

More Than Skin Deep

Indonesian-born skin specialist, Monica Njo, practises what she preaches – that beauty comes from within

Hailing from Solo, Central Java, married mother of one, Monica Njo, lives in a light, airy penthouse on the east coast of Singapore with her young daughter and oil trader husband. Working as a doctor in Java, she specialised in skin consultancy for leading cosmetic brand Ristra's clinic where she gave advice to patients with problem skin. So it was something of a natural transition to establish the Make Up Store in Singapore with three friends: Indah Papan, Linda Irawaty and Clarisza Jaury, in 2005.

Njo's attitude to skincare is that beauty comes from within. "Everybody is born beautiful," she says. "But proper skincare plays an important role in maintaining skin."

Brought up in a traditional Indonesian Chinese family, Njo was encouraged to take care of her skin, "My mother is a disciplinarian who ensured I was well behaved and well groomed," she says. "So as a teenager I made the effort to take care of my face with traditional recipes."

She studied medicine at the Atmajaya Catholic University in Jakarta for eight years before qualifying to become a doctor. Then, as a skin consultant in Indonesia working for a leading cosmetic brand, she advised patients attending the clinic with various skin problems. "Most of the cases were acne, pimples or hyper pigmentation." Interested to learn more about skin and how to take care of it, she looked into

which creams to steer clear of: the good, the bad and how to avoid the premature ageing process. "It's good practice to give extra attention to our skin as it's the biggest human organ and can be seen from the outside. And it's good to be concerned with how we look, especially when it's related to facial skin. When you meet people, they look at your face first."

Njo's decision to study medicine arose from her passion to help people in need, "My father encouraged me to be a doctor. He wanted to be a doctor himself and went to university but didn't continue as he couldn't stand to see blood, so he became

"When you meet people, they look at your face first"

a businessman instead. Even though I don't practise as a doctor now, the knowledge and experience I gathered over the years will remain with me."

The idea to bring the Make Up Store to Singapore evolved when Njo's friend, Indah Papan flew to Stockholm, Sweden – Make Up Store's headquarters – three years ago. "She found a makeup brand she fell in love with," says Njo. "It made her feel like a kid in a candy store." A second trip to Stockholm was subsequently planned and Papan was joined by Njo, Irawaty and Jaury. The first store in Singapore opened in July 2005 at Marina Square and last year

saw two more launches in Paragon and VivoCity.

Njo is actively involved in charitable events organised by her daughter's school, the United World College, where parents are encouraged to participate. To maintain her work-life balance, Njo works in the mornings while her daughter is at school and spends time with her after school.

Njo also loves watching films, live performances and dining out with friends. "Beach resorts, exotic foods and massage are relaxing for me," she says. She relishes cooking Indonesian fare at home, tending to cook traditional recipes handed down from her mother's family. She also cooks Thai and Italian fare, but for dinner parties and birthday parties she hires a chef.

Njo has always been interested in interior design, as well as gardening, and was involved in the interior design of her home and small balcony garden. Her home's interior is an eclectic mix planned with her interior designer. "We discussed what I wanted and in which context, took a look at my collection of furniture, then created a concept. It took almost a year to complete as we went to Bali to choose some pieces. I learned gardening from my father who has green fingers and is a plant lover. As a child I was surrounded by plants and I liked to watch him taking care of them."

On her plan to retire young, Njo's life philosophy is that your life is "a perfect reflection of your beliefs. Where there's a will, there's a way," she says. □

Words: Alexandra Kohut-Cole Photography: Frank Pinkers, Mousefilms
Makeup: Josephine Yim, Make Up Store Hair: Vinn Wong, Action Hair Salon, Paragon