



GOOD HAIR DAYS FOR ALL: NOW THERE'S A cause we can get behind. But while cosmetic brands have clearly been getting the memo that beauty isn't solely for white skin tones, the hair industry has taken longer to get up to speed. Up until very recently, mainstream haircare for black women took up a lonely shelf in the local pharmacy. Physically – and psychologically – the message was clear: Afro hair was far removed from the beauty industry's ideal of Gisele-like locks that swing and blow in the wind.

But that's all changed. Afro hair is now the industry's influencer. So much so, in fact, that the US market for black haircare is estimated to reach a staggering \$2.56 billion (around £2.08 billion) at the end of 2016. Cue a new wave of high-performance products that, for the first time, make you re-think the way you style and care for Afro hair. 'We're now seeing a real investment in technology and a new understanding of textured hair,' says hairstylist Vernon Francois, who counts Lupita Nyong'o and Kerry Washington as clients. 'Rather than just being lumped into the sweeping category of "curly" hair, the new products better suit the needs of tighter, kinkier coils.'

This is all down to clever ingredients like moisture-trapping botanicals, antioxidant-rich polyphenols and smoothing amino acids,

which can put paid to dryness, frizz and limp-looking curls.

But why the sudden wake-up call? Francois credits the natural hair movement, which has been gathering momentum over recent years, for the change. 'More and more black consumers are moving away from heat straightening and chemically relaxing their hair, and are embracing their true texture.' The result is an increase in demand for products that work with it. Social media has also been a key driver, with a global community of women connecting with each other and demanding that they be represented. 'Instagram has created an empowering space for women of colour like myself to have a voice, share advice and now also benefit commercially from it,' says London-based Breeny Lee, whose hair and beauty YouTube vlogs command over 1.9 million views. 'Hair brands can't afford not to listen.'

Nor, it seems, can the fashion world. 'Big, bold textured hair has always been seen on the catwalks – but on light-skinned models,' says Francois. 'Now the Afro, flat-top and defined curls are showcased by models who actually have that texture naturally. Supermodel Lineisy Montero and Adwoa Aboah, the new face of H&M, come to mind.'

This new approach speaks volumes. Yes, there's still a long way to go, but at least a hair agenda that makes high-performance products accessible to all is bringing us one step closer to equality in the shampoo aisle. ►

