

best of beauty 2006



A Special Report by Paula Begoun

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I'm always amazed when looking back on all of the products I review in a single year. Over the past 12 months my team and I have investigated, examined, and analyzed more than 720 products for my *Cosmetics Counter Update* newsletter and online Beauty Bulletin. What astounds me is that, despite the plethora of products we manage to review, I have to admit it barely scratches the surface of the thousands of new products the cosmetics industry launches each year worldwide. I find this incredibly frustrating and wish there was some way to analyze every new product launched, but have to accept that it simply isn't

It is now much easier to find truly state-of-the-art moisturizers

humanly possible. To make up for this limitation, we do our best to focus on a balanced cross-section of products reflecting an assortment of department store, drugstore, infomercial, salon, spa, and boutique lines that a large number of my readers have expressed an interest in. Between those requests and what's advertised in fashion magazines (and, increasingly, on television), I am confident we are meeting the needs of my readers better than ever before when it comes to providing the information they need about the best products for their skin type (at least that's the feedback I've been getting from you). Thousands of women tell me that this helps them shop for cosmetics with confidence regardless of their budget. As we venture into the New Year, let's take a moment to look back on the products that, based on my strict, demanding criteria coupled with current substantiated research, really deserved my "Paula's Pick" rating.

In many respects, the best skin-care products of 2006 carry on the positive upswing seen in the best products from 2005. It is now much easier to find truly state-of-the-art

moisturizers (loaded with antioxidants, cell-communicating ingredients, and skin-identical ingredients). There are more effective sunscreens that go above and beyond providing reliable SPF-rated sun protection, and several serum-style products that provide skin with the essential ingredients it needs to look and feel healthy without being troublesome for oily, blemish-prone skin. All of the products in this report were chosen not only for their superior formulas but also because of their protective, air-tight packaging, which is critical in order to keep the beneficial light- and air-sensitive ingredients they contain stable.

Another, particularly odious note, was the trend toward creating more and more expensive skin-care products, and I mean really, really expensive! At the top of the list are Doctor's Dermatologic Formula (DDF), who began selling 28 tiny vials totaling about one-ounce for \$1,000 and Estee Lauder's Creme de la Mer The Essence, with a three-vial offering for a grand total of \$2,100. Even gold bullion doesn't come close to costing this much (the current price for an ounce of gold is about \$600)! This kind of pricing for skin-care products is becoming even more standard with many creams, lotions, and serums now selling from \$300 to \$500 for a one-ounce container, including Revive Intensite Volumizing

Even gold bullion doesn't come close to costing this much.

Serum (\$600 for one ounce); N.V. Perricone Neuropeptide Eye Area Contour (\$390 for one ounce); Cle de Peau The Cream (\$500 for one ounce); Orlane Hypnotherapy (\$470 for 1.7 ounces); Darphin Stimulskin Plus Complex (\$350 for a one-month supply); and La Prairie Cellular Radiance Cream (\$525 for 1.7 ounces). It can be very hard for many consumers to avoid being seduced by the "expensive must mean better" concept (and the assumption that their skin will have

far less wrinkles and sagging with pricier products). The cosmetics industry knows this and is happy to serve up price tags that exploit this well-established myth.

Dermatologists continue to flood the cosmetic shelves and counters with product lines bearing their names or endorsements. At least 10 new “Cosmeceutical” lines were launched in 2006. Most of these doctors are photographed with their white lab coats in place, providing a physician’s air of authenticity. As someone who speaks to dermatology groups around the world, consults with dermatologists and plastic surgeons, reads more than a dozen dermatology medical journals, and analyzes and reviews these product lines, I can safely say that you should look past the lab coat. Doctors are not trained to be skin-care formulators or cosmetic ingredient experts.

All the skin-care products below truly represent the best of the best among what we reviewed in 2006.

One of the predominant crazes of 2006 was advertisements for creams and lotions dramatically insisting that they replaced or eliminated the need for Botox, dermal fillers, medical laser or chemical resurfacing, or plastic surgery. Needles and scalpels placed next to frightened women proclaimed how unnecessary these intimidating procedures would be if only you used that company’s products. Scare tactics and unrealistic promises do convince women to buy products; anti-wrinkle sales soared in 2006. Despite the amount of money we’ve spent (and wasted) none of these products have reduced the popularity or success of medical cosmetic corrective procedures. Anti-wrinkle creams cannot provide even a fraction of what dermatologist or plastic surgeons procedures can, and with the amount you could save by not wasting your money on expensive wrinkle creams (that don’t perform as they promise), you would have more than you need to afford procedures that really do get rid of wrinkles and sagging.

Looking forward to 2007, perhaps more companies will do away with unsuitable packaging (such as jars) for their products containing air-sensitive ingredients such as plant extracts, antioxidants, cell-communicating ingredients, and the like. It would also be great to see companies minimize (preferably eliminate) the use of fragrant plant extracts that either pose a risk of irritation or simply have no benefit for skin. There are hundreds of non-irritating plants and extracts that contribute to healthy skin rather than just make the prod-

uct seem more appealing or smell like a flower garden (skin care should not be on par with eau de cologne).

All the skin-care products below truly represent the best of the best among what we reviewed in 2006, and it is gratifying to know that not all of them carry prohibitive prices. One surprising point is that there were no state-of-the-art anti-acne products launched in 2006. Instead, skin-lightening and “brightening” options grabbed a foothold, perhaps a testament to the reality that so many baby boomers are finding their years of sun-tanning are finally catching up with them. What’s unfortunate about many of these types of products is they omit hydroquinone, still the most well-researched and effective skin-lightening agent. Regarding acne, the good news is that there are effective over-the-counter products out there to help manage this all-too-common condition (just not new ones), though keep in mind this is assuredly a category of products that you want to be well-informed about when you shop.

Makeup ruled in 2006 in the realm of improved powder technology. Not only are strides in this area producing some of the silkiest textures around, but the products that use these technologies adhere better to skin and blend beautifully, providing a polished, refined look. It is now easier than ever to find makeup products that enhance, rather than detract from, good skin. And even if your skin isn’t in its best state, the products on the list below will help create that illusion. Just make sure you’re doing what you can via skin-care products to improve skin’s appearance, and to keep it protected from harmful influences, such as sunlight. The foundations, powder blush, and eyeshadows on the list all represent benchmark products in their respective categories. You’ll also find some formidable mascaras on the list as well as long-wearing lip-color products that are genuinely impressive.

Makeup ruled in 2006 in the realm of improved powder technology.

Critical Note: This list is strictly about superior formulations and, in the case of makeup products, impressive performance. Please keep in mind that an item’s inclusion on this list does not mean that I found any of the companies’ claims about their products true in the least. How a company markets their products or the misleading ads and hype they create have nothing to do with my rating system or what benefit your skin will gain.

Paula's Picks 2006

SKIN CARE

Almay

The lowdown: Revlon-owned Almay completely revamped their skin-care collection at the beginning of 2006, launching several reformulations, adding a few new products, and renaming and/or repackaging some longstanding favorites. Whether your skin is dry, normal to combination, or oily, Almay purports to have a three-step system (cleanser, toner, and daily moisturizer with sunscreen) that's right for you. I wish it were that simple, but rarely, if ever, are three products enough for any skin type. Skin care doesn't have to be complicated, but thinking it's as easy as 1-2-3 is just too good to be true (three steps doesn't take into consideration the need for exfoliation, a separate nighttime moisturizer that doesn't contain sunscreen, or special care products such as those for rosacea, blemishes, oily skin, extra dry skin, etc.). On the other hand, it is impressive that many of Almay's sunscreens have caught up with drugstore frontrunners by offering UVA-protecting ingredients (and they even included antioxidants)! Almay's packaging has improved, too, though not as much as it could have given the extra thought that went into some of their new formulas. Savvy shoppers will want to zero in on most of their fragrance-free daily moisturizers with sunscreen, along with the regular scented sunscreens, and those who prefer lotion-style cleansers won't be disappointed.

Daily Moisturizer for Normal/Combo Skin with Grape Seed SPF 15 (\$11.99 for 4 ounces) is an excellent in-part avobenzone sunscreen that is indeed appropriate for its

designated skin type. The formula has a significant amount of antioxidant grape extract, and also contains other antioxidants. Additionally, it comes in packaging that keeps these skin-beneficial ingredients stable. It's unfortunate that all of Almay's daily moisturizers with sunscreen didn't follow this protocol, but at least they got this one 100% right, and it's fragrance-free, too!

Sun Protector for Body SPF 30 (\$8.99 for 4.2 ounces) is a very good, in-part zinc oxide sunscreen for normal to dry skin. Its smooth lotion texture isn't too thick or occlusive, and it is water-resistant, although Almay doesn't make that claim. As a skin-boosting

bonus, it contains several antioxidants, and the opaque tube packaging helps keep them stable.

One sore point: Almay makes the following statement on their Web site: "SPF 30 blocks harmful UVA/UVB rays from your skin, so you can get a gradual, healthy tan." That kind of claim is on par with a doctor telling you that taking a mega-dose of vitamin C makes it OK for you to smoke as many cigarettes as you want with no ill effects. Shame on you, Almay!

Sun Protector for Face SPF 30 (\$8.99 for 1.7 ounces) is identical in every respect to the Sun Protector for Body SPF 30 above, and either product can be used on the face or from the neck down. Of course, the same review applies.

Alpha Hydrox

The lowdown: This longstanding drugstore line is known for its ample selection of well-formulated AHA products for reliable exfoliation. They updated many formulas this past year and although not all of them were slam-dunks, they remain a highly recommended line to shop if you're in the market for an AHA cream or lotion for the face. And if you're dealing with sun- or hormone-induced skin discolorations, the product below is a definite consideration!

Spot Light Targeted Skin Tone Lightener (\$15 for 0.85 ounce) I was told that this product was in part developed

by Alpha Hydrox in response to feedback from me via my earlier reviews of the company's Fade Cream. Alpha Hydrox has always done a good job in the AHA field, not only disclosing the percentage of glycolic acid used, but also formulating these types of products within a pH range that allows exfoliation to occur. Now they've launched a well-formulated, skin-lightening product that combines 2% hydroquinone with 10% glycolic acid in a base with a pH of 3.3, all in packaging that will

keep the hydroquinone stable. The lightweight lotion base is suitable for normal to slightly dry or dry skin, and the only thing missing is a selection of state-of-the-art water-binding agents and more antioxidants (vitamin E is included). Still, this remains one of the better options for those who want to



lighten sun- or hormone-induced brown skin discolorations, and the glycolic acid works in tandem with the hydroquinone to improve skin's appearance and texture.

