

BEAUTY

Madonna's MDNA Skin to Hit the U.S.

● The singer's skin-care range launches at Barneys New York in September.

BY RACHEL STRUGATZ

"I'm tired of hearing people complain here that they can't get it in America," Madonna said of her skin-care line, MDNA Skin, which is making its way Stateside three years after its launch in Japan.

Madonna codeveloped the entire range – which reads as her name without the vowels or the second "N" – of which her likeness was the sole inspiration for parent company MTG, based in Nagoya, Japan.

"It's a line I can use every day. Some things I use when I don't wear makeup and am not doing shows, and others are specifically good for having to apply makeup and be on stage under lights....I developed it for me specifically, but it also feels universal. I mean, my children use it, my friends use it," Madonna told WWD in an exclusive interview last week.

Come Sept. 26, nine stockkeeping units will hit mdnaskin.com, Barneys New York counters on Madison Avenue and Beverly Hills and barneys.com, with a rollout to additional Barneys doors later this fall and in the spring (Barneys is the exclusive U.S. retail partner for one year). Prices range from \$50 for The Face Wash to \$600 for a Rejuvenator Set that includes a Chrome Clay Mask with a removal and penetration device (a version of the tool that only removes the mask is sold on its own for \$180). Rounding out the group is The Serum, \$240; The Eye Serum, \$120; The Rose Mist, \$120; The Eye Mask, \$50 to \$120; the Chrome Clay Mask, \$120 to \$220 and Mask Remover Sheets, \$12. A Finishing Cream will join the lineup in Japan and the U.S. in November, followed by a Reinvention Cream and an Onyx Black Beauty Roller made with a high-density carbon that emits high infrared rays next year.

"I use the eye masks, I throw them in the freezer so they are icy cold. I sleep on my face so when I wake up my eyes are always puffy so I really need them. I put them on for a couple of minutes before I get out of bed. As they thaw out on your face, the ice aspect reduces inflammation and the serum has the hyaluronic acid in it. These are simple things. You can get on with your day and use them all," said Madonna, who turned 59 on Wednesday.

For someone who just "wants to do the basics" and not have an elaborate skin-care routine, the singer suggested a two-step regimen of The Rose Mist and The Serum, which she called an "all-in-one product." For those seeking something more elaborate, she pointed to the Rejuvenator Set, which comes with a Chrome Clay Mask, a dual-head Skin Rejuvenator device with a magnetic head to remove the mask and an infusion head to help with product delivery, mask remover sheets, a spatula, a stand and a cleaning cloth.

She acknowledged that after finding ingredients that are natural and can be mass-produced (with the ability to be sold cross-border), technology is integral to the range. The most innovative element by far, she said, is the aforementioned Skin Rejuvenator (paired with the Chrome Clay Mask) that was engineered by MTG.

How it works: the magnetic head contains a neodymium magnet that generates a magnetic force of 280 MT that reportedly stimulates the production of collagen and elastin as well as removes the mask without compromising skin. The opposite end is equipped with Deep Derma Infusion



Madonna is the creator of MDNA Skin.

to mimic the shape and touch of a human hand, as well as Auto Skin Search, a feature that detects moisture level within the skin so it can calculate the voltage levels to emit to achieve consistent levels of product infusion.

Additionally, the clay in the mask comes from Montecatini, Italy, where MDNA Skin was granted permission to use the city's thermal waters and fango clay. Every product in the range is formulated with M.T. Parca, a proprietary ingredient derived from four natural springs in Montecatini.

"The hero product...was something we had never seen before," said Jennifer Miles, vice president, divisional merchandise manager, cosmetics, Barneys New York, of the Chrome Clay Mask. "We were drawn to these products because of the innovation and technology behind them, and the ingredient-driven focus of the brand."

Madonna revealed that while her focus remains on building her skin-care range, she would like to expand to men's grooming as well. Further down the line she envisions developing products that are "connected more to color."

MTG has big plans for MDNA Skin in the U.S., starting with the current collection to establish brand equity and positioning as a luxury player and introducing additional franchises within the brand at more approachable – but still prestige – price points.

