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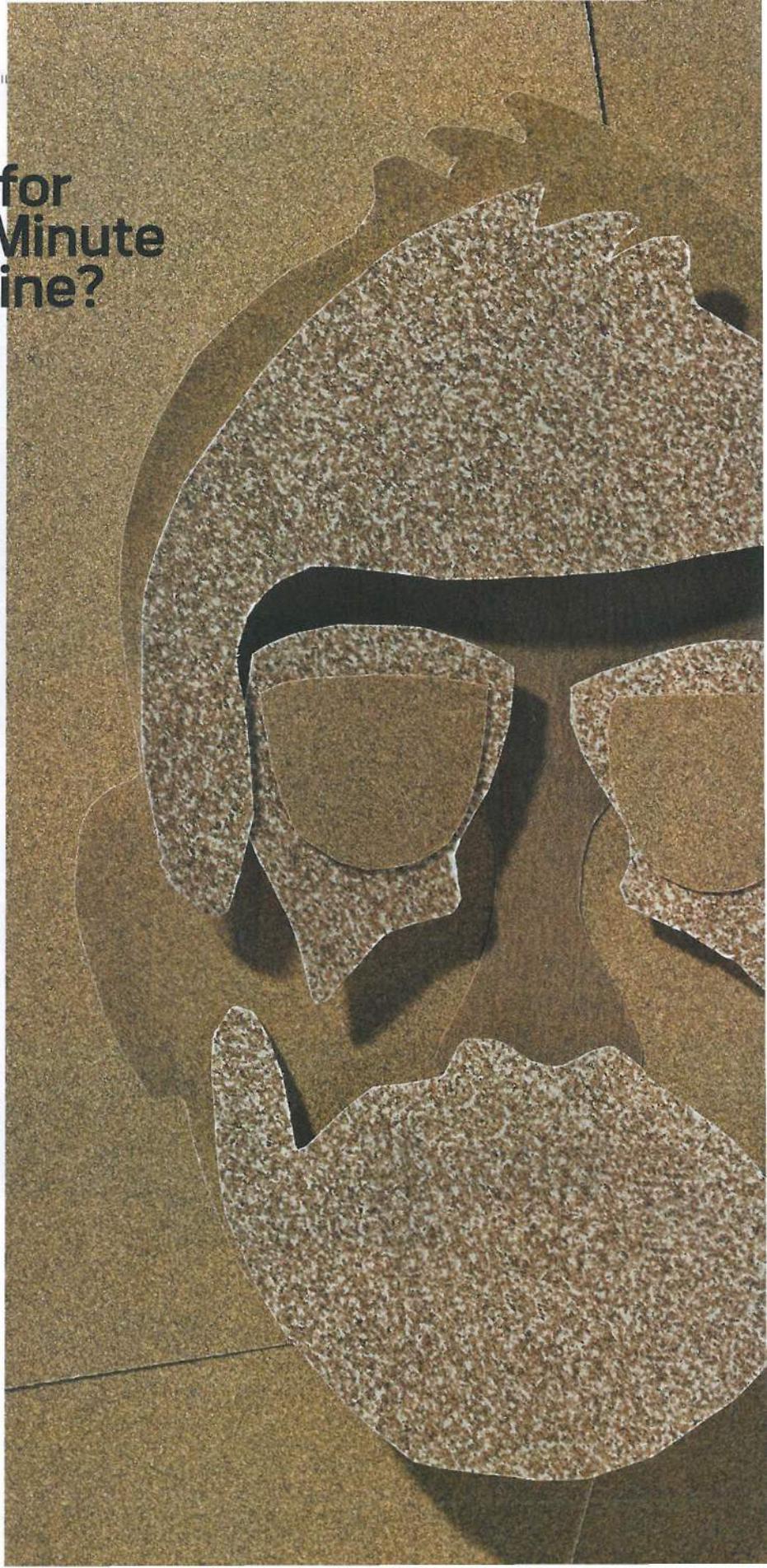
Who Has Time for a 10-Step, 45-Minute Grooming Routine?

Not most men in America, probably. At least not right now. But U.S. cosmetics companies are looking for inspiration in South Korea, where to say that men are obsessed with beauty products—serums, essences, ampoules—would be putting it mildly.



IN KOREAN, IT'S CALLED **CHOK CHOK**. IT translates roughly to “plump and moist,” and it’s the nicest thing you can say about someone’s face. It’s so coveted that many South Koreans, men included, use 10 or more skin-care products each morning and night to achieve it. Guys wash with an oil-based cleanser, followed by a foam. They exfoliate, focusing on the areas that don’t get hit with a razor. They prep their skin with a toner, massage in a series of essences, serums, and supercharged serums known as ampoules, apply a sheet mask, then moisturize with a lotion and an eye cream. The finale: sunscreen and a hydrating mist. Why the fuss? If Korean skin-care brands and their customers are to be believed, this routine will get you: (1) a dewy, wrinkle-free face; (2) out of bed earlier (the sequence takes about 45 minutes); (3) a better job; (4) more money (see No. 3); and (5) more sex.

