

Best of Beauty 2005

A Special Report
by Paula Begoun



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From Avon to Lancome, Neutrogena, Z. Bigatti, and on and on, hundreds of new skin-care, makeup, and hair-care products hit the shelves in 2005 and were reviewed in the past year's *Cosmetics Counter Update* newsletter (and then often included in my online free Beauty Bulletin). Here I have selected only the products that meet my exacting, rigorous criteria, and based on in-depth research have been shown to be the best of the best. The products that make my year-end list exemplify the amazing strides the field of cosmetics chemistry combined with other sciences continues to make. It is a thrilling time to be a cosmetics consumer, but making sure the products you buy meet current standards for advanced, superior formulations is not easy. While there are better products than ever before, there are still far too many that are either poorly formulated, absurdly overpriced, labeled with misleading and overexaggerated claims, or even worse, a combination thereof. Those armed with the knowledge to separate fact from fiction can keep their budgets intact and truly make a difference in their appearance (yes, meaning, dare I say it, wrinkles or blemishes will be less evident and less likely to occur)—now that's money well spent!

Among my top choices are foundations, concealers, and powders that are setting new standards of excellence, and, even more exciting, state-of-the-art moisturizers (lotions, creams, and serums) that allow skin to behave in a healthier, “younger” manner. An increasing amount of sunscreens have elegant and silky aesthetics to encourage daily compliance, and we're seeing more anti-blemish products that contain effective ingredients and have a genuine chance of working (rather than making matter worse). Finally, some hairstyling products are a cut above the rest—these are beauty breakthroughs everyone should know about!

Before you read through the 2005 winners, please note this list is strictly about great formulations and, in the case of makeup products, impressive textures and application. An item's inclusion on this list does NOT mean I found even a fraction of the companies' claims about their products true or how the products were marketed the least bit valid.

Note: Fewer moisturizers appear on this year's list because packaging became part of the criteria for inclusion. Antioxidants, cell-communicating ingredients, and anti-irritants decompose and deteriorate with exposure to air or light, so products containing these types of ingredients that came in jars or clear packaging could not be included in the “Best of the Best,” even if the formulation itself was outstanding.

One More Note: For more information about how I rate products please refer to the Learn section of my web site at www.CosmeticsCop.com.

The Best Skin-Care Products of 2005

Anthony Logistics for Men



The lowdown: This men's skin- and hair-care line has, like most lines aimed at men, more than its share of needlessly irritating products. However, the product below shows what they can accomplish when they focus on gentle, effective treatment rather than marketing claims.

Nighttime Acne Treatment (\$30 for 1.6 ounces) contains 2% salicylic acid (BHA) and—surprise!—has an effective pH (3.6), meaning it will indeed be able to exfoliate skin and help dislodge blackheads and heal blemishes. This is an excellent BHA product for normal to oily skin, but if you're battling multiple blemishes you should be aware that one of the main ingredients in this product is cornstarch, which is a food-based ingredient that can potentially cause an increase in the bacteria responsible for blemishes. If your main concern is blackheads (which are unrelated to bacteria), this 2% BHA option is worth considering.

Burt's Bees

The lowdown: I admit to not being a fan of this natural product line, primarily because of the many irritating plant extracts used in almost every product they sell. Just because an ingredient has a natural source doesn't automatically make it good for skin, and many of these ingredients are extremely problematic. Unless an ingredient has substantiated benefit for skin, throwing it into a product is a serious drawback. So imagine my surprise when I came across this incredibly well-formulated, rather simple hand cream for dry skin and had nothing but positive comments. How about more of the same, Burt? Put your bees to work creating more non-irritating, effective products like the one below and I'll be glad spread the news!

Shea Butter Hand Repair Cream (\$11 for 3.18 ounces) contains several outstanding ingredients to provide swift relief to dry skin (on the hands or elsewhere), including emollient plant oils, beeswax, and soothing plant extracts. That makes it a great emollient for very dry areas on the body, especially during winter months!

Clinique

The lowdown: Clinique continues to produce some of the most exceptional moisturizers you'll find at the department store, and you can add the products below to their list of impressive achievements. That unjustly famous yellow lotion (Dramatically Different Moisturizer—if there was ever an oxymoron in the cosmetics industry, this is it) is still around, and probably will be for decades to come, but it's reassuring that more often than not, Clinique's latest developments exceed my expectations.

Active White Lab Solutions Daily Moisturizer (\$35 for 1.5 ounces) won't fade sun-induced skin discolorations, although the mica it contains will help "brighten" skin. This powerhouse formula is an outstanding choice for normal to slightly oily or slightly dry skin, and contains mostly water, silicones, slip agent, water-binding agents, anti-irritant, antioxidants, plant extracts, film-forming agents, and preservatives. It is fragrance-free and does not contain any irritating ingredients.

Repairwear Deep Wrinkle Concentrate for Face and Eye (\$52 for 1.4 ounces) is an anti-aging product many baby-boomer consumers will take seriously. However, despite somewhat misleading claims, this product is as state-of-the-art as it gets, with a remarkably elegant formula. Just as advanced as most of Clinique's Repairwear products that aren't packaged in jars, this serum includes effective and abundant antioxidants, water-binding agents, cell-communicating ingredients, potent anti-irritants, fatty acids, plant oil, and smoothing film-forming

agents. It really is a brilliant formula that has the potential to significantly improve the health and appearance of skin. Will it vanquish wrinkles? No. But it will help skin to create an improved, smoothed appearance and some wrinkles will look less noticeable, but no plastic surgeons need worry about their job security. The serum texture makes this a suitable product for oily skin looking to benefit from topical antioxidants without making skin feel slick or too moist.

DDF

The lowdown: DDF (Doctor's Dermatologic Formula) is a skin-care line from dermatologist Dr. Howard Sobel. The company offers several worthwhile serums and moisturizers, and their angle is definitely geared toward providing consumers with anti-aging skin care. His latest creation is the ultra-overpriced RMX line, which uses frozen growth factor proteins in an effort to “train” cells to look younger. Look for a review of those products (with one of the most expensive moisturizers ever launched) in an upcoming issue of my free online Beauty Bulletin.

C3 Plus Serum (\$60 for 0.5 ounce) is an excellent product if you're looking for a serum that combines the antioxidant benefits of vitamin C with the skin-enhancing benefits of peptides. Packaged in an airtight opaque bottle to keep the antioxidants stable, C3 Plus Serum also contains a nice complement of ingredients that mimic the structure of skin, making it worthwhile for someone with oily or blemish-prone skin who wants an antioxidant-rich product. Traditionally, ascorbic acid (the form of vitamin C in this product) has been considered difficult to stabilize. However, new, placebo-controlled research shows that a 3% concentration of ascorbic acid (which this product contains) in an emulsion can produce positive results in skin within a short period of time. This means that, although the ascorbic acid will break down faster than more stable forms of vitamin C, some immediate efficacy is obtained when the formulation is correct (Source: *Skin Pharmacology and Physiology*, July–August 2004, pages 200–206). Assuming that your skin-care routine includes an effective sunscreen—without this essential step, applying all the antioxidants in the world to your skin would be for naught—this is a good product to consider, especially if you'd like to see what the vitamin C and peptides combination can do for your skin.

Dove

The lowdown: Dove has made some wonderfully positive strides within the last two years, going from ordinary, extremely standard body-care products and bar cleansers to offering a fairly comprehensive, surprisingly advanced lineup of options. These products are big on antioxidants, which is great, but what's less encouraging is their predominantly jar packaging. Such fortified products deserve opaque tubes and bottles so consumers can reap the most benefit from the inclusion of these air- and light-sensitive ingredients. The products below represent Dove's excellent formulas, packaged sensibly.

Fresh Radiance Anti-Aging Moisturizer SPF 15 (\$9.99 for 1.7 ounces) is a lightweight moisturizing lotion with an in-part zinc oxide sunscreen, providing necessary complete UVA protection. It is appropriate for those with normal to slightly dry or slightly oily skin; those prone to blemishes should consider this cautiously because zinc oxide has the potential to clog pores. The lotion base is an elegant combination of ingredients that mimic the structure of skin and antioxidants, making this another smart offering from Dove, and one that eclipses similar products from L'Oreal and, in many instances, Neutrogena. The opaque packaging helps keep the antioxidants stable.

Cool Moisture Lotion (\$5.99 for 8.5 ounces) may make you think twice because the “cool” portion of a product name usually means it includes an ingredient that makes skin tingle



with irritation from menthol or peppermint, assuredly a no-no for keeping skin healthy. But that's not the case here, and this remains still another outstanding moisturizer from Dove. Considering the price per ounce, this is one of the best body-lotion bargains around, and is recommended for all but very dry skin (which would need a richer, more emollient product).

Intensive Firming Cream (\$7.99 for 6.7 ounces) is similar to, but more emollient than, the Cool Moisture Lotion above. It is an excellent choice for dry to very dry skin from the neck down, and contains many state-of-the-art ingredients, including peptides, several antioxidants, anti-irritant plant extracts, and ingredients that mimic the structure of skin. What it cannot do is firm skin, even in a minor way. However, its elegant formula bests just about every department-store body lotion, and it will give dry skin what it needs to look and feel better. That alone makes Dove's inflated skin-firming claims almost forgivable.

