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# FASHION

The New  
*Creative*  
CLASS

*Jourdan*  
DUNN

Model  
Activist  
Influencer

*"Fear is not an option"*



# Most Likely to Succeed

*They may not be household names yet, but these beauty brands are setting the tone for the market at large.*

By Fiorella Valdesolo

In beauty circles, bigger isn't always better. Case in point: Buyers from mega-retailers like Sephora, Urban Outfitters, Costco and Amazon now scour gatherings like the Indie Beauty Expo (IBE) for the next buzzy brand. "Indie brands hold about 5 per cent of the market, but they're growing at 20 per cent and capturing the growth dollars," said Nader Naeymi-Rad, co-founder of IBE, in *WWD*. And Jane Nugent, vice-president of merchandising at Sephora Canada, says that it's "indies" her customers are most excited about. "Niche brands are having a major moment," she says. "Our clients like the exclusivity of having something that not everyone knows about." Pillars of the beauty world like Estée Lauder and L'Oréal have taken note, scooping up burgeoning brands: Too Faced and IT Cosmetics, respectively, were acquired for more than \$1 billion each last year.

And now more than ever, independent beauty brands rely on social media—the ultimate platform to display their voice and vision. Not to mention that if a product's design makes it Instagram bait, the buying public really pays attention. So what brands are among beauty's current creative class? From a hair-care line with celeb and social cred to a skincare brand that's built a cultish following on the virtues of one product, here is our list of power players.

## Makeup

### MILK MAKEUP

An authentic voice, images that promote a diverse and real brand of beauty and a selection of cleverly designed products with a "you didn't know you needed but now can't imagine living without" appeal are at the heart of Milk Makeup's swift success. Of its four founders—Milk Studio co-founder Mazdack Rassi, creative director Georgie Greville, fashion editor Zanna Roberts Rassi and product developer Dianna Ruth—the former two had zero beauty experience, meaning they came at the biz with a different (read: fresh) perspective.

### PAT MCGRATH LABS

While Pat McGrath has been CoverGirl's global beauty creative design director for over a decade, the makeup artist's eponymous line is a fitting venue for her pie-in-the-sky beauty ideas. Her launches buck convention. (Her first, Gold 001, a gilded pigment kit, was stealthily introduced at Prada's Spring 2016 show and then officially revealed in Paris's Tuileries.) Each following release, whether it's a celestial highlighter or a glitter lip kit, is met with a feverish response, selling out almost immediately.

### HOURLASS

Hourglass has proven that receiving high praise from your peers can be a major catalyst for success. Conceived by Carisa Janes, a former product developer, the high-performance makeup line straddles the luxury and mass categories. The brand's breakthrough moment came in 2008. "Makeup artist Gina Brooke, who was on tour with Madonna and needed something that would hold up during all the choreography, went into Sephora and asked 'What's the best primer you have?'" says Janes. "She left with ours."



**PAT MCGRATH LABS**  
LUST 004 KIT (\$80)  
GLITTER-BOMBED  
INSTAGRAM FEEDS.



ONE BOTTLE OF  
**HOURLASS VEIL**  
MINERAL PRIMER (\$24)  
IS SOLD EVERY MINUTE  
WORLDWIDE.



**MILK MAKEUP**  
GLOW-BESTOWING  
HOLOGRAPHIC  
STICK (\$34)



PHOTOGRAPHY: MAIN BY JARRET ANDERSON; PRODUCTS BY CARLO MENDOZA

# Skin

## OMOROVICZA

There's nothing ordinary about the mud in the brand's signature Thermal Cleansing Balm: The line is based on medical-grade Hungarian Moor Mud, which is blended with the country's potent mineral-rich thermal water. Getting a ringing endorsement from makeup artist Gucci Westman, who uses the products to prep models' skin backstage, doesn't hurt either. Although the brand has a loyal base of luxury customers, its long history gives it broad appeal, says co-founder Margaret de Heinrich de Omorovicza, citing Swiss designer Yves Béhar: "Consumers want products that tell stories, have magic and inspire," says Béhar.

