

As seen in the April 2011 issue of

**whole living**  
body+soul in balance

DRAWING  
INGREDIENTS  
FROM LOCAL  
FARMS AND  
INSPIRATION  
FROM HER  
GRANDMOTHER'S  
RECIPES, A  
NATURAL-BEAUTY  
PIONEER GREW  
A BOOMING  
COSMETICS  
BUSINESS.

face

to

field

NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND, may be best known for its fertile coastline, but Brenda Brock, creator of the natural skin care line Farmaesthetics, is more interested in its farms. "That sandy soil is perfect for growing herbs," she says. When Brock started using local plants to make skin ointments, they quickly became popular among her friends. So popular, in fact, that she began selling them at a roadside stand. "What at first was a hobby slowly grew into a full-fledged operation," she says. While the success may surprise Brock in hindsight, she's no stranger to the beauty of farming.

BY OLESSA PINDAK  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRÉDÉRIC LAGRANGE



**NATURE'S CALL**

Brock made her first batch of what would become the Farmaesthetics line in a tiny kitchen in Manhattan while acting on the daytime drama *One Life to Live*. "I still don't know what inspired me that day," she says, "but it was the beginning of the journey." She's kept that homemade sensibility in her products—infused oils (such as arnica in soy, far left) are made in small batches, Brock tests ingredients like live hyssop herself (left), and soap is hand-cut (below).



**ALL IN THE FAMILY**

"My daughter, Lela (above left), is named after my grandmother, who taught me so much of what I know about natural skin care," Brock says. Old family photos like the one of Lela and Uncle Jiggs (above right, in background) are placed around the small factory where the products are developed.



**SNAP A PHOTO...**  
to see video footage of Brenda whipping up some simple DIY beauty treatments. Send it to 303-847-5995 or whole@snaptag.mobi  
*Message & data rates may apply*

A seventh-generation agrarian, Brock was raised in Texas and spent summers on her family's farm in the small town of Bartlett. "Being there was magical for me," she says. "I remember the quietude of a rural farmhouse, crickets, screen doors, horses, my Uncle Jiggs kicking mud off his boots, and Aunt Dora Frances making peach cobbler."

It was there that Brock was introduced to homemade remedies. "I spent a lot of time in the kitchen, where the women had this whole world of knowledge about self-healing," she says. If someone had a rash, wound, or dry hands, they would snip a few herbs, like calendula or lavender, and blend them with oil or butter. "There was this exchange of information," Brock says. It passed from one generation to the next, an oral legacy.

Brock continued to experiment with making natural products, first as a teenager, using herbs from her father's garden, then as an adult in the 1990s in her small Manhattan kitchen. "I've had a stack of herb books at my bedside for as long as I can remember," she says. Soon after she moved to Newport full-time 14 years ago, she started to sell a collection of a dozen products at a 1930s farm stand she restored herself.

**SIMPLE SCRUB**

One of the most basic body scrubs you can make is a cornmeal and lavender-bud blend. "My aunts used to keep cornmeal next to the tub because it's such a gentle exfoliant," Brock says. The lavender buds crumble as you rub, releasing their oil.



**"NATURAL INGREDIENTS VIBRATE WITH ENERGY. THEY'RE SHARP, SOFT, POTENT, AND HEALING. IN OUR FAST-PACED WORLD, PLANTS AND HERBS HELP CONNECT US TO THE EARTH."**

"I FEEL SO PRIVILEGED TO BE THE DAUGHTER OF A FARMING FAMILY. I CAN'T TAKE OVER MY FAMILY'S FARM, BUT I CAN SUPPORT SMALL FARMERS AND KEEP THOSE TRADITIONS ALIVE."

#### BODY IN BALANCE

Traditional herbalism is based on ingredient compatibility—the way basil and tomatoes mingle so well because they thrive when planted close to each other. Similarly, if you use ingredients that naturally go together when formulating creams, you get products that don't easily spoil.

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#### BETTING THE FARM

The staples of farm life—corn, milk, beeswax, calendula, and sunflowers—are also the raw ingredients in many home remedies.

##### BEESWAX

Much of the beeswax in Farmaesthetics products is local. "It's lovely and untreated," Brock says. Beeswax can be used to thicken creams and salves, and it seals oils into the skin.

