

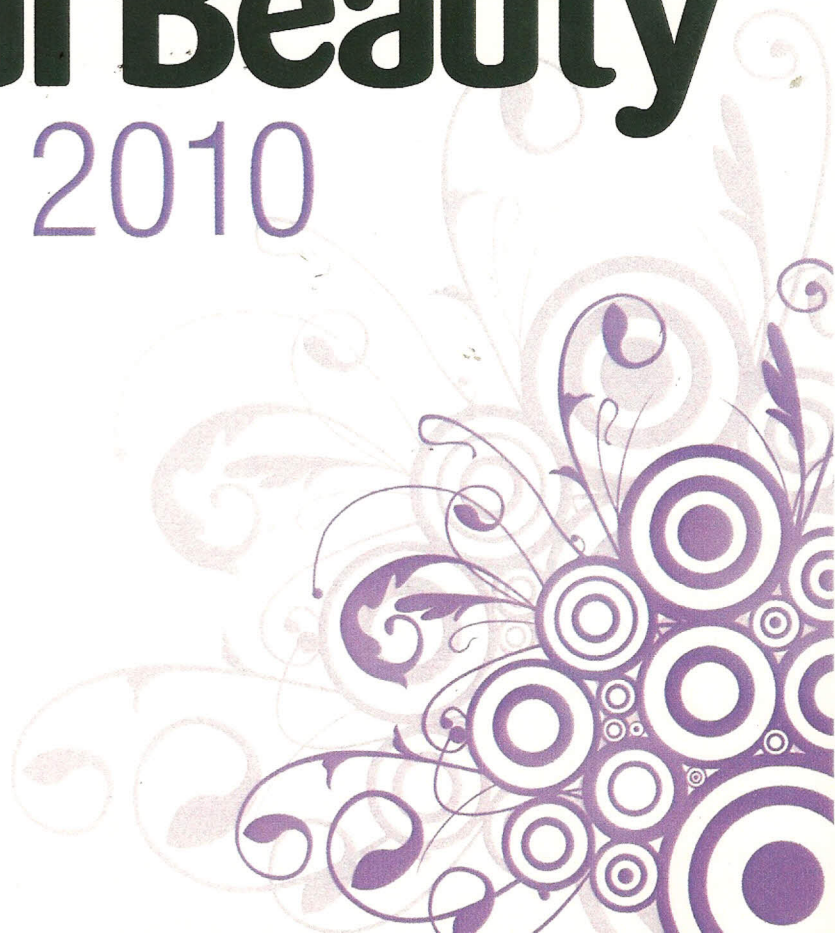


Natural Beauty

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American beauty

The daughter of organic gardeners and a qualified beauty therapist, Kimberly Sayer has practiced organic aesthetics at prestigious spas in New York and London for over 10 years. Her chemical-free skincare line, Kimberly Sayer of London, contains certified organic and sustainably sourced ingredients and the 18-strong product range has attracted an impressive celebrity following, including Whitney Houston and Paula Abdul.

You grew up in a family that grew their own ingredients both for meals and skincare. How did this shape your vision for your future business?

Well fundamentally it's meant that I could not imagine anything other than organic. My parents taught me to understand the soil, biodiversity and all the things that create the incredible active ingredients that we use.

So where do you source your ingredients from?

The bulk of our ingredients come from Northern California as they have the most stringent laws when it comes to organic harvesting and manufacture.

We also source shea butter from Africa and our essential oils come from all over the world.

Do you ever use food ingredients in your products?

Well we include things like almonds, grains, and jojoba beads, all of which you can eat even if it doesn't taste good!

There's a real trend in the UK for 'edible products'.

Yes, the idea that if it's good enough to eat, it's definitely good enough to put on your skin — I really subscribe to that.



Where do you stand on organic and fair trade certification for both products and ingredients?

Well I really like the Ecocert standard, as it's very strict in its organic regulations, and the ingredients I use are certified by Ecocert.

I think fair trade is a wonderful idea, but I've heard some conflicting reports that suggest that some fair trade initiatives restrict who the farmers can sell to, and are therefore perhaps not the best option for local growers and communities.

So do you think greenwashing has been a problem in this sector?

Big corporations always capitalise on trends, so yes. But that's why I've started doing lectures to help to educate people. When I buy a product I find out about the owner of the company, the authenticity of the product, and the ethical fibre of the company.

At Kimberly Sayer we truly manufacture in compliance with organic standards, use natural steam and gas in our processes and only use cold-pressed essential oils. That's what separates us from greenwash companies.