## ROYAL FERN

For the skincare-obsessed, doctor-backed brands are often synonymous with validity and integrity. (See Dr. Dennis Gross, Lancer and Dr. Brandt.) Add to that a minimalist design (in a zeitgeisty font like Gill Sans) and a plant-based formula developed by German dermatologist Dr. Timm Golüke and you have a surefire hit. Approval from beauty website Violet Grey's founder, Cassandra Grey, sealed the deal. "She loves our products and includes them in her social media posts, which has really driven our popularity," says Golüke.

## VERSO

The Swedish brand—based on the clock-stalling powers of Retinol 8, a skin-cell-regenerating formula that's eight times more potent than traditional retinol—quickly tapped into a growing beauty consumer group: the design snobs. Verso's streamlined packaging earned it a nom for a *Wallpaper\** Design Award, and tastemaker retailers like Want Apothecary in Montreal carry it. "Our technology, our design and the fact that we are such a tight range have created a lot of interest," says founder Lars Fredriksson.

HERO PRODUCTS

VERSO SUPER FACIAL SERUM (\$144) IS THE LINE'S GATEWAY PRODUCT.

VERSO SUPER FACIAL SERUM WITH RETINOL 8

VERSO SKINCARE STOCKHOLM

ROYAL FERN PHYTO-ACTIVE ANTI-AGING CREAM (\$375) USES SIGNATURE LIPO-SOME TECHNOLOGY.

OMOROVICZA QUEEN OF HUNGARY MIST (\$110)—BASICALLY THE CHICEST TONING FACE MIST AROUND.

HERO PRODUCTS

D.S. & DURGA COWBOY GRASS (\$199) IS AN EARTHY BLEND OF SAGEBRUSH, WHITE THYME AND PRAIRIE SWITCHGRASS.

EX NIHILO FLEUR NARCOTIQUE (FROM \$295), A WOODY PEONY, WAS A FINALIST FOR A 2016 FIFI, THE OSCARS OF FRAGRANCE.

RÉGIME DES FLEURS NITESURF (\$227) IS A TUNISIAN-NEROLI-WATER-LACED WONDER THAT'S CONSTANTLY SOLD OUT.

# Fragrance

## EX NIHILO

Ex Nihilo is an example of the perpetual appeal of all things French. "People think of Paris and dream," says Benoît Verdier, one of the brand's three founders, adding that 70 per cent of its customers are from abroad. The brand has attracted as much attention for its thoughtfully crafted luxury fragrances as it has for its road-less-travelled approach. "We invested massively from the beginning in a space on one of Paris's most prestigious streets [Rue Saint Honoré], which felt like a more contemporary idea."

## RÉGIME DES FLEURS

"Our customer wants what nobody else has: something creative and authentic that's not too accessible or safe," says Alia Raza, a video artist-turned-perfumer who is one half of Régime des Fleurs. (Partner Ezra Woods is a former fashion stylist.) Even without PR or a distributor, the super-niche line has become an editorial darling and gained traction in the art and fashion communities: Chloë Sevigny hosted a launch party last year (guests included Hari Nef), and directional store owners like Maryam Nassir Zadeh are ardent supporters.

## D.S. & DURGA

The Brooklyn-based line is known for its out-of-the-box approach to perfumery (co-founder David Seth Moltz is self-taught), inventive collaborations (its latest: an exclusive candle for New York's Whitney Museum) and motley mood board (everything from pixies to ancient Norse myths) and resonates with hardcore fragrance enthusiasts. "Perfume is an art form like any other, and I think people are seeing that," says Moltz. "People appreciate the depth of research and thought that goes into our scents."

# Green

## DRUNK ELEPHANT

"Social media has helped us get on the world stage," says founder Tiffany Masterson, whose products fall into a new category dubbed "clean clinical." The brand is formulated with the science-driven approach of a dermatologist but without ingredients like the "suspicious six" (though its ingredients aren't strictly natural). And legions of the sensitive-skinned have responded in kind. The line is often compared to SkinCeuticals, but Drunk Elephant is half the price. And while there are rumours of a Lauder acquisition, Masterson, while flattered, claims the brand isn't ready to be scooped up just yet.

