



Shu Uemura:
**Beyond
Beauty**

THE WORLD'S OLDEST LIVING MAKEUP ARTIST CONTINUES TO REDEFINE BEAUTY, PLUMBING 1000M BELOW JAPAN'S OCEAN SURFACE IN SEARCH OF ITS SECRET SOURCE FOR HIS FIRST HEALING SPA



No other make-up artist better merits the latter part of his or her professional title than Tokyo-based cosmetics genius, Shu Uemura. As a painter before his canvas, for the last 45 years he has let his imagination run free, creating textures, inventing pigments, concocting palettes and developing holistic skincare regimens that have transformed our concept of contemporary beauty. Like Max Factor, Estée Lauder and Helena Rubinstein before him, his nomenclature has become so iconic that one forgets it's associated with an actual person.

Artful expressions of his unbridled, unconventional creativity, Shu Uemura's products mirror the man himself. Poetic, dashingly deft, groundbreaking and legendary, they have played a pivotal role in the modernization and maturation of our rituals of beauty. Created in the late '60s while Uemura was working as a cinema make-up artist for Hollywood, his first product, Unmask (the precursor to his now-famous collection of Cleansing Oils), was the only product at the time effective and sensitive enough to purify, hydrate and protect the skin of 1960s cinema starlets after a day on the job. Combining therapeutic ingredients with novel textures and high-tech design, its success was a watershed for his eponymous brand.

Celebrating his 80th birthday next year, Shu Uemura (who sold a majority of his company to L'Oréal in 2003), continues to upstage the competition. Last year he launched Rouge Unlimited, a revolutionary range of lipsticks that boasts a sophisticated hybrid pigment technology; he also launched Utoco, a therapy-healing spa located on Japan's remote Shikoki Island that taps the region's pure, mineral-rich deep-sea water for its treatments and product.



Shu Uemura:

definition of luxury:

“Comfort, like taking a bath. Relaxed, and feeling a sense of satisfaction. It can be a very comfortable room as well. Whether it’s a room like a modern art museum or a vacation home, if you feel comfortable, it is luxury.”

If luxury were...

An object.

A comfortable chair or bed that is beautifully designed.

A moment.

When I wake up in the morning from a good night’s sleep, as after having a nice dream.

A place.

Mother’s womb.

A person.

My mother.



ROUGE UNLIMITED

You began as an actor and then worked as a make-up artist for cinema before launching your own beauty range. What did those years working for film teach you about the art of appearance?

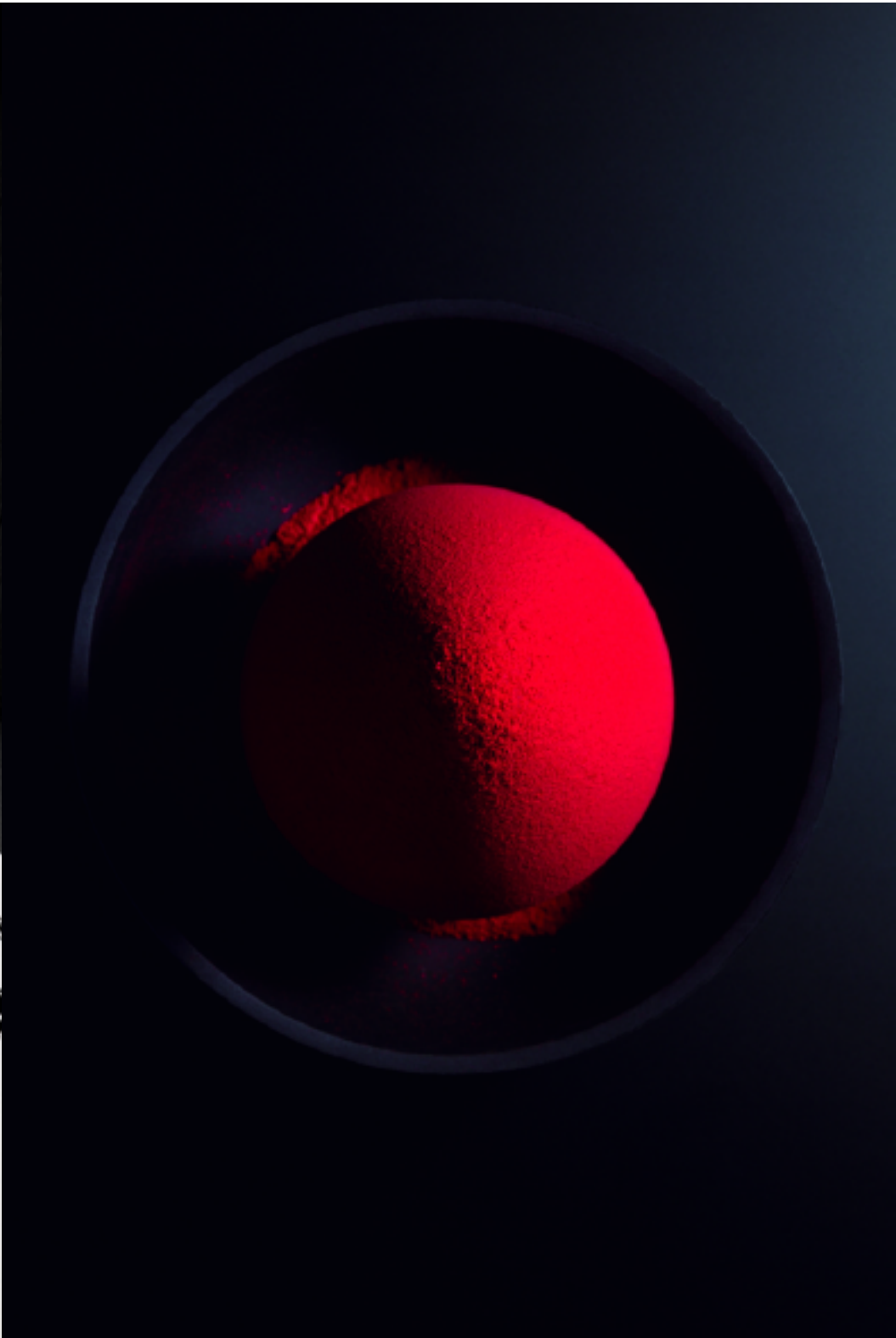
First, I learned to quickly understand the characteristics of the person (models, actresses...) and how to bring out the best of that person. Especially if I was doing makeup for an actress, I had to keep in mind the role's character. Second, it helped to develop dexterity and speed, since I had to be very fast in doing makeup for a film. And last but not least, it taught me the power of simplicity, of never doing too much.