Clinique

The lowdown: Clinique's decades-old 3-step skin-care routine saw some updating, and the only question remaining is what took them so long? These overdue changes included the introduction of three new cleansers that are sold as alternatives to their standard (and not recommended by me) bar soaps. In addition, their bland but immensely popular yellow moisturizer (Dramatically Different Moisturizing Lotion, which is about as dramatically different as comparing oranges to tangerines) was joined by the much better-formulated Dramatically Different Moisturizing Gel. Despite these improvements, Clinique's alcohol-laded Clarifying Lotions are still terrible options for skin, but at least their under-hyped Mild Clarifying Lotion still serves as a gentle toner with a tiny amount of salicylic acid and several soothing agents. Next to parent company Estee Lauder, Clinique is the line to shop for state-of-the-art moisturizers at the department store with price tags and formulas similar to other more pricey Lauder-owned lines. If only they (and Lauder) would rethink the jar packaging for most of these products, Clinique would rule the department store!



Turnaround Concentrate Visible Skin Renewer (\$36.50 for 1 ounce) contains what Clinique refers to as “an advanced cocktail of exfoliants,” but the only ingredient that has substantiated research to support that claim is salicylic acid. Although present in this silky-smooth lotion at approximately 1%, the pH of 5 reduces its ability to exfoliate the skin. Clinique has taken a cue from parent company Estee Lauder and included acetyl glucosamine, which they believe is an effective non-acid exfoliating agent. However, there is still no substantiated research proving this ingredient's effectiveness as

an alternative to AHA or BHA exfoliants. It does have excellent water-binding properties for skin, and complements the other skin-beneficial ingredients in this product quite well. Although this product won't “renew” skin, it is an outstanding, well-packaged, lightweight moisturizer that contains several antioxidants, vitamins, cell-communicating ingredients, and

anti-irritants. It is fragrance-free and best suited to those with normal to oily skin. Fans of Estee Lauder's Idealist (\$46.50 for 1 ounce) take note: Turnaround Concentrate Visible Skin Renewer is incredibly similar, right down to its light texture and silky finish.

Cosmedicine

The lowdown: No sooner had Cosmedicine launched at Sephora stores than press releases bragging about the connection between this medically-positioned product line and Johns Hopkins Medicine (JHM) ensued, and a flood of criticism began pouring in. The controversy and conflict of interest over JHM being linked with creating and selling beauty products were described in a Wall Street Journal story. Shortly after, JHM issued a statement clarifying their association with Cosmedicine brand owner Klinger Advanced Aesthetics (KAA): “KAA and the stores that distribute its products [Cosmedicine] have agreed to withdraw all references to JHM except for certain limited information—on product packages and in previously printed promotional material—that disclose JHM's consulting role. Johns Hopkins did not and does not endorse the company's products.”

It turns out that JHM was only indirectly involved with Cosmedicine. While Cosmedicine initially asserted it was “the only skin-care line tested in consultation with Johns Hopkins Medicine,” the truth was that JHM never actually “tested” the products. Rather, JHM was involved only in recommending testing procedures and evaluating the results. The dermatologist connected to the project, Patrick S. McElgunn, Assistant Professor of Dermatology at Johns Hopkins and Director of Johns Hopkins Cosmetic Center, told me the products made “reasonable claims” and the tests were fairly standard for skin-care products, and added that they were effective moisturizers. That's nice, but not exactly worth the price and all the hype. Still, there are a handful of thoughtfully formulated, well-packaged products to consider if your skin-care budget extends far enough.

Primary Care Multi-Tasking Moisturizer SPF 20 (\$48 for 1.35 ounces) is similar to Cosmedicine's Medi-Matte Oil Control Lotion SPF 20, but with a few more bells and whistles and plant oils making it a good option for normal to dry skin. This daily moisturizer includes avobenzone for sufficient UVA protection and is an option if you are willing to apply it generously.

MegaDose PM Skin Fortifying Serum with Retinol (\$85 for 1 ounce) is a beautifully formulated silicone-based serum with a notable array of state-of-the-art ingredients, though the amount of retinol is hardly worth mentioning. While the

claims are a bit over the top, it is a worthwhile moisturizer for normal to dry skin, though for less money and a similar formulary, Lauder's CP+ Perfectionist (\$55 for 1 ounce) is an equally impressive option.

MegaDose Skin Fortifying Serum (\$80 for 1 ounce) is almost identical to the MegaDose PM version above, and the same basic comments apply.

Opti-mologist Eye Cream with Light Diffusers (\$45 for 0.5 ounce) doesn't contain anything unique for the eye area. The amount of caffeine present is negligible, and the acrylates (film-forming agents similar to those used in hairsprays) are not eye-friendly. Still, this is an excellent silicone-based moisturizer complete with antioxidants and other beneficial ingredients for skin.

Opti-mologist PM Intensive Eye Cream (\$48 for 0.5 ounce) is similar to the Opti-mologist Eye Cream above, and the same basic comments apply. Both products feature packaging that keeps the light- and air-sensitive ingredients stable during use.

Dr. Denese New York

The lowdown: Without question, this had been one of the most frequently requested lines my readers wanted to know about, presumably because of its presence on the QVC home shopping channel and the publication of Denese's book, *Dr. Denese's Secrets for Ageless Skin: Younger Skin in 8 Weeks*. If you're concerned with aging, who wouldn't be intrigued by that title, and by a doctor no less? Although the book contained its fair share of inaccurate or unsupported information (just like Dr. Perricone's books on staying young and fighting wrinkles), the skin-care line features some remarkably state-of-the-art products, and the prices, though somewhat steep, aren't unreasonable for what you get. As is true for most skin-care lines (including those from dermatologists), there are shortcomings and missteps along with good products. For those who choose the best of what Dr. Denese has to offer, the rewards will be smiling at them in the mirror each day (though please don't take that to mean your wrinkles will be gone!)

HydroShield Eye Serum (\$44 for 0.5 ounce) contains silicone, antioxidants, ceramides, retinol, several fatty acids, and preservatives. This fragrance-free serum is an outstanding formulation that is recommended for all skin types. It may be used around the eyes or anywhere on the face. Its lightweight texture and matte finish make it well-suited for those with oily skin looking for the benefits of antioxidants and reti-

nol without heaviness. This is a product any dermatologist would be proud of!

HydroShield Ultra Moisturizing Face Serum (\$125 for 2 ounces) is nearly identical to the Hydroshield Eye Serum above, and the same review applies. Ounce for ounce, this serum ends up costing less than the eye-area version, and nothing about it is problematic for use around the eyes.

HydroSeal Hand & Decollete Serum (\$35 for 3 ounces) is just as nice as the other recommended serums above because it contains an impressive mix of silicones, plant oil, water-binding agents, retinol, antioxidants, and several ingredients that mimic the structure and function of healthy skin. Notice the larger size and lower price compared to the other Dr. Denese serums? That's a plus, because your skin will benefit from its use whether on the hands or face! The amount of plant oil in this serum makes it suitable for normal to dry skin.

Perfect Pucker Line Filler with Pro-Peptide Factor

(\$36.50 for 0.3 ounce) has an incredibly long ingredient list, and once you get past the silicones and thickeners, it reads like a "who's who" of antioxidants. Peptides are present, too, but although they are helpful they do not have the ability to fill in vertical lines above the lip. What does help with that are the silicones in this thick cream. Applied "generously," as the label indicates, this will serve as a spackle for lip-area lines. It temporarily creates a smoother surface that reflects light better, which further improves the appearance of this trouble

spot. Perfect Pucker would also work to "fill in" lines around the eyes, but how long it works depends on how expressive you are. The more you move the skin in this area, the less time the effect lasts, and you may not be that impressed with it to begin with. Still, there is no reason (excluding cost) not to see if this product does minimize the appearance of lines, and it is packed with beneficial ingredients and is fragrance-free.



Dove

The lowdown: 2006 wasn't nearly as exciting a year for Dove in terms of a parade of state-of-the-art products as the past few years have been. In fact, many readers expressed

disappointment at the company's decision to discontinue a selection of their products I had rated Paula's Pick, but such is the nature of this industry. The big launch within their skin-care range was the Energy Glow line, and it was a mostly disappointing collection that included a bar cleanser, eye cream with sunscreen rated a woefully low SPF 8 (what was Dove thinking?), and jar packaging for the otherwise well-formulated nighttime moisturizer. The sole bright spot was the product below, and, as this report is published, it is still being sold!

Energy Glow Brightening Moisturizer SPF 15 (\$10.99 for 1.7 ounce) is a brilliantly formulated moisturizer from Dove, and it features an in-part zinc-oxide sunscreen. The creamy formula moisturizes without feeling greasy, and includes antioxidants as well as ingredients that mimic the structure of healthy skin. The mica, zinc oxide, and titanium dioxide blend adds a subtle whitening effect that's translucent, so the result is indeed more a skin-brightening than the pasty, pale look that you can get from some other products. This fragranced daytime moisturizer is best for someone with normal to slightly dry or slightly oily skin not prone to blemishes.

Estee Lauder

The lowdown: The two Lauder skin-care products below represent how a company who really takes its research seriously can create incredibly impressive products. Unlike many companies, Lauder consistently and continually produces products that, despite some truly overblown claims and pricing that is just absurd, are truly remarkable, making them the envy of their competition. If you're looking for the pinnacle of state-of-the-art when it comes to moisturizers and serums, Estee Lauder should be one of the companies at the top of your list. They're not the only game in town (hey, it's nice to have options) but no other department store line does skin care quite as well. Wishful thinking on my part would be for Lauder to do away with the jar packaging that downgrades several superb formulations, as well as reduce or eliminate the sometimes pervasive fragrances in their products.

