

# ELLE *beauty*

17 PAGES OF CATWALK TRENDS, HAIR ADVICE AND TREATMENTS

Black Orchid  
Limited Edition  
Collection  
(including  
Pressed Perfume,  
Lip Color and  
Nail Color), £90,  
by Tom Ford

For a deeper,  
glossy finish,  
start at the base  
of the nail with  
a blob and work  
your way up  
from the edges

## RED ALERT

*Tom Ford's latest beauty venture is a vampy dramatic manicure in  
Black Orchid. While we work pared-down shades elsewhere,  
make a statement with autumn/winter's grown-up nail*

*Photograph by* PAULZAK

*Nail art by* SOPHY ROBSON

This season's  
optimum shape  
is long with  
an oval tip

# SKINCARE'S

## BEST

*Photographs by* DAVID SLIJPER

## KEPT

*There is a revolution afoot in the world of healthy skin. Already lauded for its many physical benefits, vitamin A is proving an effective anti-ageing product, too. Annabel Meggeson investigates*

## SECRET



With her long, flowing locks, cute smocks and 'magic' fingers, Anastasia Achilleos is often described as the flower child of facialists. So why is this skincare guru, whose passion for natural ingredients is so intense that she imports £90 Halal-certified exfoliators from Australia, advocating the use of one of the most chemically active skincare brands around?

'I resisted for ages,' she says. 'But when I was choosing the products for the spa [Achilleos heads up The Method Spa at London's Home House, where the clientele includes Kate Moss], I realised we had some great brands, but nothing that could really go deep. This gets right down into the deepest layers of the skin and will help with wrinkles as well as sun damage.'

'This' is a bottle of AVST1 cream by Environ, a relatively little-known skincare brand founded by South African plastic surgeon Des Fernandes and loved by many of London's big-name facialists, as well as beauty editors and pretty much anyone who's stumbled across it. The active ingredient in question? Vitamin A.

I try it out and within a fortnight of using the cream, I'm hooked. That's a month short of the recommended try-time for any new skincare product, but face creams, for all their scientific claims, work on your instinct as much as anything. Sometimes you fall for one without quite knowing why. On this occasion, though, my skin looks firmer and dewier. I canvas for a second opinion, just in case I'm seeing things, and discover a colleague who's a convert, too. 'I'd been using it for a week,' she says, 'and a friend asked me if I'd had anything done to my face. She meant it in a good way.'

If vitamin A doesn't sound especially sexy or new, that's because it's not. Along with other naturally occurring vitamins, minerals and nutrients, it's known for playing a vital role in human health and has been on every school science syllabus for years. Less well

known is that in the 1930s, research workers found it was massively depleted by exposure to light and air and suggested that skin ageing could be the result of a chronic deficiency of vitamin A, caused by the light-sensitive nature of the molecule.

The discovery sparked a series of clinical studies that proved vitamin A had an anti-ageing effect by reducing lines, pigmentation and 'thickening' skin, making it denser and less slack. By 1947, it had been manufactured in the laboratory and by the 1980s it was established that of the various forms of vitamin A (including three main types that occur naturally: retinal, retinol and retinyl), retinoic acid – which is oxidised retinal – was the most effective when it came to topical use. It soon became the gold standard of skincare and was incorporated into high-strength treatments, like Retin A and Renova.

This long track record makes vitamin A stand out from other 'wonder' ingredients, which normally undergo self-perception tests or cursory trials in labs. 'It's not about some new mushroom or berry around which a marketing campaign is built,' says Zoe Draelos, a dermatology professor at Duke University School of Medicine in North Carolina. 'It's about decades of

research validated in hundreds of peer-reviewed, scientific papers.'

What's more, we are talking about a chemical that gets right to the heart of anti-ageing. 'People think the whole genetic approach to skincare is new, but

vitamin A has always targeted the skin's DNA,' says Fernandes (age: 67; skin: smooth). 'That's how it works.' It influences some 350 genes that perform an important function in skin health, he explains, including the ones that increase cell turnover, improve collagen production and normalise melanocytes (cells that produce the pigment melanin). 'When skin is deficient in vitamin A, it becomes wrinkled,

dull, dry and develops pigmentation. Topical application addresses these deficiencies and makes skin act younger.'

