

Author reveals how the chemical cocktails women apply

# Lifting the lid on cosmetics' secret science



IN THE days when Cleopatra bathed in asps' milk and smeared her lips with the scarlet juice of cochineal beetles, beauty ingredients were both exotic and arcane.

Women in the 21st Century may shudder at the thought of the Egyptian queen's cosmetic routine but at least the raven-haired beauty knew what she was daubing on her face.

When we slap on moisturiser or rub conditioner into our hair, we rarely



**EVERY** day millions of women apply dozens of products to their faces and bodies. But do we really know what they are plastering themselves with? A Sussex woman has written a book that sets out to explain cosmetic ingredients. **SALLY HALL, left, spoke to the author of Cosmetic Watch.**



have any idea what ingredients we are anointing ourselves with.

Even if we do scrutinise the ingredients on the packet, the names are often meaningless. What is cetyl alcohol? Can you even pronounce phenoxyethanol, let alone explain what it is? And aren't nanospheres things for theoretical physicists to ponder on?

Cheryl Robertson has always been fascinated by the ingredients in cosmetics, ointments and hair products.

As a child in her native Zimbabwe, she would shield

her skin from the scalding African sun by rubbing it in the udder grease used by milkers at the local dairy.

Cheryl, who now lives in Ardingly, was desperate to get a deep, glowing tan so her white skin didn't stand out as much.

Now 42, the writer and journalist grew up in a time and place where sun protection factors were unheard of.

She said: "It was dangerous, exposing your skin to that sun but because of the politics of the time there were sanctions and we were at least ten years behind. I had never heard of sun cream, so I used the udder grease instead."

As she sizzled in a layer of grease, Cheryl never thought to question what she had put on her body.

But as the sun worshipping little girl got older, she began to be fascinated by the natural ingredients used as medicines, cosmetics and remedies for aches and pains in Zimbabwe.

Cheryl went on to work as a journalist in Johannesburg before exploring the whole continent as part of an overland tour in 1984. That was where she got hooked on discovering the ingredients in natural remedies.

"I picked up some very peculiar remedies along the way. Ginger is good if rubbed on rheumatic joints - it gives them a bit of heat. Wood from baobab trees is used on psoriasis or eczema. That's used in some Western remedies too."

Cheryl's discoveries sparked an interest which continued to inspire her everywhere she went.

In Malaysia, with a baby son and husband in tow, Cheryl found out that cabbage leaves alleviated mastitis while onion eased the symptoms of piles.

Back in England, she discovered the antioxidant and immune system-boosting properties of garlic.