DayWear Plus Multi-Protection Anti-Oxidant Lotion SPF 30, for Normal/Combination Skin (\$38 for 1.7 ounces) is another brilliantly formulated, well-packaged sunscreen from Estee Lauder. The active ingredients include titanium dioxide and zinc oxide for UVA protection, and the lightweight lotion texture slips on without a trace of the white cast typical of mineral sunscreens (this formula includes synthetic sunscreens, too). As has become the norm for most new Lauder moisturizers and sunscreens, this product is loaded with antioxidants, cell-communicating ingredients,

and ingredients that mimic the structure and function of healthy skin. The only drawback is the fragrance, which is stronger than it needs to be. For a daytime moisturizer available at the department store, this runs circles around what Lancome, Clarins, and Chanel have to offer in the way of sunscreens, and Lauder's price point has better protection for your budget as well. Another job well done, and it is indeed appropriate for normal to combination skin types.



Advanced Night Repair Concentrate Recovery Boosting Treatment (\$85 for 1 ounce) serves as a partner product to Lauder's enduring Advanced Night Repair serum. This concentrated version (supposedly with five times the amount of patented recovery complex than the original Advanced Night Repair) is meant to be used for three weeks, after which you revert to your usual routine of applying original Advanced Night Repair. Considering that the price for the Concentrate is double that of the original Advanced Night Repair, you may wonder if this allegedly more potent version is worth the upgrade. It turns out that the formulas are similar in some ways, but the differences are notable enough to definitely make Advanced Night Repair Concentrate the superior product. Its silicone content gives the Concentrate a silkier texture than the original, but the big difference is in the larger amount of antioxidants Lauder packed into the Concentrate version. This is enough of a difference to consider the original antiquated. Whether or not the extras are worth the money is up to you. Clinique's Repairwear Deep Wrinkle Concentrate for Face and Eye (\$55 for 1.4 ounces) is just as well-formulated, as is Estee Lauder's Perfectionist CP+ (\$55 for 1 ounce).

One more point: A major ingredient in the Advanced Night Repair Concentrate and in the original Advanced Night Repair is bifida ferment lysate. The bifida portion refers to bifidobacteria, a strain of bacteria found in the human body, and believed to provide immune protection and prevent gastrointestinal problems (in other words, it's a friendly strain of bacteria). How does it relate to skin care? Claims made for this ingredient is that it can do for the face what it does for the body, enhance the immune system, and decrease bad bacteria. There is no published information establishing that to be true. Oral consumption of this bacteria (it is often present in yogurt and can be purchased in supplement form) has

a couple of studies showing it can be of benefit in helping with infant eczema, but that's about it when it comes to skin (Source: www.naturaldatabase.com).

Good Skin

The lowdown: Estee Lauder-owned Good Skin is sold exclusively in Kohl's department stores. Good Skin is endorsed by dermatologist and author Dr. Doris Day. (Lauder also owns American Beauty and Flirt, also exclusive to Kohl's. These two lines rely on celebrity faces, Ashley Judd and Serena Williams, to get your attention. Logically, as many lines now do, Lauder went the doctor route with their Good Skin line, similar to dermatologist Dr. Karyn Grossman's endorsements of Lauder's Prescriptives line.) Although I couldn't find any information detailing the methods Day used to test and approve of the formulas (and the company wouldn't help), or even how she was involved, several of the products are excellent options and priced below the competition (lest we forget, Kohl's will never be mistaken for Saks Fifth Avenue) not to mention well-organized into helpful (if not always accurate) categories.

Clean Skin Oil-Free Lotion SPF 15 (\$15 for 1.7 ounces) is a very good moisturizer for someone with normal to oily skin who needs a reliable sunscreen with UVA-protecting ingredients. With an impressive 3% avobenzone, this one fits the bill for the kind of sun protection skin needs. It is appropriately lightweight, with a slight matte finish (though it won't hold up all day). It has a small, but decent, amount of ingredients that mimic the structure of skin, a cell-communicating ingredient, antioxidants, and anti-irritants. It is also fragrance-free and coloring agent-free. Now that's what I'm talking about!

All Right Oil-Free Sunscreen SPF 30 (\$12 for 1.7 ounces) is an exceptionally well-formulated sunscreen, listing avobenzone as one of the active sunscreen ingredients to cover the UVA spectrum, along with antioxidants, cell-communicating ingredients, and ingredients that mimic the structure of skin. Appropriately, it has a dependable matte finish. This really is all right!

All Bright Moisture Cream (\$23.50 for 1.7 ounces) has a compelling assortment of state-of-the-art ingredients covering every category that could make your skin happy, along with a wonderful silky texture. There's only one misstep, though it's barely worth mentioning. In essence, this is a very good moisturizer for normal to dry skin—just don't count on it improving skin discolorations. Mulberry extract and glycyrrhetic acid (a derivative of licorice) have only a small amount of research showing them to have benefit in this regard, and the research included only a handful of par-

ticipants and the ingredients were used at high concentrations (Sources: International Journal of Dermatology, April 2000, pages 299–301; and Skin Lightening and Depigmenting Agents, www.emedicine.com/derm/topic528.htm).

All Firm Rebuilding Serum (\$25 for 1 ounce) is a good lightweight moisturizer with a very good mix of interesting state-of-the-art ingredients. This is definitely helpful for skin, and the weightless texture works for many skin types. Just don't expect to see firmer skin anytime soon.

All Calm Gentle Creamy Cleanser (\$15 for 6.7 ounces) is indeed creamy and fairly emollient, so you need a washcloth to be sure you remove all of it and all your makeup. A blend of thickeners, plant oils, and silicones make this extremely helpful for someone with dry skin, regardless of whether your skin is sensitive or not.



All Calm Gentle Sunscreen SPF 25 (\$12 for 1.7 ounces) is aptly formulated for someone with sensitive skin. The sunscreen base is purely titanium dioxide and zinc oxide, which means you get excellent sun protection with almost no risk of irritation. It also has a wonderful silky feel with a nice array of impressive, state-of-the-art ingredients. While it does contain coloring agents to lessen the white appearance of the sunscreen ingredients on skin, it is fragrance-free. This one is a winner!

Mary Kay

The lowdown: Direct-seller Mary Kay claims to be America's best-selling brand according to sales data analyzed in the Kline & Company, Inc.'s "Cosmetics & Toiletries USA 2005" study, but the numbers don't add up with other reports that put Mary Kay far behind Avon, Lauder, and Procter & Gamble. Financial statistics aside, Mary Kay is not a line to gloss over. Although they do have their share of outdated formulas, they have some new additions worth noticing. Many of their newest products have proven they intend to compete with the best of the best and it is refreshing to know that most of their skin-care products are now fragrance-free. A notable mention for this line has nothing to do with cosmetics. The company donated over \$1 million to the aid relief funds for those affected by Hurricane Katrina. That's incredibly gener-

ous and proves that this is a company that takes its claim of enriching women's lives seriously.

TimeWise Even Complexion Essence (\$35 for 1 ounce) promises to restore a natural, even tone to skin while helping to reverse skin discolorations. Eschewing the established skin-lightening agent hydroquinone, this water-based serum contains niacinamide and ascorbyl glucoside instead. There is some research showing that niacinamide can interrupt the transfer of melanocytes (pigmented skin cells) to keratinocytes (regular skin cells that make the protein keratin), which would essentially cut the discoloration process off at the pass. However, these studies were done in vitro (test tube) rather than performed on human skin. Moreover, while the researchers pointed out that a positive outcome was dose-dependent, the dosage was not revealed (Source: *Experimental Dermatology*, July 2005, pages 498–508). A smaller study, which was done on human skin, revealed that a 5% concentration of niacinamide produced a noticeable effect on discolorations after four weeks of use (Source: *British Journal of Dermatology*, July 2002, pages 20–31). It should be noted that the previous study was done on only 18 women, and was from Procter & Gamble, whose Olay and SK-II lines are big on the use of niacinamide. There is no substantiated research concerning the ability of the vitamin C derivative ascorbyl glucoside to lighten skin, although vitamin C in other forms has shown potential.

So what we have here is a potentially good alternative skin-lightening product, but Mary Kay is definitely not using 5% niacinamide. Nonetheless, this product is worth considering by all skin types as a lightweight serum that contains several vitamin- and plant-based antioxidants as well as water-binding agents, including peptides. It is fragrance-free, too. While it would have been nice if Even Complexion Essence could have an impressive impact on skin discolorations, this serum still deserves a Paula's Pick rating for its other positive attributes and is suitable for all skin types.

Neutrogena

The lowdown: Despite dozens of product launches last year, Neutrogena fared best in one of their strongest categories—sunscreens. In fact, Neutrogena would do a lot better slowing down quantity and concentrating on quality. For sun protection, Neutrogena made much ado about their Helioplex sunscreen formula (discussed below) which ended up being more hype than science (if you took the claims literally, that meant Neutrogena was demeaning several of its other sunscreens—which they should stop selling if they were so far below the quality of Helioplex). Neutrogena is a company that not only knows what is needed for broad-spectrum protection but is also concerned with creating cosmetically elegant, antioxidant-containing formulas consumers will want to use. That's a huge plus, and a much better reason to shop

this line than for any of their numerous, lackluster anti-aging products (though the gems in that lineup are mentioned below, so take note). It's still more than a bit perplexing that Neutrogena hasn't launched a gentle yet effective anti-acne line. They have a huge assembly of products claiming to banish blackheads and reduce acne, yet very few of them are up to the task without creating other problems for skin. Still, there's more to love than loathe from this line, so I'll go on hoping they'll revamp the problematic products—they clearly have the know-how and financial resources to do so!



Age Shield Sunblock SPF 30 (\$9.49 for 4 ounces) has a great name, and honestly describes what a well-formulated sunscreen does for your skin. This fragrance-free, in-part avobenzone sunscreen definitely has the UVA range covered, and includes several antioxidants in stable packaging. The initially creamy application dries to a soft matte finish without a hint of greasiness. It's a texture that someone with normal to very oily skin will love, and is suitable for use under makeup.

Now to the claims. Neutrogena maintains that this product is a breakthrough in UVA protection for the United States because of their patented Helioplex technology. Helioplex is composed of avobenzone, oxybenzone, and the solvent 2-6-diethylhexyl naphthalate (this solvent is believed to make the avobenzone more stable, and avobenzone stability has indeed been a concern). According to Neutrogena, Helioplex “blocks more UVA rays than the leading sunscreen available in the U.S. today, to give you the best anti-aging protection around.” Yet, without knowing which “leading sunscreen” they are referring to (best selling products change daily), there is no way to know what they are comparing it to. What if that sunscreen didn't even contain UVA-protecting ingredients? If it is an issue of avobenzone remaining stable, there is substantial research showing that can be accomplished without the addition of the naphthalate (Sources: *Journal of Photochemistry and Photobiology*, March 2006, pages 204-213 and *British Journal of Dermatology*, December 2004, pages 1234-1244).

