



Meet The Brand Striving To Make India Known For Sophisticated Luxury Skincare

JULY 19, 2019



LAUNCHING BEAUTY
ALICE MROCKOWSKI



Growing up, Paayal Mahajan was the bullied chubby kid. By 30 years old, after enduring decades of ridicule over her size—she was 263 pounds at her largest—she dedicated herself to losing weight, an arduous task that took a toll on her skin.

“My skin, which was my pride and joy, started to show all the signs of serious weight loss. The fatty tissue was diminishing, the collagen was breaking down, and all of this was stressing me out,” says Mahajan, who shed 130 pounds. “The worst part was realizing that, as a self-professed beauty aficionado, I had allowed myself to be bamboozled by the beauty industry. There is not a trend I haven’t tried or an ingredient I don’t know of, and nothing worked for me.”

Mahajan, who came of age during the 90s, began to question everything she’d understood to be beauty and skincare truisms. “It is exhausting to constantly be told how pretty you are if only you’d lose the weight.” says Mahajan. “Also, why was I being held hostage to this belief system that only key actives—read one or two active ingredients and 90% fillers and other stuff—were the solution?”

While Mahajan worked on her relationship with her body, she started experimenting with plant-derived ingredients for her skin. Mahajan says, “I realized I needed something that would calm down my neurosensory system and build strength back into my cells.” Leveraging her background in organic chemistry, she spent four years developing skincare products designed to remap the skin’s cellular matrix.



Essential Body's products are formulated to serve multiple purposes. Its hero product, The Elixir, is an oil meant to replace a moisturizer, toner and eye cream.

"The goal is to let your cells recalibrate and find their inherent intelligence. It is truly amazing how powerful this innate intelligence is," says Mahajan. "The nerd in me thrives on this. The connection between our nervous system, neural pathways, hormonal systems, cellular metabolic processes and the vast expanse of plant intelligence, it had to be combined."

After pouring her savings into creating the brand and borrowing money from family for it, Mahajan was ready to bring her New Delhi-based brand, Essential Body, to market last year. It launched with seven products serving multiple purposes. For example, Oudh Post Shave oil doubles as a beard oil, and the hero product The Elixir is a regenerative face oil intended to replace a moisturizer, toner and eye cream in customers' routines. Mahajan says, "You cleanse, apply the Elixir and go."

"I am deeply respectful of my heritage and the value of what Ayurveda represents, but I wanted to give the world something that had never been done before, India's first real couture skincare steeped in adaptogenic phytoscience."

TWEET THIS

She blends Essential Body's products by hand to maintain quality control and uses bottles made of biophotonic glass to preserve the integrity of its ingredients. Mahajan makes two batches a month, 100 of each product, a deliberate decision since the brand is positioned as India's first couture skincare line. Bespoke formulations are available, too.

"I don't outsource my production to any third parties," says Mahajan. "I am a licensed cosmetic manufacturer under Indian law and physically blend all the batches myself in my lab. Maybe when I'm an old lady I'll pass on my recipes, but, for now, it's all me."



Essential Body founder Paayal Mahajan

Mahajan's goal is for Essential Body to show India is about more than yoga, snake charmers and ancient Ayurvedic traditions. She explains, "I am deeply respectful of my heritage and the value of what Ayurveda represents, but I wanted to give the world something that had never been done before, India's first real couture skincare steeped in adaptogenic phytoscience. I wanted people to look at Essential Body and say, 'Whoa! This is Indian?' Yes, yes it is. Proudly made in India, by an Indian, for the world."

Befitting the brand's positioning, its premium packaging contains no plastic. The products come with leather pouches made by Indian artisans that are shipped in recycled board boxes sealed with wax and carefully wrapped in leather cords from leftover materials. To Mahajan, sustainability and employing craftspeople that have been losing their livelihoods due to mass-produced factory goods is important. She says, "How do you put a price on keeping a dying ancient art alive? Leather is naturally sustainable, and the bags eliminate the need for plastics or padding. They protect my bottles, are reusable and completely biodegradable."

"I'm here to stay for the long haul, and that means growing deliberately, patiently, thoughtfully."

TWEET THIS

Essential Body's costs of goods are high, according to Mahajan. She says, "I haven't reached profitability yet. When I built my business model, I would run my numbers over and over, accounting for every last expense possible. I knew this would be a slow growth game. I didn't step into this business to rapidly scale and burn out. I have been approached by two major investors, but I didn't see them adding value to my vision. I'm here to stay for the long haul, and that means growing deliberately, patiently, thoughtfully."

Essential Body is sold direct-to-consumer through its [website](#) and has extended distribution to India's oldest luxury salon, Silhouette Salon de Beauté at the iconic Oberoi Hotel in New Delhi. It's sold at natural beauty and wellness destination Beauty Source as well. The brand's prices range from \$109 to \$1,111. Its products' shelf lives are approximately six months due to their natural ingredients and lack of preservatives.



Essential Body doesn't use plastic in its packaging. It puts its products in leather pouches made by Indian artisans.

During a business trip to New York, Mahajan had a chance encounter with Bobbi Brown and gave her phone number to the beauty industry legend and founder of [Evolution_18](#). When Brown later visited New Delhi, the two reunited. "She took the time, gave me guidance around my products and business, and reminded me that, 'You don't always see your strengths for what they are,'" recounts Mahajan. "Everything about her is what I aspire to be as an entrepreneur and as a human being. She is one of the most down to earth, smart and kind individuals I've ever met. I started thinking about how I'd been hiding pictures of myself from when I was heavy on social media."

Brown is known to provide a peek into her life on social media. Motivated by her, Mahajan decided to take ownership of her personal story on Instagram. "I was judged for my size my entire life. I want people to let go of this futile, self-defeating quest for perfection, which I recognize is near impossible in the age of social media, filters and faceting," she says, continuing, "I don't want 16-year-olds to look at Instagram and hate themselves and their bodies. I don't want 30-somethings to feel less than because of some weird concocted standard of perfection. We're calling it body positivity right now, but I hope we evolve to a time where we don't give it a name, and it's just simply acceptance."

SHARE THIS ARTICLE