Intensive Firming Lotion (\$5.99 for 6.7 ounces) is nearly identical to the Intensive Firming Cream above, and the same review applies. Why this product costs less is just marketing caprice, because the two formulas don't reflect a difference. If anything, this version should be priced higher than the Cream version because it contains slightly more silicone, a rather expensive raw material.

Intensive Nourishing Lotion (\$5.99 for 6.7 ounces) is, with a few minor differences, nearly identical to the Intensive Firming Lotion above, and the same review applies. Intensive Nourishing Lotion contains panthenol in place of the collagen in the Firming Lotion. Both are good ingredients that mimic the structure of skin, but topically applied collagen cannot add to the collagen within skin.

Estee Lauder

The lowdown: If this prodigious line would only rethink its reliance on jar packaging, their state-of-the-art formulas would be almost unparalleled in the industry. Yet, despite the fact that Estee Lauder repeatedly demonstrates their expertise at creating incredibly well-formulated moisturizers, treatment products, and serums, their packaging is too often substandard. Compared to competitors, such as Lancome, they are decades ahead. Lauder's cleansers, makeup removers, and toners are decent, but if you're going to invest money in their skin-care products, it's the non-jar packaged moisturizers (with and without sunscreen) that deserve your attention.

Future Perfect Anti-Wrinkle Radiance Lotion SPF 15 for Normal/Combination Skin (\$65 for 1.7 ounces) is a very good moisturizing lotion with an in-part avobenzene sunscreen for complete UVA protection. It is well-suited to the texture preferences of those with normal to oily skin. What is more cosmetics puffery than legitimately good news for skin is Lauder's claim that this product is "futuristic" and that its Cell Vector technology helps re-ignite skin's ability to fight the signs of aging. As I reported in the March–April 2005 issue of *Cosmetics Counter Update*, which reviewed the cream versions of this product, the technology is more a marketing concept than an intriguing formulary advantage. It turns out this product's one-two punch of broad-spectrum sunscreen protection and a wide complement of antioxidants, anti-irritants, and ingredients that mimic the structure of skin is what's really worth getting excited about. By the way, the radiance you'll get from this product is from the subtle amount of shimmer it imparts, not from "Cell Vector" technology, a term Lauder's marketing team coined. Among the three Future Perfect products, this version is the only one whose packaging will help keep its many antioxidants stable.

Idealist Refinishing Eye Serum (\$48 for 0.5 ounce) is the complement to Lauder's top-selling Idealist Skin Refinisher (\$73 for 1.7 ounces). The Eye Serum is similar to the original Idealist product, but the formula is updated to capitalize on the latest skin-care ingredients. Included in this water- and silicone-based gel-cream are long-proven emollients (petrolatum), several antioxidants (the packaging will keep them stable), ingredients that mimic the structure of skin, and anti-irritants. It won't minimize puffiness or significantly brighten the eye area, but it will protect skin and help it function more normally. This would be even better without the fragrance, but that's a minor complaint for such a thoughtfully formulated product. By the way, this can be used anywhere on the face—there is nothing in this product that makes it unique for the eye area.

Laura Mercier

The lowdown: Until the product below was launched, Laura Mercier's skin care wasn't extraordinary or worth the extra expense. Her namesake line excels in the arena of makeup, but the serum below proves she is making good on her claim that makeup only looks as good as the skin it's used on!

Multi-Vitamin Serum (*\$65 for two 0.6-ounce vials*) is a two-part product consisting of water-based Phase 1 and silicone-based Phase 2. Both phases contain ingredients that will smooth and hydrate skin, and both contain several antioxidants, though Phase 2 has slightly more. From a formulary standpoint, there was no need for this product to be split into two phases. I suppose Mercier simply wanted her serum to seem different and more scientific, and so consumers are directed to mix several drops from both phases before applying it to the skin. If the mixing step doesn't bother you, this is a very well-formulated, antioxidant-rich serum that is recommended for all but blemish-prone skin. Its packaging ensures the antioxidants will remain stable during use. The firming sensation you get from this product comes from the film-forming agent used in Phase 1, which can temporarily make skin feel tauter and look smoother. This product does not contain fragrance, but does contain a small amount of orange oil, which imparts a scent (and may cause irritation, the only misstep in an otherwise superb product). For a cosmetics line that is primarily about makeup, this is one of the more sophisticated antioxidant products around!

M.A.C.

The lowdown: M.A.C.'s skin care is at best described as ordinary, the emphasis and innovation for this line is clearly tied to its formidable makeup collection. The Prep + Prime range offers some respectable, albeit extraneous products, but the lip option below is especially noteworthy because it really works to solve a common, frustrating problem.

Prep + Prime Lip (*\$14 for 0.05 ounce*) is a base that is applied before lipstick to facilitate application and prevent it from feathering into lines around the mouth. Guess what? It works! The silicone- and wax-based stick forms a great barrier to keep color in place, in a way similar to long-discontinued products such as The Body Shop's No Wander and Coty's Stop It! As good as this product is, keep in mind it won't prevent greasy, slippery lip glosses from migrating into lines around the mouth. It works best with moderately creamy or satin matte lipstick formulas, of which M.A.C. has plenty!

Neutrogena

The lowdown: Neutrogena continues to launch new products at a rapid-fire pace, but, regrettably, many of their latest options suffer due to jar packaging or too many irritating ingredients (the company still loves to use menthol and its derivatives in many of their anti-acne/clear skin products despite the fact this ingredient is ineffective and problematic for that condition). Their Advanced Solutions line, for all its dermatologist posturing, isn't nearly as advanced as competing products such as Olay Regenerist, Clinique Repairwear, or the "targeted solutions" from Estee Lauder. Still, the product below proves they are capable of hitting a home run and offers what I hope is a sign of things to come!

Visibly Firm Lift Serum Active Copper (*\$18.99 for 1 ounce*) It's puzzling that this product was not included in the Neutrogena Advanced Solutions line because unlike most of those products, its formulation really is advanced! You probably already know this serum won't firm or lift skin anywhere, but don't let that overshadow the fact that this is an excellent water-based moisturizer for normal to slightly dry skin. It contains mostly water, slip agent, several silicones, emollient, glycerin, copper peptide, antioxidants, soothing agent, film-forming agent, and fragrance. It will make skin feel silky without looking greasy and works well under foundation to enhance skin's appearance.

Nu Skin

The lowdown: Claiming that their products contain “all of the good, none of the bad” doesn’t explain dozens of questionable ingredients in their products, many that aren’t remotely close to being natural or without concerns. But Nu Skin has still created devotees worldwide utilizing a person-to-person marketing strategy to develop loyal customers, similar to Amway. They appear to be making some positive changes, including stable packaging and better formulations with some of their latest launches.

Tru Face Essence (\$135.90 for 60 capsules). Despite some over-the-top claims, this product is an excellent way to create silky smooth skin while also providing a good dose of antioxidants, including green tea, vitamins A and E, and evening primrose oil. The buzz ingredient is ethoxyheptyl bicuclooctanona, also known as ethocyn. You may recall that this ingredient was the backbone of the Chantal Ethocyn skin-care line (of short-lived success, because their products obviously didn’t live up to a fraction of the company’s claims). Despite all manner of antiwrinkle claims for ethocyn, there never was and still isn’t substantiated evidence that ethocyn has any notable benefit for skin—though it does seem to be a good water-binding agent. Tru Face Essence is best for normal to very dry skin, and the capsule dosing system keeps the light- and air-sensitive ingredients stable prior to use.

Paula’s Choice

The lowdown: I am exceptionally proud of the new skin-care products I launched this past year, and also very excited about what’s in store for 2006. As I continue to fine-tune existing products and launch new, state-of-the-art options, I want to assure you that I will continue to adapt my line to respond to the latest, substantiated research concerning what is needed to take the absolute best care of your skin at every age.



Skin Recovery Toner (\$12.95 for 6 ounces) is designed for normal to very dry skin and contains multiple essential ingredients to address the needs of these skin types, including exceptional plant oils, ingredients that mimic the structure of skin, potent antioxidants, and unique anti-irritants. It leaves skin feeling hydrated and silky smooth, and is suitable for someone with sensitive skin, including those with rosacea or eczema.

Skin Balancing Toner (\$12.95 for 6 ounces) is an innovative toner for normal to oily or combination skin. This formula is excellent for stabilizing and reinforcing skin’s intercellular matrix (ingredients that mimic the structure of skin) while eliminating mild dryness and flaking. Skin Balancing Toner’s cell-communicating ingredients can, in theory, help

keep normal to oily skin balanced so the oily areas do not get worse and it doesn’t contain irritants that lead to reddened or blemished skin. This is a personal favorite that is now a staple of my morning and evening skin-care routine.