Neutrogena is touting this and their other sunscreens with Helioplex as a breakthrough when it really isn't anything new under the sun. Moreover, if the Helioplex blend is so wonderful, why doesn't Neutrogena use it in all their other sunscreens (especially those containing avobenzone to assure they remain stable because their marketing claims would

establish them as being unstable)? What is even more perplexing is all the ballyhoo about Helioplex and avobenzone completely ignores the UVA screening ability of titanium dioxide and zinc oxide. Both of these mineral sunscreens block light beyond the UVA light range of 320–400 nanometers, screening all the way up to 700 nanometers (Source: *Skin Therapy Letter*, Table 1, 1997), and Neutrogena also sells sunscreens with these two active ingredients. Marketing claims aside, in the end what really counts is that this remains a well-formulated, broad-spectrum sunscreen that deserves consideration when shopping for water-resistant SPF 30 products.

Age Shield Sunblock SPF 45 (\$9.49 for 4 ounces) is nearly identical to the Age Shield Sunblock SPF 30 above, and the same review applies.

Healthy Skin Anti-Wrinkle Intensive Eye Cream (\$16.99 for 0.5 ounce) is a very good, lightweight moisturizing cream for use around the eyes or anywhere skin is experiencing mild dryness. It contains a standard array of thickeners and emollients along with silicones, glycerin, several antioxidants (which is good, because none of them are present in any significant amount), anti-irritant, retinol, film-forming agent, and preservatives. It is fragrance-free and packaged so the retinol will remain stable during use. This eye cream will (like any well-formulated moisturizer) reduce the appearance of fine, dry lines and wrinkles. However, contrary to Neutrogena's claim, it won't reduce the appearance of dark circles or fill in deep wrinkles. As elegant as this product is, it's not a viable alternative to cosmetic procedures such as Botox or dermal fillers.

Healthy Skin Anti-Wrinkle Intensive Night Cream (\$16.99 for 1.4 ounce) is very similar to the Healthy Skin Anti-Wrinkle Intensive Eye Cream above, except for its slightly thinner, more lotion-like texture. It, too, is fragrance-free, features stable packaging, and the amount of antioxidants, anti-irritant, and retinol appears equal, making this another beneficial product to be used around the eyes or anywhere skin is normal to slightly dry. The Intensive Eye Cream and Night Cream versions each leave skin feeling silky-smooth.

Paula's Choice

The lowdown: 2006 was an incredibly exciting year for my line. As we enter our eleventh year, I am consistently proud of what my team and I have accomplished in bringing my customers a broad selection of truly elegant products with state-of-the-art ingredients research has proven are beneficial for creating and maintaining healthy, radiant skin. My Super Antioxidant Concentrates are perennial best-

selling, and for once I can rest assured knowing that they are so popular because they work rather than because they are heavily promoted or make outlandish promises. I look forward to launching several new products next year, and pledge to continue researching what it takes to take the best possible care of your skin at any age.

Skin Recovery Super Antioxidant Concentrate (\$21.95 for 1 ounce) is one of two new antioxidants I am excited about. This specialty treatment designed for normal to very dry skin contains a sophisticated blend of efficacious plant oils, several potent antioxidants, anti-irritants, and the cell-communicating ingredient retinol. It provides not only a beneficial dose of antioxidants to skin, but also soothing moisture, leaving dry skin feeling fresh and radiant. Best of all, this combination of ingredients fortifies skin so it is better able to defend itself against environmental aggressors and bring itself to a healthier state.

Skin Balancing Super Antioxidant Mattifying Concentrate (\$21.95 for 1 ounce) shares many of the same traits mentioned above for my Skin Recovery Super Antioxidant Concentrate, including potent levels of several antioxidants and retinol. However, this specialty serum is designed for normal to very oily skin. It is non-greasy and uses dry-finish silicone polymers to create a weightless texture that helps absorb excess oil, keeping skin matte longer. The anti-irritants reduce the redness and inflammation from blemishes and the overall formula allows those with oily or blemish-prone skin to use an antioxidant-rich product without the heavier ingredients found in many creams and lotions.



Cuticle & Nail Treatment (\$10.95 for 0.06 ounce) is an oil-based concentrated moisturizer designed to keep nails and cuticles in peak condition. It is dispensed from a click pen applicator that features a built-in synthetic brush, making application quick and convenient. The formula is also well-suited for spot application wherever skin is dry—it works beautifully on toenails too!

Skinceuticals

The lowdown: L'Oreal-owned Skinceuticals caters to the spa, salon, and specialty boutique markets, and they have a considerable online presence on sites such as www.skinstore.com and www.drugstore.com. They offer a formidable

selection of vitamin-laden products, with particular emphasis on stabilized vitamin C (the vitamin C craze of the early 1990s is still going strong with this line). However, what got our attention in 2006 was the launch of the two retinol products reviewed below. Retinol is noted for improving skin cell function and it's even better that Skinceuticals paired it with other beneficial ingredients. The retinol products below are definitely more potent than the retinol-containing products sold by many drugstore lines, including Neutrogena and RoC, and are not priced exorbitantly, making them great choices if you're curious about what a well-packaged retinol product may do for your skin. As long as you keep expectations realistic (in other words, don't expect pronounced wrinkles or expression lines to vanish) you may very well be delighted with the results.

Retinol 0.5 (\$42 for 1 ounce) makes many anti-aging claims, yet because it contains a significant amount of retinol the claims you can bank on are building collagen and stimulating cell regeneration. But, since other ingredients can also do that, or at least assist in the process, it's a bit overly optimistic to hang all your hopes on one specialized ingredient such as retinol. Luckily, this water- and silicone-based serum does contain many other beneficial ingredients for healthy skin, including ceramides, cholesterol, lecithin, antioxidants, and the anti-irritant bisabolol. The opaque bottle with a pump applicator helps maintain the stability of the retinol, which is a prerequisite for products with this ingredient. Retinol 0.5 is suitable for all skin types. Getting back to the claims, Skinceuticals boasts that this serum will also minimize pore size and correct blemishes. The first claim rests on a subjective judgment, and the second, about retinol being able to correct blemishes is, at this point, more theoretical than proven. In contrast, tretinoin (active ingredient in Retin-A) has considerable research supporting its use as a prescription acne treatment. While it's definitely possible that using a retinol serum like this one will result in fewer blemishes, it's not as much of a sure thing as using a tretinoin product. The benefits of retinol versus tretinoin are that retinol has significantly fewer and comparably minor side effects, but the tradeoff is reduced efficacy (Source: *Cosmetic Dermatology*, volume 18, issue 1, supplement 1, January 2005, page 19).

Retinol 1.0 (\$48 for 1 ounce) is similar to the Retinol 0.5 product above, except it contains 50% more retinol (a fact the ingredient statement bears out). The same basic comments apply, but a caution is warranted because using retinol at this level (1%) poses a slight risk of side effects that are similar to, but less pronounced than, those caused by topical tretinoin, including redness, flaking/peeling, and possibly stinging. These effects should be short-term as the skin acclimates to retinol, but if they do not dissipate or if they worsen with continued use, stop using the product; retinol at this level may not be right for your skin.

Wei East

The lowdown: The goal of this new line is to bring Chinese herbal remedies together with Western cosmetic science, a fusion aimed at creating new-age products claiming to provide the best ingredients of the present with those of the ancient past. Many of the plant extracts used are unique to this line, but aside from the claims, there is very little proof, beyond anecdotal evidence, that any of the chosen Chinese herbs and some of the various plant extracts have benefit for skin. That fact didn't stop Wei East from assigning all manner of benefits to such romantic-sounding ingredients, such as white lotus, lily, and Chinese rose. The good news is that some of the plant extracts in their products do have a reasonable amount of research backing up the claim for a positive impact on skin. Not surprisingly, Wei East, just like hundreds of other cosmetic lines, also takes their claims far beyond reality. None of these ingredients, from China or anywhere else on earth, will restore skin to its youthful state.

China Herbal Eyes Alive (\$35 for 0.7 ounce) is said to contain a complex herbal formula that works to diminish dark circles and puffiness. Those claims are a standard accompaniment for most eye creams, and this one is no exception. Its emollient will definitely smooth dry areas and temporarily reduce the appearance of wrinkles (as any emollient moisturizer does). This product deserves recognition for its blend of antioxidants (even if none are capable of remedying dark circles or puffiness) and its opaque tube packaging, which will help keep them stable. It is the most intelligently formulated product in the Wei East line.

Paula's Picks 2006

MAKEUP

Almay

The lowdown: Along with revamping their skin-care line, Revlon-owned Almay also reformulated many makeup items within the last year, the most impressive of those being the mascaras below. Almay has always been a notch above Revlon when it comes to mascaras, and their Triple Effect offerings are an offshoot of Revlon's excellent Fabulash Mascara. I don't know what went wrong with Revlon's attempt to make a waterproof version of Fabulash (it's terrible) but Almay definitely succeeded in creating a stellar waterproof mascara that produces long, beautifully separated lashes. Other key Almay makeup items to pay attention to are their foundations, powders, liquid eyeliner, and shimmer products.

One Coat Nourishing Mascara Triple Effect (\$7.99) is marvelous. It has a dual-sided brush that maximizes length, curl, and thickness, though if you get too enthusiastic while applying, it can go on somewhat heavy and uneven. The side of the brush with longer bristles quickly lengthens and separates lashes, while the opposite side has short, closely packed bristles to add thickness and drama. The formula keeps lashes soft yet is easy to remove with a water-soluble cleanser, making this a top choice and one that rivals the best mascaras from L'Oreal. Of course, there is nothing in it that is nourishing for your lashes.



One Coat Nourishing Mascara Triple Effect Waterproof (\$7.99) has the same dual-sided brush as the non-waterproof version of this mascara, but this one has a far thinner texture. That means less drama than the non-waterproof version, but there is no question that this waterproof mascara maximizes lashes quickly and beautifully, and it wears without a hitch.

