



Natural *beauty*

Inspired by her childhood in Kazakhstan surrounded by nature, Bath-based Olga Brennand founded an organic skincare brand which harnesses the power of herbs and plants

WORDS: Catherine Welton



The door is opened by a smiling woman in a crisp white shirt, with the sort of dewy, flawless skin that makes you wonder how old she is. Of course, I'm far too polite to ask. As she leads me to the treatment room for my face sculpting massage, I can smell geranium, rose and something earthier too, and I feel myself relaxing in anticipation.

Olga Brennand is the founder of Thirns, an organic skincare brand that's based in Bath – but was inspired by her childhood in Kazakhstan. 'It's a mysterious, beautiful place with mountains, woods and pine trees. The nature there is full of herbs and wild berries,' she recalls. 'I always loved seeing how the plants develop from a really cold spring (it could be minus 40 sometimes), and how they grow and become powerful. Whenever I felt unwell, my mother would

create remedies from the herbs and plants.'

Olga was drawn to a career in cosmetology and worked for some of the biggest names in the industry, including Guinot and Estée Lauder. After moving to the UK in 2010, she worked on Harley Street and for the Avanti Aesthetics Academy, where she still practises today.

Having worked with a huge range of products over the years, in 2022 Olga decided to create her own skincare range inspired by her love of nature. 'I always wanted to have better results, I always continued my training, and I started to read more deeply into ingredients and combinations of ingredients, particularly herbs and plants.'

Perhaps surprisingly, she finds the same inspiration in the countryside around Bath as she did in Kazakhstan. 'It's like déjà vu. I see wild oregano, yarrow, chamomile,



Sea buckthorn, rosehip, raspberry and juniper take centre stage in Olga's products

and I think, "I know them!". Even the soil is similar.'

'Thirns' is an old English word for thorns, and thorns – including rose, sea buckthorn, rosehip, raspberry and juniper – take centre stage in Olga's products.

'I love thorns! Sea buckthorn berries are a unique medicine, because they have so many vitamins, it will heal everything. During cold winters, if my hands are cracked, I use sea buckthorn oil under cotton gloves. You wouldn't believe it; in the morning the cracks are gone. Raspberries are always calming and restoring, especially after being in the sun, they're good for inflamed skin or any allergies.'

Other ingredients in Thirns products include horsetail, one of the oldest plants in the world, and seaweed. 'Seaweed is so powerful,' Olga marvels. 'Did you know not all of them have even been discovered yet? It's incredible that they live underwater and produce chlorophyll.'

'Plant extract is so unique, my whole life I've seen how it works. Plants are always trying to help us.' Which is why she also believes in sustainability. 'Plants should be grown and harvested organically; that's respect and love.'

Two new products are currently in development, a vitamin C mask and an oil serum, but Olga says she's mindful not to expand the range too much. 'It's nice to add something new but I do it really carefully, because all the products should work synergistically together.'



The Thirns Skincare range

As I settle onto the massage table, I ask Olga what I can expect from a Thirns facial. 'It will be pleasant and relaxing but also powerful. The lymphatic drainage massage is based on your anatomy and will put the facial muscles in the correct position, so more open eyes, a lifted jaw line. And, of course, moisturised and glowing skin.'

After a relaxing deep cleanse with a balm made with rosehip and juniper (at home, she advises leaving it on while you're brushing your teeth, for the full effect, 'It's a shame to remove it straight away!'), she begins the massage. With Olga's firm but gentle pressure, I feel like my face is being given an invigorating yoga work-out. It's very relaxing and I almost drift off a couple of times.

A brush exfoliation follows, and then the revitalising mask, made from brown and green algae and rose. There's a pleasant

tingle, just enough that you know it's doing something.

After 10 minutes, the mask is removed and she applies eye cream – with a helpful tip: If you want to reduce dark circles, you need to improve the circulation so apply outwards to inwards – but if you're addressing puffiness, apply the opposite way. Next, a lip balm with raspberry oil. Olga advises wearing it during the day as a gloss or at night, worn over and above the lip line, to help prevent vertical wrinkles above the top lip.

She finishes with a spritz of energising mist and my skin feels fresher and plumper than it has in a long time.

As we say our goodbyes, I ask her if she could guess how many faces her hands have treated over the years. 'It's a good question!' she laughs, 'But if I started trying to think about it, I'd give up counting!' ●

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