2% Beta Hydroxy Acid Gel (\$15.95 for 4 ounces) is a formulation that was created as a direct response to customers who love my 1% Beta Hydroxy Acid Gel but asked for a stronger version. Like all of my BHA products, this formula is pH-correct, so the salicylic acid exfoliates skin and helps clear the pore’s pathway to the surface, dislodging stubborn blackheads and preventing blemishes. In addition, BHA has antibacterial properties, another advantage to reducing breakouts, and it also contains soothing anti-irritants. Both my 1% and 2% Beta Hydroxy Acid Gels have a nearly weightless texture and a soft, nearly imperceptible finish on skin.

pHisoderm

The lowdown: Found in most major drugstores, this small skin-care line's products won't knock your socks off. Still, pHisoderm remains a good option for cleansers and also happens to sell one of the gentlest topical scrubs around for those not yet ready to explore exfoliation via AHA or BHA products or who want something different than a washcloth (which is my personal favorite way to "scrub"—mechanically exfoliate—the face).

pH20 Anytime Nurturing Scrub with Gentle Microbeads (*\$5.95 for 5 ounces*) is a creamy formula that not only is value-priced, but also has the ability to exfoliate skin while rinsing cleanly, making it a great choice for all but very oily skin. It is thankfully free of irritants such as peppermint and menthol, although it does contain fragrance.

Pond's

The lowdown: Pond's launched several new products last year, and most of them were truly disappointing. Owned by Unilever, the same company responsible for the Dove brand's buzz-worthy skin-care products, Pond's latest still includes a drying bar cleanser, toner with irritating alcohol, rather harsh detergent cleansing agents, menthol, and fragrant irritants such as coriander oil. They're a good line to shop for eye makeup remover, cleansing cloths, and AHA products, but, other than the stellar product below, the rest of the line should be avoided. When in doubt, look to the Dove line for a comparable product—chances are it won't contain the problematic ingredients that keep Pond's from being a stronger contender at the drugstore.

Radiance Restored Age-Defying Skin Brightening SPF 15 Moisturizer (*\$10.99 for 1.7 ounces*) has a superior formula with several antioxidants in suitably protective packaging. This in-part zinc oxide sunscreen is outstanding for normal to dry skin. Its silicone, glycerin, and triglyceride base contains almost a dozen antioxidants and ingredients that mimic the structure of healthy skin. This product does contain mica, which imparts a subtle shimmer to skin.

Rodan + Fields

The lowdown: Physicians Katie Rodan and Kathy Fields are known to many from their appearances on infomercials for their successful ProActiv line. In 2004, Rodan + Fields became part of the Estee Lauder group, unquestionably a financial and marketing windfall for any cosmetics company. As a result, their product line expanded, their prices went up, and their packaging became far more sophisticated and upscale. This new name-sake line involves therapeutic approaches for those suffering from a variety of skin conditions, and claims to work for anti-aging, skin discolorations, and anti-acne. Lots of consumers believe that dermatologist-developed products will be the answer for their skin-care woes, but do use caution. After reviewing dozens of so-called doctor-designed product lines, including this one, I can tell you there are no miracles to be found, and often there are some problematic products to steer clear of. Lastly, many of these lines are quite comparable to other product lines without the physician headliner credentials.

Reverse Step 2 Prepare: Skin Lightening Toner (*\$35 for 4.2 ounces*) is an alcohol-free toner that contains 2% hydroquinone, an excellent, time-proven ingredient to lighten sun- or hormone-induced pigment discolorations. In addition, it comes in opaque packaging that keeps the ingredients stable, and contains the antioxidant vitamin C and beneficial plant extracts. Lemon and arnica extract have no place in a product like this (or any product, for that matter), but the amounts are negligible. The tiny amount of salicylic acid (less than 0.5%) will provide minimal exfoliation even though this product's pH would allow it to do so. It remains an excellent option to address the skin lightening needs of those with normal to very oily skin.

Skinceuticals

The lowdown: Sold primarily in dermatologist's offices and upscale spas, this successful (2004 sales figures topped \$35 million) doctor-designed line has some good solid science behind it, not to mention some very effective, state-of-the-art foundations. In particular, their sunscreens, vitamin C products, and several moisturizers are highly recommended, assuming your skin care budget is generous.

Skinceuticals was purchased by L'Oreal in May 2005, and I sincerely hope they will allow this line to keep producing outstanding products backed by substantiated research rather than marketing razzle-dazzle. It's a pricey line, but one worth pursuing if you choose to spend more than is needed for elegant, advanced skin-care products.

C E Ferulic (\$122 for 1 ounce) comes complete with all manner of anti-aging claims, but the only ones you can bank on with this product (based on a significant amount of research) are its ability to reduce free radicals and defend skin against oxidative stress. It reportedly contains 15% L-ascorbic acid, a form of vitamin C considered an excellent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agent (Sources: *Experimental Dermatology*, June 2003, pages 237–244; and *Bioelectrochemistry and Bioenergetics*, May 1999, pages 453–461). Because L-ascorbic acid is stable only in low-pH formulations (Source: *Dermatologic Surgery*, February 2001, pages 137–142), the good news is that this product's pH of 3 is low enough to allow this form of vitamin C to be effective. Also present in this water-based antioxidant serum are vitamin E and ferulic acid. Vitamin E, appearing here as alpha tocopherol, also has a well-established reputation as an effective antioxidant (Sources: *Radiation Research*, July 2005, pages 63–72; *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, December 2004, pages 443–447; and *Journal of Investigative Dermatology*, February 2005, pages 304–307).

Ferulic acid is relatively new to the skin-care scene, but earlier research suggests that it provides antioxidant and sun-protective benefits to skin while enhancing the stability of topical applications of vitamin E (Sources: *International Journal of Pharmaceutics*, April 10, 2000, pages 39–47; and *Free Radical Biology and Medicine*, October 1992, pages 435–448). As research into this and similar compounds (such as caffeic and ellagic acid) continues, I suspect we will see more antioxidant-based products enhanced with them, which is great news for keeping skin healthy and protecting it from further damage.

C E Ferulic is suitable for all skin types. Its brown-glass packaging helps keep its high level of antioxidants stable, although an airless pump applicator would have been better than the dropper tip, because that requires you to remove the cover with each use, exposing the oxygen-sensitive antioxidants to air.

Spa Sciences

The lowdown: This spa-influenced line, available at Target and on Drugstore.com, is big on gimmicky products and even bigger on unfounded claims. Still, there's a silver lining to every cloud, and the moisturizer below represents that, not to mention a pattern this entire line should have followed.

Anti-Aging Moisture Day Lotion (\$18.95 for 1.7 ounces) is inappropriate for daytime use because it does not include sunscreen, but is an option if paired with a foundation containing sunscreen. This formulation is impressive because it omits the fragrant oils common to other Spa Sciences products and includes more antioxidants. In addition, it has airless packaging that helps keep the antioxidants stable. It also contains greater amounts of water-binding agents and lacks the questionable ingredient acetyl hexapeptide-3. If you have normal to dry skin and prefer a fragrance-free moisturizer with a lightweight lotion texture, this is highly recommended.



Stridex

The lowdown: Stridex is a familiar name to anyone who has shopped drugstores for anti-acne products. Lamentably, most of their products continue the trend of combining active ingredients such as benzoyl peroxide and salicylic acid with irritants like alcohol and menthol. I was pleasantly surprised to find the tide appears to be turning with the product below, and hope the line breaks tradition and starts giving acne sufferers what they really need to treat blemishes. Then again, I've been waiting to see more of that for years, and it's more than a bit appalling that it hasn't happened!



Benzoyl Peroxide Powder Pads (\$6.49 for 28 pads) are a unique new option to disinfect blemish-prone skin. Featuring an effective concentration of 2.5% benzoyl peroxide and free of typical irritating ingredients found in lots of acne products such as alcohol, witch hazel, or peppermint, these larger-than-usual, nonabrasive pads are recommended for all skin types battling acne. These pads contain a mild detergent cleansing agent, so unless your skin is very oily or you have makeup to remove, they will gently cleanse skin while disinfecting, and they do not need to be rinsed.

Trish McEvoy

The lowdown: For putting together a customized makeup wardrobe, the McEvoy line and its collection of palettes and planners is almost without peer. The skin-care products were reformulated and although some improvements were made, there were proportionately more missteps. Perhaps the third time will be the charm for McEvoy's skin care, but for now, this line remains one to shop primarily for makeup and, in particular, outstanding brushes.

Oil Control Paper (\$13) features a roll of thin tissue paper (a great absorbent material) wound on a plastic spool and packaged in a Saran Wrap-style container. You flip open the top and pull out the amount of paper you need, then tear it off using the cap's serrated edge. This is a clever alternative to packaging single-size sheets, and these papers (which do not contain powder or other additives) do their job, soaking up excess oil and leaving skin smooth and shine-free. The case is small enough to fit into most handbags, making on-the-go touch-ups a breeze.

