



# Marc Belle

FOUNDER OF MR BLACKMAN'S

"I'm one of those people who likes to solve a problem – and if someone else hasn't solved it, then I'm going to try. If that means learning a new skill, then that's what I'll do," explains Marc Belle, creative director and founder of men's grooming brand Mr Blackman's. In this case, the problem was a lack of beard and skincare products designed for Black and mixed-race men – something Marc, who is of Bajan heritage, discovered after growing a beard.

Unimpressed by the itchy, oily and generally ineffective products on the market (most of which were aimed at White men), he decided to create his own. Despite his non-scientific background ("let's not talk about how I did in chemistry at school," he laughs), he knew "a bit about plants," and was soon researching and experimenting with balms, oils and blocks of soap.

Fast-forward four years, and the Brighton-based entrepreneur has singlehandedly grown his kitchen lab into an award-winning brand, that's won plaudits for its back-to-basics, eco-conscious approach. Handmade in small batches, products draw inspiration from the natural bounty of Barbados, with authentic botanical ingredients such as crushed coriander, shea butter, coconut and seaweed sourced fairly and sustainably. To simplify skincare regimes, Marc has purposefully kept the range streamlined to beard oil, aftershave balm, and a combined shampoo and shave bar.

It's easy to be cynical when every beauty brand is trumpeting its sustainable, fair trade, green and natural credentials, but they practice what they preach: "When it comes to suppliers, we look for companies that care and do the right thing; it's not about getting the cheapest suppliers, it's about getting the best quality." Packaging is kept to a minimum, and soap offcuts are kept for personal use.

He might not be a chemist, but Marc's on to a winning formula. Hot on the heels of a collaboration with fellow Bajan brand, Mount Gay Rum, Mr Blackman's has been shortlisted as a finalist in the Great British Entrepreneur Awards 2020, bolstered by strong sales and an active online community exploring issues such as mental health. "We see everyone that supports us on social, whether they've got 10 followers or 10,000, as part of the team, because without them we wouldn't be doing this," adds Marc.

The 'core' team for manufacturing, packing and shipping is Marc himself, with a little help from his wife. Running a successful skincare brand is actually his second job alongside a career as a creative director, graphic designer and digital marketing strategist for the likes of Sony, MTV, Google and Diesel. "Free time? Who needs that?" He jokes when asked how he juggles it all. Mr Blackman's is still the David to the Goliath of Bevel, the grooming brand owned by Tristan Walker, but Marc has plans to expand across the Caribbean and the UK.

Ultimately, as long as he's making people smile, Marc is happy. "I could say working from home, or setting my own hours, or physically creating the products is the best thing about running my own brand, but actually it's knowing you've created something that not only works, but that people like, talk about and share."