



# Seoul power

*THEY LED* the way with BB creams and now Korea's SMART AND DEDICATED approach to skincare and make-up solutions is making *the world take notice.*

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When South Korean actress Jun Ji-hyun wore a coral pink shade of lipstick on an episode of a popular South Korean television program, audiences took notice; in fact, they gave their undivided attention. So enamoured with Ji-hyun's choice of hue, tenacious viewers narrowed the search down to Yves Saint Laurent's Rouge Pur Couture in No. 52, and just like that, the lipstick was a worldwide sellout, proving not only the power of celebrity but also that South Koreans were serious about beauty.

Most Western women would love to conclude that South Koreans are genetically predisposed to clear-as-day complexions, but the fact is that they work hard at it. Western skin regimens are akin to a 100-metre sprint: they are reactive and require results in a short amount of time. For South Korean women, on the other hand, it's more of a marathon mentality: a considered, planned and precise course of action. If the tortoise and the hare taught us anything it's that slow and steady does win the race after all.

Most morning beauty routines go something like this: cleanser, toner, serum and moisturiser. Thankfully, Clinique's three-step campaign went a long way to educating consumers on knowing their toners from their moisturisers and why both are integral to maintaining a youthful complexion. My foray into skincare came in the form of a three-step regimen as a 14-year-old when, shock horror, I started getting pimples. Little did I know that my Eastern neighbours had a head start on their skincare – a good 10 years, in fact. They start around the same age you and I learn to tie our shoelaces.

"It's part of their routine, like a chore. It's like brushing your teeth – an essential way of maintaining your hygiene," says Charlotte Cho, co-founder of Korean beauty e-retailer Soko Glam. "There's no manual – they are just really savvy and ask the right questions, so Korean cosmetics companies need to be savvy themselves and listen to their customers," Cho adds.

It's a mindset that's firmly ingrained in Korea's history. Even ancient Korean texts have whole chapters dedicated to nixing skin concerns. She who knows why she needs an oil cleanser as well as a foaming cleanser demands intuitive skincare. "I love that in Korea they have so many ▶

names for different looks. Here we call it luminosity or something similar, but they have so many different words,” says make-up creative director of Lancôme Lisa Eldridge, who upon taking up the top job, which was announced in January, took a market research trip to South Korea. “They are just so innovative with their products. I love talking to girls and hearing their thoughts and about how seriously they take it – like how they’ve done their lipstick and why some girls don’t have a certain type of make-up on. It’s a whole new world over there,” Eldridge says.

Cho agrees that while Korea has cemented itself as the epicentre for skin, make-up will be the new frontier. “BB cream came out of Korea – now every brand offers a BB cream,” explains Cho about Dr. Jart’s BB cream which was first to market and rivals Psy’s *Gangnam Style* as Korea’s most popular export. “BBs help to even skin tone, moisturise, brighten and conceal blemishes, so the product fits well into the market as healthy and rich-looking skin is heavily regarded,” says Lee Jae Yeon, marketing director at Johnson & Johnson Korea.

According to the Korean Health Industry Development Institute, in the first half of 2014, exports of beauty products from Korea increased by 34.5 per cent year-on-year. Cho’s prediction: “I assure you that the cushion compact will be everywhere in the next few years.”

Following the lead of Korean beauty conglomerate AmorePacific’s launch of the cushion compact, brands including Lancôme have launched their own version of the game-changing foundation. The cushion technology is a pillowy foundation-drenched sponge, which is applied to the skin with another circular, flat sponge. “When I spoke to women in Korea they said that they like their skin to look like a peeled egg – that really shiny look,” explains Eldridge. “What I like about it [Lancôme’s cushion compact] is that you can do it both ways [shiny and matt]; you can do sweeping with it or tapping with it.”

In contrast to some cultures, which tend to use make-up as a shield to face the day, Korean women prefer it to merely enhance

what is essentially a base of excellent skin. “Korean’s prefer light ‘nude’ make-up,” says Jae Yeon. “Creating a clear base with skincare products is important.”

A clear-as-day complexion doesn’t come without some investment. Korea’s well-documented 10-step skincare regimen has helped assert the country as skincare’s nerve centre, but the approach is less cookie-cutter. “It really depends on your skin type and what you want to achieve,” says Cho, as an American-Korean who was (by Korean standards) relatively late to the party when she stumbled upon beauty mecca Seoul at the ripe old age of 22. “Korean women really care – they don’t just use a product because it’s popular. They ask themselves: ‘Is this product going to treat my skin’s condition?’”

For Cho, treating her skin’s condition on any given day looks like this: oil cleanse, foam cleanse, toner, essence, moisturiser, and SPF – each step layered upon the last for a very specific purpose. In the evening, Cho repeats this routine plus adds either a sheet mask or an exfoliant. Taking into consideration both a day and night cleansing routine, Jae Yeon states:

“According to the Korean Food and Drug Administration, Korean women use 14 products per day, while men use nine.” That’s about three times more than the average in China, the US and Europe.

Admittedly, I feel somewhat naïve when I ask Cho to rewind and explain to me the phenomenon of the sheet mask, a mainstay of skincare in Korea, though relatively new to the Western market. “Sheet masks are incredible,” she enthuses. A one-time use product applied for 20 minutes after cleansing and toning, sheet masks improve the efficacy of the other products in the ritual. “Your skin is forced to mingle with all of these products that have positive ingredients for your skin. A lot of skincare products might end up evaporating but this really forces your skin to accept the ingredients,” says Cho. The result? A slightly taut and brighter complexion, with dehydration lines softened. Perhaps the sheet mask is the ultimate metaphor for the Korean beauty industry: targeted, advanced, smart and ready to mingle. ■

**“THEY LIKE THEIR SKIN TO LOOK LIKE A PEELED EGG – THAT REALLY SHINY LOOK”**



Lancôme Miracle Cushion in 03, \$60.

Neutrogena Hydro Boost Water Gel, \$25.

SK-II Facial Treatment Essence, \$100.

Dr. Jart+Water Fuse Beauty Balm SPF 25, \$52.

Dr. Jart+ BB Cream, \$25.

**STEP-BY-STEP**  
Knowing the art of layering is key to an enhanced complexion. Here, a multi-step routine decoded.

**OIL CLEANSE**  
Used in the evening, it preps the skin by removing make-up.

**FOAM CLEANSE**  
Applied in a circular motion to slough away impurities, foam cleansers should be used both morning and night.

**TONER**  
After cleansing, toners return the skin to optimal pH levels and prepare it for the steps to follow.

**ESSENCE**  
The secret weapon for brightening and encouraging cell turnover. Spray, then gently press in.

**MOISTURISER**  
Hydration is an imperative step for protecting the skin and ensuring skin stays dewy both morning and night.

**SHEET MASK**  
Enhances the efficacy of any other products used on the skin.

**SPF**  
If you skip one step in the regimen, don’t make it this one. Whether you’re venturing outdoors or not, an SPF is vital in combating photo-ageing. For daytime, opt for a BB cream or foundation with added SPF.