American Beauty

The lowdown: I was pleasantly surprised by many of the makeup products offered in Estee Lauder's American Beauty line sold exclusively at Kohl's department stores. Not surprisingly, the emphasis among the products is on creating (or emphasizing) natural beauty. With actress Ashley Judd as their spokesmodel, they're on the right track as far

as representing an appealing American woman who's approachably beautiful. American Beauty is primarily about skin care, but their color products, while not comprehensive, are certainly worth a look if you happen upon the products at your local Kohl's store.

Blush Perfect Cheek Color (\$15) is a pretty darn near perfect powder blush. There are 22 attractive shades with a mix of matte and subtle shine versions. The application is sheer and even.

Becca

The lowdown: This Australian import was created by makeup artist Rebecca Morrice Williams and is sold in the United States primarily at Sephora boutiques. A founding principle of the company was that the foundation and concealer shade ranges would feature colors for all women, regardless of skin tone. For the most part, that has been admirably achieved. A distinct highlight is the beautifully neutral yet extensive selection of foundation and concealer shades for all skin tones, from porcelain to ebony. Coinciding with Rebecca's mission to offer complexion-enhancing shades for all women was her goal of creating a "deliberately unmade-up look." Unfortunately, she wasn't as successful in that regard. That's not to imply these products aren't worth considering because most of them are, and some of them are exceptional. Rather, the texture and finish of the foundations, concealer, loose powder, and other items is unlikely to convince you that you're not wearing makeup—nor do they feel weightless, as claimed. Someone with oily to very oily skin wouldn't be pleased with any of the foundations from this line, and the concealer, for all its positive attributes, shouldn't be used over blemishes as recommended. Still, compared to native Australian makeup artist Sue Devitt's line (also sold in many Sephora stores) Becca definitely comes out ahead with mostly superior products and a lower price point to boot.

Compact Concealer (\$35) contains two concealers in one compact. Both formulas are mineral oil-based and have smooth, thick textures that must be warmed (with your fingers) prior to application. The Medium Cover version has a slightly softer consistency and provides nearly opaque coverage on its own. If you still need more camouflage, you can dab on the Extra Cover formula, which does provide a bit more coverage. Despite the oil-based formula, both concealers set to a soft matte finish that is minimally prone to creasing. Unlike many other concealers that provide this level of coverage, Becca's version works without looking thick or obvious on skin (of course, blending is key). The range of 34 (yes, 34) shades is nothing short of remarkable because almost all of them are outstanding and present options for

the fairest to the darkest skin tones. The ones to avoid due to peach, orange, or copper overtones are Brulee, Mallow, Toffee, Pecan, and Fudge. The Butterscotch shade is slightly peach, but can work for some medium skin tones. If you're curious, Compact Concealer is much easier to work with than Laura Mercier's Secret Camouflage (\$28).

Eye Color Powder (\$20) has an awesome silky texture and supremely smooth application that is highly blendable. All of the shades have shine (including those labeled Demi-Matte), but the formula doesn't flake and the pigmentation in most of the shades allows for application over a broad swath of skin tones. Although Chintz and Chiffon are both too green to use alone, they work when mixed with other shades, particularly the many brown-toned options.

Pressed Shimmer Powder (\$34) feels lusciously smooth and has a beautifully even application. The level of shine is moderate to high depending on the shade (all of the shades are gorgeous and versatile), and it not only meshes well with skin but also doesn't flake. This is highly recommended for evening makeup or to highlight specific features.

Translucent Bronzing Gel (\$34) has a cream-gel texture that blends easily and provides a truly translucent bronze color that's appropriate for light to medium skin tones. It isn't the least bit orange, nor is it shiny, making it a prime pick if you're a fan of this type of product.



The Brushes (\$19–\$64) are another standout from Becca. Almost all of them work expertly for their intended purpose, and are well-shaped, full, and soft enough to warrant the splurge. The brushes are composed of natural or synthetic hair, with the synthetic hair options preferred for use with moist products. Particularly great are the Powder/Blush 15 Brush (\$54), Eye Colour Wash 36 Brush (\$37), Brow/Liner Brush 09 (\$25), Eye Colour Blender Brush 35 (\$30), and the versatile Medium Tapered Brush 10 (\$32). The only superfluous brush is the Bronzer/Shimmer Fan Brush 39 (\$35), and some may find the Creme Blush/Bronzer Brush 34 (\$37) too firm for a smooth application.

Bobbi Brown

The lowdown: There is much to admire about this long-standing, Lauder-owned, makeup artist line of products. The selection, colors, and textures continue to evolve and improve, though the prices are inching toward being prohibitive, but the allure of exclusivity created by a price tag is often what attracts many cosmetic shoppers. Brown's color line has for years been a safe bet for finding suitable foundation shades, but it's the selection of unique, innovative products that create excitement—and not just because of the ads and claims, but because the products really work well while remaining user-friendly. An added bonus (at least at the counters I have shopped in various cities) is that Brown's counter personnel, while definitely there to sell products, are also able to offer useful and creative tips about makeup application.

No Smudge Mascara (\$20) really doesn't smudge, but its performance goes beyond that. You'll enjoy how quickly this mascara lengthens lashes without clumps, and it provides more thickness than most waterproof mascaras. It stays on all day, whether you're swimming or getting caught in the rain, and it doesn't make lashes feel dry or brittle. Removing it requires more than a water-soluble cleanser, but that's par for the course. This is one to try if you prefer shopping for mascara at the department store.

Long-Wear Cream

Shadow (\$22) takes a cue from Brown's successful Long Wear Gel Eyeliner and merges that technology into a silky, cream-to-powder eyeshadow collection. Application is surprisingly easy, but you better be fast because the formula sets quickly. It also doesn't have as much initial movement as powder eyeshadow, which can make blending difficult to nearly impossible. In terms of long wear, this passes with flying colors and absolutely refuses to crease (though you may notice slight fading at the end of the day). All but two of the shades have shimmer, but the shine level is mostly subtle to moderate. Bone and Suede are completely matte, with the former being a great all-over shade and the latter good for softly defining the crease. All told, this is a very good option if you're looking for a departure from powder eyeshadow, or something novel to use with a powder eyeshadow. And because the two formulas go together easily, you can apply powder eyeshadow over or under Long-Wear Cream Shadow if you are careful not to rub too hard.



The Body Shop

The lowdown: Eyebrows were raised when cosmetics giant L'Oreal purchased this England-based company in 2006. Knowing L'Oreal's somewhat controversial (at least to animal rights activists) former stance on and history of animal testing, some people expressed disappointment at this alliance, particularly toward founder Anita Roddick. Although L'Oreal no longer conducts animal testing, it still seems like a case of strange bedfellows for The Body Shop (whose stance against animal testing won them many customers in their formative years) to join forces with L'Oreal. Still, improvements among the product selection have already been noted (due to L'Oreal's influence and investment) and, at least on the surface, L'Oreal intends to let this established brand maintain its identity. In addition to the standout product below, you'll likely be pleased with most of The Body Shop's latest foundations, lipsticks, and shimmer products, the latter having several products to choose from.

Lip Line Fixer (\$9) marks the return of a former Body Shop favorite of mine, though the name has been changed. Lip Line Fixer was No Wander in its first incarnation, and this remains a very good automatic, retractable lip pencil whose colorless formula puts an invisible border around the mouth that helps prevent lipstick from feathering into lines. It worked very well as No Wander and works just as well today with its more serious-minded name. Keep in mind that as effective as this pencil is, it won't completely stop greasy, overly slick lipsticks or lip glosses from traveling into lines around the mouth, but for matte to semi-matte finishes it is first-rate.

Clarins

The lowdown: Still known primarily for their vast selection of skin-care products bestowed with plant extracts (though the amount of plants compared to standard synthetic cosmetic ingredients is minimal), cosmetics consumers would be wise to skip that portion of the line and look toward their much improved makeup selections. Clarins has done a particularly good job with their foundations, updating previous formulas with considerable improvements and a decent range of shades. Their loose powder, blush, brow pencil, and lipstick options are also highly recommended, provided the prices are in line with what you can comfortably afford. Interestingly (and honestly), the makeup products don't make a big deal about the plant extracts and instead focus on pigment technology and light-focusing claims which, though still a bit fabled, play out successfully in real life. Just ignore

the constant anti-pollution claims. No amount of foundation or powder is going to keep smoke, smog, or city street grime from affecting your skin.

Express Compact Foundation Wet/Dry (\$36) replaces Clarins Hydrating Powder Foundation and improves on its predecessor in every respect. It has a supremely silky, talc-based texture that blends seamlessly to a natural matte finish that makes skin look dimensional, not dry and powdery. The eight outstanding shades provide sheer to light coverage, but there are no options for dark skin tones. It can be used wet for more coverage, but apply carefully or you risk streaking. This is definitely worth auditioning if you prefer pressed-powder foundations!

Clinique

The lowdown: Just as Estee Lauder has greatly improved their powder eyeshadows, so has Lauder-owned Clinique. Unlike former versions of Clinique powder eyeshadow, the Colour Surge options show up well on skin so you don't have to pile them on to achieve effective shading. I am happy to report that you will find several of Clinique's new foundations, powders, blushes, pencils, mascaras, and lipsticks to be outstanding, with proportionately few products to avoid. If you're a woman of color and haven't stopped by to check out Clinique's latest foundation shades, take another look (and request shade samples, which the sales staff is usually prepared to make). Clinique is also finally offering makeup brushes, and gone are the days of their white-coated consultants trying to apply makeup with nothing more than Q-tips and cotton balls. It may not be coincidental that the availability of makeup brushes happened at the same time several powder-based makeup products improved as well, especially in regards to enhanced pigment saturation and texture.

Colour Surge Eye Shadow Quad (\$25) has the same velvety texture and swift-blending application as Clinique's single and duo Colour Surge Eye Shadows, which is good news! Quads make sense if the shades are well-coordinated, and that is indeed the case with three of the five sets available. Teddy Bear, Spicy, and Choco-Latte are all winners. Regardless of which quad you choose, Clinique's latest eyeshadow formula is far and away their best yet.

