testing as well as packaging orders."

Despite such success, one of the most likeable characteristics about Gerlinde is her

modesty. I sense a level of both gratitude and surprise at her own achievements. Perhaps that is why she still finds it difficult to ask customers for feedback, despite the growing reputation of her products.

We're sitting in a converted bedroom, the hub of Gerlinde Naturals. Here, commitment and passion are such that every item is produced fresh to order, a philosophy that forms the core of the business. Cupboards are stacked with empty containers rather than readymade creams; the focus is on organic ingredients, sourcing from UK suppliers and recycled packaging in a holistic approach.

Gerlinde explains her philosophy: "I didn't go to the High Street because I don't want my products sitting on shelves. I have to add some preservatives to water based products in order to protect customers, but the preservatives I use are mild and gentle."

Quietly determined and persistent, these key elements form the backbone of the success of her business.

There's a fragrant tranquillity infusing the room, too, which readily mirrors the businesswoman's composure.

As she tells me more about the plants that form the basis of her lotions, Gerlinde explains that marigolds and lavender are grown in her own garden. These plants are easy to dry and macerate, though getting the end result right, and to an acceptable consistency, can be time consuming. It takes anything from five to 50 attempts before she is satisfied.

"Macerating and blending is all done by hand in Borosilicate beakers and I use laboratory glass rods, thermometers, stainless steel hand whisks and pipettes for the process. I also apply a rolling process, gently rolling the finished Facial Serum, Oil or Cleanser bottle for a couple of minutes



Hand-blended cleansing creams and face oils suit all skin types



Naturally appealing, for when your skin needs rejuvenating



Ingredients in vegan-friendly products include jojoba, rosehip and lemongrass

between my hands to mix the ingredients together. This avoids the introduction of air and makes the product more stable and resistant to oxidation."

Then there's product stability testing. Waiting for official approval means each new item may take half a year to launch. Still, she has many more skincare products waiting to be developed and added to the three dozen already available.

Although Gerlinde Naturals' customer base is predominantly women over the age of 40, her extensive range of moisturisers, cleansers and face oils, I'm assured, suits all ages. Every item is also safe for those

suffering from eczema, whilst enriching vitamins, minerals and plant extracts are perfect for ageing or dehydrated skin as she is keen to confirm: "I believe in a natural, sustainable lifestyle. My products don't contain any ingredients from animal sources and customers won't consume toxins through their skin."

Ever smiling, Gerlinde is as humble about her knowledge as her success. She takes great care in creating individual orders and at this point presents me with a delightful box adorned with a white gift tag, its Handmade With Love stamp, cut out flower and tiny silver heart portraying all the appeal of a personalised present. Inside are a number of lotions nestling on brightly coloured recycled shredded paper and I can't wait to experience the remedial qualities of my nourishing lip balm and Shea Butter Body Cream.

Gerlinde's innate interest, nurtured from a young age, has evolved from a hobby into a flourishing business and she readily enthuses about 100% organic products, the British FreeFrom SkinCare Awards and this year's seed launches.

It is a devotion that so inspires, there's no doubt that, just like the Austrian beauty's complexion, Gerlinde Naturals will continue to blossom. ■

See www.gerlindenaturals.com