MTG is said to be on track to do \$383 million in revenue this year, a 46 percent increase from 2016's \$262 million in sales. The company's revenue has grown by 20 times in the past decade and employees have increased tenfold. And despite existing sales and distribution within its native Japan and Asia – largely driven by innovation in technology-based devices – the company still has no U.S. presence, even after 21 years.

"I am extremely honored to create a brand together with Madonna while finally being able to launch in the USA," said Tsuyoshi Matsushita, president, MTG.

MDNA Skin is carried at 12 department stores and three duty-free stores in Japan; Harvey Nichols in Hong Kong; Taipei Sogo in Taiwan and in September, at Shinsegae in Korea. Two MDNA Skin Spas are located in the Grand Hyatt Tokyo and Grand Hyatt Fukuoka, with another slated to open at the Grand Hyatt Seoul next month.

This is where MDNA Skin comes in, as the brand will serve as MTG's point of entry into the U.S., Europe and the rest of Asia. By 2020, MDNA Skin is on track to have a presence in 11 countries that span Japan, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, the U.S., Korea, China, the U.K., France and Italy.

To support the launch, MDNA Skin will "play in every single marketing channel possible," said Shannon Goldberg, vice president of marketing for MDNA Skin. Digital advertising will start to roll out at destinations like people.com and marie-claire.com in September, with print hitting select October books.

"We're paying close attention to what our key visuals are. Of course in Asia, American celebrity cachet resonates a little bit more. It's a little more meaningful [there], whereas here [in the U.S.] we have to really watch how we're positioning

the brand – as not just another celebrity brand, but rather a brand that is great and can stand alone by itself," Goldberg said. "And then there's Madonna – we're not saying that she comes second – she's truly the creator behind this brand. It's not just another celebrity brand."

Dr. Paul Jarrod Frank, MDNA Skin brand consultant and Madonna's dermatologist of two years, came on board in the spring of last year to help with the American business. Previously, he's worked with brands such as Estée Lauder on developing products and adapting skin care for the Asian market – this time he's doing the reverse.

"Madonna doesn't do anything half-assed," Frank said during an interview last month at his office on Manhattan's Upper East Side, referring to the singer as the "ultimate consumer." "She is not a dermatologist; she doesn't know about formulations and packaging...[but] she knows what she likes, and what she likes has done well in the general population. She was looking for guidance [from me] as a scientific middle man between the company that makes the product."

Frank was attracted to MTG's roots in technology, which he called the largest growth area in beauty for noninvasive products and treatments. But for him, refining MDNA Skin's offerings – and looking at formulation, packaging and marketing – comes down to fundamental differences between the American and Asian consumer.

"Asia is very attuned to using several products and regimens; Americans want hero [products], they want a pill, a cream. They [Americans] are not great at following instructions, they aren't as regimented," Frank said.

Because of this, MDNA Skin looked to make every product in the collection important, or a "hero."

"She may love our mask, but she may not buy our spray, so we make sure each product is worth it if she's going to cherry-pick it," Goldberg said.

The brand hasn't seen price-resistance in its native Japan, where the most expensive item in the line – the Rejuvenator Set – is one of two bestsellers (along with The Serum) at the brand's flagship counter at Isetan in Tokyo. Reportedly, more than 100 units are sold of the \$600 set each month.

However, Goldberg acknowledged that even though Madonna has millions of fans all over the world, many of them aren't going to be able to afford MDNA Skin's premiere collection. To appeal to this broader base, MDNA Skin is employing two strategies, she revealed, starting with a secondary line that's already in development and slated for a fall 2018 release to accommodate more "traditional" U.S. retailers. For instance, a moisturizer that will soon launch at Barneys has a \$250 price point, but product from MDNA Skin's accessible line would ideally retail around \$75. The other strategy involves creating "snack-size" versions of the initial range that she described as being more substantial than travel size with an entry price point for a new consumer who isn't willing to or can't afford a \$600 set.

"With Madonna being the 'Queen of Reinvention' you can expect this brand to evolve, grow and change – that's just the brand's DNA," Goldberg said, noting that there are plans for two to four product launches per year that will be at the "cusp of cutting-edge technology." "This brand is what's next for her as a person. Of course she's a mother first, and has a charity – and skin care is her next endeavor."