## W3LL PEOPLE

The natural-beauty sector has been lagging behind, making W3LL People's strides that much more pronounced. The Texas-based brand uses green skincare technology and was one of the first to be EWG verified. "W3LL People has purposefully targeted the discerning modern woman who demands a cosmetic that is clean but also performs," says co-founder Shirley Pinkson. Considering that she previously worked at Nars, she is eminently qualified when it comes to cosmetic colour payoff and efficacy.

## BEAUTYCOUNTER

Beautycounter's mission is "to get safer products into the hands of everyone." One of the first in a wave of modern direct-to-consumer retailers, it attained an even broader reach last fall with a limited-edition Target collection. Fans of the brand's clean skincare and makeup (former Kevyn Aucoin assistant Christy Coleman is chief artistic officer) herald the pared-down aesthetic and relatable voice. "I think people respond to us because we're committed to transparency and making only realistic promises to consumers," says founder Gregg Renfrew.



R+CO DEATH VALLEY DRY SHAMPOO (\$29), WHOSE IMAGES AND EFFECT MIRROR ITS NAME



HERO PRODUCTS

# Hair

## OUAI

Jen Atkin first entered our collective beauty consciousness by way of the Kardashian clan, who flaunted her now-signature style. (Think slightly rumpled and sexy.) Her hair-care line Ouai is further spreading the Atkin gospel, which is driven largely by social media. "We want to build a community, not just a brand," she says. "We have a relatable voice, and we're doing away with unrealistic campaigns and ideals. Our goal is to get you out of the bathroom in 10 minutes or less."

## R+CO

That the products need to pass muster on set and backstage with the three longtime editorial stylists helming the brand (Garen, Thom Priano and Howard McLaren) means the formulations are legit. But it's the brand's cool-kid packaging and offbeat names like Vicious, Pin-stripe and Outer Space—envisioned not by a big design firm but by former model/stylist-turned-R+Co creative director Amanda Wall—that have captured people's attention and filled Instagram feeds.

## HAIRSTORY

Here's a radical notion: a hair-product line driven by the idea that you don't need a lot of product. Created by longtime beauty-world outlier Michael Gordon (founder of Bumble and Bumble), Hairstory's New York salon and four-product line celebrate each individual's, well, hair story. "We're tapping into the fact that people really want to look like the best version of themselves," says Wes Sharpton, a stylist with Hairstory. "We're making products that work while not overwhelming the consumer with a million choices."



OUAI'S TREATMENT MASQUE (\$40) IS A "FIVE-MINUTE HAIR MAKEOVER," SAYS ATKIN.



HAIRSTORY NEW WASH (\$55): THE SUDS-FREE CLEANSER IS AT THE CORE OF THE BRAND'S PHILOSOPHY.



DRUNK ELEPHANT T.L.C. FRAMBOOS GLYCOLIC NIGHT SERUM (\$112) WAS THE BRAND'S FIRST SUCCESS STORY.



HERO PRODUCTS



BEAUTYCOUNTER CLEANSING BALM (\$94) IS A BESTSELLER.



W3LL PEOPLE EXPRESSIONIST MASCARA (\$29) HAS EARNED COUNTLESS ACCOLADES.



# CULT PRODUCTS

These three are proof that, when it comes to momentum, sometimes a one-hit wonder isn't such a bad thing:

1. Paris-based colourist CHRISTOPHE ROBIN's Cleansing Purifying Scrub with Sea Salt (\$67) is a godsend for all manner of scalp issues.
2. Chief among MOON JUICE's growing product line is the oft-copied Beauty Dust ingestibles (\$39). (Add the powdered supplement to tea or water.)
3. VINTNER'S DAUGHTER sells only one product: a potent, 100 per cent organic botanical serum (\$240). The key to its success has been good old-fashioned word of mouth.



PHOTOGRAPHY: PRODUCTS BY CARLO MENDOZA