The Best Makeup Products of 2005

Aveda

The lowdown: Although known for their vast hair-care collection, Aveda is not a line to gloss over when shopping for makeup (though you will want to bypass their skin-care products which are often fraught with irritating "essential oils"). Last year most of Aveda's foundations, tinted moisturizer, concealer, and powders were reformulated with mostly positive results. Unlike many other lines, Aveda's makeup tends to contain a higher-than-usual amount of antioxidants, and they know what they're doing when it comes to effective, broad-spectrum sun protection.

Inner Light Tinted Moisture SPF 15 (\$25) is a replacement for Aveda's former Moisture Plus Tint SPF 15, and it has basically stayed the same (and that's good news). Minor updates include the addition of minerals and an antioxidant. The product still has a titanium dioxide sunscreen and a smooth, creamy texture that hydrates while leaving a satin finish. It is suitable for normal to dry skin and offers sheer coverage and a hint of color. Six shades are available and they are all quite good. Sienna is slightly peach for tan skin tones, but it is almost too sheer to matter. Burl is an excellent shade for dark (but not very dark) skin, conveying deep color without turning ashy.

BeneFit

The lowdown: Rather than focus on compelling formulas that match current state-of-the-art standards, most of BeneFit's items attract attention by virtue of cute or clever names and the line's overall irreverent fun. Shopping for and using skin care and makeup can indeed be fun, but it's no laughing matter when the products being considered are a woeful combination of mediocre and expensive. The concealer below is a notable exception, as are BeneFit's latest foundation and their longstanding, long-wearing cream eyeshadows.

Lyin' Eyes Concealer (\$18) is the clever name for this click-pen concealer that you apply with a built-in synthetic brush. Each of the three skin-like shades applies with ease and provides medium coverage while setting to a smooth, non-cakey matte finish. It does a great job of convincingly concealing minor flaws without looking like you've got something to hide—and that's the truth!

Bobbi Brown

The lowdown: This popular, well-distributed line has lost none of its touch for creating beautifully wearable color palettes. I am consistently impressed with the shade selection Brown presents. The mix of nudes, neutrals, brights, and deeper tones for women of color is commendable, and that goes for the sheer cream blush below, too. Owned by the Estee Lauder Companies, Bobbi Brown remains an excellent line to shop for basics such as foundation, blush, and eyeshadows, and there are a few innovative products too, along with several thoughtfully-coordinated palettes and cosmetic travel kits. An added bonus is their counter personnel who tend to be adept at discussing makeup rather than going on and on about marketing claims.



Pot Rouge for Lips and Cheeks (\$22) looks greasier than it is. You may be surprised how easily it applies because there's no heavy feel and it's free of excess slip. Its semi-moist finish makes it great for dry skin, but not the best for solo use on the lips or if you have an uneven skin texture or breakouts. If you opt to use this as timesaving lip-and-cheek makeup, you may want to follow up with a lip gloss, particularly if your lips are routinely dry or chapped. This is one of the better creamy blushes to hit the scene, and is recommended over Stila's similar, but slightly too greasy, Convertible Color (\$20).

Chanel

The lowdown: In recent years Chanel's skin-care formulas have taken a backseat to their mostly outstanding makeup offerings. It's not that the skin-care products are terrible, but for the money, you'd be better off having your credit card imprinted at the Estee Lauder or Clinique counters, at least if state-of-the-art products are a priority. Chanel makeup is a different story. Their foundations, concealers, powders, blushes, lipsticks, and lip glosses compete strongly with top choices from Bobbi Brown, M.A.C., Lancome, Dior, and Clarins. I've also noticed that, at least on the west coast, Chanel's sales staff has become more casual and less imposing, though it could be I caught the right people on their better days!

Purete Mat Shine Control Powder SPF 15 (\$42). Looking for a smooth-as-silk pressed powder that helps absorb excess oil? Check. A powder that doesn't look cakey or thick on skin? Check. How about an in-part titanium dioxide sunscreen for enhanced sun protection? Check. It's all here, and all at a premium price. Chanel has crafted a wonderfully light-textured, talc-based pressed powder with broad-spectrum sunscreen, and three of the four available shades are outstanding. The darkest shade, Warm Rose, is OK, but may be too peach for some medium skin tones. This is highly recommended for normal to oily skin, but only if your budget allows for such a splurge. If not, no worries: Cover Girl, Neutrogena, and Paula's Choice offer equally good pressed powders with sunscreen for one-third of Chanel's price.

Vitalumiere Satin Smoothing Compact Makeup SPF 15 (\$55) is sold as being “exceptionally creamy,” and that’s an accurate description for this rich, compact-type foundation. Complete with a titanium dioxide sunscreen, this is an excellent foundation for dry to very dry skin that needs only sheer to light coverage. It moisturizes without feeling thick or greasy and leaves skin with a radiant finish that, if you truly have dry skin, needn’t be set with powder. All but two of the nine shades are attractive options for fair to medium skin tones. Avoid Cool Beige (slightly peach) and Natural Beige (slightly pink) unless you will be applying this so minimally that an off shade is irrelevant. Just keep in mind that sheer application of a sunscreen means you will not be getting a reliable amount of sun protection.

Clinique

The lowdown: When it comes to makeup, Clinique wins high marks for its bountiful selection of everything from foundations and concealers to blushes, all manner of pencils, and mascaras (their High Impact Mascara is a personal favorite of mine). This past year didn’t necessarily raise the bar for Clinique, but since most of the makeup they offer remains highly recommended, maintaining the status quo is anything but ordinary!

Colour Surge Eye Shadows (*Velvet, Soft Shimmer, and Duos*, \$13.50 – \$17.50) marks the first time Clinique’s eyeshadows have what they’ve been missing for years: good pigment concentration, an enviable smooth texture, and easy application that blends expertly. Their former shadows tended to go on very sheer and had a texture that was too flyaway and powdery, hindering decent application. This new formula solves those problems and offers an attractive palette of shades, including a few matte and almost-matte (meaning negligible shine) options; check out Buttermilk, Bewitched, and Crushed Plum. The Soft Shimmer shadows have the same texture and application traits as the Velvet formula, except that each shade has shine. These sublimely silky colors blend beautifully, and although the shine (shimmer) isn’t what I consider “soft,” the finish is appropriate for daytime makeup if you have unwrinkled eyelids and a smooth underbrow area. The Eye Shadow Duos present some beautiful color combinations, but each pair is shiny, so they’re not for the wrinkled eye area.

Colour Surge Impossibly Glossy (\$14.50) seems daring by Clinique’s standards because most of their previous gloss products have been remarkably sheer. Not this one. Take the “Colour Surge” name seriously—these tube glosses are pigment-rich, offering near-full coverage and a shimmer-infused glossy finish that’s moist rather than sticky. The decadent colors are all beautiful (actually, they’re sexy) and work well alone or paired with a lipstick for added drama.

Cover Girl

The lowdown: Procter & Gamble-owned Cover Girl has been around for decades (they brought back model Christie Brinkley to represent their makeup for mature skin, some time back she used to be the face of the company’s teen-oriented Clean Makeup) and the improvement in their products from junk drawer, preteen makeup to sophisticated formulations initiated in 2000 is still going strong, as evidenced by the number of products listed below.

TruBlend Pressed Powder (\$8.49) carries on the remarkable pigment technology introduced with Cover Girl’s TruBlend foundation. This talc-based powder has a silky smooth, slightly thick texture that meshes so well with skin you won’t know you’re wearing powder. Instead, the skin looks refined and finished rather than pasty or dry, an effect that is flattering on all skin types. Six shades are available, and here’s where Cover Girl’s “matches 97% of skin tones” comes into play. All of the shades are beautiful; in fact, I found I could wear four of the six convincingly. Somehow, the pigments in this powder simply enhance skin without changing its natural color. This is good news, because it means you’re not likely to make a mistake while choosing a shade—just pick something that looks close to your skin tone and try it on. Chances are, you’ll be pleasantly surprised with the results. As an added bonus, unlike many of Cover Girl’s pressed powders, this option is fragrance-free.



TruBlend Powder Foundation SPF 15 (\$9.49) has a mica- and talc-based texture that's buttery, silky, and slightly powdery all at once. That's an admittedly strange description, but it accurately describes this superb pressed-powder foundation that features an in-part titanium dioxide sunscreen. It blends beautifully, providing light coverage that leaves skin looking naturally polished rather than thick and powdered. Among the 15 shades, almost all are suitable and they represent a wide range of natural skin tones. The only colors to avoid because they are too pink, peach, or rose are Medium Light, Warm Beige, and Natural Beige. The following shades are OK because this product blends so well, but should be approached with caution: Classic Beige, Natural Ivory, and Creamy Natural. Classic Ivory is an excellent shade for fair skin, while Buff Beige is an ideal neutral for lighter skin tones.

This TruBlend product joins the small group of pressed powders that offer sufficient sun protection. However, because sunscreen of any type needs to be applied liberally, pressed powders with sunscreens are best used in combination with a facial sunscreen or foundation with sunscreen to assure complete coverage.

