

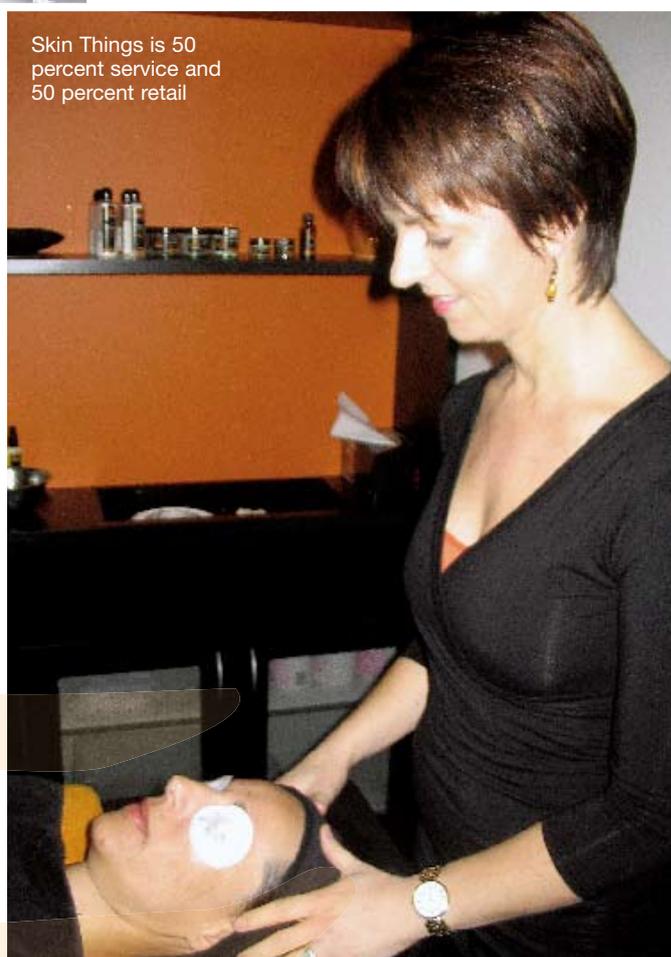
The Heart of Skin Things

by Michelle Hespe

Australian Giftguide Magazine took a trip to Adelaide and delved into a skincare store and beauty salon where everything is naturally moving ahead...



Jennie takes care of a customer



Skin Things is 50 percent service and 50 percent retail

In 1995, Caroline Bugg was working as a beauty therapist at Myers in Adelaide when she decided to do some of her own research into the products she was promoting. After work, she paid a visit to her local bookstore and bought a cosmetic chemical dictionary that changed her life, for she was horrified to discover the chemical content of products she had been recommending to customers.

"I was selling moisturising creams that cost \$150 for 30grams, and I couldn't believe what they had in them!" she said. "I became so disillusioned. I couldn't sell products that I didn't believe in."

So four weeks into her research, Caroline quit her job at Myers and decided to make her own cosmetics. Her theory was that if she couldn't buy exactly what she wanted, she'd make it herself. Of course, it wasn't long before friends began commenting on how good her skin looked and orders for her homemade products started streaming in.

"I don't test on animals - I test on humans! My friends were my guinea pigs," she said. "If I had a friend with oily skin, or someone with acne, I'd get to work. My sister had dry skin under her eyes and it took so many products and almost over a year to create the perfect eye cream for her. She'd try something for a month and then it just stopped working for her or something would work for a week and then it made her skin worse. Finding what is right for different people can be a really long process."

Knowing what ingredients she wanted in different products was a great start for Caroline and knowing what worked and what didn't work on her friends also helped her to move forward, but then came her first big hurdle.

"I had to work out how to preserve things naturally," she said. "Mashing bananas and sticking them on your face is all very well, but who has the time to do that every day? So then how do you preserve a

mixture that works for you? So once I worked out how to make a particular product, I had to think about how I could keep it from going bad."

By this stage Caroline had set her heart on creating her own skincare business, so she applied for the government funded New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS). She took on the course offered and went through the demanding process of making a comprehensive business plan while studying accounting, marketing and sales.

At the end of the course, participants were required to present their business idea and the board made a decision as to whether it was inventive enough and whether it would work when put into action. Needless to say, the board passed Skin Things with flying colours and Caroline was awarded an income for a year, similar to job start allow-

sure that my customers and clients are getting something that is right for them. Then they'll come back when they discover that what they've bought is actually making a difference."

Although Skin Things is not entirely organic, it is purely natural.

"There are many products out there that may be grown organically, but are not certified organic, so we can't use them and promote our products as organic," Caroline said. "Right now, going completely organic would mean I would lose some of the complexity of my products. For instance the eye creams alone have 20 ingredients. However I want to eventually make sure everything is organically, 100 percent natural."

Caroline is well aware that over the past decade, the number of people savvy about what is organic or natural and what is not has grown rapidly and companies that promote their products as natural when they are not are giving themselves a bad name.

"People are reading labels these days and they know what they are putting on or near their bodies," Caroline said.

Products for sale at Skin Things range from lip balms and hand creams to face oils, scrubs and cleansers to bath salts, soaps, body sprays, shampoos and conditioners. The popular orange and cinnamon face scrub and the olive oil peppermint foot balm are just two of the scents mingled with other delicious concoctions that make entering a Skin Things store akin to walking into a sweet smelling banquet of desserts. You'd be forgiven for having the desire to eat most of the products.

Packaging is also critical to the success of Skin Things, so labels are bright and dynamic. "People tend to be attracted to a product by the packaging first and then they will smell it to see if they like it. If they like the smell they then decide to purchase it to try it," Caroline said. "Packaging and smell are very important in determining whether a consumer buys a skincare product. And we have to remember that we're competing with massive companies with millions of dollars to spend on branding and making their products look good, so you really have to shine."

The nut of Skin Things however, is the fact that unlike the products that she once pushed in a department store, Caroline believes in what she is selling, so her passion for her products shines through in every facet of the business.

"Basically, I want to know that people are buying a product that helps them and a product that they, and I, believe in," she said. ☐



Shop manager Nicole Hepple (left) and executive manager Jennie Simon behind the counter of Skin Things



Owner/founder of Skin Things, Caroline Bugg

ance, while she set up shop. She has never looked back.

"I've always had big visions for Skin Things," Caroline said. "My vision is to have specialised concept stores, kind of like The Body Shop. I want to have a friendly retail shop that doubles as a beauty salon. Salons are often cold, unfriendly and they are usually targeted towards women only. Many beauty salons only have people walking in if they have an appointment, because they are timid about entering and just looking around. I want people to feel comfortable about walking in and just browsing."

Skin Things is taking off. It has just moved to a larger store as it outgrew its original premises and it now has two beauty consultants in Victoria and two in NSW. Skin Things is approximately 50 percent service and 50 percent product sales. The business also has Party Plans whereby the hostess is pampered with a treatment such as a facial and her guests have the opportunity to sample the products.

Caroline believes Skin Things is working because she is result driven, her staff are extremely well trained and knowledgeable when it comes to the products and the human body, and she also emphasises the educational side of the store.

"I like to educate people about their skin and let them know why they should or should not use particular products. I also want to make



Inside a Skin Things store



A gift-boxed assortment of Skin Things



The dynamic packaging of Skin Things catches the eye