

Curl Chemistry: A homegrown natural haircare brand by Liesl Katzen



By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Like many great success stories, local haircare brand Curl Chemistry was born to address a need harboured by the founder themselves. For 28-year-old Liesl Katzen, the problem was finding products that adequately cared for her natural curly hair, following her decision to ditch chemical straighteners and embrace her 'roots'.



Liesl Katzen

After some experimentation, Katzen formulated and launched her first product, the Curl Chemistry Curl Activating Cream. One product soon grew into a range, as demand for the homegrown brand grew among Cape Town's natural hair community.

Born in Namibia and now residing in Parow, Cape Town, Katzen has grown her business through word-of-mouth and social media, with Facebook and Instagram pages that boast a strong following.

Her BCom degree, completed at the University of the Western Cape in 2019, has aided her understanding of important human resource and finance processes, and she now employs one permanent and three casual staff members, and hopes to expand her brand beyond South Africa.



Curl Chemistry products are manufactured and packaged in Cape Town, and are made using natural butters and oils, including shea butter, olive oil, argan oil and coconut oil. They're also vegan-friendly and devoid of any sulphates, parabens, silicones or mineral oils. Currently, Curl Chemistry can be purchased in salons around Cape Town and Johannesburg or from over 50 direct sales agents across the country.

Here, Katzen shares with us her entrepreneurial journey thus far.

What inspired you to start your own haircare brand?

The idea for Curl Chemistry came from my own struggle with hair products in 2014. There weren't many curl-friendly brands on the store shelves so I decided to experiment and make my own. I formulated hair products that catered to my hair texture and surprisingly it works for many other textures now.

Once we launched the Curl Activating Cream (which was the first product), I saw a huge demand for the products and decided to take on the challenge of managing a business in this industry.

The demand for products designed for naturally curly hair seems to have exploded in the last few years. What do you think are the main factors driving the natural hair movement?

I think people are more in tune with natural beauty, and that includes hair. People are accepting their natural beauty and that's what drives this movement. They're starting to love how their hair curls naturally even though they were taught from a young age that straight hair was the only way to go. I learned to love my natural hair after giving up all relaxers and straighteners.



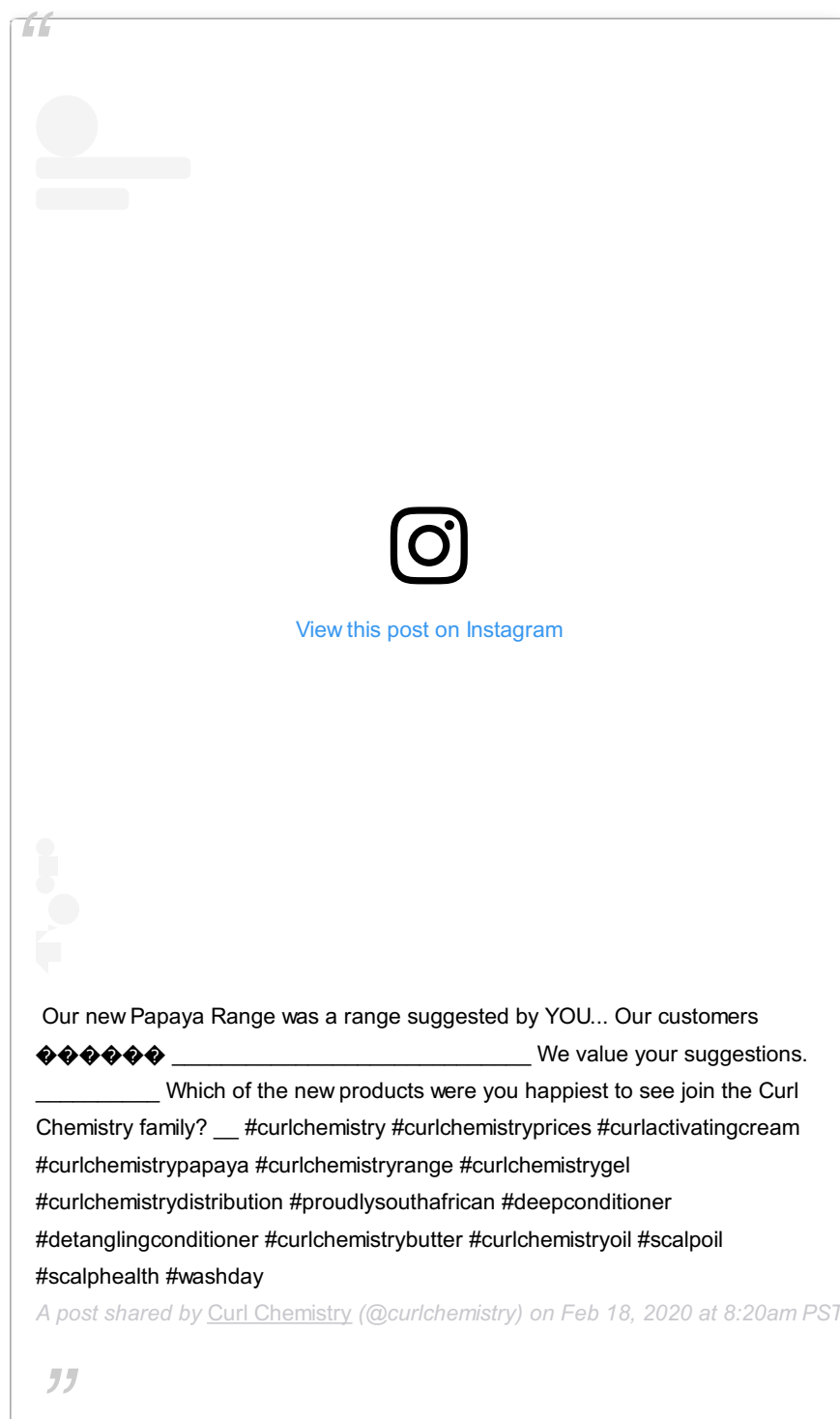
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What inspires you, personally and professionally?