One of your latest ranges plays with paradoxes, juxtaposing vivid with sheer, demure with glossy, pure color with high design. What do you find so appealing about contrasts?

It is interesting to see how two completely different qualities enhance each other. I never want to be too obsessed with symmetry.

Your new Rouge Unlimited line is inspired by pigments developed by a 17th century porcelain potter who was able to capture difficult hues in his finishes. How was this ancient technique adapted into the color-fidelity technology?

The potter inspired me to attempt to break the boundaries of color in lipstick. I wanted to expand the potential of makeup color. Shu Uemura pigment is made in Japan; the hybrid pigment in the Rouge Unlimited collection is the result of a long collaboration between Shu Uemura laboratories and a leading Japanese company specialized in ink creation.



Was this the first time that an ancient formula inspired a new product or range?

No, I look at many natural formulas from around the world and research their validity. For example, Beta Glucan was known as a health supplement for a number of decades for its amazing healing properties before this inspired me in creating the ACE B-G skincare line.

When conceiving of new products, where do you look for inspiration?

In order to create uniquely beautiful high quality products for professionals, we need to combine things found in nature through science, then add art and imagination.

You popularized the concept of skincare makeup, meaning makeup that actually improves the skin's metabolism. How do the ingredients in your makeup achieve this goal?

Almost all the products include ingredients from deep-sea water that moisturize the skin.

How and when did you become aware of the healing properties of deep-sea water?

Water is the source of life, and the source of beauty. I have always believed the quality of water to be of importance when creating cosmetics, too. In the 1980s, I heard of a group of scientists studying deep-sea water near Cape Muroto in Kochi Prefecture, Japan. Common folklore said that this water could help heal skin conditions and was used for its health benefits in food and medicine. When I first touched the deep-sea water, I was surprised to feel how gentle, soft and moisturizing it felt on the skin. Depsea Water was launched in 1998.



DEPSEA WATER



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You claim to be able to tell the purity of water by touch? Is your sensitivity to water related to your belief that the secret to beautiful skin lies in the rituals of cleansing?

I can tell the water's hardness or softness, or if the water would be soothing to the skin.

The Utoco spa is located in a rugged area a two-hour drive from the airport. How important is the sense of making a pilgrimage to this healing site as a part of the therapeutic experience?

Shikoku is actually known for the Buddhists' pilgrimage of the 88 temples around the island, and we can see the statue of Kobodaishi from the spa entrance. I'd like to think that the distance keeps the spa away from the modern urban lifestyle many people lead and keeps the area quiet. The spa is there to be a sanctuary for focusing only on one's wellbeing. Muroto in Shikoku is also the only place in Japan where the deep-sea water naturally comes close enough to the surface so that we can reach it.

How is the spa conceived as a total environment devoted to deep-sea water?

All the spa treatments use deep-sea water. The pool is filled with deep-sea water. The food is cooked in deep-sea water. And we have lots and lots of deep-sea water to drink.



DOVE BRADSHAW
SIX CONTINENTS: SOUTH AMERICA
2005



DOVE BRADSHAW
SIX CONTINENTS
2006

“If I had to name one contemporary artist whose work I admire most these days it would probably be Dove Bradshaw.” Shu Uemura



“Cleansing oil
has been the
first and most
significant
innovation.”

Shu Uemura

For someone who is so devoted to the healing elements of the natural world, you are also very open to avant-garde design and technologies. Why, in your opinion, do nature and technology balance one another out so well?

We are born from nature, and we return to nature. Science allows us to advance. To me, nature, avant-garde designs, and technology are not contradictory at all.

From Unmask to Rouge Unlimited, which of your innovations are you most proud of for their contribution to the modern-day rituals of beauty and well-being?

Cleansing oil has been the first and most significant innovation. In the last 40 years it has changed the way people cleanse. From the original Unmask beauty oil, the current cleansing oil has been reworked over 10 times, each time improving the texture, action and ingredients.

If you could create any beauty product, what would it be?

A product that would rejuvenate the skin. Rebirth of the skin. n

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