

CLEAN SWEEP

Skincare fans rejoice – Drunk Elephant has finally landed in the Middle East, and with it, clean-clinical ingredients, a no-nonsense approach, and bottles so Instagrammable they’ve made cameos in countless celebrity ‘shelfies’...



Stay-at-home mum turned beauty boss Tiffany Masterson is the founder of Drunk Elephant



If you had to sum up the Drunk Elephant aesthetic in one word, it would be ‘disruptive’. It’s the idea that once you’ve peeled away the hype surrounding the brand’s neon-topped bottles it leads to an even more thrilling discovery: that this is the real skincare deal. “It works, plain and simple,” says founder Tiffany Masterson.

The US brand, which shot to cult status almost overnight, not only speaks to a highly engaged community of followers on social media (one million and counting) but is also changing the conversation around skincare. With an almost unconscious instinct for being game-changing, it walks the fine line between science-led and having a cute name that is millennial clickbait (Drunk Elephant refers to the intoxicating-like effect its hero ingredient, marula, has on elephants that consume it). “I knew that adding an edgy vibe would create curiosity and attract attention,” Tiffany told us.

If being the fastest-growing skincare company in the history of Sephora is what you call ‘attention’, then that’s precisely what Drunk Elephant commands. This is especially impressive given the brand wasn’t founded by a big cosmetics company but by a stay-at-home mother of four determined to get her skin issues under control. “I’d occasionally break out, had mild rosacea, visible pores, you name it,” explains Tiffany. “I was a frustrated, confused brand-hopper searching for anything that would help. I realised that to get what I wanted, I would need to develop it myself.”

BLAZING A TRAIL

People are the key to Tiffany’s vision, which has turned the traditional skincare model on its head. Without a background in the beauty industry, she talks about how she came up with products by talking to dermatologists and asking beauty editors what they wanted, rather than telling women what they needed. She taught herself about ingredients: what worked, what didn’t and what it would take to have healthy skin.

Once she had her ingredient decks ready, Tiffany turned them over to a chemist, who made the necessary tweaks and brought the formulations to life. “The end result was a true representation of what I wanted from the beginning – clinically effective, non-toxic formulations that contain high percentages of actives and are totally non-irritating,” she explains.

The company launched in 2013 with only six products: Virgin Marula Luxury Facial Oil (of course); physical

sunscreen; two cleansing bars; C-Firma Day Serum and T.L.C. Framboos Glycolic Night Serum. Bestsellers today include the resurfacing T.L.C. Sukari Babyfacial, with AHAs to leave skin feeling like marble; Protini Polypeptide Cream, which is billed as an anti-ageing cream packed with peptides and amino acids to improve firmness; Lala Retro Whipped Cream, a gloriously thick moisturiser, not unlike old-school cold cream, that miraculously dries matte; and the purifying Jelly Cleanser, which includes omegas 6 and 9 to satisfy another criteria: that it be non-stripping. The new pivot? Hair and body care.

COMING CLEAN

Tiffany attributes much of Drunk Elephant’s success to its ingredient-elimination philosophy. Otherwise known as the Suspicious Six, or the proverbial elephant in the room. Do you find fragrance and essential oils irritate your skin? Tiffany did too, which is why you won’t find them in any Drunk Elephant product. Concerned about whether silicones, SLS and drying alcohols are necessary in skincare? Tiffany asked the same question and the answer is no: silicones congest while the others strip skin of moisture. All are on the banned list, as are chemical sunscreens, which can cause breakouts.

Throw in ‘clean-clinical’ ingredients that Drunk Elephant products do contain and it becomes an even more appealing prospect. “I believe that ingredients must be biocompatible with the function of the skin and support its acid mantle,” Tiffany explains. Put simply, ones your skin recognises, processes and benefits from so it can stay healthy.

While natural beauty fans wax lyrical about Tiffany’s line, she is quick to distance herself from the scene. Perhaps the most refreshing thing about biocompatible skincare is that it cuts out the bewilderment of choosing between natural or synthetic ingredients. By judiciously incorporating both, she’s been able to strike a happy medium. “It isn’t about natural vs. synthetic, it’s about effectiveness and safety,” explains Tiffany. “Essential oils are natural but they can inflame skin.”

She defends her use of synthetic ingredients, which often get a bad rap, by saying: “Your body synthesizes ingredients all the time. In the same way, we synthesize vitamin C from citrus fruits so it becomes ascorbic acid, which is a more stable version for the skin.”

Drunk Elephant has even come to the rescue of those who love the idea of retinol for fine lines but shy away from the dryness and irritation it can bring to the skin-renewal party. For vitamin A purists, Tiffany did the unthinkable when she created the A-Passioni Retinol Cream by using vegan retinol and encasing it in a blend of passionfruit, jojoba and marula oils to make it less shocking for the skin.



B-Hydra Intensive Hydration Serum, Dhs185 for 50ml; C-Tango Multivitamin Eye Cream, Dhs274 for 15ml, both Drunk Elephant, exclusive at Sephora



From left: C-Firma Day Serum, Dhs308 for 30ml; Virgin Marula Luxury Facial Oil, Dhs278 for 30ml; Lala Retro Whipped Cream, Dhs231 for 50ml, all Drunk Elephant, exclusive at Sephora

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A-passioni Retinol Anti-wrinkle Face Moisturiser, Dhs350 for 30ml, Drunk Elephant, exclusive at Sephora

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOTTLE

But neatly ticked boxes aren’t Drunk Elephant’s style. The products are designed to mix with one another (B-Hydra Intensive Hydration Serum, for example, tempers punchier products like the retinol cream) and are supposedly suited to every skin type. “I have a different approach to skincare,” admits Tiffany. “There are true skin types we are born with (oily, dry, sensitive) but I don’t think they need different ingredients to thrive. Skin is skin; if it is dry it just needs more moisturising ingredients. Skin that naturally produces more oil needs less. Eliminating the Suspicious Six can often reset skin to a normal, healthy and balanced behaviour.”

Even acids aren’t ruled out for sensitive skin. “If we take care not to strip skin’s protective barrier and allow it to slowly build up a healthy tolerance, there shouldn’t be a problem,” she asserts. Which is quite the statement considering Drunk Elephant works with levels of acids normally found in no-nonsense doctor brands.

Ultimately, however, Tiffany wants customers to feel like the brand itself is a close friend – a friend who is maybe a little wiser but still has a sense of humour, especially when it comes to product names like C-Tango, which sounds like a Marvel superhero. But perhaps superheroes is what Drunk Elephant has been creating all along. ■