



INDEPENDENT

Why Southern African skincare deserves a spot on our top shelves

Grounded in ancestral knowledge and formulated from the region's rich array of botanicals, the product offers a beauty perspective that much of the world has not yet seen, writes **Adele Cardani**



umerous destinations across the globe serve as inspiration for **skincare's** most beloved and sought-after offerings. The K-Beauty (Korean) and J-Beauty (Japanese) brands are celebrated for raising the standards of the global skincare industry. Then there is the pursuit of the effortlessly cool “French girl beauty” – think tousled bed hair with a parted fringe and a just-been-kissed blotting of red lipstick. But **South African** skincare – grounded in ancestral knowledge and formulated from the region's rich array of **botanicals** – offers a beauty perspective that much of the world hasn't yet seen.

This fact propelled Catarina De Avillez, a veteran of the premium beauty industry who has worked for the likes of YSL Beauty, Armani, and Lancome, to found **The Natural Africa**.

This new, small-batch, sub-Saharan-plant-based skincare range reflects a deep love for her heritage and a reverence for the land's native flora. African beauty – also referred to as A-Beauty – has long gone unnoticed in the UK's luxury space, so this week I spoke with De Avillez about why it deserves a spot on our top shelves.



A descendant of rooibos farmers in **South Africa**, De Avillez says: “I grew up around African plants, steeped in the knowledge of their powerful applications and nourishing benefits. My mother is South African, so I have always spent a lot of time in **Cape Town** and, more specifically, in Hermanus, a coastal town in the **Western Cape**, home to an abundance of natural beauty and wholesome ingredients.”

She tells me that the region’s magnificent mountains, lowland valleys and coastal plains form one of the richest areas in the world for plant biodiversity, being uniquely located at the convergence point of numerous soil types and microclimates.

“Often, beauty brands source ingredients from parts of the world they have never seen, so it’s special to have experienced first-hand how the plants growing around me are trusted for their healing properties, being used as teas, medicinal remedies, and natural skincare by the Cape’s indigenous communities for millennia,” De Avillez says.

“Africa is too often overlooked within the luxury market. Being able to showcase what this part of the world has to offer, and honour its rich heritage on a global scale, feels necessary.”



De Avillez’s goal became to mindfully bring luxurious skincare that is superpowered by Southern African botanical wisdom to the world – without damaging the Cape in the process.

As someone with an eternally thirsty complexion, The Natural Africa’s **Resurrection Moisturiser** immediately caught my attention. De Avillez explains to me that *Myrothamnus flabellifolius*, or resurrection plant, found only in Southern Africa, is known for its ability to “play dead”.

The plant has developed a remarkable survival strategy to remain dormant throughout a drought. It’s able to exist for years without a drop of water, drying out completely and appearing to be dead, only to spring back to life within three hours of rainfall, sturdy and renewed. The same compounds that protect the plant and allow for rehydration during the harshest of conditions are what The Natural Africa uses in its moisturiser formula to create a tall drink of water for your face.

Rosehip berries, which grow at high altitudes between the dramatic peaks of the Maluti mountains, are another key ingredient in the range, being used to create the brand's **Rosehip Oil**.

De Avillez explains: “Across Africa, more than 40 per cent of the population lives below the international poverty line. Rural people are often left with little to no sustainable income, especially in the winter months. Our rosehip berries are hand-picked, mainly by women, providing the local communities with valuable and sustainable economic opportunities. We work with a botanical supplier that provides income year-round for over 500 families who would otherwise be impoverished.”

Once gathered, the berries are sorted according to village, which means that each batch can be traced back to the specific family who picked it.



This thoughtful, wild harvesting and selective eco-sensitive cultivation of over 10 key botanicals results in a dermatologically approved product range, featuring a cleanser, serum, moisturiser, and oil – each lovingly named after its hero plant.

De Avillez concludes: “Africa is a treasure trove of nourishing flora. For thousands of years, indigenous people have relied on these as organic skin remedies. We couldn’t make our products without the collaborative efforts and knowledge passed on through generations.”

Embracing a truly global vision of wellness, a handful of UK-based e-retailers are beginning to bring A-Beauty to our doorsteps. The Natural Africa’s range is currently available through **the company’s own website**, as well as from **Skindays** and **Collagerie**, and will be launching on more clickable destinations soon.