You've trained with top aromatherapists and attended the Neal's Yard Beauty Therapy College in London. Who over the years has inspired you the most?

Yes I studied with Michael Winter of Neal's Yard, and we used to sit in Parsons Green and experiment with new products! Now I get inspired by other small companies that are truthful and ethical, and are who they say they are. I find that small companies tend to be more authentic.

I've also been impressed with Wholefoods Market who stock my products in the US and the UK. They work with quite a few small vendors, and it's not just health food products. They represent the next level in this retail sector and have a more sophisticated approach.

Your product literature puts a lot of emphasis on anti-ageing products. Would you consider launching a capsule collection aimed at more mature skin?

Yes, I would certainly be open to that — absolutely!

And your existing line already uses an anti-ageing ingredient called plant collagen?

Yes, plant collagen is a natural plant ingredient that helps with the structure of the cell wall — it firms and tightens the dermis. When used in beauty products the skin breaks it down easily as it mimics skin collagen, and it helps to tighten, firm and lift the skin, as well as pull in moisture.

Is this ingredient unique to the Kimberly Sayer range?

As far as I'm aware, yes we were the only ones using it in the last six months.

And the entire product line was initially developed while you were working in top spas in both NY and London?

Yes, I wanted to create products that give women a spa feeling in their own home, which is very relevant in this financial climate, so we developed masks, scrubs and simple products that are easy to use.

How have your sales been affected by the recession?

Well recent months have been very quiet in retail. Sales are definitely less busy, but as we have a competitive price point while still offering a high quality product we've found that when people discover the line they're nicely surprised and stick with it. We deliberately didn't raise our prices in 2008 due to the unstable financial climate, and we're really focusing our efforts on how we can help people to preserve their skin for less money. So, although we're getting less retail traffic, we're still shipping out tonnes of orders.

How do the UK and US natural beauty markets differ?

UK women generally always have good skincare regimes, so the focus is more on finding a brand that delivers on their skincare needs. I've spent a lot of time on the sales floor in Kensington Wholefoods, and the feedback we receive from customers has really helped to guide us with what we're doing with the line in the UK. Women in the US, however, still use soap on their skin, so it's more about educating the consumer and introducing them to cleansers, toners, scrubs and moistu-

risers. Having good quality skincare is the only way to have great skin.

What natural or organic beauty trends do you think are emerging?

Consumers are definitely developing more of a social conscience with regards to where ingredients are sourced from, whether companies invest in community outreach products, and whether products are green and packaged sustainably. And I think consumers want actual evidence of this social activity. At Kimberly Sayer we source a lot of ingredients from community projects in Rwanda and Uganda, which help families to support themselves, and we also donate 10% of our profits to US communities. I believe that social partnering is as important as using sustainable ingredients and recycled packaging.

And Anti-ageing still remains a huge trend, with women becoming increasingly aware that they can still look good in their 40s, 50s and 60s, particularly in conjunction with a healthy diet.

As well as anti-ageing, the male grooming market is also experiencing sustained growth — do you intend on launching male only products in future?

Men can use the existing Kimberly Sayer range as the packaging is fairly unisex and the aromas are lemon-based, so not too sweet. But I would love to do a men's line, in fact I have all the products figured out already, it's just a matter of producing them. Male consumers are far more loyal shoppers, once they find a product that they're happy with they stick to it.

Who do you consider to be your main competition?

I would say the likes of Dr.Hauschka, Jurlique and Suki — companies that are organic, legitimately clean, and not just making natural claims, which really means very little these days. We're results driven and always look for the best ingredients.

In the UK there is growing consumer demand for manufacturers to invest in ingredients efficacy testing, and to then publish the results in marketing material or on-pack. Is this something you intend to do at Kimberly Sayer? That trend has not reached the US yet, but I love it! We need to put all our ingredients testing information online. I'd be very open to doing it as it legitimises the products. I think that's great.

Where do you hope to see the brand in five years time?

I'd obviously like to see growth, and to be a household name, but also to be known as a clean, pure, organic line that gives back and is trusted. Consumers get so disappointed with brands they've placed their trust in, or disillusioned when a brand gets bought out, so being seen as a trustworthy company is important.

Name two beauty products you couldn't do without.

I can't do without sun block, so it would have to be my award-winning Antioxidant Daily Moisturiser with SPF 25, and my Eye Lift Gel, which I always carry round in my bag and is great for puffy eyes. ■

The Kimberly Sayer range consists of 18 products made from pure plant oils and extracts