##### CALENDULA

Known as the skin-mending herb, calendula is used in remedy oils and salves. "If you have super dry or cracked skin, this helps it heal and keeps the tissue intact," Brock says.

##### SUNFLOWER OIL

Sunflower oil is light, making it a perfect moisturizer for summer. "It's logical, since that's when sunflowers are at their peak," Brock explains.

##### DRIED MILK

Milk typifies balance—it has lactic acid, which is an exfoliant, but it's also rich in skin-healthy fats, so it replenishes the skin while removing the top layer of dead cells. "On the farm, milk baths were given to kids with rashes or irritations because it settles the skin," she says.

##### CORNMEAL

This grain is made for exfoliation. The more you pulverize it, the finer it becomes, resulting in a gentler scrub. "When you mix cornmeal with essential oils, the granules remove dead skin and the oils help nourish and heal," Brock says.

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In 2000 Brock started outgrowing the farm stand. She accepted a small investment from friends and family to find a dermatological lab that was willing to re-create her products on a large scale using only natural ingredients from small American farms. It took nine months to get the products right, but then word spread.

“How did I grow the business?” Brock asks. “Every time I got a call about an opportunity, I said yes.” One of those calls was from a salon owner inviting her to a beauty event. Brock went and made spa contacts, and soon Farmaesthetics was at the Four Seasons in Santa Barbara, California.

Eventually Brock wrote a business plan and submitted it to Springboard Enterprises, “a sort of CEO boot camp for entrepreneurial women,” Brock explains. Hers was one of 13 proposals chosen, and the business really took off. “There are ups and downs to owning my own company,” Brock says, but when she gets discouraged, she thinks about her family and one mission: “It’s not just a business plan on a page—everything I do is based on preserving generations of rural American traditions—it’s the real thing.”



**“I STARTED ON MY OWN WITH 12 SALVES, CREAMS, AND OILS AT A FARM STAND. NOW I HAVE NINE EMPLOYEES AT MY STORE IN NEWPORT, WHERE WE SELL 67 PRODUCTS.”**



**A DREAM REALIZED**

“I still hand-write all my labels and send them to a printer, who scans them,” Brock says. To decide whether new packaging has the appropriate vintage feel, she puts it next to a radio from the 1930s—if it’s a good fit, she knows she’s nailed it. Michele Bundy, Brock’s executive coordinator (pictured left) has a master’s degree in holistic counseling from Salve Regina University in Newport. “The women who work for me understand that there’s a connection between the products we use and total skin health,” Brock says. “The store really is the culmination of so much hard work,” she says. “Every time I walk in there, I almost can’t believe it.”



produced and styled by Dawn Sinowski; opposite: photograph by Johnny Miller

**NATURALLY INSPIRED**

Many products on store shelves feature key ingredients that come straight from the farm.

**SUNFLOWER**

The sunflower oil in Juice Beauty Cleansing Milk (\$22, [juicebeauty.com](http://juicebeauty.com)) helps cleanse the skin without stripping it. Dr. Hauschka Regenerating Eye Cream (\$59, [drhauschka.com](http://drhauschka.com)) uses the oil to protect delicate skin.

**CALENDULA**

Jurlique Calendula Cream (\$32, [jurlique.com](http://jurlique.com)) soothes and heals chapped, irritated skin. Aubrey Organics Calendula Blossom Natural Deodorant Spray (\$9, [aubrey-organics.com](http://aubrey-organics.com)) is perfect for sensitive underarms.

**HONEY**

Kiss My Face Olive & Honey Soap (\$3, [kissmyface.com](http://kissmyface.com)) combines olive oil and honey to seal moisture into the skin. Nivea Milk & Honey Lip Balm (\$2.50, [drugstore.com](http://drugstore.com)) soothes chapped lips.

**MILK**

Powdered milk is the base of Farmaesthetics Sweet Milk & Lavender Bud Facial Exfoliate (\$23, [farmaesthetics.com](http://farmaesthetics.com)), a dry scrub you blend with water. Fresh Milk Bath & Shower Cream (\$18.50, [fresh.com](http://fresh.com)) gently exfoliates and has moisturizing shea butter.