Brush-On Cream Liner (\$14.50) deserves consideration if you're a fan of Lauder-owned Bobbi Brown's Long Wear Gel Eyeliner (\$18) or M.A.C.'s Fluidline (\$14.50). Clinique's me-too version is essentially the same thing: A densely pigmented cream-gel eyeliner packaged in a glass jar. The formula applies easily (similar to liquid eyeliner) and sets to



a long-wearing finish that won't smear, smudge, or flake even if oily eyelids are a problem. It may seem like a bonus that Clinique included a brush, but unless you want a thick line, you'll want to experiment with finer-tipped eyeliner brushes. Among the four shades, Black Honey is shiny; the others are classic black, brown, and gray. As with all products of this nature, it must be recapped tightly after each use to prevent the product from drying out.

Cover Girl

The lowdown: A major push for Procter & Gamble-owned Cover Girl (CG) was their Advanced Radiance products being advertised by former CG supermodel Christie Brinkley. Although most of those products (foundation, concealer, and powder) have considerable merit, the foundation reviewed below came out far ahead with its near-perfect texture, seamless application, and natural-looking finish (not to mention great selection of shades, including options for women of color). Other high points of 2006 for Cover Girl were their Lash Exact Mascaras (regular and waterproof), Outlast Double Lip Shine, Outlast Pressed Powder, and IncrediFULL Lipcolor. This is a line that long ago stopped marketing to teens and has wisely catered to and created products for adults intent on looking beautiful without wrecking their budget. Over the last several years Cover Girl has leapt to the forefront of prime drugstore picks, and done away with most of its unpleasant and underperforming products. One note of caution: Their Clean Makeup, the line's oldest foundation, is still around and not recommended due to the irritating ingredients it contains as well as a preponderance of pink, rose, and peach shades that don't resemble anyone's real skin tone.

TruBlend Whipped Foundation (\$7.89) has a delicately whipped, slightly creamy texture that floats onto skin and feels gossamer-light. Blending is easy and it sets to a natural matte finish with a hint of luminosity (not the sparkling or shiny kind). As with Cover Girl's original TruBlend Foundation, most of this version's shades



are versatile, meaning you will likely find that, because of the pigment technology they use, you can wear two or three shades without looking unnatural. Among the 15 colors there are excellent options for fair to dark skin tones. The only shades to avoid due to overtones of pink, peach, or copper are Natural Ivory, Creamy Beige, Toasted Almond, and Natural Beige. This silicone-in-water foundation is best for normal to slightly dry or slightly oily skin. It's also workable for those with dry skin if you apply a moisturizer first.

Dior

The lowdown: Fully immersed in the marriage of makeup and fashion, Dior has adeptly reinvented itself as a hot commodity among trendsetters and the style-conscious. Often when this takes place, it is accompanied by a lack of quality that negatively contrasts the style and flair. Not so here; if anything, Dior's newest products (particularly their foundations and mascaras) are some of their best ever. It's unfortunate the prices are so high, but if you're going to spend in this range for makeup, it's gratifying to know you're getting a fantastic product. Of course, who could forget Dior's shiny powder eyeshadows? Although the shade combinations aren't the easiest to work with (and some should be avoided entirely unless you want your eye makeup to be more caricature than comely) they have one of the smoothest textures and applications around.

DiorSkin Sculpt Lifting Smoothing Concealer (\$28) has a price that should give you pause, but there's no denying that this is a formidable concealer worthy of attention. The silky, silicone-enhanced formula begins slightly thick, but blends very well. It has minimal slip, so it does a great job of staying precisely where you place it, drying to a satin matte finish that provides significant coverage. Dark circles and redness are easily erased, but this concealer never looks too thick, and creases minimally. It comes in three superb shades, though only for fair to medium skin tones. Forget about the sculpting and lifting claims because they are mere fantasy, but the rest is as real as it gets.

DiorShow Waterproof Mascara (\$23) is Dior's best waterproof mascara to date. Although the brush is enormous and can be difficult to work with, you will find it produces copious length and respectable thickness without clumps or smears. The formula is tenaciously waterproof but easier than most to remove with a makeup remover, making it highly recommended if your mascara budget extends to Dior's price point.

Estee Lauder

The lowdown: As much as Lauder excels with their often state-of-the-art moisturizer and sunscreen formulas, many of their makeup products are also not to be overlooked. They have significantly improved their shade selections across the board while at the same time introducing foundation and powder textures that either compete neck-and-neck with the best available or continue to raise the bar. Weak spots include most of the mascaras, some of the eye and brow pencils, and the makeup brushes which, on average, don't compare to those from other Lauder-owned lines (M.A.C. and Bobbi Brown, for example). Just about everything you need for a complete makeup application is available from Lauder, but judicious shopping will serve you well as you navigate the copious offerings and, more often than not, an increasingly helpful rather than pushy sales staff.

Double Wear Stay-in-Place Lip Duo

Duo (\$24) is almost identical to Lauder-owned M.A.C.'s Pro Longwear Lipcolour (\$19.50). There is a slight price difference, and it's worth mentioning that Lauder's version does not offer additional variations of the glossy top coat as M.A.C. does, providing alternative finishes. Otherwise, this version and the one from M.A.C. take first place as the best long-wearing stain/lip colors on the market, though best is a relative comment. For example, we've tested every major contender in this group, from the original Max Factor Lipfinity to copycat versions from Cover Girl, L'Oreal, Lancome, Maybelline, Revlon, and Smashbox and there are drawbacks to this kind of product. Most of them have similar positive attributes and all of them wear longer than traditional lipsticks. Lauder and M.A.C.'s versions excel because they have the smoothest textures and most even wear. When the color starts to fade (and just when that will happen depends greatly on the type of food you eat and how much of the stain and top coat you apply) it does so without chipping or flaking. In addition, the glossy top coat feels light and is completely non-sticky, while others run the gamut from thick and syrupy to super-slick. There are drawbacks to be sure, such as needing to routinely re-apply the top coat to ensure comfortable wear (and the top coat does not last long at all). Speaking of color, Lauder's shade selection is smaller than M.A.C.'s, but there's really not a bad one in the bunch!



Pure Color EyeShadow (\$17.50) has been reformulated, and although the previous version was amazingly silky and applied beautifully and color-true, this one is even better! It has an enviable silkiness and ultra-smooth texture that meshes with your skin rather than looking like powder sitting on top of it. Another refinement is the departure of the chunky Lucite containers. Now each shade is packaged in a flat compact that includes a built-in mirror and throwaway sponge-tip applicator (applying eyeshadow with a brush is always the preferred method). None of the singly-sold shades are truly matte, but the almost matte options (which have a slight reflective quality suitable for daytime wear) include Sand Box, Chocolate, Mink, Taupe, Ivory Box, Plum Pop, and Slate. In line with the "pure color" name, the rest of the shades include traditional and trendy options, with the shades Ivy, Cherry, Aqua, and Lagoon being either too difficult to work with or too clownish for anything but high fashion or theatrical makeup. Pumpkin is a deep orange shade that is tricky to work with, but it is an attractive pairing for darker skin tones when blended with a deeper brown.

Flirt

The lowdown: Inclining itself toward the appeal of Benefit's playful, mischievous, and bawdy names, Lauder-owned Flirt (available exclusive at Kohl's department stores) is all about catching the eye of teens and twenty-something females. Aside from its cutesy appeal, there are some eye-catching items to play with, which is easy to do with the exceedingly convenient tester units. Oh, and the pricing? Nothing flirtatious about that! This line is serious about being reasonably priced. You'll find some wonderful options for pressed powder, powder blush, eyeliner, lipstick, and eyeshadow (including matte shades) that deserve an audition.

Pretty Easy Quick Cover (\$10) is suitably named, as this foundation/concealer is a pretty easy, quick way to apply foundation with almost no chance of making a mistake. I am generally very skeptical of cream-to-powder foundations. Often, they go on and feel too dry and look flaky, go on too creamy and look greasy, or just appear thick on the skin if not blended with diligence. That isn't true for this twist-up-cover stick with skin-accurate shades. It goes on effortlessly, with a silky smoothness that immediately dries to an exceptionally soft powder finish, providing light to medium coverage. Now if only they gave you more product! This 0.17 ounce is stingy at best, but that also means it won't take up much room in your makeup bag. The colors are great and the tester units make experimenting with the various shades simple to do.

Good Skin

The lowdown: Lauder-owned Good Skin's makeup (available at Kohl's department stores) isn't anywhere near as extensive as their assortment of skin-care products, but half of what's available is worth testing. Steer clear of the All Right Makeup and Anti-Acne Concealer, and stick with their powders and, for those with normal to slightly oily skin, the All Firm Makeup.

All Firm Finishing Powder (\$15) has a wonderful silky texture and a sheer application that goes on beautifully. The only shortcoming is that it can be a bit powdery, so be sure to knock the excess off your brush before applying it to be sure you aren't putting on more than you need. Of the six attractive shades, watch out for Level 4, which is slightly peach.

Guerlain

The lowdown: Debuting on my year-end "Best Of" list for the first time is this century-old French line known for their Meteorites powder beads (which don't do much for the face other than add a subtle glow to skin, which can be achieved from many other considerably less expensive lines). Far more noteworthy is the mascara reviewed below, as well as their powder eyeshadows and Divinora Enticing Eyes Mascara. Although not the easiest line to track down, many Sephora stores stock the best of what Guerlain has to offer, and a greater assortment of their products is available on www.sephora.com.

Maxi Lash Extreme Volume Mascara (\$26) is the most impressive mascara Guerlain has produced in years, and this is a company whose mascaras have almost always been more about image than performance. You'll appreciate how adept this is at instantly lengthening and thickening lashes, all with minimal clumping and expert separation. Lashes are dramatically enhanced, though not to the point of some of the newer mascaras (such as L'Oreal Volume Shocking) that make lashes so ridiculously long it's akin to wearing falsies.

Putting that aside, if you're going to spend this much on mascara, this product will absolutely not disappoint, though there are far less pricey options that work as well, if not better.