While this sounds like the stuff of teenage dreams (and late-night infomercials), it’s serious business—approximately \$10 billion—a-year serious. In the past decade, South Korea’s beauty industry has become one of the world’s biggest. Though men ac-



Layers upon layers: Some South Korean men have a tiered skin-care regimen that's calibrated to deliver a youthful, glowing complexion.

count for a fraction of sales, about \$635 million in 2013, demand continues to grow. And what they want is a visage that radiates like a baby's. "Glowing skin is a major measure of total perceived wellness" in South Korea, says Joseph Scott Grigsby, vice president of global marketing and creative for Lab Series, a men's luxury skin-care line. "Guys want to look perfect so they're perceived that way." Whether this thinking inspired Korean pop culture or vice versa is unclear. But after television shows like *A Gentleman's Dignity*—basically *Sex and the City* with dudes—became hits while showcasing fastidious manicuring, public prettifying went mainstream. (By then, cosmetics CEO Yu Sang-Ok had entered his seventies with a memoir titled *The CEO Who Wears Makeup* and soccer star Ahn Jung-Hwan had become the face of Somang Cosmetics.)

Chok chok sounds kind of crazy—but exploring a \$635 million business does not, so U.S. companies are looking east. "It used to be the French who led skin care;

90 free minutes a day is a tough sell). Rich Bellis, 27, a New York City Web editor who pays attention to his skin, says, "When I buy products off the shelf, inevitably there will be some stubborn blemishes and dryness here or oil there," he says. "If the Koreans can solve that for me, bless them—I'm on board. But they'd need to do it in fewer steps." Still, we may be closer to living *la vida chok chok* than we think. As in Korea, the men's share of the domestic personal-care market is growing at a rapid clip. "We're on the cusp of great change with the way men take care of their skin," says Janet Pardo, senior vice president of global product development at Clinique. "We're starting to see this incredible need and desire from men in North America to step it up a notch." Already, Dr. Jart+, one of the first Korean brands to sell in the United States, is "slowly introducing more intensive routines for men," says Richard You, the brand's general manager.

But is such a comprehensive regimen even

"KOREAN MEN ARE GOING TO DRASTIC LENGTHS TO REDEFINE THEIR JAWLINE—including SURGERY," SAYS A LUXURY-SKIN-CARE EXECUTIVE. "WE ASKED, 'HOW CAN WE DO THAT WITH INGREDIENTS?'"

now American brands are taking direction from South Korea," says Peter Thomas Roth, whose eponymous unisex skin-care line makes hydrating masks with Korean components like Jeju Island green tea. A snapshot of a cosmetics store's shelf, like Sephora's, proves Roth's point. Every brand seems to offer something from the land of the morning calm: There's Clinique's Even Better Essence Lotion, Neutrogena's Hydro Boost Water Gel, Laneige's Bright Renew Emulsion, and Roth's own Un-Wrinkle Turbo 24k Gold Line Smoothing Toning Lotion. Grigsby says Lab Series' brisk-selling MAX LS Age-Less Power V Lifting Cream, formulated to firm and tighten men's jawlines, is a direct reaction to trends on the peninsula: "Korean men are going to drastic lengths to redefine their jawline—including surgery. We asked, 'How can we do that with ingredients?'"

Whether this daily ritual approaches "Gangnam Style" levels of popularity in the United States remains to be seen (finding

good for you? Not necessarily. "A 10-step routine is simply way too drying," says Dr. Jeannette Graf, an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City. "Before you even get to the serums, you've washed your face twice or more, causing a hydration imbalance." To avoid that, Dave Cho, cofounder of Soko Glam, an e-tailer of Korean beauty products, suggests test-driving the trend: Apply a toning lotion as an aftershave, or wear a hydrating sheet mask while brewing your morning coffee. What's most important is being consistent. "Koreans don't stay young-looking because their skin-care routine is 10 steps," says Dr. Paul Jarrod Frank, a dermatologist and founder of the Fifth Avenue Dermatology Surgery and Laser Center in New York City. "They look good because their routines are regular." Your skin craves consistency, and it'll reward you with an even, hydrated glow for doing the same thing every day. Call it whatever you want. ■

SET DESIGN BY KATE LANDUCCI FOR MARY HOWARD STUDIO.