

THE RISE OF HAUTE HAIR

Luxury haircare is beauty's new booming product category as some of the most high-tech, science-backed skincare ingredients are finding their way into your shampoo...

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Until recently, haircare lacked the same degree of innovation as skincare. But with mounting concerns, from Covid-related hair loss to chronic stress and air pollution, skin experts from the world's most prestige beauty brands are focusing their expertise above the forehead. A new breed of hyaluronic acid for hydration and molecules to activate stem cells for hair growth has resulted in the 'skinification' of haircare. Brands are now drawn to the idea that our scalps have a similarly complex set of needs to the skin on our faces. Not to mention, empowering us to once again become the proud owners of glistening, youthful strands.

Arguably the forerunner of this burgeoning trend is iconic French skincare brand Sisley, which branched out into haircare in 2018. "The scalp and the skin have the same external and internal aggressors in the form of UV, pollution, stress and ageing," says Florence Maraval, Hair Rituel by Sisley brand director, noting that the product line-up borrows from the fortifying peptides, restorative vitamins and nourishing oils that give the brand's skincare its golden reputation. The jewel in the crown (literally) is the Revitalising Fortifying Serum. It uses rice proteins to stimulate hair follicle stem cells for denser, stronger hair – claims backed up by a clinical study at the Sabouraud Center at Saint-Louis Hospital in Paris.

Hair we go

One legacy of the pandemic is that luxury players such as Olaplex and Oribe, with its aptly named Gold Lust line, are growing at a much faster pace than mass market brands.

Professor Augustinus Bader, the German stem cell scientist famous for creating a hydrogel to accelerate burn healing, is the latest member of this elite club. Given our skin struggles to repair itself the older we get, his cultish The Cream facial moisturiser deploys a patented complex of vitamins, amino acids and synthesised molecules to activate stem cells and boost them into healing mode. The same theory about ageing is behind Bader's haircare line.

"Hair was the natural next step," says Bader, noting that the five-piece collection (shampoo, conditioner, leave-in treatment, hair oil and scalp treatment) also contains the famous TFC8 complex found in his skincare. The regimen aims to "target the follicle and hair root to support cell function and improve hair strength, resilience and growth rate," Bader explains.

"We have translated the concept of skin repair to the scalp. It's the first-of-its-kind innovation to target the

cellular environment that allows the hair follicle to repair itself using specific stem cells to nourish and protect it."

Another noteworthy launch comes from German molecular scientist and aesthetics doctor Barbara Sturm. Her molecular haircare collection uses the same language as skincare and features three core concerns – Balancing, Super Anti-Aging and Anti-Hair Fall – each with a targeted shampoo, conditioner, serum and mask designed to influence the scalp's eco system. "Studies have established a link between scalp health and hair growth," says Sturm. "The scalp is an extension of our skin: its surface provides a distinct environment for microbes called the 'scalp microbiome'. This physiology extends into the dermis to deliver nutrients that are essential for healthy hair growth. Its care requires the same strategy and delivery as the skin on the rest of our bodies."

To that end, the antioxidant purslane, which Sturm has dubbed the "fountain of youth enzyme", makes an appearance in some of the formulas, as well as an innovative form of hyaluronic acid (Cationic Hyaluronic Acid) that adheres to the hair, enabling it to continue hydrating brittle strands long after rinsing. Of course, all of this innovation comes at a price. While haircare by Dr Barbara Sturm and Professor Augustinus Bader is more affordable than their skincare, they still sit comfortably in the prestige category.

For a more prescriptive approach, look no further than Harklinikken. Founder and lead scientist, Lars Skjoth, is committed to taking the stigma out of hair thinning and has seen a dramatic increase in visitors to his plush Dubai clinic. "The complexity of treating hair loss is enormous, especially when you're using standard products," he says. Rather, his offering, the Extract, is a custom-blended daily treatment to

boost the optimal health of your scalp and counteract thinning. Hair specialists at the in-house lab hand mix the formula tailored to your individual needs, using natural ingredients derived from various plants such as burdock root and marigold.

"People are investing more in haircare since the pandemic because they've had more time for self-care and self-reflection at home," says Skjoth. Unsurprisingly, everyone now wants a piece of the action, with Bloomberg reporting that the global luxury haircare market is expected to be worth \$31.50 billion (Dhs115 billion) by 2027. It's a tantalising prospect for even more effective results and catnip for those whose hair regimen is so sophisticated, it's akin to a well-honed skincare routine. ■

