



Joli Baker

one compact *at a time*

By Mary Welch

When Joli Baker was in her 20s, she didn't worry much about her skin. At age 30, it started to get her attention and by 40, it was getting tougher maintaining good skin. "I'm fast approaching 50, and let me tell you, there's a new set of challenges."

But Baker, who had been in the cosmetic industry for more than 25 years, decided to take matters into her own hands. With her husband, Bob, and partner Bob Cohen, she started Pür cosmetics, a collection of mineral-based cosmetics and skin care products. The line, introduced five years ago, is now being nationally distributed in 233 ULTA stores. The store added the line in 32 ULTA test markets about a year ago and quickly became a best-seller.

Jeff Askenas, vice president of merchandising-prestige cosmetics & skincare for ULTA, says the store is "thrilled to partner with Pür Minerals, as it will provide the ULTA customer with a comprehensive selection of natural mineral make-up and treatment products."

Baker, who predicts 2007 sales of \$20 million, is thrilled not only with the success of the line but from the testimonials she receives. "Since it is mineral-based, our products are not only good for you but work with women who have skin allergies. We've had women who haven't been able to wear any make-up – even hypo-allergenic lines – tell us they are able to use Pür Cosmetics. And, it makes them – and us – feel good."

Baker began her career as a sales associate with Clinique, an Estée Lauder company. She eventually rose through the ranks to become the regional marketing director for a five-state \$73 million territory. She left Clinique when she and her husband formed Cosmetic Resources Inc., a company that assisted television shopping networks sell cosmetics. "We worked behind the scenes, helping in brand development, working with the on-air guests, that sort of thing."

The couple was commuting between New York and Florida when her husband and Atlanta businessman Bob Cohen, CEO of Astral Brands, came across a formula for a mineral foundation. "I loved the concept but the question was, 'was I ready to go back into the business with something of that magnitude?'"

The answer was yes. Pür Cosmetics was started and the Bakers moved to Atlanta.

The original foundation was a loose mineral product, which Baker decided should be pressed. "Women put their make-up on in the car today," says the mother of a 7-year-old son. "You can't have your foundation and power be loose. It'd get all over you."

They started with the foundation but Baker knew what the line had to encompass. "It had to be a full-blown line but each product needed to fill a need. I just didn't want to do another lipstick. It

had to be natural with no chemicals, no talc, no petroleum-based products, no alcohol and no fragrance. It had to look and feel great in the packaging. And, more than anything, it had to perform."

The company developed 12 initial products and decided to go on television in Canada to test the reaction in 2002. Baker was the on-air spokeswoman. The line became the top-selling color brand on Canadian television. "Obviously we were filling a need," she says. Next, they went to the Shop At Home TV station and Shop NBC in 2003, effectively launching the line in this country. The response was the same.

Currently, there are more than 165 products in the line, with more being planned. A body wash line will be introduced this year. Pür Cosmetics use a variety of minerals and other natural ingredients. For instance red colors are taken from annatto seeds and carmine, a natural dye used by the Aztecs. The mineral wash, for instance, uses magnesium, copper and zinc to clean the skin. Other minerals used include mica, iron oxides and zinc oxide.

"People think that because it's all natural that it's not fun ... that people wearing them have no sense of style or fashion and are just concerned with hugging trees," she says. "But that's not true. Our line is natural but it is very sophisticated. We are not understated. We are not boring. I say that our mascara is like false eyelashes in a tube!"

Baker fully expects Pür Cosmetics to become a top brand at ULTA. She is considering other retail opportunities and is venturing overseas as well. She will enter four countries, both in Europe and Asia, reaching customers first through TV shopping shows and then in retail outlets this year with more to come.

"If anyone told me I'd be doing this five years ago, I would have laughed out loud," she says. "This has been a phenomenal success and it has changed women's lives. Putting make-up on and good skin care is not frivolous. It goes right to our self-esteem."

She is aware that she needs to manage the growth carefully, making sure that the quality is controlled, the distribution is unfettered and that new products are developed.

"We are here for the customers. We are always looking for new products, new formulations, new delivery systems. So we have to be reasonable in how we grow the business. It'll be one step at a time and through channels, like retail stores, that fit well with our customers."

Baker and Pür Cosmetics have one simple goal. "We intend to change the world," she says, "one compact at a time." ♀

Photography by Joseph Wong