Advanced Radiance Age-Defying Compact Foundation (\$8.99) is a silicone-based cream-to-powder foundation with a superior smooth texture that applies almost like a liquid makeup. It feels wonderfully light, blends well, and provides light to medium coverage with a satin matte finish. The 14 shades include some outstanding neutral tones, but six of them have undesirable overtones of peach, pink, or rose. The following shades should be avoided: Natural Ivory (fair skin doesn't need this much pink to look good), Medium Light, Warm Beige, Creamy Beige, Classic Beige, and Ivory. Classic Ivory and Buff Beige are great for lighter skin tones, while Soft Sable and Classic Tan are winners for dark skin.

If you're wondering about the "Age-Defying" part of this makeup's name, it comes from the inclusion of niacinamide and vitamin E, the same Vita-Niacin complex used in many Olay products (Procter & Gamble is the parent company of Cover Girl and Olay). Niacinamide and vitamin E have merit for skin, but the tiny amounts included in this foundation are barely worth mentioning. If anything, this foundation's finish can make pronounced wrinkles more apparent, so it isn't the best choice for "mature" skin. Advanced Radiance Age-Defying Makeup is best for normal to slightly oily or slightly dry skin. Any dry areas should be prepped with a moisturizer because this foundation's matte finish will exaggerate dry spots.

Outlast Smoothwear All-Day Eyeliner (\$6.99) is an automatic, retractable pencil that features a built-in sharpener, a nice option when you need to make the pencil tip sharper (to allow you to draw on a thinner line). I was very impressed with how well this pencil goes on and how, once set, it wears fairly well without a trace of smudging or smearing. Some fading does occur, especially by the end of the day, but for the most part this is a slam-dunk recommendation as one of the best eye pencils available at the drugstore. One caution: Removing this requires more than a water-soluble cleanser. OK, two cautions: Avoid Sage, because this shade of green eyeliner isn't pretty on anyone who is interested in being taken seriously.

Delux Beauty

The lowdown: This small makeup-only line is sold primarily at Sephora stores, and its highlights include the product below as well as a vast selection of lip gloss shades. It is otherwise an OK line that's more expensive than need be, and as a whole, it doesn't compete with lines such as Bobbi Brown, M.A.C., Stila, or Trish McEvoy.

Cream Powder Eye Shadow (\$18) has merit if you're a fan of this type of eyeshadow. The cream-to-powder, silicone-based texture applies smoothly and is surprisingly easy to blend. I like the fact that it doesn't have too much slip, making it easier to place color exactly where you want it. These eyeshadows have a slight tendency to crease, and would be a problem in that regard only if you have oily eyelids (in which case, you should only be using powder eyeshadows). The shade selection favors shiny hues, but there are a few almost-matte options, including Copper, Pink Blonde, and Stone.

Dior

The lowdown: Dior's makeup is a sight to behold, not because every product is five-star, but because their packaging is so opulent and chic—these are compacts and lipstick components you'll want to touch up with in public! Although pricey, their lip glosses go the distance and offer striking colors with sumptuous textures, while their foundations have improved considerably (and most now include effective SPF 15 sunscreen). Dior is also still a top contender for consistently excellent department store mascara.

DiorKiss Lip Gloss (\$19) is one decadent lip gloss! Its thick, syrupy texture feels semi-sticky on lips and each of its bold yet sheered-down colors has a rich, vinyl-like shine. This tube gloss with a built-in angled applicator is a splurge, but if you love lip gloss and enjoy having several variations from which to choose, this worth seeking out—and it lasts longer than most.

Dior Addict Lip Fluid (\$23) is a lipstick/lip gloss hybrid. If you're in the mood to splurge on cosmetics, it's a great option to consider (well, unless you're prone to lip color feathering into lines around your mouth). That's because it feels light but moisturizing on lips and imparts a glossy (but not glaring) finish. Because all the top-notch shades have more pigment than traditional gloss, you get longer wear, while still enjoying the wet look that shiny gloss provides. As a plus, and I don't know what compelled Dior (of all lines) to do this, Lip Fluid does not contain fragrance.

2-Colour Eyeshadow (\$30) has an ultra-fine, supremely silky texture that feels almost creamy and blends superbly. The vast majority of Dior's eyeshadows are replete with shine, and that's the case here, too. Each duo features a light and dark complementary or tone-on-tone blend, so as long as you avoid the blue and lime green duos the combinations are all pretty much can't-go-wrong. However, unless your eye area is perfectly smooth and unwrinkled, these are too shiny for daytime wear. Younger women who are not yet dealing with visible signs of aging on their eyelids (such as the models Dior tends to use in their eye-makeup ads) can use these shadows indiscriminately. The best pairings are 665, 785, and 545, while those most difficult to work with are 175, 858, and 455. They can be used wet or dry, with wet application intensifying the color (often to a flattering effect).



Estee Lauder

The lowdown: Estee Lauder has always had a mostly commendable assortment of makeup, but the past few years have taken them to the forefront in terms of producing foundations, powders, and eyeshadows with decadently silky textures, improved application, and impressive shades. The two items below are truly deserving of inclusion on this list, and I am looking forward to what this venerable brand has in store for 2006. Lauder's makeup price point is slightly above that of sister company Clinique, but in many ways the extra cost is warranted because their formulas tend to go a step beyond what Clinique launches in this arena.



AeroMatte Ultralucent Pressed Powder (\$26) directs you to “finish flawlessly” because “AeroMatte is so soft and air-light sheer, all you see is skin.” That's really the case with this amazing talc-based powder. AeroMatte has a supremely silky, cashmere-like texture that is a pleasure to work with because it never leaves skin looking too powdered or dry. It is available in eight neutral-toned shades, including options for darker skin (these options also work well as bronzing powder on light to medium skin tones). Lauder recommends this powder for all skin types but someone with very oily skin will want a more absorbent powder than this, and the cornstarch in this formula may present a problem for those battling blemishes. Otherwise, this is highly recommended, although it's a good idea to apply it with a powder brush rather than the included applicator.

Individualist Natural Finish Makeup (\$32.50) is one of the silkiest, most blendable, and natural-looking foundations Estee Lauder has ever produced. Its soft cream texture has just enough slip on skin for controlled application, yet it sets to a natural (meaning not powdery or flat-looking) matte finish suitable for normal to slightly dry or slightly oily skin. As natural as this looks, it still can provide medium coverage. I only wish this had a sunscreen, too, for those with oilier skin who don't want to layer products. A staggering 24 shades are available, and I am pleased to report that all but 2 are outstanding, true-to-life, real-skin colors, including some remarkable pale tones and non-ashy options for dark to very dark skin tones. Avoid the too rose Fresco and too peach Cocoa.

Lancome

The lowdown: 2005 wasn't that impressive a year for Lancome's makeup. Their Flex WP Waterproof Mascara was a surprising letdown and they are still (shockingly, because they've known better for years) producing new foundations and lipsticks with sunscreen that lacks sufficient UVA protection. Without question they do offer some excellent foundations, powders, concealers, eye lining options, and, of course, mascaras. But the lacking UVA protection issues need to be addressed, at least if they intend to be taken seriously by consumers concerned with wrinkles and protecting skin from further sun damage.

L'Extreme Instant Extensions Lengthening Mascara (\$22) is positioned as a lengthening mascara, and it does just that. With a brush similar to mascara hall-of-famer Definicils (\$22), L'Extreme quickly elongates lashes with barely a clump. It allows you to create long, fringed lashes with subtle thickness and it wears well throughout the day. As impressive as this mascara is, you don't have to spend this much for such results, because other L'Oreal-owned lines have excellent options. Maybelline New York Lash Discovery Mascara (\$5.99) and L'Oreal Voluminous Volume Building Mascara (\$6.99) are equally adept at lengthening and expertly defining lashes, but that doesn't mean this great entry from Lancome is undeserving of a Paula's Pick rating!

Lauren Hutton Good Stuff

The lowdown: So many readers asked me to review this line, I had to see what all the fuss was about. I guess when you have a well-known, older, still vibrant model at the forefront of cosmetics claiming to help mature women "look good and feel great," it's reason enough to be curious. Overall, most of Hutton's Good Stuff was more akin to average stuff than anything "good," but there were a few winners, the most impressive being the product below.

Loose Powder (\$25) has a wonderfully light, airy texture and seamless application that makes skin look radiantly polished rather than too matte or dry. The talc-based formula is ideal for normal to dry skin; someone with oily skin (whether all over or just in the T-zone) will likely find this powder not absorbent enough. The four sheer shades are beautiful and well-suited to a range of skin tones. In particular, Brown is a great non-ashy shade for dark skin tones, or it could be used by medium skin tones as a bronzing powder.

L'Oreal

The lowdown: As I stated in last year's Best of Beauty report, L'Oreal makeup remains the one to beat at drug and mass-market stores. Their mascaras (and most of those from sister company Maybelline New York) are consistently impressive, while L'Oreal's True Match line raised the bar not only for texture, application, and finish but also for an imposing but extremely well-edited selection of shades for fair to dark skin tones. The one drawback (and something that Revlon always gets right) is inconsistent use of sufficient UVA protection in their foundations with sunscreen.

