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PURE INNOVATION

Involved with cutting-edge product development most of his professional life, Leland Hirsch, co-founder of ARTec, discusses the company's latest launch—purehair—and what he believes the industry needs most.

Why did ARTec decide to launch purehair, its 18-product, aromatherapy-based wet line?
ARTec is a strong environmental company. We always recycle and we felt [pure and natural] was a viable client category that was weak in professional haircare. We also feel that consumers recognize the term aromatherapy and understand how it changes the personal-care experience. By 2000 we wanted there to be a different type of product available to hairdressers.

What kind of research went into this line? How pure is it?
First of all, we actually went to the biggest companies in the world that produce aromas and told them that we don't want any artificial fragrances in our products. We wanted natural oils that are stable, and we wanted to participate with these companies as both a marketeer and as a manufacturer so that the products are client and hairdresser friendly. We didn't want them to be medicinal and heavy. It took three years of research to identify pesticide-free oils.

We also wanted haircare that didn't contain artificial color. Our dyes are made from natural substances, such as caramel, which is basically burnt sugar. There is nothing wrong with using dyes, but this line is for those people who are looking for something pure. We use a surfactant (the cleansing agent in shampoos) derived from corn, which is gentle on the hair and scalp and less irritating than other surfactants. The conditioners contain certified organic corn silk. The line contains natural resins such as soybean for hold and crispness. The products are as natural as you can make them while still being able to perform. Only the preservative system isn't naturally derived because no natural one exists yet.

Also, oils need to be stored in packages that hold the aromas for a long time. Glass is commonly used because nothing can permeate its cavity wall. One of our focuses was to produce long-term stability packaging. All of the packaging in the purehair line has a double-wall cavity, which is basically two layers of two different types of plastics. This keeps the aromas very consistent and stable and yields a better product.

Does ARTec have any unique marketing strategies for purehair?
Yes, we want to create a merchandising environment in the salon that is a separate identity from other salon haircare lines. We're also launching stainless-steel, convertible, retail display racks for the line that come with promotional pictures that change every quarter, and removable shelf talkers that contain information about the aromas.

Our marketing-promotional material is cross-generational because statistics show that the Boomers are turning 50, and they are the largest segment of the country who have the most money. You can't just market to the cute, edgy boys and girls. This is for

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people who want less-irritating products and great aroma in their hair and in their bathroom.

Purehair is such a large product line. Why didn't ARTec start with just a few components and add to the purehair line gradually?
From day one, we wanted to create a completely different environment with this line. There are so many lines on the market today and we wanted to create something special. We wouldn't be perceived as special if we just introduced six or seven products. That's why we launched 18 products, including retail and counter displays and a promotional magazine—all on launch—and all to help salons get to the next level with this segment of the market.

What is ARTec's pure shop division, and what plans do you have for it?
The pure shop division is the natural division within ARTec. In the future, we're planning aromatherapy skincare and makeup. We're sourcing packaging right now. The line is going to be very special. The skincare will be a therapeutic and corrective: an Erno Lazlo type of line. After skincare and cosmetics, we will come out with natural haircolor.

Next year, we're launching haircolor for ARTec. It will have more conditioning, contain brighter reds, and provide salons with a strategy for building a haircolor department. There will be two phases to it: one for beginner colorists and the other for more experienced colorists. Half the line will be premixed colors such as brown-reds, brown-golds and so forth. Colorists can use just one tube, they don't have to mix anything. It's very simple color for beginners. The other half of the line will contain colors that experienced colorists can mix to create what they want.

Where do you see the professional beauty industry going in 2000?
In 2000 I think we all better figure out how to get more hairdressers into the beauty industry. The chains, salon owners, manufacturers and distributors should all focus on campaigns aimed at bringing people into this industry. Regis is doing a campaign, JC Penney has a great one and Nubest & Co. [Hirsch's and partner Michael Mazzei's salon] is developing one. Salons will have to put up signage about the opportunity, creativity and benefits this industry offers. This kind of promotion is very important. There are lots of talented people out there, and the industry isn't getting its fair share of them.

We need to create an identity for this industry. I think we should be doing a milk-industry-type of ad campaign. There are lots of celebrities and sports figures who went to beauty school such as Fran Drescher and Danny DeVito. All the leaders in this industry should come together and create such a campaign. We need spokespeople.

What do hairdressers need today to be truly successful?
One thing—passion. If you've got passion, you'll do well. Just go to New Jersey and you'll find more passionate stylists, the most motivated hairdressers in the world. I don't know if it's something in the water... I lived there for about eight years. You go into salons there and you see that everyone is motivated about products and technique—it's amazing!—HEATHER LANDAU

Team ARTec: Business partners Leland Hirsch and Michael Mazzei