

The Gift of the Grape Seed

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Bathing in wine in as far back as 55 B.C., Cleopatra was well ahead of the beauty curve. Fast-forward a few millennia to 2001, when native El Pasoan Wayne Beckley launched Merlot Skin Care. After catching a segment on CBS' 60 Minutes that attributed much of France's long life expectancy to its citizens' red wine-heavy diet, Beckley's wheels began to turn.

Beckley deduced that the grape seeds in red wine play a key role in keeping the French healthy. Fortunately, his hunch was right on, as further research would prove the antioxidants found in red grapes are extremely beneficial to one's well being. Beckley also discovered that grape seed polyphenol antioxidants are up to 50 times more powerful than those found in Vitamin E and nearly 25 times more powerful than those in Vitamin C.

Utilizing his background in chemistry, Beckley concocted a few skin care formulas. Keeping with the current environment-friendly trend, Merlot ingredients are extracted straight from Mother Earth. Beckley says, "It's all-natural and there is no animal testing or byproducts. I guess you could say the line is pretty green."

Initially, Beckley developed three Merlot products: a moisturizer, a cleanser and an eye cream. Living in El Paso, he decided to launch the line locally. "I knew five Walgreen's managers and asked if they would allow me to put my items there. They agreed, but said that if the products didn't sell I would have to come and pick them up." After a month of slow sales, the stores asked that Beckley remove the line. As luck would have it, however, KVIA News Channel 7 aired a story on Merlot the following evening. The next morning, Beckley received several phone calls from Walgreen's asking him to restock their shelves. Thereafter, Merlot flourished. "The word spread and we went from five local Walgreen's to 5,200 Walgreen's and 1,600 GNC stores nationwide," Beckley boasts of the line's success.

Beckley's beauty line has quickly catapulted him to the top of the cosmetic food chain. Responding to customers' growing demand, Beckley has expanded the Merlot brand. He says, "It has gone from three to 14 different items. We now carry night creams, clay masks and toners. really, it's a very complete skin

lot's competitive costs have buyers begging for more. "My best customers come from Lancôme, Estée Lauder, expensive retailers. They don't have to go to department stores anymore."

Boasting superior quality at a reasonable price, Merlot has its shoppers hooked. Deborah Van Pelt has been a fan of Merlot Skin Care for five years. A beauty industry veteran, Van Pelt knows skin care. "I'm an esthetician, so I'm picky, but I saw a difference immediately. I will spend any amount on beauty products, but this definitely compares to the expensive stuff I've tried," she raves. Using virtually the entire Merlot line, she is hard-pressed to choose a favorite product.



She is a fan of the moisturizer, "I like the consistency, it's not greasy, but I like the night cream, too. It absorbs quickly instead of just laying on top of my skin. I'd recommend it to anyone," Van Pelt says.

In order to continue Merlot's success, Beckley explains, "We plan to keep expanding. We have some important meetings right now and we're working on a 30-second television commercial, which will air nationwide on channels like the Food Network, Lifetime, and HGTV." Although Merlot Skin Care is constantly evolving, Beckley remains firmly planted in the Sun City, shipping orders from a warehouse on Montana Avenue.

Despite a few initial setbacks, Merlot Skin Care has become a pioneer in the beauty industry. "I felt like the lone-ranger six years ago, but now there are so many companies that have grape seeds in their line. It's a growing trend," admits Beckley. Merlot Skin Care shows no signs of slowing down. Beckley adds, "When people buy it, they buy it over and over again. In the years I've been in business, I could count the amount of returns on one hand." With that kind of track record, even Cleopatra would have