True Match Super-Blendable Powder (\$7.99) has the distinction of offering the largest palette of shades available at the drugstore. That is to the advantage of almost all skin tones, because this is an outstanding, talc-based pressed powder. Its texture isn't quite as otherworldly as Estee Lauder's AeroMatte Powder (reviewed above), but it's close, and the price difference between the powders should give you pause. True Match Super-Blendable Powder is suitable for all but blemish-prone skin (owing to the inclusion of cornstarch, a food-based ingredient that can feed the bacteria that contribute to blemishes). Among the 24 shades, divided into groups of warm (W), cool (C), and neutral (N), the only ones to avoid are W5 (too peach), N5 and N6 (too orange), C4 (too ash), and C7 (too copper). Shade C2 is great for very fair skin because it is neither too white nor too pink. L'Oreal has rolled out an impressive tester unit for the launch of this powder (and the concealer below), so take advantage of it if you decide to audition this powder.



True Match Super-Blendable Blush (\$9.99) is a collection of silky powder blushes whose sheer colors and seamless application do indeed make them super-blendable. The palette of soft colors is beautiful and is divided into warm, cool, and neutral tones just like L'Oreal's True Match foundation, powder, and concealer. You might find their blush groupings confusing (some of the cool shades go on more golden or peach than befits that description), but if you shop by the color itself rather than by its classification you should be satisfied. This currently reigns as one of the better powder blushes at the drugstore. (Note: each shade has a subtle shine, but it gives a soft glow to the cheeks, not distracting sparkles.)

M.A.C.

The lowdown: M.A.C. is steadfastly holding to its reputation as a makeup leader rather than follower, and most of their latest offerings reinforce their exemplary track record. In the instance of Pro Longwear Lipcolour, they took the concept of an established product (Max Factor Lipfinity) and made a good thing that much better, not to mention versatile.

Zoom Lash Mascara (\$10). If thick, full lashes are what you're after, look no further than this new mascara from M.A.C. Although it can go on a bit too heavily (especially if you're too zealous while applying), it builds impressive thickness almost immediately and does so without bothersome clumps or smudges. This is also supposed to curl lashes, but the effect is subtle—you'll still need your eyelash curler (assuming you ordinarily use one). This mascara is best for those who want lash drama, not demureness.

Fluidline (\$13.50) is nearly identical to Bobbi Brown's Long-Wear Gel Eyeliner (\$18), a once-unique product I am a fan of because of its remarkably easy application and tenacious wear. Long Wear Gel Eyeliner, and now, M.A.C. Fluidline (and Stila Smudge Pots)—all Lauder-owned companies, by the way—are the only eyeliners that can stand up to oily eyelids without fading, smearing, or running. All of these have a slightly moist application that sets to a long-wearing matte finish. Fluidline is every bit as tenacious as Brown's Long-Wear Gel Eyeliner and among the many odd shades, the best options are Rich Ground, Dipdown, and Blacktrack. Money-wise, Fluidline is less expensive than but nearly identical to Brown's Gel Eyeliner, and is slightly better than Stila's Smudge Pots.

Pro Longwear Lustre Lipcolour (\$19.50) continues the two-step lip-paint trend established by Max Factor Lipfinity, but perfected by M.A.C. Their original Pro Longwear Lipcolour takes first place for the longest wear while maintaining a comfortable feel on lips (assuming you routinely apply the top coat). It also wins extra points for being less prone to chipping and fading. The Lustre version is a departure from the original Pro Longwear in two ways: The colors (which are less opaque, but they're not sheer) and the accompanying top coat, Mirror (which is infused with multicolored glitter rather than being clear and glossy). The application process and impressive wear time are the same, but I am not a fan of the glittery top coat. It limits the use of the striking but soft colors Pro Longwear Lustre Lipcolour has. The good news is you can purchase one of M.A.C.'s other top coats to accompany the Lustre shade you like—the bad news is it must be purchased separately for \$12.50 (it screws onto the color-base component so you can alternate top coats as needed). See if you like the glittery top coat before committing to this. Otherwise, this product (and M.A.C.'s original Pro Longwear Lipcolour) is highly recommended.

Max Factor

The lowdown: Once in danger of becoming a makeup has-been, Max Factor has taken a cue from Cover Girl (both companies are owned by Procter & Gamble) and launched several noteworthy makeup items, including the powder below. Lest we forget, their Lipfinity (and Cover Girl's Outlast) redefined long-wearing lip color and are still going strong. Max Factor's price point is slightly higher than Cover Girl, and you'll notice that all of the best Max Factor items have a Cover Girl version whose formula is nearly, if not completely, identical.

Colour Adapt Pressed Powder (\$9.99) is identical to Cover Girl's TruBlend Pressed Powder (reviewed above) and the same formulary and performance comments apply—not surprising given that both companies are owned by Procter & Gamble. The only difference, aside from packaging aesthetics, is that Max Factor offers only four shades, all of which are workable for light to medium skin tones. For specifics, please see the review for Cover Girl's powder above.

Maybelline New York

The lowdown: One day Maybelline's makeup offerings will be as predictably reliable as those from parent company L'Oreal (and its department store sibling Lancome). For now, the company's launches tend to be hit or miss, yet they continue to excel in the categories of mascara, concealer, pencils, lipsticks (their newer formulas), and the occasional innovative product.

Instant Age Rewind Under Eye Concealer (\$6.99) is a superb matte-finish concealer that provides substantial coverage without creasing, caking, or making skin look dry and pasty. It blends well and has enough slip so that mistakes (including applying too much) are easy to soften or buff away. There are five shades, and while Fair and Light are winners, Medium may be too peach for its intended skin tone range, while Dark is strongly peach.

Dream Mousse Blush (\$7.50) has a texture that's accurately described as "air-whipped." It has a soft, spongy texture that gives way to a superior application for what's essentially a modified cream-to-powder blush. Each shimmer-infused shade blends on soft and sheers out quickly, so you can experiment without imparting too much color. Those wishing to add more color will find this product layers well. Even better, this really stays in place after it sets and experiences only minimal fading. It is a fun yet functional departure from powder blush, and is best for normal to slightly dry or slightly oily skin (provided you don't mind having shiny cheeks).

Neutrogena

The lowdown: Neutrogena's makeup tends to be a mixed bag. However, products like the one below prove that they are capable of setting new benchmarks for their drugstore contemporaries to strive for, rather than just treading water to keep up with the competition. To date, I have yet to see an "all-in-one" makeup product that combines as many skin-care benefits (sunscreen, cell-communicating ingredients, moisture, antioxidants) as this product. Hopefully Neutrogena has something similar in the works for those with normal to oily skin—their current option in this regard, Skin Clearing Clean Tint, is comparably disappointing.



Healthy Skin Enhancer SPF 20 (\$11.99) combines an in-part titanium dioxide sunscreen with retinol and a hint of color, all of which serve to enhance skin due to their respective qualities. Moreover, there is more than just a dusting of retinol in this product, which makes it unique! It has a light, creamy texture and a satin finish appropriate for those with normal to dry skin. If an oily T-zone is an issue, this product should be set with powder to reduce the sheen it leaves on skin. The six sheer shades are great and include options for fair (but not very fair) to tan skin tones. In addition—and this is again unusual for a foundation—plenty of antioxidants are included.

Paula's Choice

The lowdown: I added several new makeup items to my color collection, each one a unique formula with benefits and attributes not easily found in other products. The majority of new products were created as a result of customer feedback, and each one meets my exact criteria for performance, effectiveness, and elegance.



Constant Color Lip Paint (\$9.95) is an innovative lip product I developed as an alternative to long-wearing lipsticks such as Max Factor Lipfinity and Cover Girl Outlast. Although I am a fan of both products, they have limitations. You cannot reapply the color without starting over or use them with other products, such as an additional lipstick or gloss. Constant Color Lip Paint solves such dilemmas thanks to its versatility. Applied alone, it serves as a long-wearing, full-coverage lip color with a matte finish that won't roll, chip, or make lips feel parched. Used with another lipstick, it can serve as a base color or it can be applied over any other lip color or lip gloss (without disruption) to create a unique shade or to intensify the effect.

Natural Finish Oil-Absorbing Makeup SPF 15 (\$12.95) is a sheer foundation designed for normal to oily/combo skin. The lightweight, state-of-the-art formula begins slightly creamy, but blends to a smooth matte finish that absorbs excess oil, while also providing sufficient UVA protection thanks to its in-part avobenzone sunscreen. I created four shades that are suitable for fair to medium/tan skin tones, each capable of sheer to light coverage. This is a brilliant way to combine sun protection and soft coverage to create a natural look that helps keep excess oil in check without feeling heavy or too thick.

Skin Perfecting Loose Powder (\$12.95) has a supremely light and wonderfully silky texture, and makes skin look naturally polished, not powdered. This talc-based powder is available in two translucent shades, and may be layered for additional shine control. It is recommended for all skin types.

Barely There Sheer Matte Blush (\$8.95) is a product I didn't think I'd appreciate, but after experimenting with the final version of this silky smooth, color perfect formula, I quickly changed my mind. Each of the seven sheer shades apply easily and evenly, and have impressive staying power despite the sheer application. I often use two shades to create my own blush, and the sheerness of each shade makes mixing and matching foolproof.