IsaDora

The lowdown: IsaDora (sold exclusively at Walgreens) is positioned as an internationally appealing, fashion-forward, drugstore cosmetics line, complete with European credentials, which can be an enticement for American consumers (of course in Europe, American-branded product lines have an élan for the consumers there). All of the IsaDora products are fragrance-free, although most of the lip glosses have a flavor that also imparts an aroma. For the most part, IsaDora has some impressive products, and at prices that compete favorably with tried-and-true lines such as L'Oreal and Revlon. However, I disagree with their claim that each product is of the "highest possible quality and the latest development in cosmetics." While that may hold true for some of IsaDora's better products, there are far too many disappointments (particularly in the mascara and lipstick categories) to give credence to this claim of being on the cutting edge of makeup formulations. If you decide to explore this line at your local Walgreens, the items to try include blush, eyeshadows, a couple of the foundations, and several lip glosses.



Compact Foundation Powder (\$11.99) surprised me with its unique texture and application. It's neither a true powder nor a cream-to-powder foundation, but that's what its texture most resembles. It begins slightly creamy, but as soon as you start blending it morphs into a powder with just enough

slip to blend (it is best applied section-by-section because it does set quickly). It's really a unique product and one that is appropriate for normal to slightly oily skin. Use caution if you have dry patches, however, because the powdery finish will exaggerate them. One drawback is that the packaging doesn't allow you to see the colors, but the color stripe on the compact is a fairly accurate representation. As it turns out, all six shades are beautiful, and they all blend out more neutral than they appear in the compact, which is good because a few appear too pink or rose. This is definitely an intriguing product in the IsaDora line, and their most original foundation.

Eye Shadow Quartet (\$10.99) is a find! Although each set of four colors has at least one shiny shade, the texture is magnificent: a creamy-feeling powder that is not the least bit dry, dusty, or flaky. It glides over lids and allows precise blending. The pigment level is higher than usual, so you get stronger color and more coverage than you do from most powder eyeshadows, not to mention long wear. For a professional makeup design, these work great and the price is more than fair. The best combinations (which include a dark color for use as eyeliner) are Pearls, Classic Brown, Crystal Mauve, Pearly Minerals, Silvery Gray, Antique Gold, and Chocolate Brown.

Triple Eye Shadow (\$9.99) has a formula that's identical to that of the Eye Shadow Quartet above, except here you get three shades in one compact. The same positive texture, application, and wear comments apply here as well. Among the trios, the most attractive combinations (again, at least one shade in each is shiny) are Retro Chrome, Sandy Sky, Frosty Mauve, Classic Nougats, Patina, and Golden Espresso. The price for this level of quality is a significant reason to shop this line for eyeshadows, but keep in mind that the shiny shades are best reserved for evening use unless you have firm, unwrinkled eyelids.

Jane

The lowdown: Independently-owned Jane (sold off by Lauder a couple of years ago) still has a decent presence in major drugstore chains, with the best selection typically found at Rite Aid. Always a value-priced line, the price-to-performance ratio is turned on its ear by the products below, proving superior makeup doesn't have to cost a fortune. Other star products from Jane (that have been around for awhile) include their powder blushes and Lipkick Rich Color Lipstick.

Max Lash² for Intense Volume Mascara (\$4.99) is a dual-sided mascara: Step 1 is a white primer, Step 2 is a traditional mascara. As usual, the primer does nothing to improve the application or results. If anything, the mascara alone is preferred for nicely defined, clump-free length and a touch of thickness, though it takes several coats. I don't recommend the primer step, so you're essentially paying for just the mascara, but the price still makes it a bargain.

Shimmering Bronzer (\$5.99) is shine done right because this smooth-textured, almost creamy-feeling pressed powder applies beautifully and clings well. You get five "stripes" of shimmer powder in one compact, complete with a work-

able brush and mirror. The well-coordinated colors can be blended as one shade (to use as bronzer or blush, depending on the set) or one or more colors can be used for eyeshadow and highlighting. This product bests Bobbi Brown's Shimmer Brick Compact because it is silkier (though Jane copied Brown's concept) and because Brown's version costs six times what Jane is charging.

L'Oreal

The lowdown: I'm surprised more makeup products from L'Oreal didn't rate better in 2006, because goodness knows they launched so many! However, L'Oreal is still a force to be reckoned with at the drugstore, and more of their foundations now sport sunscreens that finally have UVA-protecting ingredients. Unfortunately, of late they have rested on their laurels after launching their still outstanding True Match products in 2005. Their Endless Kissable ShineWear Zero-Transfer Lip Duo didn't best or even tie with Max Factor's Lipfinity or Cover Girl's Outlast many imitators and the Volume Shocking Mascara (water soluble version), while definitely impressive, had some drawbacks that didn't merit a Paula's Pick rating. One thing about L'Oreal remains certain: Consumers deciding between their skin care or makeup should always choose the makeup. Almost without exception, L'Oreal's color products present some truly beautiful, appealing options whether skin is fair or deep and their skin-care products more often than not disappoint.

Waterproof Volume Shocking Mascara (\$11.99) is a waterproof mascara that really did produce shocking results, and I mean that in a good way! Although the lash-enhancing result isn't as prodigious as its non-waterproof partner, you'll still be shocked by how long and thick this two-part mascara makes your lashes. A translucent white primer is applied first, using a standard mascara brush. This is followed by a mascara, applied with a serrated comb applicator. It's the applicator that takes lashes from blah to bountiful in seconds, and the more you comb it through your lashes, the longer and thicker they get. However, if you can't restrain yourself, you'll find this produces a too-heavy look that must be smoothed out lest you go all day with thick, spidery-looking lashes. The formula wears well (an overzealous application may produce minor flaking) and takes patience to remove, so be prepared. Otherwise, if you want a false eyelash effect that holds up to rain and tears, you've found it!

Lancome

The lowdown: If you're going to shop L'Oreal-owned Lancome at all (and a lot of you do) the main attraction remains their vast collection of color cosmetics. Particularly noteworthy are their many foundations (and the ones with sunscreen are increasingly including UVA-protecting ingredients), concealers, powders, and, of course, their best-selling mascaras. Lancome launched a new eyeshadow formula in 2006 and although it was well-received and worth a look, what they produced wasn't as impressive as Estee Lauder's Pure Color EyeShadow (reviewed above) or the Colour Surge Eyeshadows from Clinique. Not surprisingly, many of the newest Lancome makeup items had similar if not identical counterparts launched by L'Oreal-owned Maybelline. For example, Maybelline's Dream Mousse Blush (\$6.99) is just like Lancome's Magique Blush Soft-Radiant Mousse Blush (\$28.50). Ditto for Maybelline's Dream Matte Mousse Foundation (\$8.99) and Lancome's Magique Matte Soft-Matte Perfecting Mousse Makeup (\$37.50). Both sets of products are recommended, and it's up to you about spending the extra money to outfit your cosmetics bag with a Lancome-branded product.



Teint Idole Ultra Enduringly Divine and Comfortable Makeup (\$35) debuts as a notable improvement over the original Teint Idole Makeup. As one of the genuine ultra-matte foundations, the original formula provided long wear and good coverage, but application had to be quick and precise because mistakes were not easy to correct. I am thrilled that those negatives have been banished with this updated version. It has a near-weightless silky texture with a fluidity that makes blend-

ing a breeze. It sets to a strong matte finish (and still does so faster than other foundations for oily skin), but you have enough play time to blend it on smoothly and evenly—and if you don't, mistakes can be buffed out. The latest pigment technology allows Lancome to achieve a long-wearing, oil-absorbing matte finish without creating a flat or mask-like appearance. Seventeen medium-to-full-coverage shades are available, and here's where things start to decline a bit. Most of the fair to light shades are excellent, but the deeper shades have an orange to copper cast that even the makeup artist who assisted me commented were "bad shades" that "need more work." I love it when cosmetics salespeo-

ple openly agree with me, so I savor those moments. The shades to be cautious with include Ivoire 2 and 4 (slightly peach) and Suede 2 (can turn peach). Avoid Suede 1 and 4 as well as Bisque 8, all of which are blatantly peach or copper. Suede 5 is the only good option for dark skin tones, and overall, the Buff range of shades is the most workable for light to medium skin tones.

Laura Mercier

The lowdown: For absolutely beautiful foundation textures, impeccable coverage, and a surprising amount of makeup know-how, Laura Mercier's line is tough to beat. The shade range doesn't encompass every skin tone, but the choices are numerous and this line also wins high marks for their powders, cream blush, lip gloss, shimmer products, brushes, and some great mascaras. The prices are somewhat steep, but if you find a couple of products that work for you, it's worth the splurge (especially for foundation, which is critical to get right). Really the only issue with Mercier's makeup is that the few products with sunscreen lack sufficient UVA protection, something that should be corrected because most of her competitors have this edge, including Bobbi Brown, Stila, M.A.C., and BeneFit.

Flawless Face Silk Creme Foundation (\$40) has a name that not only makes you want to try it immediately (Flawless? Silk? Yes, please!), but also happens to be 100% accurate. One of the hallmarks of Mercier's foundations is how well they mesh with skin. Her formulas, even this one that provides significant coverage, somehow manage to look very skinlike, primarily because they don't settle into lines, pores, and minor crevices. Flawless Face Silk Creme Foundation's silicone base blends expertly and sets to a silky matte finish. It is one of the few almost-full-coverage foundations that doesn't look too thick and that doesn't dull down healthy skin's natural luminosity. Granted, as exceptional as these qualities are, this foundation still looks like makeup—no one will believe you're sporting a sheer look—but if that's the kind of coverage you're looking for this deserves serious consideration by those with normal to oily skin. Each of the seven shades is impeccable, but there are no options for someone with dark skin.

M.A.C.

The lowdown: I have sung the praises of M.A.C. for years, as they were not only one of the first makeup artistry-driven brands to hit the scene but they also offer a nearly overwhelming number of options for everything from foundation

to lipstick. Through the years their foundation shade range has remained a strong attraction to shop this department store counter, because, for the most part, they have options whether skin is porcelain or ebony (and everything in between). They also remain one of the few cosmetic lines to offer more than a handful of matte blushes and eyeshadows, many available in portable palettes that can be refilled. When it comes to long-wearing lipsticks, M.A.C's Pro Longwear Lipcolour (\$20) is the champion—and let's not forget their exquisite range of makeup brushes that allow you to take the artistry home and recreate it every day. Although more a copycat than innovator, the product below (and others) demonstrates that the folks behind M.A.C. intend to not only match the benchmark but rise above it. For the most part, they tend to succeed with (pardon the pun) flying colors.

