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Feature

The Shobha collection.



Deep Roots

Shobha hair removal products are based on the tenets of Indian beauty practices.

By Joanna Cosgrove
Online Editor

When Shobha Tummala, founder and CEO of New York City-based Shobha, sought to create a natural, yet luxuriously exotic approach to hair removal, her inspiration came from the centuries-old beauty practices of India. Based on the ancient philosophies of Indian beauty customs and inspired by the botanical remedies of India, the menu of hair removal services at her Shobha salons include threading, sugaring and waxing. In addition, the company has created a range of complementary personal care and signature lifestyle products that fulfill "a harmony between the body, mind and spirit."

"Hair removal is a major focal point in the lives of most people, but for some reason there is not much out there in terms of pre- or post-hair removal products," she said. "There are literally hundreds of product lines for skin care, hair care and cosmetics, but not much choice when it comes to safe, natural and effective at-home hair removal and aftercare solutions for problems like ingrown hairs and skin irritation."

Spending summers with her grandmother in the city of Hyderabad, Ms. Tummala was immersed in India's natural and spiritual beauty culture.

"My grandmother made all my beauty products herself," she recalled. "Hair conditioner was created from crushed hibiscus petals picked from a tree in our backyard; soap from a mixture of shaved sandalwood and lentils. Moisturizer was just the cream from fresh milk."

Upon returning to her grandmother's each summer, she was scolded for not maintaining the traditional personal care she was taught between visits.

"My grandmother could tell if I had been using store-bought products from the color and texture of my skin and hair," she exclaimed, "it was unbelievable!"

It is also in India where Ms. Tummala experienced threading, the customary way to remove facial hair. The process, which she described as painless, efficient and precise, made her swear off wax, until she returned to the U.S. and found there was no one in her area that threaded, inspiring her to fill the void with her own eponymous product line.

The result is a careful juxtaposition of traditional Indian natural-ingredient influences with a modern formulation appeal consumers want.

"Despite all of the high-tech ingredients and formulations in the market today, we have actually discovered that our clients are looking for more natural alternatives that are both effective and gentle for sensitive skin," she commented. "We have found that our clients welcome the smells and textures of the Indian ingredients we incorporate into products and treatments."

The marquee product in the Shobha line is Shobha Sugaring Gel (8 fl. oz., \$20). The product is a "secret-family recipe" in which sugar, lemon juice and water are cooked to form a thick, sticky gel that looks similar to honey. When applied to the skin the gel adheres to hair. A denim strip is smoothed over the sugared area and then pulled off, removing the gel and the hair, much like a muslin strip does in a standard waxing process. Ms. Tummala said sugaring yields best results when it is performed monthly, every three to five weeks, when the hair is long enough to lay flat on the skin (about ¼ inch in length).

Ancient Influences, Modern Sensibilities

A product line that fuses traditional ingredients and influence with modern results can come with inherent formulation caveats, especially when it comes to sourcing appropriate ingredients native to India while trying to maintain an acceptable shelf life.

Shobha cloths



"We find ourselves still running into this problem and have even begun looking into cultivating our own natural herbs and other ingredients," she said.

In addition, it's not easy translating time-honored beauty traditions into modern applications that a fast-paced urbanite can appreciate.

"For example, most of us get our flowers from a florist or deli (if you're in New York City), not the tree out back, and our milk comes in a carton, usually fat-free, so the option of skimming the fresh cream of the top to use as a moisturizer is pretty much impossible," she explained. "Therefore we put extra thought and much consideration into figuring out how our modern conveniences can work with age-old traditions when we launch a new product or treatment."

The company's most recent new product, Shobha Ingrown Relief Lotion (2 oz., \$22), addresses ingrown hairs that can occur after hair removal. The product is formulated with chamomile, glycerin, tea tree oil, vitamin A and glycolic acid to exfoliate, moisturize and soothe skin discomforts.

Shobha also markets Devi Rosewater Toner (8 fl. oz., \$22), a mild fluid that reduces skin irritations and redness, as well as an all natural fiber Ayate Exfoliating Cloth (\$15) geared for daily skin exfoliation, and a 25-count pack of single-use skin soothing Freshening Cloths (\$19).



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