Revlon

The lowdown: Although Revlon is still trying to dig itself out of years of debt, their financial woes have not kept them from staying on the cutting edge of makeup technology and launching several well-formulated products. Their revamped Age-Defying line is testament to this, and on schedule for 2006 are reworking of several items in their famous ColorStay line. Perhaps most intriguing, after years of disappointing or lackluster mascaras, Revlon struck gold with their truly fabulous Fabulash formula.

Age-Defying Light Makeup SPF 30 (\$12.99) debuts as a brilliant sheer-coverage foundation that features broad-spectrum sun protection from titanium dioxide, zinc oxide, and octinoxate (boy Revlon knows how to marry sunscreen to foundations!). This slightly creamy, water-resistant makeup sets to a natural-looking semi-matte finish that is appropriate for someone with normal to slightly oily or slightly dry skin. There are six shades, including Skin Brightener, a very pale peach that softly perks up pale skin and doesn't look all that peachy once it's blended into place. Most of the other shades are great, but watch out for the too-peach Light Medium and Medium Deep. Although this is a sheer makeup, the peachiness of these two shades is hard to blend away. This would be an ideal foundation for casual weekend makeup when you may spend more time outside than usual.

Age-Defying Makeup SPF 15 (\$13.99) comes in two formulas, one for dry skin and one for normal/combination skin. Confusingly, the dry-skin formula lists talc as one of the main ingredients, which provides a soft matte finish. In contrast, the normal/combination skin formula is more emollient, with an almost matte finish. Both foundations provide broad-spectrum sun protection; the dry-skin formula has an in-part titanium dioxide sunscreen, while the normal/combination formula contains titanium dioxide and zinc oxide. Texture- and application-wise, both formulas are equally wonderful. Which one you choose depends on the type of finish you prefer, because both provide seamless medium coverage without a heavy feel. Each foundation features 12 shades, and they tend to go on lighter than they appear in the bottle. The best news: There's not a bad shade in the bunch, and there are options for light to dark (but not very fair or very dark) skin tones. Whether you choose the dry or the normal/combination skin formula, both of these foundations are best for normal to slightly dry or slightly oily skin.



Age-Defying Concealer SPF 20 (\$8.79) is a creamy compact concealer available in three very good yellow-toned shades (but be careful with Neutralizer; it is too yellow for fair to light skin tones). The titanium dioxide and zinc oxide sunscreen combination not only ensures excellent UVA/UVB protection, but also contributes to this concealer's medium to full coverage. It has a beautifully smooth application that, given the product's thick texture, blends better than you'd expect. Considering this product's creaminess, it is surprising that it has only a slight tendency to crease into lines around the eyes. All told, job well done, Revlon!

Fabulash Mascara (\$6.99) Are you ready for this? After years of struggling, Revlon has finally produced a mascara to rival the best of L'Oreal's formidable stable of lash-enhancing options. Fabulash is Revlon's best mascara in years. It promises fuller, clump-free lashes, and it delivers—big-time! You'll get a clean application that defines each lash while lengthening and thickening in the right proportions to produce dramatic but not over-the-top lashes. Add to this the fact that lashes stay soft without flaking or smearing, and Fabulash deserves a very enthusiastic Paula's Pick rating!

Rimmel

The lowdown: This British import drugstore line remains a strong contender with a price-to-performance ratio that's tough to beat, especially with their powders, lipsticks, lipliners, and mascaras. Most items cost five dollars or less, and although the packaging isn't spiffy or substantial, as the cliché goes, it's what's inside that counts most!

Lasting Finish Pressed Powder (\$4.97) is a beautiful, silky, talc-based pressed powder that leaves skin looking polished rather than over-powdered. Considering the price and excellent performance, it is almost a steal, though it's best for normal to dry (not normal to oily, as advertised) skin. All three shades are great, with each going on slightly translucent—making the ideal color choice a less daunting task. Regrettably, there are no shades for darker skin tones.

Stila

The lowdown: If you're looking for one-stop makeup shopping at the department store, you may want to park yourself at the Stila counter and explore their numerous options. I have mentioned in the past that Stila has the best neutral palette of foundations around, and that still holds true today. Their latest offerings, including tinted moisturizer and pressed powder with sunscreen, stick foundation, gel eyeliner, and mascara have added more stellar options to an already top-notch lineup. Missteps happen, but compared to many other lines, Stila has a noteworthy batting average.

Lash Boost (\$9.50) is a lash primer that works. But before you get too excited, its effect is not as “mesmerizing” as Stila claims. What’s nice about this lash primer is its brush. Pre-mascara, it easily separates, noticeably lengthens, and minimally thickens lashes. Applying mascara afterward allows you to achieve a finished look that leaves lashes longer and more fringed and curled than with mascara alone. There are mascaras out there (including Stila’s Major Lash or L’Oreal’s Lash Architect) that accomplish this with one product, but if you’d like something to give your regular mascara an occasional boost (say, for an evening out or special occasion) this does the job without setbacks.

Urban Decay

The lowdown: Although still a line designed more for shock value and kicky trends than the basics to create an elegant makeup application, Urban Decay shouldn’t be overlooked, especially if you’re in the mood for improved versions of standard products with sometimes clever, often eye-catching packaging. Even better, for a department store line, the prices aren’t outrageous.



Triple XXX Slick Lip Gloss (\$15) is a lip gloss whose slick, weightless texture and wet, glossy finish somewhat justify its naughty-sounding name. This pot gloss is adorably packaged, but the contents are also worth getting excited about if you routinely use lip gloss. Few offer such a nice glossy payoff without feeling the least bit sticky or tacky. The petrolatum base means lips will stay smooth and resist chapping, while the sheer colors (which look much more intense than they actually are) are all goof-proof choices.

Vincent Longo

The lowdown: Available in most Sephora stores, this makeup artist line has many enticing choices, from lipsticks to gossamer powders and beautifully neutral foundation shades. Stumbling blocks include lack of sufficient UVA protection in their foundations with sunscreen and a tendency toward greasier-feeling lipsticks (though the lipstick colors are often stunning and more classic than the avant garde makeup artist line NARS).

Day Play Duo Compact Powder Blush (\$35) is a powder blush that includes two shades in one large compact. The Day shades are soft, sheer colors for use as blush, while the Play shades are deeper and brown-based, ideal for evening makeup or contour. Used alone or blended together, they have a superior smoothness that practically floats onto the skin and looks naturally flattering. Each duo’s shades are well-coordinated, and the shine is minimal. This is an admittedly costly product, but if you find a duo where both shades are appealing, it may be worth the expense, and it certainly looks beautiful on skin.

The Best Hair-Care Products of 2005

Alberto VO5

The lowdown: Most consumers are familiar with the Alberto name, and their products are hard to miss if you’re perusing the hair-care options at any major drugstore. Although most of their shampoos are problematic, they launched a full line of teen- and young adult-marketed styling products that successfully match the latest hairstyling trends and do so at a bargain price, at least compared to similar products from salon brands. Despite the exclamation-tinged names and flashy ads, style-savvy adults of any age should explore these options.

Max! Hold Fast-Drying Hair Spray Mega Hold (\$3.99 for 8.5 ounces) works beautifully to provide a fine mist of firm hold for structured styles or when you just don't want your hair to have much movement. This formula is relatively easy to brush through, but, true to claim, does dry quickly—so don't consider using this if you're looking for a working spray to use during styling.

Quick Hold! Fast-Drying Hair Spray Extra Hold (\$3.99 for 8.5 ounces) is nearly identical to the Max! Hold Fast-Drying Hair Spray Mega Hold above, and the same review applies, with the exception that this product provides slightly more hold.

Power! Control Styling Gel Mega Hold (\$3.99 for 7 ounces) is a very good, alcohol-free styling gel capable of providing a medium to slightly firm hold without being overly sticky or stiff. Contrary to claim, this (like all styling products that contain film-forming agents) can build up on hair, and its humidity resistance goes only so far. Remember, when hair is battling humidity, nature always wins. This gel is recommended for all hair types.

Grip It! Styling Gel Extreme Hold (\$3.99 for 7 ounces) is nearly identical to the Power! Control Styling Gel Mega Hold above, and the same review applies.

Play It Again! Reworkable Putty (\$3.99 for 4 ounces) doesn't quite have a putty texture—it's a thick styling cream whose water- and Vaseline-based formula works well to smooth curls and tame frizz on thick or coarse hair that is normal to dry. This contains a strong holding agent, which allows the product to function as more than just standard pomade. As such, hair can be smoothed with hold, especially if your goal is to enhance the texture of short hair or create an exaggerated style that remains workable throughout the day. This is surprisingly easy to shampoo out, and its hold factor negates the need for a finishing spray (unless you really need to freeze strands in place).



Aveda

The lowdown: Aveda is known for their hair-care products as well as their fervent belief that plant-based ingredients are preferred to synthetics (even though they use plenty of those ingredients throughout their product line). The truth is that there are beneficial synthetic and natural ingredients; the trick is using the best in each category to create enticing, effective products. Although the Pure Abundance Volumizing Shampoo is recommended, avoid its matching conditioner because the amount of clay it contains winds up causing dry, flyaway hair.

