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Jane Wurwand

July 14, 2015

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## DERMALOGICA: HEAH-AH, THEY-AH AND EVERYWHERE

*Victoria Thomas, an LA-based freelance writer and public relations executive, took the announcement of the sale of Dermalogica to Unilever to heart mainly because she helped play a role in the brand becoming a beauty editor darling through her PR and consultant work for nearly 14 years at the firm. Here, Victoria writes about the first time she met Jane Wurwand, Dermalogica's founder, and the day a Cape Town accent sounded like the voice of God.*

Dermalogica is currently in the process of being acquired by Unilever—as is Murad, which was announced less than a week later. Dermalogica, the visionary skin care brand created in Los Angeles in 1986 by power couple Jane and Raymond Wurwand, will see Unilever capitalize on its uniquely tribal following, and it will surely benefit from Unilever's vast R&D and international distribution capacities. The Wurwands, based in LA, will continue to helm Dermalogica for an undisclosed period as the transition is completed.

I went to work for Jane and Raymond Wurwand in 2001, first as Dermalogica's account executive at an ill-starred PR firm in Venice, Calif., then as a full-time Dermalogica employee at the brand's locations in Torrance and Carson, CA, and ultimately as a freelance content-provider and consultant. The defining character of my relationship with this landmark brand is that I remember it in moments—individual, specific, sensorial moments of stunning clarity. These moments stand alone and distinct from one another, versus the run-together blur that a long romance might suggest.

The first of these moments was the first time I met Jane. She and Raymond arrived at the PR firm where I worked for an initial meeting to discuss our possible agency-client relationship.

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Jane hypnotized me as she opened the front door and walked through it, a svelte woman with cropped hair, crisp Brit-speak and Bette Davis eyes. She walked right up to me, introduced herself, and immediately touched the lapel of my black lambskin jacket (I was in one of my recurring Goth-chic phases). “I fancy a bit of leather,” said Jane, smiling slightly, flicking her enormous, Liza-like eyelashes up and down the length of me. I have since learned that initiating powerful physical contact is elementary to the Dermalogica culture, and the brand’s skin therapists practice this art of seemingly casual social touch often.

And wouldn’t you know it, we were hired!

Early on in our relationship I attended what I later realized was a sales meeting. It was hardly my first time at a rodeo, but this was no typical sales meeting. Jane was dressed in a dazzling white pantsuit and paced the stage like a panther. Hundreds of women sat, then stood, then began shimmying in place, earrings swinging, bracelets clanging, mascara running, updo’s tumbling down. To be honest, I can’t remember a word she said—perhaps because her sheer electrical force had blown out the circuits, and her mic was dead as a doornail. No matter. Her wave of kinetic charisma had the crowd sweating and in a frenzy.

Afterward, I fought my way through the wall of thrashing, perfumed females to find Jane backstage. As if scripted, she was calmly sipping tea from a bone china cup and saucer. The big lashes flicked up and down with a little grin. The deafening roar from the floor beyond suggested the thousand-year din of the gladiatorial arena. “Hi, darlin’,” she said coolly. “So, how was I?”

My most vivid memory of Dermalogica was a moment on the phone with Raymond Wurwand, in October of 2001. Things had gone south fast with the Venice PR agency. I had been working with Dermalogica for about six months, but the agency was suddenly shutting its doors. As I readied 500 press samples of Dermalogica’s latest launch, Daily Microfoliant, the office furniture was literally being carried off around me as I frantically sealed and labeled the padded envelopes. Just as a telephone electrician arrived to disconnect the service, the phone rang. I picked up the receiver, and there was that unmistakably clipped sound of a Cape Town accent. “This is Raymond Wurwand *heah-ah*,” said the voice on the other end, quite firmly. “What in the devil is going on over *they-ah*?” I began blubbling as the lights and air-conditioning unceremoniously snapped off. After a few moments, Raymond, a bit more gently, said over my whimpering, “Well, Jane and I have discussed it, and we think that you should come to work for us at Dermalogica, over *heah-ah*.”

And I did. It’s where I learned many things, including the fact that removing my makeup with baby oil is a bad thing (it leaves tiny bumps, or milia, in the skin, because mineral oil is occlusive and blocks the follicle). I also learned that wicker, at least in Jane’s interpretation of feng shui, is bad for business, which is why she banished straw baskets from my cubicle. Most importantly: Jane would often quote her own practical British mum when the going got tough, saying, “Stop whining and eat your sausage.”

Like a martini of sorts, I am both shaken and stirred by the news of the sale of Dermalogica. I have shed many scaly skins throughout the 14-year process, each of them better-exfoliated, moisturized and SPF-protected than the last. Dermalogica’s new partnership with Unilever will

no doubt trigger a similar molt. And who knows exactly what shall be revealed once the current layer of dermis is shed?




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