

WHY FRENCH WOMEN *don't get* WRINKLES*

With a mantra of moderation and common sense as a sure-fire way to stay slim, French Women Don't Get Fat sold three-million copies. Seems they take the same approach to skincare – with impressive results

Words ROSIE GREEN Photographs SYLVIE LANCRENON

Ask for a Diet Coke in Paris and watch the waiter's nostrils flare in contempt. If you want to stay slim, you can see him thinking, then why not swap your vulgar hit of aspartame, caramel E150d and carbonated water for some l'eau, a little wine and a side order of self-restraint?

The French, as we are often told, are big on self-restraint, and never more so than when it comes to skincare. While we are always after the next big thing (Mintel research says the UK sees the most skincare launches in Europe), the French steer clear of fads in favour of the tried and tested. Proof? Clarins' top 10 products have all been around for at least 20 years. And while we Brits want speed and shortcuts (we have the dubious honour, says Mintel again, of being Europe's number-one user of cleansing wipes), French

women are loyal and consistent (Darphin says 75% of its French customers are repeat buyers).

After a lengthy infatuation with all things American, industry insiders are once again lauding the French approach to beauty. Clémence Poésy, Vanessa Paradis, Charlotte Gainsbourg and current front-row obsession fashion editor Virginie Mouzat (see her skincare secrets on page 134), are all being féted by the style cognoscenti, their enviable natural glow rendering Tinseltown's tweaked and frozen faces passé. And, suddenly, high-profile dermatologists are praising the nation's diligent use of feel-good, plant-powered formulas, suggesting they be more beneficial long-term than more aggressive, instantly gratifying products. So, is it time to re-embrace the French mix of quality ingredients, consistent application and cossetting formulas? Here's how to get that Gallic glow (and keep hold of it). >>

STOP OVERLOADING

The latest beauty buzz word to emerge from the States is 'status cosmeticus', a state of skin irritation brought on by over-stimulating the epidermis with harsh products and treatments. Consultant dermatologist at London's Cadogan Clinic, Dr Susan Mayou, says she's seeing more and more redness, stinging, inflammation and eczema in patients combining a multitude of ingredients with overzealous application. Her patients' wrinkle-fighting arsenal can be often be 'counterproductive', she says. Why? It can compromise the skin's natural barrier, exposing it to pollutants, more UV-penetration and other irritants. This can be ageing, not only because of the damage inflicted while the barrier is weakened, but also because, as Dr Mayou points out, 'it can take weeks or months to get skin back to a point where it can tolerate any kind of anti-ageing regime at all.' Enter the cossetting skincare of Darphin, Decléor, Clarins et al...

DON'T FEEL GUILTY

'The French generally talk about their skincare in terms of a ritual, whereas we call it a routine, and in the US, they say regimen,' says Fiona Brackenbury, head of training and education at Decléor. 'The French feel beauty products and treatments are deserved, essential and guilt-free.' According to Mintel, French women invest way more than their European neighbours in skincare, an incredible €2.2 billion and almost double what we Brits spend. The same research also shows the French are the Europeans most likely to visit beauticians. But it all pays dividends. 'I can instantly tell a client who has looked after her skin with facials and good products,' says star facialist Sarah Chapman, adding that pampered skin is not as reactive and is more resilient to environmental and cellular damage, 'so, it's less likely to show the classic signs of ageing.'

BUY PRODUCTS WITH FEEL-GOOD FACTOR

Lavender, ylang ylang, camelia... one thing that marks out traditional French skincare brands is their love of natural essential oils. Decléor's delicious, new home spa range, Relax Intense, is based on 'aromacology', a new term describing how essential oils are used to deliver inner wellbeing, as well as outer beauty.

If there was ever any doubt of essential oil's potency, Brackenbury cites a recent Japanese study, which showed that diffusing it into an office environment positively affected both work rate and adrenalin levels. Darphin's new Ideal Resource anti-ageing moisturiser is similarly holistic. Their labs created a fragrance that worked to elevate mood, as well as brighten skin. With its specific plant extracts and carefully selected notes, it's the olfactory equivalent of Prozac.

BE DILIGENT

The French legendarily pass down their beauty expertise from mother to daughter - and it shows in their skin. 'We often see three generations in a row,' says Sylvie Jouault, director of the legendary Darphin Institute in Paris. But even if you weren't introduced to the skincare three-step before you were in a training bra, being consistent now will pay off. The long-term benefits of even the most basic skincare have been proven by a recent Proctor & Gamble study that showed simple daily moisturising can be a powerful anti-ageing tool

- because skin is more hydrated, expression lines can't etch in so deep. The result, it seems, is a backlash to inflammatory, outlandish products, and a move to quality ones you'll want to use again and again. As Clarins' head of research and development, Dr Lionel De Benetti, says, 'For a product to be effective, you need to apply it daily, like a medicine.'

REDISCOVER CLASSICS

Sometimes, it makes sense to stick to the classics. At the heart of many French skincare brands are their facial oils, which may seem less sophisticated than some high-tech offerings, but are extremely effective, as they 'build' skin, helping retain its resilience and suppleness. Indeed, when Dr De Benetti was tasked with updating Clarins' original facial oils, he couldn't find anything to improve, so it's still the same effective formulation conjured by founder Jacques Courtin-Clarins when he began using them on clients in 1954 (albeit in smart, new bottles).

Darphin is also seeing a rise in sales of its facial oils, and with good reason. NYC-based dermatologist Dr Frederic Brandt praises the anti-ageing power of the French beauty favourite, saying that oils not only act as a shield against the environment and slow skin's water loss - something research has linked definitively with ageing - but that by combating dryness, they make skin less susceptible to free radical formation, which minimises collagen breakdown, and therefore lines and sagging. Vive la jeunesse!

3 FRENCH LESSONS

The latest additions to France's favourite skincare ranges

● **DARPHIN** Ideal Resource, £50 ☒, boosts radiance, fights wrinkles and improves texture (available from February).
● **ANNE SEMONIN**'s latest launch, Oligo Cleansing Gel, £31 ☒, is a gentle,

wash-off formula with a biological exfoliator, for sensitive and combination types.
● **DECLÉOR** Relax Intense is a new at-home spa range made up of Aromessence Relax Intense Dry Oil, £43; salon-

strength Fruit Seeds Scrub, £25; Relaxing Shower Oil, £22.50; and ultra-luxe Massage Balm, £35, all ☒.