Pure Abundance Volumizing Shampoo (\$14 for 8.5 ounces) purports to make hair feel thicker and look fuller thanks to the acacia gum it contains. However, this ingredient is present in an amount too meager to provide a benefit for fine or thin hair, plus it won't hold up during rinsing. This product is recommended as a gentle, detergent-based shampoo for all hair types, including color-treated hair. It contains enough conditioning agents to cause buildup, though it would take quite awhile for buildup to occur.

Frederic Fekkai

The lowdown: Celebrity hairstylist Frederic Fekkai proffers a hair-care line whose prices are in line with someone of his stature (anyone want to book an appointment for a \$200 haircut?). Some of the products are quite effective and a cut above the very standard world of hair-care formulations. It's the ones that are standard (or below average) that make shopping this line carefully a good idea. No one needs to spend over forty dollars for shampoo and conditioner when comparable or even better options exist from less pricey salon lines and at the drugstore.

Luscious Curls Conditioner (\$20 for 8 ounces) is an excellent conditioner for normal to very dry hair that is normal to thick or coarse, curly or straight. It contains an effective blend of thickeners, emollients, silicone, detangling agents, antistatic agents, film-forming agents, plant extracts (these have minimal to no effect on hair regardless of its texture), and preservatives. This will help keep curly hair hydrated and make it smoother and less prone to frizzies, but that benefit is not exclusive to this product, so although it's recommended and worthy of "best" status, so are many less expensive conditioners reviewed in my book *Don't Go Shopping for Hair-Care Products Without Me*, 3rd Edition.

Garnier Fructis

The lowdown: Once sold only in Europe, L'Oreal-owned Garnier Fructis debuted stateside with hair dye, then launched a comprehensive, ever-expanding hair-care line. Although it suffers from repetitiveness and tall-tale claims, the reality is Garnier Fructis makes some great products, particularly for styling hair, where the options are plentiful. Be sure you like the sweet/citrus scent before investing, because it stays with you all day. Otherwise, the price for these products is a perfect example of why good hair-care products don't have to cost a fortune.

Style Surf Hair Texture Paste Matte Effect (\$3.99 for 5.1 ounces) isn't as paste-like as other styling products in this category, and turns out to be a very good water- and beeswax-based pomade for those looking to smooth hair, enhance texture, or control frizzies without making hair look greasy. This product does have a matte effect on hair (so don't expect it to enhance hair's shine), and is minimally sticky. This paste earns extra points because, despite the high wax content, it's relatively easy to shampoo out.

Jack Black



The lowdown: Jack Black is a product line aimed at men, and their simple names and straightforward packaging should appeal to the average male consumer, at least if you can get him into a boutique such as Sephora, where this line is typically sold. In addition to some worthwhile hair-care products, Jack Black has a few well-formulated sunscreens and a good moisturizer. The core products to a man's daily shaving routine are mostly problematic, and best avoided.

Sleek Finish Hair Texture Cream (\$16 for 4 ounces) is a very good, light-to-minimal-hold styling cream, which is an excellent choice for normal to very dry hair that is normal to coarse, curly, or thick. The emollient conditioning agents make it too heavy for fine or thin hair. It is comparable to (and slightly less expensive than) Kiehl's Cream with Silk Groom (\$17 for 4 ounces).

Joico

The lowdown: Although not as well publicized as competing salon lines such as Paul Mitchell or Matrix, Joico has some unique formulations that go beyond the ordinary and, for the most part, do a better job of giving their money's worth to consumers who prefer to shop salon lines. This is a good line to shop if you have dry to very dry hair, and it's refreshing that the products designated for specific hair types or conditions really are appropriate for them.

Silk Result Straight Smoother (\$15.96 for 5.1 ounces) contains only a fractional amount of film-forming/holding agent and ends up as a creamy, leave-in conditioner that is best for dry to very dry hair that is normal to coarse, curly, or thick. It will moisturize and smooth hair while imparting shine, some frizz control, and a touchably soft feel. Unfortunately, because nature always wins, this product is not humidity-resistant; but no product is, so don't let that stop you if your hair type qualifies for this well-formulated product.

L’Oreal Professional Paris

The lowdown: L’Oreal has owned the ARTec salon line for several years, and this past year began the transition of renaming the products with their masthead, plus the term “professional” to reinforce ARTec’s established salon roots. Between these products, L’Oreal’s main line and their high-end Kerastase brand, you’ll find many more similarities than differences. In fact, almost without exception, the major difference comes down to price and the consumer perception of prestige vs. mainstream products.

Texture Fresh Style Feather Weight Cream (*\$13 for 4 ounces*) has a gel-like texture that performs in hair as though you had mixed a styling gel with equal parts leave-in conditioner and water-soluble pomade. It offers a light, flexible hold with minimal stickiness and lots of shine. This is a great product to enhance and define curls regardless of hair texture (though someone with thick or very coarse, curly hair will likely want a heavier product), and also works well on all hair types to provide soft, conditioned hold. L’Oreal’s main line does not currently have a single product comparable to this item—but stay tuned!

Pantene

The lowdown: Pantene is probably one of the most recognized hair-care brands in the world, and their product lineup is enormous (and, unfortunately, incredibly repetitive). They launch dozens of new products every year, often tinkering with the previous year’s formulas or spinning them in new direction. Although their Blonde, Brunette, and Red Expressions products are in no way tailored to those hair colors beyond marketing claims (surprising but true), they do present some reliable options, as do many other Pantene products, all at prices that should make budget-conscious consumers smile.

Blonde Expressions Color Satin Polish Finishing Creme (*\$4.99 for 3.5 ounces*) is an outstanding water- and silicone-based styling cream that is every bit as effective as salon-sold products that cost three times as much or more. Its blend of silicones, holding agent, and panthenol makes it easy to achieve smooth, sleek, and shiny hair, and it also offers some protection while heat-styling, not to mention frizz control. It is recommended for use with straightening or flat irons, and can be used on damp or dry hair (though dry hair is preferred). This product does not contain a single ingredient specific for blonde hair—the silicone doing the work enhances all shades with equally impressive results.

Brunette Expressions Velvet Look Sleeking Balm (*\$4.99 for 3.5 ounces*) is identical to the Blonde Expressions Color Satin Polish Finishing Creme above, and the same review applies. Which one you choose depends on your packaging preference: the Blonde version comes in a tube, while the Brunette version is in a bottle with a pump. Neither product provides a unique benefit for the needs of a specific hair color.

Ultimate Finish Perfecting Creme (*\$4.99 for 4 ounces*) is an excellent, practical, and value-priced silicone finishing cream. It is similar to the Blonde Expressions Color Satin Polish Finishing Creme above (see what I mean about Pantene being repetitive?) and the same comments apply. You get slightly more product for the money, but Ultimate Finish Perfecting Creme has a thinner texture, meaning the formula likely has a bit more water than the Satin Polish Finishing Creme.

Thickening Spray (*\$4.29 for 6.8 ounces*) is a cleverly formulated styling spray/leave-in conditioner hybrid that contains several water-binding agents that are good for fine or thin hair because they will not weigh it down.

Smooth & Shine Styling Milk (*\$5.49 for 5.1 ounces*) works beautifully to smooth hair, add shine, reduce frizzies, and provide soft, touchable hold. Used prior to styling it can provide some protection from heat. This is yet another example of an inexpensive, mass-market product that put to shame salon products that cost much more and don’t provide any difference in the results you get.

Classic Care Texture & Shine Defining Pomade (*\$3.99 for 1.7 ounces*) is a water-soluble pomade that is slightly creamier than the norm, and that makes it good for drier hair that is not fine or thin. It adds texture, shine, and definition to hair while keeping frizzies at bay, and is easy to shampoo out. Although labeled as “extra strong hold,” hair remains soft and pliable without a hint of stiffness, a trait I think most consumers find advantageous.

Sebastian

The lowdown: Formerly owned by Germany-based Wella and now under the ownership of Procter & Gamble, Sebastian is a hair-care product junkie’s bonanza. The options are seemingly endless, and even better, most of them are well-formulated products with price tags that, while not inexpensive, won’t break the bank either. What to focus on while shopping this line is a good question, and my recommendation is to pay attention to their intriguing styling products and leave-in conditioners before jumping into the basics.

Shaper Shapeshift Hybrid Putty (*\$12.50 for 1.8 ounces*) is indeed a hybrid product given its ingredients, which include the castor oil typically found in water-soluble pomades, the waxes typically found in traditional pomades, and the lighter emollient ingredients usually seen in styling creams. What this means for your hair is a product that will smooth, tame frizzies, and add glossy shine with malleable hold. A little goes a long way, however, and even a small amount of this styling aid can make hair look greasy, so it is best for shorter, highly textured hairstyles and not recommended for normal to fine or thin hair. Sebastian deserves credit for coming up with a new twist on standard pomades, though this product does contain fragrance.



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