The other advantage of vitamin A is its direct access into cells via retinoid receptors on the cell walls. 'Skin cells are very hard to penetrate,' says Fernandes, 'but they're naturally primed to receive vitamin A.' With increased use, these receptors grow in number, so the effects of applying a cream with vitamin A are exponentially good.

Yet it's relatively under-exploited and few mainstream skincare brands feature vitamin A as their hero ingredient. Why? For a start, most vitamin A is only available on prescription. 'Active forms like retinoic acid and tazarotene can be highly irritating and have to be used under supervision,' says Dr Stephen Mandy, a Florida-based dermatologist, who prescribes retinoic acid to at least 20 new patients every week. 'Skin gets used to it eventually and you get amazing results – I call it the Retin A glow – but you need a "hibernation" period of several months as some skin can get red and rash-y.' Add to that the fact it's expensive, unstable and has to be carefully packaged so it doesn't degrade, and you can see why it doesn't fit the bill for your average snap-it-up, slap-it-on moisturiser.

But as consumers become more savvy, the onus is on skincare companies to promote products that have proven results. 'Of course, women still hanker after the "youth in a jar" dream, but increasingly they're rolling their eyes at some of the claims,' says Draelos. 'Try to sell them something with an exotic ingredient from an exotic country and they will be on Google discovering it can no more penetrate their skin than the fingertip applying it. They're starting to realise ►

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that an ingredient of the moment is just that – new and different, not necessarily efficacious and better. Women now want a product with proper research behind it.'

While vitamin A has that in spades, the challenge has been to find forms that are effective, but don't cause as much irritation as traditional, high-strength variants and can be incorporated into over-the-counter formulations. Fernandes believes retinyl palmitate and retinyl acetate meet this spec, though even Environ products can only be bought in salons or places where advice is dispensed along with a purchase, as you need to start on a low dose and build up. But now, after years of research, other brands are bringing their versions to the market.

Last month saw the launch of a new range by Philosophy – the Miracle Worker has the ingredient hydroxypinacolone retinoate, aka high-performance retinoid or HPR. Best known in the UK for its brightly coloured

bubble bath and catchy mottos, Philosophy is a serious contender in the US skincare market. 'We recognised a demand for no-nonsense products containing time-trusted ingredients that spoke for themselves,' says senior brand spokesperson Robin White. 'We immediately looked to vitamin A, toying with the idea of developing a product with retinol, but it's difficult to get the concentration right. In the end, we researched a family of derivatives called retinoids and discovered that HPR was effective, but didn't cause irritation.'

Roc, a brand that's been loyal to retinol ever since parent company Johnson & Johnson developed – and patented – an effective, stable form in 1995, has upped its game with the launch of WrinkleCorrexion. 'The range contains our highest percentage of retinol to date,' says

Roc's head of research, Dr Nathalie Issachar. 'And we've buffered it with other ingredients like hyaluronic acid' and biopeptides to make it less irritating.'

Meanwhile, beauty insiders are on tenterhooks for Dr Sebagh's 'revolutionary' cream, which also contains retinol and is due to launch in early 2011, as well as Olay's Professional Pro-X Deep Wrinkle Treatment. Currently available in the States, it's 'flying off the shelves', according to Wendy Lewis, one of New York's foremost authorities on cosmetic treatments and a long-term fan of vitamin A.

Pro-X made headlines (well, the *New Scientist*, anyway) when it was pitted against retinoic acid in a validated, peer-reviewed trial and the results, which proved it to be as good as the industry standard, were published in the *British Journal of Dermatology*. 'It was the first time a cosmetic product had gone head-to-head with a drug product >

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over a long period of time and shown parity,' says Dr Mandy. But it's precisely this landmark result that could prevent it being launched at all in the UK. 'The European Cosmetics Directive considers a product that has a significant effect to be more than a cosmetic. Here, they're saying something is as good as retinoic acid – a prescription drug – and that could cause problems.'