The customer feedback is what inspires and encourages me to continue on this journey. There have been many times I wanted to give up, but then another blessing falls on my lap. It was just proof that I had to continue on this journey. I also get inspiration from the industry itself and the customers who come up with new suggestions and ideas for me to cater to their needs. My new Papaya range is based on customer suggestions and it's been doing great.

Personal inspiration comes from my own goals that I set out for myself. I left my day job to invest in my business so I'm inspired to make things work.



Our new Papaya Range was a range suggested by YOU... Our customers
💎💎💎💎💎 _____ We value your suggestions.
_____ Which of the new products were you happiest to see join the Curl
Chemistry family? __ #curlchemistry #curlchemistryprices #curlactivatingcream
#curlchemistrypapaya #curlchemistryrange #curlchemistrygel
#curlchemistrydistribution #proudlysouthafrican #deepconditioner
#detanglingconditioner #curlchemistrybutter #curlchemistryoil #scalpoil
#scalphealth #washday

A post shared by Curl Chemistry (@curlchemistry) on Feb 18, 2020 at 8:20am PST

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❏ ***How did you go about formulating Curl Chemistry products? And what is important to keep in mind when formulating products for natural hair specifically?***

I currently have a manufacturer that makes the products for us, which saves us a lot of time. The formulation of natural hair products is different from others, because natural hair needs moisturising oils and ingredients aimed at retaining moisture in the hair - your olive oils and avocado oils are good for retaining moisture. Water is also a natural's best friend. So all the products need to hydrate and then retain that moisture.

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

It's grown every year, especially with our new range we launched in November last year. People are loving the new products. Lots of customers have referred our products to their friends and family abroad and we've shipped to them. We've also had to upgrade our packaging space to accommodate for better production and packaging in the last 3 years.

📌 *What have been the biggest lessons along your startup journey?*

I've learned not to take everything personally, because some people are there to judge and put you down, but the bulk of our customers are genuine and are there to encourage us to do better. I've also learned to take advice and learn from the bigger companies. You need a system and you can't do everything yourself. You, as the owner, need to push the business to be better and take it to the next level.



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📌 *Curl Chemistry is currently stocked in a number of salons and is also sold through agents. Any plans to get into mainstream retail?*

I would love to, but let's see how that unfolds. It would make our products easier to access so it's definitely something to consider for the future.

📌 *What's next for Curl Chemistry, and what is your ultimate vision for the brand?*

I would love to cater to the African market to the best of our ability. I'd like to stay relevant and be the one brand people think of when they mention natural haircare in Africa. I'd love the brand to branch out to different African countries. We will keep going as long as there's a market for our products.

Visit the [Curl Chemistry website](#) for more info, and connect with the brand on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

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