

Environ's Dr Des, a skin care innovator for the ages

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

29 Nov 2018

The Environ Skin Care success story is far from over. The almost 30-year-old homegrown brand has just notched up its latest achievement by being named the Top Medical Skin Care Company in the 2018 Aesthetic Everything Aesthetic and Cosmetic Medicine Awards, a global competition run from the USA which is voted on by consumers.



Environ CEO and chairman Valerie Carstens with Dr Des Fernandes, Environ Skin Care founder and scientific director.

This latest win gets added to Environ's long list accolades recognising the transformative abilities of its vitamin A-based skin care solutions.

Environ Skin Care founder and scientific director Dr Des Fernandes has pioneered many world-firsts, including the Vitamin Step-Up System, Cool Peel Technology and collagen induction therapy. He also took the company's skin care knowledge into the technology field with the launch of the patented Ionzyme DF Machine – the world's first low frequency sonophoresis and iontophoresis facial treatment.

Since launching in 1990, Dr Des and Environ CEO and chairman Valerie Carstens have grown the Cape Town-based brand steadily, with 140 products present in more than 70 countries today. With vitamin A as the cornerstone ingredient in the company's skin care philosophy, Environ remains a trusted brand among skin care therapists, dermatologists and consumers the world over.

Here, Dr Des reflects on his journey of innovation.

■ ***Firstly, congrats on your recent Aesthetic Everything Awards win. What does this recognition mean to you and Environ?***

We are honoured to be named the Top Medical Skin Care Company by the Aesthetic Everything Awards as it acknowledges our track record of more than thirty years using science to change skin and transform lives. It also recognises our mission to use science to future-proof skins across the globe and the efficacy of our products, which help create the appearance of more youthful, healthy-looking and beautiful skin.

■ ***As one of the first brands to introduce vitamin A as a core ingredient in formulations, can you explain why this***

nutrient is so powerful for our skin?

I first started using vitamin A in skin care in the 1980s. By using it in high enough doses, I started seeing incredible results – skin became more radiant and visibly improved. I began to realise that vitamin A is the 'oxygen' that skin needs to look beautiful and healthy for life.

It occurs naturally in the body but due to exposure to the sun, pollution and free radicals, our natural reserves become depleted. It is therefore an essential skin nutrient that has to be replenished every day for skin to appear healthier and more resilient.



Share with us your journey from plastic surgeon to product innovator.

I studied medicine and graduated with an MB.B.Ch at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. I obtained my surgical education and training (specialising in Cardiology), F.R.C.S. (Edin) from the College of Surgeons in Edinburgh in 1973.

After training in various hospitals in the UK I returned to Cape Town to work as a Cardio-Thoracic Surgeon and joining Professor Christiaan Barnard in the world famous heart transplant unit of Groote Schuur Hospital where I became part of the world's first heart transplant team. I was also responsible for the illustrations of the 'Piggy-Back' or 'Double' heart transplant.

In 1975 I returned to my passion, plastic surgery, and eventually became the consultant in charge of the Cleft Lip and Palate Division at the Red Cross Children's hospital for 21 years. As a result of my expertise, I was made the fellow of the Plastic Surgery Unit at Show University in Tokyo.

In 1979 I commenced a private practice in the field of reconstructive and plastic surgery. I wrote numerous papers and chapters for medical publications on various Plastic Surgery procedures, I have also written and lectured around the world on skin health and skin rejuvenation.

My research into vitamin A led to the creation of Environ in 1990. I was determined to create a skin care range that would maintain healthy skin, especially as the incidence of sun-related skin disorders was growing worldwide. I pioneered the use of vitamin A in high enough doses to help counteract the harmful effects of the environment, pollution and stress to create radiant, visibly improved skin in the 1980s.

We introduced the world to the first vitamin A skin care system in 1990 – the Environ Vitamin Step-Up-System, following in 1992 with the world's first chemical and physical sunscreen with antioxidants.

I also developed the world's first safe and effective Cool Peel Technology system in 1994 and went onto pioneer skin needling or collagen induction therapy in 1996. Ionzyme, Environ's premium Vitamin Step-Up-System Range, launched in 1997 and was the world's first 'made-to-order' vitamin A skin care regime. There have been many award-winning innovations since then, most exciting is what's happening in the world of Environ today with intelligent new formulations and technology.

■ How has the skincare space and consumers' expectations of products evolved over the past 30 years?

Never has the pressure been greater on the consumer to look his or her best at all times. This is due to the advent of social media: As the snap, upload and share fascination increases, so too does the pressure on the consumer to look flawless. This trend is playing out in the following ways:

- Consumers are increasingly becoming more knowledgeable about skin care ingredients, and are seeking brands that are constantly at the forefront of innovation.
- Smart technology in skin care is becoming a mega trend. However, this has by and large been accessible to those who visit professional skincare centres. Consumers are now demanding more convenience, so we are seeing an increased demand for at-home devices.



We are responding to these trends with new launches addressing the skincare concerns of ageing, sensitivity and dehydration. The Focus Care Youth+, Comfort+ and Moisture+ Ranges as well as the revolutionary new DF Mobile Skincare Device have been game changers in the professional skin care space this year. The DF Mobile is great for consumers who want to maximise the results that they get from their products and professional treatments at home.

The convenient hand-held device targets frown lines on the forehead or between the eyebrows; smile lines and fine wrinkles around the eyes; upper lip lines, hyper-pigmented marks from sun damage; double chin and also minor scars.

▣ What would you say has been the secret to Environ's success?

It is simple: We continue to push the boundaries of global professional skincare using science to create products that help transform people's lives and make a beautiful, lasting difference to skin.

For more information on Environ [visit the website](#), and connect with the brand on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

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