Technakohl Liner (\$14.50) is the eyeliner pencil to choose if you demand a supremely smooth application that doesn't drag or skip while imparting rich color. Initially creamy, this automatic, retractable pencil's formula sets to a soft powder finish that remains smudge-resistant. All of the shades except Brownborder are laced with shine, so if shine's not on your must-have list, stick with that shade. And unless your eyelining goal is to draw attention to the liner rather than to your eyes, skip Jade Way, Auto-de-blu, and Smoothblue.

Max Factor

The lowdown: Procter & Gamble-owned and failing Max Factor has a fabled legacy they tried to parlay into increased sales this past year. Figuring they needed more sex appeal and allure, they hired model/actress Carmen Electra and fashion makeup artist Pat McGrath to spice things up. Along with racier ads came sleek new packaging and displays, but apparently few consumers noticed (or cared) because many major drugstores have dropped the Max Factor line entirely. It's not a huge loss, however, because all of their star products have an identical yet less expensive counterpart in the Cover Girl line (also owned by Procter & Gamble). If you're curious to try Max Factor, they are typically found in Wal-Mart stores. Products to pay attention to are their Colour Adapt Foundation, Colour Perfection Luxe Gloss, the mascaras, and, of course, the product that forever changed the long-wearing lipstick category: Lipfinity.

Lash Perfection Waterproof Mascara (\$6.99) wins high marks for being an overall excellent mascara if your goal is equal parts length and thickness without results that are too excessive. If your mascara mantra is longer, thicker, drama ... well, this doesn't impress to that extent. But it is waterproof, shows its stuff quickly without clumping, and wears all day without a hitch.

Maybelline New York

The lowdown: This L'Oreal-owned mainstay line has almost as many positives as L'Oreal's namesake line. Their foundation shades have improved considerably, as have their powder textures and, to a lesser but still noticeable extent, their powder blush and eyeshadows. However, Maybelline's raison d'être is mascaras, and this is extremely apparent when perusing their in-store displays (the mascaras typically get one-third to one-half the allotted space). The mascara below and many others (such as Unstoppable and Volum' Express, but not Great Lash) are reason enough to shop this line, but they surprise in other areas too, such as with the Superstay Lipcolor, several excellent concealers, and eyelining options. No one will look at your elongated lashes and colored lips and think "Maybe she's born with it" but there's many reasons to be proud to say "it's Maybelline."

Intense XXL Volume + Length Microfiber Mascara (\$7.99) is similar to L'Oreal's Volume Shocking Mascara reviewed above, but (despite the name) this is less intense. It involves a two-step process of base plus top coat, although—just like Maybelline's other XXL mascaras—the top coat makes little difference, assuming you're willing to apply two or three coats of the mascara itself. The best news is that whether or not you use the base coat, you'll get beautifully long, nicely separated, and moderately thickened lashes with absolutely no clumps. The formula wears well and removes easily, making for hassle-free work all around!

Superstay Lipcolor (\$9.49) brings us another Lipfinity imitator, though I must admit that a few of these "me-too" products have wound up performing better (in one aspect or another) than the originator. Maybelline's version is one such example, it bests Lipfinity by the way it wears more evenly. Superstay Lipcolor is a two-part process: You first apply a color coat, wait two minutes for it to set (it feels very sticky as it dries, unlike most of the other long-wearing lip paints out there), and then you apply a glossy top coat to ensure a shiny finish and, more importantly, comfortable wear. Whereas Lipfinity, like Cover Girl's identical Outlast Lipcolor, tends to wear off at the inner portion of the lips, Superstay Lipcolor stays and stays. There's just one caveat: This is not a liquid lipstick that makes it through a meal, though it's fine with just drinks. This is partially because Maybelline's shade range is so soft. Most of the colors, even those that appear intense, apply sheer, and layering doesn't build significantly more color. Removing this product requires using mineral oil, Vaseline, or an oil-based cleanser. The top coat is in stick form, and feels similar to the top coats that accompany Lipfinity and Outlast. Although I disagree with Maybelline's claim that Superstay Lipcolor lasts 16 hours, it is another terrific alternative to traditional lipstick and definitely an alternative to the here-this-minute-gone-the-next lip glosses.

N.V. Perricone

The lowdown: This doctor-designed line is known for its skin care, supplements, and many books penned by Perricone himself. Imagine my surprise when he launched a tinted moisturizer that bested many others, albeit at a hefty price. Perricone's line isn't suffering, meaning lots of consumers are buying the hype (and a lot of it is hype because there is little substantiated research to back up many of his claims, but that's another story) and at these prices it is imperative to know what works (and why) and what doesn't. Just to be clear, as well formulated as this moisturizer is it doesn't outshine Neutrogena's or Bobbi Brown's, which sell for far less money.

Active Tinted Moisturizer SPF 15 (\$65) ranks as one of the most expensive tinted moisturizers available, but at least all of the necessary bases (and then some) are covered. Featuring an in-part titanium dioxide sunscreen, the formula applies smoothly, and its creamy texture leaves normal to very dry skin sufficiently moist, with a fresh, dewy finish that doesn't feel greasy. The formula even includes several antioxidants, and it's packaged to ensure they remain stable after the product is opened. Two of the three shades are great; only Tint 03 is quite yellow, with an effect that is difficult to soften on medium skin. Still, it may be worth a try at the counter to see how it looks, assuming you're willing to pay the premium price. For about half as much money, equal kudos go to Bobbi Brown's SPF 15 Tinted Moisturizer (\$38) and Aveda's Inner Light Tinted Moisture SPF 15 (\$25). For even less money, Neutrogena's Healthy Skin Enhancer SPF 20 (\$11.99) and Paula's Choice Natural Finish Oil-Absorbing Makeup SPF 15 (\$12.95) are other prime options.

Paula's Choice

The lowdown: I must admit I had more fun this year expanding my makeup line. Getting the basics right (revisiting my foundations, concealers, lipsticks, and mascaras) took more time and considerably more effort than planned so it was nice to add a new product that was unique, effective, and wearable. This Gel Eyeliner quickly became a favorite of mine and within a few months became one of the most popular products in my makeup line. Based on customer requests, additional shades will launch in 2007.

Constant Color Gel Eyeliner (\$10.95) is a long-wearing, water-resistant gel-cream eyeliner. Its uniquely smooth, quick-drying formula has the texture of a thick cream lipstick, helping it to apply easily next to the lashes with your favor-



ite eyeliner brush. This versatile product provides the best of both worlds with the dramatic effect of liquid eyeliner and the smooth application of liquid or powder liner. It applies quickly and won't smudge, fade, smear or tear-off once it has set.

Rimmel

The lowdown: London-based and with a British rocker edge, Rimmel is now available in many drugstores (and the cosmetics superstore Ulta) and deserves recognition for producing some of the best mascaras at any price point. If you're turned off by Kate Moss as their spokesmodel (their makeup doesn't have to make you look like that), try to look past her because you could be missing some affordable, terrific products. Their Natural Bronzer, Exaggerate Full Colour Eye Definer, and lipsticks are also standouts though the packaging for many products needs to be reconsidered due to its impracticality or cheap feel. Still, what's inside matters most and in that regard Rimmel tends to please.

Volume Flash Instant Thickening Mascara (\$5.99) continues Rimmel's mostly successful batting record by being a formidable thickening mascara. It lengthens, too, but is best for creating beautifully separated, really thick lashes. You won't find the thickness is instant, but with some effort (and no clumps) your lashes will be captivatingly dramatic! Added bonus: Lashes stay soft, and this removes easily with a water-soluble cleanser.

Sephora

The lowdown: Sephora's private label makeup selection rivals what's sold in every other line they carry in terms of selection, but not consistency. Usually displayed at the front of the store (hey, it is their own brand) the products tend to be hit or miss. In addition to the kit below and their vast selection of very good makeup brushes and all manner of grooming tools (from blotting papers to eyelash curlers and toe separators) you'd be wise to check out their Lengthening Mascara, Extreme Lash Mascara, and, for shimmer fans, the Luminizer. And because this is Sephora, there are testers available for every item and every shade, not to mention plenty of mirrors and supplies to clean things off afterward.

Stila



Arch It Brow Kit (\$35) is just about one of the most practical brow kits I've ever seen. Packaged in a chic leather case about the size of a change purse are a compact housing brow powder, brow wax, two synthetic brushes, a mini clear brow gel, a full-size pair of tweezers, brow stencils, instructions, and a larger (but too scratchy) brow brush. The brow powder is matte, and although the accompanying wax looks too dark to coordinate with the powder, it applies sheer. The instructions are brief, but accurately tell you how to use the stencils (three shapes are included) to perfect your brows. If you are new to the practice of brow tweezing and shaping, this kit will get you off to a great start and is highly recommended!

The lowdown: Now independently owned after being sold by the Estee Lauder Companies, Stila is still helmed by Hollywood makeup artist Jeanine Lobell and is now primarily available in Sephora stores. The line has not lost its touch for offering an outstanding selection of neutral foundation shades, along with some brilliant concealers, matte powder blush, and enough innovative products to keep things fresh. Given the overall quality and high performance of this line, I still cannot imagine why Lauder sold it, but there's likely more to the story than what was revealed in the trades, and regardless of ownership, as long as Stila's best products remain, that's reason enough to seek out the line and see what strikes your fancy.

Perfecting Foundation (\$30) was the only stick foundation launched from a major cosmetics company last year. A couple of years ago it seemed like all the well-known lines offered this type of foundation, but these days they seem to have fallen out of favor. Leave it to Stila to save one of the best for last, because this new option is a commendable choice for normal to dry skin not prone to breakouts. (That's because, as with all stick foundations, the ingredients that keep it in stick form aren't the best to use over blemishes.) Perfecting Foundation has a creamy, soft texture that glides over skin, feeling almost gel-like but leaving a noticeably moist (but not greasy) finish. If not blended well it can look heavy, but smoothing things out with a sponge or, as Stila recommends, applying it with a foundation brush, solves this problem. When it's carefully blended you'll get medium to almost-full coverage, and this doubles as a concealer for trouble spots (though it's not recommended to conceal breakouts). Each of the 13 shades is recommended. Stila has an ongoing knack for creating true skin shades, and they did it again with this foundation. Whether you have fair or very dark skin, chances are you'll find an impressive match here.



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