

{ BEAUTY }

CUSTOM BLENDS DO IT YOUR WAY

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Walking into a department store and picking up a jar of cream or a bottle of perfume from a cosmetics counter might be the conventional way to shop for beauty products. But increasingly, shoppers are looking past traditional "one size fits many" formulations and turning to brands that let them choose custom blends, made for them.

Some companies position such products as the "couture" version of beauty, tailored to a person's exact requirements for the best fit. Others say they're responding to a demand arising in an age of blended ethnicities, when the composition and color of skin is radically different than it was even a few decades ago. And in these cash-crunched times, some consumers figure that, for the money they spend, they might as well get personalized products.

"There are so many reasons this is happening," says Jane Buckingham, founder and president of the Intelligence Group, a market research firm. "This next generation of consumers is

generally brought up to believe that they are special, unique and different, that it's all about having it their way. So if they can customize their songs on their iPods, eliminate the bad pictures on their digital cameras and design their own dresses online, it's no surprise the trend has found its way into beauty categories."

Looking for a fragrance that recalls a cherished time in Spain and reflects an abiding love of French lavender and fresh-roasted coffee? An extended consultation with a perfumer such as Alexandra Balahoutis of Strange Invisible Perfumes will capture it all in a bottle. A custom-blended cream at My Blend can address issues such as skin that's affected by frequent travel or hormonal factors. At DoshCare, a new Ayurveda-based skin-care offering, customers are asked in-depth questions about their sleep habits, digestion and how they process emotions before a product is formulated.

Below is a sampling of the burgeoning made-for-you lines.

Prescriptives

The pioneer in customized beauty, Prescriptives offers a comprehensive array of custom-blended cosmetics.

How it works: A Prescriptives staffer determines a customer's skin tone and blends foundations, powders, concealers, lip glosses, lipsticks, bronzers and moisturizers on the spot, testing them on the customer every step of the way. Details of each blend are kept on file.

What it costs: From \$26 for a lip gloss to \$62 for foundation.

Where: "Store locator" option at prescriptives.com lists select Macy's and Nordstrom stores in the Los Angeles area.



Prescriptives

My Blend

Some 225 combinations are possible in this new line, part of the Clarins group.

How it works: Clients answer questions about stress levels, lifestyle, how they react to seasonal changes. A "personal blend expert" then chooses a base — one of eight creams or lotions that contain anti-aging peptides — then mixes in "boosters" aimed at providing extra hydration



Prescribed Solutions

Prescribed Solutions

How it works: Only available in doctors' offices, products can be adjusted for seasonal differences as well as specific skin conditions. For someone with rosacea, for example, anti-aging cream can be customized with vitamin K, goji berry and Arnica montana flower extract. There are about a dozen base products of eye serums, facial cleansers and night creams, and 10 boosters, for scores of options.

What it costs: Boosters, \$35. Other products go up to about \$145. Customization is included, and most doctors do not charge a consultation fee.

Where: About 20 medical practices in the Los Angeles area, listed at www.prescribedsolutions.com

Strange Invisible Perfumes

How it works: Founder and perfumer Balahoutis interviews the client, asking for preferences in literature, music, art and aromas. Then a "Floral Water Tasting," during which the client sips waters infused with blue lotus, jasmine, orange blossom and violet leaf, is used to gauge preferences. A number of compositions and essences are patch tested, and Balahoutis spends the next month formulating the scent.

What it costs: \$2,100 for the custom blending, which includes the first quarter-ounce bottle of perfume. Reorders, \$250 a bottle.

Where: Strange Invisible Perfumes, Venice



Strange Invisible Perfumes



Memoire Liquide

Memoire Liquide

How it works: A total of 160 individual fragrances, which can be worn on their own, are laid out at an elaborate fragrance bar. A consultant talks to the client to determine whether his or her taste in scents runs to the fruity or the floral, the sweet or the spicy. An unlimited number of combinations can be tried until the customer is happy.

What it costs: \$35 to \$60 depending on the size of the bottle.

Where: Studio at Fred Segal