Until we know one way or another, you can make do with Olay's Definity range. It contains niacinamide, aka vitamin B3, which Dr Fernandes is enthusiastically billing as 'an ingredient of the future'. In his view, vitamin A remains king, but 'still needs its courtiers'. B3 has some way to go in terms of research, he says, but so far it's been shown to increase hydration by supporting the skin's protective barrier, and reduce pigmentation.

The other key courtier? Vitamin C. Cited by every facialist and skin expert ELLE spoke to as 'a must', it doesn't have any activity on the skin's DNA, unlike vitamin A, but plays a potent role in diminishing the effect of free-radical damage and improving collagen formation. 'It's easily depleted and, as we don't have a lot in our cells to begin with, boosting supplies through diet and creams can make a difference to skin,' says Fernandes. 'It works especially well with vitamin A to plump and brighten the skin.'

But while many companies are harking back to the ABC of skincare, other key areas of research haven't disappeared. Over at L'Oréal and Estée Lauder, scientists have been diving into gene-targeting territory with incredible optimism for several years – and they're not about to stop any time soon. Lancôme's Génifique, which targets age-regulating genes, stimulating the production of youth proteins, now sells one bottle every seven minutes, and there are more products using similar technology due to launch next year.

Estée Lauder has made genetic ageing technology its primary anti-ageing target. The most recent research has focused on epigenetics, a complex field of science which postulates that in addition to our basic (immutable) DNA, there is an additional layer of genetic coding that can determine the way in which that DNA is expressed and influenced by environmental factors. I'm vastly oversimplifying, but if you think of DNA as the score, the epigenetic code is the orchestra that performs it. If the lead violinist's off sick and the conductor's drunk, it's not going to sound great, no matter how wonderful the original composition. Estée Lauder's newest Re-Nutriv range, available from November, aims to influence that 'orchestra', ensuring bits of our DNA are in tune.

It seems a lot to ask of a cream, but Daniel Maes, who was Lauder's senior vice president of research and development at the time, reckons they have found 'a goldmine. And we are exploring it to the end.'

Before you rush out to the beauty hall, bear in mind that finding a cream to believe in is just the beginning. 'No cream can do everything. You have to use it as part of a regular regime, eat healthily and have regular facials to really see a difference,' says Fernandes, whose own skincare routine includes a myriad of products, daily needling (using a tiny stamp-like device to create micro-channels in the skin and enhance penetration) and a treatment every week. He even condones the occasional injectable, adding that they work better if skin is kept strong and healthy with a good skincare routine. 'There are certain ingredients that can put back what your skin is missing and help it look great, but they're not going to turn back time or perform miracles.'

As Achilles puts it: 'I love my creams, but they're not going to make you look 21 again.' Two things stand out in her 15 years' experience, she says. 'First, the women who spend a little time every day in touch with their skin – massaging, applying warm compresses and generally taking care with cleansing and so on – have better complexions, no matter what they use. Second, the most powerful influence on skin is what's going on in your head. I see it all the time: people who are unhappy, cynical or simply resigned have older-looking skin, while the opposite is true of people who are positive and upbeat. I'm very happy to use my creams, but I'm aware that's not enough any more. At the end of the day, youth comes from within.' It seems that flower-child moniker fits after all. ■

## VITAMIN A SKIN BOOSTERS

1. Miracle Worker Miraculous Anti-Ageing Retinoid Pads, £61.50, by Philosophy
2. Revitalising Serum, £72, by Skeen
3. Re-Nutriv Ultimate Lift Age-Correcting Crème, £155, by Estée Lauder
4. Anti-Ageing Complex, £90, by Le Métier de Beauté
5. Retin-Ox Wrinkle Correxion Daily Anti-Wrinkle Moisturiser, £26.99, by Roc
6. Liquid Gold Intensive Night Repair Serum, £42.99, by Alpha-H
7. AVST1, £29.95, by Environ
8. Definity Colour Enhancer, £26.99, by Olay

