

Conscious skincare with SA's own Lulu & Marula

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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South African skincare brand Lulu & Marula is catering to the growing demand for natural, ethically-made skincare products.



Jesslynn Shepherd

Operating from a beauty studio in Cape Town, Lulu & Marula harnesses the gifts of southern Africa's famed Marula tree to develop scientifically-formulated products that work with one's skin to balance and boost its natural processes.

The brand is the brainchild of beauty enthusiast Jesslynn Shepherd, who started the company in 2013. Skincare scientist Monique Spaltman later joined the team, and now heads up all product research, development and testing to ensure superior product quality.

With Shepherd being a "green living idealist", the Lulu & Marula range is made from pure botanical and plant-derived ingredients, with no artificial colours, fragrances, parabens, petrochemicals, synthetics or other harmful ingredients used in the formulations. The brand is also against animal testing, and all products are endorsed by Beauty Without Cruelty.

Today, Lulu & Marula is stocked at more than 30 retailers across SA and Namibia.

Here, Shepherd shares more about her journey building an ethical, all-natural skincare brand.

 ***Tell us a bit about your background before starting Lulu & Marula, and what inspired you to enter the skincare business.***

I come from a digital marketing background where I worked as a strategist in an advertising agency, and this gave me a pretty good background from which I could launch my brand. However, starting Lulu & Marula came about very organically.

I began experimenting with my own basic skincare formulations in my kitchen as a response to the lack of options when it came to natural skincare in South Africa. I struggled with hormonal breakouts, but was also aware of the importance of prevention against premature aging, so finding something that tackled both angles and worked for my skin was really difficult. The idea for Lulu & Marula started there.



■ ***Cute name! Where does it come from?***

Lulu is my family dog, she's a Giant Schnauzer and is such a cutie. I chose Marula as it's a key ingredient that we've incorporated throughout the entire range because of its unique ties to South Africa.

Marula trees only grow in specific areas of southern Africa and it's such an incredible ingredient for all types of skin concerns. It's packed with antioxidants to nourish, repair and rejuvenate skin, and has been used to treat skin ailments for centuries.

■ ***The beauty industry is notorious for using buzzwords and dubious marketing claims. How does Lulu & Marula uphold its promise of being natural and ethically produced?***

We only source ingredients that are 100% plant-based and come with scientific reports to prove their traceability and authenticity. We are also endorsed by Beauty Without Cruelty which upholds our beliefs that cosmetics should never be tested on animals – not just the finished products, but the ingredients shouldn't be either.



Monique Spaltman and Jesslynn Shepherd

■ ***Who is the Lulu & Marula customer, and what do you think makes your brand stand out?***

Our customer is the conscious, modern South African woman. It's a customer that likes to shop for local, consciously-created goods. I feel that Lulu & Marula as a brand is fresh and accessible, we don't talk down to our customers but rather include them and help them to understand how to take care of their skin.

Lulu & Marula is also a brand that encourages our customers to want to take the time they need in their busy lives to care for their skin. The scent, packaging and feel of each product is designed to make the user feel like they're taking a little mental holiday. It's the user experience that we want to transform from a routine to a ritual.

■ ***How has your business grown since its humble beginnings?***

It started as a side project that I did in my spare time alongside my full-time job, and now we have several people working alongside me on the brand, servicing an extremely loyal customer base. It's grown massively and I'm so proud of the whole team that helped Lulu & Marula get to the place it is.



■ ***How did you go about getting your products stocked by retailers, and did you encounter any unexpected challenges along the way?***

We've found that we have a much bigger success rate when retailers approach us, rather than the other way around. To get to that point we've just focused on creating a really strong brand, getting the word out there, and if you build something convincing enough, people will find you.

It's always challenging finding retailers that are the right fit for the brand, both from a values and a functionality perspective. It needs to be somewhere that attracts the right customer base, but also has flexible payment terms that work for a small business, especially with the cash flow limitations that small business have. We've managed to balance this quite well, and we always learn a lot when things don't work out.

■ ***What inspires you, personally and professionally?***

Personally, I love being in nature with my dogs! I'm lucky that where I live I have access to the beach and mountains for beautiful, quiet walks. I'm a homebody, and I get my energy from taking downtime.

Professionally, Lulu & Marula's customers! The feedback we get from our customers is what really inspires us to keep going and working towards doing better.



■ *If you could go back in time and give yourself one piece of business advice, what would it be?*

Honestly, this is such a difficult thing to answer because every mistake I've made along the way has been such a valuable learning. Every step taken was needed to get to the stage we are now.

■ *What's next for Lulu & Marula?*

We're focusing on our current product range and our professional salon treatment range, so you'll be seeing us in new spaces very soon!

Visit [Lulu & Marula online](#) for more information, and connect with the brand on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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