

Algae, turmeric, tamarind seeds ... Not the ingredients you'd expect in a luxury beauty brand, perhaps, but Elethea founder and local resident Nausheen Qureshi swears by their efficacy. She tells Debbie Ward how growing up in Kenya led her to discover the secrets of great skin

A NEW BUSINESS with one foot in Chelsea, the other in Africa, has transformed the unlikely ingredient of algae into a luxury skincare range. Chelsea resident and Elethea founder Nausheen Qureshi grew up in Kenya and was inspired by local remedies: "We would have traditional things put on our skin – herbal concoctions. When I was young I was quite a science geek. I used to think, 'What is it within these compounds that makes your skin change or heal?'"

Qureshi studied biochemistry at Imperial College London and started her business soon after, joining forces with a university friend who specialises in cellular imaging.

Now based on Elystan Road, she returns to Kenya regularly, where she sources natural ingredients, including a special algae from the Rift Valley.

"Algae is probably the most amazing superfood on our planet; it has it all," says Qureshi. "It feeds off a rock, and the Rift Valley has all these unique minerals. It also completely balances the water levels within your skin." It's a three- or four-month process to purify the algae for beauty use, but it regenerates in a few days, making it environmentally friendly.

Tamarind seed extract, meanwhile, also sourced from Kenya, is Elethea's natural alternative to the hyaluronic acid widely used in skincare and could be the "next big thing", says Qureshi. "It attracts water molecules and improves levels within the skin, and plumps out lines and wrinkles."

Though she also uses ingredients from elsewhere, like turmeric (inspired by her Indian heritage) and rosehips (home-grown in Britain), Qureshi is keen to

focus on Africa and challenge preconceptions that the continent is all about poverty. "They have such an incredible knowledge in Kenya, because they've been so nomadic. They've had to teach themselves, because it's really important to know which plants help them and their cattle," Qureshi explains.

The journey from Qureshi's idea to Elethea's official launch last August was slow, involving four years of initial research, then four of "trial and error". She says: "I'm a bit of a perfectionist. I wanted to be able to say, with the quality we have, with the research we have, this can totally change your skin."

Elethea products retail for £120–£210, but Qureshi says: "I believe you go all out. If someone is buying quality, they want quality in every single aspect." For instance, she says, Elethea uses no fillers, and its cream is 30 per cent water, rather than the typical 60 per cent, "because we ▶



The Elethea range
Right: Elethea founder
Nausheen Qureshi

want to pack it with nutrients".

Still embracing her inner geek, the biochemist is an expert in decoding labels and spotting how some manufacturers "try to be cheeky". She explains that though ingredients must legally be listed in quantity order, those of less than 1 per cent can appear anywhere, giving the illusion they're a greater component. And she's not a fan of multi-function BB creams, combining skincare with make-up – a big trend in recent years: "It leaves too little percentage for the active ingredients."

Qureshi is happy to give advice through Elethea's website and has some original tips. For instance, in winter, she recommends cleansing your skin just once a day, so as not to strip its defences.

Qureshi's time veers between long, labour-intensive hours in the lab and thumb-twiddling waits for results. Though Elethea was actually ready to launch in 2011, she held off until 2013 so as to be armed with strong test results. "Capital is intensive, especially for a start-up, but I wanted to prove [my product] works."

Elethea has five products, including an Eye Architecture Cream and Youth Capture Serum. Qureshi plans to add perhaps one product a year but to keep the range small.

For now, it sells online, though she's poised to appoint a small local distributor. "It's a luxury brand; that means you can't have it mass retailed. You have to cap your manufacturing, so it's almost a limited edition," she explains. Her next step is finding a Chelsea location to launch bespoke Elethea facials, because she believes once people experience the product, they'll want to take it home.

Qureshi could perhaps soon be a good tester for her own anti-wrinkle products as she jokes she hasn't had a decent night's sleep since she came up with her business idea. "It's definitely not for the faint-hearted," she says, "but my mantra is: 'Keep going.'"

www.elethea.com

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